

How successfully did the Nazis impose their ideology on German women?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Deutschland wächst aus starken Müttern und gefunden Kindern



'I have donated a child to the Führer.' Thus proclaimed one German mother upon giving birth. She had clearly absorbed the government propaganda that urged women to have more children as a vital way of strengthening the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*. We open this chapter with a selection of sources on attitudes towards women in the Third Reich. You may find them very provocative. However, in order to develop a balanced assessment of women's position in the Third Reich, you must also seek to understand the general perceptions of women at the time, and not read back into history your own views on the position of women in society. You should also understand the extent to which some Nazi views were held by other groups and societies at the time. Finally, you will also need to consider objectively the services the Nazis provided for women.

- A** What role were women to play in the Nazi state? (pp. 292–5)
- B** How did the Nazis try to implement their ideas? (pp. 296–301)
- C** Review: How successfully did the Nazis impose their ideology on German women? (pp. 302–3)

SOURCE 15.1 A poster produced in 1935 by the Organisation to Aid Mothers and Children: 'Germany grows through strong mothers and healthy children'

FOCUS ROUTE

Using your work on Sources 15.2–15 and Chart 15A, explain:

- a) the proposed role for women and the ideal type of woman in the Nazi state
- b) what the Nazis disliked about 'emancipated' women.

SEMINAR

You might like to organise your study of this chapter around a seminar (see page 277).

A What role were women to play in the Nazi state?

ACTIVITY

Split up into four groups. Each study one selection of sources:

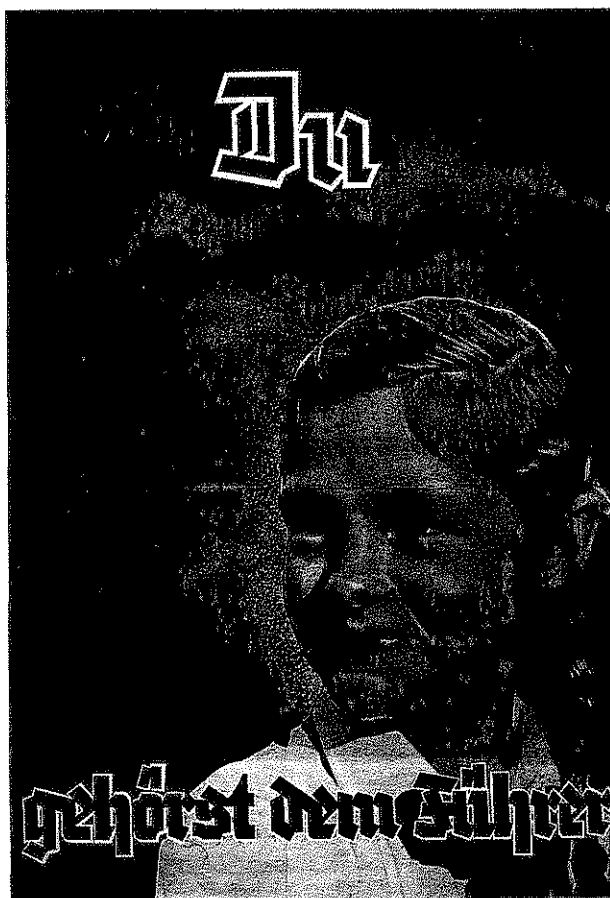
- a) Sources 15.2–6
- b) Sources 15.7–9
- c) Sources 15.10–13
- d) Sources 15.14 and 15.15.

In your groups, discuss and record what each source shows about Nazi attitudes, identifying what the Nazis thought women should and should not do/be like. Then report back to the class, referring to specific sources.

SOURCE 15.2 *Familienbildnis*: the ideal German family – a painting by Wolfgang Willrich in the 1930s



SOURCE 15.3 A 1937 propaganda poster aimed at German girls: 'You too belong to the Führer'



SOURCE 15.4 Nazi slogan on the role of women

Kinder, Küche, Kirche [Children, kitchen, church]

SOURCE 15.6 German rhyme

*Take hold of kettle, broom and pan.
Then you'll surely get your man!
Shop and office leave alone,
Your true life's work lies at home.*

SOURCE 15.5 Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, Head of the Nazi Women's Organisation

Woman is entrusted in the life of the nation with a great task, the care of man, soul, body, and mind. It is the mission of woman to minister in the home and in her profession to the needs of life from the first to the last moment of man's existence. Her mission in marriage is . . . comrade, helper and womanly complement of man – this is the right of woman in the New Germany.

SOURCE 15.7 A German newspaper in 1937 explaining why women should be ineligible for jury service

They cannot think logically or reason objectively since they are ruled only by emotion.

SOURCE 15.8 A speech by Hitler to the National Socialist Women's Organisation in 1934

If the man's world is said to be the state, his struggle, his readiness to devote his powers to the service of the community, then it may perhaps be said that the woman's is a smaller world. For her world is her husband, her family, her children, and her home . . . the greater world is built on the foundation of this smaller one. This great world cannot survive if the smaller world is not stable . . . The two worlds are not antagonistic. They complement each other, they belong together just as man and woman belong together.

. . . We consider it natural if these two worlds remain distinct. To the one belongs the strength of feeling, the strength of the soul. To the other belongs the strength of vision, of toughness of decision, and of willingness to act. In the one case this strength demands the willingness of the woman to risk her life to preserve this important cell and multiply it, and in the other case it demands from the man the readiness to safeguard life.

THINKING POINTS

What aspects of Nazi views on women are still prevalent today?

SOURCE 15.9 Extracts from two contemporary Nazi publications

Marriage

Marriage is the lasting, life-long union of two genetically healthy persons of the same race and of different sexes, which has been approved by the national community, and is based on mutual ties of loyalty, love and respect. Its purpose is the maintenance and furtherance of the common good through harmonious co-operation, the procreation of genetically healthy children of the same race, and the education of them to become hard-working national comrades.

SOURCE 15.10 Goebbels, 1929

The mission of women is to be beautiful and bring children into the world . . . The female bird pretties herself for her mate and hatches eggs for him. In exchange, the mate takes care of gathering the food, and stands guard and wards off the enemy.

SOURCE 15.12 From the Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*

The most unnatural thing we can encounter in the streets is a German woman, who, disregarding all laws of beauty, has painted her face with Oriental war paint.

SOURCE 15.14 Himmler

With bigamy, each wife would act as a stimulus to the others so that both would try to be their husband's dream woman.

SOURCE 15.15 From an NSF (National Socialist Women's Organisation) publication during the war

It has always been our article of faith that a woman's place is in the home, but since the whole of Germany is our home we must serve wherever we can best do so.

The Function of Sex

Sexual activity serves the purpose of procreation for the maintenance of the life of the nation and not the enjoyment of the individual . . . If, however, the desire to have a child has been fulfilled and the continuation and enlargement of the nation has been secured by the production of a sufficient number of children, then, from the point of view of the nation, there is no objection to further satisfaction of the sexual urge.

SOURCE 15.11 'Ten Commandments for Choice of Spouse': advice issued to women

- 1 Remember that you are a German.
- 2 If you are genetically healthy you should not remain unmarried.
- 3 Keep your body pure.
- 4 You should keep your mind and spirit pure.
- 5 As a German, choose only a spouse of the same or Nordic blood.
- 6 In choosing a spouse, ask about his ancestors.
- 7 Health is also a precondition for physical beauty.
- 8 Marry only for love.
- 9 Don't look for a playmate but for a companion for marriage.
- 10 You should want to have as many children as possible.

SOURCE 15.13 Hess, in a newspaper article, 1939

As all National Socialists know, the highest law in war, as in peace, is preservation of the race. An unmarried mother may have a hard path. But she knows that when we are at war, it is better to have a child under the most difficult conditions than not to have one at all . . . the family is the basis of the country, but during a war the highest service which a woman may perform for the continuation of the nation is to bear racially healthy children. Be happy, good women, that you have been permitted to perform this high duty for Germany.

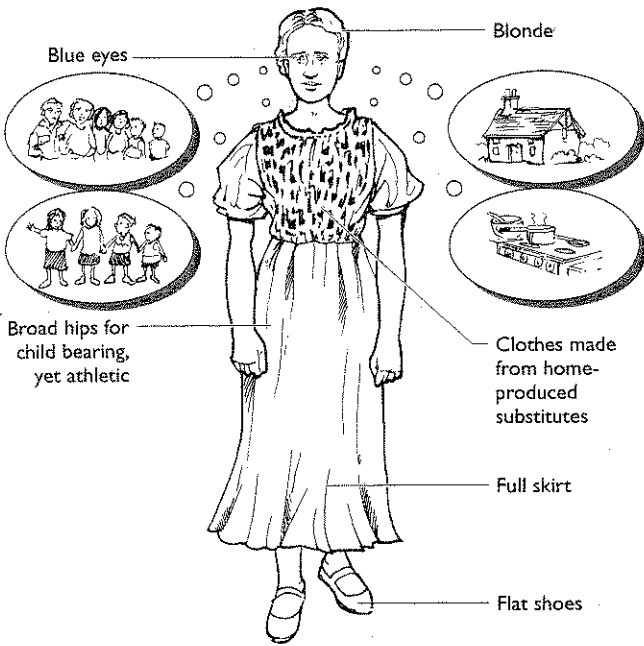
Nazi policy towards women was largely reactionary. The Nazis wanted to reverse many of the recent trends that had increased opportunities for women throughout Europe, such as increased female employment in the non-agricultural sector and a declining birth rate that was partly due to wider access to contraception. These trends had been present in Germany under the Weimar Republic, many of whose supporters advocated further EMANCIPATION. Women had been given the vote and experienced greater cultural freedom, and the growing gender imbalance (considerably increased by war casualties, with an estimated 2.8 million surplus women in 1919) had created further opportunities.

A reaction against these trends had set in during the Depression with some moves to discriminate against women in work, and there was an inevitable fall in female employment. Into this context came the Nazis who had a clear vision of women performing what the Nazis considered to be their traditional role as homemakers and childbearers. In the national struggle for survival, women had a vital, if different, role from the warrior men: to breed genetically pure Germans to ensure German supremacy. The Nazis also emphasised the role of the family as the 'germ cell of the nation', and this had clear implications for the position of women in the state.

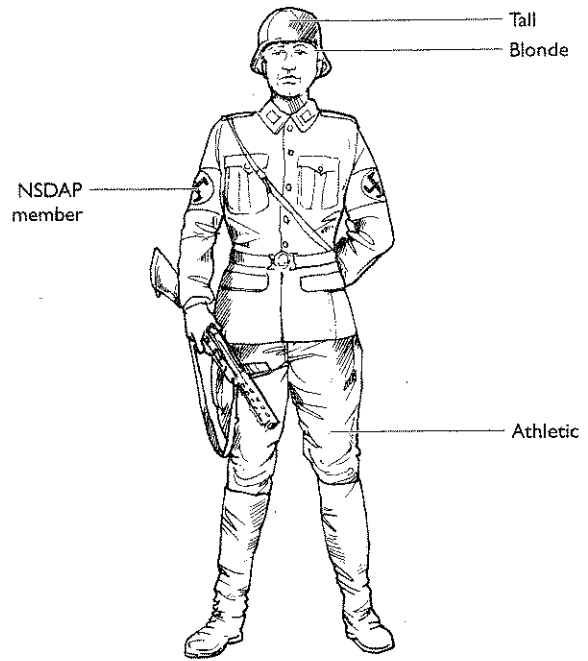
However, as in other areas of policy, Nazi ideology came into conflict with broader trends and other economic priorities. The early years of the regime saw the forcing of women out of employment and the encouragement of traditional family structures. However, during the war, because of the need for more workers and more soldiers, the government encouraged the utilisation of female labour, and also childbirth outside marriage. These were just some of the several contradictions you will find within Nazi policy towards women.

Does this topic create the same or different problems for male and female students of history?

Nazi ideal woman



Ideal man



SEPARATE SPHERES

Her role is in the home to:

- Raise many children
- Look after her family
- Be a good homemaker
- Cook using left-overs

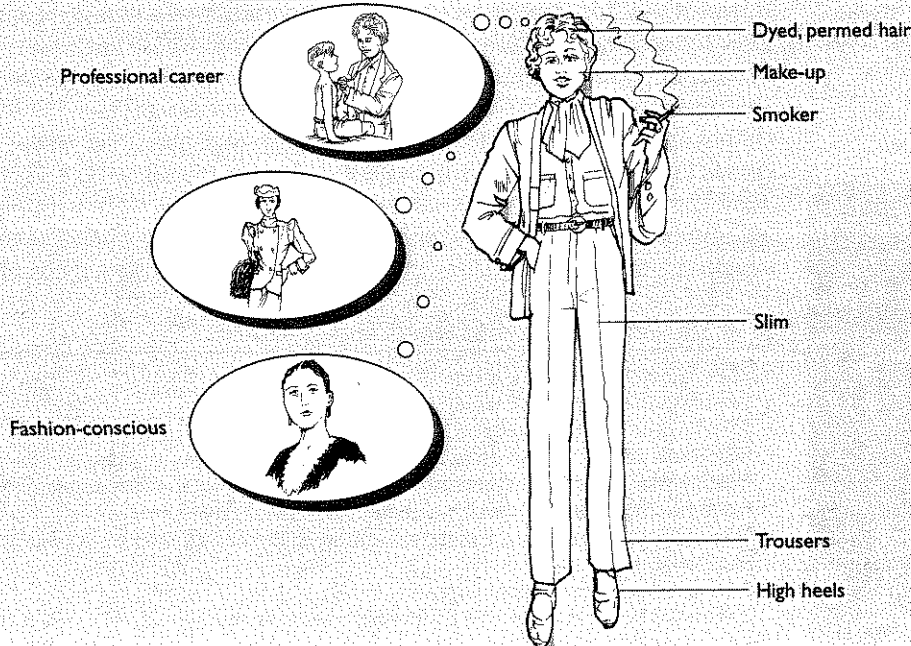
His role is to be part of the big world of:

- Politics
- War
- Work

But both are:

- Equally vital members of the *Volksgemeinschaft*
- Selfless
- Healthy
- Of pure blood
- Fanatical followers of Hitler

The modern (1930s) woman (American/French) the Nazis criticised



B How did the Nazis try to implement their ideas?

FOCUS ROUTE

Complete your own copy of the following assessment chart as you read the rest of the chapter.

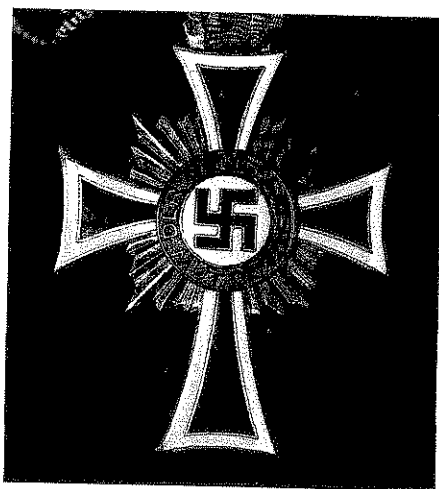
Area	Key measures	Successes	Limitations and failures
Increased births			
Improved welfare			
Reduced employment			
Reduced education			
Involvement in women's organisations			

SOURCE 15.16 In 1943 a Marriage Law was drawn up but not enacted

All single and married women up to the age of 35 who do not already have four children should be obliged to produce four children by racially pure German men. Whether these men are married is of no significance. Every family that already has four children must set the husband free for this action.

Should governments have the right to force their citizens to have a certain number of children?

SOURCE 15.17 The Honour Cross of German Motherhood, an award given to women for bearing children. It was modelled on the military cross for men. Bronze crosses were given to mothers of four or five children, silver for six or seven, gold for eight or more. Cross bearers were also entitled to a special salute from the Hitler Youth



Soon after the Nazis came to power, women who had experienced new freedoms under the Weimar Republic began to feel the Nazi backlash. In 1933 the Law for the Reduction of Unemployment cleverly linked the fight to reduce unemployment with the introduction of Nazi policies towards women. Marriage loans were granted to women who gave up their jobs. This was soon followed by restrictions on women's employment in the Civil Service. Thus in October 1935 the official guidelines for recruiting civil servants and teachers stated: 'In the event of males and females being equally qualified for employment in public service, the male applicant should be given preference.' In the dire conditions of high unemployment at the time there was not a strong reaction against such a policy.

Marriage too became increasingly influenced by legal changes that both threatened and encouraged German married couples to produce the right racial stock and plenty of it! Divorce became easier, but this was not inspired by concern for women's rights: it was in order to boost the birth rate by ending unproductive marriages that were deemed 'worthless' to the national community. A further example of the Nazi perception of the need for children is shown in Source 15.16.

To help inculcate their values, the Nazis created a series of organisations for girls and women, membership of which eventually numbered millions. However, the Nazi belief in a national community was not mere propaganda. They implemented welfare schemes that supported women and their children. Thus in the *Gau* of Munich-Upper Bavaria, Nazi organisations in one month in 1934 distributed 25,800 litres of milk, 1,500 grocery parcels and 172 sets of baby clothes and linen. Nationally, the number of women attending recuperation homes after childbirth rose from 40,340 in 1934 to 77,723 in 1938. Harvest kindergartens to look after children when their mothers were working in the fields increased from 600 in 1934 to 8,700 in 1941. Prolific mothers were awarded medals in recognition of their contribution to national objectives.

15B Nazi organisations for women

- 10–14 Jung Mädel (Young girls)
- 14–18 BDM (League of German Girls)
- 18–21 Glaube und Schönheit (Faith and Beauty)
- NSF (National Socialist Women's Organisation): an umbrella organisation co-ordinating existing women's organisations to bring them into line with official ideology. It ran the Reich Mothers' Service, which trained housewives and midwives
- DFW (German Women's Enterprise): set up to develop an elite of women committed to Nazi ideology
- RAD and DAF women's sections
- The welfare organisation NSV (National Socialist People's Welfare) relied greatly on paid and volunteer female labour

■ 15C Nazi policies towards women

AREA OF LIFE						
	Births	Marriage	Welfare	Education	Employment	Public life
A Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase pure German births 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase suitable marriages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop healthy Germans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare women for their proper role • Restrict opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce female employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise women and incorporate them in the Nazi <i>Volksgemeinschaft</i>
B Measures i) 1933-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial incentives, e.g. marriage loans, birth grants • Improved maternity services • Propaganda to raise status and self-esteem of mothers and housewives; awards, e.g. Mother's Cross • Penalties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Higher taxes on childless couples – Tighter penalties on abortion – Restrictions on contraception information – Measures introduced for compulsory sterilisation of 'undesirables' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1933 600 RM marriage loan if unemployed • 1937 Loan extended to women in work • 1935 Marriage Law required certificate of 'fitness to marry' before marriage licence issued • Oct 1935 Blood Protection Law: marriage to Jews, Black people, gypsies forbidden • 1938 Marriage Law extended the grounds for divorce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NS-Volkswohlfahrt (NSV), the National Socialist Welfare Organisation, set up • Vast expansion of health offices, especially in rural areas; improved sanitation, preventative medicine, genetic and racial care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited university enrolment of women to 10% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1933 Women in top civil service and medical jobs dismissed • 1936 Banned from being judges, lawyers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No female Nazi members of Reichstag permitted • Two women's organisations created: NSF, DFW
ii) 1939-45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lebensborn</i> programme extended. Encouragement of births outside marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1941 Couples found cohabiting after their marriage had been banned were sent to concentration camps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved childcare facilities, especially for working mothers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrictions dropped as great demand for well-educated workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1939 Compulsory agricultural labour service for unmarried women under 25 • Women exhorted to help war effort, but only in 1942 were women of 17-45 told to register for work (many exceptions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nazi women's organisations support the war effort (e.g. clothes collections for the Russian Front) ...
C Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1933-9 Birth rate rose, then slowly declined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1932: 516,000 marriages • 1934: 740,000 marriages • Divorces increased after 1938 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infant mortality dropped: 1933 7.7% 1936 6.6% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop in numbers of women at university until Second World War 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of women in employment rose • Further increase during the war 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased female participation in Nazi bodies
D Overall assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase may have been due more to economic recovery than to Nazi policies/ measures • Birth rate rose compared to during the Depression; but did not get back to levels of Weimar Germany • Nazi eugenic policies reduced the population potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in marriages may have been due more to economic optimism than to government policies; e.g. average size of family fell • Divorce was extended to help national objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare closely linked to eugenic policies • NSV largely staffed by women; improved opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrictions on opportunities for women were increasingly relaxed as women were needed, since demand for workers and soldiers grew 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nazi policies had marginal effect on overall female employment • Main impact was on the professions • During the war, women were less mobilised than in the UK or the USA • 1943 Speer's proposal to conscript women fully was opposed by Hitler due to the effect he thought it would have on morale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In many ways the Nazis gave increased opportunities for (mainly middle-class) women to become involved in public life, although they were excluded from decision-making

How effective were Nazi policies?

ACTIVITY

- 1 The overall effectiveness of Nazi policies was mixed and, as we have seen in other areas, the situation became more problematic when the war was underway. Study Sources 15.18–24 and list evidence that suggests that
 - a) Nazi policies were successful and that men and women accepted Nazi views of the role of women
 - b) Nazi policies were not so successful.
- 2 Choose three different types of source and evaluate each one as evidence of the success of Nazi policy.



Gertrud Scholtz-Klink (1902–): the ideal Nazi woman

Scholtz-Klink initially worked for the Berlin Red Cross. Her SA husband died of a heart attack during a demonstration and this inspired her to carry on his work. In 1929 she became the leader of the NSF in Baden and later deputy leader of the Nazi organisation nationwide. In 1934 she was promoted to Reichsfrauenführerin (women's leader) of all Nazi women's organisations (Frauenwerk, Woman's League of the Red Cross, Women's Bureau of DAF, Women's Labour Service). Her leadership was, however, in fact token; although she fronted the organisations, she was subordinate to the top male Nazis.

She was a great supporter of Nazi views on women's role, exhorting women to be enthusiastic breeding machines and beasts of burden for the greater glory of the Reich. She was a good speaker, and was sent abroad to win admiration for the new Germany. Unlike many Nazi leaders, she did actually conform to Nazi ideals: she was blonde, healthy and had four children.

In 1945 she hid from the Allies but was eventually arrested in 1948. She was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment for being a 'major offender' as a diehard Nazi, but was acquitted of war crimes. She remained a strong supporter of the Nazi regime whose good she believed outweighed the bad.

SOURCE 15.18 Advertisement in a German newspaper

52-year-old doctor. Fought in World War One. Wishes to settle down. Wants male child through marriage to young, healthy Aryan woman. She should be undemanding, used to heavy work, not a spender, with flat heels, without earrings.

SOURCE 15.19 Advertisement in a German newspaper, 1939

Two vital, lusty, race-conscious Brunnhildes with family trees certified back to 1700 desiring to serve their Fatherland in the form most ennobling to women, would like to meet two similarly inclined Siegfrieds. Marriage not of essential importance. Soldiers on leave also acceptable.

SOURCE 15.20 Letter to Hitler from several women published in a Leipzig newspaper in 1934

Today, man is being educated not for, but against marriage. Men are grouped together in clubs and hostels... Woman stays back further and further in the shadow of loneliness... we see our daughters growing up in stupid aimlessness living only in the vague hope of perhaps getting a man and having children... A son, even the youngest, today laughs in his mother's face. He regards her as his natural servant, and women in general as merely willing tools of his aims.

SOURCE 15.21 Letter of thanks from a woman in a recuperation centre

I would like to thank the Führer heartily with the assurance that I am aware as a German woman and mother of my responsibility to look after my children... and to educate them into being fit, useful people.

[Note by husband] She has put on 14lb, and the strength she was lacking before her trip has considerably come back again... March forward, NSV, flourish, prosper and the nation will be healthy.

SOURCE 15.22 American journalist, 1937

How many women workers did the Führer send home? According to the statistics of the German Department of Labour, there were, in June 1936, 5,470,000 employed women, or 1,200,000 more than in January 1933 . . . The vigorous campaign against the employment of women has not led to their increased domesticity and security, but has been effective in squeezing them out of better paid positions into sweated trades. Needless to say, this type of labour, with its miserable wages and long hours, is extremely dangerous to the health of women and degrades the family.

SOURCE 15.23 A joke told at the time

The father is in the Party; the mother in Frauenschaft [NSF]; the son in the Hitler Youth; the daughter in the BDM. So where does the ideal National Socialist family meet then? At the Reich Party Day in Nuremberg!

SOURCE 15.24 V. Ziemer, Education for Death, 1941. An American teacher describes a visit to a Berlin clinic

Hospital beds came and went with methodical precision. The doctors made quick, deft incisions in white abdomen walls.

'What are they doing?' I asked.

'These doctors', he said, 'are sterilising women.'

I asked what type of women . . . and was informed they were the mentally sick, women with low resistance, women who had proved through other births that their offspring were not strong . . .

'We are even eradicating colour-blindness,' my SS guide told me. 'We must not have soldiers who are colour-blind. It is transmitted only by women.'

In the 1930s France was one of many countries that banned contraception and abortion, and gave rewards for large families. Some states in America and some Scandinavian countries compulsorily sterilised mentally ill people. Does this affect your view of Nazi policies?

SOURCE 15.25 A Social Democrat poster published in December 1930. It says, 'Women, this is what it will be like in the "Third Reich"! Your reply should be: Fight the Nazi for Social Democracy!'

FRAUEN,

so geht's euch im »Dritten Reich«!



»Die Frau muß wieder Magd und Dienerin werden« sagt der Naziführer Feder. Deshalb ist auch in der Hakenkreuzfraktion keine Frau vertreten.

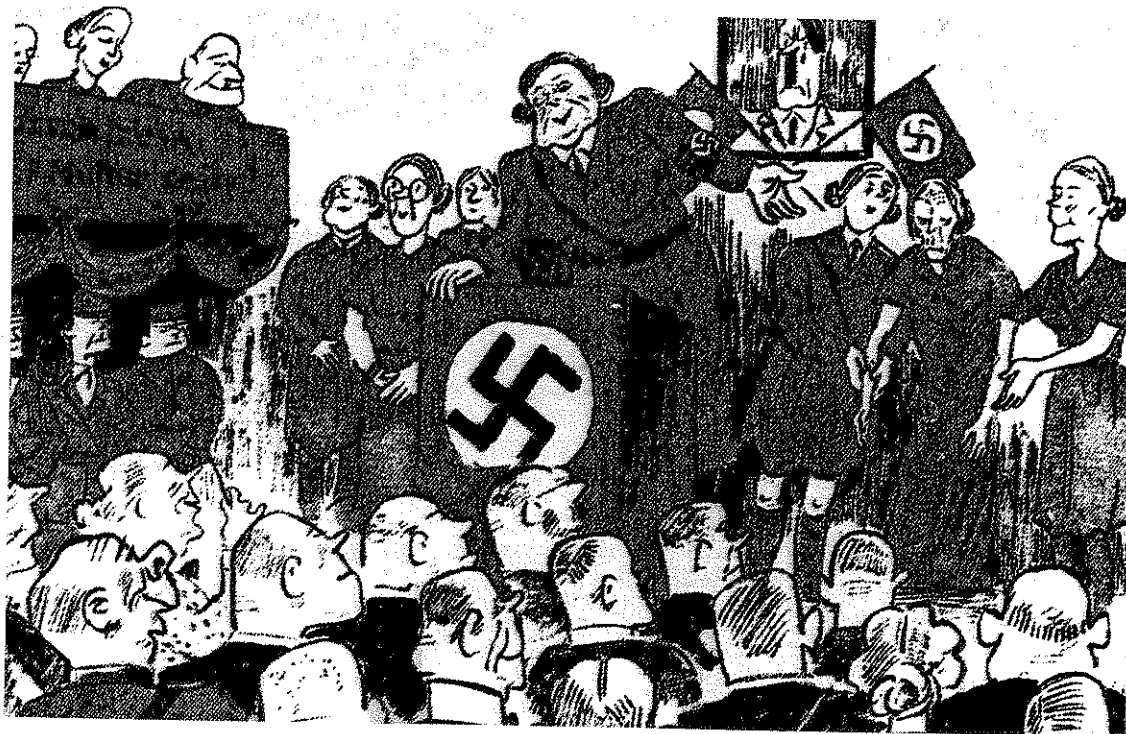
Eure Antwort:

**Kampf den Nazi - -
für die Sozialdemokratie!**

SOURCE 15.26 A female farm worker ploughing during the war



SOURCE 15.27 'Introducing Frau Mueller who up to now has brought twelve children into the world.'
A German cartoon from the 1930s



SOURCE 15.28 Marriages, divorces, births and deaths

A

Year	Marriages	Live births
1929	589,600	-
1931	-	1,047,775
1932	516,793	993,126
1933	638,573	971,174
1934	740,165	1,198,350
1935	651,435	1,263,976
1936	609,631	1,277,052
1937	620,265	1,277,046
1938	645,062	1,348,534
1939	772,106	1,407,490

Note: 1938-9 figures include extended territory

B Divorce statistics after the 1938 Marriage Law

Reasons for divorce	1938-41
Matrimonial offences, including adultery	197,000
Irretrievable breakdown	31,000
Refusal to procreate	1,771
Premature infertility	383

C Average number of children

1933	3.6
1939	3.3

D Mean marriage rate 1933-9

20 per cent lower than 1923-32

SOURCE 15.29 Women's employment (in millions)

A

Job	1933	1939
Agriculture and forestry	4.6	4.9
Industry and crafts	2.7	3.3
Trade and transport	1.9	2.1
Non-domestic services	0.9	1.1
Domestic service	1.2	1.3

B

	Married women working outside the home
1933	4.2
1939	6.2*

* 35% of married women aged 16-65

SOURCE 15.30 'Join the youth groups': a recruitment poster for Nazi organisations. Membership of DFW and NSF in 1941 was 6 million out of 30 million female adults, i.e. 1 in 5 women



The Nazis' policies towards women suffered from several contradictions, for example over their attitude to marriage and the family. The main burden of their propaganda was to encourage the healthy Aryan family, as a small unit of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. However, several of their policies undermined the family. The demands of the Hitler Youth took youngsters away from the family and encouraged them to challenge any non-Nazi attitudes of their parents. The quest for a genetically pure race led to the encouragement of divorce and sterilisation for those 'unworthy' of marriage: an approach that aroused the anger of the Catholic Church, as did later the policy of 'euthanasia'.

During the Second World War the quest for a larger population of genetically pure Germans led to encouragement of procreation outside marriage, as in the *Lebensborn* (Life Springs) programme. In what were, in effect, state-run brothels, 'Aryan' women had babies by SS men. The programme was set up in 1935 and by 1944 nearly 11,000 children had been born in these special homes.

The Nazis' attempts to drive women back into the home were even less successful. The number of women in all types of jobs increased, mainly due to the economic recovery. By 1936 the economy was suffering from a labour shortage in key areas, and by 1939 this had become acute. Here ideology conflicted with economic need. Increasing numbers of women were attracted back into work, but the government did not encourage this. When war broke out, several Nazis advised Hitler to introduce female conscription, but he rejected this, partly on ideological grounds, but probably mainly because he was concerned at the effect on soldiers' morale of drafting their wives into factories. Not until 1943 were women aged 17–45 compelled to register for state-allocated work. The 'totalitarian' Nazi state was thus far less effective in utilising its resources than the liberal regimes in Britain and the USA.

The extent to which women absorbed Nazi propaganda is hard to judge. Mason has argued that the regime was more popular overall with women than with men, and that most women preferred to stay at home than work in factories. This was one factor increasing Hitler's reluctance to impose conscription. Middle-class women, who suffered greater restrictions on their careers, were probably less enthusiastic.

One must also remember to study the regime in context. Many of the Nazis' ideas were just more extreme or explicit versions of views that were widespread well before the Nazis gained power. Thus the Catholic Church and conservative organisations advocated the separate spheres view of women's role and stressed the importance of procreation.

There is considerable debate amongst the growing number of historians of women's history about the impact of Nazism on women. Initial stress by radical feminist historians on the evil impact of Nazi policies has been challenged by other historians arguing that, even if for questionable reasons, there were advantages for women in Nazi Germany. They argue that the benefits of a policy should not be cancelled out by its unattractive aims. In some areas, such as women's organisations and youth groups, the Nazis widened experiences for women. Social services improved. Opportunities to avoid the drudgeries of paid employment had advantages. Furthermore, several historians now stress the ineffectiveness of many Nazi restrictions. This is not to deny that for many women (though proportionately a small number) as well as men their experience of the regime was horrific.

In many ways this account of Nazi policies towards women illustrates some of the limitations on the totalitarian nature of the regime. The Nazis adopted a fairly cautious approach; thus only a few women were actually forced out of jobs; the regime relied more on financial and moral pressure. When in 1939 the Nazis needed female labour contrary to their previous policies, they proceeded very cautiously, partly because they were afraid of the reaction from women and men.

ACTIVITY

Read the historians' assessments in Sources 15.31–4, then answer these questions.

- 1 What contradictions in Nazi policies towards women do De Grand and Frevert identify?
- 2 Which historian stresses the success of Nazi policies most?
- 3 What explanations do Mason and Frevert give for the successes of Nazi policies?
- 4 Why does Pine see Nazi policy towards the family as evidence of the regime's totalitarian nature?
- 5 What conclusions can be drawn from these extracts as to the impact of Nazi policies on women?

SOURCE 15.33 Lisa Pine, *Nazi Family Policy*, 1997, p. 181

The Nazi regime utilised the family for its own ends. Marriage and childbirth became racial obligations rather than personal decisions, as the National Socialists systematically reduced the functions of the family to the single task of reproduction. They aimed to shatter the most intimate human group, the family, and to place it as a breeding and rearing institution completely in the service of the totalitarian state.

is women's history best written by women?



Review: How successfully did the Nazis impose their ideology on German women?

We conclude by studying some of the views of historians who have analysed the position of women in Nazi Germany.

SOURCE 15.31 Alexander De Grand, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, 1995, pp. 57, 63

The fascist position had always been that class distinctions were artificial and superficial but that biologically determined gender roles were immutable [unchangeable] ...

The conservative and stabilising elements of Nazi ideology – to keep women in their place and maintain them as a pillar of the traditional, hierarchical society – could not be reconciled with the political, social and racial ambitions of the regime.

SOURCE 15.32 Tim Mason, 'Women in Germany 1925–1940', in *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class*, 1995, p. 132

In respect of its attitudes and policies towards women, National Socialism was the most repressive and reactionary of all modern political movements. And yet it seems that the overtly [undisguised] anti-feminist policies of the regime after 1933 were at least partially successful, in that they secured the approval, perhaps gratitude, of many German people, men and women alike; partially successful too in blocking and turning back the social, economic and educational pressures which had been conducive [led] to gradual progress towards emancipation in the preceding decades. At the very least, there is scarcely any evidence that the policies adopted on the family and on women's work were unpopular, despite the fact that they ran directly counter to basic liberal, democratic and socialist principles, principles which seemed to have been widely accepted during the 1920s.

SOURCE 15.34 Ute Frevert, *Women in German History*, 1988, pp. 248, 250

Even if most of the twelve million women in the numerous Nazi organisations of 1939 were not themselves ardent National Socialists, twelve years of being educated and bombarded with propaganda by the Volksgemeinschaft cannot have left individual consciousness and collective memory unmarked. In addition the impact of welfare measures ... reinforced popular loyalty ...

National Socialism ... was ... a highly ambiguous period in history which witnessed a unique confluence of 'modernist' and 'traditionalist' tendencies. In a few areas, such as voting rights, access to the upper echelons [levels] of the civil service, and family planning, the fruits of hard fought battles were destroyed; in many areas (most notably with respect to the labour market), the Nazi state represented but a smooth continuation of existing structures and processes, together with all their unfavourable aspects (lower wages and less upward social mobility). By contrast, where youth policy, divorce laws and social organisations were concerned, the Third Reich offered women novel opportunities for participation and recognition in public life, and, indeed, many women benefited in an unprecedented fashion from such socio-political innovation ...

The actual outcome of policy was sometimes different, and often diametrically opposed, to its intended effects ...

The immense ability of the regime to mobilise the population, and the relative rarity of deliberate acts of political resistance, however, suggest that women who satisfied the political, racial and social requirements – and the vast majority did – did not perceive the Third Reich as a women's hell. Much of what it introduced was doubtless appealing, the rest one learned to accept.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Identify the contradictions between Nazi ideology and some of the developments that the government actually assisted, by linking each belief (a–d) with one or more developments (i–vii).

Ideology

- a) Women as producers of babies
- b) Women to stay at home
- c) Support the family
- d) Support traditional, rural society

Conflicting developments

- i) Encouragement of birth outside marriage
 - ii) Development of industrial/military might
 - iii) Compulsory sterilisation for the hereditarily 'ill'
 - iv) Fostering youth assertion in Hitler Youth
 - v) Growth in female employment
 - vi) New organisations for women
 - vii) Encouragement of divorce
- 2 The historian G. Layton has argued (in *Germany: the Third Reich*, 1992, p. 105): 'Nazi policy towards women and the family was contradictory and incoherent, and did little to affect the ongoing sociological trends of an industrialised society.' Do you agree?
- 3 Hold a debate between two women in 1939, one supporting and one critical of the regime. Give yourself a specific identity, since this could well influence your view of the regime. Consider your class, your age, your religion, your pre-1933 voting behaviour, your home region, etc.

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 15: How successfully did the Nazis impose their ideology on German women?

- 1 Nazis believed women should concentrate on childbearing and supporting their husbands.
- 2 This distinct role for women was seen as important and of equal value to the role of men.
- 3 Many of the Nazis' reactionary ideas were widely held, and many women viewed their policies positively.
- 4 Nazi policies towards women were in some respects contradictory.
- 5 The Nazis stressed the role of the family, but increasingly they were prepared to encourage divorce and extra-marital sex to breed more genetically pure Germans.
- 6 The government provided marriage loans and increased welfare services for mothers.
- 7 The Nazis initially encouraged and forced women to give up some jobs, but this trend was reversed during the Second World War.
- 8 Women's opportunities in universities were initially restricted, but this policy too was later reversed.
- 9 The Nazis set up several women's organisations that involved women outside the family sphere.
- 10 Women's experience of the Third Reich was complex and varied, and was not simply a reflection of Nazi ideology.