

Reforms, Regulations, and Rationalism:  
The Female Reproductive Emancipation in Weimar Germany, 1918-1933

Katherine St Arnaud

History Honours Thesis

Dr. Lauren Faulkner Rossi

April 10, 2020

## Acknowledgements

There are many people who supported my research and writing for this honours thesis who must be acknowledged. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Lauren Faulkner Rossi, my supervisor, for her patience, time, and editing for which this would not have come to fruition without. I would like to thank Dr. Roxanne Panchasi for teaching me the importance of historiography, to Dr. Jeremy Brown for his efforts to help me develop my methodology and for giving me the tools to grow into an improved writer, to Dr. Sarah Walshaw whose kindness and compassion helped me become a better learner, and to the Department of History at Simon Fraser University for this opportunity. I extend my very great appreciation for their endless support, reviews, advice, and extra spoons to my cohort: Slade Brown, Laura Carpentier, Miranda Walston, Grayson Mead, Phoenix Yurkovich, James Champion, Abbie Henderson, em von euw, and Gabrielle McLaren.

My appreciation also goes to Brian Park, Corina Staniloiu, Mica Jensen, Jason Roughley, MaryJo Whelan, and Samantha de Leon for their encouragement and friendship. I would like to express my special thanks to David Park, my partner and best friend, who provided me endless support, joy, and encouragement during the process of this. I am especially thankful to and grateful for my family for their encouragement, support, and belief in me as I wrote. I dedicate this honours thesis to my parents, Sarah and Dave; my sisters, Alison and Jennifer; and my grandparents, David, Patricia, Leo, and Lorraine.

## Introduction

In recent academic writing, historians have debated the question of whether the emancipation of women actually happened during the Weimar Republic. Many historians have cited the liberalization of sex and beliefs about female sexuality as evidence of female emancipation. However, historians have failed to take into account that the need to control the reproduction of women shaped the female emancipation movement. *Sonderweg* is the German word that means “special path.” In comparison to the rest of the world, the Weimar Republic of Germany was on a special path with its societal sexual liberation and female reproductive emancipation.

German feminism in the Weimar era differed greatly from what we understand feminism to be today. A unique feminism surfaced in this period which described women as capable of modernization and emancipation, but ultimately their destiny was to become a mother.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have described maternalist feminists as feminists who believe that womanhood is defined by motherhood and that motherhood is a source of strength and agency.<sup>2</sup> This feminism distinguished the *Sonderbarkeit* (oddity or difference) of women’s sensibilities in comparison to men.<sup>3</sup> Feminists in this period believed that, while women should be able to control their reproduction and have the right to sexual pleasure, their nature and sexuality could only be fulfilled through being mothers.<sup>4</sup> This is my working definition of feminism that I will use when discussing feminism in this period.

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<sup>1</sup> Atina Grossmann, “Abortion and Economic Crisis: The 1931 Campaign Against Paragraph 218,” in *When Biology Became Destiny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 75-76.

<sup>2</sup> Kirsten Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science: Women Sexologists in Germany, 1900-1933*, (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2017), 130-131.

<sup>3</sup> Grossmann, “Abortion and Economic Crisis,” 75.

<sup>4</sup> Grossmann, “Abortion and Economic Crisis,” 75.

Historians have long debated how to describe the “New Woman” of the Weimar era. The descriptions of the New Woman are vast and varied because this type of woman challenged the norms that defined femininity, female sexuality, and the roles of women in the public sphere. Characterizations of the New Woman have ranged from masculine, to evil, to sexually liberated. Critics of the period often portrayed the New Woman as evil and selfish. Contemporary scholars focus on the New Woman as a symbol of the sexual liberalization of this time. One aspect is widely agreed upon by historians: the New Woman is representative of female emancipation in the Weimar Republic. The New Woman of Germany remains today as a symbol of this sexual revolution. She was sexually emancipated, liberal, and childless. She was a source of anxiety for the nation because of her childlessness. The state was facing a crisis of falling birthrates and the visibility of childless, single women. The state wanted to reconcile the new and modern woman with the traditional roles of women, mainly motherhood.<sup>5</sup>

The term rationalization is essential to understanding the Weimar Republic. Rationalization reached into all aspects of life, not just sexuality and reproduction. Historians have used the term to describe the emergence of Germany as a modern industrial society.<sup>6</sup> Rationalization is the scientific management of everyday life for productivity and innovation. The rationalization of reproduction came from the belief that reproduction could be controlled and calculated in the same manner as industrial production. The policies of rationalizing fertility and reproduction in the Weimar Republic came about because of anxieties about declining birthrates. *Bevölkerungspolitik* (population politics) shaped the sex reform movement and the

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<sup>5</sup> Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Cornelia Osborne, “Rhetoric and Resistance: Rationalization of Reproduction in Weimar Germany,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 4, no. 1 (March 1997): 66.; Detlev J.K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 101.

state used it to justify the new health and welfare practices to stimulate reproduction.<sup>7</sup>

Motherhood was an integral component in the rationalization of reproduction in this period.

Many people believed that pregnancy and motherhood were women's service to the nation.<sup>8</sup>

New reforms made birth control more accessible, promoted marriage counselling, and gave more reproductive freedom to women. Historians characterize this era as modern, liberal, and sexually revolutionary. Yet what is missing from the narrative of this period is an understanding of the underlying motives behind these reforms. The state implemented reforms to regulate and rationalize reproduction. The Sex Reform Movement in Germany gave women newfound reproductive freedoms, but there were motives behind the reforms that had little to do with respecting the agency and autonomy of women. Historians have neglected the influences of eugenics, patriarchy, and need for the state to control reproduction that shaped the course of the sex reform movement for women. The definition of patriarchy varies according to region, period, and culture. For the purpose of this thesis, I define patriarchy in the context of the social power that men used to dominate women. This extends to their control over women's bodies and roles in the public and private spheres of society. This patriarchy included female doctors and reformers during this period. While outwardly many advances in this realm appear to be progressive, the motives behind them were meant to regress the sexual emancipation of women.

In this thesis, I seek to examine issues within the reform movement that did not emancipate women by focusing on four aspects. The first aspect I will explore is the relationship between eugenics, motherhood, and the sex reform movement to aimed to regulate which women were reproducing. The second aspects I examine are the sex, birth

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<sup>7</sup> Annette Timm, *Politics of Fertility in Twentieth Century Berlin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 84.

<sup>8</sup> Osborne, "Rhetoric and Resistance," 68.

control, and marriage counselling centres and the eugenical basis that motivated their creation. I will explore the policies that guided the implementation of the clinics and the purpose that these clinics served. Third, I will study how the state, doctors, and reformers used birth control and sterilization to regulate who was reproducing and how these tools took away the agency of women. I will explore the underlying motivations behind the availability of birth control, abortions, and sterilization as a means of controlling reproduction in this section. The fourth aspect I will analyze is the ideology of the period's most prominent sex reformers to demonstrate how patriarchy and eugenics shaped their ideas. I will analyze their feminism and beliefs about the social roles of women in this section to understand the infiltration of patriarchy into their ideology. The intersection of eugenics and patriarchy with German feminism, female emancipation, and the redefinition of women's social roles during the Weimar Republic are significant because scholars describe this period as modern when it is actually a period characterized by doctors, reformers, and the state regaining control over female bodies. This regression from female emancipation shows that this was not a modern, nor truly emancipatory time for women.

### **Historiography**

Atina Grossmann distinguishes the era of sex reform in the Weimar Republic from the National Socialist era that followed in her book *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920-1950*.<sup>9</sup> Her book follows the sex reform movement from its inception during the Weimar era, with new trends in family size, and proceeds to discuss how different sex reforms emerged. Grossmann describes the sex reform movement as a mass social movement that transcended class, education, and gender. She highlights the state's fear of the

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<sup>9</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*.

new visibility of women in the public sphere and the declining birthrates. Her main contention is that the sex reform movement gained influence in a grassroots movement of doctors, healthcare workers, lay reformers, and the working class. She argues that the politicization and medicalization of the sex reform movement went hand in hand; doctors involved themselves in the movement because if they did not participate the commercial market would dominate birth control and abortions. Grossmann also argues that the state and reformers used marriage, sex, and birth control clinics across Germany to regulate the reproduction and sexuality of the nation. The creation of these clinics was conditional on the existence of the mass sex reform movement, pressuring the state for reforms, and the existence of a national public health and social insurance system. The system was precarious because, while people could access birth control through doctors, abortions were still outlawed, which drove women to lay practitioners for dangerous abortions. Grossmann's work is ground-breaking in analysing the connections between the reproductive emancipation of women and control over fertility in this period.

Kirsten Leng's book, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science: Women Sexologists in Germany, 1900-1933*, asserts that even those viewed as radical sex reformers had ulterior motives that strayed from allowing women to control their fertility.<sup>10</sup> Science began to play an increasingly important role in the understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality, as well as the sex reform movement. Doctors and reformers often applied ideas about eugenics and racial hygiene to reproduction. Many doctors and sex reformers believed that women should be able to inhabit roles outside of motherhood for a time, but ultimately they believed that they should follow their biology and the course of nature into becoming mothers and reproducing for the nation. Leng's book serves as the basis for my argument, as her work demonstrates that the beliefs and motives

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<sup>10</sup> Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science*.

of many sexologists revealed that their sex-reform goals were about control and the reinstatement of previous traditional gender roles.

Melissa Kravetz's book, *Women Doctors in Weimar and Nazi Germany: Maternalism, Eugenics, and Professional Identity*, argues that female doctors used the sex reform movement to inhabit the newly gendered spaces.<sup>11</sup> Kravetz's work is useful in analysing the gender norms that were placed on professional and societal roles. Female doctors were able to create a space for themselves in the professional field in women's and children's medical care because of societal beliefs about their maternal feminine nature. Kravetz discusses the implications of female doctors in these new medical spaces, such as the marriage counselling centres, which gave women professional spaces that also allowed them to embrace motherhood. While their new positions in medical spaces demonstrates a newfound role in the public sphere and progress for women in the medical profession, it also suggests that these professional women endorsed or were complicit with patriarchal, gendered roles of women in society. I will explore this connection to further analyze the relationship between female doctors and the implications of their beliefs.

This thesis will engage with two works by Cornelia Usborne. In her monograph, *Cultures of Abortion in Weimar Germany*, she examines the depictions of abortions in mass culture and the practices of ordinary people of the period.<sup>12</sup> Usborne's research articulates how lay abortionists and doctors performed abortions, who performed them and why, and why abortion rates were so high despite their illegality. What is particularly useful is her examination of the doctors who performed abortions. Their reasoning partially accounts for the attitudes of doctors

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<sup>11</sup> Melissa Kravetz, *Women Doctors in Weimar and Nazi Germany: Maternalism, Eugenics, and Professional Identity*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Cornelia Usborne, *Cultures of Abortion in Weimar Germany*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 19.



towards female reproductive emancipation at this time. Understanding how doctors utilized their medical power is essential to understanding the reproductive emancipation of women. Women's experiences with abortions are also critical. Osborne's analysis of primary sources, criminal cases, and instances of doctors' abuses of power are valuable to further articulate doctors' roles in controlling the reproductive emancipation of women.

I will also examine Osborne's article "Rhetoric and Resistance: Rationalization of Reproduction in Weimar Germany."<sup>13</sup> Osborne outlines the policies and reasoning for the rationalization of fertility and the forms of resistance to rationalization that took place. The concept of rationalization is at the centre of understanding the need to control fertility because the dramatic decline in birth rates caused the need for the rational planning of procreation. Her article is important for understanding the emancipation of female reproduction because it lays the groundwork for the policy around and reasoning behind the rationalization of all reproduction. She emphasizes factors in rationally-planned reproduction, including eugenically-charged motivations. This thesis both contends that the rationalization of reproduction emphasized eugenics as well as demonstrates how essential having control of female bodies was to rationalizing reproduction.

*When Biology Became Destiny*, edited by Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion A. Kaplan, is a collection of essays about the politicization of female reproduction and motherhood in the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich.<sup>14</sup> The book as a whole is useful in understanding the roles of women in the Weimar era, but I will focus on two essays that deal with reproduction and sex reform: "Abortion and Economic Crisis: The 1931 Campaign Against

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<sup>13</sup> Osborne, "Rhetoric and Resistance," 65-89.

<sup>14</sup> Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, & Marion A. Kaplan eds., *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

Paragraph 218” by Atina Grossmann and “Helene Stöcker: Left-Wing Intellectual and Sex Reformer” by Amy Hackett.<sup>15</sup> Grossmann focuses on resistance to Paragraph 218, the section of the German Criminal Code that made abortion illegal in Germany. She argues that the abolition of the law that criminalized abortion was a central goal of the sex reform movement. Grossmann presents Dr. Else Kienle, a doctor and advocate for the right to abortion, as a key figure in the movement and analyzes her feminism in connection with the biological destiny of women: motherhood. Kienle was a sex reformer whose feminist ideals emphasized the role of the mother for women in society. Hackett analyzes Helene Stöcker, a female sexologist who was integral in the sex reform movement. Hackett engages with Stöcker as a multifaceted figure because while she was a reformer and feminist, she also conformed to the idea that women should be mothers and was a eugenicist. I will utilize her examination of Stöcker alongside Leng’s to understand the prominent figure and lend insight into the sex reform movement as a whole.

Annette Timm’s book, *The Politics of Fertility in Twentieth-Century Berlin*, demonstrates the blurring of the boundary between public and private life through her analysis of public policies.<sup>16</sup> Timm focuses on state responses to the German population crisis caused by declining birthrates since the founding of the nation in 1871. Pro-fertility welfare measures in the Weimar Republic were designed to promote having children to the public. The state created these policies to reinforce a sexual civic duty among the population and to provide a sense of valour with regards to reproductive duties. Focusing on Berlin, Timm is concerned with the intersection of individual desire and the attempts of the German state to influence reproduction. This book will help to understand how state policy exercised control over the fertility of women. While Timm’s

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<sup>15</sup> Grossmann, “Abortion and Economic Crisis,” 66-86.; Amy Hackett, “Helene Stöcker: Left-Wing Intellectual and Sex Reformer,” in *When Biology Became Destiny* edited by Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, & Marion A. Kaplan, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 109-130.

<sup>16</sup> Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 4.

book spans the twentieth century, this essay will focus on the content that explores its first thirty years.

### **The Sex Reform Movement**

The *Sexualreformbewegung* (sex reform movement) was a movement to regulate rather than repress sexuality.<sup>17</sup> The state's decision to regulate sexuality and reproduction was based on their belief of the need to rationalize reproduction in society. Their wish was to regulate fertility in a way that advanced the political, social, and economic beliefs of the period.<sup>18</sup> These new changes to public policy made access to birth control and information on sexual health easier. However, reformers and the state had other motives that took precedence over the liberalization and emancipation of female reproduction. The Weimar state was mainly concerned with regaining control over the bodies of women that it had previously lost. This area of the sex reform movement demonstrates the use of progressive policies with the hope of an ultimately regressive outcome. The state implemented birth control, marriage, and sex counselling clinics to regulate sexuality and manage reproduction. At the same time, *Bevölkerungspolitik* (population politics) also shaped the sex reform movement in the Weimar Republic.<sup>19</sup> These new policies resulted from anxieties that declining birth rates would lead to the extinction of the German people and the beliefs that they had to keep the eugenically unfit from reproducing.<sup>20</sup> Population policy rhetoric justified the new health and welfare practices in the Weimar Republic.<sup>21</sup> This created a politics of fertility that would educate citizens on the importance of marriage from the point of view of the state, provide them with medical advice, and help them to implement

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<sup>17</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Osborne, "Rhetoric and Resistance," 66.

<sup>19</sup> Timm, *Politics of Fertility in Twentieth Century Berlin*, 84.

<sup>20</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 102.

<sup>21</sup> Timm, *Politics of Fertility in Twentieth Century Berlin*, 84.

responsible reproductive decisions within their marriage.<sup>22</sup> The sexual reform movement meant discussing sex in a rational, scientific, and realistic way.

### **Merging Motherhood, Eugenics and Sex Reform**

#### Controlling Reproduction

The sex reform movement was not just about stimulating reproduction, but also about controlling who was reproducing. Sexual and reproductive decisions were political because they had a direct effect on the future of the nation and the *Volk* (German people).<sup>23</sup> The politics of fertility, as Timm coins it, justified state intervention in the private lives of citizens.<sup>24</sup> The field of eugenics is another area in which there was a pervasive infringement on the bodily rights of women. Female sexologists called for the regeneration of the race and believed eugenics to be a key component in shaping the sex reforms that they wanted.<sup>25</sup> There was a fundamental difference in beliefs among sexologists during this time. Moral eugenicists believed that the role of sex was exclusively for reproduction and not for pleasure; positive eugenicists attributed the degeneration of the race to sexual repression and encouraged racially fit people to continue having desirable births; negative eugenicists prioritized the practice of preventing dysgenic births.<sup>26</sup> Showing the infiltration of eugenics into sexology is integral to my thesis because reformers used eugenics as a tool to repress and control female bodies.

#### Motherhood

The role of the mother of the nation persisted within German social attitudes in other aspects of the sex reform movement. Manfred Georg, a German Jewish author, published “The

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<sup>22</sup> Timm, *Politics of Fertility*, 84.

<sup>23</sup> Timm, *Politics of Fertility*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Timm, *Politics of Fertility*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science*, 184.

<sup>26</sup> Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science*, 194.; Timm, *Politics of Fertility*, 86.

Right to Abortion” in 1922 to comment on public discourse surrounding the abortion laws.<sup>27</sup> He acknowledges that there would never be political unanimity on the subject, yet in a state without compulsory military service, the state has no authority over the body. This is likely because in a state with compulsory military service, the state will need children to be born and grow up to become soldiers. He argues that abortion is valid no matter the reason, be it “love of pleasure” or an economic situation that makes a child impossible to care for.<sup>28</sup> Georg proposes that the issue of abortion is one of protecting the reproduction of the nation. While his argument for abortion appears to be centred on the reproductive emancipation of women, his solution to the problem of high rates of abortion is embedded in paternalism. Georg’s solution is that the socialist state should take responsibility for the well-being of both the mother throughout the pregnancy as well as the infant once it is born. He asserts that this new system of maternal and pediatric care will also recognize the differences between the sexes and will endorse the separate but equal mentality. He explains that, if women lost their right to vote, they would regain control of the “mother’s chamber.”<sup>29</sup> The “mother’s chamber” that he references is both a woman’s uterus, meaning motherhood, and a state body that women would run that dealt with exclusively feminine spheres. This source demonstrates the belief that women taking control of reproduction would allow them to focus on motherhood. Besides the obvious paternalism and sexism in trying to eliminate women’s suffrage, it shows the belief that women should be confined to motherhood and typically female spaces. It also shows a lack of understanding or ignorance of the issues that

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<sup>27</sup> Manfred Georg, “Right to Abortion” 1922, in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, eds. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 200-202.

<sup>28</sup> Manfred Georg, “Right to Abortion,” 201.

<sup>29</sup> Manfred Georg, “Right to Abortion,” 202.

women faced in pregnancy, which Stokes has indicated ranged from fear of miscarriage to fear of birth itself.<sup>30</sup>

The state enacted population policies to ensure that women continued to be mothers of the nation.<sup>31</sup> Motherhood was a central issue during this period because of the anxieties about population demographics and the inability for women to control or limit their reproduction. The feminism that helped birth the sex reform movement demonstrates the infiltration of patriarchal and traditional values. Such values were embedded in theories that proposed female nature and sensibility were inherently different (*Sonderbarkeit*) from male nature, and that female nature could only be fulfilled by motherhood.<sup>32</sup> Dr. Else Kienle, a German physician and prominent sex reformer, held this belief. Such a belief stands at the intersection of radical reformists and traditional values by asserting women's right to sexual pleasure while also maintaining that their nature can only be fulfilled by motherhood. Female sexologists believed that their proposed reforms would help women become "race mothers" and empower women in their sexuality, thus serving the purpose of enabling them to make autonomous sexual decisions and reproductive decisions about children.<sup>33</sup>

### Sex Reformers

The strength of patriarchal values and paternalism seeped into leftist sex reformers' theories about autonomy and control over female bodies. The leftist sex reformers were left-wing intellectuals, or were characterized by their affiliation with one of the left-wing parties, either the Social Democratic Party (SPD) or the Communist Party (KPD). Leftist sex reformers were divided by different goals, but still aimed for reforms. Communist sex reformers believed that a

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<sup>30</sup> Stokes, "Pathology, Danger, and Power," 363.

<sup>31</sup> Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science*, 270.

<sup>32</sup> Grossmann, "Abortion and Economic Crisis," 75.

<sup>33</sup> Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science*, 186.

woman's right to choose to have children and the number of children was a class issue, because a working class women's existence was constrained by their inability to control their reproduction.<sup>34</sup> Communist reformers were more concerned with class injustice than the patriarchal constraints of abortion laws.<sup>35</sup> The SPD wanted to maintain an abortion law to prevent women from being coerced by their partners to abort an unwanted child, they maintained that there would be special provisions for special circumstances.<sup>36</sup>The SPD's goals were similar to the KPD , but their members were more reserved in their actions towards their goals for sex reforms because they were afraid of losing political support.<sup>37</sup>

Leftist intellectuals were concerned with authority over the body, making women mothers, and helping people find sexual pleasure. It is also important to note that these reformers were both men and women. Reformers exhibited a combination of progressive and traditional attitudes. Perhaps this was the ceiling of radicalism regarding female reproduction in this time. Although male and female reformers advocated for female sexual pleasure and agency in making choices, there were pervasive goals to make women mothers. How progressive could this movement be if it aimed at restoring, at least partially, pre-emancipation social roles for women? The movement was progressive in many aspects, such as their views towards female sexual pleasure and autonomy, but a central aspect of this movement was controlling female reproduction. Because of the emphasis on the act of control and the goal of returning women to maternal roles, this movement was no longer primarily about emancipation. This was an era of trying to regress women from their newfound sexual liberation and control over their bodies back to an era of state control over bodies and sexuality.

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<sup>34</sup> Grossmann, "Abortion and Economic Crisis," 68.

<sup>35</sup> Grossmann, "Abortion and Economic Crisis," 74.

<sup>36</sup> Grossmann, "Abortion and Economic Crisis," 78.

<sup>37</sup> Grossmann, "Abortion and Economic Crisis," 83.

Helene Stöcker is an example of a woman whose patriarchal beliefs about women's role in society infiltrated her feminism. Stöcker took part in the creation of the *Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform* (League for the protection of Motherhood and Sexual Reform, BfM) in 1905. The BfM was an organization devoted to improving women's position as mothers, defending women's right to sexuality, and protecting unwed mothers.<sup>38</sup> She was a scientist, suffragist, and feminist. However, her feminism had a different meaning than what we associate with the word today. Her feminism did not stop at the goal of employment for women but pushed for the ability of women to have work, love, a home, and children.<sup>39</sup> Her belief that women could balance their work with their responsibilities in the home was radical at the time. She advocated for the removal of moral judgements of sexual acts because they were natural and human.<sup>40</sup> She believed that women had rights to eugenic education, birth control, and legal abortions because these all were central to their roles as mothers, but she also thought that women had a duty to help with the regeneration of the race.<sup>41</sup> Within Stöcker's ideology we see an interaction between traditional and progressive beliefs about women and their role in society.

Grete Meisel-Hess is another reformer whose aims are contentious because, while she was an advocate for progressive reforms such as female heterosexual autonomy, she maintained herself as a maternalist feminist and eugenicist.<sup>42</sup> Meisel-Hess intertwined the beliefs that women could be both autonomous and sexual beings as well as responsible for reproduction.<sup>43</sup> Her goals were to sexually liberate racially fit women so that they would become mothers of a healthier and superior generation, and to discourage those who were not eugenically fit from

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<sup>38</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> Hackett, "Helene Stöcker," 112.

<sup>40</sup> Hackett, "Helene Stöcker," 115.

<sup>41</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 36; Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science*, 219.

<sup>42</sup> Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science*, 188.

<sup>43</sup> Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science*, 189, 211.



having children because it was unethical.<sup>44</sup> The BfM, to which both she and Stöcker belonged, was insistent that while women should control their fertility, those who were racially fit had a responsibility to society to reproduce healthy offspring.<sup>45</sup>

The patriarchal beliefs that women are the vessels of the nation's children and these children would strengthen the race were held not just by men, who dominated the public sphere, but also by women. These beliefs made female sexual emancipation conditional to the benefits of the race and society. It is unlikely that these reformers realized that they were adopting patriarchal values, but it would also be incorrect to say that they had no agency in pursuing these aims. It is entirely possible that they did not classify them as patriarchal values or that they did not see a contradiction or problem in adopting them. By trying to place women back in the role of the maternal figure, they were complicit in the actions to stifle the new roles of women in society that extended beyond the domestic maternal figure.

### **Marriage, Sex, and Birth Control Counselling in the Republic**

The state believed that the return to the health and stability of the prewar years would cause the birth rates to go up, but despite the returning stability, there was no corresponding rise in birth rates.<sup>46</sup> Sexologists, those who studied the science of sex, found that female frigidity was an underlying cause for the crisis in erotic and family life.<sup>47</sup> Intending to raise fertility rates, the state established sex and marriage counselling centres to help responsible marriages produce healthy and racially fit children. The creation of marriage counselling clinics in Germany in this period served many purposes besides liberating sex.

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<sup>44</sup> Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science*, 216-217.

<sup>45</sup> Leng, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science*, 200.

<sup>46</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 36.

The state blurred the distinction between the individual and the nation through reproductive policies because they feared that people were not having enough children.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the Weimar state intruded the private institution of marriage through counselling centres.<sup>49</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld, the sexologist who founded the Institute of Sexual Science in Berlin, viewed marriage counselling services as necessary to rationalize and medicalize marriage in order to produce children of the highest quality.<sup>50</sup> Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science began offering counselling in 1919 because he believed partners needed to know their sexual compatibility, their health compatibility, and their eugenic suitability in order to have a healthy and happy marriage.<sup>51</sup> Sexual compatibility and helping couples lead pleasurable private lives were integral to the purpose of counselling. Showing Germans how to lead healthy, satisfying sex lives would create a productive and more fertile society.<sup>52</sup> In this way, sex had both social and political purposes. It was not only about married couples having pleasurable sex, but rather about fixing the sexual misery that plagued the German population, hoping to increase birth rates. Mutual and ongoing pleasure were key to having an enduring and fruitful marriage.<sup>53</sup>

R.W. Darré proclaimed in his 1930 article, "Marriage Laws and the Principles of Breeding", that Germans needed to apply the principles of breeding to maintain their superiority.<sup>54</sup> He had just finished his PhD in agriculture with a specialization in animal breeding at this time and people considered him to be an agrarian radical because he wanted to apply his principles of breeding to humans.<sup>55</sup> Darré argued that Germans had been breeding the best

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<sup>48</sup> Kravetz, *Women Doctors in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, 28-29.

<sup>49</sup> Kravetz, *Women Doctors in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Timm, *The Politics of Fertility in Twentieth Century Berlin*, 83.

<sup>51</sup> Timm, *The Politics of Fertility in Twentieth Century Berlin*, 88.

<sup>52</sup> Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 298.

<sup>53</sup> Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 299.

<sup>54</sup> R. W. Darré, "Marriage Laws and the Principles of Breeding" in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 133-137;

<sup>55</sup> As discussed with Lauren Faulkner Rossi, April 3, 2020.

offspring since the nineteenth century, but supervision of their breeding had wavered in recent years. Marriage counselling centres certainly followed the rhetoric of breeding with eugenics in mind. Marriage and family size had been part of the rhetoric of doing one's civic duty to their nation. The state intervened in marriage because the demographics showed declining birth rates and national health. Darré would go on to become a Nazi in the same year and was later appointed Minister of Agriculture in 1933. His ideas had influence over Himmler when it came to establishing a racially-pure Aryan race in a vastly expanded German empire.<sup>56</sup>

The state utilized marriage counselling centres in two ways, to promote and to control marriages to lead to the highest quality offspring. One example of how marriage counselling clinics pursued eugenically-driven goals are those in Prussia, set up by the Minister of Public Welfare; these clinics performed pre-marriage medical examinations to determine the genetic fitness of the couple.<sup>57</sup> The Prussian clinics made marriage counselling voluntary, but their goals were to inform citizens that marriage was no longer private.<sup>58</sup> If the clinic workers deemed citizens unfit, the clinic would try to dissuade the couple from marrying and having children.<sup>59</sup> Sterilization was often used within the clinics as a permanent solution for women that doctors considered to be unsuitable for reproduction. Doctors considered sterilizing husbands, but this was quickly disregarded because women could still be raped or seduced by other men.<sup>60</sup>

Prussian policies towards marriage counselling were designed to make citizens aware of their eugenic duties to the nation and to try to make them feel responsible for future generations of Germans.<sup>61</sup> The marriage counselling centres thus served the purpose of intervening in the

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<sup>56</sup> As discussed with Lauren Faulkner Rossi, April 3, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Osborne, "Rhetoric and Resistance," 72.

<sup>58</sup> Kravetz, *Women Doctors in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, 28.

<sup>59</sup> Osborne, "Rhetoric and Resistance," 72.

<sup>60</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 73.

<sup>61</sup> Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 103.

reproduction of families, while physicians and reformers could provide their expertise to help with the fertility of couples. Reformers and doctors worked together to establish such marriage counselling centres all over the country; Berlin had twelve set up between 1926 and 1928.<sup>62</sup> The sex reform movement thus created the space for marriage counselling clinics to appear all over the country, and yet the goal of these counselling centres was not to liberate reproduction but to control it.

The state and reformers created the birth control clinics and sex counselling centres to provide women with sound medical advice and expertise to maintain their sexual health. However, for members of the working classes, the clinics were a place where their agency could be threatened. The BfM had been demanding marriage certificates since before the First World War, but it was not until after the First World War that the state began to use marriage certificates as a strategy to exercise control over the reproduction of heterosexual couples.<sup>63</sup> The state used marriage certificates to promote marriages between healthy and fit couples while trying to hinder the ability of unfit couples to marry and produce dysgenic offspring.<sup>64</sup> The clinics used educational leaflets to attempt to persuade couples to disclose health problems to their partners in the hopes that it would prevent the birth of a degenerate child.<sup>65</sup> The use of the centres to manipulate couples based on fear of dysgenic births demonstrates that the state used reforms to try to control reproduction.

Marriage counselling centres were also useful in helping to avoid the danger of a decreasing population. The state thought marriage counselling could work to prevent strife between partners that could decrease the possibility of having children and thereby harm the

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<sup>62</sup> Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 109.

<sup>63</sup> Osborne, "Rhetoric and Resistance," 69.

<sup>64</sup> Kravetz, *Women Doctors in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, 25.

<sup>65</sup> Kravetz, *Women Doctors in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, 27.

population.<sup>66</sup> Birth control advice clinics run by the *Verband der Krankenkassen Berlin* (Berlin's Health Insurance League, VKB) attempted to dissuade women from using contraceptives if it was not economically, eugenically, or medically necessary.<sup>67</sup> The state used marriage counselling centres as a tool to keep married couples happy, healthy, and having pleasurable sex in the hopes that it would allow them to have children.

Male and female doctors were actively working in these clinics to provide information and advice as they saw fit. This meant that the information available was not uniform and depended on the doctor's judgement and beliefs. These clinics were important for the working class to access birth control, as public health insurance reimbursed public clinics therefore it made birth control affordable. Besides providing birth control, doctors used these clinics to try to increase the birth rate by providing guidance on planning families and controlling reproduction. Grossmann notes in her studies that case histories from these clinics indicate that doctors prevented people they thought unfit from having children out of mercy and for the person's benefit.<sup>68</sup> Doctors beliefs that the eugenically unfit needed to be sterilized solidified while working in these clinics because of the amounts of the poor and working class they came in contact with. At this time doctors, reformers, and the state believed that poverty or unemployment could be passed hereditarily. Some doctors did not like these clinics because they thought that they replaced the role of the family doctor. Many doctors resented the clinics because they took business away from their private practices which were not covered by public insurance.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Timm, *Politics of Fertility*, 111.

<sup>67</sup> Timm, *Politics of Fertility*, 110.

<sup>68</sup> This supposed mercy was founded upon eugenic beliefs and referred to sparing a possible child from being born eugenically unfit.

<sup>69</sup> Grossman, *Reforming Sex*, 46, 62; Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 114.

Women doctors played a large role in these clinics, as they believed that they had a special legitimacy because of their womanhood in sex, birth control, and marriage counselling. They believed they should be the ones to treat women instead of their male colleagues because they had dual experience as women and physicians.<sup>70</sup> Female doctors treated their patients in the context of a woman's life, unlike their male colleagues, and felt that they had a specific responsibility to other women. They believed that making medicine humane and empathetic, rather than cold and unsympathetic, would lead women away from lay abortionists and "quacks" whom they trusted into the safer public health system.<sup>71</sup> While they defended women's rights to birth control, they worried about the consequences of therapies of contraception and sex education. These female doctors wanted to protect women from unwanted or premature sexual activity. Many of their patients disclosed they were having sex for pleasure, rather than procreation or love, which shocked the women doctors. While they were willing to protect the body rights of women, they still believed in traditional ideas about sex and pleasure. They promoted their beliefs about heterosexual relations through sex advice, but still were willing to provide information about sexual relations. Women doctors possessed a mixture of progressive and traditional ideas towards female sexuality.<sup>72</sup>

### **Abortion, Birth Control, and Sterilization**

Physicians had to decide whether to use birth control was the woman's choice, whereby they would facilitate access, or whether the decision rested upon the physician.<sup>73</sup> The actions of physicians show that while some were willing to give women control over their bodies, a vast

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<sup>70</sup> Atina Grossmann, "German Women Doctors from Berlin to New York: Maternity and Modernity in Weimar and in Exile," *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 1 (1993): 69.

<sup>71</sup> Quacks are those that did not have medical licenses but still performed abortions, as healthcare became medicalized, they were increasingly attacked by the media and doctors because of their illegitimacy.

<sup>72</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 19, 66-70.

<sup>73</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 56.

majority believed that they had the authority to make decisions about female bodies and control their reproduction. Abortions could potentially solve the problems of the procreation of unfit women, yet it caused an outrage because of the immorality of terminating life. Birth control offered a way to control reproduction, yet many factors influenced the effectiveness of contraception and women could not be trusted to use it properly. Sterilization provided a means to definitively prevent a woman from having children, and it proved to be popular among many reformers. Many doctors supported the cause for legal abortion and access to contraceptives because they believed that it served eugenic purposes. Poor and overcrowded living conditions, crime, alcohol abuse, and irresponsible sexual hygiene as witnessed in working class neighbourhoods provided superficial evidence for the validity of their claims.<sup>74</sup> Doctors and reformers believed that, through birth control, abortion, and sterilizations, they could control working class women's reproduction.

### Abortion

Abortion was the most debated and contentious aspect of the sex reform movement in Weimar Germany. The debate permeated sexology, the political left and right, and crossed social classes. The rise in illegal abortions contributed to anxieties about moral degradation, social health, and the future of the family. Women found ways to have abortions despite their illegality, whether they were self-induced or performed by lay abortionists or doctors. Self-induced abortions became less prevalent through the 1920s when friends or neighbours would recommend known abortionists. Osborne asserts that lay abortionists with no professional training dominated the abortion market, in 1928 they performed approximately half of all abortions in Berlin. The German media labelled lay abortionists as "quacks" and criticized lay

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<sup>74</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 70.

abortionists for taking advantage of women by performing illegal abortions for commercial gains.<sup>75</sup> Lay abortionists dominated the market because they were referred by the community network or neighbors which made women feel safe, they were less expensive than doctors, and they often had more experiences of successful and safe abortions.<sup>76</sup> Paragraph 218 of the criminal code made abortions illegal under German law unless they were medically necessary. The courts could give jail sentences to women who had abortions and people who aided them, those who performed abortions without the woman's consent or for commercial gain could face harsher sentences.<sup>77</sup>

Instances in which abortionists took advantage of women seeking abortions were not uncommon. A master printer in the Rhineland was on trial for violating paragraph 218 in 1927. His patients reported that he insisted on intercourse before performing the abortion because patients needed to be warmed up or to dilate the cervix. Another abortionist in 1932 accepted intercourse as a form of payment, especially in cases of working class women. It was not uncommon for abortionists or doctors to sterilize women while performing the abortion, whether it was consensual, coerced, or performed without their consent. Dr. Hope Bridges Adams Lehmann is an example of a doctor who performed sterilizations without the informed consent of her patients. Dr. Adams Lehmann claimed that she performed the sterilizations in the interests of her patient's welfare, but the fact that her patients were among the poorest in society is also significant. Notes from her surgical records indicate that she had sterilized patients for, among other reasons, having an intellectual disability.<sup>78</sup> While Adams Lehmann was willing to perform abortions that women asked for, she took their agency over their reproduction out of their hands

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<sup>75</sup> Usborne, *Cultures of Abortion*, 101-103.

<sup>76</sup> Usborne, "Rhetoric and Resistance," 80-84.

<sup>77</sup> Grossmann, "Abortion and Economic Crisis," 68.

<sup>78</sup> Usborne, *Cultures of Abortion*, 83-84, 89, 116.



by sterilizing them. Her paternalism over her patients' bodies indicates a regression in the emancipation of women. The reason for sterilizations often pertained to preventing dysgenic births, and in performing them the abortionists endorsed ideas about eugenics and racial hygiene that subverted the movement for female sexual emancipation.

The movement to abolish Paragraph 218 transcended gender, social class, and political lines. Many factors came into play in the debate about abortion and reproduction. Some of the most significant factors were the drop in the national birth rate beginning in 1870 and the massive loss of life during World War I, thereby creating a general panic that the *Volk* would not be sustained.<sup>79</sup> In making abortion illegal, the state took the agency away from the woman and forced her to have a child against her will. Otherwise the woman had to find a doctor or lay abortionist willing to perform the service illegally. The fight for the legalization of abortion was not only about the rights to one's reproduction and bodily autonomy. Like most reforms during this period, it also pertained to racial hygiene and eugenics. Many reformers believed that those unfit to reproduce had the social responsibility to keep themselves from doing so, but without the option of abortion in the case of pregnancy, they faced the difficult choice of either keeping the child or having an illegal abortion.<sup>80</sup> Ideas about female reproductive rights intersected with eugenical theories in the reformer's belief that the unfit were responsible for keeping themselves from reproducing.

While reformers advocated for the right to choose, there was an interest in preventing dysgenic births, so it was not a wholly emancipatory proposition. Doctors and reformers were not convinced that individuals who were irresponsible enough to get pregnant accidentally

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<sup>79</sup> Stokes, "Pathology, Danger, and Power" 360.; Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Grossmann, "Abortion and Economic Crisis," 76.

should have the right to determine the fate of their pregnancy<sup>81</sup> Even so, there were instances when people advocated for the decriminalization of abortion for eugenical reasons. For example, the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (Federation of German Women's Associations, BdF), a moderate middle-class women's organization, petitioned for the right to terminate a pregnancy on medical grounds if they expected the child to be born with physical or mental disabilities.<sup>82</sup>

### Birth Control

Education about and access to birth control were highly regulated during this period. The German Criminal Code embedded the first proscription in Section 184 in 1900 during the imperial period, which prohibited the advertisement of contraceptives in public places because the products were for obscene use.<sup>83</sup> Despite these obstacles, reformers believed that birth control would allow married couples to achieve sexual pleasure.<sup>84</sup> Being able to control the number of children they had would relieve them of the anxiety associated with intercourse and would ensure marital happiness and stability, which would eventually lead to children.<sup>85</sup>

There were challenges in getting women to use the new technologies of birth control. Not only was it often time-consuming to acquire birth control, but also the new technologies could be risky. Although reformers vilified old methods of birth control such as *coitus interruptus* as ineffectual, many people continued to practice this method because it was considerably less risky than the new inventions. Osborne discusses the resistance to the medicalization of birth control and cites a survey from 1917 that 84 percent of the 311 couples surveyed used *coitus interruptus* as their only form of birth control. There were instances in which patients told their doctors that

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<sup>81</sup> Grossmann, "Abortion and Economic Crisis," 76.

<sup>82</sup> Helen Boak, *Women in the Weimar Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 14, 213.

<sup>83</sup> Timm, *Politics of Fertility in Twentieth Century Berlin*, 94.

<sup>84</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 22.

<sup>85</sup> Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, 302.

they had used it effectively for years or knew people who had success with it. This demonstrates the agency of women in resisting new medical practices in favour of forms of birth control that had existed for longer and had been practiced successfully by people they knew.<sup>86</sup> Women had been using this practice of birth control for far longer than the contraceptives that were on the market. The familiarity of tried and true methods from family members or friends was often preferable to going to a doctor for advice.

Walter von Hollander viewed birth control in a paternalistic manner in his article “Birth Control- A Man’s Business!”<sup>87</sup> In it, he is concerned that research into and designs for birth control will become dominated by women, and birth control used by men will fall further behind. Hollander asserts that birth control should be the man’s responsibility because he holds the power in the relationship. He believes that men are the “superior protector,” and therefore he should be responsible for protecting his female partner from pregnancy.<sup>88</sup> This perspective is unanticipated because most people believed the responsibility for pregnancy rests on the woman.

Sex reformers used the motto “better to prevent than abort” as a way to frame approaches to controlling reproduction as more palatable for those who opposed new reforms for increased access to birth control.<sup>89</sup> Dr. Else Kienle was one of the doctors who believed in this understanding of reproduction. On April 14, 1931, she published an article commenting on her arrest and her beliefs concerning the sex reform movement. Kienle wrote that “[she] is against so-called abortion and instead [she is] an advocate for birth control” to prevent pregnancy.<sup>90</sup> She argued that eighty percent of women having abortions already had several children whom they

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<sup>86</sup> Osborne, “Rhetoric and Resistance: Rationalization of Reproduction in Weimar Germany,” 74-75, 78,79.

<sup>87</sup> Walter Von Hollander, “Birth Control- A Man’s Business!” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 715-717.

<sup>88</sup> Von Hollander, “Birth Control- A Man’s Business!” 716.

<sup>89</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 15.

<sup>90</sup> Else Kienle, “The Kienle Case,” (1931) in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, eds. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 213.

could not afford. This claim was to refute the beliefs that abortions contributed to the population decline in Germany, particularly because the state believed there was a crisis due to the visibility of the decline in birth rates.<sup>91</sup> Her belief as a doctor was that it is “[disgraceful] when one, from the allegedly lofty standpoint of science, demands that a wretched, oppressed, and emaciated body should bear new life.”<sup>92</sup> In a joint statement with Dr. Kurt Wolf, a colleague who was arrested with her for performing abortions, she revealed in her defence that she believed “that women and girls will once again joyfully give the gift of life to children” when Germans were no longer suffering from hunger, housing shortages, and chronic misery due to the economy.<sup>93</sup> This demonstrates the belief that women did not want to be mothers due to economic hardship, but once the economy turns they would begin having children once more. Kienle is an example of the mixture of progressive beliefs with traditional values. While she argued for the decriminalization of abortion and believed it was disgraceful to force a pregnancy upon a woman, she still demonstrates that she believed it to be an economic issue.

Access to birth control was useful for eugenic purposes. Alfred Grotjahn, the first prominent eugenicist and professor of Social Hygiene, believed birth control was a way to facilitate procreative hygiene.<sup>94</sup> Facilitating the use of birth control within the population was a means to control who was procreating. Doctors believed that degeneration could pass hereditarily, therefore birth control availability could prevent those deemed unfit from reproducing. Eugenic reproductive beliefs had not been as prominent before 1918, but the wartime impact on public health brought it into prominence across society.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Kienle, “The Kienle Case,” 213.

<sup>93</sup> Grossmann, “Abortion and Economic Crisis,” 74.

<sup>94</sup> Osborne, “Rhetoric and Resistance,” 68.

<sup>95</sup> Osborne, “Rhetoric and Resistance,” 69.

## Sterilization

Doctors of both genders were among the most active in taking away the agency of women seeking medical help. While some performed abortions because they believed that women should be in control of their reproduction, many took away that choice. Sterilization was a quick and effective means to control the reproduction of those who were less likely to use birth control effectively and for those most likely to undergo illegal abortions.<sup>96</sup> Women were the better candidate for this intervention because, although it would be simpler and safer to sterilize men, women would still be susceptible to seduction or rape and could get pregnant even if their husbands were sterilized.<sup>97</sup>

Sterilization for those deemed unfit to reproduce was contentious in this period. There were instances when the state sentenced lightly or acquitted doctors who performed abortions and sterilizations, such as when the court acquitted the case of Adams Lehmann.<sup>98</sup> Interestingly, the subject of voluntary sterilization went to court in 1931 in the Offenburg Sterilization Trial.<sup>99</sup> Women believed pregnancy and childbirth to be inherently dangerous and this fear transcended class, region, and education. The court's decision was that voluntary sterilization constituted bodily harm, therefore making it illegal. Stokes cites Usborne in her work, saying that there is a fine line between compulsory and voluntary sterilizations. This fine line existed because of the power dynamic between the person seeking the abortion and the person performing the abortion. In this situation, a woman in a vulnerable state could be persuaded or coerced into agreeing to sterilization by the person performing the abortion. It appears that it was acceptable for doctors to sterilize their patients without explicit consent, whether out of interest for the welfare of the

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<sup>96</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 72.

<sup>97</sup> Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 72.

<sup>98</sup> Usborne, *Cultures of Abortion*, 80.

<sup>99</sup> Stokes, "Pathology, Danger, and Power," 365.

patient or for eugenic purposes. However, according to this court decision, it was unacceptable for a patient to ask or consent to sterilization of their own accord because many female witnesses in the trial had demanded legal sterilization over their fears of pregnancy and childbirth.

Ultimately, this comes down to female agency over their reproduction. Either way, the woman is not in control of what happens to her body. Osborne claims that the interest of the medical profession in eugenics during this period is indicative that doctors used sterilization as a weapon to control reproduction and a form of permanent birth control to prevent dysgenic births, not solely in the interest of giving women reproductive freedom.<sup>100</sup>

While there were instances in which women were able to choose whether they wanted to have an abortion, use birth control, or be sterilized, there were many instances in which medical professionals took that choice away from women. When we discuss this period as a time of female reproductive emancipation, we must keep in mind that a society that allows the removal of an individual's agency over her own body is not emancipatory. Denying women the right to choose whether to terminate a pregnancy removes their agency. While the provision of birth control in this period in itself is liberal, the proposed use of birth control as a means to control who was reproducing is not. Making sterilization illegal while not condemning physicians who performed the act without prior consent is not an act of liberation, but an act of oppression. The uses of abortion, birth control, and sterilization show that the intentions of the reformers and the state were not to provide options and allow women to take control of their bodies, but rather to manipulate women or confine them along the lines of their own goals. The gains that women made for their reproduction during this period were not because the state and reformers believed

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<sup>100</sup> Osborne, "Rhetoric and Resistance," 76.

they should have complete autonomy over their bodies, but because the reforms benefitted the nation.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis has shown that tradition and eugenics in this period shaped the reproductive emancipation of women, the need to control female bodies, and the reinforcement of patriarchal gender roles. Patriarchal ideas about traditional gender roles infiltrated the leftist sex reformers' ideology to assign to women the role of mother, regardless of their desires. While holding liberal ideas towards sex and contraception, sex reformers were ultimately looking to control who was reproducing and trying to stimulate the reproduction of healthy offspring. Ideas about racial hygiene and eugenics extended into the movement for contraception, sterilization, and abortion to control who was reproducing. Sex reforms and the rationalization of reproduction aimed at keeping people whom state and reformers considered eugenically unfit from reproducing and encouraging the reproduction of those who were. The state and reformers used sex, birth control, and marriage counselling centres to encourage certain kinds of people to reproduce. They created these centres to help sustain happy marriages, to end sexual misery by teaching about sexual practice, and to provide the means to control reproduction so that ultimately married couples would produce children. These centres also aimed to prevent people who were not racially fit or those with unfit hereditary conditions from reproducing. This targeted the working classes because of the hereditary conditions they were believed to have, such as unemployment and alcoholism. Reformers did this through the provision or withholding of birth control and sometimes went as far as sterilizing women against their will or knowledge. Doctors were among the biggest perpetrators of denying the agency of women in this period.

This thesis has shown that female emancipation in the Weimar Republic was not truly emancipation because the rights that women gained were granted with ulterior motives. Female reproduction can only be truly emancipated when women have complete control and agency over their bodies, and when these rights are freely given in belief that women have the right to these two things. The manipulation of women by sex reformers, state policies, and the state because of their ulterior motives, to promote fertility and to prevent those deemed unfit from reproducing, characterized the reproductive emancipation of this era. However, it is important to take into account that women in this period may have believed themselves to be truly emancipated. Women had gained the ability to control their reproduction and their bodies like never before, and the Weimar Republic had the most liberal laws for abortion in Europe. Earlier I had proposed that there may have been a ceiling for radicality, but now I believe this to be the best way to understand the attitudes and beliefs of women. The state controlled this ceiling for radicality, about the reproductive emancipation of women, through its own goals and objectives. The liberalization of attitudes towards birth control and abortion served the goals of the state and reformers, not for women. Therefore, I conclude that the so-called reproductive emancipation of women in this period was not emancipation at all because they were subject to the control of authorities such as the state, reformers, and doctors.



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