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The Photographic Enactment of the Early New Woman in 1890s German Women’s Bicycling Magazines

Beth Muellner

The studio photographs of women bicyclists sent in by the readers of the German women’s bicycling magazines Draisena and Die Radlerin in the latter half of the 1890s are read as evidence that an Early German New Woman was busy defining emancipation independently from the organized women’s movement long before the New Woman of the 1920s. The photographic evidence of the magazines helps elucidate the terms “emancipation” and the “New Woman” in relation to bicycling and corrects historical scholarship that too easily conflates these terms with sport and the German women’s movement, primarily due to the ubiquity of turn-of-the century bicycle advertisements. (BM)

Late nineteenth-century women bicyclists were viewed as independent, youthful, and emancipated, and were inscribed in the popular imagination as such through the proliferation and public display of advertising posters, postcards, and stamps. While European and American advertising suggests that bicycling was synonymous with women’s emancipation, a number of historical and contemporary sources connect the sport with the German women’s movement. In the 1897 publication Der Radfahrsport in Bild und Wort (The Sport of Bicycling in Picture and Word), editor Paul Salvisberg calls women’s bicycling an almost compulsory activity in the modern women’s movement.¹ In their 1992 book on German women’s bicycling, historians Gudrun Maierhof and Katinka Schröder argue that women active in various factions of the women’s movement unequivocally supported bicycling. But in reality, only a small number of women in the moderate German women’s movement approved of bicycle use for females. If one considers that only four percent of Berlin’s overall population even owned a bicycle in 1900, a

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closer examination of the bicycle as an emancipatory vehicle becomes necessary. Part of my purpose here is to clarify the meaning of emancipation and to analyze the sweeping allusions of the German Women’s Movement to German women’s bicycling in the 1890s. As historian Dörte Bleckmann concludes, while bicycling cannot be aligned with organized women’s struggles for education, work, and voting rights, if one explains emancipation through the study of individual women’s stories of emancipation, the bicycle was indeed an important vehicle for those who could afford one. As evidence of what I call the Early New Woman who emerged in the 1890s, my analysis focuses on photographs of women bicyclists in the German women’s bicycling magazines Draisena (Draisena) and Die Radlerin (The Woman Cyclist) from the latter half of the decade. While the popularity of bicycling for women first reached its zenith in the 1890s and in 1896 more women’s bicycles were produced than men’s, the sport remained a matter of heated debate among religious leaders and medical doctors in the popular press throughout the decade. Frequent caricatures of women bicyclists in publications such as Simplicissimus depicted them as either Amazonian Mannweiber (“masculinized women”) or idealized them as youthful and delicately feminine. But the evidence of numerous studio photographs of women bicyclists sent in by the readers of Draisena and Die Radlerin and published in each edition speaks to women’s own strategies to envision and define an image of emancipation for themselves.

The richness of visual texts in the magazines provides a unique opportunity for readers to understand the Early New German Woman’s interpretation of emancipation in the 1890s. Given the abundance of images produced in the nineteenth century with the development of lithographic and photographic technologies, it is easy to understand why cultural historians turn to visual artifacts in particular to interpret the past. The inventions of color lithography and the modern standard bicycle emerged more or less around the same time (1872), and lithographic artists and bicycle manufacturers were eager to show what their new machines could do. This development, coupled with poster artists’ fascination with the bicycle, led to the creation of more color posters of the bicycle than any other product by the turn of the century (Franke 90). The texts in Draisena and Die Radlerin primarily covered such bicycling-related topics as health, fashion, etiquette, and technology, but the magazines also included regular commentary on and critical assessment of advertising images of the bicycle. Invoking the sensory overload of nineteenth-century visual stimuli that Stephan Kern discusses in The Culture of Time and Space, an 1898 cartoon in Draisena pokes fun at a male bicyclist’s (mis)reading of an advertising poster (Figure 1). The
cartoon playfully cautions against interpreting generic advertising images of emancipated bicycling women as reflecting the experiences of real women. It plays on the male bicyclist’s “short-sightedness” on many levels. In tipping his hat, he adheres to a traditional etiquette between the sexes that the Early New Woman might find charming but old-fashioned. The woman in the poster obviously does not respond, but neither may an actual modern woman. By adhering to traditional modes of behavior, the man loses control of the new technology—the bicycle—and also of his reading of the Early New Woman. In the man’s assumption that the poster is actually a woman, Draisena reminds readers that the false representation and interpretation of women bicyclists can be hazardous. Because of such humor and other caricatures found in the magazines, readers might have studied the photographs of real women bicyclists all the more carefully. While the color lithograph offers little more than a one-dimensional print of a generic woman, photographs provide a more immediate representation of a historical “truth” and as such function differently primarily in regard to visual object’s agency. But while nineteenth-century advertising images of bicycling women seem to have become icons of women’s liberation and have been treated by scholars as important historical artifacts, the historical photographs of women bicyclists in particular have received no closer analysis except to embellish written histories of women’s bicycling. No “truer” icons of modern womanhood serve as witnesses to history than the evidence of photographs.

Figure 1: Humor in Draisena
The articles in the German women’s bicycling magazines *Draisena* and *Die Radlerin* focused on the relative newness of women bicyclists’ public exposure and display. The nature of the static space represented in the magazines’ studio photographs reflects a rather conservative approach to the display of the woman bicyclist by not depicting the sport in action. The magazines’ women publishers situated women bicyclists within what Ruth-Ellen Joeres calls the “performance of propriety” in their modest representation of the “deviant” act of bicycling. Indeed, the strategy of attracting both conservative and more liberal-minded women readers to the sport relied upon the acting out of various performances in print and image. By using professional photographic portraits, the editors of *Die Radlerin* and *Draisena* maintained some control over the promotion of bicycling as a serious and respectable activity for women. The majority of photographs in the magazines present meticulously dressed middle-class women and their bicycles. Although the higher number of studio photographs in the magazines was not necessarily tied to hobby photographers’ limited access to the technology at the time, studios might have provided bourgeois women the kind of discretionary atmosphere they needed to allow themselves to be “taken.” While the magazines include the names of the various photographic studios next to the photograph itself, most names are only abbreviations. Thus it remains unknown whether or not the aesthetics promoted in studio portraits were controlled by mostly male photographers or if indeed women photographers also participated.

The similarity between an advertising image (Figure 2) and studio photograph (Figure 3) reminds readers of the creative process behind visual representations and that the photograph, like the lithograph, can be considered a construction. However, instead of focusing on the art of photography or on the intentions of the photographer, I am influenced by Marianne Hirsch and Roland Barthes, who regard photographs as historical texts that speak in a complicated dialogue between past and present. Like Hirsch, I keep returning to the idea of a photograph as something that “has been” (Barthes’s “ça a été”):

The realists of whom I am one [...] do not take the photograph for a “copy” of reality, but for an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art. [...] The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation. (Barthes qtd. in Hirsch 6)
Figure 2: Bicycling Magazine Ad

Figure 3: Bicycling Magazine Photograph
The reader is confronted with an actual image staring back out of "the perpetual present: [...] a mutual look of a subject looking at an object who is a subject looking (back) at an object" (Hirsch 9). In contrast to flat, generic images in advertising, if one imagines the photographic referent as "looking out" of the photograph as much as the viewer is "looking in," the viewing and interpretation of photographs reveals a much more complex process. Viewing a photograph is not a one-way, linear experience—an important consideration in terms of challenging assumptions about gendered spectatorship, particularly regarding women's traditionally passive and/or objectified position. First, women viewers are empowered through the "past reality" of women bicyclists in photographs. In viewing the photograph as a visual artifact that speaks to the lived history of an individual woman and her choice to have a portrait taken with her bicycle, the photographic referent (the sitter) maintains a degree of individual agency.

The photographs present space for individual interpretations and fantasy for both the female spectacle/object and the spectator/viewer. Interpreting the photograph in a way that sees beyond images allows for a continuous dialogue with each viewer and generation. The viewer sees the subject-object's proud stature, her uniqueness, or the way the subject's neatly put-together bicycling costume may resemble the viewer's, the way the subject's gaze confronts or deflects the viewer, and the sitter's decision to either sit on or stand next to her bicycle. The sitter's choices are captured by the photograph and details—such as whether she crosses her arms or waves, or holds a whip or a flower, for instance—offer room for the viewer's individual interpretation of the sitter's self-representational decisions (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Frau Otto Koerner Chose to Sit
Carol Mavor offers insights into activating the subject and the viewer of the photograph from positions of passivity. The mobility of the photographic reproduction (an external landscape is viewed inside the parlor, for example) "permit[s] the reproduction to meet the beholder [...] in his own particular situation, [and] [...] reactivates the object reproduced" (221). Mavor refuses to give into the one-sidedness of photography, i.e., the "taking" of the subject by the photographer. Instead she focuses on the intransitive nature of photographs whose subject-objects "strike back at us with 'the will and the force of the sitter' [so that] just who is taking who [sic] becomes a moot point" (119). As with any photograph, we cannot truly know the circumstances of production. What we do know is that the photograph of Frau Otto Koerner (Figure 4) centers on her figure and the only-partially-visible bicycle in the lower right corner of the image. Wearing a suit with bowtie, boxy hat, and pants, she leans casually on a post and sits on a small stone barrier, legs openly crossed. The studio backdrop shows a column in the distance, and overall the photograph seems to capture her taking a break during a ride through a city park alone. She appears relaxed, but gazes toward the left. Despite her seeming modesty in not looking directly at the camera, the photograph most likely stirred interest, primarily due to the ongoing debate about pants or skirts for bicycling. Even the most outspoken bicycling advocates considered pants appropriate only for bicycling and nothing else. Frau Koerner's choice to wear pants for the photograph, not to mention the masculine position of her crossed legs, seems quite bold. But regardless of the viewer's regard of pants, the viewer contemplates the photograph on her own terms.

While photographic documentation provides important evidence of nineteenth-century women's mobility and can be used to allay claims that women's travel accounts were often fictionalized, these photographs give an imaginary space for projecting the ideals of emancipation according to individual preference. The photographs in Draisena and Die Radlerin are offered within a specific context, and their interpretation depends upon various textual markers. The ultimate paradox of photographic portraits is that they represent both a specific social type and the private identity of the sitter; thus the reader can never truly "trust" what they see (Clarke). Such is the case with Frau Koerner, for example. How did her photograph come to be published in the magazine? Did she herself submit it? Viewers often affix photographs with a certain meaning, but such labels can lead to questions about what first appears as a visually stable identity on the surface. Upon closer inspection, titles affixed to photographic portraits place the image somewhere on the spectrum "between social sanctioning and private confusion"
(Clarke 85). Thus, the subtitles in the bicycling magazines given before or after the bicyclist's name, such as “From Our Gallery of Graceful Riders,” “A High Protectress of the Sport of Ladies’ Bicycling,” or “Prize-Winning Amateur Acrobat Bicyclist,” give the image significance through its identification within codes of cultural and social status (Figure 5). While an image’s title catalogs it according to a specific “type,” the interior state of the private being remains through the inclusion of the sitter’s full name and creates multiple interpretive possibilities. Thus, whatever the physical presentation might mean, or whatever gesture the sitter offers (standing, sitting, waving, arms crossed, dress, pantaloons, smiling, turning away), the women depicted are automatically assigned significance in the world of women and bicycles through labels such as “graceful,” “a protectress,” or “prize-winning.” But, as assured as these images may appear in their objective verification of a certain state, the façade they present also leads to a questioning of their static social world. Is there any significance to Frau Anna Burkhardt’s choice to sit on the bicycle (Figure 5) vs. Frau Otto Koerner’s choice to next to it? Did Herr Koerner have a say in the matter? “More than any other kind of photographic image, the portrait achieves meaning through the context in which it is seen” (Clarke 1). The context in which the photographs of women bicyclists were viewed is very specific—namely within the pages of a women’s bicycling magazine. In this sense, the images have to be read against what is known (the printed text that frames them), as well as what is unknown (the historical context that motivated these women to have their images made permanent for later consumption). The interest in, demand for, and production of the visual is presented as issuing directly from Die Radlerin’s readers:

I have written up to now so much about women bicyclists that surely a few charming young women readers scold: “Oh, what use to me are all these words, I want to see some pictures!” Now, there is something to what she says, and the realization that a photograph makes an attractive women more interesting than one hundred lines of text has moved me to request the photographs of two outstanding young women bicycle disciples to be included in the Radlerin, and these have already been handed over to me willingly. (1897)

Both Draisena and Die Radlerin promoted the idea that the reader can actively participate in visually defining the woman bicyclist. From Die Radlerin’s inclusion of the address and owner of a company that specializes in small and price-worthy cameras for the bicyclist, to
Draisena's regular column “The Sport of Touring and Amateur Photography,” women readers were encouraged to create their own photographs. At the same time, however, while individual participation in visual representation was promoted, most photographs in the magazines came from professional portrait studios. Like feminist historians of science and technology Ruth Oldenziel and Nina Lehrman, who see women taking on various tools of technology as “technological actors,” the photographs document women’s interest in the technology of the bicycle, but also their interest in and adoption of the technology of photography. It is the use of the latter technology that clearly illustrates how keenly aware these women were of the path-breaking nature of their status as cyclists.

Figure 5: Frau Anna Burkhardt “Gracefully” Poised in Action
The women in the bicycling photographs are an early-1890s version of the German New Woman. Although the New Woman has been well documented as a cultural phenomenon and historical reality between 1918 and 1933, many of the authors of Katharina von Ankum’s important volume Women in the Metropolis emphasize that these women’s liberation from traditional gender roles was already on the decline by the mid-1920s. The Early New Woman was busy making waves long before then. While historians do allude to the phenomenon of the Wilhelmine New Woman in regard to bicycling, such as David Ehrenpreis’s 1999 article “Cyclists and Amazons,” the emphasis is on caricatures and advertising. Others discuss the Wilhelmine New Woman as caught between the identities of the femme fatale and the femme fragile (Wittmann). I want to differentiate between these definitions of the term Early New Woman primarily in reading the existence of the photographs as a sign of women’s own agency in constructing images of emancipation. The photographs offer evidence that they enacted emancipatory gestures—dressing differently and exiting the protected bourgeois sphere to bike in public at their leisure—which were independent gestures outside of organized women’s efforts. They tended to their physical and mental selves, which can be recognized as emancipatory for women in every age. Moreover, they took the additional step to memorialize pleasure in the sport via photographs. The focus on bicycling demonstrates how women spent their leisure time before Siegfried Kracauer’s 1920s observations of the “little shop girls” going to the movies. The focus on leisure to signify a new generation of women differs from the focus on women’s labor efforts during World War I or the physical and social traits of younger women (bobbed hair, androgynous dress, unmarried, employed) as important markers of a modern woman. So how does the women’s movement factor into the emergence of the Early German New Woman?

Prior to the last decades of the nineteenth century, moderate conservative members who adhered to rather traditional bourgeois ideologies regarding marriage and gender roles dominated the first generation of German women to organize. The number of women involved in the initial movement was relatively small; they came from upper-class families, had a university education, and often decided not to marry because of their “feminist” ideals. Their main interest was to change and improve the political and ideological conditions of women’s lives in society. For a variety of reasons, including Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Law (1878–90), moderately conservative women prevented other factions of the wider women’s movement from becoming members in the umbrella organization Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (Federation of
German Women’s Associations) formed in 1894. This excluded the interests of socialist, working-class, and radical factions of the movement.

The activities and work of the radical fraction sought to loosen the strict moral and sexual codes for women, and, as such, might seem more closely related to the interests of younger women. It is this group that is connected most readily with the New Woman of the Weimar time period. The women born after the first generation of organized German women were larger in number, uneducated, lower-middle class, and not particularly politically motivated. Because many emancipatory ideas were already present—women could work and study by 1908 and vote by 1918—younger women pursued interests that they felt benefited them personally, such as fulfilling their own sexual desires or delaying or avoiding marriage. Some historians regard the lack of political or economic force behind the more personal agenda of younger women as a failure vis-à-vis the community-building efforts of the original movement (Evans).

The New Woman can be connected to the Early New Woman primarily via their individual interpretation of emancipation through leisure activities. While some members of the radical fraction, such as Lily Braun, spoke out in favor of the bicycle, a sweeping endorsement of bicycle use for women by the German women’s movement was not possible because of differences in agenda and membership. In general, the disconnect between older and younger generations, the political and economic conservatism during Germany’s nation-building phase, as well as the incongruous interests of different factions of the women’s movement created individual definitions and assessments regarding the impact of the bicycle. One area of disagreement was in the understanding of work versus leisure, a point that highlights use of the bicycle in the 1890s as a still mostly middle-class leisure activity.

Because of the debate over women’s sexuality and social roles at this time, popular German language publications that promoted bicycling were careful to distance themselves from emancipatory ideas that would have seemed improper to more conservative bourgeois women. The handbook Vademecum (1897), published by the magazine Wiener Mode (Viennese Fashion), explains the relationship between the women’s movement and women’s bicycling as such:

Above all, we recognize that the question about whether or not women should ride the bicycle has much in common with the general question of women’s emancipation, even though the questions do not appear to belong together. “Emancipated women” take a stance only in regard to their aptitude for work and to their equality
with men in career opportunities, and concern themselves less with matters of mere pleasure. (qtd. in Bleckmann 142)

From this perspective, the women’s movement in general seems to have presented itself as separate from the sport of bicycling, i.e., as a serious political endeavor versus a leisure activity. On one hand, one can detect in this comment the disdain for idle leisure that was ideologically imposed upon bourgeois women for much of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, socialist feminists would have had difficulty embracing the idea of leisure because it could be regarded as too bourgeois or capitalist. Therefore, they would also be unable to consider leisure as a serious emancipatory undertaking. It was only in the first decades of the twentieth century that women of the lower class were able to afford a bicycle, and frequently the sole purpose in purchasing a bicycle was to be able to seek and take on employment positions further from home.

Radical members of the German women’s movement who spoke out on the controversial topic of women’s sexuality remained cautious in associating leisurely or everyday activities such as bicycling with any notion of distracted from the more serious project of sexual liberation. One can also detect in the Vademecum quotation a slight disdain for “emancipated women” or for women active in the movement in general. After all, Vademecum was a publication devoted to the leisure activity of bicycling. That “emancipated women” could not bother themselves with “matters of mere pleasure” was meant as a jab at the caricatured uptight bluestocking. Ultimately, rather than associating the phenomenon of the bicycle with the various agendas of the German women’s movement, the bicycle as a leisure activity could be interpreted as emancipatory on an individual level. Through a new self-consciousness that came about as the result of many societal changes, women undertook activities that led to their personal growth and development, and the bicycle was one of many instruments in this change (Bleckmann 150). Documenting one’s life in photographs was another.

The individual pursuit of emancipatory experiences as exemplified by cycling is one feature that sets the Early New Woman apart from her predecessors in the organized women’s movement. Of course the founding mothers of the movement had their own individual interpretations of emancipation, but what defines the women’s movement has more to do with a joining of forces to reach specific goals rather than with the pursuit of individual interests. After all, they did not endorse bicycling for women as an organization. By and large, the goals of the organized movement dealt with work and education. The magazines Draisena and Die Radlerin offer important insight into how women’s leisure
experiences with bicycles reflect a period of transition for women. Inspired by the activities of the women’s movement, but of a different political persuasion, the Early New Woman begins to forge ahead and on her own, deciding as an individual what suits her own notion of freedom, like bicycling. As Ehrenpreis concludes, positive images of bicycling women converted women “from political figures into commodities espousing the virtues of fashion, leisure—and consumption” (30).

For the most part, the magazines’ layout and juxtaposition of the textual and visual allow multiple interpretations of emancipation for individual readers. In the humorous sketch, “My First Bicycle Excursion,” in an 1898/99 publication of Die Radlerin, the married Frau Dr. Cäcilia Lederer recounts how her bicycle teacher abandoned her to her first public, solo ride. In preparation for her ride to the Prater, the author seems to exude confidence: “Truly cheekily did I pace the room, snapped on my gloves, so self-assured, as if to say, ‘look at me, I have the courage to do this!’” Through this confessional mode, readers receive insight into Lederer’s personal challenge and are made aware that emancipatory efforts do not come easily. Lederer’s words “look at me!” remind the reader of women’s self-consciousness and continuous self-vigilance as a spectacle in the public eye, the “as if” drawing attention to the performative aspect of the confidence she exudes.

The battle for self-actualization is fought in the performative space of the public and the private. While Lederer boasts in the privacy of her own room, she also confesses a desire to put an end to the “act.” Instead of focusing on the visual accoutrements of what seems emancipatory and perhaps even too bold, suggested by the sister’s disapproving comments that “the skirt was too short, the cap too crooked, the tie too red,” Lederer follows through with her plan, inspired by personal pride and self-commitment. While the reader is made to understand that bicycling is always a public spectacle—“As the servant girl told me afterwards, at least fifty people were standing around watching me mount the bicycle”—Lederer’s story also portrays the sport of bicycling as a space in which a more personal battle is fought: “my honor was at stake” (166). In keeping with women’s individual interpretation of emancipation through bicycling, the author’s reference to her honor can be interpreted as emancipatory in its reference to keeping a commitment to oneself, rather than in adhering to conservative, patriarchal, and/or bourgeois rules of femininity. This perspective revises the traditional notion of a woman’s honor that regards men as its true protectors.

The visuals that accompany Lederer’s story offer interpretive options for the more cautious-minded as well as for those willing to see the need for greater social risks to experience personal freedom. The
story, which runs over four pages, begins under the photograph of a married couple standing next to their bicycles at a Blumenkorso ("flower pageant/parade") in the Rheinland. While there is no clear connection between the Rheinland couple and Lederer's text, organizing them in such a way on the magazine's page suggests to the reader that the story will be about a married couple. This would certainly be understood as a most appropriate way to undertake "a first bicycle excursion." On page two, the written text reveals that the author's escort is not her husband, but the bicycle teacher, and worse yet, he has accepted another "needier" student in place of the author. Lederer's frustration and disappointment motivate her to continue the excursion plans on her own. The images that balance the text on this page are ads of bicycles, bicycle seats, the Hammond Typewriter, and the "Neues Frauenblatt" (New Women's Newspaper). The juxtaposition of advertising texts that allude to consumer choices for women with the author's description of riding unaccompanied reinforces another aspect of women's independence: her role as consumer. The typewriter ad specifically seems to highlight women's paid work and the possibility of economic independence. For middle-class readers who might relate to the frustration of Lederer's struggle for emancipation—if only for an afternoon of bicycling in the park—the suggestion to acquire additional "tools" that better enable emancipation is empowering.

A center photograph that shocks visually and textually dominates the third page of Lederer's article (Figure 6). The photo's boldness is reflected in the image of the amateur bicycle artist Viola Ziemann of Hamburg balancing her bicycle's back wheel, front wheel high in the air. She wears striped pants gathered at the knee with white bows, a white ruffled shirt, and her long, black hair flowing openly down her back. Her eyes are directed almost defiantly at the viewer. The contrast of the female acrobat with Lederer's written account of personal bourgeois triumph acts to temper what might be read as a "deviant" solo excursion. Despite the wheelie-popping bicycling Amazon, Lederer's actions come across as quite innocent. The written narrative records Lederer's self-dialogue, reflecting both trepidation and exuberance ("O God, O God! [...] I must ride today to the Prater, come what may!"), her sister's jeers ("Ok, show me what you've got"), the spectators' observations as reported by the servant, and her departure for her courageous ride ("I was honored by several people out for a stroll with the usual cheers"). The comments emphasize the visual, repeatedly reminding the reader of the public spectacle of the solo woman bicyclist. Because the audience most likely consists of bicycling enthusiasts,
Lederer's story offers humorous inspiration and self-confidence to those seeking to assert their independence.

The insertion of the Ziemann photograph pushes bourgeois readers to another level of desire and fantasy: the realm of celebrity and star worship. *Draisena* and *Die Radlerin* made frequent use of celebrity photographs, and portraits of various aristocratic women (who happen to endorse bicycling, but do not pose with their machine) were often placed on the title page of the magazine. Drawing on the cult popularity of some nobility, the magazines' editors hoped to make the sport even more attractive to the average middle-class reader. In the history of women's bicycling, aristocratic women and actresses were often the first to risk public visibility, primarily due to the fact that they could afford
it, financially and socially, seeming to exist as they did beyond the boundaries of bourgeois rules and decorum.

The magazines also regularly include photographs of women bicycle acrobats, racers, and Blumenkorso participants. Integrating local celebrities, who were often Blumenkorso participants, and amateur sport stars in the magazines' visual spread convinced the average woman that, if the woman-next-door in the photograph could perform on a bicycle, she herself could attempt at least to ride one. Illustrating the multiple identificatory and interpretive positions for the female reader, the layout of Ziemann's photographs is positioned squarely between two triangle-shaped lithographs of men and women bicycling together on opposite corners of the page, creating a diagonal shape that borders the text on all sides. The photograph of the bold female acrobat counters the more generic lithographic images of men and women in the corners, both set against Lederer's written narrative of personal triumph. Readers can then choose to identify with either the bold photographic display of the acrobat, the more hetero-normative and neutral lithographs that hide on the sidelines, or with the smaller-scale, but still public actions of Lederer.

On the final page, readers are rewarded with a photograph of Frau Dr. Cäcilia Lederer herself (Figure 7). The author sits on a bicycle in a modest sporty dress and hat that contrasts Ziemann's acrobatic outfit and flowing hair. In the studio portrait, Lederer engages actively with the observer, smiling at and waving to the camera. To counteract the bold actions of her unaccompanied bicycle excursion, the caption reads, "From Our Gallery of Graceful Bicycle Riders." The text surrounding the photograph tells of her encounter with the male Sportsgenosse ("sports comrade") who accompanies her throughout the rest of her ride. Ending the article with the properly accompanied and appropriately dressed married woman (the caption also repeats the title "Frau Dr.")], the magazine offers more conservative skepticism an attractive, well-dressed (skirted), and composed woman as role model.

Finally, despite the presence of textual messages that remind the reader of exterior hindrances—the teacher abandoning his pupil, her sister's constant nagging ("You riding alone to the Prater, have you lost your senses? Do you want to be brought home dead?") etc.—the photograph of Lederer in a confident and relaxed pose reassures the reader that the solo excursion has done no harm. The photograph reflects the clothing and gesture of bourgeois femininity, and the bicycle's presence takes on the character of a prop. The reader must carefully examine the photograph of Lederer on the bicycle and might wonder how she balances on the bike, for her feet do not touch the ground. The reader
hopefully recognizes in her “balancing act” the construction of emancipation and identifies Lederer’s complicity in it, as she balances on a bicycle propped up by invisible wires. If the story recalls moments of emancipatory behavior—continuing her ride despite stares or comments, advertisements that suggest buying power or work opportunities, photographs of physically uninhibited female acrobats—the final photograph reminds the reader that neither the story nor the photograph are random, but borne out of Lederer’s individual struggle to experience and document a particular kind of freedom.

Figure 7: Frau Dr. Cäcilia Lederer

In conclusion, using photography to represent women’s attempts at “conquering” the bicycle, Draisena and Die Radlerin allowed their readers to interpret individually women bicyclists’ versions of emancipation. The photographic referent in the bicycling magazines allows some
subjectivity; the sitter’s “performative” aspect extends to the reading of the photograph itself. “The structure of looking is reciprocal: photographer and viewer collaborate on the reproduction of ideology” (Hirsch 7). In understanding photographs as performative, i.e., as active rather than static images, readers gain insight into women’s visual interactions and how they can be empowered in both subject and object positions. The evidence of bicycling Early German New Women in the photography of Draisena and Die Radlerin validates the claim that women were empowered to interpret and shape the image of emancipation on their own terms.

Notes

1 “Das Damenradeln ist das Länder zwingende Moment in der modernen Frauenbewegung” (111). The rather archaic formulation here makes translation challenging. It is not clear to which “Länder” von Salvisberg refers given the awkward placement of the quote in the text. It stands alone as a subtitle for Amelie Rother’s article on women’s bicycling in von Salvisberg’s edited book. All other translations are mine unless otherwise noted.


3 Ruth-Ellen Joeres discusses ambiguous nineteenth-century “radicality”: “Radicality may well have lurked behind eccentricity, but it can also be present in the performance of propriety, especially when that propriety is present in a woman who presents a modest appearance even if her activities tend to deviate from the expected gender role” (Joeres 117, my emphasis).

4 The introduction of the Kodak roll film camera came in 1888 and led to an increase in image-making by amateurs and an overall democratization of photography (Stokes 194).

5 The encouragement of women to become professional photographers was promoted in the woman’s magazine Die Frau in the following articles: “Photoskulptur,” Paul Schettler (Dec. 1899); “Die photographische
Lehranstalt des Lettevereins zu Berlin” (Feb. 1904); “Die Flucht in die Photographie,” Franziska Mann (Dec. 1905); and “Die Berufsphotographin,” Anna L. Plehn (Oct. 1906). Interestingly, in addition to being a bicycle enthusiast, radical feminist Anita Augsberg, along with her friend Sophia Goudstikker (1865–1924), opened a photo studio “Hof-Alelier Elvira” in Munich.

6 Mills discusses various discourses particular to women’s travel writing, such as the concerns of safety and believability, in chapters 4 and 5 of Discourses of Difference.

7 Clarke discusses the photographic essay of the Weimar period, August Sander’s Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts, as the basis for his argument. Sander assigned generic titles such as “The Carpenter,” “The Seamstress,” and “The Gentleman,” to describe studio photographs of anonymous people. “Susan Sontag felt that in his attempt to reflect a ‘comprehensive taxonomy’ of the German society, Sander ‘unself-consciously adjusted his style to the rank of the person he was photographing’” (Clarke 86).

8 The questioning of the way one reads the individual is prominent in the realist work of nineteenth-century writers such as Theodor Fontane or Gottfried Keller (in particular here, Kleider machen Leute).

9 The juxtaposition of text and image is of importance when considering possible interpretations for each, as their positions reveal different types of relationships such as opposition, collaboration, and parallelism (Hirsch). While the concept “a picture is worth a thousand words” has credence in our cultural understanding, the power of language cannot be so easily dismissed. Indeed, the reading of an image must not be taken at “face value,” but, as suggested, within the framework of a specific discourse. In cautioning against the lack of social context, Benjamin comments, “Wird die Beschriftung nicht zum wesentlichsten Bestandteil der Aufnahme werden?” (“Kleine Geschichte der Photographie” 93).

10 The column started in 1898 and was edited by H. Schnauss, chief editor for the photographic journal “Apollo” in Dresden. Entitled “Die photographische Ecke,” it covered various detailed aspects of photography for the bicyclist, including equipment, photo-taking tips, and film development on the road.

11 If indeed amateur photography on bicycling tours was a popular hobby, without it being mentioned in magazine articles one would hardly come to the same conclusion through the choice of photographs displayed in these pages. Few reader-photographs appear, but this perhaps attests to women bicyclist’s bourgeois modesty and avoidance of the “sin” of vanity.
Works Cited


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