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Troubling Normal, Taking on Patriarchy

Criticizing Male (Hetero)Sexuality

On 16 February 1914, former president of the League of German Women's Associations, Marie Stritt, wrote a letter to Dr. Max Hirsch regarding his invitation to contribute to his new journal, the *Archive for Women's Studies (Frauenkunde) and Eugenics*. A pioneer in the fledgling field of *Frauenkunde*, which sought to comprehensively study Woman beyond gynecology,[1] Hirsch aimed to publish cutting-edge scientific research on all matters pertaining to women in order to establish objective—and, as suggested by his journal's title, eugenic—answers to the woman question that preoccupied many Europeans at the beginning of the twentieth century.

1. Hirsch viewed *Frauenkunde* as an "inter-disciplinary study combining the expertise of biologists, medical scientists and social scientists. But physicians and especially gynaecologists were meant to have the major responsibility in this enterprise, for they supervised all aspects of life from the cradle to old age." Paul Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 257.

In her letter, Stritt not only declined Hirsch's offer, but also called for the establishment of a new journal, the *Archive of Men's Studies* (*Archiv der Männerkunde*).[2] Such a journal, she asserted, would address the fact that while "much thought and talk have been dedicated to the subject of man as a species and concept . . . very little has been written about it and so far there has been no mention of an appropriate study and comprehensive science of man."[3]

Stritt was not alone in her desire for a comprehensive scientific treatment of masculinity, and above all male heterosexuality, that would shift the critical focus from Woman to Man. As moderate feminist leader Helene Lange lamented, "It is never the man, always the woman who is assumed to be the object of observation. Man is the human being par excellence. . . . He establishes the norm against which woman is measured."[4] In making men the "objects of observation," women hoped to create knowledge that could possibly undermine men's legally and socially sanctioned privileges, including in the sexual realm. After all, as Grete Meisel-Hess argued, "as we learn from every-day experience, man, far more often than women, is the primal source of the sorrows, disillusionments, and unending troubles of love."[5]

Such desires for transformative knowledge arguably stemmed from decades' worth of political frustration. Since the mid-nineteenth century, feminists in many European polities had advanced critical analyses of male sexual behavior ranging from the consumption of prostitution to marital rape. Although the aforementioned acts were deplored as immoral and undesirable, feminists nonetheless encountered resistance to their critiques and demands

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

3. Marie Stritt to Max Hirsch, 16.02.1914, Hirsch Nachlaß, Handschriftabteilung, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

4. Helene Lange, *Intellektuelle Grenzlinien zwischen Mann und Frau*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: W. Moeser Hofbuchdruckerei, n.d. [est. 1897]), 1.

5. Grete Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis: A Critique of Our Sexual Life*, trans. Eden Paul and Cedar Paul (New York: Critic and Guide, 1917), 291. Subsequent citations of this work appear parenthetically in the text.

for reform, in large part because men's behavior was naturalized and normalized through medical claims that men required regular sexual activity to maintain good health. In the nineteenth century this medicalized norm of male sexuality, along with that of passive female sexuality, helped underwrite the so-called double standard of sexual morality that differentially evaluated what constituted acceptable sexual behavior for men and women. The sexual double standard espoused and rationalized differential codes of sexual conduct for men and women. While tacitly condoning extramarital sexual behavior among men, it heavily penalized the same behavior among women.

By the turn of the century, however, a number of social, cultural, and economic factors converged to put pressure on prevailing norms of male sexuality and render masculinity and male sexuality objects of social concern. In particular, growing public anxiety regarding the spread of venereal diseases in expanding urban centers like Berlin shifted attention from female prostitutes to their male clientele as the primary vectors of disease. Men's sexual practices became linked to the degeneration of the body politic, and helped to frame male sexuality as racially threatening.

Emboldened by these developments, at the turn of the century some female sexual theorists began engaging science to challenge not only the sexual double standard, but also hegemonic forms of male sexuality. In so doing, they questioned the wisdom of using male sexuality as the basis for the rules of sexual governance. In this chapter, I examine critiques of masculinity and male sexuality from three by now familiar figures: Johanna Elberskirchen, Rosa Mayreder, and Grete Meisel-Hess. In their monographs, these authors drew upon evolutionary theories and even Freudian psychoanalysis to argue that men's existing sexual practices contravened and exceeded nature, with negative implications for the future of humanity. Elberskirchen went further and also referenced sexual biology and anthropological theories of a universal, primordial matriarchy to account for the origins of men's sexual behavior. The kinds of scientific evidence these theorists used had implications for the reforms they proposed to regulate and ameliorate male sexuality.

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

Women's sexological critiques of male sexuality emerged at a time when many middle-class social reformers, commentators, artists, and intellectuals feared that masculinity itself was in a state of crisis.[6] This sense of crisis was largely inspired by the perceived destabilization of middle-class masculinity. Over the course of the nineteenth century, an idealized norm of bourgeois masculinity had developed across Europe that was "at once self-assertive and self-controlled," defined by its "productivity, economic usefulness, self-discipline and moderation."[7] According to George Mosse, this "manly ideal" embodied modern society's "felt need for order and progress."[8] A corresponding feminine ideal, defined by passivity, greater emotional expressiveness, and nurturance, provided helpful contrast. However, by the 1890s, contemporaries increasingly believed that new political, economic, and cultural realities, ranging from feminism to the desegregation of the white-collar workforce to the rise of new, predominantly urban subjects such as the dandy, were threatening masculinity and patriarchal power itself.[9]

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6. On the "crisis of masculinity," see Peter Davies, "Introduction: 'Crisis' or 'Hegemony'? Approaches to Masculinity," in *Edinburgh German Yearbook*, vol. 2, *Masculinities in German Culture*, ed. Sarah Colvin and Peter Davies (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), 3–12; Gerald N. Izenberg, *Modernism and Masculinity: Mann, Wedekind, Kandinsky through World War I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 5, 7–9; Claudia Opitz-Belakhal, "'Krise der Männlichkeit'—ein nützliches Konzept der Geschlechtergeschichte?," *L'Homme* 19 (2008): 31–50.

7. Izenberg, *Modernism and Masculinity*, 6. Conditions in turn-of-the-century Britain offer an insightful parallel to those prevailing in Germany, and are helpfully illuminated in Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity, and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 19–23.

8. George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 77.

9. See Izenberg, *Modernism and Masculinity*, 7–9; Angus Maclaren, *Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1–2; Judith Allen, "Men Interminably in Crisis? Historians on Masculinity, Sexual Boundaries, and Manhood," *Radical History Review* 82 (Winter 2002): 200; Edward Ross Dickinson, "'A Dark, Impenetrable Wall of Complete

For many, the growing visibility of male homosexuality, dramatically signified by the scandalous trials of Oscar Wilde, provided the most troubling evidence of masculinity's decline. Conservative social commentators believed that these developments were not only undermining the martial masculinity required for imperial and domestic governance, but also precipitating the feminization of man and the coming of "sexual anarchy."[10] As Mosse observed, "The corruption of the purity and chastity of manhood stood for the sickness and dissolution of society."[11] The "sickness" of masculinity was a widespread preoccupation at the turn of the century, as physicians and social commentators noted increasing rates of nervousness—a trait usually associated with women—among men.[12]

The perceived failings of masculinity were fueled by and contributed to the pervasive discourse on degeneration. Though disease and vice, and health and virtue, had been coupled at least since the beginning of the 1800s,[13] by the end of the nineteenth century these associations coalesced into a medico-scientific and cultural discourse that acquired a name and a diagnostic framework, thanks to studies such as Bénédict Augustin Morel's *Physical, Intellectual, and Moral Traits of Degeneration in the Human Species* (1857), Cesare Lombroso's *Criminal Man* (1876), Ray Lankester's *Degeneration* (1880), and Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892).[14] Although the reception and deployment of degeneration discourses

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Incomprehension': The Impossibility of Heterosexual Love in Imperial Germany," *Central European History* 40 (2007): 487–490.

10. Fin-de-siècle anxieties surrounding sexual anarchy were also international at this time. For an exploration of conditions in the United States and United Kingdom, see Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990), 9–12. See also Andrew Smith's discussion of Max Nordau's analysis of fin-de-siècle masculinities as degenerative phenomenon, in *Victorian Demons*, especially his chapter entitled "Degeneration, Masculinity, Nationhood and the Gothic."

11. Mosse, *Image of Man*, 80.

12. Ibid., 83–85.

13. Ibid., 79.

14. For a discussion of why the period 1880–1914 is particularly important in understandings of degeneration, see Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-c. 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 20–21.

varied across national contexts, their popularity throughout western Europe fed off anxieties surrounding social, political, and economic instability.[15] Degeneration discourses treated forms of embodiment that indicated a "morbid deviation from an original type" as symptoms of decline and decay.[16] Particularly disconcerting to degeneration theorists was the supposed effeminacy and weakness of modern, urban, middle-class men.

Perhaps the most important catalyst inspiring critical investigations into male sexual behavior and norms of masculinity was the growing anxiety surrounding the spread of venereal diseases in major metropolitan centers at the turn of the century. Alfred Blaschko, a chairman of the German Society for the Fight against Venereal Diseases, estimated in 1892 that 10 percent of Berlin's population was syphilitic.[17] In 1900 he asserted that in Prussia, 3 out of every 1,000 people became sick with an infectious venereal disease daily; he further extrapolated that, out of a population of 56 million, 174,000 were infected with venereal diseases.[18] Meanwhile, Berlin gynecologist Ernst Bumm estimated that 20–30 percent of sterile marriages were due to gonorrheal infections.[19] Venereal diseases were held responsible for causing miscarriages, stillbirths, congenital illnesses, and sterility. They therefore threatened not only those infected, but also their offspring. Beyond their devastating health consequences, venereal diseases and their transmission were subjects of concern among social reformers on moral grounds.

15. Ibid., 7–10.

16. Bénédict Augustin Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine* (1857); quoted in Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, 9th ed. (London: William Heinemann, 1896), 16.

17. Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*, 174.

18. See Siegfried Borelli, Hermann-Joseph Vogt, and Michael Kreis, eds., *Geschichte der deutschen Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten* (Berlin: Blackwell, 1992), 25. See also Lutz Sauerteig, "'The Fatherland Is in Danger, Save the Fatherland!' Venereal Disease, Sexuality, and Gender in Imperial and Weimar Germany," in *Sex, Sin, and Suffering: Venereal Disease and European Society since 1870*, ed. Roger Davidson and Lesley A. Hall (London: Routledge, 2001), 76.

19. Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*, 174.

For many, the spread of venereal diseases like syphilis and gonorrhea symbolized the larger crisis of sexual morality they believed was afflicting society as a whole.[20] Even socialists viewed venereal disease metaphorically: in his widely influential text *Woman and Socialism*, leader of the Social Democratic Party August Bebel declared that venereal disease was the result of the repressive nature of the bourgeois family, and especially the suppression of women's sexuality.[21] In many ways, public concern with venereal diseases marked the extension of long-standing anxieties surrounding prostitution; however, preexisting anxieties were now amplified by new developments. Intensive urbanization, particularly in Germany, created greater awareness and visibility of the disease, while scientific advances in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century led to the discovery of the bacteriological origins of venereal disease.[22] Furthermore, increasing scientific and public interest in eugenics at the turn of the century drew attention to the role of syphilis and gonorrhea in causing hereditarily transmitted illnesses. Venereal diseases, alongside alcohol, were viewed as pernicious "racial poisons" that caused an array of pathological conditions that damaged "the quality of the nation's hereditary stock."[23]

Whereas female prostitutes had been the primary object of medico-scientific concern in the fight against venereal diseases during the ninenteenth century, in the early twentieth century attention shifted to men's role in spreading venereal disease throughout the broader population. Blaschko asserted in 1901 that for every 10,000 adult men (over the age of fifteen) in Berlin, 83 were in treatment for gonorrhea and 36 for syphilis.[24] In 1903, he maintained that two-thirds of all those suffering with venereal diseases

20. On this point, see Ann Taylor Allen, "Feminism, Venereal Disease, and the State in Germany, 1890–1918," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4 (July 1993): 27–50.

21. Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*, 94.

22. Albert Neisser identified *Gonococcus bacillus* as the cause of gonorrhea in 1879. F. Scahudinn and Erich Hoffmann pinpointed *Treponema pallidum* as the cause of syphilis in 1905.

23. Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*, 246.

24. Borelli, Vogt, and Kreis, *Geschichte der deutschen Gesellschaft*, 25.

were young men between the ages of twenty and thirty; indeed, he estimated that, on an annual basis, out of every 1,000 young men between twenty and thirty, almost 200 became infected with gonorrhea, and 24 with syphilis.[25] Growing scrutiny of male sexuality was consistent across northern Europe at the turn of the century, as Roger Davidson and Lesley A. Hall have noted.[26] Increasingly, normal male sexuality was represented as posing a pathological threat to the wider body politic. Contemporaneous literary works such as Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881) dramatized the physical and psychological suffering men inflicted via venereal disease not only upon their immediate victims, but also upon hereditarily tainted next generations. Such turn-of-the-century texts represented men who cavorted with prostitutes or other extramarital partners as poisoning their sexually naive wives and unborn children, thereby imperiling racial health and progress. Diverse commentators and activists began to suggest that putatively normal male sexuality was a problem for social and racial hygiene.

Critical attention to men's roles as vectors for the spread of venereal disease also helped expose contradictions within the bourgeois ideal of masculinity.[27] Specifically, it illuminated the conflict between man's self-discipline and his sexual instincts. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, middle-class masculinity was defined by its supposedly superior capacity for self-control and moderation, particularly over animalistic sexual desires. On the other hand, the normal man was also attributed with an instinctual need for regular sexual fulfillment that exceeded the needs of the normal woman. This latter assertion had served to legitimize prostitution as a necessary evil that prevented men from becoming "pests" to their wives. Yet given the apparent frequency with which men's sexual desires won out over their self-control—and the dangerous

25. Ibid., 21.

26. Roger Davidson and Lesley A. Hall, "Introduction," in Davidson and Hall, *Sex, Sin and Suffering*, 10.

27. In his reading of British self-help literature, Andrew Smith skillfully demonstrates how this tension was elemental to paradigms of middle-class masculinity since at least the mid-nineteenth century. See Smith, *Victorian Demons*, 19–23.

racial consequences of this capitulation—the tensions within the bourgeois masculine ideal were becoming increasingly clear.

Although the German state did not treat venereal disease as a matter of pressing regulatory or legislative concern until the outbreak of the First World War, between 1899 and 1914 civil society mobilized. Feminists were particularly active on this issue. For feminists, venereal diseases were disconcerting not only because of the threat they posed to public health, but also because of the dangers they posed to women, above all married women, who could be unknowingly infected by their husbands.[28] The German Abolitionist Federation, which opposed the state regulation of prostitution and was led by Anna Pappritz and Katharina Scheven, played a major role in publicizing the dangers of venereal disease infection. The activity of feminists like Pappritz and Scheven was also instrumental in shifting the focus away from prostitutes and onto average men as the loci of disease transmission. Here, they criticized men's privacy rights, including within the physician-patient relationship, that feminists claimed kept women ignorant of the risks of infection they faced. Furthermore, they sought to make women aware of the health risks they might incur upon marriage to men "with a past."

New organizations were also formed at this time specifically to try to halt the spread of venereal diseases. The First International Congress for the Fight against Venereal Diseases, held in Brussels on 19 September 1899, played a catalytic role in the formation of the German Society for the Fight against Venereal Diseases, established in 1902. According to its founding documents, the society's early goals included combating ignorance and shame by publicly discussing sexual dangers, eradicating prejudice toward people with venereal diseases through popular education, attempting to shape legislation that would help prevent and treat venereal diseases, and fighting against prostitution using "practical means."[29] Although its membership never exceeded 5,000 in the prewar

28. Ann Taylor Allen, "German Radical Feminism and Eugenics, 1900–1908," *German Studies Review* 11 (Feb. 1988): 44.

29. Borelli, Vogt, and Kreis, *Geschichte der deutschen Gesellschaft,* 19–21.

period,[30] the society's members included a number of high-profile figures and participants, such as the well-known medical reformers and esteemed scientists Alfred Blaschko and Albert Neisser, and leading feminists Henriette Fürth, Anna Pappritz, Katharina Scheven, Helene Stöcker, Anita Augspurg, Lida Gustava Heymann, Marie Stritt, and Rosa Mayreder. Although the society brought together a diverse group of men and women who shared a concern with venereal diseases and how to prevent them, it also served as a site of conflict among these actors regarding effective and just solutions to this problem.

The conflicts within the society regarding the regulation of venereal diseases were a microcosm of broader social struggles concerning the governance of male sexuality. Despite increasing critical attention devoted to male sexual behavior and its social effects, many male medical experts remained reluctant to advocate measures to discipline male sexuality. While anti–venereal disease activists of all stripes broadly agreed upon the desirability of certain social hygienic measures such as sexual education, treatment clinics, and legally mandated premarital health examinations, the treatment of male sexuality within anti-VD programs consistently provoked conflict.[31] Most men within the German Society for the Fight against Venereal Diseases continued to support the state regulation of prostitution, much to the consternation of their feminist colleagues, and even sought the transfer of regulatory authority from the police to public health officials.[32] They also promoted a

30. Ibid., 28.

31. For contemporary feminist examples of such demands, see Lida Gustava Heymann, "III. Kongreß der deutschen Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten," *Der Abolitionist* 3 (1904): 65–66; Maria Lischnewska, "Die geschlechtliche Belehrung der Kinder," *Mutterschutz* 1 (1905): 137–170; Henriette Fürth, "Der Aufklärungsunterricht: Ein Beitrag zur Sexualpädagogik," *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 12 (1908): 243–246; and Fürth, "Sexualpädagogik und Sexualethik," *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 12 (1908): 564–568. See also the Bund für Mutterschutz's 1906 petition to the Reichstag, "Einführung der geschlechtlichen Belehrung in den Schulunterricht," Folders 3.1 Frauenbewegung, 3.1.1 Bund für Mutterschutz, 29; Thesen, Aufrufe, Flugblätter, Petitionen und Veröffentlichungen des BfM, Schreiber Nachlass, Bundesarchiv Koblenz.

32. Allen, "Feminism, Venereal Disease, and the State in Germany," 32.

range of other measures that would safeguard the health of male clients and effectively preserve the sexual status quo, such as the distribution of prophylactics and the use of pharmaceutical treatments for venereal disease such as Salvarsan, which entered clinical use in 1910 and proved more effective than existing treatments involving mercury salts.[33] Conversely, women sexologists and feminists insisted upon new standards of sexual morality and new modes of sexual governance that would empower women to regulate male sexuality, including marriage certificates that attested to the health of marital partners[34] and, later, criminalization of venereal disease transmission.[35] In the view of many feminists, laws seeking to regulate sexual conduct should affect men and women equally.

Male scientists within and beyond the society rationalized their position by arguing that male sexual traits and behavior were products of evolutionary instinct and sexual physiology. They claimed that men possessed an aggressive, powerful sexual instinct that sought to satisfy their innate sexual needs. In Richard von Krafft-Ebing's view, a man's sexuality was guided by "a powerful natural drive" that made him "aggressive and stormy in his love-play."[36] At times this aggressive instinct could be so overpowering that it overwhelmed a man's attempts at resistance and self-discipline and even lead to sexual violence. Krafft-Ebing went as far as to claim that sadism was merely "a pathological exaggeration of the male sexual character."[37] Male scientists further asserted that the

33. For further details on the debate among feminists and male physicians regarding male and female sexuality and their appropriate regulation, see Dickinson, "'A Dark, Impenetrable Wall.'"

34. See Adele Schreiber, "Die Anfang neuer Sittlichkeitsbegriffe in Hinblick auf die Mutterschaft," in *Mutterschaft: Ein Sammelwerk für die Problems des Weibes als Mutter*, ed. Adele Schreiber (Munich: Langen, 1912), 163–188, as an example of feminists' advocacy of marriage certificates.

35. Norway and Denmark passed such laws in 1860 and 1906, respectively, which legally required both men and women to submit to treatment and penalty for knowingly exposing others to infection. The Norwegian law included a penalty of up to three years in prison for this offense. See Allen, "Feminism, Venereal Disease, and the State in Germany," 42.

36. Dickinson, "'A Dark Impenetrable Wall,'" 472.

37. Ibid., 476.

strength and aggression of male sexuality necessarily exceeded the boundaries of monogamy. In a curious turn of phrase, psychiatrist Paul Näcke claimed that men were "by nature polygamous and inclined to sexual 'snacking.'"[38]

Within their analyses of male sexuality, these male sexual scientists asserted that their observations were neutral, and that they arrived at their conclusions through objective study. They insisted that because male sexuality was a product of nature, it should be subject to neither moral censure nor social regulation. However, women sexologists developed their own analyses to refute such contentions, and to further argue that, for the good of men, women, and the future of the race, male sexuality ought to be subordinated to what they argued were the more altruistic impulses of female sexuality. They drew upon scientific evidence to prove that their arguments and solutions were justified not only by social needs, but also by biological realities.

Discerning the True Nature of Male Sexuality

In order to understand masculinity, female sexual theorists probed the evolution and psychology of male sexuality, drawing attention to its innate qualities and how they informed a man's total personality. They further probed how male sexuality impacted relations between the sexes, and the very constitution of the social order.

Rosa Mayreder insisted that masculinity and male sexuality must be considered in light of historical developments, specifically the rise of civilization and its effects on sexual roles and relations. Here she developed an evolutionary framework that treated gender as plastic and as fundamentally tied to and shaped by cultural and sociopolitical changes. According to Mayreder, "The conception of masculinity in modern society rules like an ancient idol which is still publicly worshipped and served with prescribed sacrifices, although it has long ceased to work miracles. The ideas connected with this are made up of remnants of bygone ages and survivals

38. Ibid., 474.

of relationships."[39] These "remnants" are the two types of masculinity that Mayreder maintained have been in conflict with one another since the earliest days of civilization: namely, primitive masculinity, "which is based on the utmost development of physical faculties," and what Mayreder calls "differentiated masculinity," which is "directed to the development and the increase of the intellectual faculties" (94). This conflict between "the power arising from physical superiority" and "the power arising from intellectual superiority" has long "struggl[ed] for mastery within the male sex itself," and found its oldest cultural representations in the contrast between the warrior and the priest (94).

Although Mayreder believed that turn-of-the-century masculinity was profoundly "differentiated," she nonetheless acknowledged that the further evolution of masculinity into what she viewed as a higher, more intellectually and spiritually elevated form was inhibited by the persistence of primitive masculinity. Part of this persistence, she suggested, stemmed from biology: "The warlike element in masculine nature has its origin in neuro-muscular activity. In general the male sex is brave and aggressive on account of its muscular strength, while the female sex is timid and passive because of its muscular weakness" (99). In any event, vestigial primitive masculinity inculcated a state of mind that prevented men from fully embracing their differentiated nature. Mayreder described modern man as "suffer[ing] through his intellectuality as from an illness" (108). Modern man continually sought to cling to his "primitive" strength; consequently, Mayreder claimed, "this fear of appearing unmanly, or displaying any lack of that virility attributed to the primitive ideal of the sex, serves to maintain all the preposterous atavistic prejudices, all the senseless, incompatible tendencies of which the life of the modern man is so full" (109).

This struggle was particularly true in the sexual realm. It was within the sexual realm that the conflict between men's "primitive" and "differentiated" natures was most starkly realized. According

39. Rosa Mayreder, *A Survey of the Woman Problem*, trans. Herman Scheffauer (London: Heinemann, 1913), 91. Subsequent citations of this work appear parenthetically in the text.

to Mayreder, "Civilisation makes demands on him which are at variance with his teleological nature as a male. It is the teleology of his primitive sexual instincts that determines the intractability of the impulse which asserts itself beyond all restraint in the individual soul, and shapes the personality towards its own ends" (115). The development of men's intellect does not curb or kill this "primitive instinct"; rather, Mayreder argued, "when the masculine intellect, having developed itself in the direction of abstract study and grown out of proportion by force of 'specialising' in one particular field, incurs the danger of disturbing the relation of the individual to the totality of life, then the masculine temperament disturbs its equilibrium still more by dividing the individual into a spiritual being . . . and an animal being, degraded to the lowest level of sexual existence" (116). Mayreder declared that the current arrangements of sexual life reveal that "the sexual instinct is the most dangerous enemy to self-mastery in a man. In seducing the individual into sinking below the level of his personality, it assumes the aspect of an irresistible force and destroys the consciousness of that inner liberty which springs out of the ability of the higher impulses of the will to resist the lower" (119).

Mayreder tied primitive masculinity to the sexual instincts of a male type she called the masterful lover or masterful man, a kind of man "who will have nothing in common with women, who will not suffer her to enjoy the same rights as himself" (194).[40] The masterful man was the purveyor of what she characterized as an erotic of the "strong fist," which depended not only upon aggression and violence but also upon the subordination and sexual objectification of women to achieve sexual satisfaction. In Mayreder's words, "The sexual relationship for the masterful man is bound up with the idea that woman is a lower order of being, essentially different from man but created for his purposes. The sexual relationship ministers to his sense of superiority—it gives him the sensation

40. To be clear, when Mayreder used the term "masterful" to describe this kind of man as lover, she—or rather, her translator—meant to suggest a domineering attitude toward sex. In the original text, Mayreder uses the phrases "Männer der herrischen Erotik" and "herrische Männlichkeit"; Rosa Mayreder, *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit* (Jena: Eugen Diedrichs, 1905), 211.

of power and possession" (194–195). According to Mayreder, an "element of the cruel is latent always in the masterful lover, and it discloses itself in the craving to make the woman feel the weight of the strong hand"; she insisted that when this cruelty "becomes connected with morbid instincts," it shades into sadism (216). For Mayreder, the apotheosis of the masterful man in modern life was the man who beat his wife (195).

True erotic pleasure for masterful men derived from their sense of power over women and the associated belief that they could conquer every female being if and when they wanted (201). This is why masterful men highly esteemed virginity and the sexually restrained woman: "He cherishes the idea that the woman offers herself up as a sacrifice" (197). This pleasure stemmed from a pernicious, misogynistic view of women: as Mayreder observed, "According to the masterful man, a weak, inferior creature, without individuality—such as the woman of his conception—can have no control over herself; she is bound to succumb to temptation once she comes under the power of a masculine will" (199).

For Mayreder, contemporary gender dysfunctions emerged precisely from the sexual inclinations of the masterful man: "It may be said . . . that the position of the female sex in life is established in accordance with the sexual instincts of the domineering type of man" (195). In her view, masterful men's sexuality produced a "state of terrorism" that bore "most hardly upon the higher order of cultured women" by turning a blind eye to "the existence of any other kind of woman than that of which he has need," and treating "all women [as] of a piece . . ., scarcely distinguishable one from another" (199). He therefore "prefers to designate as pathological anomalies all aspects of womanliness that do not accord with it. A woman who seeks independence, a woman of strongly-marked individuality, is in his eyes either a neurotic or else a mass of affection; and he always detects the influence of a man in anything that a woman happens to achieve in the field of the intellect" (200). It was the masterful man who conceived "love as a battle" (207). Moreover, Mayreder saw the masterful type of man and his sexuality as dangerous because he applied the strong fist not just to the female, but to all life phenomena: "The 'strong hand' which they use

toward women they use in all the contingencies of life. They ride rough-shod over the world as well as over their wives, and they sacrifice their weaker fellow-men to their own ends" (196). Man's single-minded sexual selfishness and aggression thus extended itself beyond the bedroom, and may help explain man's lust for sociopolitical power and control. Although Mayreder conceded that "masterful" sexuality may have served an evolutionary purpose at an earlier moment of development—"the illusion of superiority," she suggested, may be "seen to be a device of Nature for providing the man with the necessary aggressive self-confidence required for his sexual conquest"—such behavior was reflective of a "primitive order of life in which the individual is rather a propagative unit than a personality" (203). On the "higher planes of life," such behavior appears "very ridiculous" (204).

Mayreder was not alone in viewing prevailing impulses of male sexuality as "primitive," or in arguing that men's sexual characteristics directed their actions beyond the bedroom: writers like Grete Meisel-Hess and Johanna Elberskirchen also believed that men's sexuality shaped their entire personality. Meisel-Hess adopted a psychological approach to male sexuality that endeavored to analyze the relationship between modern man's mind, drives, and cultural environment; as we will see, it drew upon and redeployed psychoanalytic concepts. In Meisel-Hess's view, the "strongest impulse of [man's] own nature [is] the impulse to the discharge of sexual tensions" (*Sexual Crisis*, 292). With respect to their sexuality men were like children: like children, men were "remarkabl[y] susceptib[le] . . . to the influence of suggestion," were "endowed with a considerable element of childish greed, the greed of acquirement, the greed of possession, so long as [their] desire is resisted," and shared "the impulse to spoil or to throw away [their] new possession when its first freshness has worn off, and when the novelty of ownership has begun to stale" (291). In her view, modern men suffer from a "peculiar form of sexual dependence," namely, upon "some special fetich": "In almost all men . . . erotic sensibilities can be aroused only by some peculiar shade of sensation" (287). Whereas Mayreder viewed male sexuality as tending toward sadism, Meisel-Hess believed it was more inclined toward a kind of

spiritual masochism, evidenced in men's predilection for women who were "masterful" and "frigid" (298). "Man now seeks a severe mistress, one whose domination he will be unable to escape," she maintained (299). These women offered to men a kind of "security imposed by the proximity of strong and severe natures"—and even "by a subflavor of suggestion . . . the ideas of a mother, the sort of mother that everyone would like to have had, strong, and leading onwards" (299). Meisel-Hess's claim that men seek out a mother figure, unbeknownst to their conscious selves, reveals her familiarity with and manipulation of emerging psychoanalytic themes.

In agreement with Mayreder, Meisel-Hess observed that, as a consequence of the peculiarities of modern male sexuality, men were unable to appreciate women as personalities, and instead viewed them as belonging to a singular type: "Numerous indeed are the men who lack the very beginnings of the power to understand the individuality of women of the higher type; and rarer still are those competent to understand such women to the full, and therewith truly to enjoy them" (301). Men use and abandon women "of noble and self-sacrificing type" (292); for this reason, Meisel-Hess argued that "the so-called new women"—like herself—were the greatest victims of current conditions: "The tragedy of their lives is that they have been born too soon" (301). Meisel-Hess maintained that whereas "frigid women readily attain to marriage and to procreation," "healthier and more ardent women, those who give themselves freely and are therefore more genuinely woman, rarely succeed . . . in effecting permanent sexual associations with such men as predominate to-day" (294). For this reason, Meisel-Hess suggested that women may be better off channeling their impulses of "self-surrender" into "channels of friendship, philanthropy, and even love of pets"; in her view, "it is better to bestow this kind of tenderness upon a favorite cat or a lap-dog than to bestow it without limit upon a man" (292).

From the perspective of these writers, men seemed innately and single-mindedly interested and invested in the pursuit of their own perverse sexual satisfaction. In her assessment of the overweening importance of sex for men, Johanna Elberskirchen reversed Otto

Weininger's claim that women were nothing more than sex by asserting that sex constituted the first and deepest point of life for men. In her words, "Sexual life in its most repulsive, sickest form was the first and deepest meaning of life for men, God Priapos their highest deity!"[41] Elberskirchen even refused to characterize male sexuality as bestial because "the animal does not know sexual degeneration" (87). Based on her understanding of male heterosexuality as below bestial, in *Revolution!* Elberskirchen elaborated a grand narrative that held male sexuality directly and brutally responsible for women's subordination. Elberskirchen drew upon anthropological claims of a universally prevalent primordial matriarchate and evolutional theories to assert that men's self-serving sexuality led them to usurp women's rightful roles as centers of the social order and regulators of sexual life.[42] Based on her reading of scientific writings by Darwin, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, and Oscar Hertwig, as well as the anthropological studies of J. J. Bachofen and Friedrich Engels, Elberskirchen argued that women's social subordination and sexual disempowerment were caused by the fall of the matriarchy and the rise of patriarchal civilization based on private property and individual rather than collective enrichment. According to Elberskirchen, women could not equally compete within or participate in systems based on individual accumulation because of the demands of pregnancy and childcare. Women's material dependency in turn enabled men to sexually dominate women and force women to service their excessive sexual lust. In Elberskirchen's words, "With the overthrow of matriarchy, the emergence of private property and of slavery, and with the onset of the degeneration of the man's sexual instinct, the woman fell into

41. Johanna Elberskirchen, *Was hat der Mann aus Weib, Kind und sich gemacht? Revolution und Erlösung des Weibes: Eine Abrechnung mit dem Mann—ein Wegweiser in die Zukunft!* 3rd ed. (N.p: Magazin-Verlag, 1904), 87. Subsequent citations of this work appear parenthetically in the text.

42. On the popularity of matriarchal theories at this time, see Ann Taylor Allen, "Feminism, Social Science, and the Meanings of Modernity: The Debate on the Origins of the Family in Europe and the United States, 1860–1914," *American Historical Review* 104 (October 1999): 1085–1113.

the sexual servitude of man. The woman was unfree, a servant, a slave" (73, 75, 77).

Men's domination of women, sexually and materially, led men's sexual instincts to become decadent, as men could force women to fulfill their sexual desires out of proportion with their sexual needs. Consequently, she asserted, men's sex drive had become unnaturally aroused, in turn requiring an unnatural satisfaction (76). As she put it, "The sex drive of the man became unnaturally aroused and required an unnatural, over-natural satisfaction. The man could achieve this satisfaction: the female was in his economic power, at least under his economic supreme authority, and not he, but rather the female, had to carry the physiological consequences of this satisfaction, the child!" (76). The unrestricted possibility of sex also caused men to lose sight of what constituted real sexual needs, and to confuse their decadent standard with a healthy one. For Elberskirchen, then, men's seizure of social and political power was bound up with their sexual desires and instincts. She implied that it was man's innate sexual selfishness, which permeated his entire being, which drove him both to accumulate private property and to sexually dominate women. Male sexuality and material dependence were represented as the interconnected causes of women's downfall.

Elberskirchen further argued that women's evolution had been hampered by patriarchal modes of sexual governance, which placed men unnaturally in charge of sexual selection. Here she drew upon Darwin's theory of sexual selection, as outlined in *The Descent of Man* (1871). Darwinian sexual selection postulated that within the mating process, males and females play distinctive yet equally important roles. Significantly for women like Elberskirchen, the theory asserted that although males were responsible for wooing the female and fighting off competitors, females exercised the final decision over mate selection. Moreover, sexual selection theory held that mate selection was based upon criteria that would contribute to the improvement of the species.

According to Elberskirchen, much in line with the principles of private property ownership, men exercised sexual selection not in the interests of racial advancement, but rather according to their

own individual inclinations. Men selected women who would satisfy their sexual desires, expressing a marked preference for subservient, passive, and superficially beautiful women. Such women, Elberskirchen asserted, were "best designed to serve the degenerate sexual lust of man—[they were] without will and without the capacity to resist." With such a prevailing standard of sexual selection, Elberskirchen maintained that men could hereditarily perpetuate women's biological and psychological inferiority in order to maintain unequal relations between men and women (*Revolution*, 79–80). In her view, men had transformed woman via perverse selective practices into a sexual object, "a sad and sadness-arousing torso of human strength and beauty" (88). Importantly, Elberskirchen was not alone in lamenting the evolutionary and eugenic consequences of male sexual degeneration. Grete Meisel-Hess similarly asserted that men's "blunted [sexual] senses" not only rendered them "insufficiently stimulated in a union with his most favorable biological complement," but also ensured that they found "such a union tedious" (*Sexual Crisis*, 287).

Female sexual theorists' analyses of male sexuality offer a damning view of male sexuality and masculinity. They further suggest that women's prospects for equality and fulfillment within heterosexuality were bleak. Some theorists argued that modern male sexuality was incapable of intimacy, and had destroyed the grounds of understanding between men and women. Marking the gulf between female and male sexuality at this particular moment in time, Meisel-Hess pointedly observed, "It happens in our day the regeneration of one sex is coincident with the manifest degeneration of the other" (301). According to Meisel-Hess, the men of her generation were unable to initiate, sustain, or even recognize loving relationships with "ardent," healthy women. Men's inability to love, as well as their dependence upon sexual fetishes for the attainment of sexual enjoyment, were, she maintained, "common characteristic phenomen[a] of our time [that are] pathological in character, the outcome of a disease to which Professor Freud of Vienna has given the name of *sexual neurosis* (also *sexual psycho-neurosis* or *sexual compulsion-neurosis*)" (153; emphasis in original). This neurosis, she asserted, is characterized by the presence of "physical

sexual tension, to the degree of ardent desire," alongside "psychic inadequacy for its discharge" (154). Following Freud again, she claimed that another characteristic of the "sexual compulsion neurosis" was the "exaggerated conscientiousness of the sufferers," which prevented them from acting on their sexual impulse and instead transformed them into "sexual cripples" and "masculine *demi-vierges*" (154–155). According to Meisel-Hess, male "sexual cripples are to-day in the majority"; she evocatively diagnosed them as "remain[ing] susceptible to stimuli and yet are dead within." Referencing Ibsen's *Ghosts*, she described their souls as "worm-eaten" (155). Meisel-Hess further argued that men's sexual neurosis helped create the "dread of woman" that she perceived as "so characteristic of contemporary males." "From the sexual excitement produced by woman arises," she declared, "the conflict which is the very essence of this disease" (154). The fundamental problem was that men want to have sex with women, but feared becoming entangled with them, particularly women who may be their equals. Quoting herself from an earlier text, she argued that modern men were

> unable to surmount the ultimate obstacles between I and Thou. . . . Their amatory intimacies are never fully consummated. They get through the preliminaries of love and the first preludes; but that which comes afterwards, the most beautiful and also the most difficult part, remains unenjoyed, unmastered, unconsummated. I am not referring here to what is ordinarily termed impotence. This sentimental impotence has nothing to do with mere physical weakness, but is far more disastrous, since it forever debars those affected with it from an entry into the deepest experiences of love. (155)

Meisel-Hess concluded that men's pathological inability to love, particularly to love women who may be their equals, predisposed her male contemporaries to vacillate between the extremes of sexual renunciation and sexual excess.

According to female sexual theorists such as Elberskirchen, Mayreder, and Meisel-Hess, men's degenerated sexuality had transformed heterosexuality into a toxic institution. As Edward Ross Dickinson has observed, by positing fundamental differences between male and female sexuality, women writers like these three,

alongside many of their male sexual scientific counterparts, suggested a fundamental incommensurability between modern men and women.[43] Elberskirchen and Meisel-Hess further maintained that men's pathological sexuality had broader consequences beyond the possibilities of individual heterosexual intimacies, and implicated the fate of humanity. In light of such conclusions, what kinds of reforms were possible?

Competing Visions of Sexual Reform: Equality, Matriarchy, Asexuality

Despite sharing a dim view of male sexuality, women sexologists advanced different visions for the reform of sexual life. Mayreder and Meisel-Hess believed that male sexuality could be remade and improved by creating conditions of greater equality in social and sexual life via changes to law and sexual ethics. Conversely, Elberskirchen insisted that, given the innate incommensurability between male and female sexuality and the degenerative effects of male sexuality, radical change was needed that would return women to the center of social and sexual life. Their divergent attitudes toward sexual reform can in part be explained by the kinds of scientific ideas and evidence they invoked.

For Mayreder and Meisel-Hess, the reform of male sexuality—and heterosexuality itself—was possible, but depended upon profound social reforms and a transformation of gender ideologies. They insisted that true love and partnership, both social and sexual, were possible only when conditions of equality existed between the sexes. As part of this equality, they demanded that men begin to recognize women as individuals with different, fully developed personalities and dreams and life goals of their own. Part of the reason that Mayreder and Meisel-Hess were optimistic about the prospects of reforming male sexuality lay in the fact that they believed that male and female sexualities and subjectivities were the products of evolution and its mechanisms, such as sexual selection.

43. On this point, see Dickinson, "'A Dark Impenetrable Wall.'"

Importantly, evolutionary theory does not relate a linear narrative of either progress or decline: rather, it is premised upon the possibility of change and adaptation.[44] As Rosa Mayreder asked of her fellow feminists, "Inasmuch as sexuality has, during the evolution of civilisation, become sublimated into love, why should a biological change, destined to influence still further the psychosexual disposition of the sexes, be regarded as a mere Utopian assumption?" (*Survey of the Woman Problem*, 221).

Mayreder for one was confident that "the increasing intellectualisation of humanity," which she believed characterized the trajectory of Western civilization, would eventually produce a better kind of man. For her, part of the problem with contemporary manhood was that men were living in a time of evolutionary change and transition, one that exacerbated the strain between their "primitive" instincts and their strivings for progress. The tensions in the male condition were further highlighted by the fact that, thanks in part to the feminist movement, women's roles were changing and becoming more "like men." Mayreder insisted that contemporary life showed "how liable to modification are the characteristics which we are inclined to label once and for all as masculine or feminine" (105). The solution to the problem of male sexuality lay for Mayreder in men's full embrace of the trajectory of evolution. Men must embrace the evolution of their being toward the "differentiated" model of masculinity, and allow their intellectual refinement to "extend to the sexual side of [their] nature." "To be reborn in a new masculinity," Mayreder declared, men "must do away with all the prejudices and weaknesses which belong to the primitive manhood, retaining only those elements which are inseparable from [their] nature as [men]" (123).

Mayreder believed that men would only be able to fully embrace their differentiated masculinity and triumph over the "temptations of sex" through a "higher determination of the will," which would

44. For this reason, present-day feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz continue to view evolutionary theory as a serviceable narrative for feminists. See Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 13–53.

prevail if "the conditions of the individual's life [were] favorable." However, she pointed out that modern life was characterized by conditions that everywhere "expose [men] and the claims of [their] sexuality to the worst conditions," which ensured that "debasement is unavoidable from the moment that personality and sexual impulse are in conflict" (121). The conditions producing this conflict stemmed from what Mayreder saw as the unnatural channeling of sex life into either marriage or prostitution. Upholding marriage as the only legitimate outlet for sexuality means that boys are improperly educated not only about sexuality but also about love: "At the age when their organism is beginning to tremble under the shocks of approaching manhood, they are treated like sexless machines, condemned to the tedium of dull lessons and the unwholesomeness of a sedentary life. . . . They are thus in their most impressionable years allowed to blunt their sensibility . . . and to become deaf to the warnings of Nature" (120). Mayreder maintained that this insufficient education virtually ensured that young men would become inhibited from realizing "the right to love during the very period in which Nature most strongly urges it" (117). Consequently, she observed, young men were "condemn[ed] . . . in the prime of [their] youth to have sexual relations with the lowest order of woman—those who earn their livelihood by prostitution" (117). Notably, Mayreder did not deny here that men may have instinctive sexual urges, but believed they must be trained and properly channeled to reflect and correlate with the current state of civilization. Moreover, male sexuality must be directed toward appropriate gender *and class* objects.

Clearly, in Mayreder's view a new sexual-ethical order was required, one that was more in touch with the realities of evolution. Although Mayreder did not explicitly call for recognition of free-love unions as Meisel-Hess did by championing "erotic friendships" (discussed further in chapter 5), she did believe that the two conflicting sides of men's nature could be reconciled through love. Love could serve as the bridge between the mind and the body, and could help men gain mastery over their sexual impulse, for "love permits of the sexual relation being transfused with a content of personality" (117). Mayreder defined love as "the emotion which

permits of the fulfilling of the task of generation in a spirit of self-respect, as distinguished from lust, which is limited to a purely physical desire for sexual intercourse" (208). A precondition of love, in her view, was "[a] real communication of souls between individuals of opposite sex"—a skill only possible in the present between women and men who had attained "a high development in the sphere of psycho-sexuality" (208). The "man with a genius for love," Mayreder maintained, was able to treat women "with intuitive understanding," and was "capable of completely assimilating himself with them" (209). He did not experience sexual and loving intimacy with women as a kind of loss of either personal integrity or self-respect, but rather as a form of spiritual enrichment. Moreover, he was capable of union with a woman who was a fully realized, complex, and individual personality, and was not merely a projection of his own "domineering" erotic tastes. Between these two equals, Mayreder noted, bonds of "unextinguishable friendship" were forged that did "not end when the phase of rapture has passed" (210). Ultimately, in Mayreder's view this "unextinguishable friendship" between two equal personalities, accomplished through the subordination of lust to love, the intellectual domination of sexual impulses, the eradication of fantastical projections of gender norms, and the full inclusion of women in public life, would provide the foundation for the regeneration of heterosexuality.

Mayreder maintained that women, currently men's sexual and ethical superiors, could serve not only as models toward which men could aspire, but also uplifting influences on masculinity and male sexuality. According to her, the consequence of centuries of demanding sexual purity and monogamic loyalty from women meant that they had developed a superior sexual consciousness and self-mastery that made them well equipped to regulate sexual life. "Whether or not sexuality bears a different ratio to the totality of a woman's nature, or whether the sexual differentiation be only the outcome of the demands on women made by men," she asserted, "certain it is that woman's strenuous striving after sexual purity and her exclusive self-surrender to the one man of her choice have resulted in the refining and ennobling of sexual consciousness among women. The heroism of self-mastery which women display

in thus insisting upon the sexual integrity of the personality is a form of superiority which cannot but make itself felt as soon as the recognized restrictions of their social position shall have been done away with. It already places them above the newer form of manhood" (122–123). Mayreder suggested that women's greater involvement in public life "as a social fellow-worker" might help to achieve a change in sexual life, "that field where one-sided masculine civilisation has failed" (123). On this basis, she confidently asserted that "the part taken by women in modern ideals of culture, in the liberation of the individual for the purpose of his unfettered spiritual development, in the battle for the rights of a free personality, will not, in the long run, pass without leaving its definite stamp upon the organisation of society" (222).

Like Mayreder, Grete Meisel-Hess believed that male sexuality was malleable. Throughout her discussions of male sexuality, she was careful to qualify that her comments pertained to men of "today," or to "modern men." According to Meisel-Hess, "the sensual impotence of our contemporaries, their incapacity to react to stimuli, their 'love-loathing,' are the outcome of the corruption and weakening of their physical energies, of their deficient powers of nervous resistance, and their general confusion of mind" (*Sexual Crisis*, 152). "Cerebral" and physical "exhaustion," as well as nervous conditions such as neurasthenia, were major contributing factors to the degeneration of male sexuality. To this end, many of the problems of male sexuality stemmed from the conditions of modern life: in Meisel-Hess's view, "The struggle for existence, whose intensity in modern social life exceeds all normal dimensions, renders the evil acute" (152). Taking an evolutionary and eugenic perspective, she also maintained that the problems of modern manhood were the cumulative consequence of "the impairment of the selective process"—that is, faulty sexual selection. Like Elberskirchen, Meisel-Hess believed that sexual selection under patriarchy had degraded women and perverted men: "Inheritance from a bad stock creates the predisposition; the conventional code of sexual morals which permits to the male every possible sexual excess is an accessory factor" (152). Because the "pathological" condition of male sexuality was the result of environmental conditions and faulty

evolutionary mechanisms, Meisel-Hess maintained that masculinity could be recuperated. Although she acknowledged that there existed a "sub-group" of men "in whom the stigma of this inadequacy is inborn and therefore irremediable," she insisted that other "sexual cripples" had "acquired it in the steeplechase of the struggle for existence." This latter group, she maintained, "may be cured when the conditions of life become favorable," with the cure signified by the "capacity to enjoy love" (154).

Meisel-Hess, like Mayreder, held sexual ethical reform to be critical to the rehabilitation of masculinity and male sexuality. Meisel-Hess clarified that a new sexual morality was desperately needed, but specified that it must be accompanied by women's economic emancipation (155). She maintained that women ought to guide men, who would be saved by the "limitless power of self-sacrifice in the loving hearts of women" (155). Meisel-Hess defined love more metaphysically than Mayreder: drawing on the writings of Wagner and Maeterlinck, she described love as mutual sympathy, and as the process of "acquir[ing] knowledge of another soul . . . rejoic[ing] over each new discovery . . . grow[ing] more intimate through ever fresh confidences . . . [and] be[ing] aware of every stage at which the inner impulsive energy of either has rushed to meet and to mingle with the like energy in the other" (156). This definition of love, like Mayreder's, presumed equality between men and women—not just formal, civic equality, but existential equality, the ability of each party to realize themselves fully as independent, complex human beings.[45] Meisel-Hess went so far as to declare misogyny a "morbid manifestation of the sexual life" that had become instinctual in men (as opposed to accusations of misandry hurled toward women, which she believed stemmed from women's "unwilling[ness] to pervert the truth in man's favor") (289).

Whereas writers like Mayreder and Meisel-Hess believed male sexuality, and thus heterosexuality, could be rehabilitated through ethical and social reforms and through women's empowerment,

45. During her own time, Meisel-Hess believed that such a "natural and healthy human relationship, one in which both partners are equally tender and equally ardent," was "rarely encounter[ed]." Meisel-Hess, *Sexual Crisis*, 300.

others like Johanna Elberskirchen were pessimistic. Arguably, Elberkirchen's pessimism stemmed from her belief that true sexual equality did not exist in nature. Although she drew upon evolutionary ideas like her optimistic counterparts, Elberskirchen also relied upon evidence from sexual biology, which suggested that sexual traits were innate and, more importantly, unchanging. Her analysis therefore led her to conclude that social and ethical reforms could not affect sexual equality because the sexes were unequal at the most basic biological level. Put simply, Elberskirchen believed that men were intrinsically inferior to women. For this reason, she maintained that the existing social order was based on a perversion of nature that could only be rescued by placing women in charge of sexual life.

Elberskirchen believed that maleness itself was less biologically valuable than femaleness. She found the most material evidence of man's inferiority (and women's superiority) in the sperm and the ovum. In Elberskirchen's view, the sperm was but "an appendage of the ovum," completely dependent upon the ovum for its existence. Unlike the ovum, the sperm lacked protoplasmic nutrients with which to nourish itself; if it wanted to develop itself, Elberskirchen pointed out, it must bind itself to the ovum and allow itself to be fed. Elberskirchen even advanced the peculiar metaphoric claim that the sperm was a "natural-born proletariat, dependent upon the ovum, dependent upon the woman in his entire development and existence" (*Revolution*, 71). Contrary to the sperm, Elberskirchen maintained that the ovum, "the mother-cell," was the original source of all being. According to her, the superiority of the ovum is apparent in its rich abundance of plasma, which nourishes and sustains life (69). It is the ovum, she declared, in which "all strength is saved—not in the masculine semen cell" (68). Indeed, in Elberskirchen's view, "the sperm is destitute!" (69–70). Contrary to Mayreder, Elberskirchen declared that women's capacity to create life is what makes them superior: "Motherhood makes the female strong—in natural, healthy circumstances, the female is powerful, superior, the ruler" (61).

In asserting the biological superiority of females, Elberskirchen echoed Havelock Ellis's conclusion in *Man and Woman* (1894)

that "[Woman] is thus of greater importance than the male from nature's point of view."[46] As Elberskirchen phrased it, "The female is rich, the female has nourishment, not the man. The man is incapable of producing a surplus of nourishment. Everything that he produces he uses for himself. . . . The man can in no direct way be creatively active, like the female, [for] the man is destitute!" (*Revolution*, 70). Elberskirchen attributed the problems of patriarchal social order to the discrepancy between man's biological responsibilities and his social privileges and power:

> The expansion of life, the biological performance and the biological obligation and responsibility of man is much less than that of the woman—but his rights are much greater, outrageously much greater. . . . From this a monstrous decadence must naturally develop with iron regularity. For . . . where the law of equivalence does not govern, a decline must necessarily enter. The fact is that patriarchy has caused only unnaturalness, sickness, prostitution, physical, spiritual, and economic degeneration, in short individual and social degeneration. (109–110)

Given what she believed to be the demonstrable and innate biological superiority of the female over the male, Elberskirchen insisted upon a radical overhaul of existing modes of social organization and sexual governance that would place the preponderance of power in women's hands. In the first instance, she insisted on women's need for economic security and their right to work. Elberskirchen framed this demand in evolutionary terms, proclaiming women's need to reenter the "struggle for existence" (89). According to Elberskirchen, "Nature wants the female to work . . . [to be] independent and self-sufficient and in every relationship capable to provide for nourishment, because she is a mother, and thereby she can support herself and her child" (71). Becoming self-reliant, she claimed, would improve woman and womanhood both physically and psychologically. It would restore to woman "her property, her freedom, her health, her good fortune," which "man robbed from her through his degenerate sexual impulse" (99). For Elberskirchen,

46. Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Sexual Characteristics* (London: Walter Scott, 1894), 384.

all of the "so-called 'specifically masculine' characteristics . . . and occupations of man are nothing other than stolen goods" (114, 99). Yet Elberskirchen's ultimate vision was much more radical than demanding economic independence and the right to work: she insisted on the creation of a social order wherein the sexes' powers corresponded with their innate biological value and degree of responsibility for reproduction of the species. Elberskirchen advocated the establishment of what she called a new-style matriarchate that recentered woman, the "original social cell," as the "biological fulcrum and crux of the world" (100–101). A "female dictatorship" (*Weiberherrschaft*), in Elberskirchen's view, would reflect the natural order based upon woman's central role in generating and sustaining life (108–110). Returning to a matriarchal order would regenerate the race by returning to women their supposed right of final choice in sexual selection. Just as they had during the time of the ancient matriarchate, women would exercise their sexual choice with a view to improving the race, and would choose their mates according to "intelligence, strength, and beauty" (89).

At the same time, Elberskirchen maintained that women's freedom was only possible via an abandonment of sexual dissipation; for her, this meant an abandonment of heterosexuality and men. A release from what she referred to as "Sexus" would free women to develop their personalities and realize their full existential potential. An abandonment of men and heterosexuality would constitute a protest against women's assigned sexual inferiority. In the name of women's emancipation Elberskirchen demanded that women break "away from sex, away from inferiority—back to freedom and health, back to spiritual and physical superiority! Back to the mighty, holy, natural law of the mother—back to matriarchy. That is the real, the innermost slogan of the emancipation of women—that is their innermost necessity" (115).

Women's theories of masculinity and male sexuality offered not only potent criticisms of existing male sexual practices, but also powerful and even radical means of arguing for new modes of sexual governance that empowered and liberated women. Despite sharing some similar views about the nature of male sexuality, Mayreder,

Meisel-Hess, and Elberskirchen did not agree on the kinds of reforms that were needed to improve existing conditions. Their differing proposals arguably stemmed from their engagement with particular forms of scientific knowledge. Because Mayreder and Meisel-Hess drew primarily upon evolutionary ideas and arguments, they tended to be more optimistic regarding the possibility of changing male sexual behavior and improving the status quo. Conversely, Elberskirchen's reliance on biological arguments that held sexual traits to be innate and unchanging made her less hopeful about the possibility of change, and rendered her more likely to propose radical solutions

It would be easy to dismiss the ideas examined in this chapter; however, I maintain that these texts and the ideas contained within them are worthy of investigation for a number of reasons. First, they demonstrate the ways women were able to work with science to articulate visions of an alternative social order wherein male needs and experience did not anchor and orient sexual and social life. Science enabled women to envision futures as equals or superiors to men, and even futures without men. The fact that their analyses were in some cases expressed in absolutist terms can further be read as evidence of women's frustration with men's seeming unwillingness to change in the face of fifty years of sustained activism. We must remember that, as noncitizens with no recourse to political or economic power, whose previous appeals to justice and ethics had seemingly fallen on deaf ears, women had very few legal or political tools at their disposal. We may therefore want to ask ourselves what other means they had available to have their voices legitimized—and why these writers should have necessarily felt magnanimous toward men.

Second, these critiques of masculinity and male sexuality provide further evidence of how women were able to appeal to the scientific revelations of nature in order to criticize the sexual status quo. By showing existing conditions were unnatural, hence abnormal and injurious to the health of individuals and the body politic, women could demand that sexual life no longer privilege male sexual preferences and prerogatives.

Third, the ideas examined here hint at the ways some women sexologists connected women's sexual oppression to racial degeneration—and, conversely, women's sexual emancipation to

racial regeneration. We have encountered such rhetorical moves already in the discourses on the female sex drive and on nonnormative female subjectivities. Here, both Grete Meisel-Hess and Johanna Elberskirchen invoked the theory of sexual selection to criticize men's unnatural, self-interested mate choices, which purportedly contributed to racial degeneration, and to highlight women's altruistic selection, which contributed to the elevation of the species. By tying women's emancipation to racial imperatives, these women suggested that they did not seek sexual reform solely (or even primarily) for women's benefit. Was this move sincere or purely strategic? In the next chapter, I consider in greater depth how one of these women sexologists, Grete Meisel-Hess, theorized the relationship between sexuality and race, and explore reasons why racial thinking appealed to women like her. I further demonstrate how racial appeals could be deployed to support demands for women's freedom to engage in pleasurable (hetero)sexual experiences.