

## NOTE TO USERS

PREVIEW

This reproduction is the best copy available.

**UMI**<sup>®</sup>

PREVIEW

"DAS GESPRENGTE KORSETT": GENDER IN LESBIAN PERIODICALS  
IN BERLIN, 1924-1933

by

Amy Dawn Young

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Modern Languages and Literatures (German)

Under the Supervision of Professor Christina Brantner

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 2004

UMI Number: 3159570

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**

---

UMI Microform 3159570

Copyright 2005 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company  
300 North Zeeb Road  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

DISSERTATION TITLE

"Das Gesprengte Korsett": Gender in Lesbian Periodicals in Berlin, 1924-1933

BY

Amy D. Young

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Approved Christina E. Brantner Date 12-2-04  
Signature

Dr. Christina Brantner  
Typed Name

Priscilla Hayden Roy 12-2-04  
Signature

Dr. Priscilla Hayden-Roy  
Typed Name

Robert K. Shirer 12-2-04  
Signature

Dr. Robert Shirer  
Typed Name

Joy Ritchie 12-2-04  
Signature

Dr. Joy Ritchie  
Typed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Typed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Typed Name

Nebraska  
UNIVERSITY OF  
Lincoln

"DAS GESPENGTE KORSETT": GENDER IN LESBIAN PERIODICALS IN  
BERLIN, 1924-1933

Amy Dawn Young, Ph.D.

The University of Nebraska, 2004

Advisor: Christina Brantner

This study begins by looking at the status of women during the Weimar Republic in Germany. This serves as a context for looking at how gender is constructed during that period in time. Women's employment, reproductive issues and women's suffrage are all examined to get a sense of what life for women in general might have been like during the Weimar Republic.

The details about the production of lesbian publications at that time provide interesting insights into how the lesbian community was structured during the Weimar Republic, to the extent that it is possible to discuss a "community" as such. The interconnections between individual publications, and the relationships between publications and various social, political and scientific groups help illuminate the context out of which discussions of gender arose.

Each of the texts types has its own unique way of creating and/or disrupting gender, ranging from attempts to categorize specific behaviors as being an inherent part of one gender, to assertions that such attempts are artificial and therefore not innate. The examination of the construction of gender

and attempts to refute gender as a binary system in theoretical texts, personal narratives, reprinted news articles and fiction shows the tendency to focus on a few key themes. The discussions between sex researchers concerning the cause of both lesbianism and transvestitism are reflected not only in the theoretical texts, but show influence in personal accounts and fiction as well. Masculinization, cross-dressing and intersexuality are all significant topics regardless of text type, because of their centrality to discussions of gender and sex in spite of attempts to push them to the margins. The inclusion of "heterosexual transvestites" in lesbian publications further complicates the discussions of sex and gender, leading to the questions about the potential for reaffirmation of gender binaries by people otherwise invested in crossing gender boundaries.

PREVIEW

## Table of Contents

Introduction		2
Chapter One	The Status of Women	8
Chapter Two	Publication Information	25
Chapter Three	Theoretical Texts	39
Chapter Four	Short News Items	62
Chapter Five	Fiction	77
Chapter Six	Transvestites	93
Conclusion		121
Bibliography		



## Introduction

When I began researching my dissertation in the fall of 2000, whenever the topic came up in conversations, the response to my dissertation topic was frequently one of surprise. People were not surprised that I had picked this topic, but rather they were surprised to find out that there were lesbian periodicals in Berlin during the Weimar Republic, and that some of them were published concurrently for a significant length of time. To a great degree, I could understand their amazement.

Not all that long before I had started working on my dissertation, the English version of Claudia Schoppman's Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians During the Third Reich had been released in the US. At the time when I initially read *Days of Masquerade*, the potential to use the periodicals mentioned never occurred to me. It was only sometime later, while researching the usage of the word "lesbian", that I saw the periodicals mentioned again, and looked at them with an eye toward a possible dissertation topic.

A quick search on WorldCat showed that they were available on microfilm. So I ordered them through Interlibrary Loan, and was pleasantly surprised at not only the amount of material available, but at the amount of material that was truly interesting, and spoke to my interest in gender and transgender issues. Searches for secondary sources also showed that although there were sources available on similar topics, no one had looked at the periodicals themselves. To

that point there had been no published research on gender and transgender issues that focused primarily on these periodicals. They were sometimes mentioned in histories of the Weimar Republic, or used to develop a context for another argument, but they have never been the focus of published research in their own right. That is not to say, however, that nobody had ever engaged these texts academically. Thanks to the Spinnboden Lesbenarchiv in Berlin, a handful of papers and theses written by women, primarily in Germany, show a growing interest in these periodicals.

### **The Status of Women**

Since lesbian publications of the Weimar Republic tended to present echoes of significant cultural and intellectual trends of the time, the significance of the context in which they were produced should not be overlooked. The Weimar Republic was a dynamic time for all topics surrounding womanhood, with significant changes in many official policies as well as modes of representation. Employment policies concerning women, which had been liberalized during World War I to accommodate labor shortages, were then rewritten, making it much more difficult for women to secure employment in fields outside of those that were considered to be appropriate for women. The women's movement of the time, having reached its primary goal of securing suffrage for women, began to lose influence within the parties, and therefore within the government generally. Discussions surrounding women's bodies, such as the birth control and abortion debates, and discussions of fitness and wellness brought more

attention to women's bodies and appearances. This trend extends to the image of the New Woman and other manifestations of pathologized forms of female existence such as the mannish woman, spinsters and lesbians, putting the very definition of "woman" in the center of a cultural identity crisis.

### Publication Information

These periodicals can generally be divided into two groups, surrounding Die Freundin and Frauenliebe. Die Freundin was published for a time as Ledige Frauen, and Frauenliebe was later a part of Garconne: Junggesellin. Frauen Liebe und Leben was dedicated to wellness, and even the title shows its close connections to Frauenliebe. Blätter Idealer Frauenfreundschaften was published by Selli Engler, who at various times wrote for both Frauenliebe and Die Freundin.

All of these publications were interconnected, in that they often shared writers. The authors and many readers were frequently members of various women's clubs, with the members of individual clubs tending toward loyalty to one particular publication. Both the periodicals and the women's clubs were also all connected to an intricate web of organizations, roughly centered around the *Bund für Menschenrecht* and the *Deutscher Freundschafts-Verband*. Although the publications may have been interconnected in many ways, the two groups tended to be less amiable toward one another, struggling against each other for influence and members.

### **Theoretical texts**

The periodicals in question participated frequently in theoretical discussions of the day. Although it is unclear if they had any influence outside of their readership, it was clear that there was an attempt to inform their readers about current theories about a number of significant topics, as seen in the tendency to present multiple perspectives on any one topic. Masculinity and femininity, as well as their corresponding physical manifestations and behavioral traits as they are societally tied to men and/or women, are frequently highlighted. A corollary topic is the perceived masculinization of women. There is also significant discussion of the historical and cross-cultural existence of lesbians, pointing out that lesbians have existed in many other time periods, as well as in non-western cultures.

### **Short News Items**

These publications occasionally printed short news items that had appeared in other newspapers, both from within Germany and from abroad. The topics varied greatly. Some described news items interesting for their implications for women in general, including women's roles in society, and what was deemed "appropriate" for women. The perceived masculinization of women reappears here as well, in the form of reports on participation in activities said to lead to masculinization. Women who chose to wear men's clothing were the subject of another set of reports, as were reports of people who were born with both male and female genitalia, or people who possessed one at birth and

developed a second some time later. Although there is a certain amount of similarity to the texts reprinted about transvestites, these lesbian-centered short news items were generally not followed by commentary by the editors as those concerning transvestites were.

### **Fiction**

Fictional texts are interesting for a number of reasons. They provide an opportunity for their authors to express opinions on a number of topics, and show a range of experiences. Fictional texts can be utopian visions for what the world should be like, and cautionary tales about what the world is actually like. Although gender is not always a primary topic for fictional texts, it is very significant for others. It is these texts which are the focus, and can provide interesting insights into how gender was perceived and performed at that time.

### **Transvestites**

A small portion of the texts in these periodicals deal with transvestites, and the issues that they faced in their lives. The nature of transvestitism was debated in the discourse of the periodicals, since there were conflicting theories about whether transvestitism was biologically determined or socially constructed. Personal experience plays a significant role in many texts, both in the form of descriptions of how to gain access to women's clothing, as well as in the form of personal narratives, which were often individual his/herstories comparable to coming out stories in the gay and lesbian communities. Reprinted articles were

frequently used in a didactic fashion, with reprints sometimes accompanied by a critique or editorial response. Fiction as written by and about transvestites tended to positive, with the lead character making a smooth transition to living as a woman, falling in love, and living happily ever after.

The intention for this project is not to come up with one uniform, homogenous sense of what "gender" was in these periodicals, but rather to point out the various currents flowing through the different types of texts, and the various sites of resistance to societally defined gender.

PREVIEW

## Chapter 1

### The Status of Women

When looking at texts written by and for lesbians during the Weimar Republic in Germany, it is useful to keep in mind the context in which they were written. As Shearer West states, "In women's history, it does not pay to confine oneself to such polarities as 'image' and 'reality', but to examine instead how constructions of identity contributed to what women were and what they stood for" (2). Lesbians, who were neither completely integrated into mainstream society nor completely excluded from that same society, constructed identities, which both borrowed from and broke with mainstream images of sexuality and sexual identity. We find rejection of some roles and representations, appropriation of others, and attempts to imagine completely new roles and representations.

It is this interplay between representations and the reality of women's experiences during the Weimar Republic that is important when considering the context for this discussion of gender in lesbian periodicals. The societal tension shown by the competing representational models of the *Vollweib* and the New Woman reflect the desire for traditional femininity and the increasing emancipation of women, respectively. This chapter examines changes in the perceived and real roles of women and the conflict between areas that showed the desire for "traditional" roles for women, and areas that showed the emancipatory potential for women during the Weimar Republic. Women's

employment, which provoked passionate reactions disproportionate to the minor amounts of real change, is central to the discourse surrounding both the New Woman and the *Vollweib*. Politics, although not as controversial a topic as women's employment, is an area where changes occurred during the Weimar Republic, including the extension of suffrage to women. Discussions of the changing discourses on women's sexuality show both the conflict and change in the tension between tradition and emancipation. The discussion concludes with the examination of the various classification schemes and competing models of femininity, such as the *Vollweib*, the New Woman, and women who moved beyond femininity as it was then conceptualized, earning the label of Intersexual.

## Employment

Women's employment was one of the areas displaying the tension between traditional women's roles and attempts to change them. The *Vollweib*, as the representation of traditional femininity, would have either worked exclusively in the home, or if she worked outside the home, only in an occupation viewed as being suited to women. The New Woman, on the other hand, was represented as being employed, increasingly in areas that had been considered to be jobs suited to men, and therefore competing with men for those positions. The reality of women's employment is much more complicated.

Prior to World War I, employed women were not seen as a threat to male employment, since 90% of women were working in jobs in what were traditionally



viewed as “the female industries of textiles, clothing manufacture, and confections” (Pore, 89). The few remaining women worked the lowest-level jobs in male industries (Pore, 89). During the war, the employment of women was necessary to offset the number of men who had gone to war. However, after the war was over, the men began to return. Women were not always amenable to the idea of giving up their position for returning servicemen, although they frequently were required to do so. Nevertheless, a series of policies was developed to reduce the number of women in the workforce.

These policies intended to return employment statistics to the pre-war division of labor between women and men. This had damaging effects on women's employment. One such decree from 28 March 1919 and 25 January 1920 stated that

People were to be dismissed in the following order of priority:

1. Women, whose husbands had a job.
2. Single women and girls
3. Women and girls who had only 1-2 people to look after
4. All other women and girls (Thönnessen, 91)

This dramatically changed the employment outlook for women, and by 1925, a clear majority of women had returned to jobs in “female industries” where they no longer competed with men (Pore, 96). The exact numbers can be seen in the census statistics from 1925. There were, in fact, 5% more women employed in 1925 than there had been in 1907, but male employment increased 6.6% in the same time period. As the number of jobs had grown, the number of men

employed as compared to the number of women employed became even more skewed in favor of men (Bridenthal and Koonz, 44-45).

The so-called "double earners" were especially reviled at this time. These married women workers were fired from some jobs, and prevented from applying for others, sometimes regardless of the ability of her husband to earn a living. One of the clearest attacks on married women workers came in the form of the *Zölibatsklausel*, or celibacy clause, found in Article 14 of the *Reichspersonalabbauverordnung* (PAVO). According to this article, married female civil servants could be fired, even if they had tenure, "sofern nach dem Ermessen der zuständigen Behörde die wirtschaftliche Versorgung des weiblichen Beamten gesichert erscheint" (Art. 14, PAVO, as cited in Greven-Aschoff, 173). The first version of this celibacy clause was part of a broader attempt to reduce the number of civil servants in general, due to economic and budgetary constrictions. However when this policy was re-instated in May of 1932, it was no longer an emergency measure, but rather became part of everyday employment policy (Greven-Aschoff, 173).

The cumulative effect of employment trends and policies was that women became increasingly likely, when employed at all, to return to occupations traditionally considered appropriate for women. In terms of the difference between the *Vollweib* and the New Woman, women were likely to have either chosen willingly, or been forced into the path of the *Vollweib*.

## Politics

Since conceptualizations of “traditional” womanhood do not include references to political action, any change in the political status of women would have been a deviation from the “traditional”. The reality is that there was change in the political potential for women, showing a tendency toward emancipatory developments. This tendency was nevertheless moderated by the relative lack of change beyond that of suffrage for women.

Women finally received the right to vote in 1918 with the help of the Social Democratic Party and others. In 1919 women voted in their first national election, and women were also selected as candidates for the *Reichstag*. Women made up 9.6% of the *Reichstag* representatives in 1919, which was by far the greatest percent seen during the Weimar Republic (Greven-Aschoff, 161). Soon after, in 1920, female representatives began to lose their foothold in the *Reichstag*, after the parties they belonged to experienced losses in the elections.

Unfortunately, the female representatives to the *Reichstag* were never able to develop a substantial power base or significant influence outside of discussions of women-specific topics. Even at the point where their concentration in the *Reichstag* was the highest that it would be during the time of the Weimar Republic, the women representatives worked “ausschliesslich im Rahmen der sog. Frauenfragen; zumindest äusserten sich die Frauen der bürgerlichen Parteien in den Plenarsitzungen nur zu solchen Themenkreisen” (Greven-Aschoff, 171). Although there were exceptions where the female representatives presented a united front, most of the time they sided with the

party they belonged to, thus circumventing any significant change for the status of women in general. (Greven-Aschoff, 171)

Soon after the elections of 1919, the political parties that had fought hardest for women's suffrage began to distance themselves from the goals of the women's movement. For example, the Social Democratic Party, which had spearheaded the effort to extend the vote to women, was disappointed that women were not voting for the party that had contributed to women's suffrage. They therefore came to view women's suffrage as a hindrance to broader political goals.

Some suggested that women were politically naïve, more easily swayed by the most popular party in the district and more subject to direct political pressure. Others have suggested that the more sensitive nature of women was offended by the controversy among socialists that had resulted in the formation of three socialist parties. The most common view was that women tended to be more religious and therefore repelled by the non-Christian socialists (Pore, 58).

Since women appeared to be reluctant to support the Social Democratic Party, the Party gradually lost interest in women's issues, which were then relegated to the women's movement. This set up a vicious circle between many women's groups and the political parties. Women's lack of enthusiasm for party politics is directly related "to the singular lack of response to women's issues by the parties" (Meskimmon, 16). This turned out to be the basis for decreased cooperation between advocates of women's issues and the parties themselves. Political parties also continued to maintain stances that were contrary to the opinions of female members.

Despite the fact that matters concerning women's work, contraception and abortion, for example, were publicly controversial in the period, most of the political establishment defended reactionary positions on the matters, falling far short of the line taken by women themselves in feminist groups. (Meskimmon, 16)

Women, therefore, can hardly be faulted for not refusing to support a political party insensitive to their concerns and that refused to support them on issues of very personal relevance.

This lack of action within the realm of the "traditional" politics of the political parties and the Reichstag does not mean that women were not politically active in other ways. This included activities such as Käthe Kollwitz's political art, Clara Zetkin's work for the well-being of working-class people, and Helene Stöcker's activism in the area of contraception and abortion reform, among others.

## **Sexuality**

It is difficult to separate discussions of women's sexuality during the Weimar Republic from politics, since significant areas of women's sexuality was subject to political regulation. An especially salient example of the significance of both politics and the increased focus on women's sexuality can be seen in the abortion and birth control debates. These debates often turned into heated discussions and outright arguing about the societal status of women. People who leaned to the left politically tended to advocate unrestricted self-determination regarding all aspects of sexuality regardless of marital status or reproductive intent. On the other hand, people who leaned to the right

advocated “traditional” models of womanhood , which emphasize motherhood and mandate sexuality restricted to marital and reproductive purposes, conflicting with the idea that women have the right to determine all areas of their sexuality.

However, this right was not always considered absolute, even among those generally supportive of women’s sexual freedom. A more moderate approach can be seen in the articles of Dr. Max Hodann, a contributor to both lesbian and sexological journals, who was one of the preeminent woman-focused sexologists in the Weimar Republic. He advocated sexual freedom as long as it was pleasurable for both parties involved, and masturbation in moderation. He also provided advice on birth control and methods for resolving various sexual problems such as vaginal dryness or frigidity. However, as Grossmann points out, Hodann’s writing “served as an extension of the counseling center or the doctor’s consulting room. It reflected sex reformer’s scientifically objective and determinedly matter-of-fact approach, and outlined a body regimen clearly meant to be both disciplinary and emancipatory.” (28) This “body regimen” advocated by many members of the *Reichsverband für Geburtenregelung und Sexualhygiene* (RGS) bears many similarities to the tradition of *Lebensreform* or lifestyle reform. Unlike the RGS, the lifestyle reform movement was not clearly allied with any specific political ideology, but rather had advocates from across the political spectrum. In spite of significant debate about the kinds of activities included in lifestyle reform, two pivotal ideas serve as a basis for all aspects of lifestyle reform.

1. eine Reform aller Lebensgebiete, insbesondere der Körpergebundenen, die unbedingt zu einer naturgemäßen Lebensweise führen müßte;
2. eine persönliche Selbstreform, die vor allen staatlichen und sozialen Reformen durchzuführen ist. (Barlösius 218)

Lifestyle reform clearly included naturopathic medicine, vegetarianism and *Freie Körperkultur*, a nudist movement. Some perspectives also included various strains of urban planning and land management reform efforts, the anti-alcohol movement and *Reformhäuser*, which were businesses formed to sell products to individuals striving to engage in lifestyle reform. Still other connections can be seen to women's groups, family groups, and children's rights groups. Some even see lifestyle reform as a "Teil der gesamten kulturkritischen Strömungen." (Barlösius 220) Others, however, would disagree with this interpretation, pointing out that lifestyle reform also included a tendency toward "a diffuse antimodernism, overlapping with *völkisch* sentiments, which saw industrialization and urbanization as corrupting evils." (Grossmann, 26, Grossmann's italics)

This *völkisch* tendency can also be seen in the methods of neoclassical *Körperkultur*, which was very popular during the Weimar Republic. *Körperkultur*, although similar to lifestyle reform in its emphasis on health, was politically much less neutral. With its tendency toward anti-semitism, it was embraced as a method of representation by the Nazis. *Körperkultur*, or body culture, sought to reverse the tendency toward what was seen as an overemphasis on mental activity at the expense of physical fitness. "Bildet ihr den Körper und den Geist,

dann erzieht ihr ganze Menschen" (Preiss 1). There are, however, conflicting trains of thought regarding the varied regimens of physical activity. Some advocates intended to improve physical fitness, not in an attempt to bring the body back to a more natural state, but rather as a way of increasing the adaptability of the body, and therefore making it suitable for steadily increasing demands of life (Mensendieck, 2). Others, however read *Körperkultur* as encouraging femininity in both body and "nature," with the goal of reaching the stage of being known as the *Vollweib*. According to this perspective, it was best reached through "the gender-specific exercises of *Körperkultur*," (Frame, 29) which sought to alleviate the "damaging influence of civilization's neglect of the female body and mind." (Frame, 31)

### Classification

Given the changing roles of women and the pressure applied from both the traditional and emancipatory sides of the debate, there was a measure of uncertainty about how to identify the nature of individual women. There were a number of classification schemes that sought to bring order to a changing system of gender attributes. Lynne Frame discusses how

classification schemes of the Weimar period order every aspect of humanity, from physique to handwriting, to give contours to a society in disarray. They provide the individual with means for differentiating and discriminating, for drawing new boundaries and putting up barriers for security." (13)

These classification schemes were intended to provide information about an individual's suitability as a spouse or parent. For women, the most significant