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**Title:** Representations of “female” madness in German-language literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

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**Abstract:** Using an interdisciplinary approach, my dissertation examines the intersection of “womanhood” and madness in German-language literature and culture. While scholars have studied the “madwoman” of the previous centuries extensively, my dissertation presents the first comprehensive study of representations of “female” madness from 1894 onward. Since the late 19th century, female authors from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland have been appropriating discourses of madness in order to critique the contradictory ramifications of mandatory adherence to the construct of “femininity”. Employing theories of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, I argue that the madness discourse represents a key site where writers negotiate the ongoing hegemony of societal ideologies defining the special status of the female psyche, body and sexuality as entities which need to be monitored, shaped or optimized. My research thus redeploys “female” madness as a research category. While previously applied almost exclusively to the realities of white middle-class women, I argue for an intersectional conception of critical madness studies which takes account of gender, race, and religion to offer culturally specific insights into the lives of German women from diverse backgrounds. My study addresses texts by well-known authors, such as Hedwig Dohm, Christa Wolf, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Elfriede Jelinek, as well as lesser known writers, such as May Ayim and Christine Lavant.