A CRISIS OF MARRIAGE?
THE DEBATE ON MARRIAGE REFORM IN THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC WEIMAR WOMEN'S PRESS, 1919-1933

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ABSTRACT

LARISSA R. STIGLICH: A Crisis of Marriage? The Debate on Marriage Reform in the Social Democratic Women's Press, 1919-1933
(Under the direction of Karen Hagemann)

Article 119 of the new constitution of the Weimar Republic established marriage as the "foundation of family life" and placed it under special protection of the constitution. Although women were guaranteed equal political rights under the new constitution, their civil rights remained regulated by the Civil Code of 1900. Representatives of the women's movements had criticized the Civil Code since its implementation. Following women's experiences of increased independence during the First World War and their changed economic, social, and political circumstances in Weimar Germany, even more women's groups demanded a reform of marriage and family law. This thesis explores the discourses surrounding marriage reform in the Social Democratic women's press of the Weimar Republic. It reveals that they neither agreed on the causes of the perceived "crisis of marriage," nor on the necessary measures for a "marriage reform." This diversity of thought reflects not only the process of renegotiating gendered marital roles within the quickly changing political, social, economic and cultural circumstances of the Weimar Republic, but it also sheds light on Social Democratic women's political activism. Taken together, these discourses illustrate the complicated process of redesigning marriage in shifting social circumstances.

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INTRODUCTION

In December 1918, in the midst of the November Revolution that ultimately brought democracy to the German people after World War I, the Social Democratic women's journal *Die Gleichheit* (Equality) proudly announced to its female readers: "today German women are the freest in the world. They have full, unconditional equality with men, they can vote for and be elected to all political bodies."[1] Less than a year later, in August 1919, the newly elected democratic parliament of the Weimar Republic, the *Nationalversammlung* (National Assembly), passed the *Verfassung des Deutschen Reiches*. Article 109 of this new constitution ostensibly made the *Die Gleichheit*'s claim for political equality a legal reality. It declared "All Germans are equal before the law. Men and women have in principle (*grundsätzlich*) the same political and civic (*staatsbürgerliche*) rights and duties."[2] For many Social Democratic activists of the women's movement—those who had fought for women's equal political rights since the late ninetieth-century—the new constitution of the Weimar Republic represented foremost a realization of their struggle.[3] Others, however, recognized that legal political equality was only a precondition for "full, unconditional equality" that extended to all areas of politics, the economy,

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[1] Editorial Staff, Title Page, *Die Gleichheit* no. 5 (December 1918), 33.

[2] The Constitution of the German Empire of August 11, 1919 (Weimar Constitution), English translation available through German History in Documents and Images (GHDI). The German text is: "Alle Deutschen sind vor dem Gesetze gleich. Männer und Frauen haben grundsätzlich dieselben staatsbürgerlichen Rechte und Pflichten." http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=4862 (Accessed: November 13, 2013).

[3] For an overview of the German women's movement and the struggle for equal political rights see Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894-1933* (London and Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1976); Barbara Greven-Aschoff, *Die bürgerliche Frauenbewegung in Deutschland, 1894-1933* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981).

society, and culture as well.[4] And they recognized that the path to do so would be fraught with difficulties.

The challenges of realizing "full, unconditional equality" had their roots in the Weimar Constitution itself. In the aftermath of World War I, the parties that comprised the first government—the Majority Social Democratic Party (MSPD), the Independence Social Democratic Party (USPD), the liberal Democratic Party (DDP), and the Catholic German Center Party (Center Party)—had different political motivations, but ultimately all compromised to create the constitution of Germany's first parliamentary democracy. The MSPD was motivated in part by a desire to calm down the revolutionary activities of the extreme left, which threatened to undermine the republic.[5] The Center Party, in turn, aimed to imbue the new constitution with the re-stabilizing influence of the family, which they feared the Social Democrats were intent on destroying.[6] They wished in particular to use the family unit as an agent of cultural demobilization after the profoundly destabilizing effects of World War I. The devastating loss of life during the war and the heightened anxieties about the health and survival of the German nation, which were shared by politicians and lawmakers across the political spectrum. As such, the family represented a central component in the discussion of the new constitution.[7]

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[4] In the early discussions of marriage reform in *Die Gleichheit*, such as those from 1919, authors and readers alike revealed an awareness that social, economic, and cultural equality lagged behind political equality. See for example W. Griechen, *Die Gleichheit* no. 15 (25 April, 1919), and Kurt Heilbut, *Die Gleichheit*, no. 17 (23 May, 1919).

[5] For a thorough overview of the aims and interests of the various political parties preceding and following the election to the National Assembly in 19 January, 1919 see, Eberhard Kolb, "The Revolution and the Foundation of the Republic, 1918/19," in *The Weimar Republic*, 2nd ed., trans. P.S. Falla and R.J. Park (London: Routledge, 2005), 3-22.

[6] Rebecca Heinemann, *Familie zwischen Tradition und Emanzipation: Katholische und sozialdemokratische Familienkonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2004), 68.

[7] For a more lengthy and specific discussion of the inclusion of the family within the constitution, including the subcommittee formed in order to help develop the basic rights guaranteed to the family, see Heinemann, "Die Institutionalisierung der Familie in der Weimarer Republik – Die Aufnahme der Familie in den Schutzbereich der Weimarer Reichsverfassung," 67-108.

This importance, coupled with the necessity of a compromise between the MSPD and USPD on the one hand and the Catholic Center Party and DDP on the other hand, prompted the majority in the National Assembly to include Article 119, which stated:

(1) Marriage as the foundation of the family and the preservation and reproduction of the nation is placed under special protection of the constitution.

(2) The protection of the purity, health, and social welfare of the family is the responsibility of the state and the municipalities. Families with many children have the right to compensational welfare.

(3) Motherhood is entitled to the protection and care of the state.[8]

While the parliamentarians of the Christian and conservative parties were particularly adamant in their demands for such an article in the new constitution, it was supported by many liberal and Social Democratic members of the National Assembly, men and women alike.

Together Articles 119 and 109 created an inherent tension in the constitution of Germany's first parliamentary democracy. While article 109 secured women the same civic and political rights as men, Article 119 protected marriage and the family based on the normative model of the male breadwinner and female homemaker family. Article 109 also stood in contradiction with the German Civil Code (*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*, or BGB), which upheld the husband's patriarchal power in the family and household. Written in 1896 and implemented in 1900, the Civil Code held the father responsible for all financial matters and final decisions regarding children, while his wife's duty was to manage the common household. Divorce remained difficult, only possible on the principle of guilt.[9]

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[8] Artikel 119. Die Verfassung des Deutschen Reichs vom 11. August 1919. http://www.documentarchiv.de/wr/wrv.html#ERSTER_ABSCHNITT02 (Accessed, November 13, 2013).

[9] Book 4 of the Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch concerned Family Law. For the sections regarding spousal relations, duties, and marital property law see §§1353-1518. http://www.koeblergerhard.de/Fontes/BGB/BGB1896_RGBl_S.195.htm (Accessed November 13, 2013). For a thorough account of the origins of the German Civil Code and its history up

The liberal and Social Democratic women's movement had criticized the Civil Code as patriarchal and obsolete since its implementation, and their criticism only increased in Weimar Germany.[10] Several factors led to this development. During World War I women had experienced increased independence in their everyday lives. Many wives and mothers replaced their husbands as the primary breadwinner and head of the household, and many daughters moved from agrarian and domestic jobs into the better-paid positions in industry and the trade and services sectors. The public discourse about the equality of men and women after the war—including the promises implied by the new constitution—raised women's expectations and hopes of equality, not only in politics, the economy, and society, but in the family and marriage as well. At the same time, the conflicts in many marriages seemed to have grown, likely because both partners had changed throughout the course of the war. One indication thereof was the rise of divorces in the post-war years. These developments, coupled with other anxieties, resulted in an increased discussion about the perceived "crisis of the family and marriage" and growing demands for a "reform of marriage."[11] These were not limited to demands for legal marriage reform. Rather, a broad variety of requests and demands were subsumed under this slogan, including social reforms that addressed personal relations between married couples, as well calls for a new approach to sexuality and reproduction. Women's groups from a broad political

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until its implementation in 1900 see, Michael John, *Politics and the Law in Late Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Origins of the Civil Code* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1989). For a more recent volume that seeks to situate the origins and history of the Civil Code into its broader legal context see, Margaret Barber Crosby, *The Making of a German Constitution: A Slow Revolution* (Oxford: Berg, 2008).

[10] For the classic overview of the women's movement from 1848 through the end of the Weimar Republic, including agitation against the Civil Code, see Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany*. For a more detailed overview of the liberal women's movement and their objections to the Civil Code see, Greven-Aschoff, *Die bürgerliche Frauenbewegung in Deutschland*. For detailed discussion of women's criticism of the family law sections of the Civil Code see, Christiane Berneike, "Das Bürgerliche Gesetzbuch 1873-1896," *Die Frauenfrage ist Rechtsfrage: Die Juristinnen der deutschen Frauenbewegung und das Bürgerliche Gesetzbuch* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1995), 18-43.

[11] A lengthier discussion of the other anxieties that ensued as a result of World War I will be undertaken in Chapter 2.2.

spectrum were particularly vehement in their demands for a "marriage reform." They did not agree, however, on the causes of the perceived "crisis of marriage," and struggled to come to a consensus regarding the necessary measures for a "marriage reform."

The following study explores the contours of the debate surrounding the issue of "marriage reform" in the Social Democratic women's movement, which was especially active in this debate throughout the course of the Weimar Republic. The focus of my investigation is the two main women's journals of the Social Democratic Party (SPD): *Die Gleichheit* (published between 1892 and 1923) and *Frauenwelt* (published between 1924 and 1933). These journals represented the SPD's standpoint and with it a very distinct and influential position in the Weimar debate about the "crisis of family and marriage" and their proposed reform. I will explore the debate in these two journals during the period between 1919 and 1933, the years of the Weimar Republic.

In the center of my analysis is the portrayal of contemporary marriage, particularly the perceptions of its problems and their causes, as well as the legal, social, and cultural proposals for its reform. The following questions guide my analysis. *First*, what did the SPD journals describe as the problems of contemporary marriage and how did their perceptions change; what did they explain as the causes of the perceived "crisis of marriage" and in which way did these causes inform their suggested strategies for marriage reform? *Second*, what did the SPD journals define as an "ideal marriage"—including the relationship between husband and wife, and other roles and duties; how did these ideas change and in which ways did they influence the proposals for marriage reform? And, *finally*, what were the suggested marriage reforms in the SPD journals; how did they change and which factors influenced these changes? These lines of inquiry allow for a nuanced understanding of the debates surrounding the "crisis of marriage" in

the Weimar Republic and how the perceptions and proposals even within the SPD women's movement converged or diverged over time. Because the debates on the "crisis of marriage" and marriage reform in the Weimar Republic can only be adequately understood in the context of the profound social, economic, political, and cultural changes that affected German society in the aftermath of World War I—which had transformative effects on the institutions of marriage and the family themselves—this background will be included in the study.

My research reveals that there was a multiplicity of perceptions of the "crisis of marriage," conceptualizations of the ideal marriage, and proposals for its reform. With a focus on the debate about marriage reform—including legal, social, and cultural proposals for reform—I can examine how these journals reflected knowledge about the expected gendered roles of German citizens within their marriages. An investigation of these journals also illustrates how they produced and reproduced this gendered knowledge in turn. This multiplicity of conceptions and the ostensible lack of consensus about marriage reform is revealing on several levels. The broad assortment of positions—even within the Social Democratic women's journals—sheds light on the spectrum of political approaches and generational differences within the Social Democratic women's movement itself. It also reflects the realities of the profound political, social, economic, and cultural changes Germany experienced throughout the course of the Weimar Republic. Moreover, the diversity of perceptions and suggestions is suggestive of the changing roles for German men and women in their marriages. Just as Germany itself experienced profound changes in the aftermath of World War I, so too did gendered marital roles. Ultimately, an analysis of these journals is an ideal entry point into navigating the shifting expectations for marital unions that went beyond the desire for a legal reform of marriage. These changing expectations, though often contradictory, filled the pages of the Social Democratic

women's journals and can offer valuable insight into the process of redesigning marriage in shifting social circumstances.

Historiography

The topic of marriage reform in the Weimar Republic is located at the intersection of a variety of historiographical traditions: the history of the family, women's and gender history, and legal and political history. The contributions of family history can be credited with expanding interest on the effects of structural changes on the institution of the family, many of which speak directly to my investigation of the institution of marriage in the context of the social, political, economic, and cultural upheavals of the Weimar Republic. The methodological innovations of women's and gender history engendered an expansion of the topics of historical work regarding women, and later, gender. Women's historians are also responsible for expanding the definition of the political to reveal the decisive and myriad ways in which women too had political agency. These developments, in turn, facilitated innovations in political and legal history to include a broader definition of "the political," in general. More specific literature on the Social Democratic press and the Social Democratic women's movement have occupied a decisive and active space in the development and expansions of these fields. Taken together, these historiographical approaches have decidedly influenced my understanding of the legal, social, economic, and cultural components of marriage reform in the Weimar Republic.

The history of the family is one historiographical approach central for this project.[12] Historical demographers and social historians of the 1960s and 1970s were interested in the effects of larger structural changes on the institution of the family. They explored, for example,

[12] Due to the representative function of the family as an indicator of the stability of a society or nation, the institution of the family was an early subject of social scientific research. An interest in the family as a subject of historical research, however, was initially slower to surface. See, Karin Hausen, "Familie als Gegenstand Historischer Sozialwissenschaft. Bemerkungen zu einer Forschungsstrategie," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1:2/3 (1975): 171-172; Andreas Gestrich, *Geschichte der Familie im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999): xi.

the effects of industrialization and urbanization of family size and organization, and on rates of marriage and fertility. These studies problematized the conceptualization of the family as a static institution that followed the bourgeois model of the male breadwinner and female homemaker family, and demonstrated the broad variety of family forms even in modern history. They showed that the reality of families was inextricably bound up with other processes of economic, social, political, and cultural change, and depended not only on the economic and social status of a family, but also on the specific culture. The multiplicity of forms and definitions corresponded with historical conditions.[13] One important early study that explored the social situation of the family in Weimar Germany was the 1992 book by Heidi Rosenbaum on German working class families in the early nineteenth century.[14]

Although the study of the family represented a logical starting point for the first women's historians, in the last two decades the family has become less prominent as a *primary* subject of women's and gender history. With the ascendancy of gender history, "feminist historians concluded that in order to make clear the centrality of gender as a category of analysis, they needed to look beyond the family, and they illuminated how gender structured politics, society, and culture."[15] Historian Robert G. Moeller has argued that the family has not disappeared, but rather, "it has migrated into other keywords."[16] Put differently, in the transition from social to

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[13] For an overview of research on the family from historical demography and social history see, Michael Mitterauer, *Vom Patriarchat zur Partnershcaft: Zum Strukturwandel der Familie* (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1977); *Familiengeschichte: Materialen zur deutschen Familie seit dem Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1983); W.R. Lee, "Past Legacies and Future Prospects: Recent Research on the History of the Family in Germany," in *Journal of Family History* 6 (1981).

[14] Heidi Rosenbaum, *Proletarische Familien: Arbeiterfamilien und Arbeiterväter im frühen 20. Jahrhundert zwischen traditioneller, sozialdemokratischer und kleinbürgerlicher Orientierung.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992.

[15] Robert G. Moeller, "The Elephant in the Living Room: Or Why the History of Twentieth-Century Germany Should Be a Family Affair," in *Gendering Modern German History: Rewriting Historiography*, ed. Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quataert (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 229.

[16] Ibid., 230.

cultural history, the family has moved to the borders of the field of women's and gender history. Moeller's keywords—including social policy, the welfare state, labor law, politics, nationalism and citizenship, consumption, and sexuality—are categories that represent the most recent research on the study of the family.[17]

The history of women's activism and politics is another historiographical approach that informs my study. Women's history, which grew out of the feminist movement, developed an early interest in the history of women's political activism, one that was sustained by gender historians in subsequent decades.[18] The first wave of study on women in Germany, which coincided roughly with the ascendancy of women's history in the 1970s, was interested in especially in the early women's movement in Imperial Germany, women's political activism in Weimar Germany, and women's experiences in the Third Reich.[19] The second wave of research

[17] For studies that address the family and marriage at its intersection with the body, reproductive rights, and sexuality, see Cornelie Usborne, *The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany: Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Atina Grossman, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). For research on the family and marriage and the welfare state, see Young-Sun Hong. *Welfare, Modernity, and the Weimar State, 1919-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Christiane Eifert, "Coming to Terms with the State: Maternalist Politics and the Development of the Welfare State in Weimar Germany," in *Central European History* 30:1 (January 1997), 25-47. For a thorough study on the gendered implication of labor policy in the Weimar Republic see Rouette, *Sozialpolitik als Geschlechterpolitik*. For some of the most recent literature that directly addresses either conceptions of marriage and the family or marriage and family policy, see Heinemann, *Familie zwischen Tradition und Emanzipation*; Michelle Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk: Weimar and Nazi Family Policy, 1918-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[18] For an overview of the development of the field of women's activism and politics in modern German history, see Belinda Davis, "The Personal Is Political: Gender, Politics, and Political Activism in Modern German History," in *Gendering Modern German History: Rewriting Historiography*, ed. Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quataert (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 107-127.

[19] The seminal article "Beyond *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*: Weimar Women in Politics and Work," was originally published in *Liberating Women's History*, ed. Berenice A. Carroll (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), and was later reworked in the collection *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman, and Marion Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984). Other foundational works include, Jean H. Quataert, *Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Renate Pore, *A Conflict of Interest: Women in German Social Democracy, 1919-1933* (Wesport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981); Karin Hausen, *Frauen suchen ihre Geschichte: historische Studien zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1983); Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986); Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987). For an excellent overview of these developments see, Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quataert,

in the early 1990s maintained this interest in the women's movement and the labor movement, but with some important developments. By working from an expanded definition of "the political," which to included the private sphere as well, these historians began to consider, for example, not only Social Democratic women's activists, but also the activities of the Social Democratic milieu as a whole. Among the most important and influential of these studies that explored Social Democratic working class women—both their formal and informal activism—was Karen Hagemann's *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik: Alltagsleben und gesellschaftliches Handeln von Arbeiterfrauen in der Weimarer Republik*.[20] Another important contribution of this wave of research was the more thorough exploration of the intersections of the history of the family and the history of the Social Democratic women's movement, which continued to broaden the definition of the political.[21] As this study investigates the discourse on marriage reform in the Social Democratic women's press, several studies on the Social Democratic Party press as a whole are also insightful.[22] More recent scholarship on women and gender continues to

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"Gendering Modern German History: comparing Historiographies and Academic Cultures in Germany and the United States through the Lens of Gender," in in *Gendering Modern German History: Rewriting Historiography*, ed. Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quataert (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 1-38.

[20] Karen Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik: Alltagsleben und gesellschaftliches Handeln von Arbeiterfrauen in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1990). See in particular the chapter, "Die sozialdemokratische Frauenbewegung," 509-638.

[21] See Karen Hagemann, "Arbeiterfamilie und Bevölkergunspolitik," and "Familienideale –Familienrealität," in *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 159-219 and 306-350. See also, Karen Hagemann, "Von 'guten' und 'schlechten' Hausfrauen. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Rationalizierung im großstädtischen Arbeiterhaushalt der Weimarer Republik," *Historische Mitteilungen* 9, no. 1 (1995): 65-84; and Karen Hagemann, "'Rationalization of Family Work': Municipal Family Welfare and Urban Working-Class Mothers in Interwar Germany," Special Issue of the Journal *Social Politics* 4, no. 1 (1997): 19-48.

[22] For an important precursor to literature on the Weimar Republic that specifically addresses illustrated magazines, see Ulla Wischermann, *Frauenfrage und Presse: Frauenarbeit und Frauenbewegung in der illustrierten Presse des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1983). For two overviews of the Weimar press, see Winfried Lerg, "Media Culture of the Weimar Republic: A Historical Overview," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 12:1 (1988): 94-107; Bernhard Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

reveal important new insights on the formal and informal nature of women's political activism—both progressive and conservative—in the Weimar Republic.[23]

The history of marriage and marriage reform in the Weimar Republic lies at the intersection between many well-developed historiographical fields including women's and gender history, the history of the family, and the history of the Social Democratic women's movement and its press. Despite its unique location, research on marriage reform—not only legal and political reform, but economic, social, and cultural reform, as well—remains somewhat underdeveloped. With the exception of Dirk Blasius' thorough exploration of the legal perspective in *Ehescheidung in Deutschland 1794-1945: Scheidung und Scheidungsrecht in historischer Perspektive*, there is a relative dearth of literature on this important subject.[24] This is in part because historians have primarily situated marriage within the larger field of family history as a related, but subsidiary component.

The sparse treatment of marriage in modern German history may be reason enough for more scholarly attention to this topic, but marriage also has larger significance. As with many other Western countries, German women received full political citizenship rights before they achieved full social or civil rights of citizenship.[25] This tension, as described above, was particularly acute in the case of Weimar Germany. Women articulated their dissatisfaction with

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[23] See for example, Julia Sneeringer, *Winning Women's Votes: Propaganda and Politics in Weimar Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002); Raffael Scheck, *Mothers of the Nation: Right-Wing Women in Weimar Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Kirsten Heinsohn, *Konservative Parteien in Deutschland 1912 bis 1933: Demokratisierung und Partizipation in geshclechterhistorischer Perspektive* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2010).

[24] Dirk Blasius, *Ehescheidung in Deutschland 1794-1945: Scheidung und Scheidungsrecht in historischer Perspektive* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987); for another important exception see, Arne Duncker, *Gleichheit und Ungleichheit in der Ehe: Persönliche Stellung von Frau und Mann im Recht der ehelichen Lebensgemeinschaft 1700-1914* (Böhlau Verlag GmbH & Cie: Cologne, 2003).

[25] Sociologist Ruth Lister has critiqued Thomas Marshall's chronological definition of citizenship as progressing from civil to political to social citizenship, arguing that in Western societies women and other marginalized groups often gained equal civil rights later than political rights. See, Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 3.

the contemporary institution of marriage by expressing their visions of an ideal marriage and proposing solutions for its reform. Put differently, in the Weimar Republic legal marriage reform was a site at which women contested their lack of social and civil rights and advocated for a reform that would begin to address these acutely experienced discrepancies between legal and civil equality. As such, the topic of marriage reform in the Weimar Republic deserves more explicit attention from historians of modern German women's and gender history.

Theory, Methodology, and Sources

As a result of the influences of post-structuralism and the ascendancy of cultural history, there was—and often continues to be—a movement away from political history. But with the contributions of the "new political history," as well as the above-mentioned historiographical traditions of women's and gender history and the history of the family, it is time to address "the political" from a more interdisciplinary perspective. For my study on the discourses of the "crisis of marriage" and marriage reform, I combine the approaches of discourse analysis, political, and gender history. I implement Phillip Sarasin's understanding of discourse as the "historically circumscribable thematic contexts of speech" that "determine the possibilities and limits of meaningful speech and coherent social interaction."[26] The medium of these discourses is speech—be it written or spoken—and as such, the debates surrounding the "crisis of marriage" and suggestions for marriage reform formed a central discourse of the Weimar Republic. As mentioned above, I will focus my analysis on these discourses within the Social Democratic women's magazines *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt* from 1919 to 1933.

Political history is another a methodological approach central to my study. During the 1970s and 1980s, women's historians, in particular, first challenged the narrow and explicitly

[26] Phillip Sarasin, *Stadt der Bürger: bürgerliche Macht und städtische Gesellschaft: Basel 1846-1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 142. See also, Sarasin, *Geschichtstswissenschaft und Diskurseanalyse* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003).

male realm of "politics" as represented in traditional historical research.[27] By explicitly linking women's activism to larger political developments, such as in Renate Pore's 1981 study of women in Social Democracy during the Weimar Republic, women's historians decisively facilitated the expansion of "politics" to highlight female agency as well.[28] Additionally, as mentioned above, women's historians applied the mantra of the women's movement—that the "personal is political"—to the study of history, as well. These initial criticisms were later taken up by social and subsequently cultural historians, who criticized the field of political history, with its traditional focus on the "business of government."[29] Although this criticism at times manifested in calls for a more fundamental shift in the discipline of history—many thought that politics was only a dependent variable in the historical process and that social or cultural history possessed more explanatory potential—ultimately this criticism enriched the field, resulting in a "new political history."[30] The successive turns (cultural turn, linguistic turn, performative turn, post-colonial turn, visual turn, special turn, etc.) served to broaden the concept of "the political" itself to include "the public uses of language and symbols" that are "crucial factors in the process of creating political spaces, actors, and events."[31] The Bielefeld group has taken up a broad definition of "the political" in order to avoid a "specifically modern (and Western) concept of 'politics."[32] Their definition of what constitutes communication as political is particularly useful for my examination of the discourse of marriage reform in Weimar Germany. The Bielefeld

[27] See Davis, "The Personal is Political" in *Gendering Modern German History*, 107-127.

[28] For Pore's study see footnote 19.

[29] Willibald Steinmetz and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, "Introduction: The Political As Communicative Space in History: The Bielefeld Approach," in *Writing Political History Today*, edited by Willibald Steinmetz, Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2013), 1.

[30] Ibid., 17. See also, Ute Frevert, "Neue Politikgeschichte," in *Neuepoltikgeschichte. Perspektiven einer historischen Politikforschung*, edited by Ute Frevert and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2005), 7-26.

[31] Ibid., 20.

[32] Ibid., 28.

group defines communication as political if it, first, has "a broad and sustainable impact on large segments or the whole of a given community."[33] Second, political communication aims at making the rules of social life and power relations obligatory. And third, "communication is political when it refers (explicitly or implicitly) to an imagined collective entity."[34] With this definition of the political in mind, the crisis of marriage and the family and its surrounding discourses clearly comprise an important component of the political history of the Weimar Republic.

"Gender" is the primary category of analysis framing this study. I use historian Joan Scott's definition of gender as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and…a primary way of signifying relationships of power."[35] I also take into consideration Scott's own recent correctives, which implore scholars to go beyond the initial approach and "think critically about how the meanings of sexed bodies are produced in relation to one another, how these meanings are deployed and changed."[36] This approach to gender allows me to examine how cultural and political discourses about marriage reform in Weimar Germany reflected, produced, and reproduced knowledge about the gendered roles of Germans citizens, especially as they related to the institution of marriage. The combined approaches of discourse analysis, political history, and gender history offer the opportunity to integrate the cultural and political discourses about marriage reform into a more complete portrayal of women's political activism and agency in the Weimar Republic.[37]

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91:5 (December 1986), 1067.

[36] Joan Scott, "Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?," *Diogenes* 57:1 (February 2010), 10.

[37] A detailed discussion of the character and contents of *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt* will follow in Chapter 3.2.

Following the introduction, this study begins with a chapter that addresses the legal and historical context of the Civil Code and post-war Germany as a whole. It explains the role of the Civil Code in upholding patriarchal and filial norms and emphasizes its contradictions with the constitution. This chapter also situates the Social Democratic debate on marriage reform in the context of the profound social, economic, and political changes of the Weimar Republic. The third chapter is divided into three sections. The first section of Chapter Three offers a brief background of the Social Democratic women's movement, and introduces some of the key issues that had animated Social Democratic women's activists since the late nineteenth century. The second section provides an introduction to the two Social Democratic women's journals, *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt*. The last two sections chronologically explore the contours of the debate on marriage reform within these two journals throughout the course of the Weimar Republic. Finally, the conclusion will expand on the implications of these findings of this study, both for the Weimar Republic, as well exploring the broader implications for the historical study of marriage and the family.

CHAPTER 1: FAMILY AND MARRIAGE IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

The issue of *Frauenwelt* that appeared on March 15, 1924 contained a brief article on a topic that would have already been familiar to most readers, if not most Germans. Dr. Julius Moses outlined the contours of the problem posed by the so-called *Frauenüberschuß*, or "surplus of women," in the aftermath of World War I. He wrote:

> The calamitous demographic consequences of the war are apparent all around us. They make clear the rearrangement of the population, in particular, the relationship of the sexes to one another. Even before the war there was numerical inequity, with women outnumbering men, so that now after the war this difference is even more distinct. In Germany more than 2 million of the best, the strongest, and the most virile men fell upon the "field of honor."[38]

In the opening sentences of this article Dr. Moses invoked some of the most acute anxieties that plagued Germans throughout the course of the Weimar Republic. The author explained the ramifications of this enormous loss of life on German society. That these German men died during their peak years of virility was not lost upon the reader. This preoccupation corresponded to concerns about a declining birth rate, which exacerbated fears about the health of the German family, and by extension, about the German nation as a whole. This article speaks to only several of the multiple profound changes and transitions Germans experienced during the Weimar Republic.

The following chapter aims to provide contextual background for the discussion of marriage and the debate on marriage reform within the Social Democratic women's journals. The

[38] Dr. Julius Moses, M.d.R., "Frauenüberschuß," *Frauenwelt* no. 2 (15 March, 1924): 19. Author's translation.

first section will introduce and explain the relevant sections of the German Civil Code. This discussion will further illustrate how the Civil Code sought to uphold patriarchal marital and filial norms, and will serve to emphasize the contradictions with the Weimar Constitution, which guaranteed *legal* equality to all women and men. The second section will situate the Social Democratic debate on marriage reform within its concrete historical context. It will illuminate the profound social, economic, and political changes that affected the Weimar Republic as a whole, but that also had transformative effects on the institutions of marriage and the family themselves. These changes led many German politicians and lawmakers to attempt to restructure Weimar Germany on familiar, ostensibly stable lines. The institutions of marriage and the family garnered increased attention from a variety of groups and were the source of many anxieties for German citizens—so great that the term "crisis of marriage" became common in the postwar vocabulary. These changes therefore comprise a very important contextual background as to why the discussion of marriage reform came to occupy such a large space in the post-war discourse of the Weimar Republic.

Legal Regulations of Marriage and Family in the Civil Law of 1896 and the Weimar Constitution

As Article 109 of the new constitution had guaranteed, "in principle" (*grundsätzlich*) German women had political equality with their male counterparts. In reality, however, many old laws of the *Kaisserreich* impinged upon the promised equality of the constitution. The marriage and family law sections of the 1896 German Civil Code remained in effect during the Weimar Republic, and they were above all responsible for this encroachment upon Article 109. The Civil Code promoted life-long monogamous marriage as the only acceptable form of cohabitation for men and women, and secured marriage as the foundation of family life. It privileged the husband in inner-marital decisions, promoted a gender specific division of labor, discriminated against

unwed mothers, and disadvantaged their illegitimate children. In short, the German Civil Code upheld a patriarchal model of marriage and the family that would ultimately prove irreconcilable with Social Democratic women's visions of marriage and partnership.[39]

A closer investigation of Book Four of the German Civil Code, which included all the specific prescriptions of matrimonial and family law, reveals the extent of its contradiction with Article 109. This section of the Civil Code regulated almost all aspects of marriage. It contained sub-sections that directly addressed engagement, the nullification of marriage and eligibility for remarriage after the death of a spouse, general prescriptions for matrimonial roles, matrimonial property law, and divorce.[40] Book Four also included stipulations for the legal treatment of children born within or outside of wedlock, prescriptions regarding parental violence, and custodianship of minors.[41] While the content of the family law section of the Civil Code was broad, the focus of this investigation is narrowed to the subsections concerning matrimonial law, which overwhelmingly sought to uphold a male breadwinner and female homemaker marital and family model.

The Civil Code's regulations of a couple's matrimonial life began, in fact, well before marriage. The Civil Code regulated engagement, in particular the potential consequences for rescinding an offer of engagement.[42] It also determined the age at which couples were allowed to marry. The Civil Code did not permit men to marry before eighteen years old—the age of legal adulthood—and women were not permitted to marry before they turned sixteen years old.[43] In addition, before the age of twenty-one both men and women—provided they themselves were

[39] See Berneike, *Die Frauenfrage ist Rechtsfrage.*

[40] BGB, Book 4, §§1297-1588.

[41] Ibid., §§1589-1921.

[42] Ibid., §§ 1297-1302.

[43] Ibid., §1303. A woman could, however, be exempt from this requirement if desired, and with parental permission.

legitimate children—required the assent and approval of their fathers in order to marry.[44] Couples were required to announce their intention to marry to the registrar prior to the civil marriage ceremony.[45] And finally, the Civil Code contained precise instructions for the procedures of the civil marriage ceremony itself, including where it would take place, which parties should be present, and the specific script for the registrar and couple alike.[46]

One of the most revealing sections of the Civil Code was entitled "Properties of Marriage in General," which detailed the gendered roles and expectations for women and men within their marriages.[47] This section upheld the husband's patriarchal power and explicitly entitled him "to make the decisions in all matters concerning the common marital life."[48] In particular, he was responsible for deciding the couple's living accommodations, both geographically and in terms of the particular domicile.[49] The effort to restrict women's marital roles to the female-homemaker family model went beyond denying them a legal role in decision-making processes. They were explicitly "entitled and *beholden* to manage the common household."[50] In addition, a wife was required to assist in her husband's business provided it fell within her household

[44] Ibid., §1305. For potential spouses who were illegitimate children, they required maternal permission to marry before the age of twenty-one.

[45] Ibid., §1316. This request expired if the couple did not complete the marriage ceremony within six months of announcing their intention to marry.

[46] Ibid., §§1317-1321.

[47] Ibid., §§1353-1362.

[48] Ibid., §1354. Translation as found in Michelle Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk : Weimar and Nazi Family Policy, 1918-1945* (Cambridge ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36. For women's criticism of this section of the Civil Code see, Berneike, *Die Frauenfrage ist Rechtsfrage*, 21.

[49] BGB., §1354.

[50] Ibid., §1356. Author's translation. Added emphasis.

duties.[51] And although she had the right to work outside of the home in the name of her husband, he also had the ultimate power to restrict or suspend this right.[52]

The section on matrimonial property law (*Eheliches Güterrecht*) perhaps epitomized what most contemporary Social Democratic women found so obsolete and outdated about the German Civil Code.[53] This section made abundantly clear that the husband's ultimate authority within a marriage also extended to financial matters.[54] Upon marriage the wife was obligated to turn over her financial possessions to her husband.[55] Her husband then had the right to make decisions regarding this property—like whether to sell it or dispose of it—without her permission.[56] The only exception to this was paraphernalia property (*Vorbehaltsgut*), or property over which the wife retained complete control. According to the Civil Code, such items included "especially clothing, jewelry, working equipment," such as a sewing machine, or another piece of equipment that the wife required for gainful employment.[57] Even this small exception to the overtly patriarchal property law revealed gender specific expectations for the division of labor within marriage.

The Civil Code also regulated divorce, the possibilities for which remained limited throughout the course of the Weimar Republic. The Civil Code allowed only very restricted grounds for divorce. For example, an individual could file for divorce if his or her spouse committed adultery.[58] Other acceptable grounds for divorce included attempted murder, gross

[51] Ibid., §1357

[52] Ibid.

[53] For women's criticism of the matrimonial property law see Berneike, *Die Frauenfrage ist Rechtsfrage*, 22-23.

[54] BGB., §§1363-1431.

[55] Ibid., §1363.

[56] Ibid., §1376.

[57] Ibid., §1366. For all of the sections addressing paraphernalia property see §§ 1365-1371.

[58] Ibid., §1565.

neglect of marital duties, abandonment, and mental insanity.[59] Moreover, divorce was only possible on the principle of guilt. This meant that one partner legally bore the responsibility for the failure of the marriage. For the "guilty" spouse this could entail providing financial support or paying other legal reparations.[60] The restrictive grounds for divorce coupled with the threat of additional financial burdens disincentivized many couples from seeking divorce altogether. This, in turn, no doubt increased disillusionment with the institution of marriage and contributed to a growing discourse about the necessity of a "reform of marriage."[61]

The above discussion has the revealed that the German Civil Code of 1896 sought to maintain a patriarchal vision of the family based on the male breadwinner and female homemaker model. And herein lay an inherent tension in the constitution of Germany's first parliamentary democracy. Although women had gained civic and political equality with men, their civil rights, as well as their marital and filial duties, were still constrained by the Civil Code. Moreover, the Civil Code also stood in direct conflict with Article 119. In addition to establishing marriage as the foundation of the family, Article 119 sought to bring gender equality to bear on the matrimonial relationship and the family: "[Marriage] is based on the equality (*Gleichberechtigung*) of both sexes."[62] Thus, the continued implementation of the patriarchal regulations of the Civil Code decidedly curbed the actualization of the new constitution's ostensibly progressive goals towards gender equality.

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[59] Ibid., §§1566-1569.

[60] Ibid., §1578.

[61] For women's criticism on divorce law see, Berneike, *Die Frauenfrage ist Rechtsfrage*, 23.

[62] Article 119, Documentarchiv, "Die Verfassung des deutschen Reiches," August 11, 1919. http://www.documentarchiv.de/wr/wrv.html. Author's translation.

Social Transformations of Family and Marriage

The profound death and destruction of World War I thoroughly devastated Germany. Although the new democracy of the Weimar Republic was faced with the monumental task of reconstructing all levels of German society, World War I had particularly profound implications for the German family. On the one hand, the war had served to exacerbate some preexisting concerns about the health of the German family and nation, such as a declining birth rate. On the other hand, the war also caused fractures and ruptures in other areas of German society that had tangible effects upon the family, such as labor reorganization and evolving conceptions of morality. As such, the perceived health of the family was a particularly pertinent marker of the post-war progress towards reconstructing German society on familiar, ostensibly stable lines.[63]

As a result of the war, the institution of the family underwent desolate demographic transformations, which greatly exacerbated the anxieties surrounding the reconstitution of family life in the Weimar Republic. Approximately 2 million German soldiers had lost their lives during World War I. Roughly thirty percent of these soldiers had been married, and they were survived by around 600,000 war widows and almost 1.2 million war orphans.[64] While about 200,000 of these war widows were able to remarry in the immediate post-war years, the more time that elapsed made it less likely for these women to find new partners.[65] These women, and their now

[63] The desire to return German society to the *status quo ante* was prevalent in the economic, labor, and housing policies of demobilization, as well. The planning for post-war demobilization began even before the end of the war. It entailed the question of how to feed, house, and employ demobilized troops, as well as what to do with the female and adolescent workers who had by and large taken their place in factories during the war. The fear that a poorly organized and crudely executed demobilization would lead to a breakdown of the post-war economy and social order leant saliency to this vision of normalcy and remained a motivating organizational impetus as the war ended and the restructuring of German society began in earnest. For a thorough discussion of the wartime planning for the postwar transition see Chapters 1 and 2 of Richard Bessel, *Germany After the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1–68. For an account of how the planning and carrying out of demobilization affected the regulation of women's work see Chapters 1 through 3 in Rouette, *Sozialpolitik als Geschlechterpolitik:* 7-130.

[64] Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*, 224–226.

[65] Ibid., 226.

"fatherless" children, often made up the largest group of state-welfare recipients. But the anxiety surrounding the phenomenon of female-headed households went beyond the financial burden they posed for the state. For many observers, these female-headed households represented a potential threat to the institution of marriage. Yet more alarming was the concern that these children would be forced to grow up without the supposed benefits of the "stern hand of the father."[66] Taken together, war widows and war orphans served as an inescapable reminder of the disruption of "normal" German family life, and contributed to the fears and anxieties regarding a post-war breakdown in discipline and moral standards.

The casualties of World War I also augmented a preexisting anxiety regarding the falling birth rate in Germany. Although the birth rate had been in decline since the late nineteenth century, by the beginning of the Weimar Republic the trend towards smaller families—especially among the working class—could no longer be overlooked.[67] The falling birth rate, which at its lowest reached 14 per 1,000 during 1916 to 1917 and failed to return to pre-war levels, led some to fear that the German people was dying out (*Volkstod*).[68] In addition, the death of so many men of marriageable age during World War I resulted in a "surplus" of over two million women *Frauenüberschuß*).[69] Due to this extreme demographic imbalance, many of these women faced similar difficulties as war widows seeking to remarry. Single women were thus faced with a paradox that only intensified post-war anxieties about the stability of the Germany family: women who were unable to marry were also excluded from having children, and were therefore unable to contribute to the rejuvenation of the birth rate.

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[66] See, for example, Minna Heimansberg, "Zur neuen Ehereform," *Die Gleichheit* no. 17 (23 May, 1919): 134; see also Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*, 227.

[67] Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 3.

[68] Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk*, 5.

[69] 15 percent of men aged twenty to forty had been killed. From the 1925 census as cited in, Grossman, *Reforming Sex,* 6.

Accompanying the population imbalance that would exclude many women from the possibility of matrimony, marriage as the foundational institution of the family itself was perceived to be in crisis. Between the years of 1909 and 1913 the divorce rate had averaged 24.6 per 100,000.[70] By 1921, however, it had risen to 62.9 per 100,000.[71] Although this increase was not actually as dire as many Germans feared, it nonetheless served as a sign of the alleged deterioration of moral standards in the post-war period. In her 1927 study of divorce in Saxony between 1920 and 1924, Ida Rost articulated the sentiments that were no doubt shared by many of her contemporaries: "If marriage is disturbed, family life is thereby endangered, and if marriage difficulties become particularly numerous, the preservation and propagation of the nation will also be impaired."[72] This articulation revealed the inner logic of many Germans concerned about the health of the German family, and by extension, about the health of the German nation. This viewpoint helps to explain why marriage and its perceived disruptions served to capture the attention of both German lawmakers and Social Democratic women's activists alike.

Among the most palpable expression of Germans' desire to return to "normal" family life was the upsurge in marriages and births between the years 1919 and 1920.[73] Although this upsurge would have seemingly placated Germans' concerns about both the rising divorce rate and declining birth rate, the perception of a drastically escalating divorce rate overshadowed the positive trend and eradicated much relief Germans otherwise may have felt at the resurgence of

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[70] Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk*, 5.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ida Rost, *Die Ehescheidungen der Jahre 1920-1924 von in Sachsen geschlossenen Ehen, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Dauer der Ehen und des Heiratsalters der geschiedenen Ehegatten* (Leipzig, 1927), 1. English translation in Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*, 231.

[73] Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*, 228.

marriage rates after the staggeringly low rates witnessed during the latter years of the war.[74] This upsurge in the absolute number of marriages, even compared to pre-war levels, undoubtedly reflected war-related motivations for marriage. And although the traditional factors leading to divorce remained, these new motivations for marriage correlated to a new subset of war-related grounds for divorce.[75] During the war, many couples had married, sometimes hastily, often in order to achieve material security. Had the husband died in combat, then the wife and potential offspring would have received the material and social benefits associated with the status of war widowhood. Marriages that survived the war, however, as well as those that comprised the upsurge of marriages immediately after the war were not necessarily well suited to withstand the difficult realities of everyday life associated with the early years of the Weimar Republic.

The acute anxieties accompanying the rising divorce rate and declining birthrate were augmented by a general uneasiness about the stability of the German family. Among the most important reasons for this uneasiness was the perceived disruption of traditional social and familial roles. Throughout the entire course of World War I, the German military had mobilized a total of around 13.4 million German men.[76] This absolute, forcible separation of male and female spheres created vast holes in German society that women were left to fill. Women stepped in to replace men in areas of the economy that had long been almost exclusively male dominated. They took industrial and factory jobs, as well as employment in the trade and service sectors—in short, women also stepped into the traditionally male role of primary breadwinner.

In many cases, women's experiences of increased financial responsibility and independence during the war did in fact contribute to a reluctance to return to their domestic

[74] Heinemann, *Familie zwischen Tradition und Emanzipation*, 155.

[75] Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk*, 71.

[76] Rouette, *Sozialpolitik als Geschlechterpolitik*, 14.

roles. As Elisabeth Röhl, one of the first female parliamentarians of the SPD in the National Assembly, wrote in her comment on the 1919 discussion of marriage reform in *Die Gleichheit*, "the exceedingly common economic occupation and independence of the *Kriegerfrau* widened the gaze of all those involved" so that they were no longer content to be confined to the "tight limits of their domesticity."[77] While their husbands were deployed, many women enjoyed this increased independence and were disinclined to return to the traditional, restrictive requirements of marriage. If this clashed with the returning husband's expectations to find his married-life unchanged, separation or divorce was a possibility.

Finally, print media played a decisive role in articulating and perpetuating the numerous anxieties that plagued Germans during the reconstruction of their nation. The burgeoning illustrated press was particularly effective in evoking strong—both positive and negative—reactions from its audience via the propagation of visual images.[78] One of the most ubiquitous symbols of change as presented by print mass media in the Weimar Republic was the so-called New Woman (*Neue Frau*). The image of the New Woman would have been recognizable to all Germans—she was portrayed in modern clothes, including shorter skirts and trousers, sported the famous short bob haircut (*Bubikopf*), and perhaps accentuated her features with an assortment of cosmetics. And while conservative politicians and policy makers may have unilaterally interpreted the New Woman as a symbol of societal degradation, there were, in fact, competing images and conceptions of the New Woman within the illustrated press.[79] For example, the

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[77] Elisabeth Röhl, "Ehereform*," *Die Gleichheit* no. 14 (11 April, 1919): 110.

[78] For a recent account of the rise and development of the illustrated magazine in the Weimar Republic see, Jennifer M. Lynn, "Part I: Mass Culture and the Rise of the Illustrated Magazine, 1919-1945," in *Contested Femininities: Representations of Modern Women in the German Illustrated Press, 1920-1945*, PhD dissertation (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012), 29-64.

[79] Jennifer M. Lynn decisively argues for the competing images of the Modern Woman. See "Part II: Contested Representations of the 'New Woman' in the Illustrated Press of the Weimar Republic," *Contested Femininities*, 65-222. See also, Atina Grossman, "Girlkultur or Thoroughly Rationalized Female: A New Woman in Weimar

Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung often portrayed a consumer-oriented version of the New Woman. Although she may have been employed in a white-collar job, her fixation on the newest perfume, stockings, or cold cream revealed the central importance of consuming new products in order to remain young and attractive, particularly in the eyes of her male boss.[80] The Communist press sought to refute the rampant indulgences of this middle-class, consumption-oriented New Woman, while simultaneously emphasizing the possibilities of female employment in industry via its own portrayal of the New Woman.[81] The Social Democratic press, including the magazine *Frauenwelt*, occupied a middle ground by depicting a "rationalized housewife," who in turn served as a female consumer of the newest technologies that guaranteed "efficient" housework.[82] Ultimately, each of these portrayals of the ubiquitous New Woman represented a unique set of ideals or, alternatively, responded to a particular constellation of fears on the part of the political group that presented the image.

Just as different political groups had various presentations and interpretations of the New Woman, so too did groups across the political spectrum perceive the so-called "crisis of marriage" as a "crisis" for different reasons. While the Social Democratic Party thought the institution of marriage was in need of social, legal, and cultural reform of some sort, the conservatives feared that these reform movements themselves might further endanger the stability of the German family. Put differently, there was no one perception of the "crisis of the family and marriage." It remains important, however, to understand the complex perceived

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Germany?" in *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change*, edited by Judith Friedlander, et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 62-80.

[80] Lynn, *Contested Femininities*, 79-80.

[81] Ibid., 85 and 102.

[82] Ibid., "Representations of the Rationalized Housewife and Female Consumer," 111-127. See also, Hagemann, "'Rationalization of Family Work,'" Special Issue of *Social Politics*: 19-48. The SPD portrayal of the New Woman also emphasized her role as a well-educated parent and educator of her children, who was aware of the developments and advancements in healthcare and family planning.

causes and contours of these different understandings of the "crisis of marriage." For only then can we more fully understand the equally complex suggestions and proposals for a "reform of marriage" that followed.

CHAPTER 2: THE DEBATE ON MARRIAGE REFORM IN THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC JOURNALS *DIE GLEICHHEIT* AND *FRAUENWELT*

While perusing the Social Democratic biweekly women's magazine, *Frauenwelt*, in the late 1920s, a contemporary reader would have found not only articles on all issues related to women's life—family, housework, consumption, health, the workplace, and politics—but also a wide range of advertisements for different products and services essential for her life and home. Situated between advertisements for "cheap Bohemian bed feathers" and Lenicet Cold Cream, a reader's attention may have been caught by the bold print of the word *Eheleute* (married couples), urging them to purchase Dr. Günther's newest book that revealed all the secrets for a happy life together.[83] Alternatively, Dr. Kühner's book *Was man vor der Ehe/von der Ehe wissen muß* (What One Must Know Before/From Marriage) was advertised as a comprehensive guide to marital life. It provided information on all stages of married life from the engagement, to the wedding, through the honeymoon. It offered advice on unhappy marriages and "the wonder of procreation."[84] These advertisements suggest that along with a wide range of other themes, information on how to lead a successful married life was essential to the happiness of the contemporary reader of *Frauenwelt*. That the issue of a happy married life also permeated the advertisements of women's journals speaks to the pervasiveness of the discourse of marriage during the Weimar Republic.

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of the evolving debate on marriage reform in the two Social Democratic women's magazines *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt*. To contextualize

[83] Reverse of title page, *Frauenwelt* no. 25 (Dec. 1927): 398.

[84] Reverse of title page, *Frauenwelt* no. 9 (May 1930): 194.

this analysis I begin by providing some historical background on the Social Democratic women's movement. The aim is to introduce some of the key issues and concerns that had motivated Social Democratic women's activists throughout the course of the early twentieth century. This introductory section reveals the continuity in Social Democratic women's activism, and demonstrates how they were ideally poised to take up the issue of marriage reform. The following subsection provides a concise introduction to the two main publications of the Weimar Social Democratic women's movement, including publication information, circulation numbers, intended audience, and ideological goals. Finally, the last two subsections explore and reconstruct the contours of the debate on marriage reform within these two journals. Despite their common political background, the editors of these publications and their readers alike expressed a multitude of different opinions regarding the problems of marriage and the suggestions for its reform.

This diversity of thought about marriage reform reflects not only the quickly changing political, social, economic, and cultural circumstances of the Weimar Republic. It also represents different political approaches—from more moderate positions to more radical ones—and generational differences within the Social Democratic women's movement. The political differences are also indicated by the transition from *Die Gleichheit*, the traditional Social Democratic women's journal for working-class girls and women published between 1892 and 1923, and *Frauenwelt*, which replaced *Die Gleichheit* in 1924, and aimed for broader social strata of female readers, especially housewives and mothers. Taken together and considered comparatively, the pages of *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt* demonstrate the relevance of the discourse of marriage reform to the everyday lives of the journal's readers. Ultimately, an investigation of the debate on marriage reform is a fruitful approach to fully understand not only

the process of renegotiating gendered roles within marriage, but also to understand how divorce—and the discourse surrounding it—came to be more mainstream within the Weimar Republic.

The Social Democratic Women's Movement

The ideology and politics of the Social Democratic Party decidedly influenced the theory and practice of the Social Democratic women's movement from its inception in the last decade of the nineteenth century.[85] SPD women's activists implemented quintessential forms of Social Democratic protest, such as strikes and demonstrations. They also placed heavy emphasis upon the education of their female members. In particular, the SPD's evolution from a class-based socialist party that at least rhetorically aimed for a social revolution, to a reform-oriented party that hoped to more incrementally change the economy, society, and politics through elections and parliamentary initiatives, decisively influenced the development of the political strategy of the SPD women's movement.[86] A brief overview of the development of the approaches to and strategies of attaining women's emancipation in the Social Democratic Party is helpful in understanding the methods of agitation and education that were later implemented within the pages of *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt*.

Until World War I the official Social Democratic approach maintained that working-class women would only be liberated upon the dramatic improvement of their economic conditions, for which they had to fight together with working-class men. Paid work would facilitate their independence from men as well as help integrate them into the labor movement as a whole. Although the universal suffrage of both sexes was a necessary precondition for equal political participation in a democracy, it was not considered sufficient to guarantee equality in other

[85] Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 511.

[86] Ibid.

areas—particularly economic equality—for either workers or women. This approach began to lose influence within the women's movement even before World War I. After the split of the SPD into the majority party (MSPD) and the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD)—which no longer wanted to support the pro-war politics of the majority—the leadership of the MSPD women's movement definitively took up a policy that focused on elections and parliamentary reform. After the *Novemberrevolution* in 1918, when German women and men finally achieved universal suffrage, this reform-oriented political approach went hand in hand with a maternalist feminism that proclaimed women were "equal but different."[87]

This maternalist feminism, in turn, became a decisive strategy for female activists in their pursuit of family and marriage reform. Since the turn of the century, the Social Democratic Party had been concerned with developing a socialist family model based on comradeship between husband and wife, and familial relationships that condemned physical abuse.[88] This discourse on a socialist family model soon expanded to include socialist conceptions for marriage. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the call for the elimination of marriages based on compulsion (*Zwangsehe*)—that is marriages based off of economic need, the necessity of supporting children, or the difficulty of obtaining a divorce, for example—occupied substantial space in the discussions of marriage and family reform. This advocacy for a *Kameradschafsehe*, or a marriage of comrades, informed the debates on marriage reform within the pages of *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt*.[89]

The SPD activist's protests against the stipulations of the German Civil Code (*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*) were also reflected on the pages of *Die Gleichheit*, even before World

[87] For an excellent in depth account of this process see, Ibid., 516-535.

[88] Ibid., 311.

[89] Ibid., 311-317.

War I. The Social Democratic representatives in the Reichstag—the national parliament of the Wilhelmine Empire—had argued fiercely against its adoption in 1896.[90] Among the most vocal opponents was the leader of the SPD, August Bebel—well-known because of his international 1879 bestseller *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (The Woman and Socialism)—who advocated for full equality between spouses within marriage, as well as a separation of possessions and income.[91] Although the proponents of the amendment to the Civil Code were ultimately unsuccessful, these protests reveal a tradition of agitation and dissent against restrictions to women's equality in social and familial life that continued into the Weimar Republic.[92]

The history of Social Democratic women's agitation and protest against the patriarchal limitations of the *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* reveals continuities that were also reflected upon the pages of the Social Democratic women's journals during the Weimar Republic. Moreover, that the discourse on the elimination of *Zwangsehe* in favor of *Kameradschaftsehe* already had strong political and cultural currency affirmed the saliency of these ideas, as well as other conceptions of reformed marriage, amongst readers of *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt*. The combination of these continuities helps to explain how Social Democratic women were uniquely poised to take up the debate on marriage reform more rigorously and systematically throughout the course of the Weimar Republic.

The Social Democratic Women's Journals, *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt*

The journal *Die Gleichheit* (Equality) was founded by the SPD in 1892 with the subtitle *Zeitschrift für die Interessen der Arbeiterinnen* (Newspaper for the Interests of Working

[90] Göran Therborn, *Between Sex and Power: Family in the World, 1900-2000* (London: Routledge, 2004), 26.

[91] Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany*, 15.

[92] For a more thorough discussion of the reactions to the BGB on the part of the SPD see, Crosby, "Last Bastion: The *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* and the Transformation of German Society," in *The Making of a German Constitution,* 189-218; John, "The Wilhelmine State and the Revision of the Code, 1888-1896," in *Politics and the Law in Late Nineteenth-Century Germany,* 160-198.

Women).[93] Then-SPD-member Klara Zetkin, the most influential female leader of the SPD women's organization before World War I, edited the journal until 1917 and helped to promote a drastic increase in readership. While in 1900 the journal only circulated 4,000 copies per issue, by 1914 the magazine had reached a circulation of 125,000 copies.[94] In 1916 Zetkin was one of the co-founders of the Spartacist Leage of the USPD. The Party Executive Committee of the MSPD therefore replaced Zetkin as the editor of *Die Gleichheit* with Marie Juchacz, who would become the most influential female leader of the Social Democratic women's movement during the Weimar Republic. The MSPD and the new editor of *Die Gleichheit* were not able to stabilize the readership, which had declined to 70,000 in 1917 and continued to decline to 33,000 in 1919.[95] One reason for this decline was that *Die Gleichheit* had to compete with two new women's journals for the leftist female readership—the USPD journal *Die Kämpferin*, founded in 1917, and the KPD magazine *Die Kommunistin*, started in 1919.

Die Gleichheit was published bi-weekly—until a switch to weekly publication in 1919—and was typically divided into two sections. The first section was comprised of approximately five articles that addressed political issues within the party, as well topics more specifically relevant to active female party members. The second, shorter section consisted of brief summaries of news from both regional and international women's movements. The layout of the journal varied little from week to week, and until the addition of the illustrated inserts in 1919,

[93] Alexandra Zelfel, *Erziehung – die Politik von Frauen: Erziehungsdiskurse im Spiegel von Frauenzeitschriften im ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert* (Heilbronn: Julius Klinkhardt Verlag, 2004), 96. Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 533.

[94] Ibid., 97.

[95] Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 525.

did not include pictures or illustrations, which were still very expensive to produce and which the party could not afford if it wanted to keep the price of the journal low.[96]

The components of *Die Gleichheit* clearly reflected its intended audience and ideological goal. *Die Gleichheit* mainly wanted to reach female party members and female relatives of male party members, who often could not afford to pay a party membership of their own. The contents of the journal revealed its commitment to educating these girls and women on political issues most serious to the Social Democratic Party as a whole, and in particular to its female supporters. In general, the journal was more overtly political than its antecessor, *Frauenwelt*. *Die Gleichheit*, however, was not immune to the intensification of competition among newspapers.[97] And in light of women's suffrage, there were particular efforts on the part of newspapers and magazines to reach a female audience, both for political purposes and in order to boost circulation numbers. The inclusion of the illustrated insert, *Die Frau und Ihr Haus* (Woman and Her House), as well as a further change in editors, was part of an effort to transform *Die Gleichheit* into a *Massenblatt* (mass circulation newspaper), in order to reach the so-called "indifferent" women. From 1919 to 1922, Clara Bohm-Schuch was the editor, who like her predecessor Marie Juchacz, was a representative of the MSPD and later the SPD in the Weimar National Assembly and the Reichstag.[98] Although coverage of political events of interest to women activists would remain in the foreground, the journal also extended its political coverage to topical issues that affected women as housewives and mothers as well.

[96] The illustrated inserts included "The Woman and Her House," which appeared once monthly and was intended to appeal to a constituency of housewives and mothers, as well as an insert of games and activities for children.

[97] For a good overview of the development of the press in the Weimar Republic, see Fulda, "The Berlin Press, 1918-1932," in *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic*, 13-44.

[98] Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 533.

The efforts to transform *Die Gleichheit* into a mass circulation newspaper were unsuccessful. Despite the attempts at popularization, the circulation of the newspaper dropped further from 33,000 to 11,000 copies from 1919 to 1920.[99] Even among the increasing number of female party members—their membership rose from 206,354 to 207,007 in these two years—subscriptions fell from 16% to 7%.[100] With the dramatic decline of the female party membership, which began in 1921 and continued until 1926, the subscription of *Die Gleichheit* fell as well. One major reason for this was that in the context of the severe economic post-war crisis—which entailed unemployment as well as hyperinflation—most party members were no longer able to finance a subscription. Because of this, the executive board of the party rejected the request of the national MSPD women's conference in Kassel in 1920 to make subscription to the newspaper mandatory for female party members. They feared that most of them would not be able to afford the additional costs and would therefore leave the MSPD altogether.[101] The decline of the female membership had already been compounded by the frustration of many new female party members at the anti-feminist demobilization policy of the MSPD and the trade unions, as well as the slow progress in women's matters after the achievement of women's suffrage.[102] Even though the number of subscriptions rose to 36,000 again after the unification of the MSPD and the USPD in 1922, the unified VSPD discontinued *Die Gleichheit* at the height of hyperinflation in 1923 due to dwindling subscription numbers that led to an unsustainably low circulation.[103]

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[99] Ibid., 534.

[100] Ibid., 534 and 571.

[101] Ibid.

[102] See, Karen Hagemann, "Men's Demonstrations and Women's Protest. Gender in Collective Action in the Urban Working-Class Milieu During the Weimar Republic," *Gender & History* 5, no. 1 (1993): 101-109.

[103] Ibid.

In March 1924, the illustrated magazine, *Frauenwelt* (Women's World), which appeared twice monthly, replaced the traditional socialist women's journal. From its inception until 1927, the editorial staff of *Frauenwelt* adhered to the guidelines of the party leadership and published articles in which the political orientation of the magazine was not obviously discernable. The less overt political message was in keeping with *Frauenwelt*'s aim to reach an audience outside of female members of the SPD, specifically the unorganized female relatives of male party members, as well as the "housewives of the masses."[104] Now, the Social Democratic women's magazine more closely resembled bourgeois fashion and entertainment magazines, so that the "indifferent" women readers would not dismiss the journal outright as socialist propaganda.[105] These goals influenced the content of the journal, which included household tips, advice on raising children, entertaining narratives and serial novels, poems and puzzles, as well as fashion inserts complete with sewing patterns, all of which reflected the attempt to raise readership by competing with other popular women's magazines at the time.[106]

Under the editorship of Richard Lohmann, the circulation of *Frauenwelt* increased from 67,000 in 1924 to 100,000 in 1926. However, despite the intention to reach unorganized working-class housewives, female party members still comprised the majority of subscribers.[107] 40 to 60% of the 151,811 female party members had subscribed to *Frauenwelt* in 1926.[108] In 1927, SPD-parliamentarian Toni Sender, a former member of the USPD, took over as editor of *Frauenwelt* in an effort to make the journal more politically engaging, while simultaneously still

[104] Lynn, "Contested Femininities," 57.

[105] Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 537.

[106] Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 537.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 539 and 571.

appealing to "the average small-town and village woman."[109] Despite this change in editorship, the circulation numbers of *Frauenwelt* did not drastically increase from their 1927 level of 100,000.[110] The journal was ultimately discontinued in January 1933 due to the growing threat of National Socialism. Since 1924 the SPD had also published the journal *Die Genossin* (The Female Comrade) in addition to *Frauenwelt*, which was intended for female functionaries in the party and distributed for free. Its number rose from 12,000 in 1924 to 40,000 in 1931, and 17% of the 228,278 female party members were subscribers.[111] Despite this alternative, members of the SPD women's organization contested the "shallow" form and content of *Frauenwelt*. That these opponents of *Frauenwelt*'s more popular appeal were primarily the more left-leaning and younger members of the SPD women's organization adds important texture to our understanding of the Social Democratic women's movement during the Weimar Republic as a whole.

The Discussion of Marriage Reform in *Die Gleichheit*

On March 28, 1919, the German Social Democratic women's magazine, *Die Gleichheit*, published the article "The Future Mothers: Thoughts about New Forms of Marriage," which chronicled the problems with the current form of legal marriage.[112] As the title suggested, the author, "Dr. Stricker," framed the article to reveal that the problem of traditional marriage lay in its restriction of future mothers. Dr. Stricker observed the war had "turned [women's] hair gray, their hands hard" and destroyed their "natural, holy right" to motherhood.[113] Due ostensibly to the demographic imbalance between men and women of marriageable age after World War I, legal marriage was no longer possible for *all* women.[114] Although one alternative option had

[109] Toni Sender, *Toni Sender: The Autobiography of a German Rebel.* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1939), 263.

[110] William Smaldone, "Marie Juchacz (1879-1956): Mobilizing Women," in *Confronting Hitler: German Social Democrats in Defense of the Weimar Republic, 1929-1933* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 108.

[111] Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 539 and 571.

arisen, Stricker maintained that only certain women were suited for a so-called "free marriage," and ultimately dismissed it as a *Leidensweg*, or a path of suffering.[115]

Fortunately, there was a solution. According to Dr. Stricker, a trial marriage (*Probehe*) provided "a third form of marital arrangement that could make thousands of women today fertile and fecund."[116] Otherwise known as a "marriage on time," Dr. Stricker held that this solution had the potential to "bring thousands of women uninhibited life fulfillment, thousands of children a peaceful childhood."[117] The author proposed that the state implement a legal trail marriage, which she claimed would simultaneously protect the rights of mother and child, while making any potential dissolution of marriage quieter and more civil.[118] In the remainder of the article she laid out her proposal for the practical arrangements of this legal trial marriage. It would last a minimum of two years with the potential for dissolution or extension only at the end of those two years.[119] In addition to prescriptions in regards to the length of the union, Dr. Stricker gave particular attention to any potential offspring. Children born within the trial marriage would be the financial responsibility of both mother and father, but if the marriage ended in dissolution, the children would remain with the mother because it is more likely that the father would remarry. The husband and potential father would be held financially responsible for the wife in

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[112] Dr. Stricker, "Die zukünftige Mütter. Gedanken über neue Ehereform.*" *Die Gleichheit* 13 (1919): 102-103.

[113] Ibid., 102.

[114] Ibid., 102.

[115] Free marriage was understood as the cohabitation of two individuals as a married couple with no legal acknowledgement of their relationship.

[116] Ibid. The exact wording in German reads "fruchtbar and reich."

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid. In the article "Ehereform.*" *Die Gleichheit* no. 14 (1919): 109, the editorial staff refer to the author of the original article as "Frau Dr. Stricker," confirming that she was female.

[119] Ibid.

case of illness, as well in the case of her pregnancy, even if their marriage was subsequently dissolved.[120]

Dr. Stricker's article represented one individual perspective on the so-called "crisis of marriage." In her view, the main problem of traditional marriage was twofold. First, it was the only legal option for procreation. Second, many women were excluded from the possibility of traditional marriage in light of the demographic imbalance following World War I. While these two problems resulted in a restriction of women's "natural, holy right to motherhood," they may have also revealed a deeper preoccupation with Germany's birthrate, which had begun to decline even before the war. Dr. Stricker's proposal of a legal trial marriage provided potential solutions to these problems. Her specific prescriptions, in turn, unearthed further problems of traditional marriage. For example, the emphasis on the husband's fiscal responsibility for his wife in Dr. Stricker's proposal was likely intended as a corrective for the economic burden faced by single mothers after a traditional marriage. In the end, Dr. Stricker was careful to emphasize her expectation that "many trial marriages would lead to long-lasting marriages (*Dauerehen*)."[121] But this should not be interpreted as indicating total continuity with traditional values. Rather, in the contemporary context, Dr. Stricker's forwarded a very unconventional and progressive suggestion, which simultaneously proved to be controversial amongst readers of *Die Gleichheit*, as well as served to expand the boundaries of the discourse on marriage reform.

As anticipated, Dr. Stricker's article proved to be controversial among the readership of *Die Gleichheit*. At the bottom of the original article the editorial staff of the magazine had solicited replies from its readers.[122] They were surely not disappointed, for over the course of the

[120] Ibid., 103.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid., 102.

next three months they published a series of reactions to the original article, which had "instigated an animated, public debate about this important problem."[123] While these reactions varied widely, together they demonstrate that marriage reform was a high profile issue during the beginning years of the Weimar Republic. On the one hand, some responders agreed wholeheartedly with Dr. Stricker's original editorial, and sometimes advocated a more thorough and progressive reform of marriage. On the other hand, other responders saw trial marriages as violating the sanctity of traditional marriage. A more thorough analysis of the responses to Dr. Stricker's article will help to reveal the multiplicity of conceptions regarding the problems of marriage and suggestions for the shape of marriage reform among Social Democrats during the early years of the Weimar Republic.

On April 11, 1919, *Die Gleichheit* published the first reply on the subject of marriage reform. The author of the article, Eilsabeth Röhl, was a SPD member of the Weimar National Assembly and the younger sister of Marie Juchacz. Röhl opened her reply with the strong assertion "it is completely without a doubt that the legal stipulations that rule contemporary marital life are fully outdated."[124] According to Röhl, "with political gender equality [*Gleichberechtigung*], the equal treatment of women must go hand in hand."[125] These opening contentions elucidated Röhl's perceptions of the fundamental problems of marriage. The remainder of the article revealed further problems accompanied by her suggestions for reform. Along with her observation that "in the last years, the new, independent woman…has undermined the male economic prerogative of the last several centuries," Röhl proposed that the way of raising children of both sexes "must be adjusted to make good, capable, educated,

[123] Editorial Staff, "Ehereform*," *Die Gleichheit* 14 (1919), 109.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid.

independent people who can give the state the best in terms of a career and family."[126] For Röhl this would also help to eliminate marriages based on economic necessity because boys and girls would be raised to "find in marriage comrades, friends, and people with whom one can go through life hand in hand."[127] These prescriptions divulged both Röhl's view on the problems contributing to the "crisis of marriage" as well as her conception of the ideal marriage.

There were, however, some tangible steps that could be taken in order to alleviate the more immediate problems associated with the "crisis of marriage." In Röhl's view, a revision of marriage law, especially divorce law, was a pressing necessity. This was especially the case in light of the war, in which many couples had endured a long period of forced separation. According to Röhl it was "a condition of the worst lack of culture and immorality to force people together who have become strangers."[128] But she also advocated for a reform that would economically protect women and mothers after a divorce, as well as ease the financial burden for men. Overall, Röhl's proposals reflected a vision of an ideal marriage based on respect and partnership between spouses—one that was incompatible with the patriarchal prescriptions of the German Civil Code. Ultimately, Röhl identified an easing of divorce proceedings as the most pressing problem of marriage reform at the time, which would work towards the ideal of a socialist marriage in a more practical, piecemeal fashion.

In the following issue of *Die Gleichheit* the editors published two more replies to Dr. Stricker's original article. Ella Wierzbitszki's response to Dr. Stricker's article identified the primary problem of contemporary marriage not with the institution itself, but rather with the arduous process of divorce. As such, she proposed that the current form of marriage could stay

[126] Ibid., 110.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

the same, so long as divorce was made less humiliating and overall easier.[129] Contrary to Röhl's stance, Wierzbitszki, who was a leading female functionary of the MSPD in Hamburg,[130] did not necessarily advocate a socialist vision of marriage. Rather, she expressed strongly that "the labor force should take up (and defend!) the standpoint that the man must be the bread-winner of the family, because the wife—who is also the mother—belongs in the house!"[131] She advocated that the working-class man was also entitled to a family wage so that his working-class wife was not forced to work out of economic necessity. Such a resounding defense of the bourgeois male breadwinner and female homemaker family model may seem out of place in the pages of a Social Democratic journal. Such diversity and idiosyncrasy, however, often characterized these publications, and in fact reflects a contemporary renegotiation of gendered domestic roles within the family and marriage.

Following Wierzbitszki's defense of the male-breadwinner family, W. Griechen put forth yet another interpretation of the problem of marriage and proposals for its reform. Griechen worried that the trial marriage would obscure the sentimental values necessary in order to enter into and sustain a marriage.[132] The author thought that trial marriages would only exacerbate the existing "Americanization" of marriages—the transformation of marriages into a business transaction.[133] Griechen's concern that trial marriages would diminish "the feeling of giving oneself and one's love completely to another person and the commitment of doing so forever" speaks volumes about the conceptualization of an ideal marriage.[134] Griechen did, however,

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[129] Ella Wierzbitszki, "Moderne Ehe," *Die Gleichheit* no. 15 (25 April, 1919): 116.

[130] Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 328.

[131] Ibid., 117.

[132] W. Griechen, "Moderne Ehe," *Die Gleichheit* no. 15 (25 April, 1919): 117.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid.

recognize that the trial period could be a valuable tool for marriage partners "interested in building a comfortable, long-lasting life together."[135] Therefore the author suggested that the engagement period be considered the trial period, and that it be extended to three years. This, Griechen hoped, would decrease the divorce rate and alleviate the financial burdens for single mothers. Ultimately, however, Griechen realized that "the foundational improvement of the place of women in political life, as well as in marriage, can only be accomplished if women continue to work and fight through organization, self-education, and upbringing to increase their economic and intellectual independence.[136] Overall, Griechen's proposals simultaneously reflected nostalgia for a romantic vision of marriage, as well as practical proposals that took into account the current economically uncertain times.

Two months after the original appearance of Dr. Stricker's article, *Die Gleichheit* published the final responses to the topic of marriage reform. Kurt Heilbut, party secretary of the MSPD in Berlin, located the problem of contemporary marriage primarily in the discrepancy between what marriage symbolized for men versus women. He explained that while women were raised to look forward to marriage, men dreaded it and often regarded it as an end to their freedom. He proposed that marriage laws be reformed from the bottom up so "that like in political life, the legal relationship between men and women [would] be fully equal."[137] Minna Heimannsberg was less reserved in her denunciation of contemporary marriage, as evidenced by her opening claim that "in its current form marriage is barbarism."[138] She identified the "almost unbreakable" bonds of matrimony as the foremost problem of contemporary marriage, and cited

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid.,118.

[137] Kurt Heilbut, "Moderne Ehe," *Die Gleichheit*, no. 17 (23 May, 1919): 132.

[138] Minna Heimannsberg, "Moderne Ehe," *Die Gleichheit*, no. 17 (23 May, 1919): 133.

the many couples who had already experienced the long regret associated with an unhappy union. Although Heimannsberg echoed August Bebel in the stance that "free love is the ideal unification of man and woman," she also recognized that with the old-fashioned moral code of Weimair Germany free-love unions remained impossible.[139] Finally, Charlotte Buchow emphatically embraced the possibility of trial marriages. She echoed Dr. Stricker's original article in that she saw in trial marriages the opportunity for women to become mothers. She hesitated to limit the duration for the trial marriage to two years, however, out of worry that it would lead to hasty unions driven by passion as opposed to the desire to have a family.[140] Despite the acknowledgement that men were the primary instigators of divorce, Buchow nonetheless maintained that the "holy trinity" of father, mother, and child should not be destroyed, for "where should a mother get the strength to give her child light and warmth when she is full of pain from the separation of her husband?"[141] Buchow's imperative that the nuclear family should remain united, while perhaps implicitly patriarchal, more importantly revealed that Social Democratic women shared the goal of restructuring marriage and the family on familiar, stable lines.

The preceding discussion reveals the wide diversity of understandings of the problem of contemporary marriage, as well as the array of different conceptualizations and proposals for its reform, that were prevalent in the early years of the Weimar Republic, inside and outside of the MSPD. Some contributors saw the problem of traditional marriage as its constriction of motherhood, therefore advocating a trial marriage to offer women the opportunity to bear children. Other contributors saw the difficulty of divorce as the foremost problem of traditional

[139] Ibid.

[140] Charlotte Buchow, "Moderne Ehe," *Die Gleichheit*, no. 17 (23 May, 1919): 135.

[141] Ibid.

marriage. They proposed an easing in divorce restrictions, or trial marriages to allow couples longer to decide whether to commit to marriage. Many contributors recognized that unlike in political life, women were far from achieving equality in married life, and therefore called not only for a reform of marriage, but also for reforms that would address gender inequalities in social, cultural, and economic life. Although these early discussions did not result in a consensus, the space that the discourse on marriage reform occupied in the Social Democratic journal speaks to the importance of this issue for SPD women's activism in the early years of the Weimar Republic.

For the last several years of *Die Gleichheit*'s publication, its debate on marriage reform continued to reveal a diverse range of understandings and proposals for reform. On October 9, 1920, *Die Gleichheit* published an article by Wilhelm Goldes entitled "Sozialisierung der Frau oder sozialistische Ehe?" (Socialization of Woman or Socialist Marriage?).[142] The article referenced other reports published about communist reforms allegedly occurring in revolutionary Russia at the time, which were said to declare all women between the ages of 17 and 32 as public property (*Volkseigentum*). Goldes interpreted these reports as misrepresenting socialism, likely with the purpose of discrediting it. Throughout the rest of the article he described a "new socialist marriage" that would solve many of the problems of contemporary marriage. First, the new marriage "should not simply serve the purpose of gratifying physical needs, rather it should be more: the inner emotional community of two emancipated individuals of the opposite sex."[143] Second, Goldes maintained that this emotional community needed to be accompanied by women's full economic and educational equality with men, which was also necessary for the

[142] Wilhelm Goldes, "Sozialisierung der Frau oder sozialistische Ehe?" *Die Gleichheit* 42/43 (9 October, 1920): 340-341.

[143] Ibid., 340.

transformation from a capitalist to a socialist society. Goldes held that the capitalist-oriented *Zwangsehe* (marriage of compulsion) could and should be "abolished through the implementation of the inner emotional and psychic marital union—the free, socialist, monogamous marriage—in which man and woman live together as complete equals."[144] Implicit in Goldes proposal for a "new socialist marriage" was the recognition of women's economic dependence upon men within traditional marriage. While the solution lay in part in economic equality between spouses, Goldes' also clearly emphasized the necessity of love and emotional commitment within marriage.

The perceived "crisis of marriage" continued to influence publications within *Die Gleichheit*. In her article "Die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter im deutschen Eherecht" (The Equality of the Sexes in German Marital Law), Ella Bormann opened with an explanation of the rising divorce rate in Germany and other *Kulturländer* (highly civilized countries).[145] According to Bormann, the climbing divorce rate was not indicative of a "brutalization of morals," as many asserted; rather, it likely meant that the "provisions of the currently prevailing marriage laws [were] being so overtaken by the economic, social, and moral development of society that it [led] to lasting attrition and conflicts."[146] Bormann continued with an explanation of the conditions in Germany that exacerbated the rise in divorce, namely the increase of female employment during the war, as well as women's greater economic and intellectual independence. She drew a parallel between the Weimar Republic, which had cast off the bonds of monarchy, and contemporary women, who had become accustomed to self-accountability and who now desired to "cast off the

[144] Ibid., 341

[145] Ella Bormann, "Die Gleichstellung der Geschlecter im deutschen Eherecht," *Die Gleichheit* no. 12 (15 June, 1922): 109-110.

[146] Ibid., 109

bondage and subordination of patriarchal marriage," in order to realize full equality between men and women in marriage.[147]

Unfortunately, inequality between the sexes was inherent in contemporary German marital law. The remainder of Bormann's article, which was published in two parts, went on to detail the shortcomings of German marital law within the Civil Code. Bormann proceeded through the Civil Code section by section and touched on some of the familiar inequalities, such as the requirement for women to relinquish their private property to their husbands upon marriage. But she also highlighted some other overtly patriarchal sections incompatible with "democratic marriage," such as women taking their husband's last name.[148] Bormann placed particular emphasis on women's economic dependence within marriage, noting that many marriages persist for longer than they should. Bormann saw this problem as linked with women's "special role" as mothers and maintained that "the full, complete economic and social independence and equality of women can only be achieved if the *Mutterschaftsleistung* (the performance of motherhood) is recognized as the irreplaceable special activity of women for society, and is accompanied by ample material compensation."[149] Put differently, Bormann, like Dr. Stricker before her, saw women's economic inequality with men and its potential adverse effects on their opportunity for motherhood, as a problem of contemporary marriage. Her solution was to secure women's economic independence in their professional lives, so that the "foundations and composition of society will be secure enough to form a living partnership

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ella Bormann, "Die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter im detuschen Eherecht (Schluß)," *Die Gleichheit* no. 13 (1 July, 1922): 123.

[149] Ibid.

between man and woman…that is grounded in pure love and free will,"[150] revealing again the ideal of the *Kameradschaftsehe*.

This foray into the pages of *Die Gleichheit* has revealed a wide diversity of conceptualizations and proposals for a reform of marriage. In part, this diversity reflected the myriad of instabilities plaguing the Weimar Republic at the time. In the pages of *Die Gleichheit*, the MSPD sought to address these instabilities by focusing their attention on proposals and measures that would serve to reform the institutions of marriage and the family. This diversity of thought surrounding marriage reform suggests not so much a lack of consensus, rather it indicates that the institutions of marriage and the family themselves were in flux. The vision of normalcy upon which many Germans sought to restructure society was in fact just that—a vision. In reality, family and marriage were no less affected by the fundamental changes that had occurred in other areas of society. As such, Social Democratic activists' proposals produced and reproduced knowledge about the shifting expectations for gendered roles within marriage that were compatible with these other fundamental changes.

The Discussion of Marriage Reform in *Frauenwelt*

In 1924 *Frauenwelt* replaced *Die Gleichheit* as the main journal of the Social Democratic women's movement. That fewer articles were published about "the crisis of marriage" and marriage reform might suggest that this discourse came to occupy less space within the women's movement during latter years of the Weimar Republic. But it also reflected the less overtly political goals held by the journal. There were fewer articles devoted explicitly to a critique of the German Civil Code or the matrimonial property law. However, *Frauenwelt*'s pages nonetheless revealed that marriage reform was a ubiquitous and pressing topic in the minds of

[150] Ibid.

readers and contributors alike. And while *Frauenwelt* also presented a multitude of different conceptions about the current "crisis of marriage," as well as varying proposals for its reform, one change was evident in comparison to *Die Gleichheit*'s more systematic discussion of marriage reform: marital problems and divorce appeared to become a less stigmatized subject in the latter years of the Weimar Republic. This was not least a result of the increasing activities of the sexual reform movement, which not only contributed to the removal of taboos in the public debate, but also led to the proliferation of marriage counseling centers, which offered members advice on both birth control and married life in general.[151] Another indicator of this development were advertisements for marriage counseling clinics and marriage advice manuals that occupied a prominent space in the pages of the magazine, often appearing alongside advertisements for divorce attorneys.[152] *Frauenwelt*, with its goal to reach an audience outside of the SPD party membership, reflected the increasing visibility and ubiquity of the discussion of marriage reform in the everyday lives of its readers.

One of the earlier articles on marriage reform in *Frauenwelt* suggests yet another reason that the discourse on marriage reform may have come to occupy less space within the Social Democratic women's movement. In an article published in March 1925, a lawyer with the last name Marx reported on the status of *das eheliche Güterrecht* (marital property law) in the Weimar Republic. The author noted that although the equality of women in public life had been almost completely carried out in the last years, the women's movement had not yet managed to achieve complete equality of women in marital law, as was promised in Article 119 of the

[151] See, Grossman, *Reforming Sex*. See also the article describing the foundation of marriage counseling centers throughout the larger cities in Germany, Dr. med. Edith Rosenkranz, "Eheberatungsstellen," *Frauenwelt* no. 18 (27 Aug., 1927).

[152] See for example the aforementioned advertisements, Reverse of the title page, "Eheleute," *Frauenwelt* no. 4 (Dec., 1925).

Weimar Constitution.[153] In particular, the women's movement was unable to achieve change in the Civil Code, which still enabled the husband to take possession of his wife's property. The author advocated that this issue be addressed with a vote during the upcoming International Law Conference.[154]

While the article on marital property law reveals continuities in the discussion of marriage reform between *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt*, it also divulges some more fundamental issues of the Social Democratic women's movement. At the beginning of the Weimar Republic, many women activists placed their hopes for wide reaching societal changes and equality within politics on the new parliamentary democratic system.[155] Many female parliamentarians were optimistic that they could affect reformative changes for the equality of women beyond the political realm. In 1919, 8.9 percent of total parliamentary representatives were women.[156] Although the percentage of female SPD parliamentarians would fluctuate between 8.8 and 13.2 percent over the course of the Weimar Republic, 1919 was the height of total female participation in parliamentary politics. Social Democratic women's hopes at the beginning of the Weimar Republic soon turned to disappointment and resignation.[157] That marriage reform in the Civil Code or otherwise had not yet been effectively addressed by 1925 surely contributed to the disappointment and disillusionment of many women activists.

The aforementioned article about marital property law was unique in that it resembled the more systematic and political style of reporting prevalent in *Die Gleichheit.* Typically, the articles in *Frauenwelt* about marriage reform reflected the less overt political goals of the

[153] Staatsanwalt Marx, "Das eheliche Güterrecht," *Frauenwelt* no. 5 (March 1925): 61.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 535.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid., 536.

journal. Instead, the format of the articles and the style of reporting affirmed the journal's goals to reach an audience comprised of the unorganized "housewives of the masses." For example, the article "Ehescheidung in Deutschland und anderen Länder" (Divorce in Germany and Other Countries), published in the October 20, 1928 edition of *Frauenwelt*, combined a critique of German divorce laws with a comparative exposé on the relative modernity or out-datedness of German marital life.[158] On the one hand, author Otto Landsberg, a lawyer and the first Minister of Justice of the Weimar Republic and an SPD representative in the Reichstag, commented sarcastically that the Prussian Civil Code (*Allgemeines Landesrecht*) of 1794 was more modern and progressive than the current Civil Code in that it offered more than five legitimate grounds for divorce.[159] But on the other hand, he also criticized the Spanish, Belgian, French, and Dutch divorce laws for only allowing wives to file for divorce if the instance of adultery had occurred within the marital household, whereas husbands needed no other justification than an occurrence of adultery.[160] This comparative presentation revealed the simultaneous continuation of the discourse on marriage reform with the attempt to capture the attention of a broader audience.

Another way in which *Frauenwelt* attempted to engage with a wider readership was through writing contests, such as the one that appeared in the September 21, 1929 edition.[161] The editors asked readers to respond to the question "What do you think about the contemporary legal form of marriage?" The first and third place winners of the contest appeared in the November 30, 1929 issue, along with a note from the editor, Toni Sender. Ultimately, despite the

[158] Otto Landsberg, M.d.R., "Ehescheidung in Deutschland und anderen Länder," *Frauenwelt* no. 21 (20 Oct., 1928): 485, 492.

[159] Ibid., 485.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Editors, "Preisauschreiben," *Frauenwelt* no. 19 (21 Sept., 1929): 444.

difficulty of the question, almost 300 women had participated.[162] The published responses reveal the same diversity of thought and opinion that had characterized Social Democratic women's viewpoints on marriage throughout other articles in *Frauenwelt* and *Die Gleichheit* before it. While the third place winner refused the current form of legal marriage both on principle and in her own life, the second place winner maintained that the current form had to remain until "the socialist transformation of the world from the ground up."[163] The popularity of the writing contest, as well as the continued diversity of opinions about the contemporary form of marriage, indicates that the discourse on marriage reform was still prevalent in the latter years of the Weimar Republic. The format that *Frauenwelt* used to access this discourse on marriage reform was not only indicative of their efforts and strategies to reach a wider audience. Rather, it also reveals the ubiquity of divorce and marital problems and suggests the "mainstreaming" of this discourse on marriage reform.

Another medium that leant itself well to a discussion of marriage reform were the thorough book reviews published in order to explore pertinent topics. And during the mid to late-1920s there was "a multitude of books that…appeared" and "took up the solution to this question," namely the question of the so-called "crisis of marriage."[164] According to Grete Wels—the wife of Otto Wels, the longtime chairman of the SPD between 1919 and 1933—and her book review, published in 1929, Ben Lindsey's book, *The Companionate Marriage*, was one of the most thorough and serious attempts at finding a solution to the crisis in marriage. Ben Lindsey, an American juvenile court judge, had first become well-known in Germany for his

[162] Toni Sender, "Das Ergebnis unseres Preisausschreibens," *Frauenwelt* no. 24 (30 Nov., 1929): 565. The second place answer was published by the editors in, "Wie stehst Du zur heutigen gesetzlichen Form der Ehe?" *Frauenwelt* no. 26 (28 Dec., 1929): 614.

[163] Cläre Kleineibst, "Wie stehst Du zur heutigen gesetzlichen Form der Ehe?" *Frauenwelt* no. 26 (28 Dec., 1929): 614

[164] Grete Wels, "Die Kameradschaftsehe," *Frauenwelt* no. 9 (4 May, 1929): 202.

book *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, which appeared in German translation in 1927.[165] *The Companionate Marriage,*[166] which was published in German in 1928, was a continuation of his previous work, in which he identified the *Sexualnot* (sexual emergency) experienced by American youth. Lindsay called for a reform of marriage law to match the emerging, new sexual morality, and *The Companionate Marriage* exhibited the concrete developments in his thinking and suggestions for marriage reform.

In her review, Wels set out in part to identify and correct some common misinterpretations of Lindsey's second book. She noted the "storms of indignation" that followed the publication of *The Companionate Marriage* and hypothesized that most people misunderstood the title and only read the book fleetingly.[167] She argued that the book's opponents misunderstood Lindsey as an advocate of free love, trial marriages, polygamy, and the easiest possibilities of divorce. [168] Wels, however, employed a series of direct quotes from *The Companionate Marriage* as counter-evidence to these misunderstandings. Contrary to these misinterpretations, Lindsey believed strongly in the inherent worth of the institution of marriage. He was an advocate of monogamy and was against divorce. She distinguished between critics' versions of trial marriage and the "companionate marriage," which was "a legal marriage, with legalized Birth Control [*sic*], and with the right to divorce by mutual consent for childless couples, usually without payment of alimony."[169] Wels also reiterated that Lindsey's

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[165] Benjamin Barr Lindsey and Wainwright Evans, *The Revolt of Modern Youth* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925); or the German version, *Die Revolution der modernen Jugend* (Stuttgart: Dt. Verl.-Anst., 1927).

[166] Benjamin Barr Lindsey and Wainwright Evans, *Companionate Marriage* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927); also the German version, *Die Kameradschaftsehe* (Stuttgart: Dt. Verl.Anst., 1928).

[167] Wels, "Die Kameradschaftsehe," 202.

[168] Here trial marriage (or "Probeehe") can be understood as "a technically legal marriage which is entered with the intention that it shall be, not and unduring union, but merely a temporary sex episode, similar in spirit to what we commonly call the 'unmarried union.'" Lindsey, *Companionate Marriage*, vi.

[169] Lindsey, *Companionate Marriage*, v.

companionate marriage was a closed marriage, entered into with the hope and intention that it [would] lead to a lasting marriage.[170] In framing her defense of Lindsey, Wels defended against potential critics by emphasizing that companionate marriages did not threaten traditional marriages, and in so doing began to build a parallel conception of reformed marriage compatible with the already established form.

In her effort to advocate for a new form of marriage, Wels identified a variety of reasons behind Lindsey's support of marriage reform, many of which she also found applicable to the current form of marriage in the Weimar Republic. Most importantly, companionate marriages already existed de facto within society. That is to say, "conventionally respectable" and "sophisticated people [were], without incurring social reproach, everywhere practicing Birth Control [*sic*] and [were] also obtaining collusive divorce, outside the law, whenever they want[ed] it."[171] Lindsey maintained that legalizing companionate marriages would not eliminate people who married in the hopes of establishing a lasting union—rather, when necessary, it would allow them to dissolve the union easily without resorting to fraud and hypocrisy.[172] This spoke directly to the issue of the *Schuldfrage* (question of guilt), which, due to the continued implementation of the Civil Code, remained as much of a financial and moral strain upon the "guilty" party in 1929 as it was in 1919.

According to Wels, the grounds for divorce in Lindsey's American marriage system and in the Weimar Republic were comparable. Because marriage was the only socially acceptable means to an erotic relationship, couples often married blindly and without considering the responsibilities or consequences. "People who enter rashly into marriage solely on the

[170] Wels, "Kameradschaftsehe," 202.

[171] Lindsey, *Companionate Marriage*, v.

[172] Wels, "Kameradschaftsehe," 202.

insufficient basis of eroticism will be double victims of the statutes of society, in that they will either be confined by the force of bourgeois convention to the life-long hell of an inseparable community until they perish, or be forced to use real or fabricated adultery in the divorce proceedings."[173] For Wels, this was the situation in which companionate marriages could offer the best possible way out, and she ultimately advocated strongly for Lindsey's companionate marriage as a beginning of the solution to the problems and conflicts of the contemporary marriage system in Weimar Germany.

Wels concluded her article with a section on her doubt as to whether society was really so advanced as to no longer need legal guidelines to make moral decisions. She classified the current state of affairs as a "dangerous transitional state," in which the excessive pressure of puritanical laws had actually served to increase a lack of sexual restraint. She used the metaphor of a swinging pendulum to indicate her opinion that society had swung too far in its sudden loosening towards sexual freedom. She suggested that rather than increasing one's love of life (*Lebensfreude*), sexual encounters led to bitterness, disappointment and torment. "What we need," she argued, "is love. And somewhat less eroticism."[174] Wels' call to action revealed an acute awareness of the shifting expectations for marital roles in the Weimar Republic. Awareness and concern over this "dangerous transitional state" led her, like many of her contemporaries, to attempt to stabilize the institution of marriage on familiar lines. Rather than embrace sexual liberation, she encouraged a marriage based on love, and thus revealed strong continuities in the debate on marriage reform throughout the course of the Weimar Republic.

In her review, Wels engaged with a host of issues related to marriage reform that displayed strong continuity with the previous discussions of marriage reform in both *Die*

[173] Ibid., 202-203.

[174] Ibid., 203.

Gleihheit and *Frauenwelt*. Wels echoed many of Lindsey's arguments, and in so doing directed attention to the continued necessity of a legal reform of marriage in the Weimar Republic. Other similarities between the two discussions also existed, including recommendations of loosening divorce law. One difference, however, between discussions of marriage reform in *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt* was the retraction of a socialist or even moderate Social Democratic position, which was in keeping with *Frauenwelt*'s less overtly political goals, as defined by the Executive Committee of the party, but which decidedly did not find support among the female membership.[175] Besides the German translation of the term "companionate marriage" to *Kameradschaftsehe*—which, as previously mentioned, had long-lasting resonance in the discourse on marriage reform—socialist ideology was largely absent in Wels' review.

The debate on marriage reform in *Frauenwelt* continued into the journal's final years of publication despite the growing threat of National Socialism, against which the magazine argued and agitated more and more intensively.[176] Beginning in April of 1931, *Frauenwelt* published a series of articles by Henny Schumacher—an educator and teacher who also wrote educational guides for women—which portrayed a variety of different contemporary *Ehekrisen*, or crises of marriage.[177] These portrayals went beyond the "superficial consideration" of hasty war marriages, and instead explicated the deeper reasons for the rise in the divorce rate over the last decade, namely "the changes in the economic and political structure of society, and the related changes in the mindset of all Germans."[178] Throughout the series Schumacher was also careful to

[175] See Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik*, 541-550.

[176] Beginning in 1930 there were increasingly frequent letters from the editor, Toni Sender, warning readers of the growing threat of Fascism and encouraging them to work towards a "lighter, safer future in the world of socialism!" See for example "Liebe Leserin," *Frauenwelt* no. 9 (3 May, 1930): 195; "Liebe Leserin," *Frauenwelt* no. 13 (28 June, 1930): 293; "Liebe Leserin," *Frauenwelt* no. 16 (7 Aug., 1930): 365.

[177] See Hagemann, Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik, 323.

[178] Henny Schumacher, "Henny Schumacher: Ehekrisen," *Frauenwelt* no. 8 (18 April, 1931): 173.

emphasize "such a close human commitment as marriage was particularly sensitive to the effects of the mental and spiritual effects of the" societal changes.[179] As such, marriage was the site at which many women negotiated their social, economic, and cultural equality vis-à-vis their spouses. It was the intended purpose of the article series to reveal some of these conflicts, or *Ehekrisen*.

Over the course of the series of articles, the last of which was published in August of 1931, Schumacher portrayed a series of *Ehekrisen* that shed light on some of the most common problems of contemporary marriage. Whether or not these incidences were fictional—the author never indicated decisively—does not detract from their significance in relation to the discourse on the "crisis of marriage" and marriage reform. First, the articles portrayed the stories of a diverse array of characters, all of whom were extremely relatable. For example, there was the story of Frau Marianne, mother of eleven, who ultimately felt so trapped by her marriage that she concluded "all men are egoists, and they misuse women!"[180] There was also the example of *die Kameradschafstehe*, whose marriage ultimately failed because of the wife's yearning for a child versus the husband's unremitting refusal to father children.[181] These relatable characters indicate more than *Frauenwelt*'s desire to appeal to a wider readership. Rather, they also demonstrate the "everyday" quality of marital difficulties and divorces within the Weimar Republic. Second, the two-part conclusion to the article series actively engaged with the discourse on "marriage reform" by offering potential solutions to these *Ehekrisen*. Schumacher's primary suggestion was to ease divorce laws.[182] Using the example of Frau Marianne, who remained in her marriage for

[179] Ibid.

[180] Henny Schumacher, "Henny Schumacher: Ehekrisen," *Frauenwelt* no. 9 (2 May, 1931): 203.

[181] Henny Schumacher, "Henny Schumacher: Ehekrisen," *Frauenwelt* no. 13 (27 June, 1931): 301.

[182] Henny Schumacher, "Henny Schumacher: Ehekrisen," *Frauenwelt* no. 16 (8 Aug., 1931): 368.

the ostensible good of her children, Schumacher suggested that there were also many other marriages that remained together simply due to the difficulty of divorce, which was in fact detrimental to the offspring of the union. Taken together, the relatable characters depicted within the article series, as well as the active engagement with the debate on marriage reform, represent the "mainstreaming" of the discourse on the "crisis of marriage."

Though diverse in form, most Social Democratic conceptions of reformed marriage pointed to the necessity of political, legal, or cultural intervention in order to stabilize marriage. The degree and form of this proposed reform varied widely. That there was no universally agreed upon strategy for marriage reform among the Social Democratic women who published *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt* reflects the shifting social, economic, political, and cultural terrain of the Weimar Republic. Contributors and readers alike viewed the "crisis of marriage" through different lenses, which in turn informed their perceptions of its problem and proposals for its reform. Over the course of the Weimar Republic, accompanied by the replacement of *Die Gleichheit* by *Frauenwelt*, the tone and prevalence of the discourse on marriage reform changed. This cannot be attributed to the less overtly political goals of *Frauenwelt* and its style of reporting alone. Rather, the diversity of formats in which *Frauenwelt* addressed the "crisis of marriage"—formats that were indeed often aimed for consumption by a wider readership—are indicative of the relevance of this discourse to the everyday lives of the female readership, and are suggestive of the "mainstreaming" of the discourse on marriage and marriage reform.

CONCLUSION: CONTESTED MARRIAGE REFORM AND THE FUTURE OF THE FAMILY

Throughout the duration of the Weimar Republic, legal marriage reform was a controversial topic that occupied a definitive space in the pages of Social Democratic women's journals. In these pages the editors, authors, and at times even the readers themselves, leant their opinions, criticisms, and suggestions to the debate on marriage and divorce reform. They sought to identify the causes of the perceived "crisis in marriage." They envisioned an ideal marriage with emphasis on the sentiments and values that should form the foundation of the institution. And they forwarded their own practical suggestions for a reform of marriage. An investigation of these debates has revealed the diversity of the perceptions of the crisis of marriage, conceptualizations of an ideal marriage, and suggestions for marriage reform. Even within the same publication there were vastly variable opinions, stances, and proposals regarding marriage reform—defenders of traditional marriage, advocates free-love marriage, and proponents of trial marriage quite often literally shared the pages of the same issue.

On the one hand, the multiplicity of different visions and understandings that characterized this debate reflects the quickly changing political, social, economic, and cultural circumstances of the Weimar Republic. The tremendous loss of life during World War I and the resulting demographic imbalances exacerbated preexisting anxieties about the health of the German family and German nation. These were in turn augmented by other anxieties, such as the fear of the deterioration of the institution of marriage itself, as evidenced by an increasing divorce rate. Concern over the upending of the traditional social order also contributed to a

growing alarm about a "crisis of marriage" and a general potential crisis of morality. Independent working women and the ubiquitous New Women served as potent symbols of the possible degradation of German society. This so-called "crisis of marriage" was a motivating force for many German politicians and lawmakers who sought reorder post-war society on ostensibly stable lines. The sheer diversity of changes and upheavals in the Weimar Republic was reflected in the corresponding Social Democratic visions and proposals for a reform of marriage. In their wide array of opinions and proposals for marriage reform, Social Democratic women activists sought a new arrangement of marital and filial relations that would fit into the vastly altered political, social, economic, and cultural landscape of the Weimar Republic.

On the other hand, this diversity of thought about marriage reform also reflects the varying political approaches within the Social Democratic women's movement itself. Following the split of the SPD into the MSPD and USPD in 1917, the leadership of the MSPD women's movement supported a reform-oriented political approach. After the *Novemberrevolution* in 1918 this was accompanied by the maternalist feminist understanding that women were "equal but different." This transition was later mirrored in the switch from the traditional Social Democratic women's journal *Die Gleichheit* to *Frauenwelt* in 1924, which was aimed to capture a wider readership, especially housewives and mothers. Despite the contemporaneous distribution of *Die Genossin* in 1924—a journal intended for female functionaries in the party—the SPD women's organizations continued to voice their dissatisfaction with the "shallow" content of *Frauenwelt*. Not only did this lead to a change in editorship to Toni Sender, but the fact that the most adamant protestors were younger and more left-leaning women, also sheds important light on the generational differences in the Social Democratic women's movement as a whole.

These insights into the Social Democratic women's movement also have broader implications for our understanding of the Weimar Republic as a whole. For the Social Democratic Party represents the Weimar Republic better than other political party. In many ways, the Weimar Republic itself was the SPD's attempt to realize their utopian vision of an alternative Germany. The positions regarding "marriage reform" articulated in the pages of *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt*—as well as Social Democratic positions on a broad range of topics relevant to the politics, economy, and culture of the Weimar Republic—were not minority positions. Rather they constituted the left half of mainstream, and as such, a larger threat to what came to be the right half of mainstream, namely the National Socialists. The National Socialists reacted to what they interpreted as the provocation of the Left, of which progressive policies regarding women were a large component. Therefore, the discourses surrounding the "crisis of marriage" and the ensuing debate on "marriage reform" within the Social Democratic women's press form an essential component to our understanding not only of the rise of National Socialism, but also of the Weimar Republic as a whole.

Finally, a focus on the representation of these proposals for marriage reform within the Social Democratic women's journals *Die Gleichheit* and *Frauenwelt* has offered a unique glimpse into the complicated process of renegotiating marital and filial norms. Not only are the contemporary shifts of these norms represented in the pages of the publications, but the journals themselves also served as the medium through which knowledge about the gendered expectations for Germans within their marriages was produced and reproduced. Ultimately, they can help to render our understanding of the process of redesigning marriage in shifting social circumstances more complete.

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