Manipulating Modernity: the *Neue Frau* Votes for Hitler

by

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To Anneliese, who was there
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<table>
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<tr>
<td>Afa-Bund</td>
<td>General Free Federation of Salaried Employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDF</td>
<td>League of German Women’s Associations</td>
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<td>BbM</td>
<td>League of German Girls</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIZ</td>
<td><em>Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>DDP</td>
<td>German Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHV</td>
<td>German National Shop Clerks Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>DNVP</td>
<td>German National People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSP</td>
<td>German State Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVP</td>
<td>German People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPD</td>
<td>German Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSDAP</td>
<td>National Socialist German Workers Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSF</td>
<td>National Socialist Women’s Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>RM</td>
<td><em>Reichsmark</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>Social Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>UFA</td>
<td>Universum Film AG</td>
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INTRODUCTION

A 1931 *New York Times* article reporting on the disquieting growth of Nazism across the Atlantic wondered in disbelief: “why does the German woman vote for a group which intends to take the ballot from her?”¹ This question revealed a paradox that has continued to captivate historians some 80 years later, many of whom still fail to sufficiently address women’s participation in the Nazi’s ascent to power. This shortcoming has been largely due to their unwillingness to confront the reality of female agency in the Nazi narrative, which inadvertently discounts women by not considering them historical actors and distorts this momentous event by ignoring some of its fundamental components. Thus, the circumstances underlying the historical meta-narrative that allowed one of the most tragic and atrocious chapters in human history to unfold are yet to be accurately comprehended. The general omission of women from the Nazi rise to power in German historiography holds implications far beyond the period in question because the continued reduction of women’s agency not only prevails in the writing of German history but also in contemporary German society, where women continue to face considerable gender discrimination and where feminist historiography, with a few notable exceptions, is less well developed and has maintained a lower profile than elsewhere in the West.

Women have remained remarkably absent as agents of change in German political history. Already in 1938, Theodore Abel’s *Why Hitler Came Into Power: An Answer Based on the Original Life Stories of Six Hundred of His Followers* denied women a place in the

¹ Miriam Beard, “The Tune Hitler Beats…,” *NYT*, (June 7), 1931.
NSDAP’s climb to power.\(^2\) While he put forward an early integrated understanding of Nazism that wove together discontent, ideology, strategy and charismatic leadership, his concluding chapters of six “socially representative” autobiographies, which were “designed to show, in unified, more realistic form, patterns of National Socialist experience” through the “portrayal of typical personalit[ies],” permitted not one single female voice be heard.\(^3\) Studies since then have continued to play down the role of women. A good example of this is Heinrich August Winkler’s *Weimar 1918-1933: Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (Weimar 1918-1933: The story of the first German democracy), which is an excruciatingly detailed but flat chronology documenting the mechanisms involved in shifting the political scene into Hitler’s favor.\(^4\) This methodical account of what Winkler understood to be the determining factors in German politics, parties and their respective (male) personalities, blatantly ignored women.\(^5\) In a similar manner, Dietrich Orlow presented a thorough narrative of the Nazis in his *The History of the Nazi Party, 1919-1933* that built Nazi strength around the, much repeated, “myth-person” of Hitler.\(^6\) Yet his analysis failed to explain why the social and cultural


\(^3\) Ibid. For the theoretical findings, refer specifically to ibid., 166-168. To investigate further the “representative sample” of autobiographies Abel introduced to substantiate his point, look to ibid., 203-301. The Appendix II, “B. General Statistical Data” provides the finishing touch to reveal with what an utter disregard for women the political historiography on the rise of National Socialism started its course: of all the data on the “six hundred authors,” who’s experience underwrote Abel’s theoretical model, the category of gender is not even mentioned. This can be investigated in greater detail in ibid., 312-315.


\(^5\) Ibid., 595-616. Winkler makes his most pronounced statement of personal opinion on the historical events in the “Nachwort” (Epilogue), which most emphatically underlines the political leadership in maneuvering the conditions that allowed Hitler to come into power. Amid the many names, dates and directives, women are not acknowledged. See the description of the events of 1932 and 1933 to see obscure disregard, specifically 557-594, 604-610.

conditions galvanized support for this personality, which, yet again, completely omitted a female presence.

The Nazis' support has been a popular topic in recent quantitative and qualitative historical research investigating the social composition of the NSDAP, but these, too, fail to acknowledge the role of women in German electoral politics. In response to traditional arguments that emphasized lower-middle class electoral support for the Nazis, Paul Madden and Jürgen W. Falter postulated that the social composition of the NSDAP was heterogeneous, even including a large percentage of laborers. Using sophisticated quantitative analytical tools, the influential work of both Richard F. Hamilton and Thomas Childers showed that the social base of the NSDAP was far more diverse than has long been assumed. These studies, while very valuable in highlighting the heterogeneity of the Nazi voter, omit women. Likewise regional studies of electoral behavior, such as Detlef Mühlberger’s *Hitler’s Followers*, which picked apart Gaue like South Hanover-Brunswick for their political leanings, left women out of the picture. Although many of these studies provide aggregate statistics that also sometimes include a portion of women, they show little sensitivity to women as a meaningful and influential social group. Even innovative and finely-tuned structural examinations of the collective processes underlying the failure of the Weimar Republic and the inauguration of Third Reich, like Detlev Peukert’s *The Weimar Republic*, fall into this category by largely excluding women.

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Although feminist historiography intends to give women an empowered voice, most attempts at doing so in the German context shrink away from amplifying a female voice that might have contributed to the rise of National Socialism. For example, Ute Frevert’s *Women in German History*, which tracked the German women’s movement from its roots in the nineteenth century to its demise under National Socialism, is an uncritical and somewhat precious rendering of women’s history.\(^{11}\) While Frevert astutely illustrated how women remained second-class citizens after having been promised and then offered political and legal equality, she falls silent on the political consequences of their continued experience of inescapable inferiority or their role in the rise of Hitler. Renate Bridenthal’s “Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche: Weimar Women at Work,” which for the first time included women as political actors, stumbled into appeasing female involvement in the NSDAP by blaming it on their incomplete emancipation.\(^{12}\) She also did not offer an explanation for why this condition drove women towards certain political persuasions. This is a significant omission, further reflected in her binary characterization of Weimar women as either housewives or sex objects.\(^{13}\)

Although Richard Evans decried the lack female inclusion in the historical record, he refrained from acknowledging their support for the Nazis. First, he dismissed the ideological commitment of Weimar women to Nazism, likening female political action to that of “pre-industrial peasants” because “it was usually spontaneous [and]

\(^{12}\) Renate Bridenthal, “Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche: Weimar Women at Work,” *Central European History*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (June 1973): 148-166. This can most notably be observed in her discussion of the political discrimination against women as it related to the work place, for more on this see ibid. 149-150, 164-166.
\(^{13}\) Ibid. 149-150.
short-term.” He concluded that the Nazis thus never truly won the “wholehearted support” of German women. While Evans, Bridenthal and Frevert open up to discussion a new point of departure in the feminist historiography of Germany, they fail to do so in a meaningful sense by dismissing the actual cooperation of women in the Nazi movement and state. Perhaps Frevert, Bridenthal and Evans wished to inspire women by highlighting the positive elements of women’s history, but such historiography, even if intended to empower feminism, fails to reveal the full dimensions of German women’s lived experience, since women, just like men, were capable of great good as well as great evil. By accepting a truncated version of female experiences, such reluctant feminist histories not only fail to do women justice, but also inadvertently belittle women by shielding and thus removing them from active participation in the events of history.

Some more recent works engage with the large-scale impact that women had on the Weimar political landscape in more comprehensive terms, such as Julia Sneeringer in her *Winning Women’s Votes*. In it, Sneeringer identified the major changes ushered in by the extension of political and legal rights to women but stressed the unaltered male chauvinism prevalent at the time. Paying close attention to party propaganda, she showed that electoral politics were nonetheless recalibrated to speak to women. The depth of her study stops there, however. Indeed, Sneeringer treats women as objects, herded along by the male-dominated political discourses and processes rather than as agents that through their perceptions, feelings and actions both shaped and changed the German political setting. Although Sneeringer probed the gender discrimination of the

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15 Ibid., 164.
Weimar era’s sociopolitical dialogue, she ultimately denied women active historical influence and largely disregarded them as a vital political constituency. Sneeringer’s approach to women as politically passive objects subject to male manipulation can be traced back to Joachim Fest, who proffered that the female attraction to the NSDAP was ruled by irrational emotionality and their unyielding infatuation with Hitler’s personality, an interpretation also observed in more recent works, such as Eric D. Weitz’s *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, where women are present as ornamental symbols rather than actors, ones entirely left out of his political conclusions.¹⁷

This brief survey of the existing scholarship on Weimar women and their support of National Socialism reveals a major gap in the historiography, one that is all the more baffling because women made up the majority of the Weimar electorate. Their omission ignores a vital angle for understanding the context that spawned Nazism. It may also make it more difficult to grasp and ultimately prevent such tragedies in the future.

Joan W. Scott provides a valuable source of inspiration and guidance for this thesis, as historical analysis of the role of women in the rise of the Nazis must be especially sensitive to women's actions and experiences, ideas and policies, which defined their rights as well as the metaphoric and symbolic representations of the feminine alongside the masculine.¹⁸ In this sense, this thesis observes women not as an isolated phenomenon but rather as they exist in a network of dialogues and images that influence the experiences and actions of women and men alike. The gender binary can thus be understood as parallel mirrors that continuously project, refract and shape their own

reflections, forever changing them and all those to follow. Consequently, Scott’s approach gives voice to women’s history not as an aggressive pursuit that extends the gender animosities but rather as an enlightening endeavor that holds great promise to enrich the historical narrative more generally, not just one devoted to women.

Drawing on these insights, this thesis seeks to fill the gap in German women’s historiography by dealing directly with the role of Weimar-era women in the rise of Nazism by analyzing urban women in clerical professions. Such women encountered the brunt forces of modernization most directly and had, due to their demographic significance and political voice, the potential to influence politics in important and wide-ranging ways despite the pervasive gender discrimination of the time. As will be seen, their voice would prove fateful for the Weimar Republic. By reconstructing the economic, social, cultural and political experiences of this group of women, this thesis intends to reveal what forces moved so many of these women to support National Socialism and thus bring about an end to the Republic that had first extended them political and legal rights.

In “Chapter I: Die Frau und der Kapitalismus” the vast changes that economic modernization brought to the urban workplace and the associated vocational identification with it of women employed in white-collar professions will be considered. Following this, “Chapter II: Die Frau und die Modernität” will grapple with the experience of modernity, specifically that of urban leisure activities and popular mass culture, which radically reshaped female attitudes, perceptions and expectations towards their lives. Taking into account the economic, social and cultural modernization explored in the first two chapters, “Chapter III: Die Frau und die Politik” will reveal how many modern urban women expressed their experiences of — and anxieties with— Weimar
modernity by supporting the Nazi Party and enabling its electoral breakthroughs in the early 1930s. In sum, this thesis will address the historiographical omission of modern urban women as important agents in the Nazi’s ascent to political power.
CHAPTER I: Die Frau und der Kapitalismus

As the city awakens with shop fronts being opened and typewriters unpacked, smartly dressed men and women crowd to work. Walter Ruttmann captures these images in his film Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt (Berlin, Symphony of a Great City, 1927). Just a few decades before, such an active female presence in the public sphere would have been inconceivable. Rapid economic modernization after the Second Industrial Revolution brought with it the extensive transformation of the social fabric of German cities. Traditionally, women’s presence in the workplace was viewed as degrading, yet prospering fields such as white-collar professions increasingly needed female employment for typing, stenography and switchboards. As a result, women penetrated the public realm of office work as oppose to factory work, often for the first time. This made women more visible in the urban landscape. These women were without doubt a symbol of change that became overwhelmingly visible in the Weimar period.

Although Weimar modernization created a sphere of economic opportunity, the power dynamics of society, though influenced by the female presence, remained male-dominated and relatively inflexible. In order to comprehend how economic modernization affected the position of women in white-collar work, this chapter will explore how the structure of the firm, the class-gender chasm and the female participants’ own attitudes towards employment created a distinct vocational attitude, or rather, an anti-vocational attitude. This generalized outlook on female life and employment expectations ultimately fostered neither a gender- nor vocation-oriented consciousness that could have provided a common identity to mobilize collective action.

The economic modernization in the Wilhelmine and Weimar periods radically reconfigured German society. Women as a social group that underwent riveting changes since they became increasingly visible in the public sphere. The focus of this chapter is on the female white-collar workers in urban centers, who were themselves a product of this process and likely experienced the transformations more vividly relative to much of their sex. In order to unpack both the opportunities and challenges they encountered, this chapter will commence similar to Kathleen Cannning’s study of female factory work in nineteenth-century Germany by first studying the overall structural patterns through Alfred Chandler’s analysis of the firm in order “to distinguish the structural transformation from the changing meanings that contemporaries ascribed to women’s work.”20 After establishing the greater economic structural trends and their impact on gender perception in the workplace, an analysis concerning their influence on the career pattern, work identities and work culture will be possible.

The European pattern of economic modernization is associated with three overall, long-term trends: population growth, urbanization and industrialization. All three mechanisms mutually interlocked to promote the conditions of a modern society. The increase in life expectancy spurred demographic redistribution to urban centers. For instance, Berlin grew from 412,000 in 1850 to 2,071,000 in 1910 and to 4,300,000 in 1929.21 Traditional economic sectors became less relevant or even obsolete, as the decline of the artisans and craftsmen fatefuly reveals, while the second wave of industrialization fostered an entirely new realm of economic opportunity. In Germany

the main driving forces in industrialization occurred within the fields of steel, engineering and chemicals. In order to expand, Chandler argues that they would take advantage of the economies of scale and scope, which was only possible through communication, transportation and, above all, meticulous organization. All of this necessitated a new army of clerical and secretarial staff.

The growth of firms relied on their unprecedented ability to take advantage of scientific management that emerged in the late-nineteenth century in the form of specialization, the division of labor and rationalization. Chandler distinguishes the meticulous organization of physical facilities and human skills into manufacturing, management and marketing as the defining path of German economic development in relation to its American and British counterparts. Perhaps the most appropriate example of a large, rationalized and scientifically divided bureaucratic industrial enterprise is Siemens, the electrical engineering firm, which had its own municipality, Siemensstadt, with more than 21,000 workers. Within this context, the employment of women grew both in absolute and relative terms beyond the greatest expectations of the previous generations.

In order to later gain a more holistic picture of the female salaried employees’ attitudes to such large firms, a brief case study will illuminate how these firms developed hierarchy-bound internal organization. Siemens diversified their products to disperse risk while they centralized their management over their rationalized production facilities.

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22 Ibid., 171-172
24 Ibid., 469.
25 For example, Siemens & Halske AG merged with electrical engineering company Schuckert & Co. GMBH to gain the economic upper hand in both communication and power technology under the auspices of Siemens-Schuckertwerke GMBH.
Each had a distinct responsibility within the corporate machine. The *Fabrizierende-Abteilung* (production division) was responsible for production, design and research activities while the *Vertriebs-Abteilungen* (sales division) was engaged in marketing, servicing and customer responsibilities. Thus, one branch dealt with the development and production of goods while the other centered on their distribution and customer relations. This example reveals the hierarchical segmentation and rationalization inherent in German economic modernization and development.

The sheer size of firms like Siemens that were built on their bureaucratic organizations required an enormous volume of information processing associated with modern communication and transportation, which changed the human capital involved in the production and distribution of goods and services. Since it necessitated a large amount of clerking, the tertiary sector now demanded a swelling number of female employees. In traditional German firms, clerking had almost exclusively been reserved for educated, middle-class males. It had generally functioned as a vocational training period in which they would acquire trade knowledge for future economic independence as shop or business owners.

The specialization of office and sales functions through the incorporation of technological innovation completely changed clerical work. Economic historian David S. Landes points to the institutionalization of technological advance as the determining factor in the innovation and spread of new technology. This large volume of new devices allowed the expansion of corporations that resided over the vast mechanization

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26 Chandler, *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism*, 469.
of production and standardization of international commerce. Within this context, there now existed a high demand for low-skilled labor such as stenographers, typists, switchboard operators and shop clerks to coordinate operations.

These technological innovations allowed for the growth of the division, rationalization and specialization of labor activity under what the historian David Blackbourn calls “American-type scientific management” in the work- and marketplace.\(^{30}\) The large, modern office grew out of this overall trend towards the automated efficiency of labor through office machinery. Standardization and automation of activity occurred through devices such as filing cabinets, pneumatic tubes for internal communication, typewriters, telephones, shorthand machines, and even went as far as, franking and letter opening and closing machines.\(^{31}\) As contemporary sociologist Hans Speier put it, “systematic arrangement was its motto, statistics was its science, and increased business its goal.”\(^{32}\) With the increase in such business, the modern office increasingly required a growing staff of clerks to operate them.

At the same time as the office became integral to the functioning of large corporations involved in the production process, it also helped spawn the growth of firms involved in the distribution of consumer goods, most notably: the department store. This American import soon won over German consumers through its stunning design and decorative interior.\(^{33}\) Similar to industrial corporations, the department store relied on coordination, standardization and systematization in “matters like the inventory, the selection of loss leaders and the rationalization of space on the main floor...

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\(^{32}\) Ibid.

area.” Just like the modern office, hierarchy of standardized functions, carried out by salaried employees “from purchasers and advertising experts to window-dressers, floor supervisors and the modern army of salesgirls,” allowed the organization of these vastly complex sales systems that spurred the growth of a mass consumer society in Germany.35

Although changes in workplace structure drastically increased economic productivity, it came with certain consequences for the nature and type of work that employees carried out. In the distribution sector, work no longer was bound by expertise, as had formerly been the case for the traditional shop owner, who was required to have a certain set of knowledge about the goods he offered and a certain relationship with his customers. Through the standardization of merchandise and systematization of prices, sales became routinized and depersonalized. In the large department store complex, a sales clerk only needed to know very little information about the goods they sold and their employers dissuaded them from fostering personal relationships with the customers. They were thus replaceable and mechanical, functioning only to repeat a memorized sales spin that could be summarized in as little as thirty words.36

Very similar conditions confronted lower-level clerical work in the office, as the employee had become but a machine operator with little personal contact and a mindless, mechanized task. Formerly, clerks had carried out an array of tasks that now were narrowly specialized in a highly repetitious fashion through the office machinery, which was coordinated by the manager from above. A contemporary observer remarked

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Speier, German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler, 25.
that “the work of these employees in present-day giant enterprises is almost manual.”

The functions that clerks carried out now included the rationalization of script (stenography), the mechanization of writing (typewriter) and the development of the telephone (switchboard). These lines of work were “dull, mechanical and very strenuous.” According to the free trade union, Afa-Bund, they also contributed to the bad health of the clerks as “disorders, caused by overexcitement of the nervous system,” for example, “were features of typing work.” Given the heavy workload expectations, such health hazards seem unsurprising, which Figure 1 demonstrates with a hint of sarcasm since the female employee’s new typewriter comes with an endless roll of paper.

Figure 1. The never-ending work of a typist (1930). Metzger, *Berlin in the Twenties*, 255.

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37 Ibid., 26.
38 Ibid., 28.
39 Ibid.
Through technological revolutions in information processing, as with communication, recording, filing, indexing and punch cards, clerical work, in sum, became reliant on the de-skilled routinization of specialized tasks. The epitome of such a mindless, repetitious job in the highly specialized and segregated modern office was the holepuncher.\(^{40}\)

As seen in the holepuncher example, no longer were clerks independent actors on an upward trajectory of employment, as their male forerunners had been, but rather, they were predominantly replaceable labor components of an impersonal system. This dependant position establishes how the economic conditions shaped attitudes towards work that negatively affected gender and labor solidarity. As suggested in this discussion and shown in Figure 2 (1925), the scientific management underlying economic modernization invited an entirely new worker into the labor market: the female white-color employee.

\[\text{Figure 2. Female overtake: A typical typewriter room in Berlin. Metzger, Berlin in the Twenties, 256-257.}\]

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 30.
With their introduction into the labor force, often for the first time, this labor group faced significant challenges at crafting vocational identities that would allow them to cohesively define and organize themselves in pursuing common workplace goals. The failure of such meaningful connections to develop, especially when contrasted to the blue-collar workers, may be attributed to a range of sources, which this chapter will now seek to explore and explicate in relation to the overall argument about the failure of female vocational consciousness and organization.

In the historical literature on white-collar unionism in Germany, one of the leading arguments builds upon the Marxist characterization of these workers as “spiritually homeless,” a “tabula rasa” or “value-parasites.”41 This case rests on their understanding that this new and diverse social group was sorely marked by an identity crisis resulting from their struggle between proletarian wage-labor and contradicting claims to a middle-class status.42 Along these lines, the “torn” class condition significantly obstructed the growth of a collective consciousness within this socially diverse vocational group.

Already in 1912, Socialist Emile Lederer identified in his work Die Privatangestellten in der Modernen Wirtschaftsentwicklung (The Problem of the Modern Salaried Employee) that the emerging group of white-collar workers were heterogeneous in both nature of work and class origin. This, he concluded, divided the group too starkly for any autonomous political action.43 After the Great War, Siegfried Kracauer extrapolated upon this position in his observations of the modern metropolis where he characterized white-

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42 Ibid.
43 Emile Lederer, Die Privatangestellten in der Modernen Wirtschaftsentwicklung, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1912).
collar workers as classless wanderers.\textsuperscript{44} In this argument, they futilely attempted to craft their own world of norms and modes of social evaluation.\textsuperscript{45} Hans Speier identified them as socially “lost” since these social latecomers borrowed at random from other classes and ages behind the façade of middle-class status, which most could not materially substantiate by their reliance on wage-labor.\textsuperscript{46} The significance of this existence without a structured identity to reference is very important when considering the potential to connect with one another and organize a group identity. Though the Marxist explanation sketches a distinct angle of social sentiments, it must have been a condition experienced by many in white-collar profession even if it was not universally representative. Yet, the Marxist interpretations fail in a holistic approach to the dynamics underlying modernization as it was socially experienced due to their blatant disregard of elemental components of human existence such as gender.

Interestingly, the discourse on white-collar work largely ignores gender, which Joan Scott’s “hierarchies of difference” in \textit{Gender and the Politics of History} has shown to reveal the female exclusion from power dynamics.\textsuperscript{47} Thus, the male dominated social narrative accentuates the domineering male presence in this historical period and in the study of it. Correspondingly, Scott explains that such historical analyses cannot claim totalizing authority because they ignore significant relationships that shaped the lived experience of both men and women.\textsuperscript{48} Still, Lederer, Krakauer and Speier all contribute valuable insights into certain class-based anxieties that plagued white-collar workers. As members of this “class,” whether conscious or unconscious of the fact, these too

\textsuperscript{44} Kracauer, \textit{The Salaried Masses}, 6.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Speier, \textit{German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler}, 38-40.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 30-41.
affected women, which must be considered alongside the inclusion of gender in the analysis.

Accordingly, both class and gender are essential for comprehending the historical mechanisms in place. In light of this, it is necessary to ameliorate the gender deficit of the previous literature surveyed in order to understand the intersection of class and gender in shaping the experience of female white-collar work. As the contemporary feminist psychologist Alice Rühle-Gerstel reveals in her socialist-inspired work *Die Frau und der Kapitalismus*, gender intersected power in important ways:

Economic situation: proletarian; ideology: bourgeois; type of occupation: male; attitude to work: female. Beaming figures, casting light that is sparkling and attractive, and yet which highlights their very ambiguities; but in any case figures iridescently confident of their social and spiritual existence.

Thus, in terms of status ideology, she concluded that those who facilitated the exchange of goods rather than the production of them had a higher social standing. Yet, she underscored the important fact that her contemporaries Kracauer and Lederer ignored: the female sex faced discrimination in employment opportunities and compensation. This radically transformed the female interpretation of class.

The most important process was the increase in the feminization of this labor pool. Rühle-Gerstel collected statistics that highlight a 165% increase in female white-collar labor between 1885-1907. Over the course of this period, Germany went from being a respectable industrial nation to a major world economic power. With increasing modernization of the economy in the 1920s, Frevert describes the continuation of this trend as the number of women in white-collar work tripled between 1907 and 1925 to

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49 Ibid., 5, 66.
50 Quoted in Frevert, *Women in German History*, 178.
52 Ibid.
1.5 million. In his book, *The World of the Office Worker*, sociologist Michel Crozier investigates the evolution of the group in its sociological context, which is marked by four characteristics: its rapid and substantial increase in size; the increasing reduction of its advantage in relation to blue-collar workers; the progressive feminization of the group; and the profound transformation of the tasks as a result of technologic innovation. Ultimately, the rapid changes in technology, discussed previously, allowed all these patterns to be set in motion. As tasks became simpler and rationalized, less skill and experience invited an influx of women at a lower salary that could be easily substituted due to the highly mechanized and specialized function of the work they carried out. For example, writer Cornelia Fuykschot, when observing the influence of office machinery on employees, concluded that stenography “demands attention but absolutely no thought.” Overall, Cozier argues that the evolution of the white-collar worker group as one of proletarization.

This process of “proletarization” was markedly felt by women in Weimar Germany as their employment positions became increasingly specialized through the growth spurts in technological innovation. Such economic patterns lowered the barriers of entry, which affected women substantially more than men because of their differing types of employment. The white-collar employment positions women had access to required a relatively lower educational skill-set. Correspondingly, female salaried employees had a relatively more diverse socioeconomic background because women from both the declining *Mittelstand* (lower middle-class) and the rising working-class could reasonably gain access to these employment possibilities without having much in

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53 Frevert, *Women in German History*, 177.
common with one another. Thus, in terms of class, women in this professional field
experienced an even greater identity deficit than their male counterparts. In contrast to
men in similar employment conditions, women not only craved the (almost exclusively
unrealized) prospect of upward mobility, but also, more significantly, they faced
discrimination and extended burdens that men were never forced to confront, such as
sexual harassment or additional obligations in the home. Max Weber recognized early on
the appeal of a middle-class status as it brought social honor or prestige and, above all,
social power. The women who chose white-collar professions subscribed to this allure.
Historical records, such as those from vocational agencies, illustrate a story of women
seeking white-collar work due to their naïve perceptions of upward social mobility and
social prestige.

Through the higher social status women associated with tertiary sector
employment, many believed to have better and more prosperous marriage prospects.
Rather than aspiring towards social betterment through higher wages and promotions,
m then remained the central focus for employment decisions, which is exemplified
by many women opting for the poorer paid clerical work in lieu of higher paid positions
in industrial labor. Such an understanding of upward mobility via traditional female
roles underscores the latent bourgeois values in the static skeletal framework of German
society in the Weimar Republic.

Female white-collar workers desperately attempted to set themselves off from
their proletarian counterparts in appearance, which their employers often even required.
A Weimar-era poll found that women spent between 25% and 40% of their income on

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57 Frevert, *Women in German History*, 181.
58 Ibid.
their appearance, such as clothing and cosmetics, in contrast to their male counterparts who only paid 10% to 12% of their income on comparable items. Many female respondents stated that they often even went without food in order to pay for clothing.\textsuperscript{59} This put white-collar employees, particularly women, in a materially even more precarious position than proletarians. Scott notes that sexual differences become mobilized to construct notions of class, as in the case of a sexualized appearance of the female white-collar workers in relation to their masculinized proletarian rivals.\textsuperscript{60}

In sum, the “classlessness” of the female white-collar employees, as characterized by Lederer, Kracauer, Speier and Rühle-Gerstel, was even more vivid than that of their male counterparts because they had a greater rivalry with the proletarian women from below due to the nature of their employment. This prompted them to more vehemently turn away from established trade unions organized for female wage-labor because they sought to differentiate themselves as much as possible from this group by emphasizing their class status over economic or gender interests.\textsuperscript{61}

As a result of workplace rationalization and mechanization, white-collar work became deskilled and segmented, which allowed women to enter the labor market without education but it also meant that women occupied replaceable employment positions where they were at the mercy of the firm. Women provided the perfect untapped pool of labor resources because they were new to employment, which meant they lacked traditions and experience in terms of labor organization and wage expectations. Thus, they were a malleable, more dispensable substitute to their male-counterparts. Further, many contemporary women acknowledged that in spite of their

\textsuperscript{59} Adams, \textit{Women clerks in Wilhelmine Germany}, 25.
\textsuperscript{60} Scott, \textit{Gender and the Politics of History}, 66.
\textsuperscript{61} Werner Thönnessen, \textit{The Emancipation of Women}, (Frankfurt am Main: Pluto Press, 1969), 161.
many opportunities, the positions of power “men keep for themselves.”62 This, for Rühle-Gerstel, put female employees in a precarious position between the classes and at the mercy of their male counterparts. What is more, women often faced a double burden of dependency in the home and work place. Female white-collar employees poignantly felt the weight of this burden because in their vocational group they additionally faced discrimination as a class without heritage, in the Marxian sense, and a gender without solidarity, in the feminist sense.

The hierarchical structure of the firm obstructed the development of gender-based labor solidarity not only through vertical discrimination but also by fostering horizontal competition and animosity. The internal discrimination along gender lines was especially evident in the practice of wage discrimination.63 Werner Thönnessen presents compelling evidence of wage discrimination against female white-collar workers, as out of 1.4 million female workers, only 10-11% were paid the same as men, 9% had less than 10% diminution in the going wage rate and 65% suffered a loss of 10%, and 16% lost more than 10%. The remaining 14% were paid below the award rate.64 Others have painted an even more dire picture for many of these young women since their wages, after insurance deductions, were often below the Republic’s poverty line of 100 RM.65 As Rühle-Gerstel’s contemporary study concluded, most female wages were on or below the poverty line: “Der Netto-gehalt ist also ein Elendlohn” (The net income is thus a

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63 It should be noted that statistics at times can establish a inflated sense of authority, which may mask the author’s bias. In this case, the relationship of power communicated is one of female-inferiority in the labor force but it gains credibility through three different sources that are mutually exclusive in origin. For more on this topic see: Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 113-116.
64 Thönnessen, *The Emancipation of Women*, 141-142.
poverty wage).\textsuperscript{66} For this reason, employers must have welcomed women into the labor market because an influx of low-wage white-collar work would increase their profits.

The discrimination that women encountered in the workplace went beyond the gender-wage discrepancy. Women faced a patriarchal managerial structure and misogynistic attitudes in the workplace every day. Agnes Herrmann, who was a leader of one of the biggest clerk’s associations before the Great War, recognized early that men would never come to view women as their equals. Rather, women met hostility and bigotry in the workplace: “It [the position of female clerks] was so low, so little respected.”\textsuperscript{67} Thus, female white-collar workers were accepted neither by men in similar work, nor by those who managed their labor. Yet, resistance to this position of inferiority did not evolve because men feared women would endanger their own positions of employment and thus, hindered vocational solidarity. Furthermore, the competition amongst women in the workplace impeded the growth of a gender conscious form of collective resistance.\textsuperscript{68}

Not only was collective action difficult to coordinate due to the structure of the workplace and the nature of the work, but also many women became disillusioned with the prospect of change. In the hierarchy of the workplace, the statistics available on female upward mobility point to deep-seated gender discrimination. The Rühle-Gerstel study from 1932 inspected 155 women to show that many, especially those below 24, held hopes of upward mobility, not only through marriage, but also through the firm. Yet the actual prospect of such mobility was slim, as only about 2\% of all women held

\textsuperscript{66} Rühle-Gerstel, \textit{Die Frau und der Kapitalismus}, 291.
\textsuperscript{67} Quoted in Adams, \textit{Woman clerks in Wilhelmine Germany}, 15.
\textsuperscript{68} Thönnessen, \textit{The Emancipation of Women}, 161.
higher positions in white-collar work. In a similar study of 25,000 women, there were only 573 women who held higher status employment in their firm (this “higher status” category included positions like head sales clerk). Studies done by historians Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz suggest even more ominous numbers for the upward mobility of women, as they rarely climbed in the ranks as less than 1% of female employees held management positions of any sort.

The intrusive nature and segregating structure of the firm made female labor associations particularly difficult to organize. What set German firms off from their international competition was their reliance on strict hierarchy and rigorous involvement in the lives of their employees. Often, this was in terms of welfare provisions and company insurance, such as at Siemens, where these incentives came in the form of profit sharing schemes, annual bonuses, a tenure-determined pension fund, subsidized holiday destinations and annual parties. Further, the German firm also became associated with the regulation of their employee’s lifestyle choices. For example in shops, appearance was integral to sustained employment, which sales clerks maintained at great personal expense, as previously discussed. At Siemens the regulation of personal lives was much more explicit, as employees could neither volunteer their leisure time nor change their residence address without formal permission by their manager. They oversaw association membership of their employees to restrict participation in labor

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70 Ibid.
72 Chandler, *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism*, 457.
organizations that would encroach on the firm’s monopoly over its employees individual lives.\textsuperscript{76} Hence, the firm could control how their employees passed their time outside the workplace, particularly in relation to whether it was in an organization that could destabilize the firm’s grip on the individual.

The management with grand divisions between departments and functions structured relationships in the firm to be impersonal, isolating and often competitive. Similar to working-class concerns about female employment, the male white-collar workers, especially those in positions of low qualification, found the flood of women into the labor force menacing. Yet, due to the limited physical expertise and acquired skill of white-collar work, women were a greater danger to the low-level male positions. This made solidarity among employees of similar vocational status across gender lines difficult.

Even among women, garnering vocational consciousness based on an awareness of a common fate among workers was unlikely according to a social psychological study done by Lisbeth Franzen-Hellersberg in the late Weimar period.\textsuperscript{77} This may have been the consequence of the horizontal competition fostered by the Americanization of the firm as management tactics rewarded the highest achievers in certain categorized functions with bonuses or other incentives, such as for example typing or sales.\textsuperscript{78} This trend strengthened in the Weimar years. Furthermore, the lack of contact with other employees, with the exception of large department stores, contributed to the circumstances that hindered female participation in labor associations.\textsuperscript{79} Even in

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 504-505.
\textsuperscript{78} Adams, \textit{Woman clerks in Wilhelmine Germany}, 10.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 63.
workplaces where there existed possibilities for staff networking, such as in large retail establishments, the management dissuaded friendliness between employees by often forbidding the familiar form of “Du” (familiar form of you). Consequently, the impersonal hierarchies by which the modern, scientifically managed firm operated, fragmented female workers first by gender through its vertical discrimination and then by individual through horizontal segregation.

Not surprisingly, white-collar women failed to develop a collective identity based on common experience. The hierarchical and intrusive firm, the disjointed and disorienting socioeconomic composition and the alienating and antagonizing labor relations combined to foster a disillusioned and apathetic attitude towards work among female white-collar workers. Although this generalizes the feelings of a vast group of women from diverse backgrounds and in various types of firms, it nonetheless reflects the overall forces that shaped, in different magnitudes and combinations, the lived female experiences in the Weimar Republic.

The upshot was that most women understood their employment in the white-collar profession as a transient form of occupation that would bridge youth and marriage. One respondent to the Rühle-Gerstel questionnaire captured the general stance: “Es ist mir schrecklich, wenn ich denke, dass ich mit sechzig noch an der Schreibmaschine sitzen soll” (For me it is dreadful to think that I should still be sitting at a typewriter at sixty). Correspondingly, by the mid-1920s, two-thirds of the women employed in white-collar occupations were below the age of 25 and almost all of them were single. Bridenthal and Koonz emphasize that although female white-collar professionals sought excitement
in independence and self-reliance, they did so within the confines of their eventual return to the bourgeois ideal of marriage and family. Accordingly, women tended to enroll in vocational courses for subjects that were easily learned, such as stenography, typing and bookkeeping, rather than more complex subjects that would have given them long-term advantages, such as accounting or management. Overall, determined by class identity and class aspirations, women’s understanding of their employment as temporary made their stakes in collective action appear lower and thus, their threshold for participation higher.

The low engagement in labor organization also must be understood in terms of the deadening routinization of the work within the occupational group and the women’s leisure time preferences, which will be unpacked in Chapter II. A twenty-five year old salaried employee recounted the mechanized feeling during her workday: “Acht Stunden lang ausgeschaltet eigenes Denken and Fühlen, eigenes Wünschen und Wollen. Acht Stunden lang […] gilt es, sich den Wünschen der Vorgesetzten zu fügen” (For eight hours, you turn off your own thinking and feeling, your wishing and desiring. For eight hours, to submit yourself to the wishes of your manager). Such a first-hand experience is visually reflected in Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt, when Ruttmann fuses machine and human components of the city through their cinematic juxtaposition. One of the most memorable examples of this is the scene of women typing and dialing since they practically merge with their devices. Thus, the viewer encounters the city as a reflective object within which women are clearly visible yet these new forms of employment also had considerable psychological ramifications, which Irmgard Keun entitles “den Serienstempel” (the serial stamp) that

84 Adams, Woman clerks in Wilhelmine Germany, 65.
her heroine Gilgi recognizes in the empty faces of the streetcar passengers.\textsuperscript{86} The film illustrates these psychological costs of modern employment most clearly when, at the close of the Act II, it parallels a busy female stenographer’s image with that of fighting monkeys. The memories of another young employee mirrored such notions as she called it “\textit{eine Wohltat, zu denken}” (a blessing to think) when the workday was completed.\textsuperscript{87} After surrendering themselves to adding machines, Hollerith machines, typewriters and stenographs, women understandably wanted to spend their leisure time according to their own choosing and in very different ways.

Apart from the general apathy, the work environment of many white-collar workers was not conducive to their pursuit of labor solidarity due to such practical factors as longer working hours. A textile worker contrasted her vocational position to that of her shop clerk sister and concluded that though they both receive equal wages, “\textit{die Arbeitszeit [ihrer Schwester] ist nicht die günstigste}” (the work-time [of her sister] is not the most convenient).\textsuperscript{88} She associated these extensive hours with her sister’s struggle to participate in organized labor.\textsuperscript{89} Thus, it is evident that the nature of rationalized work under the auspices of the firm set impediments to labor organization for this vocational group beyond the factors discussed previously.

What this textile worker so poignantly accentuated in her memoir was that being active in organized labor endowed participants with a certain sense of group identity and belonging: “\textit{es gibt meinem Leben doch noch etwas Inhalt}” (after all, it still gives my life some content).\textsuperscript{90} The Franzen-Hellersberg study corroborates this contemporary impression

\textsuperscript{87} Lüdtke, ed., “\textit{Mein Arbeitstag – mein Wochenende},” \textit{Arbeiterinnen berichten von ihrem Alltag} 1928, 22.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 50
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 49.
because she argued that young women in white-collar modes of occupation had no organizing principles. “Die Überlieferung auf allen Gebieten des Lebens sind zerbrochen, neue formen sind nicht gewachsen” (the traditions in all aspects of life have fallen apart, [and] no new forms have grown [to replace them]).

In essence, without a common denominator of identity, women working in salaried employment had no investment in it.

In short, the hopes and dreams of many of the young women who flooded into the offices and shops of Weimar Germany seem to often have remained unrealized, which contributed to the malaise of female collective consciousness. The frustration with unrealized wishes increasingly contributed to a disillusionment with the present and the romanticization of the past. In a memoir published in a 1926 edition of *Junge Kräfte*, a publication for sales and office employees, a women discerned the stressful aspect of the female urban employment: “just like on the express train, you don’t have the leisure to follow a thought to the end or finish looking at something, since your attention is immediately caught by something else.”

Such personal accounts underscore the frustration of young women alongside their strikingly naïve desires for the countryside and an imagined past with defined bourgeois gender roles. Christa Anita Brück’s *Schicksale hinter der Schreibmaschine* (Destinies behind the Typewriter, 1930) candidly expressed this shift in attitude as the young female protagonist finds salvation in the countryside after her struggle for upward mobility as a clerk in the city left her without advancement or hope.

This work of fiction allows insight into how conservative attitudes grew among this seemingly modern social group out of sheer disillusionment with the inalterable status quo.

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93 Christa Anita Brück, *Schicksale Hinter der Schreibmaschine*, (Berlin: Sieben Stäbe Verlag, 1930).
Even in trendy publications such as the trendy, female-geared monthly periodical, UHU, employment for women became increasingly conveyed as a burden. In 1930, articles still showed women with ambitious career paths: “Ich werde Mannequin um mein Studium zu verdienen” (I will model to finance my education). Just two years later, articles with titles such as “Ich schreibe auf jedes Inserat! Querschnitt durch vier Monate Daseinskampf eines jungen Mädchens von heute” (I respond to every job ad – Four months in the struggle for existence of a young women today) prevailed in the publication, showing the economic circumstance’s large-scale impact. As evident, the identity marketed to women was one increasingly dominated by male anxieties relating to unemployment as the Great Depression destroyed the already battered German economy. Consequently, the frustration of unrealized expectations combined with such popular shifts in opinion to foster an apathetic attitude rather than a will to counter the inequality for these women, which was all reinforced by the depreciating economic circumstances of the early 1930s.

As Scott outlines, worker’s associations rely on common identification to foster a social consciousness about which individuals can organize collective action in order to make alterations to the abject circumstances they encounter in their environment. As revealed in this chapter, female white-collar workers failed to adopt a common identity due to subjective and objective conditions that resulted from the process of economic modernization. In particular, the impersonal management structures of the modern, scientifically organized firm fostered a work environment that impeded the growth of collective identification through segregation, competition and discrimination. Although

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95 Ibid.
96 Scott, Gender and the Politics of History, 94.
female victimhood may seem like the overarching them in this chapter, women influenced their environment significantly. When considering their sheer absence from the public sphere just a generation or so before, the visible transformation of Weimar society, particularly in cities, remains remarkable. By entering the workforce through white-collar jobs, these women gained radically new opportunities that forever changed relations between the sexes and in the family, although the rigid conservative attitudes remained latent in society.

Even if women failed to organize and assert themselves behind a collective identity, they still stepped out of the footsteps of women who went before them. Yet, their failure to understand the significance of this step would accompany their lack of common consciousness of labor conditions and gender emancipation. After experiencing the limitations placed on their emancipation, many young, independent women longed for a return to traditional gender roles because they imagined these to be safe and stable. Sadly, the failure to recognize the power they may have garnered as an increasingly integral occupational group guided many of these women towards abandoning the political system in which they felt they could neither find nor create a place for themselves.
CHAPTER II: Die Frau und die Modernität

“Ein Film ohne Schauspieler” (A film without actors) the introductory intertitle reads as the viewers of Menschen Am Sonntag (People on Sunday, 1930) sense the real-world texture of this film, later reflected in the bustling streets of Berlin. This impression of genuine documentation is carried from the external setting of the streets with its trains, trolleys and endless swarms of pedestrians, to the internal world of the human existence, with its mental, emotional and psychological woes. The characters seem defined by a sense of lost sadness and futile inability to connect with others. Above all, the female characters garner the least control over their own fate. Although the film depicts a patent female presence in the streets and parks of Berlin, the male characters overshadow them as they coldly and indifferently take advantage of their female counterparts emotionally, physically and even financially. Sadly, this fictional rendering was a much-experienced female reality both in the public dialogue and their private existence at the time.

The closing captions of Menschen Am Sonntag indicate the cyclical reoccurrence of male hegemony in all realms of female life as it looks forward to a replay of the weekend’s antics following the workweek: “Wieder Abreit. Wieder Alltag. Wieder Woche. 4 Millionen warten auf den nächsten Sonntag. Ende” (Once again work. Once again the daily grind. Once again the week. 4 million wait for the next Sunday. End). While the film is ostensibly about capturing the lives of everyday people, it ultimately does so by revealing these people’s utter desire to escape the everyday. Leisure time distracted the modern

98 Ibid.
urban dweller from the drudgery of their work and routine. Yet, as the film so markedly illustrates, leisure time was not a mechanism of female emancipation. Rather, their leisure time activities, along with the cultural mediums that defined these, sought to reinforce the isolated and fragmented female existence as secondary citizens.

In the same manner as the First and Second Industrial Revolution completely transformed economic life in Germany, the modernization of the cultural realm through the influx of an interrelated network of mass media, entertainment and consumerism, utterly changed the human experience in the Weimar Republic. Overall, the psychological conditioning of an unbridled mass consumer society, alongside the impossible dreams it promised and its preoccupation with the moment communicated through the web of media, laid a cultural foundation that could be exploited for political aims by those willing and able to do so.

For women this cultural innovation was particularly arresting because it accompanied the many other radical transformations to their lives over the course of the 1920s. Such upheaval was concentrated in the urban centers of Weimar Germany. Here the most profound changes to the workplace, living arrangements and leisure activities combined to create a modern urban environment for women full of multilayered contradictions and animosities. Within this setting, female white-collar workers were especially vulnerable to the negative fallout of the modern urban experience because of their precarious position as newcomers to the economic, cultural and political arena. In consequence, the process of Weimar cultural modernization reinforced their isolation and atomization through leisure-time escapism and distraction, which exacerbated their depoliticalization.
Weimar culture’s “cacophony of sounds” and “dazzle of images” were the product of technological innovations. All that blossomed in the Weimar period in the form of popular culture was the product of a vast mechanization process, which had been underway throughout the nineteenth century. In this sense, the origins of Weimar popular culture emerged long before the Great War, but they did not come to their explosive fruition until the 1920s, when they influenced the public and private lives of those people who experienced them in striking new ways.

Novel mediums like the cinema and broadcasting were both born out of the alliance between technological advances and new investment. By the mid-1920s there were 2 million daily movie visitors while in 1927 there were 1.4 million officially registered radio devices throughout Germany. “Major technological improvements enhanced the quality of the reproductions and transmissions, whether over the airwaves, on a very large screen, or on the pages printed by newly developed” offset printing and linotype machines. Radio, records, movies, jazz, new dances, shows, high fashion, pulp magazines, spectator sports, films, advertising and other developments revolutionized the daily lives of people in this age. Not only did they transform their models for life, understanding of the world and perception in its very essence, but also, more fundamentally, the new mass media gave people alternative opportunities to spend their leisure time and income. In order to comprehend how such cultural

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100 The definition of *popular culture* can only be adequately comprehended in historical context. The usage of the term used in this thesis is neutral rather than negative. It is employed to describe the cultural artifacts produced by the mass commercial complex to be consumed by a large quantity of people. For further reference on this topic, see Adelheid von Saldern *The Challenge of Modernity: German Social and Cultural Studies, 1890-1969*, trans. Bruce Little (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 249.
101 Ibid., 281.
transformations affected the personal lives of female white-collar workers, a brief survey of the most dominant cultural mediums and their influence will prove useful.

With the first German broadcast transmitted to the public on October 29, 1923, the radio scored a triumph for new mediums of cultural dissemination.\textsuperscript{105} This auditory revolution brought together amplification and transmission of sound over long distances.\textsuperscript{106} From 1923 onwards, home entertainment was completely altered through the direct entry of this new leisure form into the private home. Public radio dominated the airwaves from the first broadcasts onward, and thus the state had an important influence on the medium of radio from its very inception. Nationwide programs now had the ability to reach German listeners in Berlin as well as Stuttgart simultaneously: “radio brought music, plays, sermons, and news reports into bars and dance halls, and into the privacy of peoples’ homes.”\textsuperscript{107} Additionally, there were completely new forms of cultural production such as radio plays, which gave increased access to certain manners of representation and the ability to recycle cultural artifacts for increased commercial output.

Although it was initially quite expensive, leisure time at home began to include the radio and, with continued technical innovation, the consumer costs came down starkly throughout the Weimar years so that by 1932 half of the households in big cities could boast a radio.\textsuperscript{108} In the same year, there were 4.2 million officially registered radio sets in all of Germany.\textsuperscript{109} Since radios were often enjoyed in groups either in the home or public gathering spaces, the number of registered devices must be multiplied to obtain

\begin{footnotes}
\item[106] Ibid., 238.
\item[107] Ibid., 207.
\item[109] Ibid.
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the actual number of cultural consumers the broadcasts reached. Interestingly, the scope of radio was quantitatively much greater than that of film, which has always constituted the focal point of historical scholarship on new media in the 1920s.

Undoubtedly, film became the quintessential form of mass entertainment in these years. Through developments in still photography that were quickly translated and augmented for the use in motion pictures, the early twentieth century integrated narrative and music into film production. Berlin became a city of cinema with the center of German film production at the massive studio complex of UFA at Babelsberg, a suburb of the metropolis. Even more important than the development of German film production was the maturation of the German film consumer. These new audiences “viewed films produced at the Babelsberg studios outside of Berlin, or in Hollywood, Moscow, and many other places around the world.” Particularly Hollywood, which introduced the first “talkie” in 1928, was the most dominant influence on the German cinemagoers’ mind.

All over Germany, but especially in great urban centers such as Berlin, a plethora of cinemas sprouted up that ranged from the pseudo-Rocco palaces of the Kurfürstendamm with over a thousand seats to the small, grimy make-shift cinemas in working-class neighborhoods. Regardless of their size and scope, cinemas were palaces of the imagination and “Germans attended the cinema regularly and watched melodramas, comedies, travel adventures, and newsreels.” Films offered a whole new realm of entertainment possibilities. This was especially true, though by no means

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111 Ibid., 227.
113 Weitz, *Weimar Germany – Promise and Tragedy*, 207.
114 Ibid.
exclusively, for people with lower incomes because other modes of entertainment, such as for example operas and theaters, were financially inaccessible to them. For newly independent women working for their livelihood, the financial aspect must have been particularly pertinent to the frequent choice of this medium over other, more traditional, forms of leisure activity.

The most memorable German films of the era were by no means the most popular, rather, what “Germans viewed were simple melodramas, which played to packed houses around the country.” Through such avenues, films and cinema became quintessential to modern popular culture as displayed in the rapid increase in the number of cinemas over the decade, which went from 2,400 to 5,600. Similarly, movie ticket sales peaked at 353 million in 1928. Even though these numbers reveal the public’s profound captivation with motion pictures, they do not pay homage to the radical restructuring of experience and entertainment that this explosive new medium brought about. The introduction of film as an entirely novel form of conveying content through image must be appreciated for its sheer psychologically revolutionary influence. Further, the novel nature of this medium, as so often with the introduction of new technology, made its consumers less wary of the content communicated to them.

In the Weimar era, the illustrated press was another form of new media that utterly transformed perception. What made these great developments in print-media communication possible were the changes in printing and image technology, such as the combined introduction of color off-set printing, lithography and the linotype machine.

115 Ibid., 228.
117 Weitz, Weimar Germany – Promise and Tragedy, 281.
118 Ibid., 211.
This brought about the literal explosion of print-media. For example, in the Berlin metropolitan area alone there were over 90 fashion periodicals. The foremost publishing house was the Ullstein Verlag that owned 19 major publications, which ranged from the quality *Vossische Zeitung* to the popular *BZ am Mittag*. Regardless of the publication, publishing magnate Hermann Ullstein understood “the main purpose of the illustrated magazine was no longer to illustrate the text but to allow events to be seen directly in pictures, to render the world comprehensible.” Hence, photographs, the reproducible medium *par excellence*, came to be the central conveyer of meaning.

Press photographs sought to freeze experience in an image rather than in text. People opened the pages of illustrated magazines, such as the weekly *BIZ*, and could be whisked away into a world of adventures. Thus, a reader could virtually experience flying over Edinburgh, fighting in Tibet at the side of Chiang Kai-shek, exploring the Periclean Acropolis or parading in sunny Florida, as Figure 3 illustrates:

![Figure 3. The illustrated press as a lens for the world. Christian Ferber, Die Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung: Zeitbild, Chronik, Moritat für Jedermann 1892-1945, (Berlin: Ullstein Verlang, 1982), 283, 290-291, 295.](image)

120 Weitz, *Weimar Germany – Promise and Tragedy*, 211-212.
The image monopolized the realm of popular understanding as text increasingly became sidelined. This implies a turn from a deeper understanding of objects and concepts towards a superficial and reduced acceptance of them. Kurt Koff, once editor of the BIZ, suggested accordingly an overall reorientation of society towards the visual:

At a time when life ‘through the eyes’ began to play a larger role, the demand for visuals became so strong that they alone could function as news. That meant a completely new attitude toward pictures. It is no coincidence that the cinema and the Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung developed more or less in tandem.\(^{122}\)

The consumption of images was popular, pushing the BIZ to a record circulation of 1.85 million in 1930.\(^{123}\) On top of this, the many advertisements, framing the publications’ content, bombarded the readers with even more visual impressions. They dictated, in accompaniment to the informative content of the publication itself, what was necessary and should be desired for a “good life.”

These projected ideals of a “good life” were sought by the consuming audiences in department stores, dance halls, revues, physical activities and sports competitions.\(^{124}\) Large department stores relied on the economic developments of scale and scope, which permitted them to offer a large range of goods at low prices that even a meager secretary’s salary could afford. Hence, women poured into shops that offered cheap, mass-manufactured products, such as the Berliner Kenfektion’s imitations Parisian haute couture.\(^{125}\) For most young, urban women, the maintenance of a modern, fashion-forward image was integral not only to their survival in the social world, but also, more importantly, in the workplace. *Die Dame*, an important and very popular women’s weekly,

\(^{123}\) Figure quoted in Maud Lavin, *Cut with a Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 51, 55.
\(^{125}\) Geneva, *Women in Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture, 1918-1933*, 4-5.
even featured articles illustrating women whose fashion sense had made them professionally successful as Petra Fielder (1927) or Anita Daniel (1930), who are pictured in Figure 4. The advertising industry and popular press mutually relied on one another for their success by communicating to the public the ideals and routes of a successful life, which both parties profited from.


Fashion and the outward appearance were the most accentuated topics of the female-gearred illustrated press. Following such ideals, salaried women spent an estimated 25% of their income on clothing.126 Accordingly, a 1927 commentary published in *Die Dame* on the role of fashion in contemporary society underlines the paramount significance attributed to external appearances, which were thought to reflect and even develop the internal human nature: “*immer aber ist es dir Mode die uns beherrscht […] aus ihren Forderungen haben sich unsere Sitten und Gebräuche entwickelt*” (but always it is fashion that controls us […] from its demands our manners and customes have developed).127 This

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126 Ibid., 4, 75.
communicates the utmost importance of the external image in the Weimar years as it related to life in its social context.

This “good life” relieved the momentary pains and anxiety that thwarted the decade via distraction and escapism. American jazz was the best way to show off the carefree urban life, while leaving the daily monotony behind as Katherina Rathaus (1926) related: “it cleanses tradition of the dust of decades, inflames blasé dance fanatics anew, shows all those excited by dance the rhythm of their life, their feelings and thoughts.”

The contemporary social commentator Joseph Roth responded sarcastically to this urban nightlife as he associated the female figure with frivolous materialism and hinted at her loose moral standards in his observation of a late-night interaction: “Elli’s sitting on someone’s lap, because she got new stockings today. If you’ve got new stockings, you’ve got to show them off.” Without a doubt, glamorous evening activities such as frequenting dance halls, bars, revues and shows were popularized in films and magazines as the hallmark of urban leisure time. Yet Roth’s characterization is unfairly exaggerated because such luxuries were an exception for most independent women.

The type of leisure activities these women consumed depended on a calculation of time and financial constraints coupled with considerations of their mental and physical constitution after working long hours: “I earn 110 marks now and don’t have to be cold or go hungry anymore. Instead, poverty has now crept inside me.” Instead of the most extravagant leisure activities that are popularly associated with Weimar entertainment, sports associations and competitions were by far the most popular forms

130 Brück, Schicksale Hinter der Schreibmaschine, 24.
of regular leisure activity because they were relatively inexpensive or even free.\textsuperscript{131} Still, the overall sentiment of Weimar leisure culture was that “people want to enjoy something from life, and they spend their money today on clothes and externals of every kind.”\textsuperscript{132} The recent memory of war, poverty and inflation contributed to the intense concentration on the present in consumption and leisure activities.

In the modern urban setting, an array of new forms of leisure and entertainment pursuits emerged that contributed to the drastic transformation of the life experience of those who enjoyed them, leaving the past resolutely behind. For modern women, who worked in shops or offices, cultural modernization thoroughly influenced their subjectivity, psychology, imagination and associative potential. The cult of distraction was one of the most prominent cultural phenomena that altered urban life and the experience of it. This “cult of distraction” was first identified by contemporary Marxist critics as having significant ramification for the identification and associative potential of certain social groups. Although Kracauer and Roth both had underlying sociopolitical motivations in their writing, they contribute an irreplaceable critique of contemporary culture that cannot be discounted on the ground of its Marxist origins. Further, these critiques significantly develop the understanding of why certain work conditions pushed women, employed in them, to favor the sort of leisure activities that inherently fostered an apolitical and apathetic attitude.

Fundamentally, they argued that the more monotonous the work was, the more removed the individuals would be from the actions they carried out in the workplace. In order to compensate for this listless alienation, these employees would desire to forget themselves and their surroundings in their leisure time rather than fight with strenuous

\textsuperscript{131} Peukert, \textit{The Weimar Republic The Crisis of Classical Modernity}, 176.  
\textsuperscript{132} Weitz, \textit{Weimar Germany – Promise and Tragedy}, 146.
effort to minimally ameliorate their circumstances, which female white-collar workers
might have been able to achieve through labor associations or feminist groups. Kracauer
condensed the range of criticisms along these lines:

The more monotony holds sway over the working day, the further away
you must be transported once work ends […] the true counterstroke
against the office machine, however, is the world with color. The world
not as it is, but as it appears in popular hits. A world every last corner of
which is cleansed, as though with a vacuum cleaner, of the dust of
everyday existence.\(^1\)

Although this rendering of the contemporary condition is extreme, the undeniable
upshot was that the work-leisure balance had radically shifted with the modernization of
both the workplace and the cultural realm.

The personal accounts of contemporary white-collar workers reflect this
overarching need to alleviate the hours of toil, “the dust of everyday existence,” by
entertainment and distraction. One 19-year old clerk recounted how the weekend
brought back the shine to the eyes of her colleagues, which she captured in the rhyme:
“wir tanzen und spielen noch viele Stunden/ die uns natürlich zu schnell entschwunden”
(we still dance and play many hours/ that naturally disappear too quickly for us).\(^2\) This
memory shows that although women engaged in apolitical hobbies, many still connected
with other women. Furthermore, it demonstrates the stark cleft between leisure and
work in the mind of young employees. A more cheerless account by a young shop girl
records how her day began at 5:30 a.m. with daily chores and ended with the reward of
one hour of radio entertainment in solitude.\(^3\)

Some contemporary observers identified this apolitical, escapist mass culture as
emancipatory, invigorating and as a necessary retreat from the drudgery of the office that

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1 Kracauer quoted in Metzger, _Berlin in the Twenties_, 268.
3 Ibid., 21-22.
was crucial to the functioning of a modern urban society. In this spirit, the composer Kurt Weill identified the culture of dance nightlife, especially Jazz as “the rhythm of our time,” as “one of those few things that can lift them [the urban persons] above their daily routine.” On the other hand, relationships in films, such as the one between Annie and Erwin in *Menschen am Sonntag*, take issue with the distraction of modern persons into fantasy as, in this instance, exemplified by their wall of film idols. As they rip one another’s icons from the wall, the alienation and utter removal from reality, materialized in their celebrity infatuations, becomes evident as the collection, and their relationship, seems to disintegrate.

The cinema was the epitome of the cult of distraction. Hollywood has garnered the nickname ‘dream factory’ for the very specific reasons of crafting a mesmerism of fantasy with which a modern day viewer is rather well versed. Yet in the 1920s, the imposition of the cinematic image was a completely novel manner of presenting narratives. Especially those who felt trapped in an inhospitable socioeconomic hierarchy salvaged hope in the distractive mediums of modern entertainment and, above all, the cinema with its dreams of upward mobility. In light of this, writer and Spartacist-sympathizer Bruno Schönlank’s poem *Kino* is all the more revealing:

Salesgirls, seamstresses, spinning  
Golden fairy tales of luck and the wages of true love.  
Beautiful girls follow the pictures  
And swallow the lies.  
They gladly let themselves be led astray  
By that which enchant their souls.

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139 Ibid.
Drunk with the glitter they return home
And in the dark room see yet another light,
Which breaks through their dreams bright as the sun
Till grey everyday life puts it our again.  

Although Schönlanck makes rather misogynistic assumptions by characterizing the female viewer as mindless, this poem clearly connects the fears of contemporary critical observers with the new cinematic medium. In similar spirit, Roth’s first-hand experience also scathingly compared the cinema to a modern religion complete with church, altar and God’s word. The gendered prejudice in the poem’s lines as well as Roth’s comments condense in the female object the desire of the entire population to deal with the sheer insurmountability of the trials and tribulations of their time. Thus, when inspected bearing the larger sociohistorical perspective in mind, the female emerges as a vehicle to comprehend the larger social discontents and the popular methods of grappling with them.

Regardless, the female infatuation with cinema can be both quantitatively and qualitatively justified. Frevert substantiates the medium’s popularity among women with her estimation that of the six million cinema tickets sold every week in 1930, female white-collar workers “were among the keenest and most regular cinema goers.” A young employee accounts for the popularity of this relatively inexpensive but vastly entertaining medium when she recalled her attraction to the motion pictures: “say what you want, that the cinema is kitsch. In any case it relieves my worries and I happily laugh away.” Thus, modern women were both the actresses and the consuming audience,

142 Frevert, Women in German History, 182.
which made them increasingly susceptible to public manipulation in the face of anxieties.\textsuperscript{144}

Technological modernization induced basic changes in cultural media that fundamentally altered the individual viewer’s relationship to the medium. The new technologies markedly reorganized the spectators’ structure of perception by transforming their relationship to space, vision and desire.\textsuperscript{145} Further, the modes of modern employment increased sensory deprivation that must also be taken into account when considering “their desire to escape the monotony of routine in the heightened experience of film viewing.”\textsuperscript{146} Thus, it may be argued that economic and cultural modernization transformed aesthetic expectations to redefine the sensory requirements for a positive experience to favor excitement and novelty.\textsuperscript{147}

Not only did the sensory expectations change through the exposure to new cultural mediums, but also the subjective expectations of life and the understanding of how to achieve these. This occurred in the new proximity experienced to the forms of narrative communicated in popular culture. Without a doubt, people have always been in contact with narratives of upward mobility and romanticism, yet in Weimar Germany they diffused through the masses at a previously unattained scale. In this spirit, the famous actor Emil Jannings, perceived an overall spread of heightened romanticism in


society that he attributed to the introduction of film. Further, the messages gained, via the new technology, a greater psychological permanence and an unprecedented ability to influence opinions in the population. Specifically, lower-income women found resonance in dream-like fantasies of upward mobility because it offered them a form of escapism from their drudgery of daily life as discussed before in the cult of distraction.

In stories, women almost exclusively realized their upward climb through superficial charm rather than intelligence or other merits. For example Doris, the young female office clerk from Irmgard Keun’s Das Kunstseidene Mädchen (The Artificial Silk Girl), will do anything to be like what she has seen in the movies: “I want to be glamorous, at the top. With a white automobile and a bath smelling of perfume, everything, just like Paris.” In a questionnaire of over 10,000 young, working, female Berliners, two-thirds of them went to the movies at least once a week. Hence, Doris’ fantasies were likely not an isolated experience.

Dreams of female upward mobility, realized through appearance and charm, were widely communicated. The fiction installment Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1925), first featured in Harper’s Bazaar and reprinted for German audiences in Die Dame (1928), epitomizes the quintessential narrative of female accomplishment through external allure. Feminist historian Vibeke Peterson argues that this notion was ingrained also in the workplace as “what they [female clerks and white-collar employees] did in their leisure moments appears to be determined by how much visibility the enterprise offered them

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or how much glamour they could share in vicariously." What this also reveals is that the workplace dominated the lives of women, even when not at the office. Such a profound focus on superficial characteristics as the most likely avenues of personal success defined the manner in which individuals assembled their values and commitments as seen in Figure 5. The title already points to her rapid ascent in the world: Gretel Grow, yesterday still a secretary in Berlin, today a revue performer in Hollywood…:


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Furthermore, articles in periodicals, such as this one in *UHU*, uncover how the meta-narratives presented in the cinema and the popular press produced personal narratives for girls attempting to emulate new expectations. This was especially true due to the distortion and lack of sources for identification available to many of these young women.

The Great War disabled the dialogue between generations that held lasting consequences for women’s ability to forge stable identities. An article in *UHU* (1929) concerning the relation between the generations defined it as follows: “Verachtung – Mitleid – Gewährenlassen bewegt, bezeichnet die Haltung der Jungen zur Vorkriegsgeneration” (Contempt – Pity – Connivance moves, defines the stance of the young to the pre-war generation).153 This breakdown of communication between the generations is mirrored in the popular press, which means that it must have dictated large segments of social interaction. Furthermore, an article, describing young women kicked out of their families for exhibiting certain signs of modernity stresses the older generation’s dissonance with the younger generation.154 The breakup of the traditional, nuclear family further underscores the disintegration of social structures, which held the greatest saliency in the modern urban setting.

Such lack of inter-generational communication had serious consequences for the associative potential of young, urban, female white-collar workers. As a result, they lacked a point of reference, experience or identification to measure themselves against. In particular, the young women’s insufficient exposure to older women who had lived through the time before emancipation hindered them from recognizing the importance of solidarity along gender lines that had been rather familiar to the women of the

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154 Ibid., 11.
previous generation. It follows that there was a lack of appreciation of the newly gained rights and independence women enjoyed. Additionally, the identification deficit with the older generations pushed the younger ones, who already where subjected to a whole slew of new stimulants, to turn their backs on past traditions: “in stark contrast [to the women of the generations before her], the woman of today is oriented exclusively towards the present.” Yet, the popular culture of “the moment” failed to support stable sources for female identification and provide a point of stable common reference.

As modern popular culture became the main source of leisure-time and entertainment activity, it also became the prime vehicle for identification and self-reference. In light of the absolute chaos of contradictions it communicated about modern social norms, expectations and values, the whole experience must have been very unsettling. An article in Die Dame (1927) linked the chaos of culture to that of the inner human condition: “noch vibriert Europa von den Schrecken der vergangenen Ereignisse, noch sind unsere Ausdrucksformen nichts anderes als ein Spiegelbild unserer inneren Unruhe (Europe still shakes from the terrors of past events, our forms of expression still are nothing other than a reflection of our inner unrest).”

The following survey of popular literature, relating to the topic of female sexuality and marriage, reflects the difficult and ambiguous messages regarding female identity introduced in popular culture. In the Weimar literature inspected, the characterization of the modern woman is disorienting, contradictory and far removed from many female realities.

155 Adams, Woman clerks in Wilhelmine Germany, 52-67.
The commercial network producing fictionality had an interest in a broad audience response and thus most of the characters of the Weimar period often played into familiar clichés and stereotypes. These still may be found in popular culture today, with examples like the hope-inspiring rags-to-riches tale or the thrilling good-bad detective adventure. Such characters are crafted because they can sap the emotional reservoir of a vast number of people, which is, of course, executed for its great commercial potential. The consumers of this material use them to reinforce their own lives. Thus, the producer-consumer relationship in the realm of popular culture must be comprehended as a circular reflection of mutually reinforcing images through the characters that communicate values, norms, desires, dreams, aspirations, and most importantly, fears.

Many sources in Weimar literature still conformed to the traditional bourgeois female ideal when knitting together their narratives. In this sense, the popular media aimed to preserve the utopian ideal of bourgeois womanhood in the public mind and thus halt the power diffusion across gender lines. Accordingly, feminist historian Lynne Frame proffers in her article “Gretchen, Girl, Garçon? Weimar Science and Popular Culture in Search of the Ideal New Woman” that the cultural and political imperative to halt the emancipation of women through typological definitions did not give women a foundational point of reference.¹⁵⁸ Rather, such collaborative efforts of conservative scientists and publishers to make ‘neutral’ scientific solutions “necessary for survival – survival of the sentimentally imagined bourgeois family, of patriarchy, of the German race, even of the human race” only exacerbated the problems of modern, urbanized

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society and particularly the women within it because such frameworks increasingly were so estranged from their true lived experiences. Understandably, the irreconcilable nature of such proclamations with the realities of female urban life perplexed women about how to possibly navigate their modern existence.

Although Frame delivers a compelling argument about the alliance between the popular press and the conservative propagandists in pushing certain norms and values, an inspection of late-Weimar popular stories reveals a more nuanced landscape in which the contemporary form of the bourgeois marriage as well as the female role within it are seriously questioned. Accordingly, this left women a fragmented picture and limited their ability to build common identification or collective associations.

With fears about the end of German tradition and Western civilization pervasive, it is no wonder that the expression of female sexuality became a contentious issue. The repercussions of the Great War were drastic: 2 million German men were killed and 4.2 million more wounded. This meant that approximately 19% of the German male population was a casualty of World War I. The war violently changed the German demographic circumstances. This loss of life left a massive generational and gender imbalance that shaped cultural and economic production. Women became the focus of commercial and cultural interest, which pushed them further into the center of criticism.

The debate on women’s place and reproductive rights changed perceptions of sexuality; feminine sexuality, once associated with vitality and continuity, now was linked with degeneration and disintegration for the modern woman. This reflected much about male anxiety regarding their capacity to maintain order, control, power and affect

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159 Ibid., 34-35.
rejuvenation. Male memoirs stemming from the Weimar period are filled with such a sense of emasculating powerlessness. For example, writer Stafan Zweig’s memoir *The World of Yesterday* (1943) equates the female sexual exploration with the rampant decline of values and the gripping of society by “a kind of madness”:

Young girls bragged proudly about their perversion, to be sixteen and still under suspicion of virginity would have been a disgrace to any school in Berlin at the time, every young girl wanted to be able to tell of her adventures and the more exotic, the better.\(^{161}\)

Clearly Zweig exaggerates, yet his account reveals how the contemporary male eye captured the radical changes to the female status and subsequently communicated them. Similarly, even novels such as Erich Kästner’s *Fabian*, where women occupy a rare position of power, exemplify the differing nature in which women, in contrast to men, are sexualized. Here Cornelia, a female lawyer, gives up her profession in hopes of becoming a film star through an affair with a director.\(^{162}\) Such plots uncover a deeper male fear of female intellect and power as women are reduced to sexualized commodities. They cannot even escape the bourgeois defined gender-hierarchy through professional and intellectual achievements.

Since bourgeois strictness could no longer contain women exclusively in the private sphere of the home in her roles of mother and housewife, she had to be limited in the public sphere by the characterization of her image. Hence, the male-dominated discourse portrayed women as sexualized and intellectually limited beings. Although the impact that this had on female self-perception proves difficult to assess retrospectively,


the prevalence of such values over all others in popular culture must have contributed significantly to defining female lives in the same manner they still do to the present day.

Consequently, fears of such “madness,” as described by Zweig, dominated the pages of popular novels, whose underlying message was that the ultimate happiness for women would only be found in the conventional bourgeois family. As previously touched upon, the female protagonist of Brück’s *Schicksale Hinter der Schreibmaschine* finds escape from a tumultuous excursion into the urban working world only in marriage.\(^\text{163}\) This reflected the transient nature of female work, especially for white-collar workers, who often ultimately sought stability in the institution of marriage after their time of freedom in the city.\(^\text{164}\) A more sinister element for women working in white-collar employment was recognized in Rudolf Braune’s novel *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat: Ein kleiner Roman aus Berlin* (The Girl at the Orga Privat: A small Novel from Berlin, 1930) in which Erna, the typist-protagonist, feels the gender bigotry and exploitation in the workplace so poignantly that she sees marriage as her only opportunity for a future.\(^\text{165}\) In light of such popular projections of private sentiments, marriage must have still been understood generally as the means of escape from the treacheries of the city and its male oppression.

Yet such conclusions do not do justice to the entirety of the female experience. As Peterson points out, much of Weimar popular fiction was pervaded by a hegemonic heteronormativity, which in its essence suppressed alternate female sexualities, sensitivities and desires: “they are a complex contradiction to the lived [urban] reality

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\(^{163}\) Brück, *Schicksale Hinter der Schreibmaschine*.


with its obvious and prolific divorcees and lesbians."\(^{166}\) Accordingly, the attitude of a 20-year old stenographer reveals that many women did not readily accept the “freeing” potential of bourgeois marriage and idealized family traditionalism: “Ich heirate nicht. Man hat in der Ehe viel zu wenig persönliche Freiheit. Die Ehe, so wie sie sein soll, ist ja geradezu unterwürdigend (I will not marry. One has way too little personal freedoms in marriage. Marriage, as it is suppose to be, is downright undignified).”\(^{167}\) In this sense, there were sentiments not communicated widely in popular literature that permeated the lives of modern, independent women in urban areas.

Still, a refusal to embrace bourgeois conformism also had its outlets in the popular press, though they were more rare specimens of female assertion. Accordingly, the BIZ published the short story Der Weg (The Way, 1931) by Vicki Baum in which a housewife chooses death over her confinement in the family.\(^{168}\) Such a confrontational narrative in a mainstream publication shows how contending, contradictory and disorienting the messages of Weimar popular culture were. The story exposes the deadening routinization of housework and the oppressiveness of familial obligations very bluntly. Thus, the female duties in the private sphere as mothers and wives are characterized in a very similar fashion to the popular projection of the negative qualities of female work in the office or shop. Furthermore, it seems that Baum alludes to the fact that employed women at least resided over a degree of personal freedom. Overall, this narrative presents the question of what opportunities women had: was deadening monotony their only real or perceived option? Quite understandably, the urban woman

\(^{166}\) Peterson, *Women and Modernity in Weimar Germany*, 25.
\(^{167}\) “Gespräche Zwischen Jungen Leuten – Stenografierte Dialoge,” *UHU*: 11-12.
who worked for a living found herself enmeshed in contending contemporary conceptions of love, marriage and sexuality.

Without stable sources of identification, many women turned to hopeful narratives and dream-like aspirations presented in popular literature, films and the press as their guide to life. The consequence of this was the waning of many women’s connection with more fundamental concerns such as political and vocational rights or associations that may have improved living conditions for women had they found resonance with them. Liselotte De Booy, who was Miss Germany in 1932, recognized that what she termed “light entertainment,” which implied the assembly of nonreader literature and distractive interactions of the urban dweller, brought about a certain removal from depth, meaning and commitment. She described the atmosphere of her day as follows:

The average person of today, especially the urban person, is, to be honest, irresponsibly superficial. There is scarcely any relationship between his daily life and world events and the divine. And he also lacks a proper relation to nature. How distant we are from the true meaning of life!169

What this world of dreams uncovers is that modern popular culture brought about an extreme emphasis on the exterior. It focused on short-term gratification and increasing desire for more novelty in content and form. Perhaps there is no person better to describe the escape into an outward meditation than Remarque, who in 1929 wrote of the unspeakable wounds of his generation that forced them to “live out a closed, hard existence of extreme superficiality.”170 In order to forget the underlying predicaments that tortured this era, be it in the home, workplace or larger political arena, the

redeployment of attention to the external was a movement evident in all modern cultural avenues. It was a self-reinforcing industry that constantly pushed excitement, dreams and desires through radio, film, dance halls, revues, cinemas, stage spectacles and the press, which displaced the formerly more association-friendly forms of leisure and entertainment.

The obsession with the external and superficial can be traced in the mass trend of body culture. This national addiction with Körperkultur, which manifested itself in athletic associations, bicycle clubs, instructional articles and films, contributed to a change of values that favored the outside and revealed how leisure time was now spent on the bicycle rather than at the party meeting or feminist club.\textsuperscript{171} Kracauer voiced such concerns:

\begin{quote}
the spread of sport does not resolve complexes, but is among other things a symptom of repression on a grand scale; it does not promote the reshaping of social relations, but all in all is a major means of depoliticization.\textsuperscript{172}
\end{quote}

Here again, the preoccupation with superficial attributes distracted people from confronting pressing issues in their society. The popularity of boxing revealed this mass fascination with the body, condensing the heroic Greek and the modern American to surmount the weak urban body that had been ravaged by the Great War.\textsuperscript{173}

The workplace also encouraged this athletic ideal. As the right image of Figure 6 shows, depicting a young office employee pictured in Die Dame for her athletic aptitude, a strong, fit body became the ideal for modern, employed women.\textsuperscript{174} Furthermore, the employers of white-collar women often sponsored athletic leisure activities by providing

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\textsuperscript{171} Weitz, \textit{Weimar Germany – Promise and Tragedy}, 298-299.
\textsuperscript{172} Kracauer quoted in Weitz, \textit{Weimar Germany – Promise and Tragedy}, 322-323.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 314.
\textsuperscript{174} Metzger, \textit{Berlin in the Twenties}, 267.
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them with venue and instruction. This can be observed in the left image of Figure 6, where a group of secretaries practice gymnastics on the roof of their office before starting the workday.\textsuperscript{175}

![Figure 6. Physical activity defines the modern women. Metzger, \textit{Berlin in the Twenties}, 266-267.](image)

A preoccupation with the body in leisure time supported the employers’ cause. Not only did it strengthen and revitalize the employees after long days to be better equipped for work, it potentially reduced costly ailments while it filled much of the time women could have spent in labor associations.

The new physical ideals were also associated with national vitality and were critical of the modern urban existence. This was vividly presented in the instructional film \textit{Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit} (Methods to Strength and Beauty, 1925), which heralded the Classical ideal that was quickly deteriorating because “\textit{der Körper wird vernachlässigt zwischen Büchern und Maschinen}” (the body is neglected between books and machines).\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 266.

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit}. Dir. Nicholas Kaufmann, Wilhelm Prager. Perf. Jenny Hasselqvist, Josef Holub. Universum Film (UFA), 1925.
Images of a typist’s posture and a late-night party rampage are accompanied by the warning: “ihre Sünden werden an den Tag kommen” (your sins will come to the light of day). The superficial focus that would later be more fervently idealized by the Nazis’ narcissistic aestheticism is clearly evident in such films. In this sense, it is very important to recognize that the Weimar years constituted a significant departure in culture as an aesthetic phenomenon. Further, it could be argued that these years completely redefined the aesthetic criteria underlying culture in general, which was particularly true in large cities where the sheer complexity and alacrity of the flow of information accelerated the overall cultural modernization process that would ultimately provide the vehicles, though not the motivations, for the rise of Nazism.

These patterns of popular fascination were also reflected in the cultural and commercial setting surrounding them. The most prominent example of the extreme preoccupation with the external can be found in the explosion of the advertising industry. Traditionally, the use-value had determined a purchase. However, due to the growing competition between interchangeable goods, modern advertising redirected attention outwards to their exterior. What was now important was an exciting and desirable packaging, be it the package, display or ad itself. In this sense, there was an overall aesthetic commodity fetishism that evolved with cultural modernization. In an excerpt from his book, Berlin 1870-1929: Der Aufstieg zur Weltstadt, Max Osborn warned that “the people of Berlin will have to ask themselves in all seriousness whether they did not show the tendency to embrace a distorted and exaggerated form of modernity, which was all too quick to pursue new impressions and sensations.” Advertising not only

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177 Ibid.
178 Max Osborn quoted in Metzger, Berlin in the Twenties, 282.
epitomized the changing landscape of Weimar economic activity, it also reveals how new modes of shaping human behavior were invented and mobilized on a mass scale.

With the modernization of the economy and the standardization of mass production, a market to consume all the products had to be created. Women, who constituted the greatest percentage of the population in the aftermath of the Great War, and who increasingly, especially in urban centers, had a certain disposable income, became the prime target for the advertising industry. Advertising magnified the female presence in the urban environment. In his article “We Will Show You Berlin” (1930), journalist Curt Moreck relayed that “modern advertising operates with the rigor of the categorical imperative.”¹⁷⁹ From toothpaste, razor blades, fountain pens to automobiles, beer and nylon stockings, advertising released almost dictatorial calls to consumption by projecting very poignant images associated with both a commodity and brand. This new consumerist culture became more associated with women. Such a claim is not a capitulation to the contemporary male criticisms. Rather, the underlying social expectations, the culturally defined image and the demographics of the market itself directly contributed to the industry courting women more ardently.

The female presence surrounded urban inhabitants more than ever before. This visual transition that went hand in hand with the rise of Weimar commercialism and consumerism evoked a psychologically salient reaction: it contributed to the characterization of independent women as selfish, materialistic and Americanized. In this sense, women were not only more visible in the workforce and through their post-war demographic majority, they were also ever more present in the popular press and mass media as the strongest target for the advertising industry. The flood of women into the

public realm was thus not only carried out in real terms but also in the visual imagination with the overwhelming collection of female images that stared down from advertisements at every street corner. Yet while this gave them the power of presence, this influx was intimidating and easily manipulated.

Figure 7. The Hermannplatz Karstadt illuminates the Berlin cityscape (1930). Metzger, *Berlin in the Twenties*, 309.

Considering examples like the new Karstadt building in 1930 on the Hermannplatz in the Neuköln district of Berlin, pictured in Figure 7, which was lighted, majestic and rose to meet the sky, responses such as those of Roth make comprehensible the fears associated with these changes.\(^{180}\) Roth remarked on his observation of continuously self-trumping consumerism as an urban flâneur “it was their plan [in building the largest

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department store] to be closer with God.”\textsuperscript{181} This sarcastic characterization of retailing and consumerism emphasized society’s fixation on commodities and material objects rather than deeper preoccupations with less transient topics. Through this, he further articulated the erasing of individuality from society and the homogenization of the masses through consumerism: “everything is within reach of anyone. Everyone may aspire towards anything.”\textsuperscript{182} Still, not everyone could indulge in this superficial illusion of plenty.

There was a marked disconnect between the lavish projection of plenty in popular culture and the material circumstances of most urban women working in low-level white-collar employment. Such a dichotomy further contributed to the mischaracterization of women in the public eye and the destruction of a stable foundation for their identities due to its contradictory message. Modern women who worked independently were imagined to be inherently selfish, materialistic and even degenerate. As these pictures exemplify, the shifting female roles were manipulated for commercial intent. The same image of a strong independent women, associated on the right and center of Figure 8 with motorized vehicles in the advertising, becomes negatively portrayed on the cover of the BIZ, on the left, through her masculinization. Thus, the “sportliche Kameradschaft” (athletic camaraderie) of the Jean Pateau advertisement turns into a disparaging joke-competition on the cover of the BIZ: “was sagen Sie bloß zu Fräulein Mia?” (What would you possibly say to Miss Mia?).

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 122.
Modern women were often associated with technology and global setting, which reveals that popular culture confronted issues involving modernization. These marketing tactics intended to resonate with a broad population by mobilizing widely accessible, superficial desires, which reveals how new methods of shaping human behavior were introduced in Weimar Germany.
As seen above in Figure 9, the Hudnut advertisement for cosmetics appeals to the ideal of the American woman: “Sie ist Amerikanerin. In Dingen der Schönheitspflege die anspruchvollste Frau der Welt. Für sie ist Hudnut der Inbegriff des Vollkommenen” (She is American. On the topic of beauty treatment, she is the most demanding woman in the world. For her, Hudnut is the epitome of perfection). Similarly, the French revue star Edmonde Guy was installed in the advertising campaign for the Vampyr vacuum to show that their clientele could be "Dame - und doch Hausfrau” (Lady – and yet still housewife). Thus, especially in light of her widespread characterization as international, it may be inferred that many viewed the modern woman as foreign, which her identification as Girl or Garçonne noticeably demonstrates.\(^{183}\) With this, the growth of the idea that the modern women constituted a danger to the vitality and security of the nation can be better understood.

Seen in a larger sociopolitical context, this Americanization was often interpreted as a subversive invasion via cultural avenues to emasculate the German nation through its women. Nightclubs with jazz bands where women danced the night away to the Charleston became the archetype of Americanization. Even the posters for dance halls, like the color lithograph Figure 10 shows, characterized the dancers as almost non-human with white skin and dark circles, which hints at their parallel to the living dead.

Early in the Weimar years, Kurt Tucholsky, under his pen name Peter Panter, wrote in his article *Jazz und Shimmy: Brevier der neuste Tänze* (Jazz and Shimmy: Guide to the Latest Dances) for the *BIZ*:

> The music clacks to the same beat as the typewriters that the audience left behind two hours ago; the songs are the boss shouting in rhythm, and the dancing is performed as if around the Golden Calf. The jazz band is merely a continuation of business, but using other tools.  

Hence, the female white-collar worker is linked directly with Americanized popular entertainment. These women who sold their labor, which became equated with selling themselves, for material possessions constituted the epitome of the imagined modern women who sought short-term upward mobility through relationships or advantages through their appearance and charm.

As this modern woman was thought to have “sold” herself to America, she was inextricably linked with the unpopular Weimar Republic that also “sold” itself to foreign nations through the payment of reparations. Such an association reminded contemporary audiences of the demoralizing defeat in the Great War and its painful consequences for them. The wartime failure thus became projected on the modern women through the lens of American culture. Furthermore, she was reduced even in her free leisure time to

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nothing but a mechanized cog in the system, listening to music that Tucholsky likened to the “clacks” of her typewriter while dancing about the false idol of materialism and decadence.\(^{185}\) Interestingly, the male presence, which undeniable as the picture of a dance hall interior in Figure 10 shows, remained discreetly in the backdrop or completely absent, thus removing the male from the blame for the national crisis. Contrastingly, while the fascinating international modern woman became the protagonist of advertising, she was increasingly characterized as the whore of America and thus, a destructive force to the German nation.

This contradicting message about the modern women can be further followed in the manner in which female emancipation was portrayed in advertising. Regardless of the role she is depicted as playing, there remained a striking superficiality inherent in the message. The modern international urban woman was elegant, assertive and independent. Clearly, women responded to this image positively and it brought commercial success for those companies that employed it to market their brand, as in the case of *Crème Mouson* displayed by Figure 11. This advertisement channeled an almost revolutionary message about the condition of modern women that it concluded with: “*Es fordert auch ihre Schönheit!*” (It also enhances your beauty!). Thus, in order to be an assertive woman who took full advantage of her emancipation, a standard of physical attractiveness and external beauty was communicated to be of prime importance. This advertisement suggested that such a standard would only be achieved through the *Crème Mouson*: “The Woman of Today!”

\(^{185}\) Ibid.
Independent, modern women could also take on more treacherous connotations when invoked to market products to men.


Figure 12. The treacherous allure of the modern woman in advertising. Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung, 162, no. 4119 (February 1924): 93.
For example, the advertisement for brandy, exhibited in Figure 12, plays into the vamp image of a woman seducing the perceptibly male-bird in a top hat, whose miniscule size indicates he is but her plaything, to consume intoxicating substances. The female yet again constitutes the alluring but dangerous vixen of modernity that tempts men. Feminist cultural theorist Luce Irigaray argues controversially that women exist as objects in the male marketplace where commodities and “women are a mirror of and for man.” Although this argument may be narrow, it contributes to the idea that the imagined female character of the Weimar modern women embodied male ideals, apprehensions and troubles.

Regardless of the characterization of the New Woman as selfish and a slave to consumption, most autonomous women who supported themselves through office work, confronted circumstances that could not support their imagined lifestyles. Their financial situation was often precarious and additionally, their time and energy would not allow them to indulge in the scale of excesses ascribed to them.

Many women faced disadvantages such as the double burden of home and work. Even if they did not have their own family, many young women employed in shops and offices still lived at home or were responsible for the upkeep of their living arrangements. Here they were expected to carry out a whole second line of work. The 23-year old L. R.’s account of her typical day bears witness to this: in the morning there was dusting and making the beds while at night the work was heavier and included

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washing, ironing, cooking and cleaning. “So ist die Zeit einer Haustochter und Angestelltin ganz mit Arbeit ausgefüllt und vom Wochenende bleibt ihr leider herzlich wenig” (thus, the days of a daughter of the home and employee are filled by work and there remains sadly little of her weekend). Consequently, it is important to recognize that the public image of women tossed about in the media was dominantly an illusion reflecting a landscape of greater concerns.

Although the public images of the modern woman communicated stood in stark opposition to her lived experiences, they operated to nonetheless organize the lives of women they so little resembled. In order to live up to this imagined “good life,” women went to great lengths, as real life examples of the choice of material goods over food reveal. Weimar fashion accentuated this idea. Fashion magazines, advertisements and other publications circulated images of splendor and elegance, which was simply not attainable for women working in white-collar professions judging by material standards alone. Nevertheless, employers directly and indirectly dictated a standard in appearance that forced women to spend large portions of their income on cosmetics and dress, which was relayed in Chapter I. Yet, even on meager incomes women proved resourceful and creative. Patterns and recipes in Die Dame and BIZ pay homage to the self-help solutions many women pursued in order to make ends meet while maintaining outward fashion and confidence. In light of this, the odium of the selfish, materialistic

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189 Ibid.
190 Adams, Woman clerks in Wilhelmine Germany, 25.
192 Adams, Woman clerks in Wilhelmine Germany, 25.
female was fundamentally misplaced in representing the real experiences of these women.

The overall discussion of public images of women in advertising, popular culture and entertainment has repeatedly brought to light that women became a vehicle through which male concerns with modernism, consumerism and Americanism were expressed without permitting her a contributing voice. Even seemingly objective films such as *Berlin, Synfonie einer Großstadt* visually projected this latent association. In Act III, the sweeping view of the shop displays shows the commodities for sale on the frozen female form of the mannequin.\(^{194}\) More onerously, in *Menschen am Sonntag*, the live mannequin in the shop window looks corpse-like in the afternoon sun, before the montage cuts to a still graveyard scene and then an urban apartment building that geometrically resembles the headstones.\(^{195}\) This montage cuts into the plot to seemingly communicate a sense that consumerism has infected modern urban society, whose wholehearted embrace of modernization will only bring death in one form or another. The new woman, as a product of this very modernization, was the living personification of the destructive force increasingly blamed for the distress and anguish wreaking havoc in the late years of the Weimar Republic.

Two fundamental critical views galvanized the anxiety-fueled dissemination of the negative female image: the traditionalists and the cultural pessimists. The traditionalist criticism of women grew out of the conception that the emancipated, modern female stood in contradiction to the norms and values deeply rooted in German

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society. The traditionalists’ conventional ideal of the German woman placed her in the private sphere of the home with the family. In this sense, their perception of femininity was deeply anchored in bourgeois culture and, moreover, in its very essence defined middle-class culture along gender lines. In contrast, the cultural pessimist criticism linked women with the greater projection of anxieties and fears associated with modernization such as cultural decline, geopolitical disarray and Weimar parliamentarianism. These two male projections on the female cannot fully be dissociated from one another as they combined in a misogynistic dialogue of demise and vehement accusation that were transposed on the female body.

The body of the new woman, epitomized in “the vamp,” as Pabst’s Lulu and von Sternberg’s Lola-Lola exhibit, was a threat and the source of male downfall. For example, Marlene Dietrich’s role in Der Blaue Engel that brought her to stardom embodies the captivating, deceitful vamp character with an underlying destructive characteristic, which symbolically represents new mass culture. In this sense, Lola-Lola’s destruction of the professor plays into the overarching male-dominated dialogue: feminine low popular culture seeks to destroy male higher bourgeois culture. Even progressive cultural producers, such as George Grosz, Otto Dix, Berthold Brecht, Erich Kästner and Walter Mehring mirrored this notion in their work as they characterized the dark, irrational, threatening, decadent, corrupt and rampant side of modernity as female. When the cultural and aesthetic representation of women attempts to express what no longer conforms to rational semantics, Angelika Rauch proffers that it is not intended to

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197 Ibid.
produce knowledge about real women.\textsuperscript{198} Perhaps, such unrealistic female depictions thus point to social conflicts that transcended the gender binary. Still, regardless of their intentions, the public fiction of the modern woman stifled real women’s ability to negotiate their lives in a fulfilling and dignified manner.

As the political climate became more intensely polarized by the onset of the Great Depression, the emancipated woman was more zealously blamed.\textsuperscript{199} Shifting the blame to a scapegoat based on real or imagined typological attributes made confronting the fears of the period more bearable. The modern woman was thus co-opted as a symbol of the ultimate decline of Western civilization because her emancipation was accompanied by the victory of materialism, skepticism, socialism and parliamentarianism.\textsuperscript{200} In response, male voices sought to contain female forces and thus prevent social decline.\textsuperscript{201} An example of this is \textit{Metropolis}, which can be regarded as the epitome of male castigation of female power. Here, the woman is not only associated with the evils of modernization but she herself is controlled by men and manipulated.\textsuperscript{202} Yet again, women are associated with the treacheries of modernity, which men scramble to restrain by controlling them.

\textsuperscript{198} Angelika Rauch, “The Trauerspiel of the Prostituted Body, or \textit{Women as Allegory of Modernity},” \textit{Cultural Critique} 10 (1988): 78.

\textsuperscript{199} Frevert, \textit{Women in German History}, 197, 200.


Women did not lean back and allow such hostility to bombard them without putting up a fight. From Dadaist circles, Hannah Höch pilled crossbred figures into her phantasmagoric photo-collages to depict the empowered women she observed around her. Though they comprise the minority in *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands* (Cut with a Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany, 1919), women control the tools of modernity, to which the male characters have little access or ability.\(^{203}\)

Women’s connection with technology and their sheer physical energy in the collage allows them to dominate the space, which reflects that they were both aware and active in asserting their new powers, even artistically. All these cutout women had been featured at some point in the BIZ, which thus shows that there was room for strong and positive female images.  

Particularly memorable models of the free woman were featured on the cover of Die Dame.

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These two paintings by Tamara de Lempicka, both featured in 1930, explicitly communicated to a predominantly female audience women comfortable in and in charge of the urban setting, modern technology and, most importantly, themselves.205 Later, these title pictures would be remembered for their self-assertiveness, their disturbing beauty and, above all, their free, independent women.206

In addition to consuming images of strong, assertive women, large audiences were also exposed to articles and stories that blatantly turned the tables on men. Not only did women take issue with the skewed female characterization in the male

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dominated critical dialogue, but also they overtly turned the blame men projected on them back to where it had originated: men. A good example of a confrontational article that a large number of urban women would have read is “Alle Männer in Europa haben versagt! (All Men in Europe have failed)” by the poet Annette Kolb (1931). She made no secret that she perceived women as the victors of the modern world: “Sie, nicht er, ist am aufsteigenden Ast” (She, not he, is on the ascending branch). Further, she blamed the waning of humanity, already perceptible to her in this piece, on the inactivity of men: “Wie oft sehen wir ihn um die Flucht aus der Sackgasse gar nicht bemüht, während er sie voll Entsetzen konstatiert” (How often do we see him not trying to escape the dead-end while he perceives it with horror).

This brief survey of the criticisms and responses on the issue of modern women uncover corresponding concerns regardless of gender. Women, like men expressed, fear-filled longings, not simply as a regurgitation of the male dialogue that surrounded them but for similar reasons as those that were proffered by male voices. In this sense the male and female experience of Weimar modernity must be seen as very similar: it was scary, unstable and atomizing.

Identities were malleable without stable points of reference because the intergenerational chasm along with the destruction of norms and values through war and modernization. In a city of 4,300,000 in 1930, there pervaded a sense of anonymity that drowned out the individual. Berlin, Synfonie einer Grossstadt captures the animation of the human masses and their associated machines while Metropolis visualizes the phenomenon

208 Ibid.
209 Berghahn, “Demographic growth, industrialization and social change,” in German History since 1800, 168.
through the coordination of machines with the masses.\textsuperscript{210} Thus, the sense pervaded that the individual was replaced by an almost mechanized mass collective identity. An \textit{UHU} article traced this phenomenon to leisure activities, where a mass identity offered the only bridge to subvert the differences and contradictions splitting the Weimar Republic.\textsuperscript{211} In this article, two strangers discussed a bicycle race whose thrill made class, gender and generation momentarily superfluous:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Flucht vor sich selbst in die Spannung unpersönlicher Massenerlebnisse!}
Sechstagerennen ist grossartig. Sollst mal sehen, wie das wegschwemmt, an was du nicht mehr denken willst: Arbeit, Beruf, Ärger, Sorgen. Wie die Leute da toben, sich die Kehle ausshreien, alle! Bis früh um 5!\textsuperscript{212}
\end{quote}

Flight from oneself into the excitement of a depersonalized mass experience! Six-day Race is great. Just see, how it sweeps you away, that of which you do not want to think: Work, Profession, Troubles, Worries. How the people riot, scream their lungs out, everyone! Until 5 in the morning!

Such notions foreshadow how a certain type of thrilling mass identity would be able to superficially overcome the atomized, fragmented and chaotic modern existence in Germany. This would speak particularly to the urban women subject to this discussion because they possessed few stable points of collective identification, which isolated them without a sense of place, purpose or community.

The Weimar metropolis, foremost Berlin, was full of excitement. On the surface, it was a whirlwind of light, glitter and entertainment. It never slept and was always in a rush. With the modernization of industry, the accompanying modernization of culture radically transformed the face of society and, more importantly, the individual experience.


\textsuperscript{211} "Gespräche Zwischen Jungen Leuten – Stenografierte Dialoge," \textit{UHU}: 12.

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid.
of it. Women were employed, physically active and free to roam the entertaining
cityscape, yet within this setting, they were unable to forge meaningful identities and
communities. Modern women were conscious and autonomous, but what they embodied
became thwarted through a male-dominated public dialogue. Thus, the expression of
female emancipation became a vehicle of their entrapment.
CHAPTER III: Die Frau und die Politik

In early-1930s Berlin, a young girl’s gaze captured the chilling absurdity of a devastated modernity: “while traveling on the streetcar, people on the platform fell over from hunger.”213 Yet there was no hope: “people everywhere on the streets offering themselves for any work.”214 After long years of unease, the Weimar Republic’s ill-configured house of cards began to shake violently. The period of relative stability in the mid- and late-1920s was a false glimmer of hope for prosperity and already had been an era marked by anxiety. The stock market crash of 1929 and the global descent into the Great Depression built upon the already dire conditions of the battered Weimar Republic: “an almost unbroken chain of homeless men extends the whole length of the great Hamburg-Berlin highway.”215 Without hope, consumed by anguish and disillusioned with the broken political system, it was no wonder that people sought alternate solutions.

Amidst the global turmoil, the life of white-collar employees faced deepening challenges. With the processes of rationalization and the introduction of labor-saving technology further underway amidst the economic downturn, many people active in this economic sector feared and felt unemployment. Such worries were not ill placed. The unease of the late-1920s only intensified in this sector as applicant-to-job ratios increased from 9:1 in 1928, to 12:1 in 1929 and to 26:1 right before the elections of 1930.216

Joblessness among all white-collar employees surged over the first half of 1930 by

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214 Ibid.
Without a doubt, such workplace statistics magnified the anxiety and unease white-collar workers already felt about their precarious position as sketched in Chapter I.

Although numerically women employed in clerical vocations seemed less affected by the terrific brunt of this sector’s unemployment, they faced workplace hardships that men did not. For example, their already markedly lower wages were further reduced, they faced heightened discrimination, and they accordingly accepted demotions aimed at extracting unpaid labor because they feared, and were purposely intimidated by, the prospect of dismissal. They could not organize a fight against any of this.

Women, more than men, were at a disadvantage in asserting their workplace suffering. To be sure, men also faced an inhospitable environment, but the female challenges were very different. Men held on to stable positions in the trade unions, which women had largely turned their backs upon throughout the 1920s, and had a public platform to voice their immediate concerns relating to the workplace. Also, trade unions constituted a forum that gave men a sense of belonging or community, thus offering empowerment through a shared common fate, and, in addition, they often provided real benefits to those who suffered unemployment. In this sense, trade unionism offered its male members a system of both psychological and material support. Yet, women, even those who were members in trade unions alongside their male comrades, did not gain the same types of benefits.

As the economic conditions worsened, the female ability to voice concerns and have them acknowledged deteriorated. In unions, the dialogue, already semi-hostile, became outright slander against the female “double earners.” The political arena picked

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217 Ibid.
218 Sneeringer, Winning Women’s Votes, 171.
219 Speier, German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler, 89-90.
220 Rühle-Gerstel, Die Frau und der Kapitalismus, 386-388.
up upon such talk by reducing most female employment to “double earning” and pinpointing it as a major contributor to the economic crisis. The focus of the political debate on gender issues reflected the situation in Weimar politics as such dialogues often rose to the surface in times of cataclysmic, uncontrollable transformations. Furthermore, within the context of criticism there emerged increasingly a recognition that the fallout from modernization would culminate in a complete recast of social values and norms that no longer seemed to make sense in the modern condition and left people homeless in their homeland.

An UHU series from February 1932 revealed the tingling sense that German society stood on the brink of a new departure. It was entitled “Was mir in dieser Zeit als Wichtigstes am Herzen liegt” (What currently lies closest to my heart) and was filled with fears: Jakob Wassermann wrote that “das wunderbare deutsche Volk den Lockungen der Hetzer zur Beute werden könnte” (that the wonderful German people could fall prey to the temptations of the rabble-rousers), while Manfred Hausmann sighed that “die Jugend an Lebensangst, Minderwertigkeitsgefühl und Autoritätssucht erkrankt” (that the youth could become infested with the fear of life, the feeling of inferiority and the obsession with authority). Hans Fallada spoke of urban culture’s influence on the imminent social decline: “dass wir über der Kompliziertheit des heutigen Lebens den Boden der Wirklichkeit verlieren könnten” (that we could lose the floor to reality through the complexity of contemporary life). Perhaps Hermann Hesse provided the most impressive formulation of this pervasive sentiment in The Longing of Our Time for a Worldview, which gives a remarkable

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221 Ibid., 202-203, 207.
222 Ibid., 16-17.
insight into the general undertone that permeated society about how the industrial and social changes required the formulation of a new existential mythology:

In times like the present a general impatience and disillusion with both received religious creeds and scholarly philosophies grows; the demand for new formulations, new interpretations, new symbols, new explanations is infinitely great.²²⁴

How could anyone grapple with the loss of utter control over their lives, which they saw and felt disintegrating before them? Politically, the electoral records bear witness to a distinct reaction: the NSDAP received a shocking 37.3% of the national vote in the July 31, 1932 Reichstag elections, which would mark their highest electoral achievement in free elections.²²⁵ In the extensive existing literature, there still exists a general misconception about the NSDAP’s climb to power as established in the introductory portion of this these. Fundamentally, it is a political myth that the Nazis’ success was solely a product of their appeal to men. With women as the majority of the electorate, such a feat would have been a very difficult case to orchestrate, even with the adept political scheming and propaganda of the NSDAP.

Table 1. Voting for major German Parties in Reichstag Elections, 1928-1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>May, 1928</th>
<th>September, 1930</th>
<th>July, 1932</th>
<th>November, 1932</th>
<th>March, 1933</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Vote</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total Vote</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazis</td>
<td>810,127</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>6,379,672</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>13,745,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalists</td>
<td>3,831,563</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>2,457,686</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>2,177,414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Catholic</td>
<td>8,465,174</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>7,768,072</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>1,934,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>4,657,796</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>5,185,637</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>5,782,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialists</td>
<td>9,152,979</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>8,575,244</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>7,679,912</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communists</td>
<td>3,294,793</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>5,990,169</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>5,282,626</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20,815</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5,980,102</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-voters</td>
<td>10,471,431</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>8,026,441</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>7,344,481</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total vote</td>
<td>30,733,275</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>24,774,820</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>20,574,822</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eligible voters</td>
<td>41,221,678</td>
<td></td>
<td>32,898,267</td>
<td></td>
<td>24,440,001</td>
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</table>


Upon considering the Reichstag election records shown in Table 1, the leap in voting for the NSDAP from 2.6% in May, 1928, to 37.3% in July, 1932, stands out. The watershed in this trajectory of electoral success was the election of September 1930 in which the NSDAP received 18.3% of the vote and thus established itself as a major force in Weimar politics, paving the way for what it would achieve in the 1932 elections. Much discussion has been devoted to the question of who accounts for the almost 16 percentage point jump in Nazi voters generally attributed to either “outsiders” or the “middle-classes.”\(^{226}\) A few initial patterns are observable between the 1928 and 1930 elections when referring to Pratt’s table:

- The number of non-voters decreased from 24.4% to 18%, which “freed up” almost 2.5 million new votes to be distributed among the various parties.
- The KPD gained steady votes with an increase from 10.6% to 13.1% of the electorate.
- The SPD dropped from 29.8% to 24.5% of the electorate, but these losses did not translate into gains by the parties of the political middle.

(Center, DDP, DVP, etc.) because with the exception of the Center, they experienced an erosion of their electoral support.

- The Catholic Center Party remained stable, gaining in total votes but dropping from 15.2% to 14.8% of the electorate due to the increased numbers of first-time voters.
- The vote of the other parties of the middle (DDP, DVP, etc) declined significantly from 27.5% to 22.3%.
- The DNVP’s support dropped acutely, cutting its vote by more than half from 14.2% to 7%.

After recognizing these distinct patterns, Karl O’Lessker offers a useful statistical analysis of their implication for the increase in votes for NSDAP. As O’Lessker’s first regression reveals (which looks at the stepwise change in electoral support for the NSDAP by district in relation to that of the other parties and the voter turnout), the change in voter behavior for the DNVP most influenced the NSDAP vote. As follows from Table 2, a 38% variance in NSDAP vote can be attributed to the DNVP and 32% to the increased voter turnout.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R-squared</th>
<th>Increase in R-squared</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nationalists</td>
<td>.620</td>
<td>.385</td>
<td>.385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>.802</td>
<td>.701</td>
<td>.316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Catholic middle.</td>
<td>.965</td>
<td>.932</td>
<td>.231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All others, combined.</td>
<td>.991</td>
<td>.981</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>( \beta ) weights</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>+1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalists</td>
<td>-0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Catholic middle.</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialists</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communists</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Center</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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227 Ibid., 66.
228 Ibid.
When looking at how much the individual independent variables changed the electoral support for the NSDAP while controlling the others, the increase in voter turnout in the 1930 election had the most statistically significant impact on the NSDAP’s climb at the polls.\footnote{229} Overall, O’Lessker’s results support the claim that the largest factor in the Nazi’s 1930 electoral victory was the increase in turnout, closely followed by the decline of the old nationalist vote.\footnote{230} He concludes that “it was the combination of new voters and defecting Nationalists that transformed the Nazi party into a true mass movement in September, 1930,” which built a foundation for what they would achieve at the polls in 1932.\footnote{231}

In light of the patterns identified in the national voting records and the statistical insight offered by O’Lessker, some connections can be proposed that directly relate to women. The significance of the “new voter” is clearly demonstrated by the voting tabulations as well as substantiated in the analysis by O’Lessker. Yet, this category also includes those voters who returned from political inactivity as non-voters decreased by about 6%. Taken together, many of these “new” participants were women because of their demographic advantage and their dramatic rush to the ballot.

Table 4. Participation of eligible female voters in Weimar Reichstag elections, 1919-1933, (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reichstag Elections</th>
<th>1919</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1924 I</th>
<th>1924 II</th>
<th>1928</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1932 I</th>
<th>1932 II</th>
<th>1933</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female participation</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>79.4%</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
<td>88.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\footnote{229} Ibid.\footnote{230} Ibid., 67.\footnote{231} Ibid.
As the records in Table 4 indicate, eligible women’s voting participation increased by over 6% between 1928 and 1930.\textsuperscript{232} In this period, Boak emphasizes that the gap in electoral participation between male and female voters started to narrow, though women would never exceed male voter turnout in percentage terms. In this sense, a relatively greater number of the “new voter turnout” category can be attributed to many women shifting into political activity.\textsuperscript{233}

With the Nazis established as a viable political option in the 1930 election, they set themselves up for broad electoral success. Formerly, in the early- and mid-Weimar years, women gave the Republic electoral stability, even if their turnout was relatively poor. Correspondingly, Herbert Tingsten uses statistical records to ascribe to them the role of stewards of moderation, since they backed the founding coalition parties, particularly the SPD, DDP and Catholic Center.\textsuperscript{234} Following Tingsten’s interpretation, this female voting pattern changed in the fateful election of 1930 and would continue through 1933 since to “an ever increasing extent [the NSDAP] gained support among the women.”\textsuperscript{235} Childers makes similar claims in regard to the 1932 elections as “women for the first time outnumbered men in the National Socialist constituency,” which he fails to mention was true in absolute but not in relative terms.\textsuperscript{236} In short, women were as responsible as men in the Nazi’s electoral success, especially since they debilitated the moderate opposition in their defection from the parties of the middle. Tingsten’s analysis demonstrates how with the growth in the female NSDAP vote, described thoroughly in

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{233} Boak, “Our Last Hope; Women’s Votes For Hitler – A Reappraisal,” in \textit{German Studies Review}: 299.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{236} The “Reichsstimmordnung,” §41, left the decision on gendered voting procedures and election records to be designated by the local authorities. Even if districts adopted recording methods that separated the votes by sex, many discontinued this due largely to financial considerations in 1930. For further discussion on this topic, see the two following sources: Childers, \textit{The Nazi Voter}, 260.; Tingsten, \textit{Political Behavior: Studies in Election Statistics}, 38-39.
the discussion above, “the index sank for the bourgeois parties” (the DNVP, the DVP, and the DDP).237

When von Papen called for new elections, set for July 31, 1932, the coalition parties who had once monopolized the Weimar vote with almost three-quarters of the vote in 1919, gained less than half that when they receive but 35.1% of the vote in the summer of 1932.238 The bourgeois parties, most notably the DDP and DVP, were dealt the greatest defeats with only about 1% of the total votes cast each.239 Alongside these developments, the fringe parties polarized the political setting; after the July elections of 1932, the KPD and the NSDAP together held over half the seats in the Reichstag.240 Female voter turnout was integral in bringing about these electoral results. The support of these fringe parties indicates a general sentiment towards abandoning the Weimar democratic system as extreme alternatives became increasingly convincing under the duress of the Great Depression.

As Boak’s statistics show, the male and female votes for the NSDAP were not much different from one another in relative terms.

237Ibid., 60.
239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
Table 5. The shares of the total male (m) and female (w) cast for the NSDAP in selected Reichstag elections, 1930-1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1930 m</th>
<th>1930 w</th>
<th>1932 I m</th>
<th>1932 I w</th>
<th>1932 II m</th>
<th>1932 II w</th>
<th>1933 m</th>
<th>1933 w</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bremen</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magdeburg</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leipzig</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiesbaden</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bavaria</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augsburg</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regensburg</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansbach</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinkelsbühl</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ludwigshafen</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cologne</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konstanz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Boak, “Our Last Hope; Women’s Votes For Hitler – A Reappraisal,” in German Studies Review 297.

Accordingly, Michael H. Kater claims that without this heightened female participation in voting after 1930 and the associated rise in female support for the NSDAP, Hitler would not have come to power.²⁴¹ In light of the regression analysis of O’Lessker, the statistically based observations of Tingsten and the fundamental demographic facts underlying the Weimar electorate, women played an important role in the NSDAP vote even if their political motivations have been largely overlooked by the existing electoral literature on the period.²⁴²

Since the female white-collar employee has been the protagonist of this thesis, the electoral trends presented here aim to uncover what these greater patterns imply for this social group. Sigmund Neumann, Hans Speier and William Kornhauser describe a large role in the Nazi’s electoral rise to the white-collar, “crisis strata.” Here, the implications of the transfer of votes from the DNVP to the NSDAP seen in O’Lesskers analysis can be connected to the salaried employee vocation because its labor unions, like the DHV, had been major supporters of the DNVP. Speier scrutinizes this transfer and blames the disintegration of white-collar labor cohesiveness, scant as it was, on the capitulation of the [white collar worker] association’s leadership to the NSDAP. Though the evidence is sometimes inconclusive, as Hamilton and Childers point out, it does not exclude the white-collar workers from supporting the Nazi electoral victory. Rather, it recognizes that the NSDAP’s ascent relied on greater social complexities than the listless fantasies of the lower-middle classes.

The supporting literature on the basic electoral characteristics of white-collar employees leaves the gender dimension wholeheartedly by the wayside. The synthesis of some established conclusions about late-Weimar electoral trends given above and the reconstructed world of female white-collar work and leisure in the first two chapters of this thesis suggest a political orientation among female salaried employees compatible with the NSDAP. This is further supported by a glance at the statistics on urban white-collar women. The following table gives the occupational structure of economically active agents in Weimar’s major cities:

245 This may be due to the even more scant recording of vocationally defined electoral results divided by gender since voting procedures were determined to the greatest extent on the local level as previously highlighted.
Hamilton’s table on the composition of economic activity in 1933 indicates that white-collar positions, on the national average, constituted approximately 27.7% of the publicly
recorded female economic activity in major urban centers.\textsuperscript{246} Taking into account Renate Bridenthal’s estimation that one third of the female population was gainfully employed in the late-Weimar years, about 9.2\% of the female population in German urban centers was recorded as employed in white-collar work.\textsuperscript{247} The coefficients from Childers’ \textit{New Middle Class} of the two 1932 Reichstag elections imply a positive relationship between this social group and the increase in electoral support for the NSDAP in urban districts.\textsuperscript{248}

Table 6. NSDAP vote and the \textit{New Middle Class (NMC)}, 1932

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Protestant (N=152)</th>
<th>Catholic (N=64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932 I</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td>.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932 II</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>.443</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although the \textit{New Middle Class}’ category includes other vocational groups such as \textit{Beamte} (officials) and transportation workers, the largest segment of this class was composed of salaried employees.\textsuperscript{249} If the greater probability of National Socialist support calculated by Childers is applied to the female segment of white-collar workers, it reveals that they must have contributed to the electoral success of the NSDAP.

Regardless of the fact that the city of Cologne was by no means a National Socialist \textit{Hochburg} (stronghold) with Nazi votes well below the national average, it proves a valuable example of the presence of the female white-collar worker vote in favor of the

\textsuperscript{246} Figures from Hamilton, \textit{Who Voted for Hitler?}, 486.
\textsuperscript{247} It should be noted that female employment in major urban centers was likely larger than the national average, though Bridenthal does attempt to include female agricultural activities in her postulation. Still, this estimation constitutes a base line value that remains sufficient for the illustrative purposes it serves here, but numbers could likely be adjusted slightly upwards from those presented. For a greater understanding of the makeup of female employment and specifically a compact overview of white-collar work for women, see: Bridenthal, “Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche: Weimar Women at Work,” \textit{Central European History}, 149-150.
\textsuperscript{248} Childers, \textit{The Nazi Voter}, 7.
\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 241.
NSDAP.\textsuperscript{250} The 29.1% white-collar female economic activity in Cologne, thus about 9.7% of the total female population, combined with Childers’ Catholic-coded Nazi/NMC coefficient of .389 in the July 1932 election and .443 in the November 1932 election, suggests an above average support for the NSDAP from women in white-collar professions.\textsuperscript{251} Boak shows that the total female vote cast in Cologne for the NSDAP was 22.8% in the record-breaking July election and 19.2% in the November election.\textsuperscript{252} In light of this, the approximately 10% of the female population employed in white-collar professions can be seen to account for 16.2% (3.7% of female total) of National Socialist voting in the July elections and 18.8% (4.3% of female total) in the November elections, respectively. Although Cologne constitutes a low average support for the NSDAP due to its largely Catholic electorate, this example illustrates how women did vote for the NSDAP and suggests how their vocational position may have encouraged this tendency.

The political attraction of women in this relatively modern vocational segment to the NSDAP proves puzzling because it seems such voting behavior would, from today’s perspective, be positively in dissonance with the very fundamental interests of these modern, urban women. Simply put, the ideological sentiments of the NSDAP seem a threat to the existence of these women in every sense. The following discussion aims to

\textsuperscript{250} Cologne recorded voting by gender and has census reports for the vocational distribution all for the period dating from 1932-1933. These were differently utilized by Boak, Childers and Hamilton to make their own illustrative arguments, but the numbers from each source will collectively be incorporated here to banish the conceptual invention that women were not integral to the Nazis electoral successes in the late Weimar years and to suggest that their occupational position, to some extent, differentiated their gravitation towards political parties. Although the city stands out as somewhat of an anomaly through its Catholicism and perhaps correspondingly low commitment to National Socialism in contrast to the national average, the city’s gender and vocational composition reflects that of the major German cities, setting up conditions that can be inferred to also have resonance for this social group in other urban centers.

\textsuperscript{251} Childers, \textit{The Nazi Voter}, 241.

\textsuperscript{252} Figures in Boak, “Our Last Hope; Women’s Votes For Hitler – A Reappraisal,” \textit{German Studies Review}: 297.
explain this paradox by exploring what may have motivated the women of this social
group who cast their ballot in support of the NSDAP.

In the modern city, the difficulty of identity- and community-building was a very
poignantly felt experience. The lack of participation in political parties or women’s and
vocational organizations provides insight into how their failure to forge an identity that
meaningfully incorporated these pillars of civil society undercut the ability of the modern
urban women to come together as a political bloc. Additionally, the often hostile
welcome these women received in existing associations was only underlined by the
deficit in influence and respect their voices gained in these settings, further exacerbating
their alienation from and ultimate disillusionment with such institutions. When the
conditions forced many to seek action, it was often too late and certain alternatives may
have overcome their initial distaste as the only viable option.

The appeal of the NSDAP cannot fully be reduced to its anti-party-status as the
only alternative. The romantic escapism into the aesthetic and extremely superficial
buttressed by advanced technology and media of the modern Weimar culture set the
National Socialist Party up as an alternative that would overcome the splintering
paradoxes of the modern condition: they were modern and exciting but offered tradition
and stability at the same time. Thus, they glazed over deep inconsistencies with
melodramatic romanticism of inclusion and destiny in the national community, thus
mobilizing the underlying tendencies towards aestheticism and narcissism in the German
cultural heritage for Nazi political ends.

In order to understand how the Nazis mobilized the support of many female
white-collar employees, a discussion of women’s inability to forge common identities in a
political and vocational setting proves very telling, especially after the foregoing
exploration of their work and leisure environment. Identities serve to configure experiences. Social identities define and recognize these through a pre-established organization of categories, gained through self-affiliation with a common lens of understanding. In this sense, individual identities gain social salience when the social scripts communicate with a common reservoir of experience.\textsuperscript{253} When this communication breaks down, it leaves those individuals excluded socially isolated. As with female white-collar workers, they found no place in feminist, political or vocational associations because significant features, such as their static, hierarchical structure; archaic, removed leadership; and incongruent, male-bent mission; impeded women from forming meaningfully connections with these groups. This lack of identity resulted in the experience of grave alienation, anomie and atomization among many of these women.

Over the course of the 1920s, women, especially modern women who worked in shops and offices, turned away from both gender and vocational associations.\textsuperscript{254} With female emancipation in 1919, women’s associations, above all the bourgeois-rooted \textit{Bund Deutscher Frauen} (BDF), lost their pre-war influence in the crowning of the feminist cause by the Revolution and the New Republic.\textsuperscript{255} In his study, \textit{The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933}, Evans emphatically concludes that “the BDF was altogether failing to make an impact [in the late Weimar period].”\textsuperscript{256} This was especially true for women employed in white-collar professions, who felt disconnected from the BDF through its generational gap, its moralizing mission and, most fundamentally, its failure to make materially tangible betterments in their lives.

\textsuperscript{254} Frevert, \textit{Women in German History}, 175.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., 254.
The generational gap between the leadership of the BDF and younger women mirrored the overall chasm in society left by the Great War, which Chapter II already introduced via its representation in popular culture. In 1932, Socialist Sociologist Theodor Geiger summarized his observation of the generational gap in the following terms: “The younger generation at the turn of the century rebelled against its parents’ generation and way of life; the younger generation of the second quarter of the century appears to be content to simply wait for the previous generation to die off.”

Weimar society was thus disjointed by generations unable to connect. This social separation eroded the importance of the feminist initiative for many of the younger generation, who were acquainted solely with a time of constitutional and legal gender equality that was valid at least on paper. Even if young women had recognized the importance of feminist organizations as a platform for representing their interests, the BDF was no longer a place where this could have taken place because the aged leadership of the Bilderbürgertum neither represented the modern women’s demographic nor material interests.

The umbrella structure and overall goals of the BDF became too fragmented to rally support or instigate political change. Although the BDF was initially not lacking in members, the organization failed to use its numerical magnitude for political ends because it had difficulty defining these due to its multifaceted interest groups who lacked a common purpose.

In contrast to the pre-war period, where the common gender-defined issue of emancipation had trumped all other differences, the social inequality and

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258 Frevert, *Women in German History*, p. 201.
260 Ibid., 241-247.
conflicting interests of various components of the association made appeals to gender alone unpersuasive.\textsuperscript{261} In these terms, the BDF no longer sought radical political changes for women, rather, as feminist politician Gertrud Bäumer phrased it, the BDF sought to unite women in exerting a “motherly” influence on the national community.\textsuperscript{262}

In their quest to find a new organizational vantage point around which to arrange their existential necessity, the BDF’s leadership focused their appeals on the national community, as evident in the rhetoric of the 1919 programme: “it [the BDF] unites German women of every party and creed, in order to express their national identity [to thus achieve] the conquest of social, confessional and political antagonisms.”\textsuperscript{263} The BDF noticeably shifted from its pre-war progressive stand towards the right.\textsuperscript{264} Thus, the BDF’s leadership reinterpreted the organization’s role, setting it up as a moral conduit of national prosperity.\textsuperscript{265} The position of the BDF on female work, which should be carried out “according to their nature and qualities” without coming in competition with men, and on the immorality of Weimar culture, shows both how differently the feminist cause was interpreted and why such feminism would have been distasteful for the female white-collar workers that have been introduced in this discussion.\textsuperscript{266}

Modern women who worked in the offices and departments stores of Weimar cities, would have found very little resonance of the BDF’s mission in their daily lives.


\textsuperscript{262} Evans, \textit{The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894-1944}, 237.

\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., 235.

\textsuperscript{264} This shift towards the political right can be seen in the 1928 party affiliation of the BDF’s leadership shows with 29 from the DDP, 32 from the DVP and 21 from the DVNP. For more on the political leaning of the BDF’s leadership, refer to: Evans, \textit{The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894-1944}, 244.

\textsuperscript{265} Ibid., 244.

\textsuperscript{266} Ibid., 237.
The liberal Weimar newspaper of record, *Vossische Zeitung*, made following observation on November 20, 1932:

Almost all the meetings of women’s organizations, whether the league of University Women or the Association of Women Citizens, show the same picture. As least three-fourths of women present are over forty. The generation between twenty and thirty is almost completely lacking, that between thirty and forty is sparsely represented. 267

Young women spent their time and money elsewhere since the aged, dysfunctional and immobilized women’s associations no longer offered them a cause to identify with. Understandably, the raised membership contributions, which went from about 100 RM to between 750-900 RM annually after 1929, alongside the BDF’s goals and mission, which stood in opposition to the modern urban environment female salaried employees encountered, deterred them since they perceived few personal benefits in their membership. 268 Evans concludes that the isolation from the women’s movement in general impelled younger women to join “the Nazi women’s organization rather than the BDF” because their integrative community offered many the feeling of connectedness and their boundaries of entry were more flexible. 269 Accordingly, Frau Fischer recalled how the Nazi women’s organizations “showed us by example what community is” and Frau Fey described that she did not have to “fill out paper or donate something or make a report, nothing at all. It was just nice. One played and I really could give the young girls something, because I talked to them a lot. It was absolutely nice.” 270

Most Weimar female white-collar workers also found little benefit in trade unions, which increasingly became shunned by women since they upheld a strict, gendered approach to issues of employment. This only further alienated woman from a

267 Ibid., 249.
268 Ibid., 256.
269 Ibid.
270 Owings, Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich, 2, 174.
setting in which they already experienced stark labor disadvantages such as, for example, 
the firm’s discriminatory practices exposed in Chapter I. In contrast, labor unions for 
white-collar workers had been relatively popular among women in the Wilhelmine period 
even when considering the very moderate number of female white-collar workers. The 
first gender-based unions for female white-collar workers that, as Carole Adams 
compellingly reconstructs in *Women Clerks in Wilhelmine Germany*, sought to ensure a 
stable and respectable position for women through professionalization and protective 
legislation. Yet, this labor milieu disintegrated with the explosive economic 
developments in the tertiary sector that came to their full expression in the Weimar 
years. These small and specialized vocational associations structurally failed to adapt to 
the massive influx of women into white-collar work, which is estimated to have 
increased 224% between 1907 and the mid-1920s. Further, they proved unsuccessful 
in defining their purpose in a work environment of specialized, mechanical tasks that had 
expedited the deskilling of female white-collar labor.

With the rapid increase in the size of female tertiary sector employment and 
transformation in its nature after the Great War, traditional associations were incapable 
of integrating this vast and variegated vocational group. Just as with the failure of the 
BDF to connect with the young women who entered the workforce of Weimar 
Germany as typists and shop clerks, these labor associations increasingly became 
superfluous. Especially through the type of work the female attitudes towards it and the 
lack of vocational identities already unpacked in Chapter I, women did not fight for the

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272 Ibid., 128.
expansion of preexisting or introduction of new white-collar labor associations over the course of the 1920s.

The hostile political antagonisms of the Weimar Republic further curtailed the associative potential for many female white-collar employees by entrenching the chasms already dividing the labor union milieu before the Great War. This deepening cleft between left- and right-bent organizations limited the opportunities for women significantly. Neither had a stable place for female white-collar workers: the Socialist unions on the basis of class-antagonisms and the labor organization oriented towards the political right on the basis of the gender-antagonisms.274 Even the left-leaning unions associated with the Afa-Bund would have reflected many of the male anxieties more characteristic of right-leaning unions through their discrimination along gender lines. In terms of vocational considerations, the Christian-National and Liberal-National unions constituted more pragmatic options for persons employed in white-collar work.275 Yet, the male-dominated systems of labor organization ultimately served the purpose of their founding and majority members: men.276

As the Great Depression deepened, male attitudes towards women’s work in the tertiary sector, which had already been cold, became more accusatory. Women were blamed for stealing jobs from men and destroying the labor market, as an unemployed DHV member bitterly declared:

Mechanical manipulation is all that is required now; mental work on part of employees is no longer necessary. Young girls are employed who, Heaven knows, work for lower salaries, and much quicker than we did with our stiff fingers. Their mechanical work is not blocked by worries as is the case with us old family men.277

275 Ibid., 141-143.
276 Ibid., 149, 159-162.
277 Quoted in Childers The Nazi Vote, 167.
In response to such member dissatisfaction, more conservative unions, such as those associated with the Christian-National or Liberal-National movements, blatantly denounced workplace “feminism.” Unions such as the DHV, which was the main center of nationalist unionism, even understood that this influx of women into the workplace was just another facet of Weimar social and cultural decline, especially of their professional groups.

In this unsettling environment, where women stood at the epicenter of male unemployment anxiety, it is not surprising that women felt neither particularly welcome nor represented. Frevert documents the massive drop in female trade union participation between 1919 and 1928: “the Central Union of Clerical Staff saw a 60 per cent drop, while membership of the Union of female retail and office staff fell only by one third.” When times of hardship struck, the true alliance and representation of trade unions became clear: they played into the public dialogue of the “double earner” to attack female employment in favor of their male members. Given such evidence of trade union activity, in addition to vocational considerations and attitudes established throughout this discussion, white-collar women largely left or never joined trade unions, since they were disillusioned and unconvinced by such organizations’ potential to bring materially recognizable changes to their workplace and lives.

At its very core, the downward pattern of female participation in labor and women’s associations may be attributed to many of the factors that have been discussed in the previous two chapters. What underlay this failure was a solid identification of

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278 Ibid.
280 Frevert, *Women in German History*, 175.
these young, female salaried employees along gender and vocational lines. The manner in which they viewed and experienced their work along with its hostile environment obstructed their development of strong vocational allegiance as occurred in many industry-based professions, which Kathleen Canning has perceptively demonstrated.\footnote{Canning, Language of Labor and Gender: Female Factory Work in Germany, 1850-1914.} In sum, young, urban women felt irreconcilable differences to traditional feminist, vocational and political organizations, which hindered their meaningful integration. The Nazis took advantage of the excluded disposition of these women by channeling their community deficit into the pseudo-egalitarian promises of the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} (the people’s national community).

The Weimar Constitution Article 109 proclaimed that “men and women have basically the same rights and duties.”\footnote{Evans, The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894-1944, 246.} Sadly, this turned out to be mostly a collection of empty promises. Initially, women took full advantage of this newly gained victory with 83\% of eligible female voters participating in the first elections of the Weimar Republic, which transformed the political landscape completely especially because of women’s demographic majority.\footnote{Sneeringer, Winning Women’s Votes, 5.; Bremme, Die politische Rolle der Frau in Deutschland, 35.} Yet after the first election, the lagging female participation that plagued vocational and gender associations soon infected politics: “until the Great Depression fewer eligible women bothered to vote at all.”\footnote{Bridenthal and Koonz, “Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche,” When Biology Became Destiny, 36.} The disconnect of young women to the era of pre-emancipation, resulting from the Great War and the subsequent generational gap, accounted for the failure of young women to grasp the importance of their political rights. Furthermore, similar to the female experience in the vocational associations, politics within the parties still abided by a strictly gendered organizational hierarchy, which obstructed women from participating in many party matters. Thus, the
downward trend in female political participation was not solely due to their failure to comprehend the importance of it, but rather, more significantly, based on their inability to integrate themselves into the Weimar party system in a meaningful and influential manner.

Weimar parliamentarianism and its party politics had firm roots in the Wilhelmine system, which offered new entrants few opportunities for real participatory integration due to their immobile organization, archaic leadership and static political dogmas. At the very elemental level, the system of traditional milieus, identified by German sociologist Rainer Lepsius as culturally and sentimentality defined voting behaviors, still characterized Weimar parties based on the following four like-minded communities of political idealism: protestant-conservative, protestant-liberal, social-democratic and catholic. These political cleavages allowed for only a very small degree of assimilation, which inhibited the wholehearted incorporation of modern women into any of the traditional milieux. An integration into the preexisting system would have depended on the relative alignment of value-orientation, life-style and life-goals to form a distinctive political self-understanding associated with a given cleavage. Since the young, modern women employed in white-collar work were in their life and vocation almost completely a product of economic modernization, while the political sentiments of the milieux stemmed from the pre-modernization period, most of their differences would have proved irreconcilable.

With Weimar modernization, the drastic transformations of society had greater ramifications for the formation of stable political identities along the traditional milieu

287 Ibid., 31.
288 Ibid., 36-38.
determinants. Lives changed without a responsive political representation that incorporated them. Historian Karl Rohe argues that this modernization of society brought an even greater crises to the milieu structure as it began to partially disintegrate without replacement in the face of ongoing urbanization and the atomization of individual life.289

Integral to these developments was the disintegration of formerly thriving political subcultures that had been the very foundation of political education. In the past, the family, as the nuclear source of identification, had played a major role in communicating certain political and ideological positions.290 Frau Charlotte Müller, who later became a “worker” and then an “employee,” exemplified a typical childhood fully integrated in the social-democratic milieu:

[We] lived a Berlin working family life fused to [our] political beliefs. [We] lived in a Social Democratic-built workers’ apartment and bought [our] food in a Social Democratic co-op. The children went to a Social Democratic Kindergarten.291

In stark contrast, the modern urban existence with altered living arrangements and severed familial proximity no longer ensured that political ideologies diffused through the family. Consequently, the structures of former political identity formation were failing without any replacement when women entered the political realm in the 1920s.

By gaining the vote in 1919, a year marked by turmoil and crisis, women had little time to build affiliations with parties. Boak emphasizes the important fact that women were ill-equipped in terms of political education, which meant that their ballots

290 Owings, Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich, 157.
291 Ibid.
were cast without a permanent identification with a particular party. This deficit in political education and party allegiance made women more prone to propagandistic manipulation because their political consciousness was more flexible. Further, the youth and often poor educational background of urban salaried female employees aggravated this deficit. In consequence, young women failed to forge steadfast political identities, which the inaccessible party organization and inflexible political canons only exacerbated.

The internal structure of Weimar’s political parties, which centered on conservative organizational hierarchies and pre-war leadership as defining characteristics, obstructed their ability to grapple with the rapid and continuous changes of modern society. The SPD represents a candid example of this. The aged and conservative organization hierarchy allowed for very little upward mobility and thus promoted the stagnation of political ideas as well as action. In his analysis of the SPD in *From Weimar to Auschwitz*, left-wing historian Hans Mommsen emphasizes this point because the immobility of the SPD’s internal structure, built about maturity and status, impeded the rise of the post-war youth, who may have introduced fresh innovations to assimilate the party better to the modern conditions in Weimar Germany. Mommsen goes on to blame this internal structure and its inflexible political platform for the SPD’s failure to modernize its ailing subculture or extend its electoral base, which made it fatefuly unable to transform its status from a “class-based party of the proletariat” into a “broad-based popular party.” Though Mommsen neglects the female dimension in his discussion of

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294 Mommsen, *From Weimar to Auschwitz*, 53.
295 Ibid., 50.
the SPD, his historical insight into the failure of the party sheds light on the defining structural characteristics that shaped female struggles and obstructed their meaningful realization of the political emancipation.

The inhospitable structure of party politics created a hostile environment for female political action, which would alienate women from the political process and the parliamentary system altogether. Weimar Germany’s female delegates, though they notably obtained a greater number of elected offices than their counterparts in the United States, were unable to become influential both in parties and parliament since they were ignored and not taken seriously. Female members of the SPD complained that the party thwarted their political expression by disregarding women’s attempts to set agendas, have requests acknowledged or make serious changes to the party’s internal structure. This experience was common across the political spectrum. Emma Stropp, the leading female voice in the right-liberal DVP, sharply criticized the party’s structural organization as anti-feminist as well as the continued feeling of discrimination in the woman’s section of the DVP-Nachrichtenblatt (DVP-news bulletin):

They experience the poor consideration accorded to female candidates on the ballots as an offense to all women activists and as a sign of low esteem for their political activity and its importance for Germany’s recovery. Often a female candidate has only been placed as a token candidate on a hopeless spot of the ballot.

On paper, women had gained equal access to the political system, but the promises of equal incorporation were not realized in the female experience of Weimar politics, which galvanized cynicism and disillusionment. Historian Raffael Schenk

296 Thönnessen, The Emancipation of Women, 115.; Frevert, Women in German History, 179.
297 Thönnessen, The Emancipation of Women, p. 112.
delineates the reaction of female party members to organizational and ideological immobility their tireless efforts were unable to overcome: “political women thus became increasingly disillusioned with bitterness and resignation.”300 The frustrating experience of women in party politics was translated on a larger scale to the female electorate who saw political parties making but few, if any, recognizable changes for their lives.301 The initial downward pattern of female voting participation, illustrated in Table 4, indicates that some women gave up on Weimar parliamentarianism altogether.302 Consequently, as female cynicism grew with the mounting frustration about women’s inability to represent their interests in a system of which they were proclaimed to be an equal partner, many turned away from politics or towards alternatives.

The desperate conditions of the Great Depression acted as a catalyst upon the female voters, pushing them back to the ballot box with a voter turnout of 82% in 1930, where they again encountered discrimination without the power to change it.303 There were many examples of discriminatory political actions introduced in the Great Depression, such as the SPD-led coalition that infringed on women workers’ rights by restricting laws, curtailing benefits and cutting down social services provided to them.304 White-collar labor unions supported these measures as their anxiety about unemployed fathers rose.305 In this environment, women went from relative apathy to cynical bitterness with the existing political order in which their promised emancipation left them with few options for influencing their position. Rühle-Gerstel postulated that this

300 Scheck, Mothers of the Nation, 158-159.
303 Bremme, Die politische Rolle der Frau in Deutschland, 35-36.
305 Sneeringer, Winning Women’s Votes, 171.
moment would evoke the “Mut der Verzweiflung” (courage of despair), when female helplessness became expressed in vigorous action.\(^{306}\) It did, as women, who experienced in the Weimar parliamentary democracy only stasis, corruption and the inability to grapple with serious social, economic and international issues, looked to alternatives.

In the late-Weimar period, the NSDAP deftly positioned itself as such an alternative. Its structure allowed for a matchless malleability in its ideological content while infusing adherents with a sense of integral purpose. The party leadership centered on Hitler in Munich, but below it was a mushrooming, vastly decentralized system of party operation.\(^{307}\) The major organization of the party was built on the division of Germany into Gau (a German designation of territorial jurisdiction), each under a designated Gauleiter (regional party leader).\(^{308}\) After this, the territory was repeatedly subdivided into smaller sections with commanders at each level.\(^{309}\) All were responsive to the leadership in Munich. In addition to giving people the feeling that they were involved in decision making, the party structure of hierarchy above and decentralization below provided a tremendous feedback mechanism that was constantly on the offensive to gain an electoral footing in a way no other Weimar party was operationally capable of doing.\(^{310}\)

Above all the local considerations of the Gaue, the party platform of the NSDAP was simple and vague, focusing on superficial, collectively acceptable rallying points. While they marketed themselves in familiar anti-system and distinctly German rhetoric, there was not much substance. In essence, the Nazi ideology was hollow in its content.

\(^{308}\) Ibid.  
\(^{309}\) Ibid.  
and typological in its approach. Through this flight into extreme superficiality, they avoided confronting deep contradictions and exploited popular dissatisfactions. This indistinct ideological message allowed the NSDAP to exploit the cleavages in the dysfunctioning traditional milieu system, most vividly exemplified by the array of single-issue parties.

The structure of the NSDAP as well as the vague superficiality of the party platform permitted their appeal to be tailored according to the recipient audience it intended to inspire. Though the NSDAP’s propaganda machine followed the directives issued by the Reich Propaganda Office under the stewardship of Joseph Goebbels, which specified the themes and slogans to be emphasized, much of the system of mobilization relied on the local leaders’ initiative.\(^{311}\) For, crucial in this process was the “necessity of adapting subjects to the interest of the local audience.”\(^ {312}\) Such tactics of recruitment can be observed first hand in a memorandum of the Prussian Ministry of Interior from May, 1930, that relates to the high pitch of efficiency of National Socialist propaganda:

> Hardly a day passes on which there are not several meetings […]. Carefully organized propaganda headquarters in the individual *Gau* ensure that the speaker and the subject are adapted to the local and economic circumstances. […] Rhetorical skill combined with subjects carefully chosen to suit the particular audience […] [they] prepare the ground through intensive propaganda by word of mouth for the spread of the movement which can be observed everywhere. Frequently such propaganda squads stay in a certain place for several days and try to win over the local population for the movement through the most varied sorts of entertainment such as concerts, sport days, tattoos in suitable places and even church parades.\(^ {313}\)

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312 Ibid.
Hence, without a doubt, the grassroots mobilization was fundamental to the proliferation of the Nazi movement. Accordingly, William Sheridan Allen uses his study of Northeim to emphasize the importance of the local level: “it is clear that an essential arena in the Nazi electoral surge and the seizure of power was on the local level, and that the critical figures were the local Nazi leaders.” These leaders held the brunt of responsibility for observing the social environment and then convincingly presenting National Socialism to potential voters. Interestingly, the party that presented itself as being above the entrenched and conflicting interests of the Weimar Republic, exploited these animosities to gain electoral success by unscrupulously bending their ideology to cater to each specific social groups. In this sense, the “strain” of National Socialism communicated to female salaried employees emphasized distinct features, such as community, connection, power and purpose, which channeled this social group’s anxieties related to their economic, social and political position.

The relative freedom allowed in male recruitment practices was amplified for Nazi-minded women because the NSDAP’s vertical command structure did not exist for women before 1932. This organizational apartheid in the party, resulting from “the male chauvinist mentality of the NSDAP’s men,” gave women with National Socialist sympathies a free range in interpreting and mobilizing, as well as a false illusion of power, which they passed along in their recruitment. Thus, they were “allowed […] to work out their role in the Party’s service to a great degree as they chose.” This relative freedom in the formulation of their role and function in the beginning stages of the NSDAP’s rise to power influenced the manner in which female Nazi leaders foresaw a

316 Ibid.
separate realm of female influence in the National Socialist state. While their independence gave them the illusion of importance and power, in reality women organized on the fringe of Nazi society.\footnote{Bonnie Smith, \textit{Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700}, (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1989), 514.} They operated in a shadow version of the \textit{Gau} system, substituting the directives with their own readings and makeshift tactics. Female leaders with Nazi sentiments followed their own beliefs and recruited their own audiences.\footnote{Koonz, \textit{Mothers in the Fatherland}, 88.} The success of female mobilization relied on the amorphous nature of the Party’s grass roots infrastructure that provided women with much latitude to twist the ideological message as they saw fit for their audiences.\footnote{Boak, “Our Last Hope: Women’s Votes For Hitler – A Reappraisal,” \textit{German Studies Review}, 302.} For example, “Mother Guida”, referring to Guida Diehl, preached a quasi-Christian national spiritualism to the conservative, Protestant establishment over tea, while Irene Seydel, operating in the secular, lower- and working-class milieu, spread the Germanic mission of sacrifice, which she understood as the heart of National Socialism, on her bicycle trips through Germany.\footnote{Claudia Koonz, “The Competition for the Women’s Lebensraum, 1928-1934,” \textit{When Biology Became Destiny}, eds. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman and Marion Kaplan, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 214-215.; Koonz, \textit{Mothers in the Fatherland}, 87-91.} Such variation was possible because Nazism’s vague ideological pronouncements consciously allowed for multiple interpretations with the intention of speaking deeply to a large and very diverse audience.

Regardless of the localized and vastly differentiated nature of female Nazi organizations, they all appealed to the collective cause of Aryan sisterhood.\footnote{Ibid., 115.} This 1928 poster depicts young professionals, simple workers and mothers side-by-side: “Mothers, Working Women – We Vote National Socialist. List 10.”\footnote{Sneeringer, \textit{Winning Women’s Votes}, 161.} Hence, Figure 16 suggests Aryan camaraderie across the strained socioeconomic divides through the visual...
cohesiveness of the strong figures in a balanced composition, thus feeding the hunger for greater connection and implying the fulfillment of stable social betterment to be collectively achieved through National Socialism.

In accordance, Nazi-woman’s range of messages convened in broad terms around their rejection of the Weimar system, their call on women to rise to their national destiny and
their resolute rendering of the female collective empowered through their own alternate realm of influence.\textsuperscript{323}

It proves very difficult to assess to what extent those women who ultimately cast their ballot in favor of the NSDAP actually were in contact with specific leaders or exposed to certain propaganda. Quite obviously, they would have responded poorly to proclamations such as those by the British feminist Sylvia Pankhurst, who, in disbelief, characterized Nazism as “German girls: be pure, be True, be German; boys: fight bravely, live honorably, die smiling!”\textsuperscript{324} Rather, the following examples illustrate how certain aspects of National Socialism, as it was presented to women, would have fit into the life experience of female white-collar workers and thus may have contributed to their heightened electoral gravitation towards the NSDAP.

Amid the growing economic and political uncertainty, which many women employed in white-collar work painfully felt, the incapable and unresponsive Weimar system was an obvious point of criticism. The NSDAP blamed the Revolution and Constitution, symbolic of the Weimar system, for “bestowing” upon women the “emancipation” to be exploited and subjected to misery. Female Nazi leaders like Lydia Gottschewski castigated feminism in the liberal-bourgeois form as shameful, selfish and an utter failure, which indifferently tossed women into a maelstrom of public life without protection or support.\textsuperscript{325} According to her, bourgeois-feminist emancipation gave women the right, so to speak, to tirelessly work in factories or department stores only to have their hard-earned wages siphoned off to greedy capitalists and to the United States

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\textsuperscript{323}Koonz, \textit{Mothers in the Fatherland}, 76-90; 105-108; 112-118.
\textsuperscript{325}Koonz, \textit{Mothers in the Fatherland}, 214.; Sneeringer, \textit{Winning Women's Votes}, 265.
through the Young Plan.\textsuperscript{326} “Millions are either unemployed […] or condemned to indecent starvation wages in big department stores or in some similar achievement of the Revolution.”\textsuperscript{327} As the Great Depression dragged on, the lived experience of female salaried employees, as exemplified in their close to poverty wages and near-exploitation working conditions dealt with in Chapter I, would have had much in common with pronouncements like those of Gottschewski. In this sense, these women would have seen in their own lives ample substantiation of such claims. Without other responsive outlets for their concerns or a stable structure of support, these promise of “the new unity” in a stable social totality responded to many contemporary fears and discontents.\textsuperscript{328}

The cultural, national and, importantly, female predicaments had to be blamed on the Weimar system. As one contemporary observer noted, for many “Weimar meant not emancipation but economic misery, cultural degeneracy, and national disgrace.”\textsuperscript{329} In order to take advantage of such sentiments, Nazi flyers recruited urban women who experienced the Weimar system as disorienting: “Hundreds of thousands have lost their footing in the whirlwind of the big city.”\textsuperscript{330} Not only did the NSDAP thus absolve women from the culpability in their own condition, but also it promised them that they were not alone in their despondent isolation: “Millions of German women have been denied the opportunity to establish a family by the parties of the present system.”\textsuperscript{331} Only Nazism, as the NSDAP twisted the contextual meta-narrative, would free women from the slavery of wage-labor and the alienation of an atomized existence. “Was it barbaric to

\textsuperscript{326} Quoted Ibid., 239. \\
\textsuperscript{327} Childers, \textit{The Nazi Voter}, 239. \\
\textsuperscript{328}Lydia Gottschewski, \textit{Männerbund und Frauenfrage: Die Frau im neuen Staat} (Lehmann, München 1934), 38-45. \\
\textsuperscript{329} Sneeringer, \textit{Winning Women’s Votes}, 231-232. \\
\textsuperscript{330} Quoted in Ibid., 239. \\
\textsuperscript{331} Childers, \textit{The Nazi Voter}, 239.
wish to free women from such slavery?” a pamphlet refuting the anti-female allegations of the left against the Nazi Party. 332 In a typical maneuver of Nazi hermeneutics, they inverted the debate on their own Frauenfeindlichkeit (misogynist hostility) by circling to how rather they “wished to restore the lost rights of women” as “women’s emancipator from emancipation.” 333

The party came to recognize the importance of the female voter at the encouragement of Gregor Strasser, and molded an indispensable role for women in the Nazi utopian order. 334 The radical shift of attention is evident in the flyers and posters aimed exclusively towards women that were distributed throughout the 1929-1932 elections. While in 1929 and 1930 the NSDAP had no campaigns solely geared towards women, in 1932 women made headlines in the daily Nazi newspaper, Völkischer Beobachter, with direct addresses by Hitler: “we would be fools to even think about removing her from our common work!” 335 Accordingly, in 1932, the party set out to awaken women to their invaluable mission in the Nazi cause through “entertaining assemblies, personal recruiting, flyers, posters, and their own publication.” 336 This Nazi propaganda mirrored previous addresses by early Nazi women such as Elsbeth Zander. She had empowered her female audiences by portraying women as the “guardians of the race.” 337 As the chosen moral leaders, she invigorated them with the thought of devoutly safeguarding the Nazi cause, which would restore in them true self-worth and faith. 338 The NSDAP picked up on this catching characterization of the exceptional female role in realizing the National Socialist utopia in a Weckruf publication:

332 Quoted in Sneeringer, Winning Women’s Votes, 239.
335 Sneeringer, Winning Women’s Votes, 173.; Quoted in Ibid., 225.
336 Ibid.
337 Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland, 80.
338 Ibid., 75-77, 80.
German women must help us! Today’s male sensibility is cluttered with knowledge and job worries, when not sodden with alcohol or tobacco [...] No one takes charge to end mismanagement and restore the order of the state [...] thinking women, with their fresher, invigorated senses, must intervene – even if it’s only getting men to read and informing them about today’s problems.339

Astonishingly, women seemed to be the bearers of salvation in this vision. Yet upon closer scrutiny, their role is one of symbolic support rather than assertive action. Nonetheless, Gottschewski prophesized that the Great Depression would wake her sisters to action as the Great War had done for their male partners. As she put it, “the fundamental experience of the new [women’s] movement is the Volk and its community.”340 Women were responsible for waging the internal battle against domestic decay in which only a collectivist approach would have the power to succeed.341

In the promised National Socialist state, female leaders envisioned that women would together create their own separate realm of existence, which would bridge former differences, conflicts and animosities. Such notions of a separate sphere of female life were not unfamiliar. Ironically, they were rooted in nineteenth-century bourgeois feminism that heavily influenced the philosophy of women’s organizations, such as the BDF, which the Nazi leaders so vehemently rejected.342 New support for such ideas arose out of the stark disappointment many women felt of their experience of emancipation about which they “shared deep anxieties [regarding] modern life and women’s future.”343 Sneeringer reveals how Hitler exploited such fears by promising a central role for female voices in the Nazis’ national renewal: a “wom[a]n’s job,” Hitler

339 Quoted in Sneeringer, Winning Women’s Votes, 174.
340 Quoted in Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland, 114-115.
341 Ibid., 115.
343 Sneeringer, Winning Women’s Votes, 173.
told a Nazi women’s conference, “was to lead the sexes back to their respective spheres to restore happiness to the Völker mired in need and pain.”

As established, women interpreted such an alternate sphere as a place reserved exclusively for female influence, completely removed from the male domination they continued to experience in Weimar life. Before it was to denote eastward expansion, the term Lebensraum (literally: living space) was applied to this female space. Early Nazi leader Gertrud Bäumer sketched what harmonious collective functions the female Lebensraum would include in The Woman in the New Lebensraum, while Guida Diehl even drew up a separate legislature to be applied to women exclusively in their Lebensraum.

Such ideological musings on the strong leadership role of women in the national community were practically translated through the Nazi women’s organizations, which for many women exemplified a true community under female guidance. Frau Margarete Fischer’s memory of her teacher reveals how National Socialism became associated with a positive image of female communality through the Nazi women’s organizations:

She showed us by example what community is, what sacrifice to others is. She never thought of herself. She always lived and worked for others. Exemplary! And that was what she imparted to us as the center of National Socialism.

Further, her recollections expose the experience of mutual female empowerment through National Socialism, which retrospectively seems contrary to the general sentiments associated with it.

Women’s emancipation in the wide, wide public began fundamentally with National Socialism [...] That on the one hand they should return to what was thought feminine, but on the other hand, through this

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344 Ibid., 231-232.
345 Smith, Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700, 517
347 Owings, Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich, 2.
leadership of women by women, emancipation can be spoken of in the larger breadth.\(^{348}\)

The encounter with female jurisdiction, limited though it may have been, clearly impressed a broad group of women as the extensive membership in BbM and NSF highlight.\(^{349}\) Such a positive response to the experience of female power and influence underlines the widespread frustrations with the promised emancipation of the Weimar Republic. Many women interpreted their “emancipation” as first unmet and then siphoned off by the Great Depression’s political conflict, which examples like the 1931 Beamtinnen legislation further proved to them.\(^{350}\) Responding to such sentiments, Nazi women’s leaders, through their ideological latitude, fashioned a female Lebensraum of National Socialism that “attracted women who longed to escape from male scrutiny – who sought a vent for their anxiety about women’s status in the world.”\(^{351}\) Such a female attraction to National Socialism must be traced to many women’s feeling of powerlessness and lack of communal identity, which was particularly extensive in the group of women examined in this discussion.

The Nazi Party used its amorphous, decentralized lower structure and its superficiality in party platform to mobilize increasingly widespread support among various social groups who often would have displayed conflicting interests. Such efforts can be clearly observed in their approach to women. While Nazism’s promise of stability, cohesion and security of identity held distinct allures for modern women, responding to their anomic in urban culture and alienation in white-collar work, rural mothers with

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\(^{348}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{349}\) Ibid.


\(^{351}\) Boak, “Our Last Hope; Women’s Votes For Hitler – A Reappraisal,” *German Studies Review*, 302.

strict religious views certainly understood such ideological pledges very differently.\textsuperscript{352} As shown, Nazism’s ideological superficiality could mobilize vastly different social groups, which the NSDAP used to garner all possible support by varying its promises without requiring political accountability. Further, in contrast to the Weimar parties on the defensive, the NSDAP did not have to address the problems of the ailing system. Consequently, the NSDAP became the only \textit{Volkspartei} by artificially positioning itself as the bridge to overcome the deeply divided Weimar system.

There were significant political mobilization advantages for the parties that were not associated with the founding and building of the Weimar Republic. Although the NSDAP varied their message by constituency, the anti-system content constituted a central ideological commitment of Nazism. Furthermore, as a study into Weimar political culture by Detlef Lehnert and Klaus Megerle reveals, this “integrative ideology of National Socialism derived its power from the mobilization of a negative consensus against the Weimar Republic.”\textsuperscript{353} Without a political track record to defend, they could run an electoral campaign that dealt with issues offensively. While other parties were bogged down in explanations about the current crises to defend their position, the NSDAP could use the Weimar disorder as a springboard to strengthen their campaign and focus on the future as oppose to the present or the past. This was no daring or risky political gamble and one that could easily garner consensus. An excerpt from the Reich Propaganda Department directives for the Presidential elections in March-April 1932 signed by Goebbels shows the one-sidedness of the Nazis, who presented themselves as

\textsuperscript{352} Sneeringer, \textit{Winning Women’s Votes}, 146.
an alternative without alternatives: “Those who want everything to stay as it is vote for Hindenburg. Those who want everything to change vote for Hitler.”

In all political propaganda, the NSDAP drew attention to its status as being outside of or even against the Weimar system. Thus, they visually set themselves off from the system-associated parties through energetic and offensive messages while they forcefully asserted themselves in conflict with other anti-system parties, most notably the KPD, in image and form, as the poster in Figure 17 shows:

This poster from the 1930-1932 period depicts an aggressive, muscular Nazi arm chocking the snake of Marxism and high finance under the title of “Death of the Lie,” clearly implying the enemies in the Nazi’s worldview: the Jews.

The Weimar-associated parties attempted to fend off the Nazi assault from the right by depicting it as an existential threat:

This poster depicts Nazism as the personification of death in skeletal form. Considering the 1932 political atmosphere, this poster epitomizes the SPD’s militant defensiveness against the NSDAP. Yet, the NSDAP had perfected their offensive, negative campaigning by this point, visually flooding the electoral battle with over 4 million copies of the following bright red poster screaming “ENOUGH!” off the page.  

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Such a brief survey of the election posters emphasizes the popular frustration with the Weimar system and the parties with which it was associated, and the potential for political mobilization of such a message as the conditions worsened all over Germany. For women, who already felt powerless to the uncontrollable forces engulfing them, the propaganda warfare of party politics added a heightened presence of violence and fear to their sense imminent finality.

The embattled visual landscape of propaganda reflected the chaos in the streets of many neighborhoods. The Nazis’ opportunism transcended the visual and ideological manipulation of Weimar disorder to outright aggressive action. Along these lines,
Winkler meticulously accounts the extensive illegal SA violent agitation, which the escalating fear of Communists overshadowed.\textsuperscript{356} The NSDAP manipulated the polarized political spectrum through the SA’s agitation to fan the fears of Communism. They heightened the emphasis on the rising “socialist menace” in propaganda specifically addressed to white-collar workers, as the \textit{Angestellten} campaign literature of 1932 shows.\textsuperscript{357} Women in these professions, who particularly felt the pressure from below due to their deskilled types of employment as well as their lack of vocational organization previously subject of this discussion, would have likely responded to such propaganda because it channeled fears already heavily weighing on their lives.\textsuperscript{358} Thus, economic insecurity was underlined through the physical insecurity of mounting civil unrest in the streets by “bloody battles between right and left.”\textsuperscript{359}

In this mess they had helped to create, the NSDAP took on the role of the savior. This maneuver worked well as many women, after 1930, joined the Nazis seeing them “as the most vital and potentially successful anti-left extremist group.”\textsuperscript{360} Hence, the NSDAP enhanced their anti-system and anti-Communist message by igniting civil unrest, which they exploited by blaming it on the red threat, all the while further exposing the powerlessness of the current political leadership. In contrast, they presented themselves as strong, vigorous and determined: as the outsider on a grand utopian mission to save the German nation from the looming apocalypse. In doing so, the Nazis mobilized distinct tactics and mediums that would particularly have spoken to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[357] Childers, \textit{The Nazi Voter}, 237-238.
\item[359] Owings, \textit{Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich}, 70.
\item[360] Stephenson \textit{The Nazi Organization of Women}, 25.
\end{footnotes}
the experiences of female white-collar workers, who were familiar with Weimar popular culture and urban leisure activities that were the central focus of Chapter II.

Most fundamentally, National Socialism was a continuation of Weimar in many ways, though these were less political in nature. The NSDAP skillfully took advantage of the innovations of the Weimar cultural realm to bolster its narrative and ideology. Quite naturally, it follows that a message conceived and presented along familiar lines would have had a more receptive community. Correspondingly, female white-collar workers would have responded to novelty and excitement positively, both of which were requirements for successfully marketing a beauty product and, also, though often overlooked, a political party. The concentrated sensitivity to the external connected Weimar popular culture with Nazism.

Nazism was the ultimate expression of the superficial. Even at its ideological content, its concepts were anchored in reductive aestheticism. Examples of this consist of the superficial typological aesthetic of mechanically categorizing people by biological, religious or sexual criteria. Further examples include, the vague appeals to community and destiny, formulated in loaded language and emotively charged propaganda, which distracted political audiences from the lack of substance these solutions provided the deep, contemporaneous conflicts. The utter superficiality of Nazism, as it was presented, mirrored the transition in the manner of conveying information that emerged with the new forms of mass media and popular culture in the Weimar period. As discussed in detail in Chapter II, content was condensed with the rise of the image, as exemplified by the illustrated press or advertising that held to the belief that one image communicated a whole world of meaning.
These smiling women, from a 1932 Reichstag election poster displayed in Figure 20, communicate in their visual rendering with bobbed hair, though not in textual content or through further evidence, the impression that modern women collectively support the NSDAP. Thus, the concentration on the image as the conduit of the Nazi message, infused with the youthfulness of its outsider status, connected with the urban modern culture of Weimar, which stressed excitement and constant novelty to stimulate attention in its observers.
The propaganda of the NSDAP picked up on this marketing tactic to connect with the masses through the arresting packaging of simple facts. Whether the initial response of the observer was positive, neutral or even negative, there was an interest. Interest would lead to further investigation, as attending a rally or meeting, which would, it was hoped, leave them with the impression that Nazism offered the only solution to whatever issues they grappled with. The sophisticated propaganda machine of the party was well aware of this and used it to their advantage. They pursued this through the power of visual excitement in a distinctly modern aesthetic:

The Hitler poster depicts a fascinating Hitler head on a completely black background. Subtitle: white on black – ‘Hitler’. In accordance with the Führer’s wish this poster is to be put up only during the final days [of the campaigns]. Since experience shows that during the final days there is a variety of colored posters, this poster with its completely black background will contrast with all the others and will produce a tremendous effect on the masses…

As Goebbels’ precise directive instruction for the March-April 1932 Presidential election to the Gaulleiters shows, the Nazis paid attention to minute details in order to present the NSDAP in opposition to the other parties, most notably by employing marketing tactics first discovered in Weimar culture.

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362 Ibid., 73.
By visually juxtaposing Hitler to others by employing a modernist, monochromatic palate, the NSDAP conveyed political freshness and a complete break, which underlined the National Socialists’ anti-system stance as the self-sacrificing outsider.

The energetic dynamism of the National Socialists contrasted with the weary and fraying façade of the ailing Weimar system’s parties. They were young. Forty percent of the party members were younger than thirty in 1931.  

Frau Mathilde Mundt remembers her impressions: “and now comes Adolf Hitler. He was in the war, his parents had died, 

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363 Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany*, 4th ed., 47
and he was alone, unmarried, a young man.”364 Above all, the mythical life story of the
party leader completed the Nazi narrative: their “outsider status” set them apart “as the
party of the youth” and the future.365 Accordingly, Hitler wrote in Mein Kampf: “the
function of propaganda does not lie in the scientific training of the individual, but in
calling the masses’ attention to certain facts.”366 Such “facts,” as the party’s outsider
status, communicated a vast amount of information to the consuming audiences through
their own interpreted extrapolations, encouraged by the Nazis’ amorphous rendering.

By presenting themselves as worlds apart from the Weimar system, the NSDAP
exploited frustration with the present conditions. As a completely new party, “a negative
people’s party” as Mommsen keenly observes, the NSDAP could twist anti-modernist
resentments in their favor.367 They promised a return to “a mythical past of stability” --
whether such a place had ever existed mattered little – with the Volk as a stable and
egalitarian collective identity that resonated with the many contemporaries who
experienced atomization and anomic in their modern lives.368 This community syndrome
was particularly pervasive in young, urban persons who had little familial, vocational or
gender camaraderie to meaningfully organize their lives with significant purpose, as such
films as Menschen am Sonntag reveal.369 The promise of an illusive national community with
stability, purpose and destiny “won rising support as the nation slid into chaos.”370

Coming from a party outside the political system, the NSDAP’s promises just
needed to be repeated often enough for them to be ingrained in the mind of the
audience, which the modern mediums of mass communication functioned to support

364Owings, Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich, 86.
365Mommsen, From Weimar to Auschwitz, 57.
367Mommsen, From Weimar to Auschwitz, p. 143.
368Sneeringer, Winning Women’s Votes, 216.
369Mommsen, From Weimar to Auschwitz, p. 57.
370Sneeringer, Winning Women’s Votes, 216.
brilliantly. Hitler recognized early the immense power of repetition. He wrote in *Mein Kampf* that “only after the simplest ideas are repeated a thousand times will the masses finally remember them.”

Through the innovations of modern culture, the stress of certain ideological themes could be visual, as previously demonstrated with Hitler’s poster campaign. They could also be vast physical expressions, as with rallies or parades, where the Nazis strengthened their political message by using modern technology. They could even be deceptively simple, as with the Nazis invention of a network of appropriated symbols, images and gestures, which slyly imbued the sense of a new community with historical continuity. Frau Frey corroborated the importance of simple wordplay in political slogans first seen in Weimar advertising introduced in Chapter II: “and then came Hitler. And he did it right for us young people. He said ‘Volk und Vaterland’ and ‘We must bring our people together’ and what all he had for slogans, let’s say. Just for Volk and Vaterland and what is really German again.”

Taken together, the persistent transmission of simple ideological proclamations, infused with zealous idealism, through all avenues of propaganda raised Hitler and the Nazi mission to mythological proportions. White-collar urban women were vulnerable to the mythological promise of salvation in the national community because it channeled their anxieties and frustrations into a meta-narrative that the Nazis presented through familiar mediums and forms of communication, which women had already encountered in the movies, illustrated press and advertising.

The creation of an idealized and heroic public image through the means and the methods introduced with Weimar cultural modernization were essential to the raising support of the NSDAP. The “Heil Hitler” greeting stands as a personification of National

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372 Owings, *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich*, 173.
Socialism’s ideological reduction. In a single movement, the adulation of a personality and with it an ordained mission for the German nation are communicated. As the subversive gesture indicates symbolically, only through conforming to the Nazi order is renewal possible for Germany. At the epicenter of this, Hitler placed himself as the messianic personality to lead this national salvation.

Hitler commanded this system through his rare personality, which in real and constructed terms was irreplaceable. It set him apart from contemporaneous leaders because there was no other personality in German politics with such tremendous enthusiasm, enchanting eloquence and inspiring charisma, which Hitler’s cult of personality bolstered. Many people, who experienced in the late Weimar years vast upheaval in their lives as has been shown at hand of urban female white-collar workers, would have seen a strong and passionate political leader in positive light. Frau Meyer-Semlies echoed such sentiments as she thought that the Weimar chaos “needs a strong man” like Hitler to restore Germany.\(^{373}\) Through his skills of public presentation and particularly oratory, Hitler bent the complex real circumstance into the narrow Nazi framework in order to channel his message to certain goals.

The reduction of content for appeal across a broad audience was a marketing tactic eagerly employed by the Weimar advertising industry, as previously inspected print commercials exemplify. Suitably, Hitler called himself the “great simplifier.”\(^{374}\) He perceptively took advantage of his audience’s underlying desires to gain their support, which the *Crème Mouson* commercial, discussed before, had similarly done by playing into the female longing for independence. For example, Hitler posed as a peace-seeker in public speeches to war-weary audiences, claiming to desire only the rectification of the

\(^{373}\) Ibid., 56.

\(^{374}\) Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany*, 4th ed., 125.
wrongful provisions of the Versailles Treaty through non-violent means. In this sense, he was both an idealist and an opportunist, who tenaciously and unscrupulously pursued his aims. Such a simplification of politics to purely functional operations linked with the objectives of Weimar artistic movements like the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. In doing so, Hitler's gifted rhetorical skills and charisma aided him in employing the tactics of persuasion and adopting the conceptual objectives of the Weimar cultural realm and applying them to politics in order to further his own position and with it, that of Nazism.

Hitler could align the objective in his favor through the manner in which he presented it. The most crucial and far-reaching example of this is how he braided together the story of his life with that of the NSDAP to render a narrative of triumph amid vigorous struggle. He thus positioned himself and the NSDAP to be inherently linked with the German context. In doing so, the narrative technique of popular literature and films, which modern Weimar society knew and responded to, served as irreplaceable templates for emotive manipulation. The story went something like this: out of a hostile environment, shunned as an “outsider,” first he and then the party had ascended to greatness. In light of their triumph, so would Germany: “That is the miracle of our age, that you have found me, that you have found me among so many millions! And that I have found you, that is Germany’s fortune.” By paralleling the respective narratives, Hitler molded them into one entity with only a single communal destiny, for which he claimed to have received a “divine mandate” from the trenches of World War I to “liberate the German people and make Germany great.”

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375Ibid., 28, 54.
The melodramatic tale of triumph in the face of all odds touched the emotional nerve of a population accustomed to romantic tales of upward mobility in novels and films. This was especially true for young urban women, who drew from popular culture the major ideas about how to organize life and their expectations of it. Hitler himself embodied such romanticism that had been spoon fed to people throughout the previous decade in melodramatic form. Decidedly, National Socialist “propaganda aimed at the emotions” because they deemed the masses rather unintelligent and largely unresponsive to complex theoretical rationalism. Since “the thinking of active young people was strongly irrational and emotionally flavored,” the romantic utopianism appealed to them in particularly.

The familiar narrative of upward mobility now provided the opportunity not only for personal but also national salvation as the life of Hitler and destined renewal of mythical Germany revealed. “Naturally I voted for the NSDAP. Obviously, which young person would not have, who was open-minded and enthusiastic? Was also no reason at all not to,” Frau Regina Frankenfeld recounted. Consequently, those young persons who consumed popular culture to the greatest extent would have responded most intensely to such impulses.

Our young people show little political interest [and] are not really much concerned with the study of Hitler’s thoughts; it is simply something irrational, something infectious that makes the blood pulse through one’s veins and conveys an impression that something great is under way, the roaring of a stream which one does not wish to escape.

Such emotive idealism was particularly convincing for young generations that had grown up identifying most with popular culture, which as Chapter II exposed was inherently

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380 Mommsen, *From Weimar to Auschwitz*, 56.
381 Owings, *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich*, 391.
superficial and romantic. Perhaps for many, “an inexorable march to triumph, a future to be won by belief in the Führer” presented itself as a real-life rendering of a heroic film or serialized novel rather than an absurd political notion.\textsuperscript{383}

Hitler’s utopia played into the familiar cultural escapism on a gargantuan, political scale. The culture of escapism was widely consumed by Weimar society. The evasion of momentary dissatisfactions through stories of hope and dreams of future betterment could be found in the moviegoers, who often forgot their workplace woes in narratives of glamour and beauty on the silver screen. Such leisure time consumption was particularly popular for female white-collar workers in urban centers as previously discussed. Frau Frankenfeld recounts her attraction to Nazism “as a young person, convinced and idealistic [of the] kingdom to come. That is the privilege of youth, nicht?\textsuperscript{384} Her recollection of the Nazi narrative’s attraction parallels the sentiments that similarly made fictional installments like \textit{Gentlemen Prefer Blondes} so popular. In both, superficial romanticism trumps appeals to realisms and rationalism as means to social betterment. The escapist nature of Weimar popular culture thus promoted the appeal of political fantasies in times of frustration and desperation, which made the younger generations more receptive to the NSDAP’s utopian dreams they had previously encountered in similar form through the mass media.

Young women who worked in white-collar jobs and consumed modern cultural media were particularly susceptible to such romantic idealism – especially as their own circumstances became progressively more destabilized. Their ill-defined political identities, which failed to form around milieu, vocational or gender lines as in the past,

\textsuperscript{384}Owings, \textit{Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich}, 393.
left them with a leadership deficit. As has been illustrated, the lack of group identification left modern urban women with few references to negotiate their existence. Thus, urban salaried female employees were most often very young and ill educated, which made them particularly dependent on the reservoir images, ideals and narratives that they derived from popular culture to make sense of their surroundings.

Correspondingly, the new “soldier-preacher-politician” image, as Koonz puts it, fit into the main narratives of female upward mobility, which women grasped as a last hope for social betterment as the Great Depression pushed them into existential despondency.

The NSDAP offered an inclusionary national collective identity that, through the incorporation of modern technology and mass spectacles as keystone recruitment devices, suggested a forward-minded political party to those who had experience with such products and activities from their leisure time. Such new media technology always comes with certain dangers for their consuming audiences who lack the necessary information to vigilantly filter the content conveyed through the pictures. Cultural historian Eve Rosenhaft offers some excellent insight on how identities connect to public forms of power in her essay “Women, Gender, and the Limits of Political History in the Age of “Mass” Politics.” For her, film in the Weimar period can be importantly interpreted as a mediation between public and private:

We might wish instead, then, to emphasize the differences between a literary public sphere and the kind of public created by the mass media. In particular, the addressees of the mass media constituted a *Publicum* only in

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385 Ibid.
386 Boak, “Our Last Hope; Women’s Votes For Hitler – A Reappraisal,” *German Studies Review* 299-300.
389 Ibid.
the sense of an audience, and no longer in the sense of a collectivity of reasoning individuals engaged in the interchange of opinions. The important contribution Rosenhaft makes here is that when women finally stood in a better position to realize their power in the political sphere, it had been objectified by the mass media, which obstructed their potential for meaningful political participation past that of the passive consumer. This Strukturwandel creating a “mass” society also produced a “mass” political spectacle, which leads Habermas to critique modern democracies as a process of “non-opinion public opinion” generation and registration. The Nazis profited from such overarching structural transformations because they were notorious for their bombastic theatrics and exuberant spectacles that would have found much more support in the Weimar society described by Rosenhaft.

The image’s communicative potential on the modern audience leaves a very different, more intense impression than, for example, the text of a party platform. The Nazis consciously gravitated towards leaving the most intense impressions as illustrated in form, content and presentation throughout this chapter. Thus, they did not shy away from communicating political messages through the avenues of mass media formerly occupied by popular culture, which set them apart from other political parties, as they exploited mediums such as film and tactics such as marketing. In addition to the narrative form and advertising methods, the NSDAP appropriated the technological vehicles of Weimar modernity to garner political support, as seen in the orchestration of airplanes, loudspeakers and cinema cameras at major rallies.

Correspondingly, the audiences of Weimar popular culture responded to the Nazi propaganda not only because they mobilized familiar plot lines and emotive

390 Ibid., 171-172.
appeals, but also, more significantly, since they did so using well-acclimated external forms of content presentation first introduced by cultural media. One important example of this is the integration of film in the NSDAP’s propaganda efforts. The Nazi attraction to the medium of film long predated the epic Nazi cinema, notably embodied by Leni Riefenstahl, as it became part of their propaganda activity in the early 1930s with cinematic experiments like *Hitlerjugend Quex*, soon to be followed by *SA-Mann Brandt* and *Hans Westmar*.392

Through its glorification of martyrdom in the name of National Socialism, *Hitlerjugend Quex* was the first large-scale production, according to Goebbels, which communicated the heart of Nazi ideology through the art of cinema.393 The story follows a typical melodramatic plot line inspired by the death of Hitler youth Herbert Norkus and thus was infused with a healthy dose of Nazism.394 In the story, a Communist boy recognizes the National Socialist truth while observing the Hitler youth in the park, among whom he is accepted immediately without discrimination based on his working-class background, which hints at Nazism’s pseudo-egalitarianism of collective social betterment. After forging this meaningful connection, he stands up for his newfound belief in a selfless act to warn the Hitler youth of a conniving Communist plot, which leads to the demise of his family and ultimately himself as he is stabbed to death in a dark street corner.395 The final title impresses the audience with the condensed message to take away with them as they returned to their lives from the fantasy world of the

For further information and film viewing: [http://www.archive.org/details/HitlerjugendQuex](http://www.archive.org/details/HitlerjugendQuex)
Such messages fortified by the powerful images of the film reached over a million people by January 1934. Of course, it remains impossible to decipher in hindsight exactly who comprised this audience, but it does show the large-scale attempt to innovatively communicate Nazism in form and medium familiar to modern Weimar audiences.

The film about a young, fictional Hitler youth conveys the fundamental ideological tag lines, such as national harmonic existence that would rise above contemporary conflicts, in familiar terms, such as the courageous individual who stands up for his beliefs in the face of treachery, all presented using modern media technology, such as cinema. This constitutes just one of many examples of how the Nazis gained significant political power by appropriating the Weimar media technology such as film, radio and photography, formerly monopolized in the cultural realm, for their political ends. In accordance with the NSDAP’s end of evoking strong emotive reaction through their propaganda methods, the manipulation of such technology would prove particularly appropriate.

Modern technology featured heavily in the propaganda operation of the National Socialists, which would have cast an aura of familiarity and progressiveness for those political observers who had engaged with modern technology actively in their life experiences. Such a departure in medium further contributed to setting the NSDAP off from the dusty, retrogressive Weimar parties who embraced media technology on the political campaign less energetically. Also, the fearless acceptance of media technology in their repertoire of political propaganda linked the NSDAP with the younger generations. Interestingly, this technology stood for the modernity they claimed to oppose.

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396 Ibid.
The incorporation of selected Weimar media, as well as modern technology, into Nazism presents a conundrum. Jeffrey Herf points to this seeming ideological anomaly in *Reactionary Modernism*: Nazism only accepted one of the twin products of the Enlightenment, as they incorporated advanced technology yet not political liberalism, which left a truncated vision of modernity.\(^{398}\) They overcame this ideological paradox through the marriage of the romantic irrationalism of the nation with the strength of modern technology, which Goebbels would entitle the “steellike romanticism” of the twentieth century.\(^{399}\) Along these lines, modern technology became symbolically equated with the strength of the German nation and state.

Such a triumph over paradox can be observed in the spectacular choreography of modern technology at mass Nazi rallies. Technological innovation was thus not only a vehicle to disseminate information, but also an important signal to affirm the new direction of the NSDAP by contributing to their image of power. Frau Luise Solmitz recalled the “aeroplanes above us,” the “testing of the loudspeakers,” and the “buzzing of the cine-cameras” all about them in anticipatory excitement.\(^{400}\) Modern technology surrounded the mass rally attendants and played an integral role in engineering these mass spectacles to project a certain image of Hitler and his party. Accordingly, Hitler’s second presidential campaign in the spring of 1932 was conducted by airplane travel under the propaganda slogan “the Führer over Germany,” suggesting Hitler’s command of modern technology and the German nation.\(^{401}\) In short, the NSDAP proclaimed its might through technology by rendering an image of control and command over the

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399 Ibid., 3.
instruments of modernity with “immaculate order and discipline.”

In contrast, the disarray of the Weimar political system seemed like a capitulation of the Weimar parties to the forces of modernity rather than a powerful portrayal of control.

The precise engineering of the NSDAP’s rallies, using advanced technology, served the important psychological purpose of communicating a feeling of collective belonging and association in its participants. Hitler consciously recognized this in the pages of *Mein Kampf*:

> [From the workplace] steps for the first time into a mass meeting and has thousands of people of the same opinion around him, when, as a seeker, he is swept away by three or four thousand others into the mighty effect of suggestive intoxication and enthusiasm [...] then himself has succumbed to the magic influence of what we designate as “mass suggestion.” The will, the longing, and also the power of thousands are accumulated in every individual. The man who enters such a meeting doubting and wavering leaves it inwardly reinforced: he has become a link in the community.\(^{403}\)

For those who experienced the atomized nature of modern urban life with collective forms of identity no longer pervasive and with conflict fragmenting the strained social order, the communal belonging to a predestined utopian national order was a stark contrast.\(^{404}\) Nazism was enhanced by the experience of the mass spectacle, which offered this described sense of community, gave meaning to life, and created the emotional effects that strengthened convictions. Only in modern leisure activities introduced in Chapter II, such as boxing or other sporting events, had a communal belonging been incorporated as part of the modern human experience; now it had been translated to the


\(^{404}\) It should be noted that, as Ian Kershaw warns, many of the visitors of Nazi rallies were already intrigued by National Socialism or perhaps even full converts. For more on this line of thought, see: Kershaw, *Hitler: Profiles in Power*, 52.
political sphere where it had the potential to fundamentally remedy the modern existential crisis.

For women, a stable common identity above all contemporary conflict must have had particular appeal. Young salaried employees living in urban centers most often lacked groups or associations that offered them a sense of purpose or communal belonging. Further, the conflict they encountered in the workplace and leisure time, exacerbated by the Great Depression, left them fragmented, vulnerable and immobilized, which they failed to overcome because the union of discrimination against them, based on class, gender and political parties. Consequently, Nazism’s energetic communality attracted some of those who felt that otherwise the modern human experience was void of it. Thus, propaganda techniques of Nazism, which Fest entitles its “liturgic magic,” gave people a “lost sense of belonging together and [a] feeling of collective camaraderie.”

As has been illustrated in this chapter, National Socialism wove a captivating net for young, modern women, as for many others, through their flexible message, superficial reductions, romantic youthfulness, mass community and messianic destiny, all communicated by the manipulation of modern vehicles of marketing and media technology, which set the NSDAP apart from other parties. Along these lines, Nazism presented itself through the images, narratives and leisure forms of modern culture. Thus, National Socialism constituted a distinct continuation of many non-political aspects of Weimar Germany, which made it accessible to a vast, modern audience – among them female white-collar workers – that it otherwise would have likely failed to gain political support from, which the survey of electoral records at the outset of this

chapter suggests may have importantly changed the political outcome. Consequently, the escapist superficiality of the consuming but no longer scrutinizing Publikum, trained through cultural modernization, paved the way for the ultimate superficial aestheticization of politics that culminated in the National Socialist spectacle.
CONCLUSION

German women encountered a world of new excitement and opportunity in the thriving cities of the 1920s. Yet there was also a darker side to Weimar modernity than is often represented: it was complex, difficult and full of contradictions. The reconstruction of the female white-collar workers’ world in this thesis reveals how the lived experience of this modernity significantly shaped these women’s political perceptions and actions. As they increasingly felt disconnected, atomized and alienated in a frustrating position of powerlessness, they actively responded to the message of the NSDAP. Through their lived experience of economic, social and cultural modernization, many modern urban women came to see in the Nazis a political solution to overcome their perceived systematic oppression.

Modernization came at a high price for Germany, and particularly its women. The modern economic developments of specialization, mechanization and rationalization, after the models of Taylorism and Fordism, set in motion processes that would not only open the workplace to women, but also establish new means of enforcing female inferiority. These mechanisms debilitated the prospect of women identifying along gender or vocation lines and thus obstructed their ability to organize collectively. The cultural and social developments of urban life contributed further to urban working women’s inability to contest their often exasperating discrimination. Popular culture and mass media focused on momentary satisfaction in very superficial terms, most embodied by the blossoming advertising industry, which created a distracted, romanticized and fragmented consuming public. Without stable points of reference or representative organizations, female white-collar workers responded to the
Nazis’ manipulation of modern technology and media. They mobilized these mediums to communicate deeply emotional appeals to these women by tapping into their experienced frustrations, tensions and anxieties. Thus, the Nazis unscrupulously exploited these women’s familiarity with an aestheticized, romanticized and superficialized Weimar modernity, along with their experience of it, for their own political ends. While this experience of Weimar modernity is integral for understanding the Nazi’s success in mobilizing new voters, modern women—normally associated with emancipation and progress—were significant agents in this fateful process.

The lives of female white-collar workers in the Weimar cityscape has uncovered the darker, more debilitating, aspects of modernization and the experience of modernity. In this sense, new forms of employment, entertainment and communication all can be excitingly progressive and seemingly emancipatory, but they also carry with them often unrecognized social and political implications that may in some instances, as those outlined in this thesis, even prove to be dangerous. Such findings highlight the importance of vigilance and awareness when handling novel forms of social organization, new economic functions and recent forms of cultural consumption. Along these lines, Cass Sunstein’s insight into how media technology like the internet challenges our contemporary social and political system by obstructing free speech and democracy is sobering and should gain more widespread attention as well as spark further research.407 Moreover, with the forces of modernity still altering the lives of millions every day, as it did those of Weimar women, research into possible manners to support the transition process, such as progressive forms of educational or social institutions, is of utmost importance. Especially in developing countries, the findings of

this thesis substantiate the need for greater assistance to disadvantaged groups displaced by these developments, which are often minority groups and women.

The Weimar woman’s experience of “emancipation without emancipation” reveals the difficult power dynamics of this process, which is the key to developing any modern democratic system. Emancipation of a group without their meaningful incorporation into the political process or their empowerment to overcome discrimination can push such groups toward radical alternatives. To address this challenge, the work done in the field of development economics by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum on the “capabilities approach” should gain more attention because it stresses the extension of human emancipation from paper to its lived experience. They argue that given existing social inequities and asymmetrical relations of power, the capabilities approach requires "spending unequal amounts of money on the disadvantaged" in order to bring every person up to the "same level of capability to function." How exactly this can be implemented at the individual state level and beyond remains an important, unresolved challenge. The findings of this thesis nevertheless highlight the importance of pluralism and deliberation to the modern polity: without its responsiveness to all its citizens as equal political actors, a modern democratic political order obstructs and even destroys its fundamental function.

This thesis set out to take issue with the failure to observe all groups of people as equal actors. It intended to both highlight and address the ongoing serious omission of

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410 For further reference see the canonical Polyarchy by Robert A. Dahl and the recent study by Jack L. Snyder, From Voting to Violence, which both underline the main conclusions about political emancipation drawn from this thesis.
women in German historiography. Both in the scholarly literature and the public mind, women have been sidelined by narratives that construct Nazism as a hyper-masculine force of inconceivable evil. Whether based on perceptions of bourgeois motherhood, Christian morality or feminist empowerment, the reluctance to deal with the female role to this dark chapter of human history is a conspicuous failure of modern historiography. Most fundamentally, the historiographical status quo reduces the status of women as political agents and obstructs our understanding of how National Socialism, World War II and the Holocaust came about. Hopefully some of the underlying issues broached in this thesis can be extended to alter that historical meta-narrative. The incorporation of women in the totality of analytic understanding is crucial, for only if we appreciate them as equal components in the dynamics of this world can we ever hope to overcome its gravest challenges.
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