By the early twentieth century, Germany was internationally recognized as a leader in sexual scientific research, and home to the most unimpeded public discussions of sex. British sexologist Havelock Ellis acknowledged as much in a letter to Edward Carpenter regarding the publication of *Sexual Inversion*. Because it was banned in Britain, *Sexual Inversion* was first published in Germany; however, Ellis wrote that he was “not anxious to publish it in Germany” because it wasn’t “required” there. His only hope was that the German publication would “pave the way for English publication.”¹ Similarly, British socialist publishers and translators

¹. See Ellis to Carpenter, 24 April 1896, CARP MSS 358: Letters from Havelock Ellis, Reel 5, Fabian Economic and Social Thought Series One: The Papers of Edward Carpenter, 1844–1929, from Sheffield City Libraries, Part 1: Correspondence and Manuscripts. Later, commenting on the German publication of Edward Carpenter’s *Intermediate Sex* in 1907 (prior to its English publication in 1908), Ellis wrote to Carpenter that it is “more needed in England than in Germany; it is
Eden and Cedar Paul declared in their “Translators’ Preface” to the English edition of Grete Meisel-Hess’s *The Sexual Crisis*, “In freedom of discussion in sexual matters . . . Germany is in the van.”

The world’s first professional sexological societies, the Medical Society for Sexual Science and Eugenics and the International Society for Sexual Research, were established there in 1913 and 1914, respectively. Likewise, the world’s first institute dedicated to sexual scientific research opened in Berlin in 1919. Germans were the “prime movers” behind many international, scientifically inclined sex reform movements, such as the International Association for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform established in 1912, and the World League for Sexual Reform, which began to take shape in Berlin in 1921. Researchers across the globe, in sites as diverse as Britain, Japan, and Egypt, not only referenced the authority of German sexologists in their own work, but were inspired by the German example and hoped to develop a comparable culture of sexual scientific research in their own countries.

How and why did sexology develop into such a robust, influential, cutting-edge field in Germany? In this chapter, I address this question by exploring the causes behind sexology’s emergence in early twentieth-century Germany, all of which were unique to Germany’s development as a nation-state. Here I focus on three
essential preconditions: the status and increasingly important political economic role of the sciences and medicine around the beginning of the twentieth century; the growth of interest in and concern about urbanization, specifically its effects on health and morality; and the development of a variegated sex reform movement. In the course of examining these causes, I highlight an important yet largely overlooked aspect of German sexology that helps to explain its power and enables us to locate women in its history—namely, its involvement in and dependence upon the politicization of sex.

The mid- to late nineteenth century was an era of scientific and medical innovation. Within the biological sciences, for example, scientists made huge strides in understanding the mechanisms of reproduction and the spread of diseases. During the 1870s and 1880s alone, scientists made a number of revolutionary discoveries: they recognized for the first time that fertilization occurred through the fusion of the ovum and sperm, were able to manipulate chromosomes and cell nuclei, and uncovered the connection between bacillus and diseases.\(^5\) The rapid rate of scientific breakthroughs such as these helped boost the authority and prestige of medicine and science. Moreover, these advances bolstered hopes that science and medicine could exercise humanitarian and democratic influences on social life by eradicating ignorance and superstition and alleviating suffering through remedial therapy and preventative hygienic measures.\(^6\)

In Germany, such scientific and medical endeavors were encouraged through state and private funding of medical research and the establishment and expansion of universities, hospitals, and various welfare institutions.\(^7\) According to Paul Weindling, this level

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6. Ibid., 16, 3, 1.
of investment and support aimed at “build[ing] Germany into a
*Kulturstaat*” and “gaining international respect.” These efforts arguably paid off, as they helped make Germany a leader in scientific and medical research.

Investments in science coincided with the creation of the rudiments of the German welfare state. Beginning in the 1880s, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck introduced legislation that established sickness insurance (1883), invalidity and accident insurance (1885), and pensions (1887). Importantly, physicians proved to be among the groups that benefited from the introduction of the social insurance system. It not only provided a good income, but also proved a boon to professionalization efforts. The creation and expansion of the social insurance system ultimately led to a dramatic increase in the study of medicine—and ultimately to what Weindling has characterized as a “catastrophic overproduction of doctors,” who were largely concentrated in towns and cities. Whereas there were 13,728 doctors in 1876, by 1900 that number had grown to 27,374.

Much to the chagrin of newly minted doctors, this overproduction of physicians coincided with the industrial depression of the 1870s and 1880s. Maintaining a medical practice in an urban setting was consequently difficult, and competition for insurance dollars stiff. According to Weindling, many doctors endeavored to make ends meet—and maintain their professional prestige and social status—by “colonizing social spheres related to health and reproduction.”

10. Insurance was funded by mandatory contributions from workers and employers, and administered by autonomous bodies governed jointly by both parties. Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*, 16–17.
12. Ibid., 35.
13. Ibid., 126.
to establish niches where they could claim specialized knowledge and authority. Although Weindling’s assertion is based on physicians’ leading roles in new organizations promoting racial and social hygiene, his general argument holds true for sexologists such as Magnus Hirschfeld, Max Marcuse, and Iwan Bloch, who attempted to eke out a living under these conditions. Berlin became the center of sexological niche-building, as Berlin was, in Weindling’s words, “a center for avant-garde thought on the social and psychological significance of medicine and biology.”

As the rapidly growing capital of the German Empire, Berlin was the center of formal political power and a hotbed of reformist energy and intellectual productivity thanks to its esteemed universities and new research institutes. Notably, almost all of the authors examined in this study lived in Berlin for a significant part of their lives, and all of the aforementioned professional sexological associations were founded or based in Berlin.

Practical and ideological investments in science and the niche-seeking behavior of underemployed physicians propelled the scientification of sex, and further help explain how and why scientific men became involved in sexology. To understand why and how sex came to be seen as a problem requiring sustained study and activism, we must look to the anxieties surrounding urbanization. By 1910, nearly two-thirds of Germans lived in towns, with more than a fifth living in cities exceeding 100,000. Berlin had over 2 million inhabitants by 1907. The city quickly became a subject of intense fascination and extensive research, specifically as a site of both “pleasure and danger,” to reference a tension familiar to feminists. On the one hand, big cities were seen as the

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centers of the psychological, somatic, and moral ills of modernity.\textsuperscript{18} Cities were home to prostitution, racy urban entertainment, and commercial venues, all of which supposedly facilitated illicit and “perverse” sexual relations fueled by lust and alcohol. Moreover, crowded urban living conditions, particularly for the poor, were held responsible for causing sexual abuse and even incest according to some social reformers and researchers.\textsuperscript{19} In these ways, cities were viewed as threatening the stability and health of marriages and families, and as corrupting youth.

On the other hand, cities represented opportunity and provided spaces for experimentation in new ways of living and being in the world. Specifically, they offered opportunities to explore the possibilities of sexual agency, particularly for a generation of younger women and individuals who wished to pursue same-sex desires. This, again, was particularly true of Berlin, which was home to the cultural and existential avant-garde and to a burgeoning queer culture at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{20} The challenge for many people thus became how to enjoy urban life while avoiding and combating its ills. To do so would require studying and reforming what was believed to be the root cause of many of the city’s problems and pleasures: sex.

Indeed, in the early twentieth century, studying sex and reforming sex went hand in hand. Sex reform groups ranged across the ideological spectrum, reflecting positions from the conservative to the progressive, and concerned themselves with issues such as prostitution, venereal diseases, homosexuality, marriage, maternal welfare, and the state of morality and sexual ethics. They represented a diverse constituency of middle-class professionals, including physicians, politicians, pastors, professors, artists, educators, lawyers, and writers, and varied in the tone of their public interventions,


from the moralistic to the technocratic to the philosophical and intellectual.

Their emergence was part of an explosion of reform movements at this time. As David Blackbourn has noted, the turn of the century was a “seed time of single issue groups, from the Evangelical League and the Zionists to organized economic interests.”

Although the reasons behind the growth of reform movements at this time are numerous and complex, an important catalyst was Kaiser Wilhelm II’s declaration of the Social Reform Decrees of February 1890. Although the decrees and the “New Course” they announced were intended to improve relations between workers and the state, their political and social effects were much broader—namely, they inspired a new generation to imagine and work toward alternative visions of the future, as Kevin Repp has demonstrated.

This “thaw in domestic relations,” as Repp put it, suggested that German political culture was beginning to open up to the possibility of new voices and wide-ranging change. This hope infused civil society with a new energy that in turn gave rise to an eclectic array of organizations seeking to shape the future. This statement is particularly true of many educated middle-class actors belonging to the “Bildungsbürgertum” who possessed intellectual capital, were not affiliated with or members of political parties, and sought solutions to social problems beyond the realm of formal politics. Although the Kaiser would quickly become disenchanted with the promises he made in February 1890, his decrees nonetheless served

22. The so-called February Decrees were meant to create and maintain “peace between employers and employees” by guaranteeing workers “free and peaceful expression of their wishes and complaints” and “equal rights before the law.” This included lifting the ban on the Social Democratic Party, which had been enacted by Bismarck twelve years earlier. Through the February Decrees, Kaiser Wilhelm pronounced himself committed to a “New Course” for labor relations certainly, but for the nation generally. Repp, Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity, 19–25.
23. Repp goes so far as to describe the February Decrees as the “birth certificate of a generation”; Repp, Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity, 20.
as an enduring source of inspiration for a generation already animated by an anxious discourse on modernity and clearly desiring change. Their competing solutions to modern problems and visions for social improvement could now take more concrete and organized expression.

Although they did not play a major role in the development of sexology—except perhaps as an opposing force—it is important to note that sexually conservative moral purity organizations (Sittlichkeitsvereine) were among the earliest sex reform groups, and were incredibly active in early twentieth-century Germany. Already by 1890, a national coordinating body, the General Conference of German Morality Organizations, had been established in Berlin.\(^\text{25}\) Interestingly, as was the case for progressive and radical sex reform movements, the main site of purity activism was Berlin.\(^\text{26}\) In the years before the First World War, organizations with titles such as the White Cross League and the Men’s Alliance for Combating Public Immorality proliferated. Many powerful morality movements were dominated by men, oftentimes Protestant ministers and other members of the educated bourgeoisie, even though men and women participated in the moral purity movement at a roughly equal rate.\(^\text{27}\) With their close ties to the Protestant and Catholic churches, moral purity organizations were formidable and influential champions of the patriarchal sexual status quo.\(^\text{28}\)

Purity organizations stressed the moral authority of the Christian church and its teachings in the face of various forms of sexual


\(^{28}\) Dickinson, “Men’s Christian Morality Movement,” 67. As Dickinson has observed, they were primarily influential among social and political conservatives; their influence widened after a series of public scandals around 1908 (87–90). It is also important to note that moral purity movements were often the subject of critique and satire, which Dickinson also helpfully chronicles (83–86).
“perversity” and degeneracy. As John Fout has observed, these organizations “countered the demand for sexual diversity with a pronounced emphasis on the centrality of heterosexual marriage and family.”

Moral purity groups insisted that sex was exclusively for procreation, and viewed marriage as a holy imperative. They also championed strict and separate gender roles. For them, maintaining male dominance and women’s sexual and social subordination was a critical goal. According to Fout, male-dominated purity organizations were particularly perturbed by what they perceived as “an implicit crisis in gender relations, primarily in the form of . . . eroding gender boundaries on the part of a large segment of the middle-class male population as well as part of the male working class.”

Around the turn of the century, the boundaries of gender were breached in a number of ways, including women’s growing numbers in the workforce, the rise and consolidation of women’s movements, and the growing opportunities for mixed-sex social interaction in cafés, dance halls, cinemas, and theaters. To counteract these changes, purity groups targeted youth and sought to inculcate teachings about “proper” gender roles. They promoted chastity and sexual self-discipline for young women and men alike.

Despite the influence of moral purity movements, “progressive modernity” was also “an undeniable feature of moral discourse in the German Empire,” as Andrew Lees has noted. Beginning in the 1890s, groups began to emerge that sought to fundamentally transform the way sex and sexuality were conceptualized, experienced, and governed in Germany. Many of these groups also sought to radically change relations between the sexes, and to promote women as independent sexual agents. In explicit opposition to moral purity groups, they combated the role of religion in shaping sexual life and turned to science instead. Because of their commitment to secular sexual change, these groups can collectively be described as progressive, though they differed in the kinds and degrees of change they sought.

30. Ibid., 391.
Of the groups that emerged during this time, three were especially significant for the history of sexology: the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, the German Society for the Fight against Venereal Diseases, and the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform. The Scientific Humanitarian Committee was formed in Berlin in 1897 by physician Magnus Hirschfeld, publisher Max Spohr, lawyer Eduard Oberg, and writer Franz Josef von Bülow. Its specific goal was the removal of Paragraph 175 from the German Criminal Code, which criminalized sex acts between men; its larger ambition was to fight for social recognition and toleration of gay men and, to a lesser degree, lesbians and gender minorities.

Meanwhile, the German Society for the Fight against Venereal Diseases was founded in Berlin in 1902 by physicians Alfred Blaschko and Albert Neisser. Its goal is fairly self-evident from its title: it aimed to serve as a central point of organization for individuals seeking to limit the spread of venereal diseases. The society brought together a number of prominent and learned individuals such as Neisser, the Breslau-based venereologist who discovered the bacteria responsible for gonorrheal infection. Perhaps because of the predominance of eminent physicians and scientists on its membership rosters, the society was rather successful, eventually winning grants from the Prussian and federal governments to support its work.

Finally, the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform was founded in Berlin in 1905 by an eclectic mix of feminists, physicians, artists, academics, and social reformers. As suggested by its name, the league was concerned with improving maternal welfare, particularly the welfare of unwed mothers. The league would undertake a number of practical activities toward this end, such as advancing petitions before various state ministers, creating homes for single mothers, and establishing sex and marriage advice counseling centers during the Weimar Republic. It also sought to fundamentally transform sexual norms and ethics, particularly those surrounding female sexuality.

Almost all of the female sexual theorists at the heart of this book belonged to, or were somehow involved in, at least one of these
organizations. Some of these women were instrumental in the establishment, organization, and leadership of these groups. German feminist and social democrat Henriette Fürth, for example, was deeply involved in the inner workings of the German Society for the Fight against Venereal Diseases.\(^\text{32}\) She and other women participated in the society’s meetings and contributed to its journals, where they fought alongside and against their male peers, particularly when it came to the question of the state regulation of prostitution and sexual education.\(^\text{33}\) To an even greater extent, radical feminists Ruth Bré and Helene Stöcker helped establish the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform, with Stöcker serving variously as the group’s president and secretary as well as the editor of its journal, *The New Generation*. Even in the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, an organization largely committed to the decriminalization of same-sex acts between men and the recognition and social toleration of male homosexuality, journalist Anna Rüling, Johanna Elberskirchen, and Helene Stöcker were all chairpersons.

Aside from women’s significant participation, what makes these groups important for the history of sexology is their deep investment in sexual scientific knowledge. These groups were populated by a diverse group of men and women who were united by their belief that, in the words of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee’s motto, science would lead to justice. Members of these groups, which at various times included now famous male sexologists like Magnus Hirschfeld, Iwan Bloch, Max Marcuse, Havelock Ellis, and even Sigmund Freud, adhered to shared ontological and epistemic beliefs—namely, that sex had a natural, material reality that preexisted and transcended human constructs; that this reality

\(^{32}\) See, for example, letters between Dr. Alfred Blaschko and Henriette Fürth in the Kollektion Fürth at the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis in Amsterdam (Folder 5).

\(^{33}\) See, for example, reports of the Congresses of the German Society for the Fight against Venereal Diseases from 1903 to 1911, entitled *Verhandlungen des [Ersten bis Achten] Jahresversammlung der Deutschen Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten* (Leipzig: Verlag von Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1911).
could only be accessed via scholarly and scientific methods; and that this knowledge had implications for personal enlightenment and emancipation, and for social order and governance. They even shared a broader belief that sexual science offered the means to both know and regenerate sex: that is, it had the potential to remake subjectivities, relations, and ethics in line with nature, and provide an objective basis for a just and happier world. The regenerative promise of sexual science lay in the fact that its findings sometimes fundamentally contradicted existing beliefs and values surrounding sex, sexuality, and gender. Scientific knowledge constituted a productive source of disruption, and a way of dispelling what its proponents believed to be outmoded beliefs about sexuality. It inspired the imaginations of self-consciously progressive reformers while providing an increasingly authoritative means of legitimizing their demands for reform.

To be clear, sex reformers were not merely appropriating sexual science to their ends. It is worth noting that many early programmatic articles regarding the purpose and goals of Sexualwissenschaft recognized the close connection between sexual knowledge and sexual politics, and that their authors were themselves members of sex reform groups at one time or another. These articles usually began with dissatisfied ruminations on the flawed state of sexual life, at the time most starkly represented by prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, the conditions facing unwed mothers and their children, and the social disparagement and criminal persecution of sexual minorities. This dissatisfaction often led to an insistence that scientific investigation was the only solution to the myriad problems causing sexual dissatisfaction and disease. According to Max Marcuse, one of the primary goals of research into the “Vita sexual” was to awaken people to the “necessity of far-reaching sexual reform.”

In his view, sexology could help secure emancipation from sexual need and danger; reform relations between the sexes, both inside and outside of marriage, making them happier, healthier, and honorable; and protect the state and

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society from a further increase of “unfit” and antisocial individuals while increasing the number of strong, capable, socially valuable offspring. Arguably, sexual science’s normativity served as a kind of regulative ideal. Many sexological texts contain within them visions of a better future, largely expressed in general and abstract terms, that constituted what could be described as “ends-in-view” that would inform a new, alternative sexual-social order.

Beyond epistemology and ideology, sex reform groups like the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, the Society for the Fight against Venereal Diseases, and the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform were strategically invested in sexual science. In addition to typically liberal political tactics such as presenting petitions to Parliament, these groups engaged sexual science as part of a sustained war of ideas they waged through their journals, lectures, and exhibitions. In their view, science provided true and objective support for their reform proposals, many of which were controversial by the standards of the time. By enlightening the public about the truths of sexual nature, they believed they could not only sway public opinion in their favor, but also influence individual behavior, and maybe even transform ethical and cultural beliefs and values around sex, gender, and sexuality. Because they believed that scientific revelations about sex would support and legitimate their struggles for reform and social improvement, sex reform groups produced, collected, and disseminated scientific knowledge on a remarkable range of topics concerning the psychology, biology, anthropology, and history of sex, gender, and sexuality. To this end, all three organizations published journals that featured cutting-edge sexual scientific work, new sexual theories, reviews of major works, and notices of upcoming talks: the Scientific Humanitarian Committee published the *Yearbook for Sexual Intermediaries*; the German Society for the Fight

35. Ibid., 3.
against Venereal Diseases produced the *Journal for the Fight against Venereal Diseases*; and the League for the Protection of Mothers published *The Protection of Mothers* and later *The New Generation*.

These journals constituted crucial sites for the creation, contestation, and circulation of scientific knowledge dealing with sex. In assuming the critical roles of collecting, curating, and circulating sexual knowledge, sex reform journals helped to build the sexological field. Importantly, these journals preceded the establishment of specialized sexual scientific journals like *Sexual Problems* (est. 1908) and the *Journal for Sexual Science* (est. 1908). As Magnus Hirschfeld himself noted in his 1908 article “Towards a Methodology of Sexual Science,” “The sexual scientific journals . . . have all proceeded from the publication organs dedicated to special questions.”

Sexology as a field was forged in large part within the public sphere, and involved actors, journals, ideas, and institutions beyond the limited realms of clinical research and medical practice. German sexology actually developed largely outside of academia and other institutionalized settings. No institutions for sexological research existed until 1919, when Hirschfeld opened the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin; likewise, specifically sexological professional societies did not emerge in Germany and Austria until 1913, with the creation of the Medical Society for Sexual Science and Eugenics. Sex reform organizations helped knit together sexual knowledge, sexual politics, and sexual ethics. The links they established between sexual reform and sexology would persist through the First World War and well into the 1920s.

**The Inextricability of Sexual Knowledge and Sexual Politics—and Its Gendered Consequences**

The fact that German sexology was a product of the public sphere rendered it porous, contentious, and profoundly unstable—at least before its stricter professionalization. In its early years, sexology

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was open to interventions from a range of actors, which in turn opened up the possibility of making new claims to expertise. The early twentieth century was a markedly polyvocal moment in the history of sexology: both women and men wrote texts that reported and interpreted theories and empirical data regarding sex and extrapolated their social and political implications. Participants in the field, men and women alike, broadly agreed on the importance of creating knowledge about sex rooted in secular scholarship, rather than theology, and on the criteria for adjudicating desirable, healthy sexual subjects. Moreover, they cited—and debated—one another in monographs, pamphlets, and journal articles. Iwan Bloch actually thanked Helene Stöcker and Rosa Mayreder in the acknowledgments of his *The Sexual Life of Our Time*, which clearly suggests that discussions and debates with these women informed the content of this influential work.\(^{39}\)

Sexology’s porousness should not be confused with openness, however: differently situated actors, particularly women, faced distinct challenges to their ability to participate in the field and have their authority recognized by their peers. Although men and women did not belong to fundamentally antagonistic and irreconcilable camps organized along gender lines, and despite the fact that they shared certain beliefs about science, implicitly agreed on the discursive “rules of the game” for participation in the sexological field, and worked together toward common political goals, men and women routinely disagreed on the interpretations and political implications of sexual science, particularly as it affected women’s agency and power relations between the sexes. Women had to contend with sexist and misogynist ideas about womanhood and female sexualities, as well as gendered hostility from their male colleagues.

Men and women also disagreed on the questions of who could know sex objectively, whose voices mattered, and what ought to be counted as science. Sexology as it took shape in the early twentieth century constituted a dynamic staging ground for gendered debates.

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\(^{39}\) Iwan Bloch, *Das Sexualeben unserer Zeit, in seiner Beziehungen zur modernen Kultur* (Berlin: Louis Marcus, 1908), vi.
over knowledge and power. Male sexologists clearly enjoyed structural advantages by virtue of their gender, class, and status that undoubtedly endowed their ideas with greater authority within the public sphere. For many men, women’s involvement presented a significant obstacle to the professionalization and institutionalization of the field. As male sexologists increasingly insisted on the objective, rational character of their work, they concomitantly dismissed the work of their female colleagues and interlocutors as too “emotional,” subjective, amateurish, and political.\textsuperscript{40} In fact, it was largely as a result of efforts to ensure the scientific status of sexology that the two branches of German sexology emerged.\textsuperscript{41} The different visions for sexology were ultimately organized through dueling professional societies. The Medical Society for Sexual Science and Eugenics, founded in 1913 by Magnus Hirschfeld, Iwan Bloch, Albert Eulenberg, and Hermann Rohleder, stressed sexual science’s role in “enlightening” the public and reshaping sexual laws and ethics. Conversely, the International Society for Sexual Research, founded by Max Marcuse, Albert Moll, and jurist Julius Wolff in 1914, pushed for a distinction between pure science and politics—even though some of its positions, such as Max Marcuse’s assertion that homosexuality was a sickness or congenital malformation, had definite political implications.\textsuperscript{42}

Although this division was ostensibly prompted by debates about the role of politics in scientific work, it was clearly also driven by gendered conflicts and biases. One of the main catalysts of the division in German sexology was the conflict between Max Marcuse and Helene Stöcker over what should be included in

\textsuperscript{40} See, for example, Max Marcuse, “Rundschau: Johanna Elberskirchen, Geschlechtsempfindung und Liebe,” \textit{Sexual-Probleme} 4 (1908): 153.

\textsuperscript{41} For a more detailed discussion of the two branches of German sexology—one that focuses primarily on the conflicts and rivalries between Magnus Hirschfeld and Albert Moll—see Volkmar Sigusch, \textit{Geschichte der Sexualwissenschaft} (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2008), 197–233.

the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform’s first journal, *The Protection of Mothers*. This conflict came to a head at the end of 1907, when *The Protection of Mothers* featured a notice from its publisher, Sauerländer, that stated that, as a result of a difference of opinion regarding the future content of the journal, the direction of the journal would be transferred from Helene Stöcker to Max Marcuse. Marcuse, the publishers insisted, would devote less attention to “abstract philosophical” and “literary aesthetic” themes, and would instead shine a critical light on the pressing questions of the day, above all by treating “special sexual political and sexual scientific questions.”43 (It should be noted that sexual scientific articles had featured prominently in *The Protection of Mothers* from its launch in 1905.) In the initial pages of *The Protection of Mothers* under Marcuse’s editorship, now published independently of the league and bearing the new title *Sexual Problems*, Marcuse declared, “The sexual question requires and enables a solution only through science (*Wissenschaft*).” Declaring himself “an enemy of all utopias,” Marcuse went on to state that the journal would fight against “naïve ideologues” in the pursuit of sexual “Realpolitik” that dealt with the problems of today, and that was based not on feelings but on experience and expert research.44 It is entirely unclear whether Marcuse orchestrated this editorial coup behind the scenes, or whether it was genuinely the result of the publisher’s discomfort, of which Marcuse was the opportunistic benefactor. Regardless, this development within the journal led to Marcuse’s expulsion from the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform after a special meeting of the General Assembly in December 1907.45

That this conflict of opinion between Stöcker and Marcuse was gendered beyond the identities of its protagonists is revealed by Marcuse’s comments in the wake of his break from the league. To preface these comments, it is worth noting here that Marcuse was

an adherent of the Prague-based Gestalt philosopher Christian von Ehrenfehls, who championed male heterosexual virility, declared that the highest goal of the healthy woman lay exclusively in motherhood (and a remarkably submissive version of motherhood at that), and insisted upon a strict hierarchical separation of sex roles. Throughout his time in the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform, Marcuse chafed against women’s leadership and disagreed with the league’s goal of achieving greater sexual freedom for women. In autobiographical material about Marcuse recently recovered by the sexologist Volkmar Sigusch, Marcuse stated that he sought to break with the league because, in Sigusch’s words, he “wanted to operate on the side of the strong and not feminine weaknesses.”

It is perhaps therefore not surprising that he subsequently allied himself with conservative sexual researchers and theorists like Albert Moll and Julius Wolff. Moreover, as Bernd Nowacki has noted, in the over 6,100 pages published by Sexual Problems between 1908 and 1915, the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform was only mentioned twice, amounting to a coverage of only six pages.

In one of these two mentions, Max Marcuse bemoaned the fact that the league was developing into a “special sect of the women’s movement,” and that women now constituted the majority of the league. The league was becoming feminized not only in its leadership, Marcuse insisted, but in a “deeper sense”:

> It is femininely weak, illogical, shrinks from its own consequences, is happy with half measures and satisfies itself with wishes that do not lead to results. It thinks itself revolutionary . . . and cannot free itself from biological false fundamental principles from the past . . . It raises protests in the name of morality and nature, makes demands on the state and society without thinking of the means of its realization,—it wants to help the socially outcast and moral degenerates, and knows no other advice but to lower itself to their level.

Marcuse’s comments regarding his erstwhile female and feminist colleagues, along with his mission statement for the new journal

47. Nowacki, Der Bund für Mutterschutz, 49.
48. Quoted in Nowacki, Der Bund für Mutterschutz, 49–50.
Sexual Problems, give us some sense of the difficulties women would face when trying to engage in the sexological field as it professionalized, specifically when their ideas, analyses, and arguments contradicted those advanced by their male peers. They show how easily women’s work could be dismissed as amateurish, based on feeling, too political, and insufficiently factual—even when women largely obeyed the same disciplinary protocols and generic rules as their male peers. Marcuse’s comments further reveal that the question of what exactly constituted legitimate sexual scientific knowledge was the site of intense contestation, one that involved politics, understandings of science, and gendered assumptions regarding who could create valuable and factual knowledge. Tellingly, aside from Stöcker’s membership in the Medical Society for Sexual Science and Eugenics, women were largely absent from the membership rosters of the first professional sexological societies and from the editorial boards of the first explicitly sexological journals.

It is important to remember that Marcuse did not speak for all sexologists at this time. Rather, his statements attune us to the fact that the exclusion of women from certain branches of the sexological field, particularly the branch that considered itself strictly and purely scientific, was a process that required work. While it is appropriate perhaps to speak of German “sexologies” after 1910, many of the texts discussed in the following chapters were written before this period, when battle lines were still being drawn. Moreover, the distinctions between the various camps were never absolute, and certain women were included within even the more conservative sexological circles, as long as their research was seen as strictly objective and appropriately scientific. This was the case, for example, with the gynecologist and eugenicist Dr. Agnes Bluhm, who was one of the few women involved in the highly conservative Society for Racial Hygiene founded in 1905, and invited by Marcuse to contribute some entries to his Encyclopedia of Sexual Science (1923–26). Mathilde Vaerting, Germany’s second female university professor, also proved an exception to the general rule, as her 1922 paper, “Physiological Origins of Intellectual

High Achievement by Man and Woman,” was published in the *Papers from the Field of Sexual Research*, a publication of the International Society for Sexual Research edited by Max Marcuse.⁵⁰

Lest one think that these particular women were included because of their professional credentials, and that the International Society was not being sexist but rather adhering to its commitment to rely on “expert knowledge,” it is worth noting that Albert Moll reached out to British socialist and supporter of gay rights, Edward Carpenter, inviting him to participate in the society.⁵¹ Carpenter, who eventually became a member of the society, lacked formal credentials.

Yet even when gendered assumptions and divisions between the sexes were at their sharpest and most pernicious, many women were unwilling to accept men’s authority and expertise, particularly regarding female sexuality, or to concede that sexual science was an exclusively male preserve. In spite of considerable challenges, German-speaking women produced sexual knowledge throughout the early twentieth century that reimagined the possibilities of sex, gender, and sexuality and highlighted the need for women’s sexual empowerment and thoroughgoing social transformation.

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⁵¹ See Moll to Carpenter, May 1914, Carpenter Collection, MS 386, Sheffield City Archives.