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## Forum: Feminism in German Studies

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## Forum: Feminism in German Studies

### **Abstract**

#### **From Professor Wallach's contribution entitled "Jews and Gender":**

To consider Jews and gender within German Studies is to explore the evolution of German-Jewish Studies with respect to feminist and gender studies. At times this involves looking beyond German Studies to other scholarship in Jewish gender studies, an interdisciplinary subfield in its own right. Over the past few decades, the focus on gender within German-Jewish Studies has experienced several shifts in line with broader trends: an initial focus on the history of Jewish women and feminist movements gradually expanded to encompass the study of gender identity, masculinity, and sexuality. Historical and literary scholarly approaches now operate alongside and in dialogue with interdisciplinary scholarship in cultural studies, film and visual studies, performance studies, and other fields. [*excerpt*]

### **Keywords**

German-Jewish, gender, women, masculinity

### **Disciplines**

Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | German Language and Literature | Jewish Studies

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## Jews and Gender

To consider Jews and gender within German Studies is to explore the evolution of German-Jewish Studies with respect to feminist and gender studies. At times this involves looking beyond German Studies to other scholarship in Jewish gender studies, an interdisciplinary subfield in its own right. Over the past few decades, the focus on gender within German-Jewish Studies has experienced several shifts in line with broader trends: an initial focus on the history of Jewish women and feminist movements gradually expanded to encompass the study of gender identity, masculinity, and sexuality. Historical and literary scholarly approaches now operate alongside and in dialogue with interdisciplinary scholarship in cultural studies, film and visual studies, performance studies, and other fields.

Many of the foundational texts of feminist German-Jewish Studies were written by historians who identified gaps in the scholarship on Jewish women and everyday life, and who wished to consider how Jewish women's experiences differed from those of Jewish men. A number of these social and cultural histories focus on issues relevant to Jewish continuity or breaks with Judaism, including traditional and modern approaches to religious observance; marriage and intermarriage; and assimilation, acculturation, and conversion. Marion Kaplan, Atina Grossmann, and Deborah Hertz were among the first to undertake this groundbreaking work. Marion Kaplan's first book on the Jüdischer Frauenbund (1979) opened up the field for more scholarship on Jewish women; her subsequent books offer in-depth explorations of women, family constellations, and daily life at different points in history. Deborah Hertz's study of Berlin salon women circa 1800 (1988) focused on Rahel Varnhagen, Henriette Herz, and others as prominent cultural figures worthy of further study. (Translations of writings by Varnhagen, Herz, and Dorothea Schlegel appeared in the anthology *Bitter Healing* in 1990.) Another scholar of modern Jewish history, Paula Hyman, also warrants mention here, particularly her landmark book on gender and assimilation (1995), as well as Kaplan and Deborah Dash Moore's edited volume, *Gender and Jewish History* (2011), which pays tribute to Hyman.

In the 1990s and 2000s, more scholars of literary and cultural studies began analyzing the works of women writers with an eye to their Jewish and gender identities. Dagmar Lorenz's book, *Keepers of the Motherland* (1997), provides a good general introduction. In their scholarship on Varnhagen, Hannah Arendt, and others, Liliane Weissberg and Barbara Hahn both emphasize the role of Jewish women within modernity. Due in part to the growing interest in autobiography, eighteenth-century Yiddish writer Glikl bas Judah Leib (Glückel von Hameln) has enjoyed a new reception by scholars including Natalie Zemon Davis, Iris Idelson-Shein, Monika Richarz, and Chava Turniansky. Bertha Pappenheim, a leader of the Jewish women's movement and an early translator of Glikl's writings into German, also received fresh attention from Elizabeth Loentz (as well as others interested in Freud's Vienna and "Anna O."). Other twentieth-century women writers with Jewish backgrounds have recently achieved greater recognition, often in conjunction with new editions or translations of their works, including Vicki Baum, Mascha Kaléko, Gertrud Kolmar, Nelly Sachs, Anna Seghers, Margarete Susman, Gabriele Tergit, and Grete Weil. The autobiographical writings of Germanist Ruth Klüger, who also has addressed the future of Holocaust literature, should be included here as well. (See the work of Doris Bergen, Atina Grossmann, Dalia Ofer, Cathy Gelbin, and others on gender and sexuality with respect to the Holocaust.) Several writers who remain active today continue to push the boundaries of Jewish women's writing in German, most notably Barbara Honigmann, Esther Dischereit, and Lena Gorelik.

In the last decade, many scholars of German-Jewish Studies have turned to investigations of constructions of gender and sexuality as they relate to Jewish culture. Lisa Silverman makes the case for studying Jewishness as an analytical framework or category of difference akin to gender (which, like gender, can be performed). Recent publications by Scott Spector, Sander Gilman, and others on the history of sex, sexuality, and sexology offer insight into how these histories have shaped notions of Jewish otherness, and vice versa (for further study, consider the works of sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld and N.O. Body's *Memoirs of a Man's Maiden Years*, 1907/2009). The volume *Jewish Masculinities: German Jews, Gender, and History* (2012), edited by Benjamin Maria Baader, Sharon Gillerman, and Paul Lerner, helped advance and define Jewish masculinity studies, which incorporates the study of bodies, athletes, performers, student groups, soldiers, as well as the *Muskeljudentum* championed by Zionist leader Max Nordau. Other scholars of German-Jewish history (Michael Brenner, Gideon Reuveni, Daniel Wildmann), too, have contributed to this area with research on Jews and sports. Much of this work builds on key texts on Jewish difference by Sander Gilman, Jay Geller, Daniel Boyarin, and Jonathan Boyarin. Indeed, discussions of gender and Jewishness have long focused on Jewish male difference; for many, "the Jew" is almost always gendered male.

Recent scholarship at the intersection of gender studies and German-Jewish Studies borrows theoretical approaches from—and also contributes to—visual studies, film studies, performance studies, and other fields. For example, Darcy Buerkle's 2013 book on artist Charlotte Salomon's depictions of her family history of suicide anticipated a new wave of interest in Salomon in the emerging field of comics studies. Scholars including Valerie Weinstein, Rick McCormick, and Ofer Ashkenazi have published on gender transgression and performance in the films of Ernst Lubitsch and other German-Jewish filmmakers. Following Marline Otte, Klaus Hödl, and others grounded in performance studies, Jonathan Hess's *Deborah and Her Sisters* (2017) traces the reverberations of Mosenthal's 1848 drama and its theatrical adaptations far beyond Germany. My 2017 book, *Passing Illusions*, which explores the gendered nature of visibility, uses the concept of passing to bring Weimar Jewish visibility and invisibility into conversation with the contemporaneous phenomena of African-American racial passing and queer or sexual passing. Here and elsewhere, scholars of American Jewish studies provide critical insights. Given these trends, I expect that the future of Jewish gender studies within German Studies (or feminist German-Jewish Studies) will be increasingly interdisciplinary in order to reach a broader audience, both in and beyond German Studies and Jewish Studies.

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