Shaping Sexual Knowledge

A Cultural History of Sex Education in Twentieth Century Europe

Edited by
Lutz D. H. Sauerteig
and Roger Davidson

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1 Shaping the Sexual Knowledge of the Young

Introduction

Lutz D. H. Sauerteig and Roger Davidson

The mid-1970s marked a turning point in the historiography of sexuality. Michel Foucault both de-naturalised and historicised 'sexuality', and consequently sexuality was increasingly interpreted as a historically contingent practice closely connected to power relations and values.[1] Sexual identities were no longer perceived as biologically determined but as both shaped by and shaping sexual cultures.[2] Within this framework of analysis, researchers in a variety of disciplines subsequently explored the formation and experience of sexuality in relation to class, gender, and race as well as to medicine and science. As part of this process, issues such as homosexuality, prostitution, venereal diseases (VD), masturbation and sexual abuse have attracted increasing attention.[3] As a result we have a great deal of information about the construction of what have been perceived as 'deviant' or 'dangerous' sexualities.

However, while the history of such sexualities reveals much about social assumptions, fears and norms, focusing on 'aberrant' and liminal sexual experiences and their associated discourses of exclusion arguably affords a rather limited historical perspective. As the American cultural historian, Paula Fass, rightly observed, 'questions concerning the experience of most people have dropped from sight, replaced with issues about sexuality on the margin'.[4] In contrast, the history of sex education enables us to gain valuable insights into the cultural construction of what society perceived and prescribed as 'normal' sexuality. More especially, by studying the enlightenment of the young (broadly for the purposes of this volume defined as covering the age range from one year to the early twenties), additional insights can be gained into the shaping of gender and sexual identities and the way it reflects societies' legacy of moral and sexual fears and aspirations for the future. Moreover, the different forms of textual and illustrative material employed for sex education allows for a broad range of questions to be asked on the making of the sexed body and gender and on how 'heterosexual' activities have hitherto been constructed.[5]

Child Sexuality

Since the pioneering work of Philip Ariès in the early 1960s there has been increasing interest in the cultural and social history of childhood, and of the

relationship of children to adults.[6] From the historiography of childhood, it is evident that society's perception of children's sexuality and their sexual knowledge has shifted significantly over time and differed greatly between cultures.[7] Prior to the eighteenth century and Rousseau's pronouncement of their 'innocence', there was a widely-held notion that children were naturally wicked and corrupted and that they required strict education, including flogging, to form them into moral human beings. In particular, churches and physicians were acutely concerned at the dangers of children masturbating. Thereafter, during the Enlightenment, a belief grew in the sexual innocence of children and, during the nineteenth century, the emphasis on surveillance and regulation by the central and local State and civil society in countries such as England, Germany and Austria, shifted – as in the raising of the age of consent for sexual relations – towards protection. However, as reflected in the anti-masturbation campaigns of the period, official discourses still tended to portray the child as ideally asexual and innocent and any sexual feelings as deviant and pathological.[8]

According to this historiography, modern concepts of childhood and adolescence and perceptions of sexual feelings as being an integral part of normal child development only fully emerged at the start of the twentieth century.[9] The works of Sigmund Freud, with his claim of the existence of sexual feeling in children and his psychoanalytical theories surrounding infantile sexuality, were to be of critical importance in this transition. Freud voiced his claim that 'germs of sexual impulses are already present in the new-born child' for the first time in the second of his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in 1905.[10] In detail he discussed the first sexual feelings babies and children developed, including thumb-sucking and masturbation which 'scarcely a single individual escapes', and suggested that young children might already show some sexual interest in other people, for instance when exhibiting their genitalia or showing curiosity in seeing other people's genitalia, both of which, he claimed, could appear in 'normal' children.[11] Freud's thinking was part of a more general contemporary discussion of child sexuality which began in the second half of the nineteenth century and flourished around 1900 with contributions by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and Albert Moll, who, in 1908, published his magisterial study on *The Sexual Life of the Child*.[12]

This intellectual reshaping of concepts of child sexuality by sexologists and psychiatrists was to have a significant impact on the ideology of sex educators across Europe in subsequent decades. This impact was reinforced by the increasing attention paid to the sexual feelings of the young by psychologists such as Erik Erikson and Wardell B. Pomeroy, sex-researchers such as the biologist Alfred Kinsey, by the sexologist, Ernest Borneman (Ernst Bornemann), behavioural scientists and educationalists such as Ronald and Juliette Goldman, by sociologists such as Stevi Jackson, and by a variety of anthropologists.[13] Thus, what had formerly been perceived as a function of immorality and/or as pathological behaviour, was, in the twentieth century, explained as phases in a child's 'normal' development, which, however, could

take a pathological turn if certain developmental stages or phases were not experienced or, as in the case of autoeroticism, overcome.[14]

Children's sexual feelings were still perceived as intrinsically vulnerable. They were not embraced as something positive but rather considered as something that required observation and control, even suppression, by their guardians as, for instance, Lennerhed and McEwen exemplify for interwar Sweden and Austria (chapters 4 and 9). Indeed, many medics and social scientists, including educational theorists and practitioners, became increasingly interested in what they perceived as the 'problem' of adolescence, especially in relation to crime and to sexuality, where the young could easily go astray. Thus, for policy makers and pedagogues in many Western European countries the scientific recognition of child sexuality was highly problematic. For example, while, as McEwen shows (chapter 9), in interwar Austria, traditional assumptions of sexual innocence might be abandoned by both Catholic and socialist educators, new perceptions of sexual knowledge posed fresh dilemmas for policy makers and practitioners. Similarly, as Gawin argues (chapter 12), for conservative members of the Roman Catholic clergy in Poland new perceptions of child sexuality raised the prospect of sexual enlightenment arousing precocious sexual activity, hence their opposition to any form of sex education other than the moral enlightenment of religious instruction. More generally, as many of the studies in this volume illustrate, the corollary of a new psychology of child sexuality was to question the competence of parents to address issues of sex education and to elevate the role of professional expertise.[15]

Only in the second half of the twentieth century and only within 'progressive' circles were children given room to explore sexual activities. Under the influence of the theories of the communist and Freudian, Wilhelm Reich, the 'sexual repression' of children was understood to be the major cause of human cruelty, an idea the left-wing student movements eagerly assimilated.[16] Indeed, the detrimental effects of sexual repression in childhood on adults in their later life became a recurrent theme in the discourse of sexual radicalism in the late 1960s. In England, the founder of the controversial Summerhill School, Alexander Neill, believed that 'Heterosexual play in childhood is the royal road […] to a healthy, balanced adult sex life.' Following the ideas of Freud and Reich, he also perceived sex play amongst small children as 'a natural, healthy act'. However, he acknowledged that 'adolescent sex life is not practical today' but was convinced that 'it is the right way to tomorrow's health'.[17] It was in the anti-authoritarian, privately run German kindergartens (*Kinderläden*) that children actually were allowed to run around naked and explore their bodies sexually. Yet, such practices were exceptional and where, in the 1960s, the sexual behaviour of children was publicised, conservative elements in European society reacted with shock and censure.[18] Adolescence was still considered to be a dangerous and critical period in life, especially as, with the onset of puberty, it was marked by sexual tensions and the development of a sexual identity. Public opinion as well as the majority of medical and

educational experts continued to regard the sexual enlightenment of the young as in need of surveillance and restraint and evidence suggests that this monitoring and regulation in turn provoked some resistance and rebellion.[19] This clearly reflected enduring tensions between the legacy of nineteenth-century sexual norms and the 'modern' concept of youth and adolescence.

Furthermore, although from the 1960s, under the influence of sexologists such as Kinsey and his successors, a range of sexual activities such as kissing and petting amongst adolescents did, to some extent, become more socially acceptable in European society,[20] by the end of the twentieth century, cultural attitudes to child sexuality remained extremely ambivalent. On the one hand, it became increasingly acknowledged that – regardless of the prevailing moral norms and exhortations – the young were sexually active; all too clearly reflected by teenage pregnancy rates, the increasing incidence of sexually transmitted infections amongst adolescents, and the significant decline in the average age of first sexual intercourse. Equally, it was recognised, albeit lamented, that the sexuality of the young was exposed to an unprecedented degree of sexually explicit material in the media and, by the end of the century, the internet. On the other hand, as discourses about paedophilia and the sexual abuse of children came to dominate public debate, in line with developments in the USA, the pendulum appeared to swing back, discarding ideas of children's sexual feelings and reintroducing the notion of the sexually innocent child.[21] In Britain, in the early 1980s, there was, for example, a widespread conviction, even among the more liberally minded, that children should not be sexualised and that sex solely belonged to the sphere of adults.[22] Hence, as Blair and Monk reveal (chapter 3), Britain's official education policy continues to the present day to struggle with according children sexual rights and identity.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SEX EDUCATION

This volume treats sex education in the broadest sense to incorporate many aspects of the formal and informal shaping of sexual knowledge and awareness of the young. It therefore not only addresses officially-sanctioned and regulated sex education delivered within the school system and regulated by the State, but also sex education taking place within the private sphere of the family or obtained through peer-group interactions and through the media such as sex education books, magazines or films. All these agents contributed in different ways to the shaping of sexual knowledge. This should, however, not be understood as a one-way process. As Ian Hacking argued, sexual identities are not only 'molded' through culture but, in their turn, also serve to shape sexual cultures.[23]

Lesley Hall rightly observes (chapter 2) that the history of the sex education of the young has, in recent years, attracted interest from a wide range of disciplines. However, within a growing historiography, several broad strands of

interpretation may be discerned. Many historians have focussed mainly on the history of sex education policy, exploiting a rich variety of official archives preserved by both central and local government, together with the archives and literature of interest and pressure groups who contributed to the debate over the timing, content, and delivery of sex education and to the shaping of legislation and educational guidelines.[24] Most recently, its history has been analysed as part of a broader interpretation of the social politics of the New Right, and as a vital public arena for the negotiation of sexuality, morality and citizenship.[25] Within this framework of analysis, the focus has been on sex education as an area of contention, and attention concentrated on the various actors contesting the issue, including parents, the medical profession, educationists, purity activists, the churches, and women's organisations. James Hampshire, for instance, explored the conflicting views held by the Department of Education and the Ministry of Health over the introduction of sex education in English schools.[26]

A second strand of interpretation has viewed the development of sex education as part of that web of discourses that has constructed and regulated sexuality in modern society. In particular, it has been seen as playing a central role in the social construction of sexual norms and deviances and the proscription of 'dangerous sexualities'.[27] This approach has often been appropriated by social and medical historians in locating the debate surrounding sexual enlightenment within the histories of social hygiene and sexual health in early twentieth-century Europe.[28] Historians seeking to explore the history of sexual delinquency and the impact of war on moral panic and the regulation of youth culture have also incorporated the history of sex education within their narratives.[29]

Alternative, albeit related, perspectives are furnished by feminist scholars. They view the history of sex education as representing more specifically the evolving social control of female sexuality and sexual behaviour;[30] as 'essentially part of the ideological process which effectively locks women into their maternal and familial roles'.[31] Within this framework of analysis, the process of sexual enlightenment, and the adoption and internalisation of 'appropriate' sexual behaviours is seen as fundamentally gendered. In particular, the segregated delivery of much sex education and the content of sex education materials are perceived as reaffirming double moral standards, with sex defined for girls as an experience confined to marriage and procreation and with an enduring focus on the impact of female promiscuity on public health and morality.[32] Particular stress is placed by this approach on the persistence of such gendered ideologies within late twentieth century school curricula, not only as a function of immediate postwar moral 'rearmamament' but also of the later resurgence of the 'moral right' in European and North American politics, underpinned by powerful pressure groups spearheaded by the churches. In this respect, the process of shaping the sexual knowledge of the young in recent decades is viewed as markedly impervious to trends in social politics (including feminism) and the media towards greater sexual equality.

Yet others view sex education as a paradigm for the growing conflict between the 'public' and the 'private' within modern civil society and as a peg

upon which to interpret the often reluctant and problematic interaction of the State with moral issues and shifts in the nature of the family and sexuality.[33] These studies reflect a variety of experiences. In some countries, such as the Netherlands, few fundamental obstacles to introducing sex education in schools were encountered. In West Germany, although the highest constitutional court agreed that sex education was primarily a task for parents, it also acknowledged the interest of the State and hence its right to make sex education a compulsory element in classroom teaching.[34] In contrast, in England and Wales, as in VD policy-making,[35] there was greater emphasis on civil rights and freedom of individual choice, with parents successfully campaigning for the right to withdraw their children from sex education lessons in school.

SHAPING SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE IN EUROPE

While much of the historiography of sex education is country specific, the aim of the volume is, for the first time, to draw out patterns of continuity and change and of convergence and divergence within the European experience as a whole.[36] In the course of the twentieth century, European societies by and large acknowledged the need for the young to gain knowledge about sexual matters and to be educated about what was perceived to be morally acceptable sexual behaviour. Sweden and West Germany appear to have been at the forefront in introducing sex education in school curricula, however limited and contested their early initiatives might have been.[37] In contrast, countries such as England and Scotland, Italy or Poland lagged behind, while Socialist East Germany (GDR) overcame initial reluctance and introduced sex education in schools in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[38] Divergences in timing across Europe were strongly shaped by the balance of power in each country between the 'public' and 'private' sphere, between the rights of parents to educate their children themselves and the public task of the State to preserve and control the health of its citizenry, and as Fenemore emphasizes (chapter 5), between the forces of past traditions and the visions of the future. Moreover, evidence from this volume would suggest that, in each society, this balance of power was continually being redefined and that sex education was a powerful indicator of social and cultural change.

However, as many contributors to this volume reveal, issues surrounding the sex education of the young remained a highly contested field within the various cultural and institutional discourses shaping policy and practice. In all the countries represented, the appropriate content and delivery of sexual knowledge were the centre of fierce debate. Whereas it was felt that sex education was primarily a parental task within the family, many parents were disinclined to discuss sexual matters with their children. Hence, across Europe, there was a growing concern to engage other agencies in shaping the sexual knowledge of the young, including the churches (as in Austria and Italy), schools, voluntary organizations (such as the Association for Sex Education in

Sweden or The Alliance in Scotland), the medical profession, and the media and film industry. This process, in turn, generated conflict as to the appropriate distribution of responsibilities, as the chapters in this volume suggest.

Generally speaking, from the late nineteenth century onwards, the dividing lines between acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviour became defined less by the dictates of religious morality than by increasing regard to medical notions of pathological sexualities such as homosexuality or masturbation. At the same time, men and women increasingly turned to medicine when seeking advice or explanation on sexual matters; a transition clearly reflected in the history of sex education in Europe, where clergy were slowly substituted by medical and educational experts as the source of enlightenment. Yet, chapters in this volume paint a more complex picture of developments. As Davidson and Wanrooij demonstrate (chapters 6 and 7), in European countries such as Scotland and Italy the churches remained very powerful agencies in the sex education of the young far into the twentieth century. Furthermore, as the studies by McEwan and Gawin indicate (chapters 9 and 12), where the Catholic Church did continue to dominate the process of sex education, the outcome was by no means uniform. Thus, the convergence between Catholic and socialist approaches in Austria was not replicated in Poland.

Even where, in principle, sex education was viewed as desirable, its content remained a contentious issue. In the first half of the twentieth century, the task of sex education was primarily viewed as situating sexuality firmly within the context of marriage, family and reproduction. In many European countries, mainstream thinking emphasized the importance of teaching the young Christian family values, thereby strengthening traditional gender roles.[39] Whereas sex outside marriage was condemned and strict abstinence demanded, sex within marriage, when aimed at procreation, was represented in a positive manner, with the mother to be held in awe since she had given birth.[40] Sex education had therefore to equip the young with the willpower to control their sexual urges. Moreover, the impact of war was to reinforce these perceptions, and in the decades following the end of World War II, policy makers saw sex education as vital in stabilizing (or re-establishing) sexual order and gender roles.[41]

While it is arguable that, with the 1960s, a new, more liberal philosophy of sex education was ushered in, challenging a curriculum dominated by restrictive moral norms based on Christian values,[42] fears persisted that sex education purely based on biological facts, and on teaching reproduction and sexual anatomy without regard to marital and family values, would lead to immoral behaviour. This continuing concern over the corrupting power of sexuality on the young was not only evident in countries such as Scotland where the churches retained great influence in civil society and policy-making. In Socialist countries such as East Germany (GDR), in the Soviet Union, or within the moral discourse of the Italian communist party, sexuality was believed to present a potential distraction to the young from their duties to the State and socialist society.[43] However, the response to such fears varied greatly from society to society. In

the GDR, it was believed that comradeship between boys and girls could control the arousal of precocious sexual feelings and, as early as the 1950s, a more liberal approach to sex and sexuality was adopted, condemning false prudery and allowing nude bathing at the beaches. In contrast, in England, as late as the 1980s (and arguably to this day) these fears continued to inhibit more progressive views on the content of sex education (such as the need to enlighten the young on issues relating to homosexuality).[44]

In particular, this continuing debate over the content of sex education focused around the issue of how far the young should be informed about the anatomical and biological details of reproduction. In the first half of the twentieth century, the emphasis of instruction had been on the moral aspect of sex and the biology of reproduction was generally couched in a mystifying language.[45] In contrast, after 1960, a much more bio-medical approach was adopted across Europe. In both East and West Germany (in the late 1960s) and in England in the 1980s, it was agreed that the teaching of the 'scientific' aspects of sexuality should become compulsory in schools.[46] Yet, as Blair and Monk observe (chapter 3), this often led to an emphasis on the risks rather than pleasures of sexual experience (eg. sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy), an emphasis resonant of the earlier literature of the social hygiene movement. Moreover, just as earlier criticisms had been levelled at sex education that failed to contextualise biological information within Christian ethics, more recent 'scientific' and explicit curricula and materials came under increasing attack for ignoring the social and emotional context of adolescent sexuality.

What is perhaps most notable is the reluctance of official sex education in all European countries throughout the twentieth century to represent to the young the erotic and pleasurable side of sexuality. Official discourses in Europe, as in the USA, centred on the social problems and risks associated with the sexualisation of the young – on sexually transmitted infections and AIDS, on the 'epidemic' of teenage pregnancies, and on sexual abuse.[47] Hence, the young had often to seek out unofficial sources of information about erotic aspects of their development, such as how to kiss and to 'pet'. In the pre-internet age, such sources could include the media, (especially youth magazines), fiction, film and television,[48] and of course the peer-group or siblings. Some areas of the media deliberately catered to this demand for alternative sexual knowledge. For example, from the 1970s, the popular West German youth magazine *BRAVO* regularly provided the young with a plethora of information on their sexuality and the intimate and erotic details of sexual relationships.[49] Similarly, the infamous, Danish *Little Red Schoolbook*, which furnished similar information, had, despite attempts in several countries to censor it, a wide circulation in many European countries in the 1970s, including France, Germany, Britain and the Netherlands.[50]

But what did the young actually know about sex and from where did they get their knowledge? How did they experience sex education? Conversely, what were the young ignorant about? As Crowther points out (chapter 10), ignorance is more than just the lack of knowledge but, like knowledge, the

product of cultural construction; effectively a 'discourse of silence'.[51] As Hall emphasises (chapter 2), to map the reception of sex education by the young and how it affected their sexual behaviour and concepts of morality poses a range of methodological and archival difficulties. Until recently, there existed very few sources from which historians could document how the sexual knowledge of the young was shaped. Cultural historian, Peter Gay, for instance, in his study on *The Bourgeois Experience*, tried to capture nineteenth and early twentieth-century experiences of sexuality by engaging with numerous diaries, letters and memories. Gay revealed a much more diverse picture that showed not only sexual ignorance and disasters but also numerous experiences of sexual pleasure and satisfaction.[52] More recently, with the growing use of oral history and the greater focus placed by cultural historians on 'experience', more traction has been gained on this issue. In addition, sociologists of education have begun to reveal more on the impact of TV series, magazines and the internet on the sexual enlightenment of the young.[53] Moreover, even for earlier periods, by exploiting the evidence from sex surveys and questionnaires, or childhood memoirs, one can gain at least some impression of the process of sexual enlightenment and how the young perceived and experienced the different agencies and 'knowledges' involved in sex education across Europe.

The picture that emerges is complex and heavily influenced by factors such as location, gender, class and religion. Surveys from early-twentieth century Poland, for instance, suggest, that the young often acquired sexual knowledge subversively at a much younger age than the prevailing moral norms would have allowed. In contrast, childhood memories from the Netherlands and Flanders suggest a picture of sexual ignorance.[54] In early twentieth-century Germany, the picture was not much different.[55] The Polish example suggests that boys and young men were more sexually aware than girls and that, for young women, the shock of the wedding night was acute and often had a lasting effect. However, one needs to be careful not to over-generalize from such stories; as Peter Gay has argued, children might have known more than they were willing to admit or later recalled, regardless of how partial or 'incorrect' their knowledge might have been.[56]

What is equally evident from our case studies is the degree to which, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, parents were either unable or unwilling to meet the demand of their offspring for clear information on the 'facts of life'. Evidence also suggests that, for many children, the prospect of discussing sexual issues with their parents was hugely daunting and often repulsive. Röling identifies many examples of the failure of parent-child communication over issues relating to sex (chapter 13), and indeed, this can be seen as both reflecting and reinforcing broader intergenerational conflict between parents and adolescents (Fenemore, chapter 5). As a result, whether it was Poland in the 1930s (Gawin, chapter 12), England in the early 1960s or Germany at the start of the 1970s, the peer group remained the most common source of sexual knowledge; although by the later period, especially for girls, parents and siblings had gained greater importance.[57]

In many European countries, it appears that children also acquired enlightenment from a wide range of other sources. The observation of animals, not only in the countryside but also in towns, could often furnish the basis, however crude, of sexual knowledge. For middle and upper-class children, servants could also sometimes be the source of sexual enlightenment and experience.[58] Other forms of unregulated access to sexual information involved medical literature such as pamphlets, anatomical atlases or exhibitions, popular media such as magazines, films, etc., and art and literature including pornography. This continuing quest for more information was reflected in the success of the youth magazines which dealt with issues relating to sexuality, of sex education films such as *Helga* in the late 1960s and 1970s, and in the positive response of many children to official sex education, as in Scotland, or to official publications such as the German *Sex-Education Atlas*.[59] However, it is noteworthy that some children and adolescents were shocked by what they were told or by the images they saw in sex education books or films.[60] Others either did not fully comprehend the sexual information that was being imparted, or for a variety of reasons, simply disbelieved the knowledge with which they were presented (Röling, chapter 13).

Sex education literature was rarely confined within national boundaries. For instance, one can detect a Catholic stream of sex education material with translations into the major languages of Catholic Europe (ranging from Italian to French and Austrian and to a certain degree German). Similarly, in the 1960s, a substantial amount of Scandinavian sex education material, which was perceived as being particularly progressive and explicit, was translated into other European languages (Sauerteig, chapter 8). In addition, many of the sex education books available for a British audience were actually reprinted and occasionally adapted versions of material originally published in the USA or Australia. Furthermore, sex education films could become media events on a European level. The German sex education film *Helga*, produced at the end of the 1960s under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, is a famous example since *Helga* proved not only to be a great success in Germany but also in France, Italy and England, with several thousands of school children, adolescents and young adults watching the film (Schwarz, chapter 11).

As a cultural history of the shaping of sexual knowledge, this volume seeks to address not just issues of policy formation but also the broader social politics of sex education (including those surrounding the sexual rights of the child), in addition to the content, iconography and experience of sexual enlightenment. Moreover, while aware of the degree to which these central themes both resonate and overlap, we have, to a significant extent, reflected their importance in our section headings. Inevitably, there remain many unexplored aspects of the subject and we hope that this anthology will form the basis and stimulus for further research. For instance, Röling's chapter points to the rich source of childhood memories (chapter 13). It would be interesting to know whether similar bodies of literature exist for other European countries. Furthermore, as the third section demonstrates, historians of sexuality have only just begun to

undertake serious content analysis of sex education materials. By employing the insights and methodologies of visual culture studies there is great potential for further developing this field of research.[61] Finally, whereas some countries are well researched, other such as Spain, Denmark and Norway, Hungary, the Czech and Slovak Republics, appear to be uncharted territories. What is particularly lacking are comparative studies. However, although this volume does not claim to fill this gap, we hope that it will furnish some valuable comparative insights into how the sexual knowledge of the young was shaped in twentieth-century Europe.

NOTES

1. M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, translated by R. Hurley, 3 vols, New York: Pantheon, 1978, 1985, 1986. For an overview of this historiography, see F.X. Eder, L.A. Hall, and G. Hekma, 'Introduction', in idem (eds) *Sexual Cultures in Europe*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999, vol. 1, 1–26; J. Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, especially chapter 6; idem, 'Remembering Foucault', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2005, vol. 14, 186–201.
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37. See chapters 4 and 8 by Lennerhed and Sauerteig.
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40. See chapters 8 and 9 by Sauerteig and McEwen.
41. See chapters 6–8 by Davidson, Wanrooij, and Sauerteig.
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57. M. Schofield, *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People*, London: Longmans, 1965, pp. 93–102; V. Sigusch and G. Schmidt, *Jugendsexualität*, Stuttgart: Enke, 1973, pp. 36–37, 173. In respect to sources of sexual knowledge, Schofield not only found distinct differences between boys and girls, where the mother played a more important role, but also class differences where upper- and middle-class parents were more involved in the sex education of their children than parents from lower classes.
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Sex Education, Sexual Rights, Society and the Child

2 In Ignorance and in Knowledge

Reflections on the History of Sex Education in Britain

Lesley A. Hall

INTRODUCTION: RUNNING ON THE SPOT?

Sex education, as a topic within the broader field of the history of sexuality, has been relatively neglected even though the process by which an understanding of sexuality is acquired by individuals is surely of central importance to the social historian. In the case of other developments within the field of sexuality in twentieth-century Britain, such as the campaigns for legalized abortion, family planning provisions, and homosexual law reform, there is the possibility of writing a Whig narrative of struggle and success which can then be nuanced, interrogated and revised.[1] But no such narrative so far exists for sex education.

This may reflect the liminal status of the subject, which falls on the borderline between so many disciplinary areas. Is it part of the history of sexuality? Does it belong under the history of childhood? Or is it part of the history of education and pedagogy? It certainly has links to the histories of gender and of the body. Given the close association between arguments for better sex education and concerns over issues of national health and wellbeing, is it an aspect of the history of medicine and health, or of social policy? Who, as it were, owns the history of sex education? Is it something that scholars feel the same diffidence about approaching that teachers reportedly do over teaching sex education? Or is this relative neglect because the subject is hard to get a proper grasp on: that there is research that one can undertake on the texts, debates, and policy initiatives that have addressed sex education in twentieth-century Britain, but in the middle of all this remains a continuing and possibly insoluble mystery.

In the British context, we can trace back discussions about the necessity for sex education and the various protests against it as a bad and dangerous idea to the late nineteenth century, although there had been much earlier concerns relating to the prevention of masturbation.[2] However, only the final decades of the Victorian era saw the publication of numerous texts intended for the enlightenment and instruction of parents, teachers, youth workers and children. Various initiatives by voluntary organizations, schools, local education authorities and central government subsequently took place during the course of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, there is a certain lack of narrative structure to

any story that can be told about British sex education. It has not lost the plot, because it does not have a plot, just a sequence of rather similar events: studying it is like doing the time-warp, *deja-vu* all over again, Groundhog Day. Reading modern studies on the state of sex education in the UK, it is possible to wonder just how far we have travelled from the 1870s. Certainly, while a lot of incidental features may have changed, most of the underlying issues still seem to be firmly in place.

A number of themes persist. Sex education has been cast from the outset almost entirely within the framework of a strategy for damage limitation: the focus has been on the dangers of disease, pregnancy, loss of reputation and moral character, rather than the possibilities of pleasure and empowered choice. It is about controlling and regulating, if not entirely preventing, sexual exploration and activity. It is pretty well a cliché by now that sex education is not about pleasure but primarily about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and how to avoid contracting and spreading them, and how not to become pregnant at an inappropriately early age. This theme of fear and prohibition has long historical roots, reflected most vividly in the central role in the advocacy of sex education of concerns surrounding the pernicious effects of masturbation or so-called 'self-abuse'. Even today, current arguments and policy-making are still heavily influenced by what are perceived as unacceptably high levels of teenage pregnancy and STDs, continuing a policy geared towards warning of the dangers of sexual activity among the young and towards damage limitation.

Even though educators from the earliest ventures repeatedly emphasized the need to accentuate the positive and to foreground the beauty and wonder of sex and reproduction, this was not with any view to their imagined constituency going out and experiencing these. Rather, it was to make them understand that these joys were worth the waiting for. Maud Churton Braby, author of *Modern Marriage and How to Bear It* (1908), articulated this common paradox in 1908:

> Sex is the pivot on which the world turns […] the instincts and emotions of sex are common to humanity, and in themselves not base or degrading, nor is there any cause for shame in possession of them, *although it is necessary that they should be strenuously controlled*.[3]

The rhetoric surrounding sex education might be focused on the importance of a right understanding of sex as a basis for future happy marriage, rather than paying undue attention to the darker sides of sexuality, but the notion of pleasure was seldom, if ever, stressed. Thus, Helena Wright, leading figure in the birth control movement and influential author of works on marital advice and sex education, was practically unique in mentioning the clitoris in *What is Sex* in 1932, referring not merely to its existence but also to the fact that it was for 'conveying the sensation of pleasure during copulation' and that the latter should 'result in a climax of pleasurable sensation to both'.[4]

There has been continuing dialectical struggle between those advocating the provision of clean, healthy, scientific knowledge (by the standards of the day) to combat the sordid or partial information picked up from a range of sources by children, and the opposing forces who believed that to give children sexual information was to corrupt primal innocence. There was concern from the beginning about the unwillingness and/or inability of parents to provide their offspring with timely information about 'the facts of life'. Moreover, a whole range of forces, bearing on teachers and the educational system generally, has consistently resulted in sex education being marginalized within the school system for well over a century. In addition, the actual processes by which young people gradually acquire sexual 'knowledge' or continue to have large areas of ignorance (which they may not even recognize) are still a considerable mystery.

THE HOME: 'IMPERFECT FULFILMENT OF PARENTAL DUTY'

In a volume of essays on *Young People and Sexual Health*, Audrey Simpson, director of the Family Planning Association in Northern Ireland, stated in 2004 that:

> Parents in the UK are less likely than those in some other countries to talk to their children about sex. Although many parents recognize that they have a responsibility, this does not always result in action.[5]

It does not seem therefore that matters have progressed very far since the late nineteenth century. In *Counsel to Parents on the Moral Education of their Children*, published in 1882, the pioneer woman doctor and proponent of sex education, Elizabeth Blackwell, suggested that:

> the necessary counsel may be better given by a stranger […]. This is a very imperfect fulfilment of parental duty, it is true; but it is often all that the parent can attempt, where the high and important character of sex has not been understood at the outset of family life, and thus not guided the past education of the children.[6]

Parents' disinclination to enlighten their children on the facts of life, and their feelings of inadequacy as to their competence to do so, has been a persistant theme in British sex education. Thus, Edwardian social purity feminist, Frances Swiney, commented in 1908: 'I am fully aware that this subject is viewed with the greatest repugnance by many worthy and otherwise intelligent and conscientious parents.'[7] In 1916, Mary Scharlieb, one of the founders of the National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases, a leading organization in the promotion of sex education during the first half of the twentieth

century, deplored the fact that: 'Unfortunately, there are but few parents who are fitted either by education, sentiment, or inclination, to give this knowledge to their children.'[8]

Decade by decade this failing attracted comment. In 1926, Leonora Eyles, socialist writer of several works on marriage and motherhood during the 1920s, and 'agony aunt' of *Modern Woman*, found that: '[M]any mothers […] confess that they cannot tackle the problem of telling their children the facts of life.'[9] Theodore Tucker and Muriel Pout, who pioneered the introduction of sex education in Welsh schools during the 1930s, reported parents deploring there own lack of knowledge, and consequent shyness: 'When discussing this subject with parents we find that usually the first question is "What am I to say?" They then go on to regret their lack of knowledge of science which would then, they feel, enable them to speak.'[10] In the process of running courses specifically intended for parents under the auspices of the Welsh National Council of the Alliance of Honour (a social purity organization founded by Ellice Hopkins), Tucker and Pout discovered that 'the vast majority of parents professed themselves unequal to the task and frequently asked whether instruction could be given in schools' and that, in spite of 'reasonings and pleadings […] reply again and again, "We cannot speak to our girls and boys".'[11]

Cyril Bibby, a leading figure in sex education from the 1930s until the 1960s, and special adviser on the subject to the Central Council of Health Education during and just after the Second World War, in his *Sex Education* (1944), the standard textbook on the subject for several decades, remarked upon the unpreparedness of parents to undertake the task of answering children's questions or to discuss matters of sex.[12] Forty years on, in 1987, social policy researcher, Isobel Allen, found that, even though most parents 'thought it necessary for their children to have education' on the topics of sex, contraception and bodily functions, many of them did not feel comfortable discussing these with them, even within close and trusting parent/child relationships.[13] Finally, as recently as 2005, Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education for England (a non-ministerial government department that is the inspectorate for children and learners in England) concluded in a report on personal, social and health education in secondary schools that 'research evidence shows that the overwhelming majority of parents do not teach their children about complex issues such as sex and relationships'.[14]

There has thus been a significant and long-standing mismatch between the widely-reported reality that silence reigned when it came to talking about questions of sex within the family, and pervasive beliefs that this was the place where children *should* be informed. While the 'Leaders of Opinion' (doctors, educationalists, clergymen) interrogated by the Mass Observation 'Little Kinsey' survey of the late 1940s tended to concur that children should receive some form of sex education, they were inclined to consider the home as the appropriate place for it to occur. There were also suggestions that the child should be instructed only by the same sex parent and 'not before the age of thirteen'.[15] Similar views were occasionally expressed among the general

population: two women in the street sample during Mass Observation's 1942/3 VD Survey argued that 'it [was] up to the mothers to teach the girls and up to the fathers to teach the boys', adding that 'children should always be told by their parents, but never at school'.[16]

In some cases, to a limited extent, and with varying degrees of success, parents did accept their duty to enlighten their children. The actress Elsa Lanchester's Victorian mother was a socialist and radical who had been the centre of a famous *cause célebre* when temporarily incarcerated in a lunatic asylum by her family as a result of her announcement that she intended to live in a free union with a comrade of a lower social class. However, Lanchester reported that her mother's

> advanced methods and efforts to tell me all the facts about our bodies was agony to her and left me with a disgust about how I must have been created. No children like the idea applied to their own mother and father and Biddy did not improve matters by her prophylactic plumbing approach.[17]

Alix Meynell's mother seems to have aroused less cringing embarrassment, according to the autobiography of this distinguished female civil servant:

> Mum made us feel that menstruation was a matter for pride as the entry to womanhood though it was to be a woman's secret, not shameful in itself but shameful for men to know about, even our brother or father. […]. My mother had let us all know quite naturally and matter-of factly how children were born, by telling us about her experiences as a midwife in London. I cannot have been more than seven when she described to us how she would hurry through the London streets at night to a poor family usually all living in one room, often all in one bed and of the contrast between these conditions and the beautiful new baby coming out of the mother's body.[18]

But in contrast to this openness about female plumbing and reproduction, information about the act of sex was another matter. 'Mum, the rebel, was surprisingly Victorian in her lack of teaching about physical sex. She bought us a book called *From Girlhood to Womanhood and* left it at that'.[19]

In spite of this pervasive reluctance to deal with the subject within the family, evidence is not lacking that, from at least the early twentieth century, parents were, if the issue was presented to them adequately, positively enthusiastic for schools to take on the responsibility for sex education. It is true that, in 1913, Miss Outram's attempts to enlighten her leaving class in Dronfield (Derbyshire) as to where babies came from became a local scandal.[20] However, headteacher Theodora Bonwick successfully gained parental support in Hackney for her efforts to provide similar instruction in local elementary schools.[21] Tucker and Pout reported on parents so positively affected by meetings on the subject that they enthusiastically passed unanimous resolutions

to send to local education committees.[22] Similarly, more recent studies indicate that the vast majority of parents are willing, if not eager, for children to be given age-appropriate instruction in the school setting.[23]

Parents continue to feel a combination of embarrassment and a sense of being ill-equipped to talk about sexual issues with their children. It is of course possible that this constant stress by British parents over the twentieth century that they 'had little expertise in certain matters […] [and] did not know how to express themselves' may have been the result, rather than the cause, of their oft-reported shyness and embarrassment at raising the topic with teenage children. They also cited the inadequacy of their own sex education, and their wish that their children should not suffer from the same ignorance and misunderstanding.[24]

THE SCHOOL: 'MANY TEACHERS HAVE APPROACHED THE SUBJECT WITH DIFFIDENCE'

Another topic that has been a constant in discussions about sex education in schools is the lack of training of teachers to undertake it, and the consequent potential for difficulties and embarrassment. Ian Young, of the Health Education Board for Scotland, has recently observed that, in the UK in the twentyfirst century:

> The quality of initial teacher training with regard to health and SRE [sexuality and relationships education] is currently varied, and it is possible in some institutions to graduate as a teacher without having taken an introductory course in this area.[25]

This might, very possibly, not be quite so startling if the whole idea of sex education in schools had begun (as some people seem to think it did) around the 1970s. But this concern over the lack of training of the educators goes back a good deal further. In 1926, Marie Stopes wrote in *Sex and the Young*:

> Not very long ago an elderly medical woman [unnamed in the text, but almost certainly Mary Scharlieb], feeling intensely the need of right sex instruction in schools, gathered round her a number of influential persons prepared to push through the reform. Her further advance was impossible because she could find to carry on the work a sufficiency neither of men nor women teachers themselves both instructed and intellectually dowered with the necessary facts, delicacy and sensibility.[26]

The Board of Education's first official statement on the subject was not published until its 1943 pamphlet, *Sex Education in Schools and Youth Organisations*, and this did not provide very authoritative guidance. It suggested

that 'ways and means are still matters for careful exploration' and considered it 'not possible to lay down specific principles, or to recommend specific methods'.[27] Though a few schools were providing 'carefully planned instruction', their practice was not detailed and thus not recommended as a model for general use.[28] This phenomenon of the development of good practice in particular localities, but the lack of central uptake to provide adequate means for the dissemination of the lessons learned and strategies developed, has remained a recurrent theme in discussions of the subject.

One of the few occasions on which it appeared that sex education in schools was about to achieve widespread acceptance in the UK was during the early to mid-1940s, at the time of major public health concern over venereal diseases and perceptions of moral disruption caused by the War.[29] In 1943, for example, Bristol Education Committee closed all its schools so that all teaching staff could attend a lecture and discussion, followed up with a week's vacation school for teachers. In the following year, the Associations of Assistant Masters and Assistant Mistresses (which represented most secondary schoolteachers) passed resolutions at their Annual General Meetings in favour of sex education, and the National Union of Teachers (representing most elementary school teachers) issued a statement, 'Sex Teaching in Schools', which was also supportive of the idea. The Board of Education held its first teachers' summer school on the subject in Cambridge, and Roman Catholic archbishops and bishops of England and Wales issued a statement recommending instruction of children by parents.[30]

In 1945, the first really thorough (10 lecture) course in sex education for parents was arranged by the Central Council for Health Education (CCHE) at Chiswick Polytechnic. Figures collected in 1944 from schools and Education Authorities that had circularized parents, asking their consent to their children receiving sex education, revealed almost unanimous approval, and many head teachers were so convinced of the general public approval of the subject that they did not even bother to seek explicit parental permission. Increasing numbers of courses were being given by the CCHE to teachers, parents, youth leaders, young people, and schoolchildren.[31]

To some extent, this was presumably a result of the publicity being given to venereal diseases and the general sense of social and moral upheaval during the war years. Cyril Bibby, who as Education Officer at the Central Council for Health Education had been a key figure in these developments, looked back in 1972 to the 'wide programme of sex-education […] well-established' in 1946, apparently set to become 'thoroughly integrated within the total educational picture', a 'hopeful expectation [which had] […] not materialised'. This was, he considered, partly due to changes within the CCHE as a result of the inauguration of the National Health Service, which meant the redeployment of resources into other work, but he also commented on the continuing reluctance of educationalists 'to continue any serious study of sex education'.[32] He remarked regretfully in this article, and in correspondence with his publishers, that his own *Sex Education* had remained the standard textbook on the subject

for some 25 years, in spite of having become 'sadly outdated': There was a 'total lack of basic thinking in this field by everybody else for a quarter of a century'.[33]

Given this lack of a basic literature on the subject, and the limited nature of official guidelines (with even the sex education advice of the Board/Ministry of Education eventually subsumed within more general guidance on health education),[34] few teachers could routinely have had any claim to expertise in the subtleties of sex education. The Board of Education was aware of this. As it observed in pamphlet 119 in 1943:

> Many teachers have approached the subject with diffidence in view of its nature and what they feel to be their own inadequate training or capacity to undertake it: others, for these and other reasons, have not ventured to embark on it at all.[35]

A sense of lacking any training for the task, and awareness of the potential for embarrassment, might well have held teachers back from any overt and explicit efforts to facilitate the sexual enlightenment of their pupils, quite apart from the pressures of exam curricula.

While the relatively widespread use of visiting lecturers was often condemned as making sex education something distinctive and significant, Tucker and Pout in the 1930s pointed out that it might be beneficial to have such a sensitive subject addressed by an outside person to whom pupils might more easily submit questions.[36] Similarly, Isobel Allen found in the 1980s that teenagers and parents were 'very much in favour of the use of outsiders' on account both of their presumed expertise, and precisely because they were strangers, since many teenagers preferred to talk to people they did not already know.[37] However, it is difficult to establish just who these outside lecturers might have been. In some instances, experts such as Tucker and Pout, E.F. Griffith, Cyril Bibby, and much later, Carol Lee, were associated with organizations promoting sex education. But this was not universally the case. How competent any particular lecturer might have been is largely a matter of anecdote and conjecture.

The relationship between sex education and contemporary pedagogical theories has not really been explored by historians. It was often associated with progressive schools, but the relationship between progressive education in the wider sense and sex education, and how sex education was influenced by theories of learning, merits further research. It would appear from the writings of Tucker and Pout and Cyril Bibby in the 1930s and 40s,[38] and of Carol Lee, a peripatetic school sex educator working under the auspices of the Family Planning Association in the early 1980s,[39] that sex educators were evolving their own methods of getting the message across, which involved young people as active participants rather than assuming them to be passive vessels to be filled with knowledge. They were working with children's existing understandings, soliciting questions, and engaging them in debate. This was very unlike most standard classroom procedure for much of the period and in many schools. What were

the interactions between sex education and theories of education more generally was a question that continued to surface. Thus, the 2005 Ofsted Report explicitly argues that:

> […] teaching and learning in PSHE [Personal, social and health education] is about more than the acquisition of a body of knowledge. Good PSHE lessons provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own attitudes and values as well as those of others. They will have opportunities to further develop key skills such as those of communication and be able to know when and how to be assertive.[40]

The Report therefore deplores the fact that: 'Too many schools perceive achievement in PSHE only in terms of pupils' subject knowledge and understanding',[41] and the tendency of 'teachers with weaker subject knowledge [to] tend to fall back on the more tangible aspects of programmes and conventional teaching methods'.[42]

THE CHILD: 'NOT A FAIR, UNWRITTEN PAGE […] A *PALIMPSEST*'

Underlying all these problems of policy and implementation lies a much broader question of the way or ways in which knowledge about sex is acquired – the big unanswered and perhaps unanswerable question at the heart of the history of sex education. As Elizabeth Burtney (a freelance researcher specializing in young people's sexuality) and Mary Duffy (Principal Officer, Research & Development at Barnardo's) remarked in their introduction to the 2004 volume *Young People and Sexual Health*: 'It is often difficult to attribute learning because often it is pervasive, rather than overt. […]. Nonetheless, information will be assimilated at different times and in different ways over the lifespan.' Thus, they add: 'One of the biggest challenges young people face is to decipher the mixed messages that are available to them.'[43]

Most historical studies of sex education have concentrated on exploring the messages within the various texts produced for parents, teachers, youth workers and for children themselves, or on investigating how the issue was dealt with as a matter of educational policy; in particular, when and how policy was formulated by central and local government and what sorts of debates and rationales were articulated. Yet the extent to which texts on sex education written over a period of 120 years raise questions about the process of acquiring sexual knowledge is quite striking.

Remarkably little is known about the actual experience of any sex education that took place in classrooms, quite apart from the fragmented and often erroneous information acquired behind the bike-sheds. Even if sex education was taking place in schools, it is practically impossible to ascertain what it might have been like. Many schools may have claimed, if questioned, that they

were pursuing the widely-advocated integrated approach to sex education, incorporating it within a range of different subjects, from biology to English literature, rather than treating it as a special subject divorced from the rest of the educational experience. However, this approach might have been more confusing than enlightening, depending on the individual teachers.[44]

It is only in the last twenty years that studies have been undertaken of the effectiveness of sex education. In most cases, these have employed statistical and epidemiological indicators to assess the impact of well-designed, age-appropriate forms of sex education on variables such as the age of first intercourse, use of contraception, and awareness of the possibility of STDs. The evidence is far from robust. Some studies suggest that certain approaches may have some effect (though it is always difficult, in these real-life situations, to determine what factors were actually influencing behaviours).[45] Others find the evidence less than compelling.[46] But what is it that we know when we know about sex, and how do we acquire that knowledge?

A scatter of studies have addressed children's state of sexual knowledge, although the particular factors that lead to any child's understanding are not always clear, even to themselves. Often the knowledge may have been associated with particular episodes, anxieties or queries. This is the situation outlined in the scandalous music-hall song of Marie Lloyd in the 1890s in which the child questions why the mother is making little garments, and, receiving a dismissive answer, seeks enlightenment elsewhere.

> 'What's that for, eh? Oh, tell me Ma!
> If you don't tell me, I'll ask Pa.'
> Ma said, 'Oh it's nothing, shut your row'.
> Well, I've asked Johnny Jones, see! So I know now!

This little paradigm of peer sex enlightenment was a significant factor in the campaign to prevent the renewal of the license of the Oxford Music Hall.[47] However, although she says that she 'knows now', we don't know what it is that Johnny Jones told her. This is a general problem: people believe themselves to have some kind of sexual knowledge, but it is often difficult to gain an adequate understanding of what the knowledge might consist of.

A recurrent concern articulated by writers on the subject was that formal and conscious sex education was not just a matter of transmitting the 'correct' information to the ignorant child, but more about eradicating ideas already gleaned, and re-educating the child with healthy and scientific (according to the standards of the day) knowledge. Mary Scharlieb, by then an elderly woman and a survivor of the high Victorian era, often considered an epitome of the primness of early twentieth-century social purity sex advice, observed in 1916:

> [T]hey believe that a child's mind is like a sheet of fair white paper, unwritten on and absolutely blank; they will not take the responsibility of

> writing on this virgin surface, they prefer to leave it to chance. Logically, they may fairly expect that the page will become dusty and flyblown, even if no worse defilement happens. As a matter of fact, the child's mind is not a fair, unwritten page; it is a *palimpsest*.[48]

This theme had been part of sex educators' discourse for quite some time. There was a clear recognition that children would pick up attitudes and ideas about sex from their general observations of the world, and from interpreting the reactions of the adults about them. Maude Churton Braby made this point in 1908:

> maidens are now given tacitly to understand that the subject of sex is a repulsive one, wholly unfit for their consideration, and the functions of sex are loathsome, though necessary. I write tacitly with intention, for little if anything is ever said to a girl on this subject; indeed, it is extraordinary how the ideas are conveyed to her without words, but inculcated somehow they certainly are.[49]

Margaret Stephens, author of *Women and Marriage: A handbook* (1910), similarly commented a couple of years later:

> The atmosphere of prudishness in which many young people are brought up is so thoroughly assimilated by them that they cannot, through their false modesty, force themselves to ask one single natural question of their own parents. They prefer instead […] to think such matters over for themselves, keeping their eyes extremely well open for the chance of any stray information.[50]

Even worse, if children did not receive adequate enlightenment from their parents, or trustworthy answers to their questions, let alone a reaction of shock and horror, they would find out from less desirable sources. Stephens referred to children 'gratify[ing] their curiosity by threshing out points of interest with convenient friends or dependants, frequently in a most undesirable way',[51] and the description of these sources of undesirable knowledge as 'servants and depraved playfellows' was pervasive. Norah March, a pioneering sex and hygiene educator and author of *Towards Racial Health* (1915) made the similar point in *Towards Sexual Knowledge* in 1915:

> this curiosity which children show is perfectly natural and healthy, and, moreover, is invincible, and if its claims are not satisfied rapidly, legitimately, and progressively by the one in whom all trust should be reposed, the child will be driven to seek the information from other sources – sources often wholly undesirable, often vulgar and pernicious, at any rate less valuable and wholesome than the mother's loving instruction could provide.[52]

Likewise, in the early 1920s, Marie Stopes stated that:

> through centuries children have learnt from dirty-minded servants, other children and school-fellows, such filthy nonsense about sex that their attitude towards the supreme act of life has been so debased that they do not feel the full sacredness of the marriage union.[53]

Today, the concerns may be somewhat different – depraved servants being few and far between – but there are similar fears for example of 'the media […] videos […] the teenagers' peer-group',[54] and more recently, the internet. Thus, the general issue of the child acquiring misleading or wrong information remains.

Even when there have been surveys of adults' perceptions of their acquisition of sexual knowledge, the results are not terribly illuminating. A vast array of very diverse answers on this issue were given to Mass Observation's 1949 'Little Kinsey' survey. Typical responses included:

> 'That's a natural thing for a man to know when he comes to a certain age, during conversation you learn it.'
> 'More or less by experience.'
> 'Everybody knows about these things.'
> 'Experience and the usual way.'
> 'Comes natural.'
> 'I don't know I think it's intuition. My little girl is only 7 but she knows not to touch certain places.'

Others were even vaguer:

> 'I just found out.'
> 'Haphazard sort of affair.'
> 'I'm a deep thinker, you know.'

The role of parents in conveying any information was seldom presented in a flattering light. Responses included:

> 'Told all sorts of rubbish, gooseberry bushes and black bags.'
> 'It sort of dawned upon me, mother didn't tell me she was shy.'
> 'Through a kind neighbour.'

Some respondents mentioned scenarios that recall the rhetoric about 'depraved companions' and undesirable knowledge:

> 'You learn about it in school lavatories and school desks, and I learned about in the Army, in dark corners and lewd ways.'

> 'It begins through filth […] you hear a dirty story and you begin then rightly or wrongly.'

A range of written sources were mentioned by different individuals:

> 'What I read in notices and down lavatories' [i.e. warnings about venereal diseases].
> 'I read of course.'
> 'I started off in life as a messenger boy at a chemist's shop, I picked up knowledge from books on sex that were kept there.'
> 'Left Book Club Books.'

But a significant number of respondents commented that they had been ignorant at the time of their marriage, or at least had learnt much more afterwards than they had acquired before:

> 'Not until I was married.'
> 'Being a married man you learn a lot from your wife and she learns a lot from you.'
> 'I didn't know the difference between men and women when I went on my honeymoon.'[55]

These responses unfortunately did not go into any further details as to what the respondents thought they knew and had learnt by these various methods.

Tucker and Pout, and Bibby, addressed the kinds of questions that they had encountered from children during the course of their personal experiences as sex educators. However, although they made every endeavour to enable children to feel confident in asking questions (such as asking for the submission of anonymous written queries), these were still only the areas on which the children involved felt their own knowledge and understanding to be lacking, or upon which they required reassurance. What they believed they already knew, and in which areas of sexual knowledge they assumed (often wrongly) they needed no further enlightenment, remains obscure. Bibby mentioned 'the number of old wives' tales about sex and reproduction which still circulate[d] widely', adding that: 'Sometimes beliefs of this kind are so deeply held that the teacher's explanation is not readily accepted, or perhaps is accepted formally, but with obvious mental reservations.'[56]

A remarkably similar picture was revealed for the 1980s in Isobel Allen's survey, *Education in Sex and Personal Relationships,* in which she discussed parents' sense of their own inadequate sex education. The parents in question, who would have been at school during the 1950s and 60s, described the sex education they had received at school and from their parents as being non-existent or poor. Many of them gave accounts of almost total ignorance of the basic facts of life during their teenage years and sometimes into later life. Allen describes 'evidence of great fear and anguish' in several cases.[57]

The occult nature of the process by which an individual built up an understanding of sexuality and its place in the world had long been recognized by sex educators. From the early years of the century, they urged that adults should respond honestly and openly to children's questions, as well as, if necessary, drawing their attention to the wonderful fertilization of plants, the birth of kittens, etc. However, there was also criticism of this approach on the grounds that children might not necessarily make the mental leap from the plant or animal world to human experience. In 1929, the writer Ethel Mannin was scathing about

> mothers who imagine that they are tremendously modern and rational because they have explained to their children what they like to refer to as 'the facts about life' by describing the pollination of flowers […]. They have the pathetic idea that this explanation of conception and birth makes everything seem 'nice' and acceptable to the child-mind.[58]

Many writers thought that information should not be forced on children but should only be provided in response to questions, although others pointed out that children might already have absorbed and internalized the lesson that certain topics were not to be spoken of. The extent to which ideas of the unspeakability of certain subjects could be tacitly conveyed was already being perceived as a problem by the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1934, Tucker and Pout exhorted parents 'whose children have not broached the subject […] to find a suitable occasion to do so', such as the arrival of a new sibling or the birth of offspring to pets'. Indeed, they suggested that 'the fact that the child [was] growing up [was] in itself' a sufficient reason to introduce the matter.[59]

Norah March also drew attention as early as 1915 to individual differences in learning styles:

> Some children have ready, alert, mental activity, and quickly associate one fact with another, realizing the whole story in a quick, vivid flash of insight. Other children have thoughts that come ponderously and slowly and need many more facts and details to help them up to the goal.[60]

Even if psychoanalytical concepts largely remained the province of the progressive intelligentsia, they were employed in the consideration of issues affecting sex education soon after their introduction into the UK. March, for example, was citing Freud, at least in the later editions of her work, *Towards Racial Health*. Constance Long, a follower of Jung, argued in 1920 that '[I]n the unconscious mind of the pupil we have a factor that falsifies a great deal of sex instruction'. She advocated:

> not[ing] what the child does, and how he interprets our words. Where we find fear associated with the subject we should seek to remove it […]. We should not laugh at his mistakes or his phantasies [sic], but try to get into direct contact with his emotional processes.[61]

In the same year, Barbara Low similarly complicated the picture:

> To suppose […] that by telling the child 'all about' sex-matters, answering his questions, behaving sensibly and intelligently over sex-affairs, the problem thereby will be solved, is to be in the greatest error […]. Such an idea assumes that there is only the conscious mind to be considered, rational and logical, whereas the profundities of sex and sex-emotions appertain primarily to the Unconscious. But knowledge can do something, perhaps much in […] the making of physical functions as much as possible an ordinary recognized affair, not wrapt in mystery and shame.[62]

In 1922, the woman preacher, Maude Royden, gave a vivid, and in many ways enduringly relevant, account of the process by which children came to learn, or not learn, about sex:

> At some point in our lives we begin to be curious: we ask a question; we are met with a jest or a lie, or with a rebuke, or with some evasion that conveys to us, quite successfully, that we ought not to have asked the question. The question generally has to do with the matter of birth […]. When we meet with evasion, lies, or reproof, we naturally conclude that there is something about the birth of life into the world that we ought not to know, and since it is apparently wrong of us even to wish to know it, it is presumably disgusting. We seek to learn from other and more grimy sources what our parents might have told us, and learning, arrive at the conclusion that in the relations of men and women there is also something that is repulsive […]. It means that almost at once those of us who persist in our desire to know are in danger of losing our self-respect. We learn that there is something in sex that is base – so base that even our own parents will not speak to us about it.[63]

Evidence does suggest that the recipients of sex education classes during the twentieth century in Britain often appreciated the clarification and contextualization of issues that had previously confused them, and the provision of appropriate vocabulary within a more open discussion of the subject. It was also sometimes reported that sex education within schools made it easier for young people to speak to their parents about the matters raised.[64] Yet, its exact place within the wider process of the acquisition of sexual knowledge remains hazy.

CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

In recent years, cross-country comparisons of the relationship between the provision of sex education and the incidence of teenage pregnancy and STD infections have been undertaken. For example, the 2002 Report of the Unicef

Innocenti Research Centre indicated that European countries with compulsory or universal sex education have a perceptibly better record than either the UK, or, in particular, the USA.[65] However, such findings raise the fundamental question as to whether it is the sex education *per se* which is the really significant factor, or whether it is the concatenation of social attitudes and health and social welfare policies of which sex education may be but one part? Does the sex education itself make the difference, or is it just an indicator for a much more complex blend of elements leading to better sexual health among young people, such as cultural factors affecting the ability of parents and children to discuss the issue.[66]

Certainly, there is a sense in which it would seem, over the long history of sex education in the UK, whatever instruction is being given, it has always been a day late and a dollar short in terms of the needs and wants of the young people to whom it has been directed. How far this is a function specifically of the British cultural environment or converges with experience overseas represents a key issue for future historians of sex education.

NOTES

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16. MOA, Mass Observation: Sex Survey: Box 1, Venereal Disease: File B Reports on Dec 1942 London survey,
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18. A. Meynell, *Public Servant, Private Woman: An Autobiography*, London: Gollancz, 1988 p. 45.
19. Ibid.
20. The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), Board of Education file ED50/185. See also the discussion in F. Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-moral Politics in Britain since 1830*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, pp. 153–63.
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3 Sex Education and the Law in England and Wales

The Importance of Legal Narratives

Ann Blair and Daniel Monk

INTRODUCTION

Sex education was referred to explicitly by statute in England and Wales for the first time in the 1986 Education Act.[1] Since then, the legal framework has been subject to repeated amendment by way of five further Acts of Parliament as well as secondary legislation and government circulars.[2] For educational practitioners, these frequent changes in the law have exacerbated the difficulties in addressing this sensitive, complex and highly politicized subject. Law as a descriptive 'rule-book' provides essential information for practitioners in sex education (which is to say that it tells us who can teach what and where and sets out the respective formal rights of parents, children and the State), but this chapter wishes to suggest alternative ways of 'reading law' that go beyond the formal language and functions of law.

From this perspective, the shifts in the legal framework represent a significant narrative for exploring how public policy in this area has both informed and attempted to resolve conflicts between traditional moral concerns, pragmatic health agendas and broader political conflicts between local and central government. The sheer extent of law in this area is significant in itself, but it is also important to highlight the fact that use of law as a method of regulating sex education is not inevitable and is not replicated in all jurisdictions. Consequently, law is not only a critical site for exploring the recent history of sex education but also demonstrates the increasingly significant role that law plays in resolving disputes, both political and individual, in western societies.

Following a critical overview of the recent history of statutory reform, this chapter examines the law through two alternative theoretical models. First, it looks at recent theory relating to the nature of risk in modern society and relates this to both the public health agenda and concerns about a breakdown in moral certainties. Secondly, drawing on the sociology of childhood and a critique of rights, it explores how law negotiates and is able to reconcile these competing public health and moral concerns.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Prior to 1986, the decision as to whether or not to teach sex education, and the manner in which it should be taught, was left to the discretion of individual head teachers. However, in practice, head teachers were often strongly influenced by the policies of local education authorities (LEAs). In addition, head teachers were provided with guidance on health education from central government, and, as far back as 1922, this guidance acknowledged a place for teaching about sex.[3] While not compulsory, the legality of teaching sex education could be inferred from the requirements of the 1944 Education Act. This provided that 'a local education authority shall […] contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community by securing that efficient primary education, secondary education and further education are available to meet the needs of the population of their area'.[4] As appropriate sex education was viewed as intimately connected to moral and physical development (and given the interest of religion in such matters, also to spiritual development) this provision led some to argue that schools not only had the *power* but were under a *duty* to provide sex education. However, in 1967, for a variety of pragmatic and political reasons, this interpretation was refuted by the Department of Education.[5]

By 1986, the focus of debates about legal intervention had shifted away from attempts to use the law to raise the profile of sex education towards demands from conservative moralists for law to be used to restrict the existing *ad hoc* provision. By the 1980s, the subject had become highly politicized and the debate between 'the right' and 'the left' had coalesced around the perceived biases of a section of the teaching profession and a number of education authorities.[6] Indeed, the accusation that certain so-called 'loony left' LEAs were 'corrupting children' through sex education was made explicit in election campaigns by the Conservative Party.[7] Philip Meredith argues that support by the Labour government in the 1970s for innovative programmes, such as those offered by the Family Planning Association, had 'failed to establish sufficient support within British society as a whole to survive the 1980s'.[8] This failure and the political influence of those behind the 'moral counter-revolution' of the 1980s are clearly reflected in the first legislative intervention on sex education.

The 1986 Education Act made sex education policy a matter solely for the governing body of the school, and in doing so, effectively marginalized the role of LEAs. The Act also included a back-bench amendment, introduced by moral conservatives, that required governing bodies and head teachers to ensure that sex education be given 'in such a manner as to encourage pupils to have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life'.[9] Finally, again in response to concerns about the influence of LEAs, but also in keeping with the broader neo-liberal ideological shift towards market forces and 'consumerism' in education, the 1986 Act also provided for greater parental accountability; directly by requiring that sex education policies should be made available to

them, and indirectly by strengthening their representation on the governing body.[10]

The historian, Lesley Hall, comments that 'the devolution of powers to schools and their governors meant that many innovative programmes by LEAs bit the dust, while heads were nervous of upsetting the susceptibilities of governors'.[11] New guidance issued by the Department of Education and Science was strongly criticized by legal commentators for its restrictive approach to issues such as contraception and homosexuality.[12]

Despite these reforms, the discretionary approach still dominated, and to this extent the legal status of sex education was not dissimilar to other aspects of the curriculum, for unlike most other European countries such as France and The Netherlands, control over the curriculum as a whole in England and Wales was marked by its lack of central direction.[13] However, this status quo was dramatically changed by the introduction of the National Curriculum by the 1988 Education Reform Act. This introduced an important legal and practical distinction, that remains today, between 'science' and 'sex and relationship education'. Science became one of the key compulsory subjects within the National Curriculum and, as a result, teaching about the 'biological aspects of human reproduction' became compulsory and its content under the highly centralized control of the Secretary of State for Education. Outside of this privileged space, the 'non-biological' aspects of sex education were further marginalized. At the same time, the distinction between these two categories of knowledge and information about sex was far from clear, and in the 1990s the lack of clarity as to the meaning of 'biological' and 'non-biological' became a site of political conflict.

Alongside the introduction of the National Curriculum, 1988 also saw the enactment of the infamous 'section 28' that prohibited the 'promotion' of homosexuality and the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a 'pretended family relationship'.[14] This provision only applied to LEAs and the government originally argued that it was unnecessary as LEA influence had been removed by the 1986 Act. However, the fact that this back-bench amendment was eventually adopted by the government is an indication both of the strength of traditional moral lobbyists and of the perceived political advantages of being seen to support homophobic prejudices.[15] It also attests to the fact that, as Meredith has argued, 'in the final analysis a large part of the debate on the theory and practice of school sex education in Britain continues to hinge upon attitudes to homosexuality'.[16] In this period, this preoccupation with homosexuality was frequently expressed, both explicitly and implicitly, in the context of debates about HIV/AIDS, and its significance was such that it eventually led to the second major reform of the law on sex education, the 1993 Education Act.[17]

In 1991, the Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, reconfigured the boundary between 'biological' and 'non-biological' by amending the National Curriculum for Science to include the study of HIV/AIDS.[18] This led to a political storm as the conservative moral lobby argued that this would

expose children to inappropriate information about homosexuality.[19] Moreover, they argued, with some logic, that this imposition from the centre in effect made redundant the framework established by the 1986 Act whereby sex education was to be determined by individual schools accountable to parents.[20]

While HIV/AIDS undoubtedly represented a new factor, the ensuing debate was in many ways far from new. Historically, political struggles about sex education have frequently been triggered by health concerns and 'moral panics' about venereal diseases.[21] In this way, the debate in 1993 not surprisingly mirrors those earlier conflicts, for while moral conservatives and pragmatic health campaigners agreed that sexually transmitted infections (STIs) represented a problem, there was a stark conflict between their proposed 'solutions'. Moreover, and again in keeping with earlier developments, the legal framework established by the 1993 Act represented not so much a new coherent policy, but, rather, a political compromise between entrenched and familiar, competing agendas.

The 1993 Act, for the first time, made sex education a compulsory subject for all pupils in secondary schools. This provision represents a significant moment in the history of sex education; an unequivocal statement by central government of its legitimacy and national importance. However, this approach was weakened in two ways. First, the 1993 Act placed a duty on the Secretary of State for Education to ensure that the national curriculum in science did *not* include information on HIV/AIDS and STIs and 'aspects of human sexual behaviour, other than biological aspects'.[22] Reversing the decision of Baker in 1991, these issues were explicitly located within sex education in the basic curriculum. Secondly, and most controversially, the 1993 Act allowed parents an unconditional right to withdraw their child from sex education – a right that had long been campaigned for by moral conservatives.[23] Moreover, the new guidance issued in 1994 again attempted further to restrict the scope of sex education.[24]

The election of New Labour in 1997 was perceived by many children's rights and public health campaigners as an opportunity for a shift in direction away from the restrictive traditional approach. A distinctly more pragmatic and progressive approach was adopted towards the teaching of issues relating to contraception and HIV. However, it was once again the issue of homosexuality that dominated the debates as reform of sex education policies generally were interlinked with the government's attempts to negotiate acceptance of the equalization of the age of consent for homosexual activity and the repeal of section 28. After a lengthy and bitter battle between the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the former was eventually enacted in November 2000 by the government, overriding the objections of the Lords through a rare and controversial use of the 1911 Parliament Act.[25]

However, the attempt to repeal section 28 was unsuccessful and it was not until November 2003 that this controversial provision was finally abolished by section 122 of the Local Government Act of that year. At the same time, the government introduced new guidance that made it clear that schools should

take steps to prevent homophobic bullying and to adopt a far more liberal and inclusive approach to sexuality.[26] Yet, compromise once again dominated, for alongside these progressive statements, the guidance also reintroduced the negative and confusing concept of preventing the 'promotion' of homosexuality.[27] Similarly, the 2000 Learning and Skills Act placed a duty on schools to ensure that pupils 'learn the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and the bringing up of children' and that pupils 'are protected from teaching and materials which are inappropriate having regard to the age and the religious and cultural background of the pupils concerned'.[28] Moreover, while the current framework removes many of the barriers that prevented schools from developing innovative approaches, it falls short of imposing them, and local discretion remains a significant factor. The absence of a coherent national policy in this area, despite two decades of extensive statutory intervention, attests to the fact that it remains a complex, problematic and 'politically touchy issue'.[29]

The remainder of this chapter considers how two different theoretical perspectives might help to account for the form that this historical development has taken. First it looks at how questions and the concept of risk have informed the debate, and the implications of viewing children as informed decision-makers. It then draws on the sociology of childhood to explore the tensions between the constructions of the child embodied in education law and health law.

RISK AND POLICY MAKING

Risk theory has clear implications for decisions about engaging in or refraining from sexual activity, as the risks of STIs and pregnancy, and risk to reputation, have always formed part of the territory of this debate. Moreover, this theory has similar implications for sex education. The decision to provide sex education, and decisions as to what should or should not be covered by the content of any sex education curriculum, are based on predictions of future effects which are inherently uncertain.

The rapid changes that took place in the law relating to sex education during the last twenty years of the twentieth century did not arise in a vacuum. In particular, as indicated above, the public health focus on teenage conception, on the increasing incidence of STIs, and on the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS, echo concerns over sexuality, sexual health and youth culture articulated earlier in the century.[30] However, what was new was that, by the end of the twentieth century, public health concerns had come to be expressed and understood by policy makers and academic commentators in terms of the concept of risk.[31] Addressing the magnitude and likelihood of harms that individuals in society might suffer became a focus of public and legislative policy-making from the enactment of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 onwards. Discourses of risk came to dominate not only health and safety, but also environmental and

public health spheres, and increasingly penetrated areas as diverse as financial risk and criminal justice.[32]

Academic influence on this debate can be seen in the work of sociologist, Ulrich Beck, who has characterized post-industrial western society as a 'Risk Society'.[33] Here, health is a prominent value because, in a competitive labour market, it is necessary for the individual to be both fit and healthy to survive and be economically independent. Public policy, according to Beck, is based on the view that individuals are responsible for their own health and potential harms to it, even though they cannot predict the outcome of their decisions. That health should be a prominent value is not in itself surprising, but when it is given a pre-eminent status, the fear is that this can outweigh other important values including important ethical and moral concerns.

A further tendency, forcefully criticised by sociologist, Frank Furedi, has been the emerging dominance of the 'precautionary principle'. This is the idea that where the extent of the risk inherent in an activity is uncertain, that activity should be avoided. The danger of the precautionary principle is that individuals are deprived of the power of their status and experience. In the case of sex education this means that parents lose confidence in their ability to raise their own children, delegating this responsibility to 'professionals'.[34]

There are two particular concerns with the premises on which policy choices in the field of sex education have been made: first, that policymaking borne out of public health priorities is based on the needs of society as a whole and that the needs of the individual, particularly the individual child, may not have a high enough priority to survive the political horse-trading that results in new legislation; and secondly, that a focus on technical questions of risk, based on the idea of rational choices, may not take sufficient account of the cultural contexts within which these choices are made.

Thus, the focus of policy-making on the perceived need to reduce pregnancy rates and rates of STIs, rather than the child's educational, social and health needs, means that the individual child is not necessarily of primary concern. From a public health perspective (focussed on risk), it would be acceptable to concede to parents the right to opt their child out of sex education if this would help to achieve acceptance of a compulsory framework of sex education that would benefit the many. Public health objectives would only be achieved if the great majority of parents did not exercise this right, but as parents have in general been keen that their children should receive sex education in school, a low opt-out rate could be predicted.[35]

It might also be predicted that parents who do use the opt-out would tend to come from backgrounds where there are strong cultural prohibitions on sex and sexual information. If this is the case, then the risk of underage or extra-marital sex or homosexual activity as the child matures would, perhaps, be considered even more slender.[36] However, if there are risks that need to be addressed, creating an opt-out has omitted from the risk equation the individual child or young person who did not benefit from a complete programme of sex and relationships education and might only receive the 'biological basics'

in science. Although the impact of such policy considerations on public health may have been minimal, the impact on individual children could be considerable or, in extreme cases, catastrophic. Indeed, this was the basis of much of the criticism of this opt-out provision in parliamentary debates.

There are other risk factors to be considered. Historically, governments have been happy to see the content of such programmes left to local discretion. Legislation could be a risky business in electoral terms, with powerful voices inside and outside parliament representing sex education as a cause of promiscuity rather than a necessary response to the needs of children, young people and public health.[37] The timidity of the past content of sex education programmes in schools,[38] perhaps as a result of sensitivity to powerful media representations of children being 'corrupted' by sex education, is a product of similar fears.[39] This was a particular danger in relation to questions of homosexuality and other controversial issues. From 1993, the parental opt-out, and policies enhancing parental accountability more generally, have arguably exacerbated the tendency of schools to self-censor their approaches in an attempt to produce a policy that would not antagonize parents. Moreover, in the quasi-market for education that has applied since 1988, adverse publicity has had the potential to do great harm to a school's reputation. The legal compromise has resulted in a situation where schools needed to balance their assessments of the best interests of pupil against considerations of risk to their public image.

The second criticism of information-based approaches to questions of risk is that risk-related sexual activity is far more complex than risk theory acknowledges. First, emphasizing the negative consequences of sexual activity, such as teenage pregnancy, is not necessarily going to achieve the desired results, as presenting the risks of sexual activity in an unjustifiably negative light may run counter to pupils' own experience. As social psychologist, Ann Phoenix, demonstrated, the decision of teenage girls to become pregnant is frequently a considered choice and far from the 'disaster' that it is generally portrayed to be. Moreover, within the underprivileged communities where teenage pregnancies are highest, she found no evidence that young women who do not become pregnant have greater employment or educational advantages than those who do.[40] Furthermore, sexual decision-making is unquantifiable and unpredictable because young people, like adults, do not always (or even usually) make their choices about sexual behaviour on the basis of a cold calculation of risks and benefits; and this is not because the cause and effect of pregnancy and STIs are difficult to explain and to understand.[41]

Elizabeth Burtney and Mary Duffy, whose research has focussed on children's sexual and mental health, argue that '[Young people's] assessment of risk and appraisal of outcomes is shaped by broader aspects of the social and cultural environment, as is their patterns of behaviour with regard to sex and relationships'.[42] Consequently, to be effective, sex education needs to account for issues such as risk to reputation and other cultural and economic questions that have meant young people persisting in patterns of sexual behaviour that

many adults would regard as undesirable.[43] Yet, policy initiatives have largely been premised on the assumption that, given the necessary practical biological information, young people will make the 'right' choices that accord with government concerns about teenage pregnancies and official perceptions of responsible citizenship in a global economy.[44] Despite the rapid rate of legislative intervention, theory and policy have failed to distinguish effectively between cultural risks that are a product of social complexity and technological risks that are the effects of the breakdown of regulation.[45]

Although the most recent guidance recognised that sex education must be education about relationships as well as simply about sex, the law that constitutes sex and relationship education (SRE) has remained situated within a public health and individual choice paradigm. If law and guidance regulating sex education acknowledged this complexity and treated children and young people as *competent* decision-makers, it might be better able to address both public health concerns and the needs of the individual child or young person. Clearly, concepts and theories of risk have some explanatory power. However, if law is to address the problems that underlie sex education policy there are two perspectives that it must, and currently does not, address. First, it must acknowledge the impact on the decision of the circumstances in which it is taken (which can be described as 'situated rationality'). Secondly, it must recognise that a decision about sex is not usually taken by a single individual, but is more usually action negotiated by two or more individuals (which can be described as 'social action').

EDUCATION AND HEALTH: CONSTRUCTING CHILDHOOD(S) AND LEGAL BOUNDARIES

In policy terms a persistent barrier to the adoption of such an approach has been the tension between 'education' and 'health'. The conflict between public health concerns and the agendas of conservative moralists have meant that advising and informing children about sexual matters in an effective way poses what, at times, appear to be intractable problems for the development of coherent social and education policies. Yet, it is in the process of translating conflicting concerns and agendas into practical programmes that law plays a critical role. Law provides a practical framework, but at the same time, to a certain extent, it masks the political conflicts. In order to demonstrate this, we move away from control of the curriculum and focus on the law relating to individual advice to pupils.

The extent to which teachers can provide advice to individual pupils outside of the classroom has been an enduring problem. Yet, it is arguably teachers, often more than parents, from whom children will seek advice about issues relating to sexuality, and it could be considered to be an essential aspect of their professional pastoral role. While not addressed explicitly by legislation, advice to schools on this matter has been by way of government circulars. The

manner in which the issue has been addressed has altered significantly, but the advice has consistently insisted upon a clear distinction between the role of teachers and medical practitioners, and, in so doing, has constructed a 'spatial' boundary (both physical and ideological) between 'education' and 'health'. 'Spatial' here refers not simply to a physical space but to a location that requires those found or placed there to adopt particular characteristics.[46] These tensions between the Departments of Health and Education are a recurring theme throughout the history of sex education.[47] What is significant about the recent uses of law in this context is that the construction of the boundary enables child sexuality to be framed and understood in distinct ways, which in turn legitimizes what, on the surface, appear to be contradictory forms of intervention. In other words, this boundary is more than a simple matter of professional demarcation, but, rather, a technique of governance.

The issue of individual advice was first addressed in 1994 in a circular published to complement the statutory framework introduced by the 1993 Act.[48] It stated that 'teachers are not health professionals' and that advice on such matters as contraceptive advice 'without parental knowledge or consent would be an inappropriate exercise of a teacher's professional responsibilities'.[49] This 'advice', with its veiled threat of legal action against teachers who ignored it, was roundly criticized by numerous legal commentators who argued that it failed to distinguish between an interpretation of law, and the then Secretary of State's view of good practice, and that it was, 'without foundation in criminal or civil law'.[50] In support of this view, the commentators cited the 1986 landmark ruling of the House of Lords in *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority and the DHSS* that held that doctors could lawfully provide advice about contraception to girls under the age of 16 without parental knowledge; for while the case did not refer to teachers, there was no reason why the principles underlying that decision could or, indeed, should not apply to them as much as to medical practitioners.[51]

In many respects the current guidance issued by New Labour represents a marked shift away from this restrictive approach. It states unequivocally that it is 'appropriate for secondary schools to provide education about contraception',[52] and that: '*Trained staff* in secondary schools *should be able* to give young people *full information* about different types of contraception, including emergency contraception and their effectiveness.'[53] Similarly, in support of this shift, the potential for criminal liability through the principles of aiding, abetting or inciting unlawful sexual intercourse in cases where a pupil under the age of 16 is advised about contraception has been effectively removed by section 73 of the 2003 Sexual Offences Act.

The reality that children are sexually active beings is now explicitly acknowledged, not only in relation to advice about contraception, but also in relation to information about HIV/AIDS. Thus, the guidance states in the same unequivocal manner that 'young people *need* to understand what is risky behaviour and what is not' and that, 'sex and relationship education should inform young people about condom use and safer sex in general'.[54]

While this new approach clearly challenges the 'imposition' by the 1994 circular of a stark divide between the legitimate roles of health professionals and teachers, in two distinct ways the new guidelines still ensure that the boundary between 'education' and 'health' remains firmly in place.[55] First, they are dominated by an emphasis on the dangers of sexual activity and the centrality of sex education as a means of encouraging children to delay sexual activity. It is stated explicitly that 'sex and relationship education is not about the promotion of sexual activity – this would be inappropriate teaching'.[56] Similarly, over eight references are made to the importance of delaying sexual activity. For example, it is advocated that pupils should 'learn the reasons for delaying sexual activity and the benefits to be gained from such delay'.[57] It is similarly asserted that 'effective sex and relationship education does not encourage early sexual experimentation' but 'enables young people to understand the reasons for delaying sexual activity'.[58] The emphasis on delay is reinforced by the fact that, where practical advice is advocated, it is only in the context of the negative consequences of sexual activity; in particular, teenage pregnancy and infection.

The guidance is, consequently, not 'morally neutral' about child sexuality and has been carefully drafted to avoid in any way implying that it condones sexual activity by young people. As a result, it notably fails to address sexual pleasure and alternatives to sexual intercourse and thus neglects to acknowledge the reasons why young people have sex in the first place. Moreover, research repeatedly demonstrates that these are issues about which young people have opinions and which they wish to be included in sex education.[59]

The second way in which the new guidance upholds the boundary between health and education is by emphasizing that health professionals still have a distinct role to play and that, significantly, teachers are not able to offer the same degree of confidentiality.[60] Similarly, in contrast to the position relating to health, the guidance places great emphasis on the importance, and indeed requirement, of sex education policies being developed in conjunction with parents. It fails to address and to provide much-needed advice as to how schools should balance parental concerns with both teachers' assessments of children's needs and with young people's own requests for information.

The continued distinction between health and education upholds conflicting images of childhood sexuality. In the context of health, children are constructed as independent 'quasi-adults' entitled to confidential advice and treatment. However, in the context of education, they are constructed as ideally non-sexual, vulnerable and dependant, and the provision of information and advice about sex is restricted or censored, both directly and indirectly. The emphasis on traditional morality and the privileged place of science within the statutory framework reinforce this limited role of education as compared with health as the location for explicit advice.

The fact that children have far more autonomy in the context of 'health' than they have in that of 'education' has been strongly criticized for being illogical and inconsistent. For example, the family lawyer, Andrew Bainham, asks,

'just what has happened to the rights of children in school?'[61] Similarly, a leading children's rights lawyer, Michael Freeman, comments that: 'It is a matter of some puzzlement how in the general thrust to actualize children's rights, there should have been such an obvious neglect of them in the sphere of education.'[62]

These observations are principled arguments made in support of children's rights more generally, but the inconsistency could equally be challenged for pragmatic reasons. In other words, if the right of young people to confidential advice and treatment accords with and supports the present government's aims of reducing teenage pregnancy and STIs, and with the ideals of responsible sexual citizenship, why restrict the rights of children in sex education? If treating children as quasi-adults with respect to health is consistent with public health agendas, why, for example, does the government not introduce a policy of installing condom-dispensing machines in every school? The answer, it is suggested, lies in recognizing the normative function of education and the influence of moral and cultural agendas, and the contingent nature of rights on the development of educational policy. For, in the context of sex education in schools, the ideal of the child as non-sexual dominates.

The language used in the 2000 guidance from central government provides a significant insight here. Where sexual activity is acknowledged, the expression 'young people' is used, where it is discouraged, the word 'children' is employed. This terminology confirms the view of the sociologists, Wendy and Rex Stainton Rogers, that, in contemporary western societies, child sexuality is understood through two binary constructions.[63] The dominant discursive equation in their model is: Child + Sex = Abuse. The alternative, less frequent model is Child + Sex = Adult. Where child sexuality is acknowledged as something other than abuse, it is only through imbuing the child with the characteristics of an adult. What is denied or made invisible is the possibility of Child + Sex = Child. The boundary between health and education consequently reflects not so much a principled acknowledgment of the autonomy of young people but a technique of governance that enables the provision of sexual health services to young people while at the same time perpetuating the political and cultural insistence on the 'impossibility' of good sex for children. Rights in health, consequently, can be understood to be contingent on the failure to adhere to the ideal of children being non-sexual.

While the possibility and necessity of constructing the sexual child as a quasi-adult is critical here, the fact that this 'equation' is legitimized in the discourse of health is also significant. Advocating 'Good Health' for children has none of the problematic connotations associated with advocating 'Good Sex' for children, despite the fact that, in practice, in the context of the real embodied lives of children, the information and services and treatment required are the same: once again language is critical and the legal framework that enables the 'health child' to be sexual confirms the pupil as ideally non-sexual.

On the surface, the allocation of parental rights in the context of sex education is also inconsistent and illogical. They are strong in education and weak

in health – the mirror image of children's rights. The allocation of parental rights in education accords with the ideal, and the encouragement in official guidance that children will delay sexual activity. The right to remove children from sex education was introduced only as a result of the campaigns by moral traditionalists and is an explicit recognition of their concerns about exposing children to sexual material. In addition, it is consistent, as noted above, in the context of section 28, with the neo-liberal political policies that encouraged schools to be accountable to parents and that advocated the removal of LEA controls. While expressed through the political rhetoric of 'consumerism', this was explicitly understood as a way of upholding not 'whatever parents wanted' but, rather, a political technique to ensure a traditional form of sex education: the assumption being that parents could be relied upon to exercise their rights in 'the right way'. Parents are, of course, not a monolithic group, but the assumption made was clearly that parents, as a group, would be unlikely to willingly acknowledge the active sexuality of their children, far less an open non-discriminatory approach to homosexuality.

However, in the context of health, the rights of the medical profession have overriden the rights of parents. This is clear from the *Gillick* judgment, for while justified on the basis of the rights of the evolving mature child, in fact it provides doctors with more autonomy than children. But again the lack of consistency accords with political and pragmatic calculations. Whereas parental rights in education uphold the ideal of the non-sexual child, in the context of health, parental rights conflict with the aims of preventing pregnancy. This analysis reveals the contingent nature of rights; that they are more than simply an acknowledgement of individual autonomy, privacy and citizenship.

This perspective on rights challenges liberal political orthodoxy within which parental rights are legitimized as a necessary form of protection from the ever-encroaching power of the State. The critical legal theorist, Frances Olsen, challenges this 'liberal myth' of State intervention arguing that: 'Neither intervention nor non-intervention is an accurate description of any particular set of policies, and *the terms obscure rather than clarify the policy choices that society makes*.'[64] This critique is highly pertinent in this context where the inconsistent allocation of the rights of both parents and children represent not so much a principled acknowledgment of autonomy but, rather, pragmatic uses of liberty. As the sociologist, Vikki Bell, has argued, 'laissez faire is not so much practised but used'.[65]

CONCLUSION

The introduction to this chapter argued for a critical reading of law in order to locate law within a broader social and political context. Looking at the history of sex education allows a wider cultural reading of the law. This chapter has identified how the tensions underlying the development of policy that arise out of concepts of 'risk' and 'childhood' impact on the legal

framework and how, at the same time, that framework has contributed to maintaining these tensions. Law, in other words, represents both a critical text for exploring the modern history of sex education and, at the same time, constitutes an essential component and player within this history. Looking beneath the surface of law demonstrates that, underlying the political rhetoric of child welfare and rights arguments based on 'the best interests of the child', in reality the needs and experiences of real embodied children have been marginalized in the development of public policy.

NOTES

1. *Education (No. 2) Act 1986*, Ch. 61.
2. A. Blair, 'Negotiating conflicting values: the role of law in educating for values in England and Wales', *Education and the Law*, 2002, vol. 14, 39–56; D. Monk, 'New guidance/old problems: recent developments in sex education', *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 2001, vol. 23, 271–91.
3. J. Pilcher, 'Sex in health education: official guidance for schools in England 1922–77', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 2004, vol. 17, 185–208.
4. *Education Act 1944*, s 7&8, Geo. VI, Ch. 31.
5. See J. Hampshire, 'The politics of school sex education policy in England and Wales from the 1940s to the 1960s', *Social History of Medicine*, 2005, vol. 18, 87–105, p. 102.
6. As Meredith argues, 'sex education has been deployed as a vehicle for right versus left wing antagonism although it is less accurate to divide the debate along party lines', P. Meredith, *Sex Education. Political Issues in Britain and Europe*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 17.
7. S. Sanders and G. Spraggs, 'Section 28 and education', in C. Jones and P. Mahony (eds) *Learning our Lines*, London: Women's Press, 1989, 79–128, pp. 92–93.
8. Meredith, *Sex Education*, p. 26.
9. *Education (No 2) Act 1986*, s 46, Ch. 61.
10. D. Monk, 'Sex education and the problematisation of teenage pregnancies: a genealogy of law and governance', *Social and Legal Studies*, 1998, vol. 7, 241–61.
11. L. A. Hall, '"Birds, bees, and general embarrassment": sex education in Britain from Social Purity to Section 28', in R. Aldrich (ed.) *Public or Private Education? Lessons from History*, London: Woburn, 2004, 98–115, p. 110.
12. Department of Education and Science, *Sex Education at School*, Circular 11/87, London: DES, 1987.
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Shaping Sex Education Policy

Religion, Medicine and the State

4 Taking the Middle Way
Sex Education Debates in Sweden in the Early Twentieth Century

Lena Lennerhed

> 'But show compassion; first let them receive other information, let them see beauty, harmony, and do this for a long time, before they acquire knowledge of ugliness and disharmony!'[1]
>
> Karolina Widerström 1907

> 'It will undermine our entire civilisation if these all-important questions are reduced to the level of thoughtless jokes and lustful mendacity'[2]
>
> The Population Commission 1936

This chapter explores the recurring Swedish debates surrounding sex education in schools during the first half of the twentieth century, from the introduction of the earliest proposals to their eventual introduction in schools in response to official guidelines on the content, delivery and aims of sex education.[3] Using a range of primary sources, including government reports, official directives, pamphlets and contemporary periodical literature, three aspects of this debate will be highlighted: first, changing perceptions of sexuality, and how far the leading actors in the debate viewed sexuality as primarily a biological, social or psychological phenomenon and how far it was perceived as an ethical issue; secondly, how far the protagonists perceived sexual knowledge as fulfilling a prophylactic or even liberating role rather than as a disruptive or even pernicious influence; and thirdly, the extent to which sexual knowledge was gendered in its depiction of sexual issues.

PIONEERING EFFORTS

The issue of sex education was first introduced into a *fin-de-siècle* Sweden characterized by poor health, wretched living conditions and social problems, where the labour and feminist movements were newly emergent social forces.[4] Arguably, the pioneer of sex education was Karolina Widerström (1856–1949), Sweden's first woman physician and gynaecologist, a member of the women's liberation movement, and a suffragette. In 1897, Widerström started to educate girls in their upper teens in 'sexual hygiene' – anatomy, physiology, reproduction etc. She also demanded that such education be generally introduced, both for girls and boys.[5]

Widerström's thinking was rooted in the belief that children were innocent, but that they possessed a thirst for knowledge.[6] The child sought enlightenment and asked questions about everything that it observed in its immediate environment. Furthermore, she maintained that, although the child had an open and natural relation to facts about itself and its surroundings, when it asked its parents about sexuality, it was frequently met with rebuffs, evasions or fairy-tales, such as the story of babies being delivered by the stork. As a result, Widerström argued, the child remained ignorant, and with little confidence in its parents. Still worse, the child might instead accept the street corner's 'distorted' picture of sexuality as being mean and filthy, have its instincts awakened too early and be led into unchaste acts. 'The system of silence' would then have caused precisely the type of behaviour it was designed to avert.[7]

According to Widerström, 'the principle of silence' also continued to rule in school. She claimed that everything relating to procreation, whether in the animal or the human kingdom, was carefully excluded from the curriculum. Thus, while children were taught the importance of obeying the Sixth Commandment: 'Thou shall not commit adultery', the content of the commandment was never explained to the children, and therefore remained incomprehensible.[8]

Widerström considered that all parents should furnish their children with information and advice on sexual matters, but she drew attention to the school's expanding role in upbringing. She suggested that sex education be offered as part of the biology curriculum, at an elementary level for the younger children, and at a more advanced level, including details about 'the reproductive organs', for older children. The idea of prevention was central; proper information would, for example, prevent the spread of venereal diseases (VD). At the same time, however, Widerström emphasized that instruction should not to be uniformly negative and cautionary. Rather, sexuality was to be seen in its entirety. Young people were to be introduced to sexuality's 'beautiful' and 'harmonious' aspects before gaining knowledge of 'the dark sides of sexuality'.[9]

The biological aspect of sexuality was central to Widerström's view of sex education. This does not mean that she considered ethics and sexual mores less important. The power and importance of the sex drive should be recognized, she held, but this drive should also be ennobled and brought into harmony with mankind's more elevated spiritual qualities. Nor, in her view, should ethics and biology be seen as opposites. Knowledge about procreation would create a feeling of empathy between the generations, veneration of life, and appreciation of nature's beauty and deeper meaning. A balanced and objective education in sexuality would promote both self-restraint and consideration for others, and would serve to bring up girls to be affectionate mothers, and boys to be responsible fathers.[10]

A restricted version of sex education was introduced during the first decades of the twentieth century, but almost exclusively in higher girls' schools. The

fact that girls and not boys received sex education – contrary to Widerström's intentions – derived from the gendered perceptions of their educational needs. Girls were considered more vulnerable than boys, and unwanted pregnancies were perceived as very much a woman's problem. It was believed that sex education would help to protect girls. Furthermore, since girls' sex drive was held to be virtually non-existent, sex education for girls was considered 'safe'. Sex education for boys, on the other hand, was viewed as a more problematic undertaking that might 'awaken the sleeping bear'. Consequently, boys received little or no sex education and were correspondingly largely absolved of responsibility for their sexual behaviour.[11]

The sex education offered in early twentieth-century Sweden was therefore very limited. Moreover, policy-makers remained highly ambivalent over the issue. On the one hand, concern to restrict sexual information continued. For instance, the so-called Contraceptive Law of 1910 banned the purveyance of information about contraceptives (and thus information about the protection condoms offered against VD). On the other hand, the rising incidence and moral panic surrounding VD triggered an increasing call for educational initiatives. Consequently, the Lex Veneris of 1918 decreed that public authorities publicize information about VD and how it was transmitted.[12] In 1921, a government report on the issue also presented detailed proposals for sex education in schools backed by many physicians and feminist organizations. It suggested introducing sex education, with emphasis on procreation, for the graduating classes of elementary schools and for 14–15 year-olds in secondary grammar schools, and that teachers receive extra training in the subject.[13] But nothing decisive happened. The minds of young people were considered too delicate for knowledge about sexual matters.

THE INTERWAR DEBATES

While social deprivation persisted in interwar Sweden, it was also a period of dramatic social and cultural change. Universal suffrage was introduced in 1921, and in 1932, the Social Democratic Party took power, which it was to retain for more than 40 years. The foundations of the 'people's home' – the Swedish welfare state – were laid. A society based on the principle of equality was to be constituted through extensive social reforms, including the revision of social attitudes towards sexual behaviour and sexuality.[14]

A young, modern, social-democratic couple set the trend in the discussion of sexually-related issues: the economist, Gunnar Myrdal (1898–1987), and the behavioural scientist, Alva Myrdal (1902–86). Their co-authored book, *Crisis in the Population Issue* (1934), described how a low birth rate could be remedied through welfare reforms that benefited mothers and children.[15] Subsequently, the book paved the way for the Myrdals' inclusion in the official Population Commission (*Befolkningskommissionen*, 1935–38).[16] In 1936, the Commission issued an important report, entitled simply *The Sexual Issue*. The introduction

emphasized the importance of 'openness' towards and a 'candid and unbiased discussion' of sexuality. Taking a scientific and rational perspective, the Commission suggested, among other things, that the contraceptive law be abolished and sex education be introduced in schools.[17]

To some extent, the Population Commission introduced a new discourse and mindset as the basis for sex education policy and practice. Employing an arsenal of psychological, sociological, medical and demographic information, it claimed that the principle of voluntary parenthood, of 'a healthy love life' and of 'psychophysically satisfactory sexual activities' had a rightful place in marriage, and that the use of contraceptives was justified and responsible.[18] As far as sex education was concerned, the Commission believed it ought to be taught in all types of schools and to children of all ages, that it was preferable that girls and boys be taught together, that ordinary teachers should be responsible for giving such education and that it should be given primarily within the curricula of biology and hygiene. To make this possible, the Commission also recommended that teachers receive additional education on the subject and that textbooks be revised.[19]

There are obvious differences, but also some similarities, between the views on sexuality advanced by the Population Commission and those previously expressed by Karolina Widerström. They shared the view of the unspoiled child and of the child's natural attitude to sexuality as long as sexual issues were presented in a relaxed and healthy manner and properly contextualized. Both the Commission and Widerström emphasized that, while instruction might touch on the negative consequences of sexual activities, it should focus on the positive: procreation and family life. The Commission, however, also wanted the school – gently and unobtrusively – to point out that individuals could protect themselves against unwanted pregnancies and VD through the use of contraceptives.

Widerström and the Commission agreed that sex education should be edifying, but the normative character of the Commission's report is undoubtedly more striking. It called attention to the constant need for guidance, edification, adaptation and control. Widerström and the Population Commission both held that sex education belonged primarily within the biology curriculum. But for Widerström, the study of biology in itself enriched the individual; it had an almost mystical trait, which was not at all the case with the rational population experts of the 1930s. Widerström's ethics were partially based on an idea of the natural, partially on a tacit and vague belief in Christianity. The Population Commission's moral philosophy was, by contrast, entirely secular. Training for parenthood and the sexual enlightenment of the young was primarily conceived as a means of constraining individualism in favour of 'civic morality' (*medborgerlig moral*).

Interesting comparisons can also be drawn between the approaches taken by Widerström and the Commission towards the issue of gender. They both wanted to address contemporary double standards and to promote equality between the sexes, and therefore emphasized the importance of women gaining

knowledge of their biology and sexuality. However, their views on the nature of female sexuality did differ. Insofar as she felt able to discuss the issue in the early years of the century, Widerström adhered to a more traditional and restricted view of female sexuality.[20] By the 1930s, however, new ideas and sexual norms prevailed, and the Population Commission's ideal couple – an equal sexual partnership – engaged in sex for pleasure's sake as well as for procreation. Indeed, although the Commission favoured sex within marriage, it did not entirely reject the idea of stable, premarital relationships.[21]

At the time, the Population Commission's work caused extensive public debate, and several of its suggestions were implemented.[22] The prohibition against providing information on contraceptives was abolished in 1938. That same year, legislation was pushed through that granted women a limited right to abortion. Furthermore, although progress was more mixed with respect to the Commission's recommendations for sex education in schools and an adult information campaign, organizations and individuals continued to campaign for sex education. Women physicians such as Ada Nilsson and Andrea Svedberg, both students of Widerström, composed directives on how to teach the subject,[23] reflecting a broader commitment of women's organizations to the issue.[24] The campaign culminated in 1940, when fifteen women's organizations joined forces and submitted a demand for school lessons on sexual hygiene to the National Agency for Education, founded in 1920 to implement governmental decisions and to supervise and support schools with directives and curricula.[25]

The introduction of sex education in all Swedish schools, teacher training colleges and universities was also the first item on the agenda of the Swedish Association for Sex Education (*Riksförbundet för sexuell upplysning*, RFSU).[26] The RFSU was founded in 1933 by Elise Ottesen-Jensen (1886–1973), journalist and proponent of the dissemination of sexual information, together with a group of socialist physicians and representatives of trade union and political associations within the labour movement (see Figure 4.1).[27] The RFSU had a broad programme: its principle demands included the abolition of the Contraceptive Law, free contraceptives for the poor, the establishment of guidance bureaux throughout the country, the right to abortion, and the decriminalization of homosexual acts. But its foremost aim was for the introduction of sex education in all schools and educational establishments.

The Socialist Physician Association, established in 1932, represented another strand of support for the reform of sex education.[28] One of its earliest initiatives was to establish the *Popular Journal for Sexual Education* (*Populär tidskrift för sexuell upplysning*).[29] This journal had a more pronounced social and political perspective on sex education than the RFSU. In its pages, the physician, Gunnar Inghe, expanded on the liberating effect of sexual information (*sexuell upplysning*). He argued that a better self-understanding of their own identity and emotional lives increased the willingness of young people to scrutinize social conditions. In his view, 'radicalising sexual information' would engender a 'critical, alert youth' and was therefore a weapon in the hands of the working

Figure 4.1 Elise Ottesen-Jensen of the RFSU lecturing on sex in the 1940s. With kind permission of the RFSU Archives at Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek, Stockholm.

class; a weapon that could serve in the struggle for a better social order. This was the explanation – Inghe postulated – for the opposition to sex education in schools, as he claimed that conventional restrictions on sexual knowledge were the best bulwark of bourgeois society.[30]

The influence of the Austrian psychoanalyst, Wilhelm Reich, on such views is clearly evident. In 1936, the *Popular Journal for Sexual Education* published Reich's 'The Sexual Repression of Youth', in which Reich analysed the link between bourgeois family order, sexual morals and capitalist society. Further contributions to the journal were made by Max Hodann, a refugee from Nazi Germany, who, after a tortuous journey, ended up in Sweden as a RFSU co-worker.[31] Hodann was very interested in the pedagogy of sex education, and

his children's book, *Bub und Mädel* (1925), was translated into several languages, including Swedish, where it appeared as *Things One Doesn't Speak About*.[32] Like Reich, Hodann addressed 'the proletarian youth movement', but was somewhat more cautious in his views on young people's sexual activities. While Reich considered that all repression of the sex drive promoted neurosis, Hodann thought it best if young people were abstemious.

The RFSU did not link sex education and political consciousness in the same way as did the *Popular Journal for Sexual Education*, but the association continued to press for the introduction of sex education in schools.[33] During the early 1940s, this became something of a priority. Since the continuing education courses for teachers run by Sweden's National Agency for Education could take only fifty teachers per year, the RFSU instituted the 'Jakobsberg courses' (*Jakobsbergskurserna*) in 1941, in order to educate teachers. In addition, Ottesen-Jensen, chair of the RFSU between 1933 and 1958, was regularly invited to give sex education courses at various schools (see Figure 4.2).[34]

Figure 4.2 The RFSU-leader Elise Ottesen-Jensen giving a sex education session in a school in the 1940s. With kind permission of the RFSU Archives at Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek, Stockholm.

WARTIME PROPOSALS

During World War II, a coalition government led by the social-democratic Prime Minister, Per Albin Hansson, governed Sweden. The Conservative party leader, Gösta Bagge, held the position of the Minister of Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs. In 1942, a proclamation by the Government recommended the provision of sex education in elementary schools. It stipulated that sex instruction should include anatomy, conception, embryology, VD, and racial biology. This proclamation further stressed that the purpose and meaning of sexual activity should be explained to children as being procreation. Hence, children should be told to restrain their sexual urges until they were old enough to start a family. However, a proviso was added to the effect that sex education was not to be implemented in cases where the school lacked suitable teachers.[35] In the following year, a committee was appointed which numbered among its members the Chief Medical Officer of the National Agency for Education, C.W. Herlitz, and Bishop Arvid Runestam. The committee's task was to draw up guidelines for elementary school sex education, and proposals were published in 1944.[36]

The committee's report appears to have represented a tentative compromise. Much space was devoted to ethical considerations, and no-one was left in doubt about the main issue: the school's duty to give 'clear instructions and firm rules of conduct'.[37] The guiding principle of the instruction was to be the centrality of love, marriage, and procreation, and it was to be kept within the disciplines of biology, religion and social studies. It was desirable that the children's regular teachers conduct the teaching, but the responsibility could be delegated to some other teacher or a physician where appropriate. Preferably, certain parts of the instruction should be given to girls and boys separately. Biological facts were to be taught through the use of examples; but when it came to delicate subjects such as sexual intercourse, the examples were vague. Small children were to be told that a 'seed from daddy' entered 'mummy's egg', but not shown how this was done. In the fifth grade (when the children were eleven years old), they were to be taught about the procreation of plants and animals, and girls were to be given information on the menstrual cycle. Sixth grade students were considered sufficiently mature for the term 'sexual intercourse' to be used, but were still left in ignorance as to how and why such a thing might take place. Moreover, not only were they informed that sexual abstinence in adolescence was harmless, but that premarital sexual experiences could be permanently damaging.[38]

Both the delivery and content of the Committee's proposals were met by a storm of protest. The committee had intended to submit its recommendations for consideration and comment only to a limited number of authorities, and it was widely suspected that this was to evade public consultation and debate. However, the report was leaked to RFSU's Ottesen-Jensen, who called a press conference to publicize its content.[39]

Eventually, the RFSU was allowed to present its response to the reports' proposals through the Medical Board. The RFSU criticized the directives as

too moralizing, being contrary to Swedish culture, and in need of thorough revision. Above all, the association opposed the idea that only sexual activities in wedlock were morally legitimate.[40] Furthermore, according to the association, the report was stamped by both prudishness and an 'obscurantist lack of clarity' when approaching the crucial issue of sexual intercourse. Secrecy and silence on the subject reinforced the idea that sexual intercourse was something shameful and ugly. Finally, the RFSU objected to the description of homosexuals as abnormal and dangerous, and of masturbation as a bad habit that should be avoided.

The RFSU was not alone in its critique. Alva Myrdal reacted in a column in the evening paper *Aftontidningen*:

> Sweden's long-term engagements, which are such a pronounced element of our national tradition and which educate our youth to show quite unusual faithfulness in their love in exchange for the compensation offered by the fact that intimate cohabitation starts before the wedding, is thus to be abolished. […] no distinction whatsoever is made between these, and the very loosest of relations: everything that takes place outside of wedlock is an abomination.[41]

'The pharisaical attitude has flourished in its most loathsome forms', agreed one of Sweden's most prominent liberal newspapers,[42] while an elementary schoolteachers' publication expressed itself more cautiously: 'It is perhaps the case, that there has been too much bishop and too little of physician and pedagogue.'[43] Influential authorities such as the Medical Board and the National Board of Health and Welfare also sharply criticized the recommendations. The latter, for example, pointed out that they amounted to a continued stigmatization of single mothers and children born out of wedlock. The National Board observed that, of children starting school in 1944, thirteen per cent were born out of wedlock.[44]

After this stormy debate, the so-called 'Bagge-Runestam Proposal' was revised, and in 1945, the National Agency for Education published the first directives for school sex education. Some minor changes had been made. The recommendation for sexual abstinence during 'youth' now applied to 'adolescence'. The section on 'offences' against 'marital obligations' had been removed,[45] as had references to the importance of children growing up in good, Christian homes. But in principle, the National Agency for Education and the government had accepted the committee's recommendations.

Some years later, in 1949, directives for sex education in senior classes also emerged. They established the desirability of co-education for students aged 15–17. They were considered sufficiently mature to receive information about family planning and contraceptives. Students were to be told that, although not entirely safe, condoms and diaphragms were available as contraceptives; that it was legitimate to use contraceptives within steady relationships if reasons existed for their use (for example, for medical reasons or the advancement of racial hygiene); and that each family ought to have at least three or four children.[46]

AREAS OF CONTEST

The dispute between progressives and traditionalists over the contents of sex education came to be perceived as a fight for the nation's soul, and the future of Swedish society. In this contest, the RFSU antagonized some leading Christians, who described the association as both irresponsible and immoral. The association was further accused of attacking religion, of propagating promiscuous relations amongst young people and of having discarded all moral considerations in favour of a one-sided biological perspective.[47] But, in fact, both sides agreed that sex education should be edifying as well as objective and informative, ethical as well as biological. The subject of contention was rather which norms should rule, and whether the normative or the informative aspect should be the focal point.

The RFSU claimed that there was an urgent need for knowledge, openness and objectivity around sexual issues. However, knowledge did not for that reason stand in opposition to edification; quite the contrary. Johan Wintzell, an educationalist and the RFSU's vice chairman, claimed that an ethical education based on respect for one's fellow human beings should be accorded importance in the school curriculum, including sex education. Furthermore, he claimed that knowledge in itself was of ethical merit, since knowledge was a prerequisite for correct conduct.[48] Similarly, the RFSU-physician, Inghe, was of the opinion that knowledge was not only a prerequisite for correct conduct, but also facilitated such conduct. In his view: 'Sexual information that frankly and unreservedly gives knowledge of human sex life and its rules raise [children] to be responsible and is therefore character-building in the true sense of the word.'[49]

Church leaders such as the Reverend Allan Svantesson, were, however, of a different opinion. In *Sex Education with Moderation*, Svantesson claimed that knowledge could sometimes be 'deplorably double-edged'.[50] He was not at all convinced that knowledge in itself would produce norms of conduct or an 'ethical approach to life'.

> Let us suppose that we teach our students, children or protégés that the sex organs have *this* particular function, sexual life *this* particular purpose, that, for example, masturbation gives a certain gratification but is not harmless, etc., do we then have any guarantee at all that these youths even intend to lead a pure life?[51]

According to Svantesson, young people should rather be influenced so as to bring their 'inclinations' into harmony with 'the highest [principles] of nature's order'.[52]

Svantesson did not elaborate on his argument that knowledge could be 'double-edged', but arguably he meant that sexual knowledge not only protected but could also corrupt; an idea widely expressed in the sexual politics of the time. The National Agency for Education expressed the same concern in its

guidelines to the effect that: 'Youth must be protected against both the type of sex information that induces harmful feelings of horror or guilt and against that which weakens the young people's resistance in a critical situation.'[53] While instruction was, according to the Agency, to be objective, objectivity meant taking sexuality's wider context into account, and not merely the teaching of biological facts. Descriptions of the sexual anatomy or sexual intercourse were thus deemed inappropriate and potentially harmful unless, at the same time, it was made clear that the goal of sexual activity was reproduction within a marital relationship.[54]

One argument advanced by the Agency for not making the teaching too narrowly biological was that it would challenge young people's 'natural modesty' about sexuality. This natural modesty was thought to protect young people from behaving inappropriately or immaturely. It was, according to the guidelines, a 'guardian of the love life' and of great ethical value. Sex education was designed to nurture and preserve this modesty, not challenge it 'with false and misguided "objectivity"', or by dismissing it as inhibition.[55] It was, for example, 'under all circumstances inappropriate and risky' to let school children copy anatomical charts.[56] Furthermore, it was recommended that sex education – in contrast to other school subjects – should not involve homework or examinations. The knowledge gained during lectures was considered sufficient.

In contrast, the RFSU did not embrace the idea of children's natural modesty, but rather of children's natural curiosity: children would reflect on things and ask questions, and these questions should not be deflected. Rather, they should be answered openly, objectively and undramatically. Like Widerström before her, Ottesen-Jensen called attention to children's innocent relation to sexuality. In this view, children saw sexuality as something quite natural, whereas their mentors tended to create inhibitions and feelings of shame.[57]

Thus, the RFSU believed that its work was guided by the principles of objectivity and openness. When, in 1945, Ottosen-Jensen wrote a book on how to inform children about sex, she gave it the title *Tell the Child the Truth*.[58] However, openness had its limits, even for the RFSU. Although the association stressed that the man's part in intercourse should not be ignored in sex education, and that penetration of the vagina by the penis would form part of sexual information, the RFSU did not inform children why this took place, and sexual pleasure and orgasm were not dwelt upon.[59]

In the event, teachers were left with the delicate task of conveying sexual information according to directives given by the National Agency for Education. They had to maintain a delicate balance between normative and biological approaches. While they were encouraged to speak of sexuality in a relaxed and natural manner they were also required by the Agency to adopt a cautious approach to such an explosive subject. Aspects of instruction in biology called for further balancing acts. On the one hand, instruction was to be objective and open, so as to give the young necessary knowledge. On the other hand, it was not to be too extensive or detailed, for that might fixate

young minds on sexuality. Instruction on anatomy and physiology, the sex organs and intercourse was perceived as especially sensitive. Thus the National Agency felt that knowledge protected and fostered, but that it could also be seductive and demoralizing, an ambivalent view of knowledge that rarely applied to other areas of the curriculum.[60]

Meanwhile, church authorities remained divided over the sexual norms that should be conveyed by sex education. Some writers insisted on abstinence before marriage. Thus, Bishop Torsten Bohlin argued that, if one abandoned marriage as the guiding principle in sex education, one lost the chance to 'establish a stable ethical goal for young people's love life'.[61] However, others were somewhat more flexible in their outlook, putting more emphasis on 'maturity' than marriage *per se*. Thus, Bishop Manfred Björkquist argued that: 'It cannot be right simply to equate relatively long-lasting relationships, which are, to a certain degree, founded on personal responsibility, with outright promiscuity.'[62]

According to the RFSU, sexual activities did not need to be sanctified through marriage in order to be considered legitimate and valuable. Nor need they necessarily result in children. That two people who were fond of each other engaged in sexual activities without being married was regarded as natural and right – not least because, that was how generations of Swedish people had lived. The RFSU thus accepted pre-marital sexual liaisons. However, contrary to the claims of its opponents, it did not actively encourage or promote them. The association stressed that it was inappropriate and risky for school youths to have sexual liaisons before they had reached 'psychological maturity',[63] and that sex was more highly valued if it took place within a longer-lasting, loving relationship than within a series of promiscuous relationships. As the RFSU expressed it: 'We believe that the monogamous relationship, founded on personal affection, should be the ideal.'[64] Here, then, the RFSU's views differed from those of National Agency for Education insofar as they were marginally more liberal. However, they did disagree on one issue. While the National Agency for Education linked sexuality to the institution of marriage and to procreation, the RFSU emphasized that sexual relations had value in themselves, and that they enriched and intensified human fellowship.[65] Underlying this difference of opinion were separate views on the nature of the sex drive: whether it was fundamentally 'primitive' and therefore best controlled, or whether it was a positive source of happiness.

CONCLUSION

The conflict over sex education was not a battle between political ideologies in the traditional sense. Rather, it was a struggle between two disparate discourses, two differing outlooks on humanity, society and sexuality: one secular and one Christian.

The RFSU wanted to establish a modern, scientific and secularized outlook on sexuality. It believed that school sex education would serve a preventive purpose, and that it would prepare young people for the future. Insufficient knowledge was seen as the primary cause of problems encountered by children with sexual issues. It was argued that they did not receive the knowledge they needed in order to protect themselves against the more damaging aspects of sexual awareness, and to develop into responsible and balanced human beings. The RFSU emphasized the importance of sex education to young people's personal development. Objective sexual information was considered fundamental to the individual's well-being and social competence. Accordingly, for the RFSU, the advantages of sex education were primarily social, psychological and health-related.

This stood in stark contrast to the views precisely expressed by the circle associated with the *Popular Journal for Sexual Education* in the early 1930s, which had emphasized the issue's political, even revolutionary, dimension. The RFSU's views on sex education were not highly politicized and were not part of a broader agenda to radically transform society. Nevertheless, there were those who considered the RFSU a threat, and its sex education as a prescription for disaster.

Church leaders generally viewed the family and marriage as the basis of society. Accordingly, while they emphasized that they perceived sexuality as a fundamentally bestial and primitive urge, they were willing to recognize its value if expressed in a loving relationship, and for the purpose of procreation. The RFSU, on the other hand, was firmly rooted in a scientific world-view guided by medicine, psychology and sociology. The individual was considered a social creature, but not subordinate to society, and even less so to God. Sexuality was to be separated from marriage and reproduction, and its power to promote pleasure, solidarity and well-being emphasized. Sexuality was seen as having its own intrinsic value. The sex drive was described as natural and healthy, as a driving force and as a source of pleasure. However, the RFSU did not openly praise 'free sex'. There was no desire to abolish the family and sex was considered more valuable in a loving relationship than in a casual relationship. The RFSU contrasted the modern family or the modern couple, both bound by common interests and a good sex life, to the Christian family; in this, the RFSU was following a line of argument not fundamentally different from that of the Population Commission.

Over the years, the Swedish Church had lost much of its influence in the debate surrounding sex education in schools. Meanwhile, women's organisations and sex reformers succeeded in raising the question and provoked the government into undertaking investigations and issuing new directives for sex education. In these efforts to secure sex reform and secularised sex education, such agencies were helped from the 1930s by a supportive environment, and especially by the rational and scientific perspective on sexuality of the Population Commission which continued to inform Social Democratic government. Sex education had been established and modernized, but continued to be the focus of agitated debates.

NOTES

1. K. Widerström, *Uppfostran och sexuell hygien*, Uppsala, 1907, p.12.
2. Befolkningskommissionen, *Betänkande i sexualfrågan*, (Statens offentliga utredningar, SOU 1936:59), Stockholm, 1936, p. 123.
3. These debates are also discussed in L. Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet: RFSUs tidiga historia,* Uppsala: Gidlund, 2002. Little research has been undertaken on the early history of Swedish sex education. An overview is given in 'Om sexualundervisningens utveckling i Sverige', in *Sexual-och samlevnadsundervisning*, (SOU 1974:59), Stockholm: Liber, 1974, 75–131. In addition, H. Levin discusses the feminist paper *Tidevarvet* and its support for sex education in *Kvinnorna på barrikaden,* Stockholm: Carlsson, 1997, Ch. 6.
4. Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, pp. 9–10.
5. A. Andreen, *Karolina Widerström: Sveriges första kvinnliga läkare*, Stockholm: Norstedt, 1956; 'Om sexualundervisningens utveckling i Sverige', pp. 76–78; U. Nilsson, *Kampen om kvinnan. Professionalisering och konstruktioner av kön i svensk gynekologi 1860–1925,* Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 2003, pp. 285–310. Widerström must have known of Elizabeth Blackwell's book, *Counsel to Parents on the Moral Education of their Children* (London: Hirst Smyth, 1878), which was translated into Swedish in 1883 (E. Blackwell, *Ungdomens sedliga uppfostran med hänsyn till könens inbördes förhållande*, Carlshamn, 1883), but while Blackwell emphasized morality and the preservation of chastity, Widerström put more emphasis on information. Widerström also drew attention to the beauty in sexuality.
6. This section is based on two printed lectures given by K. Widerström; *Skolan och sedlighetsrörelsen,* Stockholm, 1903, and Widerström, *Uppfostran och sexuell hygien.*
7. On similar fears within the British debate on sex education, see L. Hall, 'Birds, Bees and General Embarrassment: Sex Education in Britain, from Social Purity to Section 28', in R. Aldrich (ed.) *Public or Private Education? Lessons from History*, London: Routledge Falmer, 2004, 98–115, p. 99.
8. Widerström, *Skolan och sedlighetsrörelsen*, p. 10.
9. Widerström, *Uppfostran och sexuell hygien*, p. 12.
10. Ibid., pp. 12–13.
11. 'Om sexualundervisningens utveckling i Sverige', p. 81; Befolkningskommissionen, *Betänkande i sexualfrågan*, pp.118–21; *Betänkande angående åtgärder för spridande av kunskap om könssjukdomarnas natur och smittfarlighet m.m.*, Stockholm: Civildepartementet, 1921, pp. 36, 63, and 149.
12. H. Levin, *Kvinnorna på barrikaden*, Stockholm: Carlssons, 1997, p. 138. Lex Veneris replaced previous laws regulating prostitution.
13. *Ur Betänkande angående åtgärder för spridande av kunskap om könssjukdomarnas natur och smittfarlighet m.m.*, Stockholm: Pedagogiska skrifter, 1922, pp. 13–14, 31–35, 41–42, and 118–41.
14. Y. Hirdman, *Att lägga livet tillrätta: studier i svensk folkhemspolitik*, Stockholm: Carlssons, 1989, chapters 3 and 4.
15. A. Myrdal and G. Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, 2nd edn, Stockholm: Bonnier, 1934.
16. Gunnar and Alva Myrdal were central figures in the debate over population politics and contributed substantially to the Commission's preliminary work. In the 1930s, they were considered radicals despite their government connections. Their scientific and rational views on sexual issues became widely accepted, perhaps because they produced an effective critique of conservative ideology but, at the same time, dissociated themselves from the more extreme progressive forces. The Myrdal couple favoured sexual reform, but wanted to preserve the family as the foundation of

society. Both Myrdals received the Nobel Prize, Gunnar in 1974, for economics, and Alva, in 1982, when she received the Nobel Peace Prize.

17. Befolkningskommissionen, *Betänkande i sexualfrågan*, pp. 12–13.
18. Ibid., pp. 38 and 95.
19. Ibid., pp. 131 and 134.
20. Widerström, *Uppfostran och sexuell hygien*, pp. 12–13.
21. Befolkningskommissionen, *Betänkande i sexualfrågan*, p. 74.
22. Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 126.
23. A. Nilsson and A. Svedberg, *Undervisning i sexualhygien*, Stockholm: Tiden, 1935.
24. See, for example, S. Wikander-Brunander, *Ärliga svar på dolda frågor,* Stockholm: Norstedt, 1931; G. Kjellberg, *Varifrån kommer jag, mamma?*, Stockholm: Tiden, 1931; R. Grubb, *Vad skola vi säga våra barn om släktlivet?*, Stockholm: Tiden, 1931.
25. 'Om sexualundervisningens utveckling i Sverige', p. 104.
26. 'Upplysning' in Swedish literally means 'enlightenment', and is analogous to 'Aufklärung' in German.
27. For an overview of the RFSU, see L. Lennerhed, 'Sex reform in the Welfare State. RFSU, the Swedish Association for Sex Education, in the 1930s and 1940s', *ITH – Tagungsberichte 37: Sexualität, Unterschichtenmilieus und ArbeiterInnenbewegung*, Vienna: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 2003, 157–65. For a comparative example of socialist-inspired sex education, see B. McEwen, 'Socialist sexual education in the Austrian First Republic', ibid., 166–75; and McEwen's chapter in this volume.
28. Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 63.
29. The journal was a Scandinavian collaboration. It was published simultaneously in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and some exchange of articles took place between these national editions. Editor-in-chief was the Norwegian physician and socialist, Karl Evang, later to become director of Norway's Medical Board and one of the founders of the World Health Organization in 1948.
30. G. Inghe, 'Den sexuella upplysningen i skolan', *Populär tidskrift för sexuell upplysning*, 1934, no 1, 3–16, p. 15.
31. A. Grossmann, *Reforming Sex. The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920–1950*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 186–87; W. Wolff, *Max Hodann (1894–1946): Sozialist und Sexualreformer*, Hamburg: Bockel, 1993, pp. 60–70; Sauerteig's chapter in this volume.
32. M. Hodann, *Saker som man inte talar om*, Stockholm: Arbetarkultur, 1934.
33. Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 126.
34. Ibid., p. 138.
35. J. Wintzell, 'Sexualundervisning införes i folkskolan', *Sexualfrågan*, 1942, no 2, 7–11, p. 7.
36. *Förslag till handledning i sexualundervisning för lärare i folkskolor*, (SOU 1944:41), Stockholm 1944.
37. Ibid., p. 12
38. Ibid., pp. 16, 32, 39–42, and 49.
39. E. Ottesen-Jensen, *Livet skrev. Memoarer 1886–1966*, Stockholm: Ordfront, 1986, vol. 2, pp. 64. In *Sexualfrågan*, no. 3 and 4, 1944, a series of articles on the circulated proposal were published, along with comments from the media and various authorities.
40. 'RFSUs remissyttrande över sexualhandledningen', *Sexualfrågan*, 1944, no 4, 1–10, p. 7.
41. *Aftontidningen*, cited from *Sexualfrågan*, 1944, no 3, p. 8.
42. *Göteborgs Handels-och Sjöfartstidning*, cited from *Sexualfrågan*, 1944, no 3, p. 8.
43. *Folkskollärarnas tidning*, cited from *Sexualfrågan*, 1944, no 3, p. 8.
44. *Sexualfrågan*, 1944, no 4, 11–21, p. 15.
45. *Handledning i sexualundervisning för lärare i folkskolor*, Stockholm: Skolöverstyrelsen, 1945, p. 15.

46. *Handledning i sexualundervisning för lärare i högre skolor*, Stockholm, 1949, pp. 55, 65–67.
47. See, for example, A. Svantesson, *Folkmoral och nöjesliv*, Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsen, 1942; and A. Svantesson, *Sexualundervisning med måtta,* Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsen, 1942.
48. J. Wintzell, 'Sexualundervisning och etisk fostran i skolan', *Sexualfrågan*, 1941, no 3, 1–3, p. 3.
49. G. Inghe, 'Den sexuella upplysningen i skolan', *Populär tidskrift för sexuell upplysning*, 1934, no 1, p. 11.
50. A. Svantesson, *Sexualundervisning med måtta,* Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsen, 1942, p. 34.
51. Ibid., p.10. Svantesson also defended the 'stork's' place in sex education as a metaphor suited to young children's comprehension.
52. Ibid., p. 11.
53. *Handledning i sexualundervisning för lärare i folkskolor*, p. 11.
54. Ibid., p. 15.
55. Ibid. p. 13.
56. Ibid., p. 20.
57. E. Ottesen-Jensen, *Säg barnet sanningen*, Stockholm: Liber, 1945.
58. Ibid.
59. Lennerhed, *Sex i folkhemmet*, p. 132.
60. *Handledning i sexualundervisning för lärare i folkskolor,* p. 11. For a discussion of this ambivalence in the USA, see J. Carter, 'Birds, bees, and venereal disease: Toward an intellectual history of sex education', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2001, vol. 10, 213–49.
61. T. Bohlin, 'Sexualundervisningen vid skiljevägen', *Svenska Dagbladet,* 15 October 1944.
62. Quote from E. Ottesen-Jensen, 'Sexualundervisningen', *Sexuallivet i modern belysning*, Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1944, 417–46, p. 425.
63. 'RFSUs remissyttrande över sexualhandledningen', *Sexualfrågan*, no 4, 1944, p. 4.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.

5 The Growing Pains of Sex Education in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), 1945–69

Mark Fenemore

INTRODUCTION

How schools tackle the thorny issue of teaching adolescents about sex reveals much about the beliefs and values of a particular society – the balance of power between secular forces and organized religion; between visions of the future and ties to the past; between recognition of an individual's right to make his or her own decisions and the needs of communities to protect their cultural and social mores. On the eve of its collapse (in the Autumn of 1989), the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had developed a highly secular, rational and differentiated approach to sexual education.[1] Educators in East Germany prided themselves on the open-minded and progressive attitudes they passed on to young people, and they saw free and open discussion of sexuality as one of the key achievements of a developed socialist society. They envisaged a systematic approach to teaching children about sex, beginning as early as the *Kindergarten* stage.[2] Historian, Dagmar Herzog, takes this to mean that in East Germany (in contrast to West Germany) 'sex was not a main site for managing the legacies of Nazism'.[3] But the genesis of would-be 'progressive' sex education and advice in the GDR was more complex and contradictory than Herzog recognizes. Periods of modernizing reform were interspersed with periods of political and moral repression. In many ways, these pendulum swings reflected the tensions which existed within the ruling Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED).[4]

This chapter explores the conflicting values that helped to shape sex education in the GDR. On the one hand, leading socialists emphasized the importance of duty, obedience and sacrifice. Believing that hedonism and immediate gratification were individualistic and at odds with the collective goals of socialist society, they argued that the enemies of socialism were utilizing sex as a means of corrupting youth and of destabilizing the GDR. On the other hand, reformers emphasized the influence of the mass media and changes in society in 'accelerating' the onset of sexual maturity.[5] The earlier development of feelings for the opposite sex, they argued, was a modern problem, which required modern solutions. Prudish hostility to sex was a remnant from an outdated, bourgeois social order, which had to be overcome in order to make the full transition to

the new, socialist society. The highly educated socialist men and women of the future, they argued, would require a new, more rational and less unequal morality.

Socialism in the GDR did not emerge under ideal conditions. Its foundations were ruined cities, mass graveyards, disillusioned support for National Socialism, guilt about the Holocaust, Allied occupation and mass rapes. Underlying the debates that emerged about sexuality, it is possible to see traces (albeit faint and nuanced) of discussions and debates about the past. The GDR was not just positioned uncomfortably on the fault-lines between East and West. It was also sandwiched between memories of an ambivalent past (encompassing Weimar Germany, the Third Reich and Stalinism) and hopes for a better, more optimistic future. In making reference to sex, proponents of different paths to socialism were often (consciously or unconsciously) alluding to Germany's difficult past. In trying to define what was 'clean' and what was 'dirty', they were engaged in processes of selective amnesia and distortion.[6] Controlling adolescent sexuality allowed the displacement of memories of pollution and corruption from older to younger generations. Meanwhile, periods in which the reins were metaphorically loosened, and in which teenage girls' clothing became correspondingly shorter and tighter, also allowed an airing of collective skeletons. For many intellectuals, being able to discuss sexuality rationally and openly without prudery, hypocrisy or fear was closely associated with the opportunity to explore and challenge political taboos.

THE DEMORALIZATION FOLLOWING DEFEAT

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, traditional notions of morality seemed a far cry from everyday life. Children were forced to grow up much too quickly. As one survivor later recalled: 'In the refugee column and [later] in the resettlement camp I learned a lot more than was good for a girl of my age.'[7] Cramped living conditions brought on by housing shortages played an important role in young people acquiring sexual knowledge earlier. Often, children could not have their own rooms and instead were 'forced to sleep in their parents' bedroom or with married siblings'.[8] The disintegration of many families as a result of the war was perceived to have created a moral vacuum (*Sittentaumel*).[9] Germany's defeat left women, in particular, dangerously exposed. The ruined postwar landscape was haunted not just by cold and hunger, but also by rape and venereal disease.[10] Juxtaposed against conditions of extreme scarcity and lawlessness, the relative power and wealth of Allied soldiers made them more attractive as potential boyfriends, clients or protectors. In a context of sharply narrowed choices, prostitution became a means of regaining a modicum of power and of surviving.[11]

Both of the States that emerged in 1948–49, and which cemented the division of Germany, appeared to offer an end to disruption and a restoration of rigid moral boundaries as the best means of reconstructing family life. Given the

enormity of the horrors perpetrated in Germany's name, many found comfort, instead, in worrying about the moral condition of the nation's youth.[12] What young people really needed after all the corruption, decadence, pain and suffering was culture, education and sport. They had to be saved from what one East German Liberal politician described (in reference to dancehalls) as 'the hothouses of venereal disease'.[13] Self-abnegation offered a means of purifying and purging oneself without necessarily admitting guilt. To conservatives in the churches, communism and sex were equally dangerous temptations sent by the devil to lead the young Christian astray.[14] While dialectical materialism attacked notions of the divine, masturbation constituted a grave misuse of the body created by God himself. Despite the changes of political regime, which had occurred since he first published his pamphlet in 1940, professor for pedagogy and catechetics, Klemens Tilmann, continued to preach the same message to young men in East and West Germany in the early 1950s. At stake for him was whether they were 'victors or losers, men or slaves […]. God gave man a part of his omnipotence […] and man misuses this holy power in a base manner to pleasure himself. This is sinful. He who does this robs his body of some of its dignity and honour.'[15] Young Catholics were presented as knights in the coming struggle 'to save our people from the dragon of moral decline'.[16]

In contrast to its neighbour in the West, the new East German state was committed to displacing the clergy from its role in providing moral guidance to young people. A set of socialist ten commandments encouraged children to live cleanly and to respect their parents and members of the opposite sex.[17] The atheist *Jugendweihe* (or youth oath) provided an alternative to Christian confirmation ceremonies. It presented a materialist vision of a young person's place in the universe and his or her reason for existence. In preparation for the ceremony, fourteen-year-olds attended classes where they were taught about the dangers of premature sexual awakening and attempts at seduction (*Verfrühungen und Verführungen*). Seriousness and vigour were required in the fight against 'moral subversion' and capitalist non-culture (pornography and other 'dirty and shameful' literature).[18] Instead, youngsters were encouraged to emulate heroes of the working class in sacrificing their individual happiness for the collective good.[19] There was a persistent belief that, if only teenagers could be taught 'a deep respect and love for the battle-hardened heroes of the German working-class movement', then 'clean relations' between boys and girls would naturally follow.[20]

Unlike many of their counterparts in West Germany, boys and girls in the GDR attended the same schools, sat together in the same classrooms and were allowed to join the same youth organization. In contrast to previously existing notions about the need for rigid separation according to gender, it was hoped that common ideals and comradeship would overcome difficulties and misunderstandings between the sexes. Working alongside each other on shared tasks and projects was meant to give young men and women a real opportunity to get to know each other in a natural and unforced way. Idealists hoped that

it would enable them to form friendships and a mutual understanding of one another. According to gynaecologist and sex educator, Wolfgang Bretschneider, they could 'be gay (*fröhlich*) without sexuality playing a dominating role'.[21] Nevertheless, in marked contrast to its interventionist impulse elsewhere, the SED regime proved remarkably reluctant to tackle the controversial issue of what (and how) to teach young people about sex.

Until 1955, Anton Makarenko, the Soviet authority on education, provided a highly normative model for how, and how not to educate young people about sex. In his opinion: 'If the child is educated in relation to honesty, enthusiasm for work, sincerity, straightforwardness, cleanliness, love of truth, respect for others, love of the homeland and devotion to the ideas of the socialist October revolution then we will also educate him or her with respect to sexuality.'[22] The primary concern was ensuring that parents produced reliable 'human products'.[23] Specific references to sex were to be avoided, but Makarenko recommended that parents be especially vigilant for a sudden and unexplained interest in cleanliness or, alternatively, 'suspicious and unclean behaviour in relation to couples'.[24] Socialism had created new forms of solidarity and fulfilment. Anyone who continued, individualistically, 'to fish in the murky waters of exploitation' did not deserve to participate in new forms of collective happiness.[25]

THE REDISCOVERY OF SEX

Writing in 1956, Professor Rudolf Neubert, Professor of Social Hygiene at the University of Jena, argued that 'the last few years have given the appearance that there is no sexual question in the GDR'.[26] He cited the many questions and letters sent to newspapers and magazines, together with information from doctors and teachers, to argue that 'not everything in the relationships between boys and girls' should go without question.[27] 'Accelerated' puberty was extending the period between biological and social maturity and creating an urgent need for guidance.[28] Youngsters were apparently asking: 'Given that we are already fertile, but still find ourselves caught up in education, what should we do with our sexual energies in the intervening period?'[29] Drawing his authority from Alfred Kinsey rather than Makarenko, Neubert argued that, biologically speaking, the development of sexually functional organs inevitably brought on the urge to use them.[30] The question was: 'Is regular sexual intercourse for girls between the ages of 15 and 17 and boys between 17 and 19 necessary, useful or harmful?' Whatever the answer, he argued, there was no 'natural' right-or-wrong solution. Whether those responsible for sex education decided to accept teenage sex as a right or to encourage young people to exercise restraint before marriage, this would be a decision based on 'cultural' and societal, but not biological grounds.[31]

Neubert's desire to become an authority on sex education stemmed, in part, from his delayed ambitions as a social hygienist. As a boy, he had been a

member of the *Wandervogel* movement. This early exposure to ideas about the health-giving properties of fresh air and exercise was reinforced by friendship with the Wolf family, leading left-wing, Saxon exponents of the reinvigorating properties of nudism.[32] During the 1920s, he had worked as a researcher and, on occasion, as a travelling salesman for the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden.[33] The Nazi seizure of power in January 1933 had put him and most of his colleagues out of work.[34] However, during the latter part of the 1930s he had succeeded in re-establishing himself as a general practitioner and had built up a thriving practice prior to being called up for military service.[35] At the war's end, he managed, albeit briefly, to realize his dream of becoming Director of the Hygiene Museum.[36] The museum itself was a burnt-out shell, but he hoped that the need for effective public information about the dangers of venereal disease would find recognition and favour with the new powers-that-be.[37] Unfortunately, transition from one regime to another proved less smooth than he had, at first, envisaged. The local authorities became aware that he was a former member of the Nazi Party, and he was forced to relinquish his position.[38] Through hard work (teaching anatomy and 'human types' to art students and trainee teachers) and unswerving loyalty to his new political masters, Neubert was, nevertheless, able to 'make good' his previous indiscretions, and by June 1952 was established as a Professor of Social Hygiene at the University of Jena.[39]

Neubert's chance to make an impact on the re-emergence of 'progressive' ideas about sex education in the GDR followed Erich Honecker's dismissal as head of the official youth organization. It coincided with a period of reform during which Karl Schirdewan and others within the Politbüro sought to convince the party leadership that there was an alternative to the Stalinist model of socialism. Responding to outspoken criticisms of the failings of the authoritarian and militaristic approach to influencing youth, Walter Ulbricht added a passage to his own speech that surprised many in his audience at the Fifth Parliament of the Free German Youth in May 1955.[40] In it, he asked the editors of the daily newspaper *Junge Welt* (Young World) what was stopping them from broaching issues of sexuality: 'Are you scared of it or what? You can't argue that most young people are unconcerned by these issues. Why don't you talk about such problems in your articles?'[41] There was, he suggested, more to life than production. By avoiding issues relating to reproduction, the newspaper was alienating potential readers and missing the opportunity to win young women as well as young men for the cause.

Ulbricht's comments and Honecker's dismissal had unexpected and far-reaching consequences for the newspaper *Junge Welt*. Overnight, the monotonous calls for male youths to demonstrate their loyalty and patriotism by volunteering to serve in the armed forces gave way to frank discussions about issues of gender and sexuality. However, the campaign for better sex education for adolescents remained contradictory, not least because the editors of *Junge Welt* maintained that they were not conducting a campaign: 'We don't want to institute a "campaign of enlightenment". We want to say that boys and girls who have

questions should be able to turn with confidence to their parents, to experienced teachers and doctors. Nobody has the right to ignore the concerns of youth.'[42]

Nevertheless, the paper enthusiastically broached previously taboo topics. In May 1956, for instance, *Junge Welt* reached the novel, and for the time remarkable, view that a solution to the national tent shortage could be found by mixed groups sharing the same tents. 'Providing clean relationships exist within the Free German Youth (FDJ) group', it argued, 'then there is nothing to object to about girls and boys sleeping in the same tent.'[43] At the height of the 'thaw' in discussions about gender and sexuality, the paper published extracts from Benno Pludra's novel about a couple of young nudists, describing it as a 'clean, romantic story of camping and love'.[44] The passage *Junge Welt* chose to reproduce was the one describing the first time Haik and Paul swam naked together in the sea: 'I push her hands away, turn round in a flash and hold her firmly. Our faces are right in front of each other and Haik tries to pull away. She wriggles about like a young herring, gets mean and kicks me in the shins.'[45]

Readers were asked to write in with their views on sex education and gender relations. They did so, arguing that the paper had to write a lot more openly about the subject.[46] The underlying issue affecting most young female readers was whether, in a society describing itself as modern, and in which relations between boys and girls had changed substantially in relation to earlier decades, it was still acceptable for parents to seek to impose on them traditional standards and conceptions of behaviour. Girls no longer only had marriage and the demands of housework and childbearing to look forward to. They were increasingly expected also to train for and to take part in paid employment together with sport and cultural activities. This posed the question: 'Do we always have to be obedient?'[47] As a young woman from Quedlinburg argued, 'the times are past when someone can try and impose obedience on his seventeen-year-old daughter by boxing her ears'.[48]

While younger readers sought the newspaper's support in formulating legitimate challenges to parental authority, parents sent letters in defence of traditional values. One such letter maintained that: 'A daughter – whether she learns a trade or works in the household – should be thinking about learning, cooking, sewing etc. and not at the age of seventeen already be thinking about seducing boys. Daughters of seventeen must obey their father and mother.'[49] 'As far as my daughters are concerned', a farmer's wife stated, 'they know that before the wedding, they are not allowed to go too far.'[50] This presumed, however, that they knew how far was too far.

Although *Junge Welt* journalists continued to imagine the possibility of utopian, asexual 'coed collectives', many parents found it inconceivable that early exposure to members of the opposite sex was healthy for their children's development. Some sought to stem the sexual awakening of their children with draconian discipline and punishments. Teenagers sent letters to *Junge Welt* complaining that their parents had searched their rooms and were punishing

them because they had found letters and cards from members of the opposite sex.[51] Fathers, in particular, were apt to respond to signs of their children's increasing independence with hostility and violence. Letter writers to *Junge Welt* argued that such methods were 'bourgeois' and no longer suited the altered social conditions.[52] By banning boyfriend-girlfriend relationships, schools were allegedly reinforcing the message that it was unhealthy and improper for adolescents to develop feelings for one another. Others stated that the ban needed to be kept in force because the pairing up of couples fatally undermined notions of a common, collective spirit.[53]

Going dancing provided teenagers with their first serious opportunities for interacting with and becoming attracted to members of the opposite sex.[54] The type of dance they could go to, and the time by which they were supposed to be home, quickly became additional areas of conflict between parents and adolescents.[55] For its part, the official youth organization, *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth), sought to regulate the music and styles to which teenagers were allowed to dance. New forms of music and ways of dancing had developed alongside the existing ones that adults found provocative and even disgusting. In contrast to chaperoned formal dances, dancing apart (to 'hot' music with black origins) was seen as being explicitly sexual because it allowed boys and girls to make eye contact and to move their bodies in a more suggestive manner. Bebop was interpreted as an unprecedented excursion from the bounds of good taste and morals.

At times, there was little to distinguish the outrage expressed by Communist guardians of morality from earlier Nazi condemnations of jazz. Writing in to the *Ostsee Zeitung*, Hans Schröder from Ribnitz warned that 'The decadent contortions of the jazz dancer are like those of an African witch-doctor […]. Any girl who gives in to such revolting forms of dancing need not wonder when she is called unflattering names.' The name in question (Veronika) had been used to describe girls who went with American occupiers, particularly African Americans.[56] The arrival of Rock'n Roll and later, Beat music, placed further strain on relations between the generations. Party propagandists hoped to use the new spectre haunting Europe, Elvis 'the pelvis' Presley in GI uniform, as a means of bonding with East German parents. The picture they painted of the music's 'overstimulating' effects consequently emphasized its racial origins. Policemen, for their part, regarded western radio stations as seeking to 'incite the lowest instincts by spreading decadent and perverse music'. They admitted, however, that 'the breakdown of moral concepts during National Socialism and the disruption in the first years after the war' may also have played a role.[57]

In the Spring of 1956, senior SED politicians appeared to endorse *Junge Welt*'s more liberal approach to sex and sexuality. Hilde Benjamin, the Minister for Justice, better known for orchestrating show trials, hosted a forum for exchanging 'girl talk' about sex, the latest fashions and shopping. Benjamin argued that it was essential for all young women (and young men) to receive information about sex and contraception. In answer to direct questions

about age of marriage, abortion and divorce, she declared that having a child out of wedlock was 'no longer a disgrace'. Therefore, it was better for a teenage mother to wait until she was eighteen and to bring up the child on her own rather than being forced into a hasty marriage that she might later regret.[58] Nevertheless, the new-found openness was by no means an acceptance of 'anything goes'. The composer and one-time resident of southern California, Hanns Eisler, was encouraged to give his own, first-hand experiences of jazz in America: 'I saw many negroes [*Neger*] and ordinary American workers dancing to jazz, the real jazz. Such insane and idiotic movements, as one can often unfortunately see here at home, have nothing to do with ordinary Americans. They have nothing to do with normal people!'[59] Although prepared to accept that nudism was pure and healthy, *Junge Welt* continued to emphasize that bebop (along with other forms of 'bastardized' western mass culture) was foreign and corrupting.[60]

Drawing on the issues raised in the discussions in *Junge Welt*, Rudolf Neubert set forth a number of arguments and theses about how sexual education should best proceed in the GDR. Sexual pedagogy, like all pedagogy, should start with normal and healthy relations and not, as had often been the case in the past, with pathologies and perversions.[61] Sexuality needed to be differentiated from reproduction as: 'More important than the biological dimensions of these processes are their societal character.'[62] Young people needed to learn how their behaviour should best correspond with the societal order they were living in. Biology lessons and other forms of sexual 'enlightenment' (*Aufklärung*) were about removing ignorance, but more was required in order to create understanding. The 'facts of life' could teach people little about how to 'behave correctly towards one another'. Neubert looked forward to a time when boys and girls would learn by interacting with each other rather than by being given a set of rules to follow.[63]

Reflecting on his experiences in the Weimar German *Wandervogel* youth movement, Neubert argued strongly in favour of nude bathing at the beach, arguing that it was a lot less 'provocative and downright indecent' than a young lady sitting in a cake shop wearing a bikini.[64] Rejecting early marriage between students or trainees as impractical, he considered the pros and cons of a 'trial marriage' (*Probeehe*). Improvements in contraception and in the rights of unmarried mothers meant that the risk of illegitimacy was less important than the need to develop happy and long-lasting marriages. Although 'the decision was not easy', he nevertheless came to the conclusion that it was better to advise young people to wait until they were eighteen before having sexual intercourse, as, in his opinion, the benefits of abstinence 'for physical, moral, intellectual and, not least, societal development cannot be denied'.[65] Elsewhere he suggested a 'healthy lifestyle, lots of movement in the fresh air, cleanliness' and not too tight trousers as the means of preventing boys from 'misusing the growing sexual organ'.[66] For its part, *Junge Welt* commissioned a series of articles by Neubert on how to improve relations between young men and women.[67]

A WORKERS' PARADISE POWERED BY SUBLIMATED SEXUAL ENERGY

Following the debates in *Junge Welt* about the inadequacy of sex education, a range of competing sex education advisers emerged to combat the alleged widespread ignorance among youth.[68] Karl Dietz, the head of the Griffin publishing house, had appeared keen to reprint books by Max Hodann, the influential Weimar-era left-wing author of sex advice literature. Hoping to corner the market for himself, Neubert had argued against such an idea. In his view, there was no point in trying to modernize Hodann because he belonged 'to the history of sex education'. Instead, Neubert offered Dietz his own manuscript, which he modestly described as the best thing ever written on the topic. Dietz appears to have been sufficiently impressed to offer him a three-book deal. He was looking for someone who could reach beyond the enlightened vanguard and who was capable of speaking directly to ordinary people. As well as the books, Dietz planned a series of talks and readings, which would take the struggle for more rational attitudes to sex deep into the provinces, to the small towns and the countryside.[69]

Unfortunately for Neubert, his plans for becoming the preeminent influence on sex education and advice in the GDR were thwarted by competition from an unexpected quarter. He was beaten onto the market by a gynaecologist called Wolfgang Bretschneider. The tone of his advice book was that of 'popular science'. It was written for ordinary people with limited schooling and without the benefit of a university education. Bretschneider addressed his book to concerned parents and offered help to those struggling with the difficult question of how to go about teaching their children about sex. His main concern was to save them from unnecessary blushes by placing discussion of sexuality at a suitable distance from the messy realities of human relationships. He wrote that, by speaking to children at a young enough age about the biological aspects of reproduction, 'all that we refer to in terms of love, eroticism and sensuality can be ignored'.[70] Parents, he argued, feared that they would reveal too much about themselves and thereby undermine their authority by exposing themselves to ridicule. His answer was to focus on examples from the plant and animal kingdom, notably the herring.[71]

Although he wanted to separate reproduction from sex, Bretschneider was also keen to combine the biological 'facts of life' with the objective nature, as he saw it, of social and economic development. The ruling party's commitment to a fundamental transformation of society entailed unprecedented individual sacrifice in the name of the collective. Bretschneider believed that sublimated sexual energy, if suitably preserved and successfully channelled, could be used to power societal change. In line with the 'every man to the pumps' ethos of the GDR's heroic 'new socialist man' literature, Bretschneider presented his vision of a society in which every young man did his bit for the common good by not wasting valuable energy through selfish and unproductive masturbation or premarital sex. He alleged that energies used up by premature sexuality

hindered a young person's intellectual and social development during the decisive years when his or her position in society (and with it the role they would play for their people) was decided.[72] The major problem with Bretschneider's book, apart from the fact that it was addressed towards adults and not towards children (who nevertheless ended up reading it) was that it constituted a digest of 'older usable publications' rather than being driven by Neubert's vision of a new society.[73]

THE SOVIET LEGACY

Bretschneider's emphasis on sublimation, abstinence and the harnessing of sexual energy by the control of masturbation owed a lot to Soviet writings on sexuality from the late 1920s.[74] In the immediate aftermath of the October 1917 revolution, Bolsheviks and members of the *Komsomol* youth movement had challenged what they saw as the 'outdated precepts of bourgeois morality' and had begun to experiment in free love. 'Traditional values collapsed and revolutionary ones emerged out of the chaos. There was a quite sudden and jarring emancipation of woman.'[75] The Soviet government legalized divorce and abortion, secularized marriage, gave *de facto* marriage the same status as registered marriage, and tried to remove the social stigma of unmarried mothers and their children. Meanwhile, soldiers demobilized from the Red Army 'brought back a casual macho attitude toward sex which younger brothers tried hard to imitate'.[76]

Lenin, however, had little patience for discussions about or experimentations in sexuality. He believed that they represented dangerous distractions from the serious and essential business of revolution. He famously reprimanded Clara Zetkin for her role in allowing the German working class to be led astray by notions of sexual freedom: 'The revolution requires concentration and an increase in strength both of the masses and of individuals. It does not permit orgiastic conditions.'[77] Rejecting the 'glass of water theory' (associated with Alexandra Kollontai), Lenin argued that sex was not simply a matter of individual choice. Sex might be an urge as natural as thirst, he argued. But just because someone was thirsty, this did not mean that they had to lie down in the gutter and to drink from a puddle. The possibility of conception occurring as a consequence of sex made intercourse a matter not just for the two (or more) people concerned, but also for society.[78]

Attitudes to sex remained highly ambivalent in the Soviet Union during the course of the 1920s as 'definitions of revolution and gender roles were undergoing uncertain transformations'.[79] Although women were officially emancipated and equal to men, within the culture of male-dominated associations like the *Komsomol*, young women were 'often seen as sexual objects rather than as individuals with intellectual abilities and aspirations'.[80] In 1926, an exceptional case of gang rape that occurred in a back alley in Leningrad served to focus attention on moral lapses and received extensive coverage as part of a

campaign against hooliganism and drunkenness. Eric Naiman argues that the high-profile trial amounted to a 'discursive act of self-purification, doomed to fail because NEP [the New Economic Policy] could never purge the contradictions that defined it'.[81] Nevertheless, attempts to redefine adolescent sexuality could also involve painting libidinous women as the instigators rather than the victims of male 'hooliganism'.[82]

Surveys of Soviet students found that, in line with their materialist beliefs, they tended to emphasize the 'primacy of physiology'. In other words, they dismissed talk of love as petit bourgeois sentimentalism and focussed only on physical impulses and sensations.[83] And yet the surveys also revealed that in their behaviour they 'tended to be fairly traditional'. In such confusion about sexual mores, Sheila Fitzpatrick sees a readiness to embrace more firmly established norms.[84] The process of reestablishing fixed boundaries, Frances Bernstein argues, began in the mid-1920s. By promoting a narrow vision of acceptable sexuality, centred on harnessing sexual energy for the building of socialism, 'medical educators helped to lay the groundwork for a "sexless-sex" model of behaviour that would assert itself with ever greater tenacity in the 1930s'.[85] Sex advice writers encouraged abstinence and avoidance of masturbation as a means of preventing disease, pregnancy and the premature depletion of glandular secretions. Using scientific, production-oriented metaphors, advice writers equated the channelling of sexual energy into societal transformation with large-scale construction projects like the Dnepr Dam.[86]

Ultimately, Bernstein argues, Stalinism made Soviet sexual enlightenment literature superfluous by making sublimation mandatory. The flood of articles, brochures and lectures advocating voluntary abstinence disappeared almost overnight. In their place came rapid industrialization, collectivization and prohibitions on 'deviant' sexual activity. Prostitution, sodomy and abortion were recriminalized.[87] The new sexual criminals were sent to be reeducated alongside dissident intellectuals and other victims of the purges on massive industrial projects (including the construction of canals and dams).[88] Stalinism offered ample opportunities for substituting sacrifice for sexuality.[89] Novels like *How the Steel was Hardened* demonstrated how the heroic young revolutionary needed to deny his sexual feelings in order to be fully capable of taking part in and defending the transformation of society.[90] Such books provided depictions of militant males who were strong, but chaste and pure.[91] Significantly, despite its repeated and semipornographic references to gang rape, *How the Steel was Hardened* nevertheless continued to be considered a highly suitable text for teaching East German adolescents about 'clean' relations between the sexes.[92]

PERSUADING TEACHERS TO PROVIDE SEX EDUCATION IN THE GDR

A powerful argument in the GDR for the need to educate children about sex was that not to do so left them vulnerable to unscrupulous people seeking to

exploit and abuse them.[93] Failure to properly educate youth about sex, it was argued, could result in psycho-sexual problems and harmful, even criminal, sexual behaviour. In extreme cases, Wolfgang Bretschneider argued, ignorance resulted in sexual assault and rape.[94] Well into the 1960s, authors continued to argue that the absence of authoritative, accurate information was harming young people's development. Cases were cited of adolescents being forced to rely solely on what they could glean from outdated 'doctor books', some of which had been written during the Third Reich, or on what they overheard in adult conversations.[95] The inadequacy of such sources meant that they became acquainted with only the crudest 'ins and outs' of sex. One child surveyed appeared to believe that 'avoiding contact with animals' was a means of preventing venereal disease.[96]

Ignorance was certainly by no means bliss. Lacking even the most basic information about sex prevented young people from making informed choices. It exposed them to increased risk of venereal disease, unplanned pregnancies and the dangers associated with back-street abortions. Karl-Heinz Mehlan, the GDR's leading expert on family planning and founder of the Institute for Public Hygiene in Rostock, estimated that more than sixty thousand illegal abortions took place in the GDR each year. He believed that around a quarter of the women who underwent them came away with harm to their bodies and that between eighty and a hundred of them died as a result.[97] He also estimated that 80 per cent of the children born to those who married in the year 1960 had been conceived before the wedding.[98] At the beginning of 1961, *Das Magazin* (East Germany's would-be egalitarian answer to *Playboy*) surveyed its readers about how they taught their children about sex.[99] A fifteen-year-old girl responded saying that: 'Many children, particularly the boys are not told the facts of life at home and don't dare ask.'[100] The magazine alluded to 'terrifying' statistics recording teenage pregnancies and sexual violence by adolescents and argued that these constituted compelling evidence for the need to escape from prudish, bourgeois morality.[101] Coinciding with a renewed 'thaw' in discussions about youth and sexuality, the magazine helped to reawaken arguments first made in *Junge Welt*, and repeated by Bretschneider, in 1956.

During the course of the late 1950s and early 1960s, East German advice writers increasingly emphasized the role that teachers would play in the transmission of proper knowledge about sex. Concerned educationalists lobbied for sex education to become a central concern of the national curriculum. By neglecting the sexual education of the young, they argued, the State was failing to prepare teenagers adequately for adult life. In order to avoid developing either harmful neuroses or primitive (individualistic and irresponsible) urges, they needed to be taught a 'healthy' (socially responsible) form of sexuality.[102] It was not until 1959 that reproduction was introduced as a specific component of the curriculum.[103] Even then, it was only covered for a few hours in year nine.[104]

From 1962 onwards, a series of debates took place between educators, doctors, jurists and psychologists about the best way for sex education to proceed.

Issues that were debated and explored included: the degree to which sex education should go beyond biological information; the role other subjects could play in the development of a suitable social and moral stance towards sex;[105] whether sex education should take place separately for boys and girls; the potential role other professionals (such as school health visitors) could play in sex education;[106] and the risks and dangers that precocious adolescent sexual development posed to teachers.[107]

While, in theory, teachers were prepared to accept that such an important and complex issue should be discussed in school, few were ready to step forward and volunteer to teach it. According to the senior teacher (*Oberstudienrat*), Heinz Ahlborg, writing in 1967, teachers only seldom found the courage to tackle sex education.[108] Another adviser, Kurt Bach, believed that the majority of teachers were scared of burning their fingers by broaching questions of sexuality. In his view: 'Far from being correctly educated, it is a fact that around 80 per cent of our children and young people are not enlightened at the right time. And yet our ministry hushes this up.'[109]

Part of this reluctance stemmed from the immensity of the changes the education system had undergone in the preceding decades.[110] Large numbers of teachers had been hastily recruited straight from the factory floor (or on their return from Prisoner of War Camps) and given on-the-job training in order to replace the 'old teachers' who had been members of the Nazi party.[111] Rudolf Neubert suggested that the problems stemmed from the inadequate training teachers received. In a letter to Ahlborg, he stated that: 'In the last few years I have come to the belief that it's not youth that we should be sexually enlightening, but the parents and teachers. Without a thorough enlightenment of the teaching profession we will not take a step further towards teaching the correct way for boys to behave towards girls and vice versa.'[112]

Trust was an essential component of effective sex education. But given the highly politicized nature of education in the GDR and the role teachers were expected to play as spokespeople for a dictatorial regime, it was often in short supply. Although Kurt Bach advised teachers not to invade their pupils' privacy or to blab about confidential information, many people saw teachers as pawns of the one-party police State.[113] Few teachers were keen to draw attention to themselves or to expose themselves to ridicule by raising issues of sexuality without explicit support from above through the inclusion of sex education in the curriculum and text books. Even when it was taught in schools, observers felt that it was not tackled early enough or with enough focus on human beings, as opposed to plants and animals. Responsibility, they believed, was often being unduly placed on biology teachers. A survey carried out in 1962 found that only one in ten schoolchildren cited school as the main source of their knowledge about sex. A fifth had been enlightened by their parents. A similar percentage had turned to books. Nearly a third claimed to have found out about sex by listening to their friends.[114] In another survey, a quarter of pupils surveyed described sex education in school as 'unsatisfactory' and 'repellent'.[115] Kurt Bach called for classroom films that could be used as a

means of getting round the problems posed by reluctant or insufficiently competent teachers.[116]

Those writing about sex education were in agreement that hostile reactions to the onset of sexual feelings served only to make matters much worse. Young people needed help, they argued, in learning how to come to terms with and to manage their desires. False shame and prudery only served to create a barrier between parents and their children, leaving inexperienced adolescents to have to deal with complex and difficult issues on their own. In 1963, a period of renewed reform allowed such ideas to become policy. The *Politbüro*, the ruling party's political and executive committee, issued a protocol which highlighted the need to make society more accepting of friendships between boys and girls at school.

> We want true, deep, clean human relations and not the morality of a cloister. The more openness and understanding we can show in tackling these issues, the sooner we can avoid licentiousness, cynicism, disrespect for the opposite sex, abandonment of children and extra-marital family relationships.[117]

Nevertheless, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a tension remained between the desire to use sexual enlightenment as a means of presenting a genuinely humane and progressive face to socialism and the effects of Cold War tensions in rendering taboo certain types of behaviour and media. SED propagandists repeatedly emphasized that exposure to western forms of popular culture (radio, television, pop music, comic books, magazines and pulp fiction) was harmful to young people and risked making them sexually deviant. Even during periods of reform, SED leaders never fully relinquished their fears of contamination. The temptation to attack a particular style of music, haircut or dress as being decadent and contagious was always too great. As the official 1963 *Politbüro* message to the young emphasized: 'The reason we must devote special attention to the problems concerning the relations between the sexes among youth is because imperialist psychological propaganda aims to lead young people towards decadent irresponsibility.'[118]

During periods of heightened tension, propagandists could allow their imagination free reign to interpret 'decadent' sexual behaviour as part of a covert policy of subversion and psychological warfare. The Eleventh Plenum of the SED in December 1965 marked one such highpoint of fear and repression. Alleging that groups of young men had formed to carry out rapes, the *Politbüro* called for the removal of 'manifestations of American immorality and decadence' in East German radio, television and film.[119] In spite of Cold War attempts at containment, music that suggested alternative notions of sexuality and forms of behaviour spilled over into Eastern Germany. The youth cultures that arose to embrace such intrusions not only challenged notions of purity but, in provoking authoritarian reactions from adults, also suggested ways in which, even in a would-be socialist utopia, the past had not been successfully overcome.

Propaganda repeatedly alleged that 'dirty' (*Schund und Schmutz*) literature and pornography were deliberately spread by Western agencies in order to disrupt the socialist development of East German youth.[120] According to Karl-Heinz Walter, a leading member of the NDPD (*National Demokratische Partei Deutschlands*, the party tasked with neutralising and reforming former Nazis and *Wehrmacht* officers), part of this 'imperialist' policy for the division of Germany was the 'nerve-destroying screaming of an Elvis Presley'. By resisting the tide of dehumanising filth such as 'pornography, night clubs, wild dancing and corresponding music', which threatened to flow over into and to swamp the GDR, he and like-minded functionaries in the SED could feel comfortable and united in defending the notion that, in East Germany at least, the German *Volk* (meaning both people and race) was safe and 'clean'.[121]

The task of sex education was not just to teach young people about love, intimacy and sex, but to 'immunize' them from the influence of dirty jokes from older pupils and the street.[122] Young people required prophylactics not only against unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, but also against the corrupting influence of the West. Recognition that problems could emerge as a result of domestic conditions and home-grown deficiencies became increasingly difficult.[123]

CONCLUSION

The growth of sex education in the first two decades of the GDR proved highly uneven. Rapid, optimistic spurts were interspersed with slower, more fallow periods corresponding to changes of mood within the party leadership. The progenitors and shapers of the GDR's unique approach to sex education saw their job as that of matching biology to society. They identified parents as struggling to maintain outdated and hypocritical double standards in the face of biological and technological changes, which were speeding up the onset and accelerating the process of sexual awakening. Advice writers were keen to argue that the potential harm caused by unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and sexual violence necessitated urgent intervention. There remained, however, a tension between grassroots recognition that East German society was far from perfect and an insistence from above that 'dirt and shame' came only from the West. Although at times chiding them for not recognising that society was moving on from the past, official pronouncements were just as likely to pander to the perceived prejudices of parents. As a result, the sex advice literature remained ambivalent.

In the mid-1950s, a complex interplay occurred between the political mood within the party leadership, changes in society and culture, the urge of publishers to connect to new audiences, and the ambitions of individual experts and authors. Weimar Germany and Stalin's USSR provided opposing poles for

the development of a socialist, German, secular morality. While Karl Dietz sought to reawaken the pioneering spirit of Weimar-era sex reform, Wolfgang Bretschneider emphasized the Soviet model of sublimation. Memories of the struggle, which had once been fought for individual rights to pleasure and sexual freedom, contrasted with a Stalinist emphasis on citizens harnessing and conserving their sexual energies for the good of the collective. Ironically, it took the adaptability of a former member of the Nazi party, Rudolf Neubert, to bridge the gap between these two radically different approaches. The debates about reform, which took place within the ruling party in 1955 and 1956, allowed a window of opportunity for discussing alternative approaches to gender and sexuality. But in trying to imagine the utopian, socialist future, East German authors were also shielding their eyes from problems in the present and uncomfortable memories about the past.

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6 Purity and Pedagogy

The Alliance-Scottish Council and School Sex Education in Scotland, 1955–67

Roger Davidson

The history of sex education policy in twentieth-century Britain has, in recent years, attracted increasing attention from historians, sociologists and educationists.[1] However, the literature still contains some significant omissions. First, studies have generally focused either on the early decades of the twentieth century or the more recent abrasive social politics surrounding the issue of sex education since 1980. Until very recently, there has been a dearth of material covering the intervening years,[2] despite the fact that both contemporaries and historians have portrayed the period after 1945 as one of dramatic, albeit often contradictory, change in sexual politics and lifestyles. Secondly, the existing literature has overwhelmingly concentrated on the formulation and ideology of sex education policy in England and Wales. Little research has been undertaken on its history in twentieth-century Scotland; despite the fact that such policy was shaped by distinctive traditions of law and education, as well as arguably a distinctive civic and sexual culture. Thirdly, while the role of the Purity Movement in shaping the sexual politics of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain has received extensive coverage,[3] there has been a tendency to ignore its residual influences on post-1945 society.

Drawing on a wide range of governmental archives, this chapter seeks in part to rectify these omissions by examining the nature of Scottish school sex education policy and practice in the decades immediately after the Second World War. In particular, it focuses on the activities and ideology of the Alliance-Scottish Council, that came to dominate the response of Scottish governance to a highly contentious issue in a period of rapid social change.

THE PRE-HISTORY OF SEX EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND

Prior to the Second World War, a range of pressure groups had lobbied the Department of Health for Scotland and the Scottish Education Department (SED) on the issue of social hygiene education. The Scottish Committee of the British Social Hygiene Council (founded in 1916 as the National Council for Combating Venereal Disease) campaigned for it to be an integral part of the

curriculum, as a means of reducing the incidence of venereal disease (VD), and established local committees to liaise with educational leaders. Various purity organizations, such as the National Vigilance Association and the Alliance of Honour, products of the proliferation of moral evangelicalism in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain, as well as women's organizations, such as the Edinburgh Women Citizens' Association, also advocated the introduction of additional moral hygiene and biological instruction in schools. In addition, health officials and clinicians, often inspired by eugenics, canvassed the need for sexual issues to be addressed in schools, as part of a quest for 'racial health'.[4]

However, as in England,[5] the issue of sex education became a sharp focus for disagreement both within and between the Social Hygiene and Social Purity Movements. A considerable body of Scottish public and professional opinion remained fearful of a policy of sexual enlightenment and a Scottish Office committee encountered a widely-held belief that, unless closely regulated, sex education would merely lead 'to the very precocity and malpractice which it [was] designed to prevent'.[6] At a local level, there was often tension between medical practitioners, purity groups, and educationists over the control and content of hygiene education. Purity groups, along with Church leaders, were concerned that moral issues and ideals should remain to the fore. For their part, many teachers and education authorities in working-class areas of Scotland feared that such instruction might prove disruptive with pupils and offend religious sensibilities.

As a result, there was very little sex education in Scottish schools beyond a scatter of *ad hoc* local initiatives, predominantly involving girls.[7] Some school medical officers gave incidental instruction in sex to older pupils on an informal basis. Some talks were also given in a few schools on hygiene, including anatomy and physiology, as part of the physical training lessons. In addition, lady specialists and nurses took advantage of such lessons and medical examinations to give advice on intimate matters relating to menstruation. Only in Aberdeen was sex education given separately, outwith the normal curriculum, to all girls who were leaving school by, it was affirmed, 'a responsible nurse, a widow with an understanding, tactful turn of mind'; the girls receiving instruction in matters of 'cleanliness at menstrual times, sex dangers and their future responsibilities in life'.[8]

The SED remained unreceptive to the varied pressures for wider provision. A departmental circular in 1929 had stressed the lack of public and professional consensus on the issue of sex education and opted to leave the matter to the discretion of individual education authorities rather than issue directives.[9] Officials were strongly resistant to sex education being accorded a separate status within the curriculum, considering that, if at all appropriate, it should be imparted solely as 'an incident of biology', and they feared that guidelines would merely entangle the department in a contentious and potentially compromising public debate.[10]

However, wartime concerns at the apparent erosion of the moral fabric of British society and citizenship, especially as reflected in the sexual behaviour of

the young, presented significant challenges to this *laissez-faire* policy. A succession of official reports in the period 1943–45 urged the introduction or development of sex education in order to direct 'the natural urges of human nature', to instil 'a more informed and responsible attitude to sex' and to stem the rising tide of promiscuity and venereal disease.[11] The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland also advocated the need for a new moral and sexual code for young people.[12] In addition, a major challenge to the SED's passive stance came from the issue, in late 1943, of an advisory circular on sex education by the English Board of Education.[13] Although the circular did not advance explicit guidelines, it clearly favoured a graduated scheme of sex instruction, focusing in the early years on the physiology of sex, and in senior classes on its more contentious social aspects, where the central aim would be to channel what were perceived as potentially disruptive sexual instincts into the acceptable realms of marriage and parenthood.[14] To the consternation of the SED, some Scottish education authorities immediately began to formulate proposals on the lines of the circular.[15]

While acknowledging the demoralizing impact of the Second World War upon youth culture, the SED remained resistant to any explicit engagement with the issue of sex education and was not persuaded of the desirability of a Scottish circular on the subject. Undoubtedly, the Department was heavily influenced by the likely reaction of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland.[16] The Scottish Roman Catholic bishops issued a public statement in 1944 voicing 'their instinctive distrust of all talk of sex instruction and sex teaching'. They feared that secular proposals would not adhere to a 'moral and spiritual approach' or to a 'clear matrimonial doctrine and practice', and that 'positive training in purity' would be sacrificed to mere factual instruction in sex anatomy, thus aggravating rather than curing the moral evils of contemporary youth culture.[17]

Moreover, within the SED itself, there was a marked lack of consensus on the issue. While receptive to the teaching of basic sexual anatomy and physiology as part of the biology or domestic science curriculum, Dr G.W. Simpson, the Department's Medical Officer, considered the presentation of what he called 'the social desiderata of sex' to be fraught with difficulties; not least the enduring public and professional debate over its appropriate timing, content and delivery.[18] In contrast, W.F. Arbuckle, the Assistant Secretary, was firmly opposed to any scheme of sex education that separated its physical and social aspects, likening it to 'confining instruction in the use of TNT to information about its chemical composition … and omitting to mention its explosive qualities'.[19] In the event, while the SED was now prepared, on an *ad hoc* basis, to encourage education authorities to experiment with the use of special lecturers in their schools, it continued to withhold approval for the inclusion of 'human reproduction' in the standard biology curriculum. Moreover, the Department's response to all requests for a more pro-active policy was that 'officially their attitude was the same as it had been in 1929'.[20]

Instead, as the issue of sex education in schools became subsumed within a wider post-war reconstruction debate over health education in general, the

initiative shifted to the recently established Scottish Council for Health Education.[21] Inheriting much of the agenda, personnel, and mindset of the former Scottish Committee of the British Social Hygiene Council, over the period 1946–50, the Scottish Council for Health Education organized a series of national conferences on the future of health education in Scotland, attended by representatives of the medical and educational professions along with delegates from government departments.[22] Their proceedings revealed that, with the exception of Aberdeen, no long-standing 'direct instruction on sex' was given in Scottish schools. Many areas reported that some indirect instruction was given during biology lessons, but with a very limited bearing on human physiology and relationships. There was a similar lack of sex education within the teacher training colleges, with only one institution providing explicit instruction on the physiology of human reproduction.

The proceedings also highlighted how acutely divided the educational and medical professions were over the content and delivery of sex education in schools in the immediate post-war years. Thus, while Medical Officers of Health were agreed that adolescents should receive some guidance on 'sex hygiene and the allied problems of social hygiene', they differed over its delivery; some favouring the role being performed by school medical officers and nurses, while others viewing it as primarily the remit of the teacher. For their part, while recommending the greater use of nurses to monitor female adolescent hygiene, school medical officers in Scotland were sceptical of the benefits of English initiatives in sex education, fearing adverse effects on the mental and emotional stability of schoolchildren. In contrast, many venereologists, advancing a medicalized view of sex education inherited from the pre-war Social Hygiene Movement, advocated the greater use of medical expertise in the delivery of homecraft and parentcraft classes, with more explicit focus on the social repercussions of sexual promiscuity.

The views of educationists at the conferences were equally mixed. While directors of education and head teachers in the East of Scotland were generally supportive of additional provisions for sex education, many in the West of Scotland were resistant; not untypical was the view of one headmaster that class instruction in sexual issues would 'merely encourage the inherent weakness and wickedness of man, and possibly develop sensualists'. Other teachers voiced their concern that, as a profession, they were being asked to address contentious issues that intruded on parental rights, and which rendered them vulnerable to attack, both in the media and local politics.

Nonetheless, the weight of opinion did favour pupils, outwith the Roman Catholic schools, being given sex instruction as an integral part of health education, and the proceedings did inspire several experiments in Edinburgh and Aberdeenshire schools, several of which were undertaken by the Alliance of Honour. Moreover, the favourable feedback on such courses led the Conferences' so-called Continuing Committee to conclude that, given the 'right type of instructor', sex education could be taught to children 'with profit and without embarrassment', and to recommend that the pilot schemes should

form the basis of official guidelines and specimen curricula for use in Scottish schools. However, the Educational Institute of Scotland, a national trade union representing Scottish teachers, lecturers and educationalists, vociferously opposed such a move. Its President stressed that the bulk of the profession felt inadequate to cope with the sensitive issues involved and that sex education was primarily the responsibility of the parents and/or school medical officer.[23] Such concerns were duly reflected in the resolution of the final conference in 1950 that 'in regard to sex education, the guiding note should be cautious advance' and in the fact that, when, in December 1950, the Scottish Council for Health Education re-circulated the model syllabuses on health education, drawn up by the Continuing Committee, its officials emphasized that the sex education syllabus had been excluded, '*along with all other reference to the subject*'.[24]

For their part, the Department of Health for Scotland and the SED had sustained a detached and often evasive stance on the issue. While broadly supporting the Scottish Council for Health Education's report on health education, they were emphatic that it was purely advisory and not a directive, and that such support should not convey 'any impression that the Secretary of State for Scotland was explicitly advocating the giving of sex education in schools'.[25] In the event, the Scottish health and education departments were broadly content over the next decade to devolve responsibility for such a contentious issue to other agencies, the most prominent of which was The Alliance-Scottish Council.[26]

THE ALLIANCE-SCOTTISH COUNCIL

The Alliance of Honour had been established in London as part of the Edwardian Purity Movement in 1903. Thereafter, the Alliance had been responsible for enrolling thousands of young men into church-related organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association and for the production and dissemination of a mass of purity literature between the wars.[27] A Scottish Branch had been formed in 1926 and continued until the outbreak of war in 1939. In 1946, the Alliance in London sent one of its lecturers, Annabelle P. Duncan, to investigate the state of public opinion on sex education in Scotland. The Alliance was keen to establish itself more firmly north of the Border and to develop a team of part-time lecturers to meet the needs of schools and youth organizations,[28] and Duncan soon became heavily involved in the local pilot schemes for sex education initiated by the Continuing Committee.

In 1947, informal conferences in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen of educationists, social workers, youth leaders and church representatives concluded that, to counteract the 'landslide in morality', there was an urgent need in Scotland for specialist talks by someone with 'a suitable, medical, psychological and religious background'. The Scottish Council was therefore revived, as an offshoot of the Alliance of Honour, in June 1948, to undertake the task. In

1951, it was accorded its autonomy under the new name of 'The Alliance-Scottish Council (A Society for Education in Personal Relations and Family Life)' (ASC), with Duncan as its secretary and lecturer.[29] The Council was made up of some 24 members, normally including at least two directors of education, together with representatives of the Scottish churches and medical profession and with the Marquis of Aberdeen as President. Significantly, Allan G. Rodger and Dr John Jardine, both retired senior civil servants from the SED, were to play significant roles as Chairmen of the Alliance during the course of its existence.

The primary declared aim of the ASC at its inception was to facilitate the provision of sex education to children in Scotland by enabling 'parents and others responsible for the sex education of children to guide young people in an understanding of the scientific and spiritual meaning of sex'; guidance which would, above all, emphasize the centrality of Christian values to healthy sexual development and relationships, and equip the young 'to resist the evil influences' in public life. The intention of the Alliance was to provide lectures and literature on various aspects of personal relations, to arrange consultations on medical, psychological and spiritual problems concerned with personal problems, and to assist in the training of lecturers and advisers.[30]

Initially, the SED was reluctant to fund the Alliance's efforts. Officials continued to view the issue of sex education as 'a delicate matter' given the likely opposition of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, and were concerned that any financial commitment might be construed as constituting official endorsement for a particular syllabus of sex education.[31] They viewed the training of lecturers in sex education 'as an advanced conception' and, although Duncan was viewed as 'exceptionally gifted in the teaching of sex', they would have preferred her to adopt a less explicit and more generic role as health educator. However, given the very positive feedback arising from her previous pilot schemes in Scotland, after lengthy consultations, the SED agreed to fund in part the work of the ASC.[32] The reluctance of parents to undertake the task of sex education, and resistance to its integration within the school curriculum, made it increasingly evident that the services of a visiting expert were essential. A decisive factor in the SED's conversion may also have been the ability of the Alliance in the early 1950s to appeal to a broad spectrum of Scottish public, professional and parental opinion by conveying the physiological aspects of the subject firmly within a moral and spiritual framework.[33]

Miss Annabelle P. Duncan was a Scot who had previously spent much of her life in London. In addition to being a qualified midwife, she had wide-ranging experience of social work and teaching in physiology and anatomy. She had also acquired a considerable reputation as a lecturer on 'social relationships', including sexual issues, to schools and colleges, and to parents' and youth leaders' groups, both religious and secular.[34] In addition, prior to her collaboration with Scottish education authorities in the late 1940s, she had undertaken pilot schemes for sex education in schools in the South of England, the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and Wales.[35]

During the 1950s, Duncan (see Figure 6.1) attended a growing range of secondary girls' schools across Scotland controlled by some 12 education authorities, delivering a programme of talks modelled on her previous schemes for Edinburgh and Aberdeenshire.[36] Each set of courses consisted of three, weekly 40-minute periods in which information on sex was carefully conveyed as part of more general instruction on 'Growing Up'. During the first week, the lessons dealt with personal hygiene, the care of the body, the importance of mental and physical purity, and character formation. In the second week, each class was given talks on the reproduction of fish, birds and animals, 'including the human subject', illustrated by a filmstrip (normally *Growing Girls* and *A Brother for Susan*). Facts relating to human reproduction were always conveyed 'against the background of life as a whole, with particular reference to the family as a keystone of society', and the 'matter and methods of presentation' were carefully calibrated 'to the physiological and social development of the pupils'. The third week was devoted to answering a wide range of questions submitted anonymously in writing by the girls, from which parents and staff were excluded.[37] Throughout the syllabus, 'sex desire' was conveyed as 'normal', but also 'a powerful force' which needed to be controlled and channelled rather than expressed.

Some of the schools were very large, with as many as 500–600 girls, while others were small country schools. Visits were always preceded by extensive consultations with the Director of Education and Education Committee, and often with the Medical Officer of Health, and by talks with parents and staff. In city schools, it was often necessary to have as many as four meetings in

Figure 6.1 Annabelle Duncan conducting a sex education lesson in the 1950s (*Source*: NAS, ED48/1850)

order to enable as many children and parents as possible to attend. In country districts, attendance was always more difficult for reasons of transport but it was not uncommon for some parents to walk three miles each way to attend.[38] After every session, parents and pupils were encouraged to stay on if they wished to talk about personal problems, and a wide range of literature, in both book and pamphlet form, suitable for parents to assist in answering their children's questions, was also made available.

THE MESSAGE OF SEX EDUCATION

The construction of sexual information and sexuality within the Alliance's talks and literature reflected its origins as an explicitly religious purity organization. Religious imagery and discourse strongly suffused the Alliance's message, with only the 'communion' of lasting marital love furnishing 'redemption' for the basic sexual instincts of mankind. At the forefront of its objectives was the dissemination of 'Christian standards' so as to arm the young against the manifold temptations of post-war society and the 'new permissiveness'.[39]

Underlying its discourse was a concern to restore the social and moral controls fractured, it was alleged, by the impact of the Second World War, and to counteract the corruption of youth culture by new forms of conspicuous consumption and 'promiscuous' leisure pursuits, fuelled by a sensationalist media.[40] A *leitmotiv* of the Alliance's teaching on sex education was the importance attached to 'right knowledge'. In Annabelle Duncan's experience, the young were heavily exposed to gossip and misinformation about sex, and too often acquired their knowledge because of an 'unhappy environment' or precocious sexual experimentation. In her view, parents were often too ignorant, apathetic, embarrassed, or immoral to provide appropriate Christian guidance to their children. Furthermore, unregulated sexual knowledge was perceived as a prescription for moral disaster and, in a period of unprecedented public discussion and media coverage of sexual issues and scandals, the ASC was committed to providing a body of sexual knowledge that was properly calibrated and contextualized.[41]

Outwith the context of Christian marriage, sexual experience was depicted as inherently pathological and polluting. Thus, the development of the sex glands in boys was conveyed as a defining moment in the building of character rather than sexual self-awareness, which was inherently dangerous.[42] While nocturnal emissions were biologically normal, the Alliance was clearly uncomfortable with their implications. They were, the literature claimed, often 'accompanied by rather unpleasant dreams' and 'the loss of this fluid' should not 'as a rule, be more often than once a week'. If it was more frequent, the child was advised 'to speak to your father or mother, as you may need a tonic'.[43]

While boys were exhorted to attend to the hygiene of their 'sex glands', 'careless handling was deplored' on the grounds that 'it may sometimes force

some of the semen from the storehouses before nature is ready'.[44] Deliberate masturbation, or in the terminology of the Alliance's literature, 'self-abuse', was strongly discouraged as a 'waste of vital energy', a sign of retarded development, and a negation of 'the opportunities of Christian manhood', possibly requiring medical advice.[45] Thus, although the more dire warnings of early purity literature surrounding masturbation had been excised, a clear message was still conveyed that future health, happiness and self-esteem were contingent on abstinence and self-control during adolescence.

Such warnings reflected the continuing ambivalence within the Alliance, shared by many other governmental and professional bodies, about the possible effects of sex education. On the one hand, there was the felt need for the young to be exposed to 'correct knowledge' about sex rather than furtive or evasive misinformation from their peer group or parents. On the other, there was acute concern to avoid sexual precocity. Thus, having stressed the importance of sexual hygiene, Alliance literature immediately recommended that boys spare no further thought to the issue. For example, *How We Grow* advised that: 'The way we think about these things affects the way the sex glands work. As a matter of fact, the less we think about them the better. Therefore, now you know how they work, and how to keep them healthy, you will not have to bother yourself by wondering about them.'[46]

For physiological reasons, advice to girls about reproduction was more explicit, but the overriding stress was again on the association of sexual intercourse with marriage and motherhood, preceded by an appropriate progression through 'comradeship' and 'courtship'.[47] The knowledge of 'intimacy' was conveyed as a preventative in order to instil 'chastity' and 'self-control'. In particular, as with the social hygiene literature of the inter-war period, girls were exhorted not to excite the more uncontrollable urges of boys; the explicit assumption being that the sexual appetites of boys and girls were fundamentally different.[48] Again, the rhetoric of hygiene and pollution informed much of the detailed advice, with menstruation conveyed as essentially a cleansing process keeping 'the nest as fresh and pure as possible'.[49] The message for older girls was that female sexual health was contingent on sexual relationships being within marriage and that other sexual experiences would produce both physical and mental damage:

> In the case of a woman, this sex experience is wedded to the instinct to make a home and have children and look after the man she loves […]. Mere sex experience is only the beginning of all that. It is linked with all that; and all that is the normal and true consequence of sexual experience. When a woman is sexually awakened, and when the process stops at mere intercourse so that she is not led on to all these self-fulfilling experiences, the harmonies of her nature are spoilt. Her hunger has been aroused and she will never be the same again […]. God knows life is hard enough for unmarried women on any terms, because they do not get one quarter of the sympathy to which they, with their splendid instincts of wifehood and

> motherhood unsatisfied, are entitled; but the life of the unmarried woman who is also a sexually-awakened woman is infinitely harder.[50]

The 'sex instinct' had therefore to be 'sublimated' if it was to be a force for happiness and fulfilment and not for harm and emotional trauma.

The Alliance-Scottish Council's literature on sex education reflected its long-standing broader involvement in moral vigilance. In addition to its efforts to broaden the provision of sex education in Scottish schools, it conducted a vigorous campaign against the permissive and debasing influences of cafés, cinemas, dance halls and the media upon the sexual behaviour of the young. It inveighed especially against magazines targeted at teenagers, such as *The Boy Friend*, and by the early 1960s was actively collaborating with the police, the Scottish presbyteries and the Moral Law Defence Association to suppress their distribution in schools.[51]

THE EXPERIENCE OF SEX EDUCATION

Documenting the past experience of Scottish school sex education from the perspective of its recipients is highly problematic. Fragmentary evidence can be garnered from oral history interviews and film archives, but, in the main, it is unfocused and insufficiently robust for worthwhile analysis. Moreover, prior to the 1980s, despite the best efforts of social scientists, no investigation of children's attitudes towards sex education was permitted by the SED on grounds of confidentiality and political sensitivity.

However, in the case of the ASC, somewhat more systematic, albeit extremely limited, evidence is available. From her first pilot schemes in the late-1940s, Annabelle Duncan routinely collected feedback from pupils on her sex education talks, a selection of which was either forwarded to the SED or cited in the Annual Reports of the ASC.[52] The limitations of such a source are clear. In the main, it was the more articulate girls in the more select academies who were 'persuaded' to write to her or complete questionnaires. Furthermore, these responses were clearly vetted by the head teachers before onward transmission, almost certainly ensuring that only the more positive feedback was conveyed. Finally, in submitting such material to the SED and incorporating them in her reports, Duncan's agenda was clearly driven by the need to sustain official funding and private subscription for the ASC.

Nonetheless, the children's responses do perhaps at least capture a flavour of their experiences of sex education during this period. First, they confirm that many of the children viewed the talks as dissipating their ignorance and/or anxieties about sexual knowledge. Thus, typical responses included:

> 'I have learnt a lot in a nice way about life that I would have picked up wrongly in the street.'
> 'You have explained away my fears and worries.'
> 'It […] takes away a lot of doubts and removes wrong ideas.'

> 'I used to believe every story, but now I know, and knowing gives you more confidence.'
> '[B]efore we had our talks with you I knew very little about the subject […]. [They have] cleared up many things which were vague if not altogether wrong.'
> 'The talks cleared up a lot of stupid and groundless ideas.'
> 'I used to believe every story, but now I know […].'
> 'Before your talks, mistaken conceptions would grow and fester in our minds, till we were bound by fears, doubts and ignorance.'

Secondly, the feedback suggested that many girls viewed the talks as having a liberating effect on their relationships, both with their peer group and their parents (and especially their mothers):

> 'Since your visit, the pupils have talked more freely amongst themselves regarding personal matters. It has been very valuable in bringing us closer together.'
> 'It makes us feel more at ease in knowing […]. When the secrecy of the thing is destroyed we can speak freely and naturally to one another and also to older people […].'
> 'I was never told the facts of life by my mother, but just left to find them out for myself […]. After I became older, she would sometimes talk about babies etc but I always felt uncomfortable, feeling I knew about something I shouldn't. Now however, after your talks, I know mummy knows I know […] and we are all much more comfortable because of it.'
> 'I was rather shy about asking my mother questions and I think she was the same about telling me things. After your talks I went home and told her all about them. I discovered I knew more about the little points than she did. Now I am not shy about asking her about some things I still do not know. I feel a new bond has grown between us now.'

How far the pupils internalized the more general message of Christian purity advanced by Annabelle Duncan is impossible to say. Certainly, some of their letters associated the talks with keeping themselves 'clean and pure' and with a 'healthier' and more 'natural' attitude to sexual issues. Certainly also, Duncan claimed that many letters had been received, sometimes months or even years after a discussion, to say 'that a point made or an answer given had saved some youngster from folly or disaster'.[53] One former pupil, forced to associate with 'undesirable types of young men' in her employment, reported that: 'When I was at school a lady came to talk to us on *Growing Up*, showed us films, and answered our questions. I was then only thirteen, but I was very impressed and I never forgot. That kept me straight.'[54] However, the feedback received would suggest that the main impact of Duncan's sex education talks on the schoolgirls of Scotland was not so much increased moral awareness as a more general enhancement of social confidence and self-esteem.

DEMISE AND AFTERMATH

During the 1960s, Scottish governance came under increasing pressure from public and professional opinion to introduce a more systematic and enlightened system of school sex education, driven by what was perceived as degeneration in the sexual proclivities and health of the young. Scottish Medical Officers of Health lobbied for a more formal recognition of human biology within the curriculum.[55] The Scottish branches of the British Medical Association and the Medical Society for the Study of Venereal Diseases, alarmed at the upswing in Scottish VD figures, also pressed for better instruction of the young in 'the perils of promiscuous sex'.[56] In addition, a series of high-profile conferences on youth and sexuality, sponsored by the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Marriage Guidance Council, and bringing together medical, educational and moral welfare practitioners, recommended that the SED should support a graduated syllabus of instruction throughout the education system.[57] Similarly, several working groups within the SED itself pressed for more integrated sex instruction as a means of enabling pupils to cope with the stresses of puberty in a period of breakdown in traditional religious and community controls.[58] Moreover, although it failed to confront the central issues of the timing, content, and delivery of sex education, the report of the Cohen Committee on Health Education in 1964 did identify the need for 'education about the relationship of the sexes in all its human and social implications'.[59]

By the mid-1960s, it was becoming increasingly evident that the *ad hoc* efforts of the Alliance-Scottish Council were inadequate to address these rising concerns over the sexual permissiveness of the young.[60] Both logistically and ideologically, the Alliance was increasingly seen as unsuited to the needs of the time by education authorities and government departments. In a typical year, only about three per cent of secondary schoolgirls in Scotland received instruction from the ASC. Furthermore, although Duncan had begun to visit a number of boys' schools and to develop mixed-sex programmes, efforts to recruit a larger staff of lecturers and teachers so as to cater more fully for boys had proved abortive, partly because, with its restricted budget, the ASC was unable to offer attractive career prospects.[61] As a result, as late as the mid-1960's, its activities were still conducted single-handedly by Annabelle Duncan, then in her 70s.

Moreover, although the ASC had modified its mission statement to embrace value systems other than those of Christian morality, and begun to incorporate in its talks issues such as contraception, abortion and homosexuality, Duncan's approach was increasingly viewed by educationists as overly moralistic and out of touch with the realities of youth culture and sexual experience;[62] a view reinforced by the continuing involvement of the Alliance in purity campaigns. The limited and spasmodic coverage of the ASC's provisions and its focus purely on sex education within secondary schools was also increasingly at odds with advances in educational thinking which advocated the provision of

sex education throughout the education system within a graduated health education programme.[63] In addition, much of the ground covered by the ASC was felt to overlap the curricula not only of traditional school subjects such as biology, citizenship and homecraft, but also of newly developing subjects such as social studies and civics.

The SED did consider a range of options for prolonging the role of the ASC. One option was to expand its role by means of enhanced resourcing, but Scottish education authorities were increasingly reluctant to fund the ASC. The ASC's focus on morality was also seen as inconsistent with any collaborative structure of sex education provision incorporating the work of the Scottish Council for Health Education and the Scottish Marriage Guidance Council, whose emphases were more on physiology and secular social psychology.[64] While the ASC was widely acknowledged to have played a central role in creating a climate of opinion in Scotland that accepted sex education as a legitimate area of the school curriculum, it was no longer viewed in official circles as an appropriate agency for the future development of provisions. In the event, it was persuaded by the SED to close in December 1967 on the grounds that 'the future lay with sex education as a public responsibility' conducted directly by the education authorities'.[65]

Yet, significantly, although the SED was convinced that the Alliance had outlived its usefulness, it was still not prepared to formulate a centralized policy with respect to sex education in schools. School sex education was not included in the remit of the Scottish Health Education Unit, established in 1968 to coordinate health education policy for Scotland. Instead, in the 1970s, the SED chose to continue its traditional policy of encouraging local authority initiatives, and of devolving responsibility for more general provisions to non-governmental agencies, such as the Scottish Marriage Guidance Council and Family Planning Association.[66]

CONCLUSION

This study of the ASC furnishes a number of insights into the relationship of the State to sexual issues in later twentieth-century Scotland. First, the social disruption caused by the Second World War in many ways fuelled the quest for the reinstatement of traditional moral values, and there are seen to be clear continuities between the ideology and organization of sex education policy in interwar Scotland and those prevailing as late as the mid-1960's.[67] This was a policy underpinned by a traditional medico-moral sexology that focused on the 'control' of the sexual instinct, the conflation of sexuality and pollution, and on a hierarchy of normality and deviance, based on animal biology. The delegation of school sex education primarily to a purity organization such as the ASC was symptomatic of this agenda.

Moreover, it is arguable that the discourse of Christian purity continued to inform sex education policy long after the demise of the ASC.[68] In the late

1960s and 1970s, one does detect a shift to a more progressive approach to sex education under the influence of the behavioural sciences, and of social and medical activists within agencies such as the Scottish Health Education Unit, concerned to reduce the so-called 'sex casualties' of a more permissive society. Nonetheless, even in the 1970s, within Scottish governance, many advisers and officials were still articulating a discourse of sexual purity and sublimation rather than sexual expression, with the sexual urge, especially amongst girls, still depicted as inherently dysfunctional unless controlled and deferred into the socially acceptable, heterosexual contexts of marriage and family formation.

A central factor facilitating this continuing influence of purity discourses on the content and delivery of sex education in post-war Scotland was arguably the persistent refusal of the SED to issue clear curriculum guidelines to education authorities for fear of becoming entangled in a highly contentious area of moral and political debate. It preferred to adhere to the traditional policy of devolvement. Just as in the interwar period, issues of sexual enlightenment had been devolved upon the Scottish Committee of the British Social Hygiene Council, now a new set of quasi- or non-governmental agencies, pre-eminently the ASC, were employed well into the 1960s. Subsequently, this strategy of education officials of keeping the issue of sex education at one remove was to be increasingly at odds with the views of many health administrators faced with the escalation in the incidence of adolescent pregnancies, abortion and sexually transmitted diseases. However, in the face of the increasing politicization of sex education in the 1970s by the so-called 'New Morality', with its strident appeal to traditional purity values, such devolvement was to remain, as in England, a central feature of policy making on into the age of AIDS.

NOTES

1. See, for example, F. Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, 2nd edn, London: Routledge, 2000, part 4; J. Weeks, *Sex Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, 2nd edn, London: Longman, 1989, chapters 11–13; R. Porter and L. Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995, part 2; P. Meredith, *Sex Education: Political Issues in Britain and Europe*, London: Routledge, 1989; R. Davidson, *Dangerous Liaisons: A Social History of Venereal Disease in Twentieth-Century Scotland*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000, chapters 6 and 12; M. Durham, *Sex and Politics: The Family and Morality in the Thatcher Years*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991, chapter 6; J. Lewis and T. Knijn, 'The politics of sex education policy in England and Wales and the Netherlands since the 1980s', *Journal of Social Policy*, 2002, vol. 31, 669–94.
2. Recent exceptions include J. Hampshire and J. Lewis, '"The ravages of permissiveness": sex education and the Permissive Society', *Twentieth Century British History*, 2004, vol. 15, 290–312; J. Hampshire, 'The politics of school sex education policy in England and Wales from the 1940s to the 1960s', *Social History of Medicine*, 2005, vol. 18, 227–317; J. Pilcher, 'School sex education: policy and practice in England 1870 to 2000', *Sex Education*, 2005, vol. 5, 153–70.
3. See, for example, Porter and Hall, *The Facts of Life*, chapter 10; Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, part 4; E.J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain*

since 1700, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977, part 3; L. Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Sexuality and the Early Feminists*, New York: The New Press, 1995 edn, chapter 3; A. Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, chapter 5.

4. For details of such lobbying, see Davidson, *Dangerous Liaisons*, pp. 142–44.
5. For sex education policy formation in England and Wales prior to 1939, see L. Hall, '"Birds, bees and general embarrassment": sex education in Britain from Social Purity to Section 28', in R. Aldrich (ed.), *Public or Private Education? Lessons from History*, London: Woburn, 2004, 98–115.
6. *Report of Departmental Committee on Sexual Offences against Children and Young Persons in Scotland*, Parliamentary Papers (PP) 1926, Cmd 2592, XV, pp. 44–46.
7. National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh (NAS), ED48/181/1, minute by G.W. Simpson, Medical Officer of SED, 10 July 1933.
8. Ibid., minutes by G.W. Simpson, 6 July 1933.
9. NAS, HH60/278, SED, *Circular no. 79,* 16 January 1929.
10. NAS, ED48/181/1, minute by H.W. Cornish, 18 February 1934.
11. *Report of Medical Advisory Committee (Scotland) on Venereal Diseases*, PP, 1943–44, Cmd 6518, IV, p. 9; SED, *Training for Citizenship: A Report of the Advisory Council on Education in Scotland*, PP, 1943–44, Cmd 6495, III, p. 12; SED, *The Needs of Youth in These Times: A Report of the Scottish Youth Advisory Committee*, Edinburgh: HMSO, 1945, pp. 91–92.
12. *General Assembly of the Church of Scotland: Report of Committee on Church and Nation,* 1943, p. 246 and 1944, pp. 280–81.
13. Board of Education, *Pamphlet no. 119, Sex Education in Schools and Youth Organisations*, London: HMSO, 1943.
14. G.P. Wallis, 'Some ideological issues in sex education in post-war Britain', unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of London, 1984, pp. 21–22.
15. NAS, ED48/181/1, Minutes of Moray and Nairn Education Authority, 6 October 1943; ED 48/773, Sex education: schemes of work in Edinburgh Corporation secondary schools, 17 October 1944.
16. As one official minuted: 'Whatever the Board of Education decide to do, I doubt if S. of S. [Secretary of State for Scotland] will want to tackle this. The Catholics will oppose it violently […]', NAS, ED48/1364, J. Mackay Thomson to J. Jardine, 4 May 1944.
17. Ibid., 'Memorandum on sex education, published with the approval of the Bishops of Scotland', May 1944.
18. Ibid., evidence of Dr G.W. Simpson to Scottish Advisory Council on Education, 1943.
19. NAS, ED48/773, minute by W.F. Arbuckle, 27 October 1944.
20. Ibid., notes of meetings between the SED and Edinburgh Education Committee, 6 December 1944 and 13 June 1945.
21. The Scottish Council for Health Education (SCHE) was formally responsible for the education of the Scottish public in 'healthy ways of life'. It was semi-autonomous, with its funding and activities closely monitored by the Scottish Department of Health.
22. Unless otherwise stated, the following is based on the reports of the Conferences' proceedings and enquiries in NAS, HH61/585.
23. Ibid., minute of National Conference on Health Education in Schools, 1 December 1950.
24. NAS, ED48/178, SCHE to Secretary, SED, 22 December 1950. Original emphasis.
25. Ibid., minute by K.E. Miller, 3 May 1950.
26. A few schools did introduce limited sex education on their own initiative, within a health education syllabus, but there is no reliable information on this. In addition, some education authorities, such as Aberdeen, employed state-registered nurses to

give instruction on 'sexual matters' to girls about to leave school, as part of mothercraft classes, NAS, ED48/185, note on 'Sex education in Scotland', 12 February 1957.
27. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, pp. 139–46.
28. NAS, ED35/16, Director of Education for Edinburgh to SED, 19 March 1948.
29. NAS, ED48/1850, *Annual Reports of the ASC*, 1957–58, p. 5; and 1966–67, p. 3–5.
30. Ibid., 1951–52, p. 1; and 1953–54, p. 5.
31. ED48/178, minute by K.E. Miller, 3 May 1950 and minute by Dr G.W. Simpson, 1 August 1950.
32. See especially, NAS, ED35/16, papers and correspondence relating to the ASC.
33. This was certainly the view of A.G. Rodger, former Under-Secretary in the SED, NAS, ED48/1850, *Annual Report of the ASC*, 1964–65, p. 4.
34. NAS, HH61/585, Note on experiments in sex education, 15 October 1948; ED48/1850, *The History of the Alliance-Scottish Council Incorporating the Report of its Final Year 1966–7*, pp. 11–12.
35. NAS, ED48/181/2, note by Duncan – 'The work of the Alliance', August 1963.
36. Unless otherwise stated, the following account is based on Alliance materials deposited in NAS, ED35/16; ED48/181/1; and ED48/1850.
37. In addition, Duncan delivered many talks to teachers training colleges, to parents and youth groups and to the inmates and staff of orphanages, approved schools and children's homes.
38. NAS, ED35/16, *Annual Report of the ASC*, 1954–55, p. 5.
39. See, for example, NAS, ED48/1850, *Annual Reports of the ASC*, 1952–53, p. 2; and 1953–54, p. 5.
40. See, for example, NAS, ED35/16, *Annual Reports of the ASC*, 1953–54, p. 4; and 1956–57, p. 7; ED48/1850, *Annual Reports of ASC*, 1958–59, pp. 7–9; and 1960–61, p. 19; 1962–63, p. 11.
41. See, for example, NAS, ED35/16, *Annual Report of the ASC*, 1951–52, pp. 3–5; ED48/1850, *Annual Reports of the ASC*, 1952–53, pp. 2 and 8; 1953–54, pp. 7–8; and 1962–63, p. 11.
42. See, for example, NAS, ED35/16, extracts from T.F. Tucker, *How You Grow: A Book for Boys*, 1961 edn, London: Alliance of Honour, p. 22: 'As these glands develop […] you will feel that you would like to do other things of real value in the world and be a thoroughly sound, reliable fellow through and through.'
43. NAS, ED35/16, Tucker, *How you Grow*, p. 22.
44. Ibid., p. 25.
45. NAS, ED35/16, sample of literature used by ASC. *The Gift of Sex*, London: White Cross League, n.d., pp. 30–31; Dr E.M. Smith, *Telling Your Children: Part 2. For Mothers of Older Children*, London: Alliance of Honour, n.d., pp. 6–7.
46. NAS, ED35/16, Tucker, *How You Grow*, p. 25.
47. See especially, ibid., Smith, *Telling Your Children*, pp. 2–3.
48. Ibid., p. 3; Wallis, 'Some Ideological Issues', pp. 65–70, detects similar discourses across a range of sex education materials published in the 1950s.
49. NAS, ED35/16, Tucker, *How you Grow*, p. 20. A common feature of Alliance literature and syllabi was the use of ornithological analogies.
50. Ibid., Dr A.H. Gray, *Are Sex Relations Without Marriage Wrong?*, London: Alliance of Honour, 1947, pp. 4–5. Casual sexual relationships were also portrayed as emotionally and psychologically damaging to young men, leading to self-loathing in that it 'is only by true sex experience that our bodies are redeemed', ibid., p. 8.
51. NAS, ED48/181/1; ED48/1850, *Annual Reports of the ASC Council*, 1953–54, p. 4; 1954–55, p. 7; 1958–59, pp. 8–9; and 1961–62, p. 17.
52. The following is based upon NAS, ED35/16, letters from senior girls, Rothesay Academy; ED48/1850, *Annual Reports of the ASC* (1951–67).
53. NAS, ED48/1850, *Annual Report of the ASC* (1966–67), p. 12.

54. Ibid., *Annual Report of the ASC* (1958–59), p. 16.
55. NAS, ED48/1638, J. Kidd to H.H. Donnelly, 24 May 1960.
56. See Davidson, *Dangerous Liaisons*, pp. 289–92.
57. NAS, ED48/181/2, extract from *Scotsman*, 22 May 1962; minute Dr A. Law to F.M. Gray, 8 May 1963.
58. NAS, ED48/1785, Draft report on the growth and development of the child, January 1963; ED48/1638, Submission from PE and HE Panel, June 1963.
59. *Health Education – Report of a Joint Committee of the Central and Scottish Health Services Councils*, London: HMSO, 1964, pp. 3, 42 and 74.
60. The following account is based on papers and correspondence in NAS, ED48/181/1; ED48/181/2; ED48/1638; ED48/1850; HH8/108; and HH61/1099.
61. A very limited extent of sex education was provided in boys' schools by Dr Alex G. Mearns, Medical Adviser to the SCHE. He mainly responded to *ad hoc* invitations to address boys on issues of 'sex hygiene'. As he reported: 'A Sex talk – "the Gift of Life"-was delivered to boys in groups by ages. A simple and straightforward exposition of the facts of human reproduction was given' with blackboard illustrations and film displays. To the senior boys of monitor grade, 'assembled in the Chaplain's study, he gave a man-do-man talk on "Decent Living"', NAS, HH58/108, SCHE, Medical Adviser's Annual Report for 1953–54; HH58/111, SCHE, Minutes of Executive Committee, 15 December 1958.
62. NAS, ED48/181/2, note of discussion between SED and Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, 30 August 1965.
63. Ibid., SED memorandum on 'Education for marriage and family life', 2 July 1963 and minute by A.G. Rodger, 4 February 1965.
64. NAS, ED48/181/2, note by J.F. McClellan, 29 November 1963 and minute by I.W. Inglis, 18 December 1964.
65. NAS, ED48/1850, *Final Report of the ASC*, 1966–67, p. 11.
66. For details on these later developments, see R. Davidson and G. Davis, '"This Thorniest of Problems": School Sex Education Policy in Scotland 1939–80', *Scottish Historical Review*, 2005, vol. 84, 220–44, pp. 231–44.
67. This is consistent with the general thesis recently advanced by Callum Brown that the whole of the 1950s constituted a period of significant resurgence of moral conservatism in Britain, underpinned by a reinvigorated Christian fundamentalist and purity agenda. See C. G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006, chapter 5.
68. For the lasting impact of the 'language of purity', see also Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, p. 160.

7 Carnal Knowledge

The Social Politics and Experience of Sex Education in Italy, 1940–80

Bruno P. F. Wanrooij

INTRODUCTION

The task of writing a history of sex education in twentieth-century Italy is highly problematic. First, among the few studies dedicated to the history of sexuality in Italy, the history of sex education has received little attention. This is not because of a paucity of sources, but rather because, at first sight, the analysis of the sources does not indicate any discernible trends. The apparent homogeneity of the available material represents another problem, for, as far as sexual morality was concerned, both the hegemonic Catholic culture and its main antagonist – communism – adhered to a system of values in which sex had, above all, negative connotations.[1] Inter-cultural and intra-cultural divergences existed, but were not expressed clearly. Writing the history of Italian sex education therefore involves deploying a mass of material that seems to endlessly repeat the same concepts and the major challenge (especially for the 1950s and early 1960s) is to read between the lines of the evidence in order to detect signs of change.

This study will first locate the issue of sex education in the years 1940–80 against the backdrop of earlier developments. Secondly, it will focus on the debate over whether sexual enlightenment represented a risk for the maintenance of social and moral order or could help to reinforce 'traditional' morality. Thirdly, the role of sex education in the preparation for marriage, and the attempt to use information about the male and female physiology to strengthen traditional gender roles, are discussed. According to Catholics, it was, above all, the parents' responsibility to provide sex education, but a fourth section of the chapter addresses the issue of how schools became more involved during the 1970s. A final section is devoted to an overview of the impact of sex education on the sexual life of Italian men and women.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SEX EDUCATION

Sex education became the centre of a widespread debate in Italy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when an increasing number of publications emerged dealing with aspects of human biology and sexuality. These

publications were regarded with interest by the more progressive areas of public opinion, that hoped to find in medical science a new, non-religious source of authority in matters of morality. This contrasted, however, with the opinions prevailing among Catholics who were convinced that 'blessed ignorance' represented the best protection against 'sensual vices'.[2]

Such opposition to sex education was not only inspired by moral arguments, but also by class-specific ideas about the nature of childhood sexuality. In the case of children and young people from the middle and upper classes, silence was advocated to safeguard their sexual innocence, not yet unmasked by Freudian notions of polymorphous perversity. In contrast, the lower classes were often accused of immorality and precocious sexuality, and many authorities doubted that, in their case, sexual education could be of any use. Commentators took their inspiration from Lombroso, who, in books such as *L'uomo delinquente* (*The Criminal Man*, 1876) and *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale* (*The Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, 1893), had taught that deviant behaviour was connected to the physical constitution of criminals.[3]

Nonetheless, educators and moralists gradually became convinced that sex education could be a better answer to the temptations of modern age than silence on these issues.[4] In the first decade of the twentieth century, even among the Catholic hierarchy, this approach started to find approval. In its prudent answer to a question of Bishop Casanas of Barcelona about the moral value of the volumes of the *Self and Sex* series edited by the American clergyman, Sylvanus Stall, the Sacred Congregation of the Index was by no means wholly negative. In fact, while the Congregation condemned the publication of the volumes in Spain, it acknowledged that elsewhere some form of sex education could be permitted.

Yet, Catholics continued to nurture doubts about the form and content of sex education. They criticized the 'materialist' approach of publications that focused on anatomy and physiology but neglected the moral aspects of education, and severely condemned instances of collective education such as the public lectures on sexuality held by physiologist, Pio Foà, during the first decade of the twentieth century.[5] Even though the consent of Catholic censors as such was not requested, a negative verdict was bound to influence State censorship and constituted a major obstacle to the free circulation of ideas in countries like Italy that possessed a large Catholic majority.

The rise to power of Fascism in 1922 left even less space for the expression of dissident ideas. Even though most Fascist leaders did not conform to Catholic ethics in their private life, in public they subscribed to similar moral principles and collaborated with the Church in the attempt to impose more rigid moral norms upon Italian society. This was true especially after 1929, when the Fascist State and the Catholic Church concluded a treaty and Roman Catholicism became the State religion. As a result of these combined efforts, sexology became a tool of pro-natalist propaganda, censorship was reinforced, contraception was prohibited, and criticism of regulated prostitution was silenced. Sex education, limited to the enunciation of rules of behaviour,

remained virtually a Church prerogative and proposals to introduce sex education in schools were quickly abandoned.[6]

The terms of the debate did not change significantly when, after World War II, Italy became a democratic republic. Although the new constitution established the principle of freedom of expression, the puritan attitude of the Fascist era persisted. If anything, Catholic influence on the government increased when, in 1948, Christian Democracy became the leading party in the national government; a position that it would relinquish only in 1994. Roman Catholicism remained the State religion until 1984 and the Church had much influence on family policies. This was one of the reasons why the family legislation that had been introduced under Fascism was not modified, although this created a strain between the letter of the law and the changing reality of family life.[7]

Only towards the end of the 1960s were legislative changes introduced that were in line with more liberal attitudes. In 1971, the Constitutional Court cancelled article 553 of the 1930 Penal Code that had punished 'whoever encourage[d] practices against procreation or [made] propaganda in favour of these practices' with up to one year's imprisonment. According to the Court, this conflicted with the basic principles of the Constitution and was no longer in agreement with large sections of public opinion:

> Today the problem of birth control has taken on such importance and social relevance, and is of interest to so many that it is no longer possible to think – taking into consideration also public opinion and the increasing importance of sanitary education – that a public discussion of the various aspects of that problem, and the diffusion of information and the propaganda in favour of contraception offend public decency.[8]

In 1965, the Court had already decided that a public defence of birth control should be considered legal as long as it did not offend public morality. Until 1971, however, virtually no sex education manual dealt with the issue of contraception, even in the vaguest terms. However, even though a more liberal attitude prevailed during the 1970s, prosecutors like Carlo Alberto Agnoli continued to try and impose the most rigid norms, and the medical profession persisted in advising against contraception long after the cancellation of the law. As a result, Italian youth had an extremely limited knowledge of the various methods of birth control.[9]

This overview of developments prior to 1940 explains why the introduction of sex education was slow in Italy, why sex education was targeted at a higher age group than elsewhere, and why for a long time moral concerns were far more important than the attempt to convey 'objective' information.

TALKING ABOUT SEX

Within the story of sex education in post-1940 Italy, a number of key discourses may usefully be identified, the first of which surrounded the issue of

whether sexual enlightenment was harmful. Although the traditional Catholic doctrine approved conjugal sex not only for its primary end of *procreatio* (procreation), and for the secondary end of *mutuum adiutorium* (mutual assistance), but also as a *remedium concupiscentiae* (prevention of sinful desires), there can be no doubt that sex long remained a taboo argument for most Italians, hidden away in the scientific language of medical text books or in the Latin of the manuals for the confessors. Talking about sex was 'dirty talk', and physicians who dedicated attention to the sexual life of their patients became the victims of persecution and ostracism.[10]

Thus, the idea that sex education was unnecessary, and even harmful, was still strong among Catholics during and immediately after World War II. As Raimondo Manzini, the catholic journalist and future editor of the Vatican daily *L'Osservatore Romano*, explained in 1940: 'The blessed shore of innocence is much, too much, ignored by the otherwise so well organized man of the twentieth century. One of the crimes of our times is to use our intelligence, poetry and technology to glorify sin.'[11] According to physician and moralist, Pietro Babina, sex education consisting of anatomical and physiological illustrations, complete with detailed descriptions of the sexual organs and their function was 'fit only for Bolshevik schools, and its consequences are so disastrous that they need no commentary'.[12] In a small volume about the sexual life of young people, published for the first time in 1941 and re-published until 1961, Agostino Gemelli, physiologist, psychologist, Franciscan friar, and founder of the 'Sacro Cuore' Catholic University, explained that a sex education that only focused on the biological aspects of sexuality could not provide young people with the necessary moral guidelines and was therefore useless.[13] In 1951, Pope Pius XII re-affirmed this position, condemning 'educational materialism' and the violation of conjugal intimacy by the 'intolerable insolence' of a certain literature.[14]

Among the Italian communists, the fear that sex education could prematurely arouse the instincts of young people was also widespread. In 1950, the Communist women's organization promoted the publication of a book on education by the famous Soviet pedagogue, Anton Makarenko, according to whom 'children do not have and can't have any specific permanent interest in sexual issues'. In his view, informing them too early about sexuality was therefore wrong as this would produce fantasies leading to sexual experimentation.[15] Opposition to sex education also came from those who, like the conservative journalist, Indro Montanelli, asserted that sex was a natural fact that did not need to be taught, and who feared that a moralistic approach to sex would bridle the natural development of (male) sexuality.[16]

Yet, sexual ignorance was increasingly seen as a risk factor by others in Italian society. A change in public opinion was apparent in the success of movies like Léonide Moguy's, *Domani è troppo tardi* (*Tomorrow will be too late*). According to the publicity, this movie, which in 1950–51 was a major hit at the box-office, focused on 'the most delicate and controversial of all social problems: that of the sexual education of adolescents.'[17] Signs of change were

also apparent elsewhere. In 1962, the communist *Editori riuniti* published a book by Luisa Levi in defence of sex education.[18] By then, according to a survey, a majority of Italians was in favour of the introduction of sex education in schools.[19] In 1963, the women of the Communist Party started a campaign in favour of sex education in schools and families, aiming above all at preparing parents for the difficult task of informing their children about the facts of life. As far as the appropriate age was concerned they proposed that:

> Sex education should be given from the very first years of life in order to avoid the child developing complexes and inhibitions that will make him abnormal or ill-adjusted as an adult. Taking into consideration the erotic and sexual obsessions of our days, it is necessary to put the problem in perspective, to disclose information, and – above all – to demystify sexuality and to reduce it to its natural and normal dimensions.[20]

It was claimed that co-education also made sex education more urgent because young people had more occasions to meet and developed a less reserved attitude toward the other sex.[21] Linked to this was the accusation that parents in post-war Italian society were increasingly incapable of controlling their children.[22]

Often the proposal to introduce sex education was part of a condemnation of modernity and reflected a concern to counter its social impact. Convinced that immorality and social dissolution were part of the process of modernization, Catholics used sex education to combat secularization and its corollary of a more liberated lifestyle. As Pietro Babina remarked in 1940, in a society in which 'nudity, semi-nudity, licentiousness and double senses' reached all through the press, movies, theatre, dance halls etc., Freud's ideas about sexuality were no longer just theory but applied science. In order to combat this negative trend, Babina proposed an education that would not only inform young people about the physical aspects of sexuality, but also convince them that the marital status alone provided a legitimate setting for the expression of sexuality.[23]

For Catholics, sex education was part of a strategy that distinguished between legitimate and illegitimate knowledge. In order to control the development of young people, they proposed a strict control on films, television, books and friends, but at the same time restated the traditional moral principles by referring to the 'laws of nature'.[24] Thus, the descriptions of the differences between male and female psychology allowed Catholics to intervene in the discussion about the role of women in society. In this respect, an author like André Berge in the 1950s provides useful insights. Berge had been close to the *École des parents* (School for Parents) founded in 1929 to create an alternative for the proposals by French republicans to introduce sex education in schools. In his publications, Berge warned that the men and the women who did not live up to accepted standards of male and female behaviour represented elements of social disorder. Arguing that the virility of men largely depended on women's respect of femininity, Berge invited women to return to their 'natural' role and to focus less on political, social and professional progress for, in his

view, 'a woman cannot stop being a woman, anatomically, physiologically and biologically'.[25]

According to the Catholic author, Pietro Castelli, the different social roles of men and women were mirrored in their approach to love and sex. In a guide for the betrothed from 1956, he explained that women preferred marriage over any other kind of relationship as the maternal instinct was often stronger in them than the sexual instinct. Because of their physical, intellectual and psychological weakness, women needed a husband who really acted as the head of the family and on whose strength they could rely.[26] Sex education here clearly served the purpose of convincing young women to accept their subservient role in the marital relationship. Thus, Catholic sex education manuals typically focused on the connection between sexuality and procreation, especially when dealing with female sexuality. According to Luisa Guarnero, the marital status was the 'natural' condition of maternity, and pregnancy could 'happen only when the woman is married and can become a mother because her organism is fully developed and because she has the sensibility and intelligence to be a good wife and mother'.[27]

The use of sex education to defend Catholic morality became even more common with the upsurge of the sexual liberation movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. While part of this movement believed that sex education could be used to liberate the individual from the inhibitions imposed by a repressive society,[28] in contrast, most Catholics saw sex education as reinforcing traditional moral principles and the virtues of self-control. For this reason, Catholic bishops encouraged couples requesting a religious marriage to attend courses for the betrothed where they were instructed about the sexual as well as the religious and moral aspects of matrimony.[29] Indeed, in 1975, the General Assembly of the Italian Bishops Conference decided to make these courses mandatory.[30]

EDUCATING FOR MARRIAGE

As we have already seen, for a long time, the function of sex education was, above all, that of preparing men and women for their prescribed roles in society. After World War I, when an increasing number of women entered the labour force, educators insisted that paid work was in conflict with the female role in society and would make women less obedient to their husbands, less available for their children, and incapable of carrying out household chores. Both Catholics and Fascists saw the role of women in the labour force as an obstacle to victory in the 'battle for births' that the regime and the Church had declared in order to stop demographic decline.

While the Fascist government was active in propaganda, it left pedagogical efforts to the Catholics. In the Northern Italian city of Brescia, a Catholic priest, Giovanni Battista Zuaboni, had already, in 1918, created a school where young women were instructed about their physiology and specific duties in

order to prepare them to become 'valid aids' to their husbands. Similar initiatives abounded during the two decades of Fascist rule. Most of them had a strong moralistic imprint and dealt with sexuality only in as far as this served the purpose of backing up the prescribed patriarchal norms of Italian society.[31]

The events of World War II, the occupation of Italy by American troops, and the more rapid pace of secularization, presented new challenges to the Church, which responded to the rising demand for the introduction of divorce by holding conferences and courses, and establishing marriage guidance agencies.[32] Within Catholic marriage guidance moral objectives usually prevailed over the need to assist couples in solving their problems, and the principle of non-directive counselling that, at least in theory, was at the basis of marriage guidance elsewhere, was not applied.[33] Typical of the Catholic approach were the activities of the *Pro Familia*. In 1969, this Institute was responsible for 51 schools in Italy where students received information about the Catholic doctrine regarding marriage and the family. The *Pro Familia* institute also organized special courses for future spouses at beginners and advanced level. At the end of the upper level course, the participants received a certificate that they could present when they wanted to get married. However, by the end of the 1960s, the conservative message of this form of education was often no longer appreciated. One of the teachers admitted that the strong focus on female sacrifice was not in line with the new ideas about the role of women in society and in marriage.[34]

Far more controversial were the activities of Paolo Liggeri, a Catholic priest who had founded the first Italian marriage advisory agency in Milan in 1948. Liggeri soon became one of the most active propagandists of the Catholic vision of marriage, using conferences, radio and television programmes, books, and magazines. His main aim was to oppose the request for divorce by making marriages as happy as possible, and by offering future spouses and married couples a more complete information about the reality of married life.[35] The novelty of his approach was, above all, in his explicit reference to the positive aspects of sexuality.

Paolo Liggeri stressed the importance of sexual harmony for the success of a marriage and saw sexuality as both a right and a duty for the spouses. Liggeri's efforts to inform young people about the sexual aspects of married life during public lectures often provoked scandal and were criticized by conservatives. For instance, in *Perfice munus*, a periodical for the clergy largely dedicated to morality and medical science, Giuseppe Rossino reproached Paolo Liggeri for presenting delicate problems to a mass public without making the necessary distinctions between those who were 'morally mature' and those who were not.[36]

From the late 1960s onward, a great number of text books for courses for future spouses arrived on the Italian market, often produced abroad and then adapted for a local readership. One of these publications was by the Catholic Centre of the University of Ottawa and consisted of twelve booklets dedicated to various aspects of married life, from legal issues to procreation, and from religious

matters to sexuality. The booklet, entitled *Il nostro corpo* (*Our Body*, 1967), focused on the social meaning of sexuality as a means of communication between the sexes. It condemned masturbation and all other forms of sexuality that did not correspond to the Catholic definition of 'true love'. The sexual act was presented solely as a function of procreation, and the limited information available was restricted to issues such as pregnancy, childbirth and breast-feeding. Given the importance of procreation, the authors suggested that a voluntary pre-marital medical examination might be useful.[37]

The publications of the late 1960s and 1970s often followed the lead of Paolo Liggeri in presenting sexual compatibility as being 'of utmost importance for strengthening conjugal love'. The Catholic Centre of Ottawa series explained that 'this harmony cannot be obtained if the husband is unable to control the impetuosity of his sexual instincts and to awaken gradually the sexual pleasure of his wife'.[38] Similar suggestions were common in the text books for future spouses which often underlined the woman's right to sexual satisfaction:

> A woman is slower than a man in reaching the paroxysm of her love and, if possible, it is a good thing when both partners arrive at this point together. The man has to be aware that he is seriously lacking in sensitivity if he abandons his spouse abruptly after having reached his own relaxation without making sure that for her as well the act is complete.[39]

Significantly, in 1959, Don Paolo Liggeri had already explained that: 'Morality, like a good mother, takes into account these difficulties and allows a woman to perform certain acts on herself that allow her to obtain the satisfaction of her physical desire.'[40] In his attitude of 'enlightened ascetism', Liggeri was in accord with many lay educators of the same period who distinguished between legitimate actions and illegitimate actions on the basis of physiology and the 'natural functions' of the body and allowed practices that would help married women to reach orgasm.[41]

Liggeri remained vague about which activities could help women to reach orgasm. Medical texts were more forthcoming about this and spoke about the female erogenous zones and the clitoris,[42] but it is unlikely that much of this information reached the general public. On the contrary, one has the impression that, rather than promoting female sexual pleasure, the strong focus on sex as an important component of conjugal life made women feel obliged to accept the sexual advances of their husbands or to fake an orgasm. After all, during the 1960s they were often told that 'women who refuse their husbands too often can make them impotent' and that 'men like to hear that they have satisfied their wives during sexual relations'.[43] Many women were thus convinced that sexual harmony was the most important factor in strengthening the marriage bonds, but, as we will see, few women were satisfied with their own sexual life.[44]

From the late 1960s, Catholic sex education for future spouses was increasingly intended, not only to provide young people with solid arguments to remain chaste before marriage, but also to instruct them about the legitimacy of

sexual pleasure once they were married. As the Catholic educator, Antonio Corti, wrote in his 'Catechesis for the betrothed': 'In this general vision of love sexuality appears in a positive light and the negative attitude toward the body and toward sex has no validity: also the body is created by God and therefore it is good. Sexual pleasure as well is good if it is explored in a *human* way, and not just by using instincts.'[45]

SEX EDUCATION AT SCHOOL

During the first half of the twentieth century, the rare proposals to give schools a role in sex education met with the opposition of Catholics who were convinced that this delicate task could only be assigned to parents and well-chosen educators. In no case was it considered appropriate for information about sex to be conveyed collectively without taking into consideration the individual characteristics and needs of young people. The issue of how sex education should be delivered reemerged in 1950 when the editors of *Scienza e vita sessuale* (*Science and sexuality*) undertook a survey on the best way to combat the pernicious influence of cinema and press. Their concern focused less on whether to provide sex education and more on how to provide it: at what age to start, and whether to require schools to include sex education in their curriculum or leave the task to parents, medical personnel or trusted friends.[46]

Among the respondents, several accepted the idea of sex education at school. Amelio Macchioro, a history and philosophy teacher from Bari, proposed to integrate sex education in classes on biology, science, and religion.[47] Dino Origlia, author of a volume on the psychology of marriage, also insisted on the participation of schools. Furthermore, he suggested that sex education should start as early as possible and should not deal only with issues like childbirth and maternity, but also address problems surrounding conception.[48]

Origlia's optimistic conjecture that the attitude of the Catholic Church with regard to sex education had changed seemed to be confirmed by the response of Father Nico Di Mestre, a Catholic priest who approved the idea of sex education at school and even proposed a curriculum. He advocated that masturbation – described as a cause of physical and psychiatric disorder – should be discussed in the fifth grade of elementary school (age group 10–11); that the 'disorder of couples' and the 'problems of life' should be treated in the third grade of lower secondary school (age group 13–14); and that remaining issues such as betrothal and prostitution should be dealt with in higher secondary school (age group 14–19).[49] In an attempt to ward off criticism, Di Mestre suggested elsewhere that, before taking any initiative, it would be wise to establish with the students a relationship of trust and to make sure that they possessed the necessary level of seriousness.[50]

Most Catholic authors, however, preferred to leave sex education in the hands of parents, fearing that public lectures would not take into consideration individual differences and thus offend the sensibility of some pupils. Above all,

they dreaded that teachers would disregard the moral aspects of sexuality and focus on biology and physiology and thus go against the teaching of Pope Pius XI, who, in his 1930 encyclical *Casti connubii*, had condemned the 'exaggerated physiological education by means of which, in these times of ours, some reformers of married life make pretence of helping those joined in wedlock, laying much stress on these physiological matters, in which is learned rather the art of sinning in a subtle way than the virtue of living chastely'.[51]

The French Catholic pedagogue, Elisabeth Gérin, whose work was translated into Italian in 1963, admitted the importance of sex education on the grounds that a lack of information would interfere negatively with the psychological and moral development of children. At the same time, however, she claimed that only parents – father or mother – could provide this 'initiation to life'. If embarrassed or too ignorant, they could, she asserted, ask for the help of a medical doctor, teacher, or priest, but under no circumstances should the initiative be taken by these experts.[52]

Because of the strong Catholic influence on the Italian school system, it is unlikely that sex education would have been anything but conservative. Progressives, therefore, had no reason to press the issue and, rather than insisting on the introduction of sex education in schools, tried to eliminate the State's influence in sexual matters. Doubts about sex education at school emerge in the introduction by psychoanalyst, Cesare Musatti, to the Italian translation of *Sex Education* by Cecil Bibby, special adviser on sex education to the British Central Council of Health Education. Writing in 1959, Musatti was convinced that, while a majority of the Italians acknowledged the necessity of sex education, the possibility of applying Bibby's ideas in Italy was slim. He advised teachers not to experiment with sex education in schools: 'In our country, a teacher or a head master who would try to organize something similar, would at least lose his job, even if he would be able to obtain the unanimous consensus of families (something really difficult to obtain).'[53] Indeed, the comparison with foreign countries often only served to reconfirm the Italian claim to moral superiority as is shown also in the Italian reaction to the Kinsey Report. According to the gynaecologist, Sebastiano Di Francesco, one of the collaborators of the *La Casa* Institute, the report only showed that immorality, adultery, pre-marital sex and divorce were rampant in America, and provided a clear justification for Italy not to follow its example.[54]

As a result, sexual ignorance was widely diffused in Italy as the attempts to introduce sex education in the school curriculum proved abortive and parents often failed to play an active role. The journalist, Claudio Risé, denounced this situation in 1966 in a report about the sexual life of young Italians aged 16–24 published by the progressive weekly *Espresso*:

> At school, sexual life receives no attention in the programmes of sciences, civil education or physics, and of course it is not an autonomous part of the school curriculum. As a result, it appears only during religious education where sex is identified with the sin of impurity and vice.[55]

Other sources indicate that young people required sex education, and blamed their parents for exposing them to terrible dangers because of their ignorance.[56]

A 1966 scandal vividly revealed the increasing gap between 'official' morality and the ideas of young people. Students of the *Liceo Parini*, a higher secondary school in Milan attended mainly by upper-class students, published in their school journal an investigation on the opinions of female students on sexual matters. The results utterly shocked moralists as most girls approved the use of birth control and declared that they would have no objections to pre-marital relations if only reliable methods of contraception were available. On 22 February 1966, a local newspaper reported the protest of a group of Catholic students who denounced what they viewed as a decline of moral standards. A week later, public prosecutor, Oscar Lanzi, started a judicial investigation. Three of the students involved in the publication were interrogated at the police headquarters. A major scandal broke out when it became known that some of them had been forced to undergo a medical check. Left-wing politicians raised questions in Parliament and a large part of public opinion sided with the students against what was seen, above all, as an attack on the freedom of the press. Only the most conservative Catholics supported the prosecutor's action against what they called the 'the terrifying expressions of a small minority that go against all educational principles'. At the end of the trial, all the accused were acquitted.[57]

Although Catholic hegemony was clearly breaking down, the scandal showed the risks involved in dealing with issues that were still highly controversial. For this reason, when schools finally started to deal with sex education in the 1970s, this was only because they were forced to do so by special circumstances. At the Giosuè Carducci girl's school in Rome in 1977, one of the students gave birth to a child without anyone having noticed her pregnancy. The event led to student protest, with demonstrations and occupations in many Roman schools. In this climate, the head mistress, rather than giving in to requests for self government, decided to call in the experts of the Italian Centre of Sexology (CIS), who organized a series of meetings. Against the wishes of the students, who would have preferred plenary meetings, the CIS organized meetings in small groups and primarily discussed the scientific aspects of sexuality. According to one expert, the course had been a success because the students, after an initial phase of diffidence, had appreciated the opportunity to 'talk about issues that they had never talked about, to share ideas with their fellow students without any embarrassment, and to discover that they all had similar problems'.[58]

For similar reasons, the parents of students in another Roman high school also organized a course on sexuality with the help of experts. Even though many students participated, they objected to the exclusively scientific approach and demanded more space for discussion. The letter sent to the parent by the school board to announce a new series of lectures shows some of the ambiguities of the course:

> After long discussion, the School Board has decided to offer our young people an opportunity to deal with the problems of human sexuality in a

> serious and concrete way. In fact, it seems to us that in our current culture old taboos are breaking down, but that at the same time a new myth is emerging: that sex is only a biological fact and is not connected to human thought. […] Schools can't replace parents and, above all, they cannot impose rules of behaviour or intervene in the delicate mechanism of emotions and sentiments that are connected to sexual development. However, we have the impression that very often young people don't even have the basic information to know and to control their own body and to regulate their sexuality on the bases of rules of behaviour and morality that they themselves choose.[59]

While sex education, as such, responded to an obvious need, the methods chosen often contrasted with the expectations of young people: the students wanted more space for discussion and did not appreciate the fact that sex education was limited to scientific notions. Paradoxically, the young people who attended sex education in Roman high schools and who sided with the sexual liberation movement therefore shared with more conservative Catholics the idea that sexuality should be contextualized. They claimed, in fact, that sexual repression was above all a political problem and that the struggle for sexual liberation should be part of a broader strategy.[60]

In 1974–75, students of a Technical School in Ciampino, near Rome, organized their own course of sex education, choosing to discuss Catholic and Marxist interpretations of the role of sexuality using newspaper articles, publications of the Communist Party, and official Catholic documents. Such initiatives were severely criticized by the Catholics of the local parish who, in April 1976, distributed a pamphlet with the following text:

> Let's wake up and stop the wave of sexual perversion! Recently, in Milan, at the State technical institute for Tourism in via Verro, during the hours reserved for student initiatives, a lecture-debate about sexual education has taken place presenting as teachers some 'experts' of the gay movement FUORI and other 'scientists' of *Soccorso rosso* [an extreme left-wing organisation] and of *Magistratura democratica* [a leftist oriented movement of magistrates]. Next appeared the actors of the Theatre group 'Il Fabbricone' who have transformed the scholarly lecture into an example of the most base licentiousness. Only then did the school board intervene to make further acts of depravation impossible. Let's be aware that what happened in Milan can also happen here, and therefore we should keep watch so that our children will not be initiated into these depravities. Catholics, let's act and make sure that here things will not be like they are in Denmark, where Catholic families no longer send their children to state schools where they only learn immorality.[61]

In 1975, the Communist Party, with the support of other parties of the left, presented a bill in Parliament proposing for the first time the general

introduction of sexual education in schools of all levels. Numerous proposals followed, but all without any success: moral objections, political difficulties and a general lack of interest explain why, even today, sex education in Italy largely depends on the initiative of individual teachers.[62]

THE IMPACT AND EXPERIENCE OF SEX EDUCATION

Little information is available regarding the sexual life of young people in Italy during the decades following World War II. Indeed, the condemnation of a 'naturalistic' approach to sexuality explicitly disparaged the mere collection of data. As the Catholic pathologist, Guido Lami, explained: 'A purely descriptive phenomenology of sexuality – like the Kinsey Report – cannot provide any directives even supposing that it would be possible to gather the necessary information.'[63]

The research carried out by women such as the feminist journalist, Gabriella Parca, and the Sicilian social scientist, Lieta Harrison, can only partially fill this gap. For her study of female sexuality – advertized as a 'Kinsey Report Italian style' – Gabriella Parca based her findings on the examination of some 8,000 letters sent to the 'agony column' of two popular magazines.[64] The fact that so many women had decided to write to a magazine rather than confiding in their confessors was a sign of a more secularized attitude and indicated a desire to break the rule of silence and to try and share feelings and opinions relating to sexual issues. The approach to sexuality that emerged from these letters was ambiguous. Women rejected the rigid morality of the past, but did not approve of a more liberal approach to sex. Above all, sex seemed to inspire in these women fear and guilt. Many women felt guilty about losing their virginity, and they feared being abandoned after the so-called 'love test'. Above all, they feared getting pregnant before marriage.

This fear was at least in part a consequence of ignorance. Evidence indicated that many young women never received any information about sexual matters, and that for others sex education was limited to the absolute minimum. They were told about menstruation, but not about sexual relations, conception, pregnancy or child birth.[65] Even the most basic understanding of anatomy and physiology was often lacking, as was reflected in those letters from young women asking whether it was possible to become pregnant through kissing or masturbation.[66]

According to the research carried out by Lieta Harrison in Sicily during the early 1960s, female sexual ignorance was almost considered a virtue because it confirmed traditional ideas about women. In the view of Sicilian males, women were 'weak, irresponsible and destined by nature to succumb to male desire'. They had no sexual autonomy, were not supposed to seek pleasure, and had to hide the idea of pleasure even from themselves. The function of sexual relations for women was supposedly just to make their husbands happy.[67]

In line with such views, women were often presented as suffering from 'frigidity'. It is difficult to judge how far this corresponded to the experience of women themselves, but it seems possible that an education that condemned sexuality as sinful made it difficult for women to liberate themselves from feelings of guilt. As early as 1962, A.L. Berth had explicitly denounced the lack of information as a cause of sexual malaise and encouraged women to react against traditional morality: 'To know that a condom protects against infections and against pregnancy is not shameful and it does not constitute a proof of indecency.'[68]

During the 1970s, an increasing number of women provided sex education for their daughters, perhaps in order to ensure that they did not suffer from the sexual ignorance that they themselves had had to endure. According to Lieta Harrison, in 1972, 37.0 per cent of mothers gave sexual education to their children, although only 2.6 per cent of them had previously received sexual education from their own mothers. Unfortunately, this education often focused exclusively on the connection between sexuality and procreation and paid no attention to sexual pleasure.[69]

Sex education manuals often presented the first night of marriage as a nightmare because of the psychological stress of the spouses, the expectations of the male that were often based on experiences with prostitutes, and the fear and ignorance of the bride. The authors tried to reduce these fears. Thus, in order to prepare women for the event Luisa Guarnero instructed her readers:

> It is necessary that in this moment you liberate yourself completely and vigorously from all prejudices and psychological stress: your husband is not possessing you so as to complete the male act of his conquest and choice; nor are you the victim of an egoistical act, of a more or less instinctive, blind and brutal act of possession. Both of you, equally and together, will obtain something that belongs to each of you.[70]

At times, sex education backfired. The so-called 'love test' was the result of an unforeseen and certainly unintended male interpretation of the discourse regarding the importance of sexual harmony for a happy marriage. As we have seen, educators like Paolo Liggeri had wanted to give young couples the information necessary for their future happiness, while at the same time encouraging them to remain chaste until marriage. Young men, however, asked their girl friends to show their love before marriage in order to avoid a misalliance. Catholic educators were well aware of this problem and tried to convince young people that, before marriage, the conditions of sexual relations were such that no sexual harmony could be expected. A sense of guilt, the need to lie, psychological uncertainty, and doubts about the real intentions of the partner all contributed to making the test of no value.[71]

From the evidence collected by Gabriella Parca and others, it becomes clear that young women often felt trapped between the male insistence on a more 'liberated' sexuality and the generally conservative values with which they had been educated and according to which they were judged by society. A young

female factory worker from Turin expressed these feelings in a letter to a women's magazine that found many readers in agreement:

> I am a 23 year old factory worker. I am rather good looking, but by now I am convinced that I will remain an old spinster, not because I think I'm too old, but simply because I was educated according to sound moral principles and I don't want to give these up. At this point, after numerous personal experiences, I am convinced that today no young man is willing to wait until marriage without asking his betrothed for the 'proof of her real love' or worse 'to be sure that she can make him happy' […] I have learned all this in these years, when I still hoped to meet my man, and I assure you that I would like to return to the old days when a girl would get married without even as much as knowing her future husband.[72]

Such an attitude was understandable given the fact that many males in these years, especially in Southern Italy, still considered the virginity of their bride a guarantee for her future fidelity. In line with a strong tradition of double standards, they felt therefore entitled to exercise their 'natural right' to insist on having complete sexual relations, but at the same time blamed their girl friends if they 'gave in'. In Northern and Central Italy, sexual relations among young people created less problems, either because of a more liberal attitude regarding sexuality, or because of the survival of traditional customs, according to which a woman was to prove her fertility before marriage.[73]

The psychological strain to which young women were exposed in the case of pre-marital sexual relations was used by Catholic authors as an argument against sexual liberation. However, they did not acknowledge the fact that this strain was the effect of male chauvinism and was closely connected to the prevailing social stereotypes regarding the female role in society.[74] Attributing to the woman the responsibility to refuse the male's request for the 'love test', most manuals of sex education not only used double standards but also denied the sexual desires of women. Among the rare exceptions was the Spanish theologian, Marciano Vidal, member of the Redemptorist Order, who dedicated a special study to pre-marital sexual relations, in which he criticized the different criteria for judging male and female behaviour and even admitted that, in rare cases, sexual relations before marriage could be an expression of total and exclusive love.[75]

CONCLUSION

For most of the period under discussion sex education was subjected to the restraints of Catholic ideology. What initiated sex education in Italy was, above all, the hope that it could slow down and guide the process of modernization by convincing men and women of the need to obey standards of behaviour that were based both on moral and religious values and on the laws of nature. It would, however, be incorrect to present Catholic culture as

monolithic: the adherence to the basic principles of Catholic doctrine did not block attempts to elaborate a more liberal interpretation.

While dissidence with the values cherished by the Church and a large sector of Italian society was more openly expressed from the late 1960s onwards, the divergences between Catholic and lay culture should not make us forget what they had in common. As we have seen, communists often shared the Catholic doubts about the value of sexual enlightenment and, like the Catholics, put a strong focus on moral prescriptions when forwarding information about sex. In addition, in the late 1960s, progressives shared with Catholics the idea that it was important to contextualize sex and that sex education should not be limited to informing young people about physiological and biological facts.

Owing to the sexual liberation movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, sex education *did* undoubtedly become more widespread in Italy. Nevertheless, in 1978, a report by the sociologists, Giampaolo Fabris and Rowena Davis, based on a sample of 2,000 Italians in the age group 18–65, still denounced the lack of information that was leading to widespread sexual unhappiness.[76] Moreover, it should be noted that the process of secularization has still not eliminated the role of the Church in Italian society, and even today the debate about sex education is strongly influenced and constrained by Catholic values.

NOTES

1. S. Bellassai, *La morale comunista: Pubblico e privato nella rappresentazione del PCI (1947–1956)*, Roma: Carocci, 2000, pp. 118–22. See also, M. Barbanti, 'Cultura cattolica, lotta anticomunista e moralità pubblica (1948–60)', *Rivista di storia contemporanea*, 1992, vol. 21, 143–79. On sex education prior to World War II in Italy, see G. Bonetta, *Corpo e nazione: L'educazione ginnastica, igienica e sessuale nell'Italia liberale*, Milano: Angeli, 1990; G. Rifelli and C. Ziglio, *Per una storia dell' educazione sessuale 1870–1920*, Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1991. For a general introduction to the history of sexuality in Italy, see B.P.F. Wanrooij, 'The history of sexuality in Italy (1860–1945)', in P. Willson (ed.) *Gender, Family and Sexuality: The Private Sphere in Italy, 1860–1945*, Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 175–91.
2. R. Ruiz Amado, *Sopra l'educazione della castità: Ai confessori, educatori e padri di famiglia*, Torino: Marietti, 1909.
3. See M. Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology*, Westport and London: Praeger, 2002; R. Villa, *Il deviante e i suoi segni: Lombroso e la nascita dell'antropologia criminale*, Milano: Angeli, 1985.
4. J. Fonssagrives, *L'educazione della purezza: Consigli ai genitori e ai maestri*, Roma: Desclée, 1910.
5. P. Foà, *L'igiene fisica e morale dei giovani*, Roma: Libreria della Voce, 1910. See also Rivelli and Ziglio, *Per una storia dell'educazione sessuale*, pp. 118–23; B.P.F. Wanrooij, *Storia del pudore: La questione sessuale in Italia 1860–1940*, Venezia: Marsilio, 1990, pp. 163–64.
6. See 'Una questione delicata', *Scuola italiana moderna*, 1934, vol. 44, no. 4, 47. For a discussion of the Fascist 'strategy of concealment', see L. Benadusi, *Il nemico dell' uomo nuovo: L'omosessualità nell'esperimento totalitario fascista*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2005.
7. See L. Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics, and Legal Reform*, London: Macmillan, 1991.

8. Corte Costituzionale, *Sentenza n. 49*, 16 March 1971. The decision of the Court is discussed in: *Orientamenti giurisprudenziali in tema di buon costume*, Roma: Camera dei Deputati, 1972, pp. 192–95.
9. M. Livi Bacci, *A History of Italian Fertility During the Last Two Centuries*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, pp. 277–83. See also A. A. Vinay *et al*., *Il sesso è uguale per tutti ovvero l'impotenza del censore*, Padova: Francisci, 1977.
10. R. Pellegrini, *Sessuologia*, Padova: Cedam, 1956, pp. 9–10.
11. R. Manzini, 'Prefazione', in P. Babina, *L'amore e il sesso*, Milano: Istituto di propaganda libraria, 1940, 7–9.
12. Babina, *L'amore e il sesso*, p. 20.
13. A. Gemelli, *La tua vita sessuale: Lettera ad uno studente universitario*, Milano: Vita e pensiero, 1948 (1941), pp. 11–17; G. Cosmacini, *Gemelli*, Milano: Rizzoli, 1985; M. Bocci, *Agostino Gemelli rettore e francescano. Chiesa, regime, democrazia*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 2003.
14. Pius PP XII, 'Ai padri di famiglia francesi', 18 September 1951, in *La famiglia nel magistero di Pio XII, 1939–1956*, Roma: Colombo, 1956, 206–8.
15. A.S. Makarenko, *Consigli ai genitori: L'educazione del bambino nella famiglia sovietica*, Roma: Tipografia Dell'Orso, 1950, pp. 110–12. On Makarenko, see also Fenemore's chapter in this volume.
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17. Cf. advertisement in *Rivista del cinematografo*, 1950, vol. 23, no. 4, p. 10.
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19. M. Ricciardi Ruocco, *L'educazione sessuale in Italia*, Mandria: Lacaita, 1961, pp. 184–229.
20. *La ragazza e la società moderna*, Roma: UDI, 1963, p. 112.
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22. For some contemporary studies of the changing role of the family in education, see G. Bianchi and A. Ellena (eds) *Giovani tra classe e generazione. Le scelte dei giovani lavoratori dell'area milanese*, Milano: CELUC, 1963; E. Ramacciotti, *Inchiesta sulla gioventù*, Roma: Città nuova, 1967.
23. Babina, *L'amore e il sesso*, pp. 17–18. See also M. David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1990, pp. 90–141.
24. P. Gaioni et al., *Sei sposi e un prete parlano ai fidanzati*, Milano and Brescia: Ancora and Pro Familia, 1968. For a discussion of Catholic censorship, see B.P.F. Wanrooij, 'Dollars and decency: Italian Catholics and Hollywood, 1945–60', in D. W. Ellwood and R. Kroes (eds) *Hollywood in Europe: Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony*, Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994, 247–65.
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26. P. Castelli, *Il fidanzamento*, Milano: Istituto La Casa, 1956, pp. 51–62.
27. L. Guarnero, *Il mistero dell'amore: Ciò che un'adolescente del XX secolo deve sapere*, Torino, Marietti, 1953, pp. 19–20.
28. See A. Alessandrini and P. Delli, *Il sexantotto: Fatti e misfatti della nostra vita sessuale*, Firenze: Uskok, 1982, p. 41.
29. 'Corsi prematrimoniali', *Scuola di vita familiare*, 1968, vol. 37, no. 1, 52–54.
30. *Evangelizzazione e sacramento del matrimonio*, Milano: Ancora, 1975.
31. On the fascist patriarchy, see Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism ruled Women 1922–1945*, Berkeley: California University Press, 1992.
32. 'Cronache della famiglia', *Famiglia e civiltà*, 1952, vol. 2, nos. 1–2, 47–52.
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37. *Corsa di preparazione al matrimonio*, vol 5, *Il nostro corpo*, Roma: Tipografia Nova AGEP, 1967, p. 5.
38. Ibid., vol. 7, *Educazione alla castità coniugale*, Roma: Tipografia Nova AGEP, 1967, p. 10.
39. Gaioni, *Sei sposi*, p. 48.
40. Liggeri, *Problemi di vita coniugale*, pp. 251–52.
41. E. Schindel and A. Rot, *Il sesso*, Milano: Parenti, 1959 (1957), pp. 72–75. See also A. Stephens and H. Simmel, *Lettere al dottore: Le risposte degli studiosi a tutti gli interrogativi di natura sessuale che non avete mai osato esprimere*, Torino: MEB, 1971. For a definition of enlightened ascetism, see. I. Rubin, 'Transition in sex values: implications for the education of adolescents', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1965, vol. 27, no. 2, 185–89.
42. See N. Brunori, *Maschilità e femminilità nella condotta umana*, Firenze: Sansoni, 1952, pp. 35–36.
43. F.S. Caprio, *La vera felicità sessuale*, Milano: Longanesi, 1968, pp. 141–42. See also L. Gendron, *La sposa vuole sapere,* Roma: Bizzarri, 1972, pp. 136–39.
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45. A. Corti: *Incontro al matrimonio: Catechesi per i fidanzati*, Milano: Edizioni OR, 1976, pp. 25–26. Emphasis by the author.
46. 'L'educazione sessuale dei giovani', *Scienza e vita sessuale*, 1950, vol. 1, no. 1, 19–20.
47. A. Macchioro, 'Educazione sessuale dei giovani', *Scienza e vita sessuale*, 1950, vol. 1, no. 2, 86–89.
48. D. Origlia, 'Educazione sessuale dei giovani', *Scienza e vita sessuale*, 1950, vol. 1, no. 4, 14–18.
49. N. di Mestre, 'L'educazione sessuale dei giovani', *Scienza e vita sessuale*, 1950, vol. 1, no. 9, 48–55.
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51. *Casti connubii: Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Christian Marriage*. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_31121930_casti-connubii_en.html (last accessed 12 July 2006). See 'Una questione delicata', *Scuola italiana moderna*, 1934, vol. 44, no. 4, 47.
52. E. Gérin, *Inchiesta sull'educazione sessuale*, Torino: Borla, 1963, p. 59.
53. C.L. Musatti, 'Prefazione', in C. Bibby, *Educazione sessuale*, Milano: Mondadori, 1959, pp. 7–12. The publisher Mondadori was not linked to the Catholic Church. At the time, there was no widespread sex education in British schools. See L. Hall, 'Birds, bees, and general embarrassment: sex education in Britain from social purity to section 28', in R. Aldrich (ed.) *Public or Private Education. Lessons from History*, London: Woburn Press, 2004, 98–115.

54. S. di Francesco, *Armonia sessuale: Rilievi, considerazioni e consigli di un ginecologo*, Milano: Istituto La Casa, 1956, pp. 135–37.
55. C. Risé, *Rapporto sul comportamento sessuale dei giovani in Italia*, Milano: Sugar, 1966, 14–21, pp. 14–15.
56. M. Dorsi, *Giovani soli: Indagine fra gli studenti italiani*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1958, pp. 31–32.
57. G. Nozzoli and P.M. Paoletti, *'La Zanzara': Cronache e documenti di uno scandalo*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1966, p. 54.
58. Cf. B. Lombardi's notes on F. Masellis, 'Come si è sviluppato il corso di educazione sessuale all'Istituto magistrale Giosuè Carducci di Roma', *Rivista di sessuologia*, 1977, vol. 1, no. 2, 32–37, p. 37.
59. 'Un corso sulle conoscenze di base di sessuologia al liceo scientifico Kennedy di Roma', *Rivista di sessuologia*, 1977, vol. 1, no. 2, 30–31.
60. G. Aprile, *Erotismo senza complessi*, Milano: Quintadecima, s.a. (1971), pp. 22–28. Similar interpretations were influenced by the ideas of Wilhelm Reich which were becoming popular in Italy around 1970.
61. Leaflet of Catholic counter-information distributed by Catholic Action of Ciampino, Parish of Sacro Cuore (April 1976), cited in L. Biancatella (ed.) *Una classe contro i tabù: Un'esperienza di educazione sessuale nella scuola superiore raccontata dagli stessi protagonisti*, Milano: Emme, 1978, pp. 213–14.
62. Instead of promoting sex education in schools, in 1975, a law assigned the task of providing information about birth control and other aspects of sexuality to public family advisory agencies.
63. G. Lami, 'Aspetti medico-psicologici della sessualità', in Associazione Medici Cattolici Italiani, Sezione Milano, *Sessualità e medicina*, Roma: Orizzonte medico, 1960, 5–20, pp. 17–18.
64. G. Parca, *Le italiane si confessano*, Firenze: Parenti, 1962 (1959). In 1961, Cesare Zavattini produced a movie based on this book entitled *Le italiane e l'amore*. For a discussion of Italian youth culture in this period, see S. Piccone Stella, *La prima generazione: Ragazze e ragazzi nel miracolo economico italiano*, Milano: Angeli, 1993.
65. L. Harrison, *L'iniziazione: Come le adolescenti italiane diventano donne*, Milano: Rizzoli, 1966, pp. 42–43.
66. Cf. among others the letter of a 17 years old Sicilian girl published in Parca, *Le italiane si confessano*, p. 262.
67. L. Harrison, *Le svergognate*, Roma: Novissima, 1963, p. 13.
68. A.L. Berth, *Vita sessuale prematrimoniale*, Milano: De Vecchi, 1962, pp. 90–91.
69. Harrison, *La donna sposata*, pp. 165–67.
70. L. Guarnero, *Una vita per amare: Ciò che una giovane moglie del XX secolo deve sapere*, Torino: Marietti, 1964, p. 58.
71. G. Campanini, 'I giovani di oggi di fronte al matrimonio', in *La pastorale prematrimoniale*, pp. 34–36.
72. Parca, *Le italiane*, pp. 40–41.
73. G. Parca, *I sultani: Mentalità e comportamento del maschio italiano*, Milano: Rizzoli, 1965, pp. 84–85. On the female attitude to sexuality in Italy in this period, see also F. Cecchini (ed.) *Sesso amaro: Trentamila donne rispondono su maternità sessualità aborto*, Roma: Editori riuniti, 1977.
74. A. Riva, *Educazione sessuale della donna: Aspetti della psicologia sessuale ad uso della gioventù*, Torino: Gribaudi, 1968, p. 82; Gaioni, *Sei sposi*, p. 28.
75. M. Vidal, *I rapporti prematrimoniali*, Assisi: Cittadella, 1973, pp. 86–102. The arguments of Vidal were extremely controversial and often criticized by the Catholic hierarchy.
76. G. Fabris and R. Davis, *Il mito del sesso: Rapporto sul comportamento sessuale degli italiani*, Milano: Mondadori, 1978.

Sex Education and the Representation of Gendered and Sexed Bodies

8 Representations of Pregnancy and Childbirth in (West) German Sex Education Books, 1900s-1970s

Lutz D. H. Sauerteig

INTRODUCTION

Much recent research on the history of sex education has focussed on policy formation, whereas the actual content of sex education material has been relatively neglected.[1] This is surprising because the different forms of textual and illustrative material employed in sex education raise a broad range of questions of interest to historians of sexualities and bodies. Sex education literature provides a record of how sexual identities were defined and heterosexual activities constructed. Books, brochures, leaflets, and magazine articles, as well as films and TV programmes addressing the issue convey a great deal about what was assumed to be 'normal' sexual behaviour. Such materials reflect contemporary concepts of what constituted acceptable practices relating to courtship and marriage, family relationships, pregnancy and childbirth. Furthermore, sex education literature can be read as a culturally and historically contingent repertoire of concepts of the body, of how the sexual body was understood and of what kind of knowledge about the sexual body should be conveyed to the young. Hence, sex education material can be analysed as a guide for the young to learn about how to be a boy or a girl, a man or a woman.

This chapter examines textual and visual representations of pregnancy and childbirth in (West) German sex education books from the 1900s to the 1970s. Over the entire period, nearly all sex educators suggested that questions such as 'Where do I come from?' or 'How does life begin?' were amongst the most burning questions in which the young were interested. However, by dealing with these issues, sex educators directed children's attention to the relevance of a specific knowledge of reproduction. Authors used their narratives about pregnancy and childbirth to strengthen the fine line they were at pains to draw between mediating sexual knowledge to the young and inciting premature sexual activities. At the same time, children's sexual understanding was also shaped by the silences within these narratives and what sex educators thought unimportant or inappropriate to convey to the young.[2]

The knowledge imparted to the young about reproduction, the body's sexual anatomy and physiology, as well as the emotional aspects involved in reproduction, not only contributed to the shaping of the sexual knowledge of

the young, but also naturalized sex differences in reproduction. Hence, knowledge of reproduction became central to the formation of gender identities. In particular, the scripts for motherhood outlined in sex education material were fundamental to the construction of femaleness.[3] Yet, the narratives on reproduction changed over time, as did their place within sex education. Therefore, gender identities must be seen as historically contingent, as never entirely fixed and often challenged and renegotiated.

This study will be restricted to sex education books produced for children and adolescents in (West) Germany. Some 60 sex education books and brochures published between 1900 and 1980 have been identified, several of which were translated into German (especially from Scandinavian languages during the 1960s and 1970s), and adapted for a German readership. 15 of the more popular sex education books are analysed in depth. Most of them saw several reprints, often over more than a decade. Unfortunately, information on some of the authors is scant, and it is therefore not possible to situate them all within a larger cultural context of German sexual pedagogy.

THE HEROIC AND DIVINE MOTHER

Over the nineteenth century, education of the young on sexual matters in Germany was confined to the private sphere of the family. However, by the end of the century, public debates on venereal disease (VD), a wider concern about a decline in sexual morality, and the threat both posed, especially to the 'innocent' young, brought the issue of sex education to broader attention. Although wide consensus was soon reached that some form of sex education was indispensable, there was disagreement as to who should deliver instruction on sexual matters (parents, clergy, physicians, or school teachers), as to what kind of knowledge should be imparted, and how far one should explore biological details of reproduction. Sex educators feared that sex education might actually precipitate children's sexual self-awareness and were thus concerned to propagate self-control in order to restrain inappropriate sexual urges. Similarly, an increasing amount of sex education material was published to equip those engaged in sex education such as parents, teachers and youth-workers with the 'right' pedagogical knowledge. This also included books the young could read on their own or together with their parents – especially with their mother who was regarded as being the most appropriate person for this task.[4]

In different ways, sex education books presented the young with images of gender roles. Text and images revealed, both implicitly and explicitly, how a woman and a man, a mother and a father, were expected to behave in specific contexts. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the most prevalent image in sex education materials reflected the traditional active–passive divide in male and female gender roles. A good example is *We Young Men: The Sexual Problem of the Educated Young Man Before Marriage*, published in 1906 for

male adolescents by Hans Wegener, a Protestant cleric from the Lower Rhine Valley.[5] This book became one of the most successful sex education books in the first half of the twentieth century, running to 26 editions by 1942. Without any illustrations, it discussed moral issues surrounding male adolescents and, albeit briefly, explained pregnancy and childbirth to the young male reader. Wegener was very clear in his representation of the active–passive divide in gender roles, writing: 'We owe our existence to the fact that the mother has given herself to the father.' He described impregnation as an act the father performs on the mother: '[N]ew life sprouts in the mother's womb after the father had roused it.'[6] Similar metaphors are employed in Wegener's account on fertilization where the egg is passively waiting to be found and penetrated by the sperm.[7]

However, Wegener's image of the mother was a heroic one. Not only had she to endure the pain of labour, but she also had to be prepared to give her life for the newborn.[8] This allowed mothers to be equated with soldiers who also had to be prepared to sacrifice their lives to the nation: '[T]hose have to be met with awe who expose their life to danger for the good of others. […] A woman [*ein Weib*] who gives birth is under murderous fire which has felled a good many.'[9] Hence, it is seen as the man's natural duty to honour the woman and to protect her with his life in return for her giving birth.

This idealization of the mother as a hero typifies the sex education literature of the period. For instance, this metaphor figured prominently in Emanuele Meyer's *In Front of the Holy Gates*, published in 1913 for children over the age of 14.[10] Meyer, a physician, described the role of the mother as similar to God's role as the Creator: 'The mother is closer to the Creator than any other human being, attached to Him in the holy work of creation, in the mysterious giving and maturing of life.'[11] For Meyer, the purpose of sex education was to train girls 'to be strengthened, hardened, natural virgins' from an early age, so that later in life they could function as 'right, healthy, dutiful, as well as nourishingly able (*nährungsfähige*) mothers'. She also assured her readers that the task of the mother was not only a burden but also 'a mother's holy pleasure' (*heilige Mutterlust*).[12]

Invoking the biblical exhortation from Genesis, 'Go forth and multiply', Meyer dealt with reproduction in a chapter that opened with an engraving depicting a family (Figure 8.1). In the foreground, a mother sits breastfeeding one of her four children. Her husband kneels behind her on a log with his left arm leaning on a stick. In the background is a half-timbered house and the right side of the engraving is marked by what looks like a German oak tree with its leaves shading the family from above. The image draws on several motifs to evoke an imaginary medieval Germanic past of a happy family. Man and woman living together as husband and wife, having children, the mother nursing and caring for them and the father protecting his family. This was a depiction of traditional gender roles, of a past family ideal which readers and beholders were expected to follow. In the post-War period, when Meyer's book saw four reprints, her Germanic family ideal, however, stood in sharp contrast to the contemporary breakdown of the traditional family.[13]

Figure 8.1 E. L. M. Meyer, *Vor heiligen Toren*. [*In Front of the Holy Gates*]. *Ein Aufklärungsbuch der Jugend zum Eintritt ins Leben und in den sittlichen Kampf. Ein Vademecum auch den Erziehern und Jugendfreunden*, illustrated by B. Aistermann, Stuttgart: Strecker & Schröder, 1913, reprt. 1919, p. 39.

Although Meyer could not answer the question of how life came into being, she informed her young readers that new life develops from the unification of sperm and egg cells, explaining the function of sperm and egg and the process of cell division. In poetic and opaque language, Meyer conveys some biological understanding of what happens inside the body of a pregnant woman.[14] The embryo, she writes, is 'embedded in this wonderfully equipped organ of the motherly body which is its cradle meant for maturation […], a sealed holy shrine, sevenfold guarded.' Her entire narrative on reproduction and pregnancy is dominated by a mystifying religious symbolism, presenting procreation as an honourable, holy and serious task: 'Holy is the hour, holy it is, in which the eternal Omnipotence calls into life the delicate human embryo (*Menschenkeim*) in the mother's womb!'[15]

Like Wegener, Meyer's depiction of labour and childbirth centred on its frightening and heroic aspects:

> And one day the hour comes which counts heavy in the life of a woman [*Weib*], which is longed for and feared, which burns into memory with glowing letters, which becomes the hour of fate, which God himself calls the difficult hour! […] Small and narrow are the gates through which the young human has to pass through to reach the light of this earth, and under emotions which makes dying often more desirable, the child comes into the world.[16]

The extent to which sex educators, writing for the young, associated labour with fear, fierce pain and death is striking.[17] Narratives of pain and death in childbirth can be found in many sex education books up to the late 1960s to a varying extent. One suspects that they were meant to deter girls from sexual activity before marriage.[18]

But Meyer also comforts her young readers because, after having given birth, she suggests the mother soon forgets about the pain and experiences only happiness: 'And tears of pain are followed by tears of blessed joy which like holy consecrating drops bless the child's forehead.' It is only at this point that the father receives any attention: 'The motherly joy and motherly happiness is united with the father's noble happiness. It is a deeply moving picture to see the serious man who had stayed in deepest compassion and worry at the bedside of the expecting mother, kneeling in holy fatherly joy at the child's cradle which envelops his child, the child which will give him the sweet name of a father!' Mother, father and child form the unity of the Germanic family. In Meyer's words, 'the holy circle is now closed'.[19]

THE ANATOMY AND BIOLOGY OF REPRODUCTION

A sharp contrast to the *fin-de-siècle* sex education books was Max Hodann's *Where Children Come From*, published in 1926; a second edition was published in 1928 under the new title *Does the Stork Really Bring Us?*[20] Hodann belonged to a small group of socialist doctors who were influential in the debates on social hygiene during the Weimar Republic. He was committed to campaigns against VD and ran the sex advice centre in Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexology in the mid-1920s before being forced to flee Germany in 1933. Through his sex advice and sex education books, Hodann became a well-known but contentious sex educator in the Weimar Republic. What distinguished him from other sex educators of the time was that several of his books for (working class) children were written from a socialist perspective and designed to be studied by children themselves.[21]

Hodann's work marked an important turning point in German sex education literature. No previous author had taken such a medical and scientific

approach, explaining fertilization and pregnancy in such great detail. His medical and scientific language left hardly any aspect of procreation unexplored. He explained the function of the umbilical cord and the placenta ('*Mutterkuchen*').[22] The uterus was initially depicted in his narrative as a cosy, warm cave protecting the growing baby, but later described as a muscle 'which is hollow like a football bladder'. For the first time in sex education, Hodann provided anatomical drawings, which accompanied his medical narrative. For instance, he depicted in detail a woman's pelvis and illustrated the uterus and fetus in her body (Figure 8.2).[23] Meyer's 'sealed holy shrine, sevenfold guarded' had turned here into a schematic cross-section anatomical drawing visualizing to the beholders what previously remained unseen.

Thus, in his medical narrative, Hodann had introduced a new actor, the uterus. By contracting, the uterus alerts the mother that labour is imminent. It is not the mother who is active, it is the uterus which presses the 'embryo' out of the body and the midwife helps to deliver the baby. Subsequently, most sex education books up to the early 1970s depicted the uterus as *the* active agent in childbirth.[24]

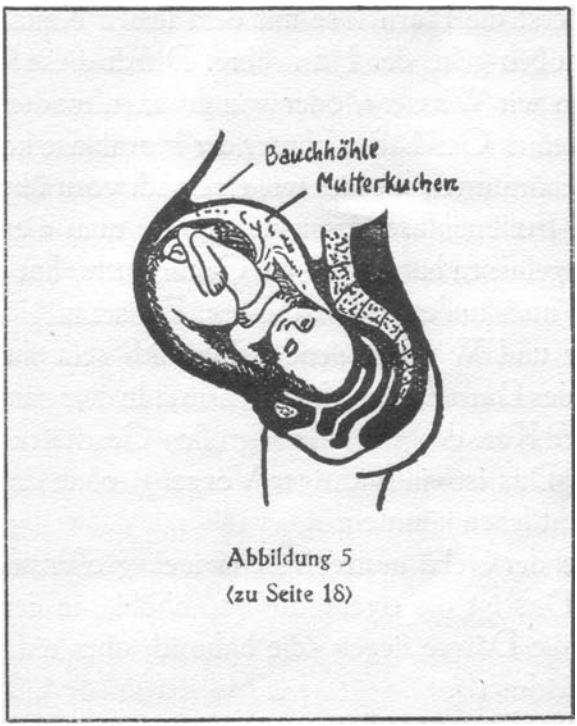


Figure 8.2 M. Hodann, *Bringt uns wirklich der Klapperstorch?* [*Does the Stork Really Bring Us?*] *Ein Lehrbuch für Kinder lesbar*, Rudolstadt: Greifenberg, 1928, p. 17.

Hodann was also the first sex educator who chose to confront the young with an image of the birth process: a schematic drawing of the pelvis of a woman in labour depicting the moment the fetus is about to emerge from the vagina (Figure 8.3). Like his predecessors, Hodann emphasized the great pain involved in labour, but he provided a medical explanation; that the contractions of the uterus 'hurt very much' as did the widening of the uterine orifice and the vagina.[25] Hodann then moved on to explain how the afterbirth came out causing a severe wound in the woman's uterus. To allow this wound to heal and the mother to recover from birth, she needed to stay in bed for about a week. During this period, one had to pay great attention to hygiene so that no dirt entered her body and caused blood poisoning.[26] The anatomical and physiological details of Hodann's narrative contributed to a medical representation of childbirth that stressed the risks involved.

Whereas the woman and her feelings were at the centre of Meyer's narrative, Hodann made only a short reference to the experience of pregnant women, pointing out that nine months of pregnancy were difficult for all mothers and that they therefore required protection and support.[27] It is only at the very end of his narrative that Hodann alluded to the role of the mother when he directly addressed his young readers, reminding them of their mother's suffering during pregnancy and childbirth: 'But now you also know that the mother has many more reasons to celebrate your birthday than you yourself have!'[28]

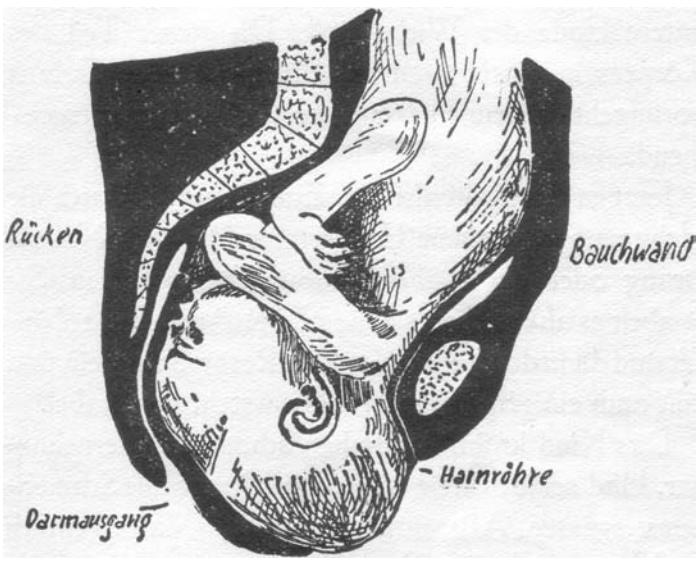


Figure 8.3 M. Hodann, *Bringt uns wirklich der Klapperstorch?* [*Does the Stork Really Bring Us?*] *Ein Lehrbuch für Kinder lesbar*, Rudolstadt: Greifenberg, 1928, p. 21.

THE YOUNG AS THE FUTURE SAVIOUR OF THE RACE: PREPARING FOR REPRODUCTION

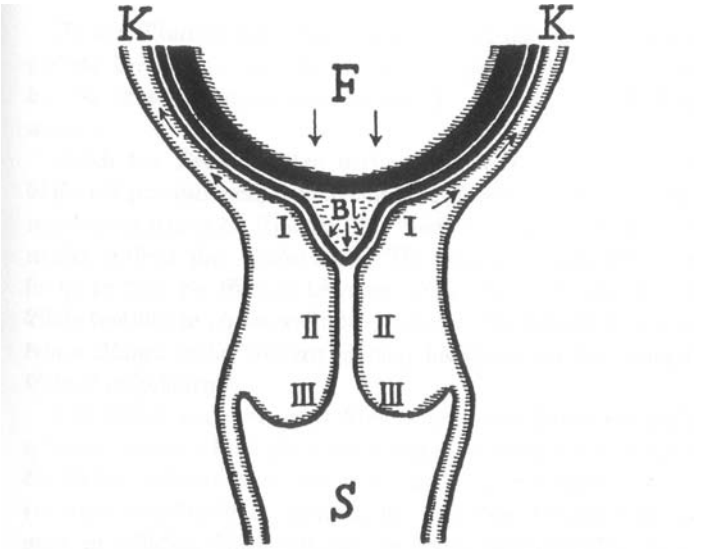
The changes in the political culture from the Weimar Republic to the Nazi regime also had an influence on sex education. The works of socialist authors such as Hodann and those of Jewish origin were banned, or they were themselves forced into exile or sent to Concentration Camps. The main concern of many sex educators remained with VD and the sexual morality of the young, but they added racial concerns and a eugenic and anti-Semitic agenda evident elsewhere from the 1900s.[29] The debates on the declining birth rate which had begun at the start of the century and gained momentum during the First World War, and the ensuing discourses on social and racial hygiene in the Weimar Republic, brought issues surrounding reproduction and the pregnant woman (such as birth control, abortion, and infant health care) into the centre of public attention.[30] The pregnant woman and the mother became of special concern to the State, this time as the 'sanctified' bearer of the future Aryan generation in an increasingly militarized society.[31] Hence, the pregnant body was no longer private, but became a matter of public attention under constant medical surveillance. The individual did not count, it was the *Gemeinschaft* (community), the *Volkskörper* (literally: body of the people), that mattered.

In 1938, the physician, Albert Wolff, published *Sexual Education: Enlightenment, Hygiene*. The book was designed to supply mothers with the necessary knowledge to educate their children on sexual matters, but it was also intended for independent use by more mature children.[32] In his heavily medical narrative, readers were provided with even more details on fertilization and cell division, and on pregnancy and embryonic development, than in previous sex education books, including Hodann's.[33] Wolff's message was clear: pregnancy had to be monitored by physicians and women should regularly seek medical advice.[34]

At the same time, Wolff's depiction of pregnancy also went back to early twentieth-century representations of the pregnant woman who had to be held in awe.[35] In a mixture of religious references and Nazi ideology, he represented becoming a mother as 'a sacrifice to the future of one's own race (*Geschlecht*) and people (*Volk*), to mankind: Is not every mother […] per se a high priest of the divine Creator?'[36] However, in contrast to Wegener and Meyer, Wolff's image of pregnancy was not obscure but embedded within clear instructions for a healthy lifestyle. In line with the Nazi ideology of the healthy citizen, he criticized those women who out of vanity suppressed their bodily changes in pregnancy through corsets and maternity girdles. At the same time, he argued that women should not parade their pregnant body, a belief which stemmed from the nineteenth century anti-sexual tradition of associating pregnant bodies with sexual intercourse. Instead, pregnant women were expected to cover their bodies up with appropriate clothing for as long as possible. Wolff also recommended a health regime, including massages and gymnastics as well as sports to train the pregnant body and prepare it for childbirth. However,

women were advised to avoid gaining hard features or 'soldier-like' muscles and bones, and to be careful not to lose their 'softness of true femininity' as a result of such training. Of course, women needed to keep their female bodies different and distinguishable from male bodies.[37]

The religious and mystifying undertone of Wolff's narrative also became apparent in the title of the book's chapter on childbirth: 'The holy hour is approaching … '.[38] Childbirth will be a very painful experience, as Wolff spelled out in a threatening statement: '"Under pain you shall give birth to your child": so it has been since time immemorial – under pain – and that gives your great and magnificent sacrifice the last consecration […].'[39] However, Wolff not only provided a religious justification for labour pain, but also a medical explanation. In a graphic metaphor, he described the working of the fetus' head as like a 'ram' (*Rammbock*) forcing its way out of the uterus, thereby causing increasing pain. Employing medical and mechanistic terms, Wolff depicted the central function of the uterus in a schematic drawing which explained how the pressure on the amniotic sac helped to widening the cervix and the vagina (Figure 8.4). This illustration gave a technical impression of childbirth and of the forces involved, thereby vividly illustrating Wolff's metaphor of the fetus' head as a 'ram'. In Wolff's narrative, the woman is only mentioned when her child is born, when her feelings are explained in euphoric words: 'Oh you mothers: what a blissful moment!'[40]



F: Fruchtblaſe (Druck von oben). KK: Gebärmutterkörper (Zug nach oben). Bl: Fruchtblaſe, mit ihrer fruchtwaſſergefüllten Spitze keilförmig vordringend. I: Innerer Muttermund (bereits erweitert). II: Mutterhals. III: Äußerer Muttermund. S: Scheide.

Figure 8.4 A. Wolff, *Geschlechtliche Erziehung*. [*Sexual Education*]. Aufklärung, Hygiene. Gespräche mit einem Arzt, Stuttgart: Süddeutsches Verlagshaus, 1938, p. 56.

In contrast to Wolff's medical approach, Rose Woldsted–Lauth wrote her successful sex education book *Girl Today – Mother Tomorrow* (1940) in a colloquial style of dialogues between a mother and her daughter, addressing girls of different age-levels starting with the 6–8 year olds.[41] In line with Nazi-ideology, Woldsted–Lauth's narrative aimed to prepare girls for their future role as mothers. Her central message was clear: motherhood was the ultimate destiny of every woman; hence girls had to be prepared for it from an early age. Although she informed the 6–8 year old girls about fertilization and pregnancy, she left her readers in the dark about the sexual act itself. When father and mother love each other very much, she wrote, they not only kiss on their mouth but with 'the whole body. So intimately, that from sheer love the life juice comes out of the man's body and finds its way into the woman's womb (*Schoß*). There it meets the hidden egg and through this the baby's life is caused.'[42] However, a young girl had to wait a long time before she could have a baby herself because she first had to learn everything 'a good mother has to be able to do' such as housekeeping (cooking, sewing, etc) and child care.[43]

Older girls were informed about some of the medical aspects of pregnancy. Interestingly, in Woldsted–Lauth's narrative, it is not the uterus but the fetus which initiates birth. When the baby is big enough, it wakes up and 'kicks open a small door in mother's womb and comes out', which is very painful for the mother.[44] Woldsted–Lauth also thought it to be important that fourteen-year old girls knew about the many risks pregnancy carried, including mis-carriages, stillbirths, or even death, but she emphasized that the risk of dying in pregnancy was very small due to the medical care provided by physicians.[45]

Like many German physicians of the time,[46] Woldsted–Lauth seemed to have been convinced that birth pain was a necessary experience for a woman in order to become a loving mother. In the tradition of the *fin-de-siècle* moral, she employed her frightening narrative on childbirth to discourage young girls from premature sexual experiences. Hence, like Wolff, she did not discuss the powerful anaesthetics and analgesics doctors had at their disposal from the 1920s.[47] As historian, Patricia Stokes, pointed out, the 'pendulum of cultural beliefs' on birth pain swung back towards greater stoicism during the Nazi period.[48] Wolff's narrative, however, aimed not at shocking girls with an extremely painful image of childbirth, but, in line with the pronatalism of the Nazi regime, suggested a slightly more positive image that aimed at encouraging young women to have children.

TEACHING FAMILY VALUES

The immediate post-war decades saw an increasing public interest in the sexual behaviour especially of the young which the Conservative government tried to police with new legislation on public morality. The 1950s were marked by a re-Christianisation of West German society driven particularly by the Rhineland Catholicism of the Conservative government. Discourses on sexual

morality emphasized the need to restore traditional Christian values of the family and marriage which were perceived as having been destroyed by the barbarism of the Third Reich. This evocation of 'a fantasized version of past security and stability' was a reaction to the fast cultural changes West German society experienced in a period which not only brought the 'economic miracle', but also, with rock'n'roll and the bikini, a new wave of eroticism.[49]

This re-emphasis on morality and traditional values is reflected in several sex education books of the time. Rather than highlighting the medical aspects of reproduction, popular sex educators of the 1950s, such as Theodor Bovet, a Swiss-born Protestant neurologist and marriage counsellor, or Klemens Tilmann, Catholic professor for pedagogy and catechetics in Munich, stressed the need to re-establish sexual morality, traditional gender relations and the Christian values of marriage and family among the generation born during the Nazi period.[50]

Bovet's two popular sex education books, one designed for boys, the other for girls, which both became available in Germany in the 1950s, did not differ much in their medical narrative on pregnancy and childbirth. A few pages were sufficient for him to deal with human reproduction and sexual intercourse. Pregnancy is dealt with on just one page, explaining the effects it had on the woman's body and giving very few medical details on fetal development. Bovet concluded by stating that a pregnant woman cannot do much during pregnancy other than ask God for his blessing for her child.[51] The medical aspects of reproduction were not at centre stage. Instead, Bovet's narrative focussed on the traditional gender roles, with girls portrayed as future mothers caring for offspring at home and boys represented as future fathers earning the family's income. He embedded his narrative on reproduction in lengthy explanations of love and marriage and the contrasting roles of men and women. Men were seen as the active agent in public and women as the passive one in her realm, the home.

Preparing children for their future duties as fathers and mothers was Bovet's main concern. He insisted that 'love between man and woman is not the only point of marriage; rather its most original purpose – as with sexuality in general – is to father (*zeugen*) offspring.'[52] Hence, Bovet abstained from any graphic description of labour pain and was more cautious about depicting the risks of childbirth than previous sex educators. Only boys were told that some women might die during labour. Boys therefore had to regard mothers with awe and look upon the 'entire process of fertilization, pregnancy and childbirth with deep respect and holy shyness'.[53] Bovet was more cautious in his advice for girls as he wanted to equip them with the 'right' knowledge for their future task of pregnancy and motherhood. He did not want to shock girls with detailed descriptions of childbirth which detered them from wanting children. Thus, girls learned about the great joy of seeing the newborn and were reminded of the immense responsibility they would later carry as mothers.[54] It was 'the most ardent wish of every woman', the 'greatest happiness' and 'greatest blessing' she could experience, to have children.[55]

One of the most prominent sex educators of the 1960s in West Germany was Kurt Seelmann, a psychotherapist, education advisor, and director of the youth welfare department of the city of Munich. His *Where Do Small Boys and Girls Come From* became the most successful sex education book of the time, with eighteen editions before 1979.[56] Written for children aged 9–14, it was a mixture of medical, anatomical and physiological information about the maturing body and instructions about gender roles. Still strongly committed to re-establishing traditional gender roles – an interest he shared with Bovet and Tilmann – Seelmann took the lead in a new direction of sex education. His narrative and images dealt in greater detail with reproduction than sex educators of the 1950s. But in contrast to the sex educators of the 1920s and 1930s, he did so in plain and illustrative language which avoided medical terminology wherever possible, and endeavoured to be comprehensible to children, relating the narrative to their world and experiences.

Seelmann's narrative on fertilisation began by comparing plants and human beings, followed by the physiology of the human body in general and the changes occurring in a woman's physiology during pregnancy. An entire chapter was devoted to explaining why men could not get pregnant. Seelmann began by describing the differences in the sexual anatomy of the male and female body which he then related to gender, thereby paying particular attention to the different roles of mother and father. Giving many examples, he suggested to his young readers that they loved their father for his 'knowledge and his fairness'. The father knew all about public life, he was stronger than the mother and able to repair a lot of things. However, he knew nothing about bringing up small children. This he left to the mother.[57] Firmly based in the post-war tradition, Seelmann's narrative, as well as his illustrations, cemented this traditional gender model by grounding it in the body's biology. For the first time, the pregnant woman is visualised and situated within a social context (Figure 8.5). A boy is depicted offering his help to an apparently pregnant woman carrying her shopping. He does so because he knows – perhaps through sex education – that a pregnant woman needs help. With his text and illustrations, Seelmann portrayed pregnant women as weak and helpless and demanded that the young reader show consideration to them.[58]

Thus, in the post-war decades, the mystery which had been so central to previous narratives of reproduction had largely disappeared. So too had the emphasis on the heroism and pain of labour. Bovet and Seelmann depicted pregnancy and childbirth as unproblematic events which were easily explicable and risk-free.[59] Medicine's claim to have made childbirth safer increasingly entered the narratives of sex education.[60] Seelmann, for instance, emphasized that a contemporary woman preferred to go to a clinic to have her child because there she received all the care she needed, was supported by a midwife or a doctor, and could rest to regain her strength so as to return home 'fully fit to do her work as before'.[61] This shift towards a more positive image of pregnancy and childbirth both reflected and reinforced the importance West-German social policy placed on protecting motherhood in the 1960s.[62]

Figure 8.5 K. Seelmann, *Woher kommen die kleinen Buben und Mädchen*. [*Where Do Small Boys and Girls Come From*]. Ein kleines Buch zum Vor und Selberlesen für 9 bis 14jährige Mädchen und Buben, illustrated by Ali Mitgutsch, Munich, Basel: Ernst Reinhardt, 1961, 9th edition 1966, p. 35. With kind permission from Ernst Reinhard Verlag, Munich, Germany.

'VALUE FREE' SCIENTIFIC SEX EDUCATION

The increasing number of sex education books available to the young by the late 1960s and 1970s was, in part, triggered by a decision by the Permanent Conference of the Ministers for Education of the German Länder in 1968 to introduce sex education in all schools.[63] In 1969, in accordance with the Conference's teaching guidelines, the Federal Centre for Health Education (*Bundeszentrale für Gesundheitliche Aufklärung*, BZgA), published an illustrated *Sex Education Atlas* to be used by parents and by teachers in school sex education for children over 14 years of age.[64] In her introduction, Health Minister, Käte Strobel, from the Social Democratic Party, stated that it was the intention of the *Atlas* to provide only 'scientifically based factual information'.[65] With the *Atlas*, official sex education moved away from a narrative that

included the social aspects of reproduction. Instead, by abstaining from any references to emotions and by focussing on the biological and medical aspects of childbirth, the *Atlas* presented childbirth in purely scientific terms. This scientific approach to sex education was in accordance with a general trend in school pedagogy of the late 1960s which aimed at introducing rationalistic and academically justified curricula.[66]

The main theme of the *Atlas* was reproduction, explained in great medical detail and with several schematic and, for the first time, photographic images.[67] Six coloured cross-section drawings of the body of a pregnant woman (Figure 8.6) illustrated the chapter on pregnancy, explaining embryonic and fetal development and the related changes in the woman's body. Further

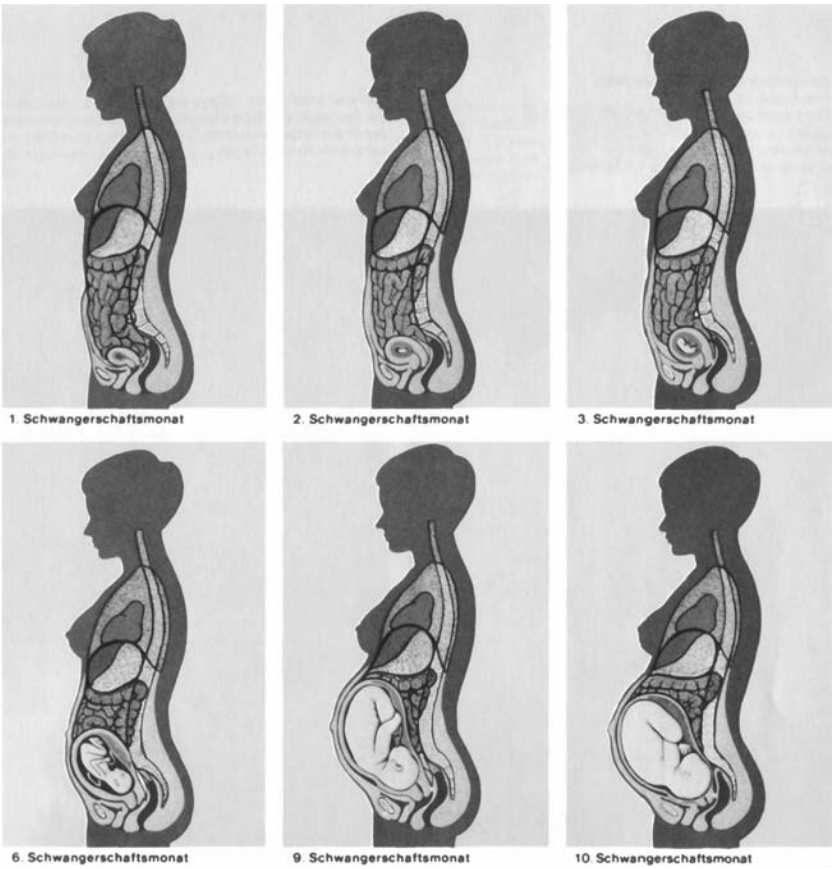


Figure 8.6 Bundeszentrale für Gesundheitliche Aufklärung, *Sexualkunde-Atlas*. [*Sex Education Atlas*]. *Biologische Informationen zur Sexualität des Menschen*, Opladen: C.W. Leske, 1969, p. 23. With kind permission from the Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung, Bonn, Germany.

schematic drawings depicted the muscles of the uterus (Figure 8.7) and its changing position throughout pregnancy. This biological and medical knowledge, mediated through text and illustrations, suggested scientific authority and precision. The chapter included a table with the average size and weight of embryos and fetuses. Children learned about the average length of the umbilical cord, and about how many litres of blood the fetus' heart pumped through its body within 24 hours.[68] This kind of knowledge was typical for a biology school textbook and students could easily be tested on it without causing much embarrassment.

Although photographic images were central to the visual rhetoric of the *Atlas*, the pregnant woman was only depicted in cross-section drawings as an object for anatomical study. There are no portraits of her intact body allowing her to display individuality and emotions. Instead, what was shown were photographic images of the foetus. Consequently, the narrative was also silent about what the mother felt during pregnancy or how she experienced her body. Young readers only learned that pregnant women needed regular medical check-ups.[69]

After having portrayed the process of giving birth in drawings of the woman's pelvis,[70] the *Atlas* moved on to a series of four striking photographic

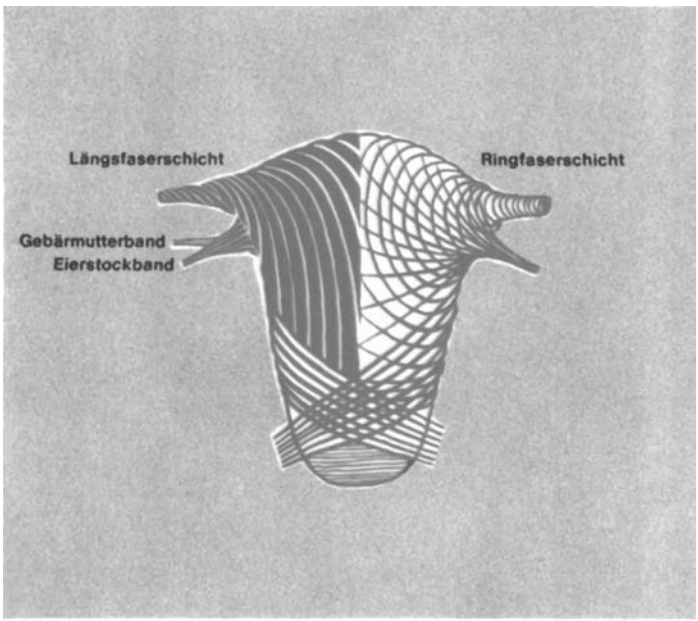


Figure 8.7 Bundeszentrale für Gesundheitliche Aufklärung, *Sexualkunde-Atlas*. [*Sex Education Atlas*]. *Biologische Informationen zur Sexualität des Menschen*, Opladen: C.W. Leske, 1969, p. 23. With kind permission from the Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung, Bonn, Germany.

images of the last stages of birth. These images were stills taken from the 1967 sex education film *Helga: On the Origins of Human Life*, commissioned by the Ministry of Health.[71] The first image (Figure 8.8 left), depicted in a close-up shot the moment the head of the child emerged through the stretched vulva, with two helping hands assisting. This graphic image proved to the beholder that the birth act was not a social but a biological event. The second image (Figure 8.8 right) was of the new born baby, lying in blood, still covered with vernix and connected to the mother through the umbilical cord. The third image (Figure 8.9 left) had the face of the crying newborn after it had been washed and, as the text indicated, the umbilical cord had been cut. The last

Figure 8.8 Bundeszentrale für Gesundheitliche Aufklärung, *Sexualkunde-Atlas*. [*Sex Education Atlas*]. *Biologische Informationen zur Sexualität des Menschen*, Opladen: C.W. Leske, 1969, p. 28. With kind permission from the Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung, Bonn, Germany.

Figure 8.9 Bundeszentrale für Gesundheitliche Aufklärung, *Sexualkunde-Atlas*. [*Sex Education Atlas*]. *Biologische Informationen zur Sexualität des Menschen*, Opladen: C.W. Leske, 1969, p. 29. With kind permission from the Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung, Bonn.

image in the sequence (Figure 8.9 right) presented the examination of a blood-dripping placenta.

None of these images depicted the woman in or after labour. Neither her full body nor her face was visible to the beholder, thus denying her any identity. The woman seemed to be strangely detached from the birth process. The *Atlas* represented labour as something that happened to her, not as an event in which she actively took part. Consequently, the narrative discussed neither the mother's nor the father's emotions. Furthermore, the attending medical professionals also remained impersonal, with only their gloved hands depicted. The visual narrative entirely centred on the newborn whose distressed face was separately portrayed (Figure 8.9 left).

The green clothes visible on all photos as well as the gloved hands of the professionals underlined the medical and clinical image of childbirth. The text praised the shifting location of childbirth from the home to the clinic, where medical technology was available, as all women knew 'that unforeseen difficulties may occur during every delivery'.[72] The medical approach of the *Atlas* is also reflected in the amount of detailed medical explanation of childbirth given to young readers.[73]

Together with the film *Helga*, the *Atlas* drew the public's attention in an unprecedented way to the sex education of the young and caused an enormous but mixed public response.[74] An opinion poll in 1969 revealed that, although very few people had actually seen the *Atlas*, 60 per cent of the respondents had heard about it and one-third approved of its medical approach to sex education.[75] Some commentators similarly praised this approach and welcomed the *Atlas* for school sex education.[76] However, it was heavily criticized by many others, especially the Churches and Conservative parties, but also by some physicians and pedagogues, because the *Atlas* neither dealt with the moral aspects of sexuality nor with partnership and marriage.[77] Critics believed that the language as well as some of the drawings were too technical, and difficult for students and even some parents to comprehend.[78] In particular, many critics deplored the illustrations of the birth scene, especially the image of the placenta (Figure 8.9 right), which were considered to be repulsive and too shocking for children. It was felt that girls might be traumatized by these images and driven into 'frigidity', dissuading them from wanting to have children.[79] However, some school teachers who used the *Atlas* in their sex education classes reported positive reactions from students and claimed that even the more controversial images were rejected only by a minority of pupils.[80]

THE PREGNANT WOMAN GOES PUBLIC: REPRODUCTION IN ITS SOCIAL CONTEXT

Although during the 1970s most sex education books continued to represent pregnancy and childbirth as a predominantly medical event,[81] a new trend began to emerge situating reproduction in a wider social context. By the end of

the 1970s, sex education books had moved away from narratives focussing on the biology of reproduction, and placed childbirth in the context of West Germany's consumer society in both textual and visual representations. Increasingly, the depiction of the pregnant woman was within family life, and her male partner was often portrayed as a full participant in pregnancy and child care.[82]

An early example of this shift was *Boy, Girl, Man and Woman* by Joachim Brauer, a school headmaster and director of a teacher's training college, the artist, Gerhard Kapitzke, and Karl Horst Wrage, a doctor, psychotherapist and marriage counsellor who had worked for the Protestant Churches.[83] Although quite similar to the *Atlas* in its medical narrative of childbirth,[84] the authors completed their chapter on childbirth with a black-and-white photograph depicting the happy family in the maternity ward. Father and mother were smiling and holding hands over the cradle of their new-born (Figure 8.10). The caption stated that this photo had been taken in a clinic where the husband was allowed to watch the birth of his child, which explained him wearing a white coat.[85] This was the first visual appearance of a father within the setting of childbirth in a sex education book, and could be seen as a response to public debates in the 1970s on the presence of fathers during delivery.[86]

The authors discussed the social and economic consequences of having children for a married couple in some detail, thereby situating reproduction in the social context of the emerging consumer society. They outlined how future parents should prepare the home for the arrival of their infant and what to buy or borrow. They also discussed the implications of having children for married and family life. In their narrative and illustrations, the authors provided a gendered image of having a baby in a traditional family setting. The husband

Der Mann besucht seine Frau am Wochenbett.
Unser Bild wurde in einer Klinik aufgenommen, in der der Mann bei der Geburt seines Kindes zusehen durfte. Aus diesem Grunde hat er einen weißen Kittel an.

Figure 8.10 J. Brauer, G. Kapitzke, K.H. Wrage, *Junge, Mädchen, Mann und Frau*, [*Boy, Girl, Man and Woman*]; vol. 1: *Für 8 bis 12jährige*, Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1970, 4th edition 1972, p. 55. With kind permission from Joachim Brauer, Germany.

was expected to have an adequate income to maintain a family and the mother to forego paid employment to devote her time to the care of the newborn and to housework. However, there was some recognition of the impact on a woman's career of having children, and it was suggested that she should have some say in when this took place.[87]

In his second sex education book, published together with the social pedagogue and psychotherapist, Gerhard Regel, Joachim Brauer departed from the traditional model of gender-roles. *Tanja and Fabian* was a picture book aimed at children aged 4–8.[88] With large coloured photographs and short paragraphs, it told the story of two children: Tanja, a daughter of a single mother, and Fabian, a single child in a traditional family, and their discovery of their sexuality. Pregnancy was introduced to the children (including the reader) with a single photograph depicting Fabian at home in the living room with his parents and his friend Tanja (Figure 8.11). Fabian's mother is pregnant and Tanja listens at her belly to see whether she can hear the baby's movements. In a complementary gesture, Fabian touches his father's belly and the children learn that men cannot get pregnant. Here, for the first time, the father is actively integrated in the narrative on pregnancy and not excluded as in previous sex education books. Even more visible than in Seelmann's book, children themselves played a role in the narrative; they were discovering sexuality and reproduction, thereby enabling their peers to identify with the narrative.

Whereas the *Atlas* depicted childbirth by directing the gaze of the beholder to the woman's genitalia, the three coloured photographs in *Tanja and Fabian* showed the entire birth scene in the clinic. The visual rhetoric of *Tanja and Fabian* allowed children to become more engaged in the story of childbirth than in previous sex education books.[89] Most strikingly, the first image (Figure 8.12) depicted the mother in labour at the moment the head of the baby emerged from her vulva. Despite placing this moment into the centre of the image, and thereby referring to previous visual representations of childbirth as a biological event, the imminent birth now became situated in a social context involving individuals and their emotions. For the first time, the father was part of the scenario and as a bystander watching from the top end of the bed. A midwife and three nurses were assisting. Childbirth was no longer an impersonal process but became a social event.

Although the image seemed to be a photographic document of childbirth, it was at the same time an arranged scenario as the mother's make-up indicates. The image represented the mother looking surprisingly relaxed and smiling, contrasting with the assertion in the text that childbirth was painful. The drip in the background suggests the administration of pain-relieving drugs. In contrast to earlier narratives of childbirth, with their emphasis on pain and fear, childbirth here was represented to children as a medically controlled and joyful event.

How much the purely biological approach was out of date by the mid-1970s becomes clear from the revised 1974 edition of the *Sex Education Atlas*.[90] The Federal Centre for Health Education had accepted some of the criticisms of the

Fabian weiß,
wie Torsten auf die Welt gekommen ist.
Er kann sich noch gut daran erinnern.
Seine Mutter sagte eines Tages:
»Ich bin schwanger.
In meinem Bauch wächst ein Kind.«

Fabian hat das gleich Tanja erzählt.
Als sie ihn besuchte,
wollte sie das Baby im Bauch hören.
Fabian fühlte inzwischen an Vaters Bauch.
Aber Männer bekommen keine Kinder.
Sie werden nicht schwanger.

12

Figure 8.11 J. Brauer, G. Regel, *Tanja und Fabian*. [*Tanja and Fabian*]. *Ein Bilderbuch für 4 bis 8jährige*, photos by H. Rogge, Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1974, 3rd edition 1992, p. 12. With kind permission from Joachim Brauer and Gerhard Regel, Germany.

Kurz vor der Geburt
ging Fabians Mutter in ein Krankenhaus.
Jetzt wird Torsten geboren.

Eine Hebamme und Schwestern
helfen der Mutter und Torsten.
Fabians Vater kann bei der Geburt dabeisein.

Figure 8.12 J. Brauer, G. Regel, *Tanja und Fabian*. [*Tanja and Fabian*]. *Ein Bilderbuch für 4 bis 8jährige*, photos by H. Rogge, Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1974, 3rd edition 1992, p. 14. With kind permission from Joachim Brauer and Gerhard Regel, Germany.

first edition and, although the text of the second edition still centred on the biological aspects of reproduction, all the previous images of the birth scene were substituted with a new series of images. These were copied from the popular monthly magazine, *Eltern* (*Parents*), which had published a sensational two-part photo-series in 1971 documenting the birth of a child for the first time in a popular magazine.[91]

By the 1970s, medicalized, clinical childbirth came increasingly under attack from the feminist and the women's health movement. Whereas most sex education books represented childbirth in the environment of a clinic, emphasizing its medically controlled safety, some more left-wing sex education books mentioned homebirth as an option.[92] The most explicit depiction of homebirth – and of childbirth in general – can be found in *About Love and Having Children* by the Danish physician, Bent Claësson.[93] In plain and colloquial language that avoided medical terminology, the book told the story of a couple whose previous two children had been born in a clinic. This time they opted for a home-birth so that their children could be present. Hence, childbirth became an event which involved the entire family. Following the tradition of documentary photography,[94] a sequence of 20 black-and-white photographs illustrated Claësson's narrative.[95] The majority depicted the entire birth scene in the family's living room with the father and the two children on the one side of the make-shift bed, and a midwife and physician on the other. The sequence began with four images illustrating how the midwife examined the pregnant woman and prepared her for birth by washing her genitals. The following images depicted the delivery in an unprecedentedly graphic way.

In sharp contrast to the images from the 1969 *Sex Education Atlas* which focussed solely on the woman's genitals, Claësson's visual rhetoric drew the viewer's attention to the labouring woman as an individual. She is depicted actively giving birth and not represented as a uterus from which the baby emerges or is extracted. From her face, the beholder can see the pain and strain of pushing the baby out. Both text and illustrations documented the emotions of everyone else involved. Her husband supported her and the children were watching the events more out of curiosity than shock. Their reactions to what they saw and experienced formed an important part of Claësson's narrative that recorded their comments and questions. At several stages, Claësson addressed his readers directly, explaining to them what they saw on the images.[96] Thus, the visual and textual narratives embraced the young readers and invited them to participate in an event they otherwise would probably not have witnessed.[97]

THE AUTONOMOUS WOMAN

The fundamental nature of this shift in focus towards the individuality of the pregnant women in the 1970s becomes obvious with the publication of *Sex Primer*, co-authored by Peter Jacobi, an expert on adolescence and an influential sex educator.[98] Although to a lesser extent than Brauer and Regel's picture

book, *Sex Primer* relied strongly on illustrations. The anti-war comments and the challenging of traditional gender roles[99] positioned this sex education book along with the work of Claësson in the 'progressive', pacifist and left wing genre of sex education.[100] The medical aspects of fertilization and pregnancy were absent from the narrative which, again, as with Claësson's book, avoided all technical and medical expressions and instead used very simple and even colloquial expressions comprehensible to children. The first pages dealt with the fairytales children were usually told about where they came from. These were dismissed as 'nonsense' and children were told how they actually grew inside their mother's body. The progress of pregnancy and the development of the baby inside the woman's body was then visualised with the help of coloured schematic drawings.[101]

For the first time a German sex education book illustrated the 'fact' that a woman was pregnant with a black-and-white photograph depicting in profile a highly pregnant and naked woman together with a naked boy listening at her belly (Figure 8.13). This image represented a mother and son in an intimate conversation about pregnancy. The pregnant woman here revealed her naked body to the gaze of the young reader. This image allowed for the representation of a pregnant woman's individuality and emotions. Whereas sex education literature from the first half of the twentieth century required women to cover their pregnant body to disguise pregnancy from the view of others, the 1970s became more tolerant of visual representations of pregnancy.

Another example of this genre was the controversial sex education book, *Show Me!*, by the American-born photographer, Will McBride, and the German physician, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Helga Fleischhauer–Hardt.[102] *Show Me!* developed its entire narrative about sexuality from the perspective of two children. More than 70 large black-and-white photos and their captions told the story of a young boy and girl discovering sexuality through their own bodies and the bodies of adults. *Show Me!* became a controversial book because its explicit photographs not only showed children's genitals and sexual intercourse, but also because Helmut Kentler, one of West Germany's leading sexual pedagogues, endorsed sexual activities between children and adults in his introduction.[103] Yet, *Show Me!* saw numerous reprints, and in 1971, McBride was awarded the Gold Medal by the American Art Directors Club for the book.[104]

Reproduction was the major theme in McBride's visual narrative. McBride represented pregnancy with an image portraying the naked bodies of a highly pregnant woman and a girl, in profile and facing each other in a conversation (Figure 8.14). Reading it from left to right this image explained the central message of the book's narrative; that for a girl becoming an adult was about becoming a woman who gave birth to children. What was important to McBride's visual narrative was the presentation of pregnancy as the outcome of a couple's love for each other and their joyful sex designed to conceive a child and complete a family.

In contrast to all other sex education books of the time, the question as to where and how a baby emerges from the woman's body was not of relevance

Figure 8.13 Peter Jacobi, Heidi Kriedemann, Lutz Maier, and Inge Peters, *Sexfibel* [*Sex Primer*], Opladen: Leske, 1972, p. 6.

to McBride. Instead, he exclusively focussed on how the woman experienced childbirth. Three close-ups (Figure 8.15) depicted the woman's face with the captions explaining the events from the perspective of the two children studying the photos. The caption to the first image claimed that the woman looks 'so frightened', and the following two captions stated that she cried out in pain during labour because her vagina was widening. The following two images then depicted the newborn baby and the laughing face of the woman expressing her joy after having given birth. 'The baby is here, it does not hurt anymore at all. The mother is very happy', the caption read.[105] In contrast to previous sex education books, McBride represented labour entirely as an emotional experience of the mother without any reference to a medical and biological context. It is only in Fleischhauer – Hardt's commentary that some of the medical and biological background of reproduction was introduced.[106]

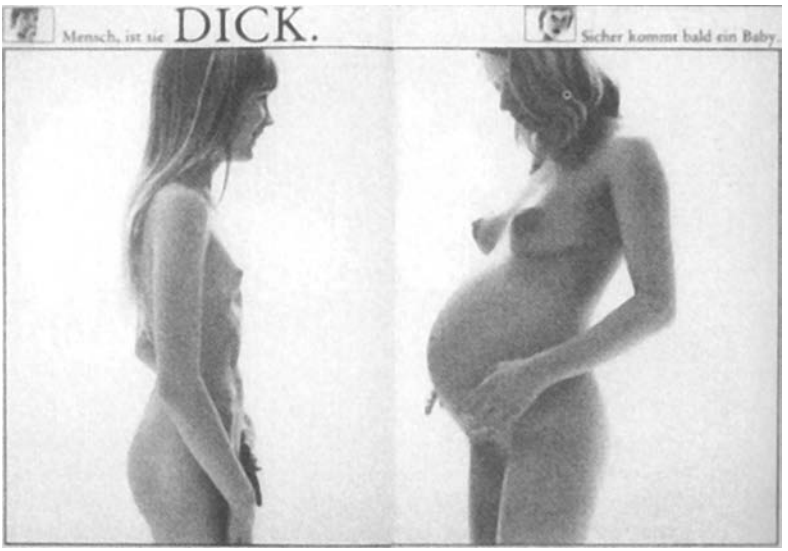


Figure 8.14 Will McBride, *Zeig mal!* [*Show Me!*] *Ein Bilderbuch für Kinder und Erwachsene*, Wuppertal: Hammer, 6th reprint 1983, pp.134–5. With kind permission from Peter Hammer Verlag (Jugenddienst-Verlag), Wuppertal, and Will McBride, Germany.

Figure 8.15 Will McBride, *Zeig mal!* [*Show Me!*] *Ein Bilderbuch für Kinder und Erwachsene*, Wuppertal: Hammer, 6th reprint 1983, pp.136–41. With kind permission from Peter Hammer Verlag (Jugenddienst-Verlag), Wuppertal, and Will McBride, Germany.

In many ways *Show Me!* represented sexuality in an open and very positive and joyful way involving pleasure and fun; its images gave the book a progressive attitude towards sexuality, acknowledging children's sexuality and encouraging them to sexually explore their bodies. But a closer reading reveals another layer of a rather traditional attitude toward gender roles. In her commentary, Fleischhauer–Hardt outlined what she and McBride intended to achieve with *Show Me!*: 'It will be one of the most important tasks of modern sex education to impart to maturing girls a natural positive attitude toward this part of female sexuality which encompasses motherly behaviour.' Arguing against the campaign of feminists for equal rights and opportunities for working women, Fleischhauer–Hardt demanded a more positive attitude towards women's role as mothers: 'The first and most important person to

look after infants and small children is by nature the mother […].' Whereas she represented the mother as confined 'by nature' to look after the children, the father was seen as the main breadwinner. In contrast to earlier texts, however, he was also expected to participate in childcare. Hence, Fleischhauer–Hardt encouraged parents to show boys how to cook and girls how to do handicrafts.[107]

The main purpose of *Show Me!* is very clear from the last two images (Figures 8.16 and 8.17). These acted as final statements of the book that, ultimately, sexuality would lead to the role of father or mother. Children were expected to learn that the process of growing up was fundamentally about a girl becoming a mother and a boy taking on the role of a father. Both children were depicted as happily accepting their future place in reproduction. Thus, the boy observes that (Figure 8.16): 'In case you ask me: As a grown-up I want to be a father' while the girl responds (Figure 8.17) 'and I a mother'.[108]

During the 1970s, another type of sex education material also emerged that discussed pregnancy and childbirth in an entirely different context. Coming from the students' movement and the sexual revolution of the late 1960s, authors such as Bent Claësson, Günter Amendt, the left-wing sociologist and sex therapist, Rolf Berger, a youth psychologist, and the English journalist, Jane Cousins, wrote about sexual feelings, erotic aspects of sex life, and the sexual problems confronting the young on attainment of puberty. Pregnancy was discussed in the context of prevention (birth control) and possible strategies for coping with unplanned pregnancy such as abortion, adoption, or marriage. Strikingly, their chapters about birth control and abortion were far longer than those dealing with pregnancy and childbirth.[109]

CONCLUSION

The representation of pregnancy and childbirth in (West) German sex education books between 1900 and 1980 was characterized by heterogeneity. The books under scrutiny differed in style, ranging from religious and military rhetoric to medical terminology and colloquial language. They differed in their narrative mode, incorporating to varying degrees dialogues between parent and child, letters, conversation between children, and the pronouncements of professional experts such as physicians, psychiatrists or pedagogues. They also differed in their employment of illustrations, ranging from pure text to picture books, and in the method of illustration, including engravings, drawings, and photographs.

The change in illustrations over the period is the most notable feature. First of all, the sheer number increased immensely from the late 1960s so that one could speak of a pictorial turn in sex education. During the first half the century, with a few notable exceptions, sex education books primarily mediated knowledge about reproduction through their narratives, but this changed in the late 1960s, when authors began to rely increasingly on the powerful effect of illustrations to unveil the anatomy and biology of reproduction. Initially through anatomical drawings, but later through vivid photographs, sex education

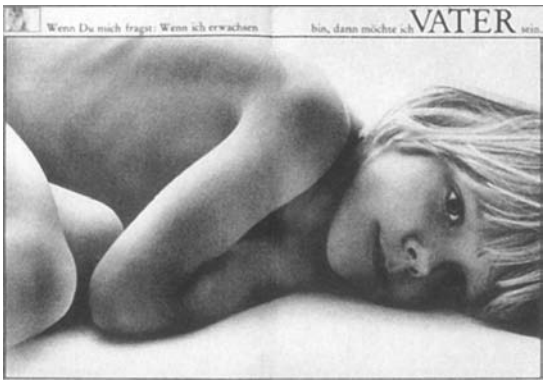


Figure 8.16 Will McBride, *Zeig mal!* [*Show Me!*] *Ein Bilderbuch für Kinder und Erwachsene*, Wuppertal: Hammer, 6th reprint 1983, pp.152–3. With kind permission from Peter Hammer Verlag, Wuppertal (Jugenddienst-Verlag), and Will McBride, Germany.

Figure 8.17 Will McBride, *Zeig mal!* [*Show Me!*] *Ein Bilderbuch für Kinder und Erwachsene*, Wuppertal: Hammer, 6th reprint 1983, pp.154–5. With kind permission from Peter Hammer Verlag, Wuppertal (Jugenddienst-Verlag), and Will McBride, Germany.

opened and revealed the inside of the woman's pregnant body to children. By depicting childbirth, the young gained access to an event they usually would otherwise not have encountered.

Although authors of sex education books agreed that reproduction in general was something all women and men should aim at, they disagreed on the image of reproduction they intended to portray to the young. The frightening images of reproduction, and especially of birth, of the first half to the twentieth

century, stressing the risks and pain involved in order to deter girls from engaging in premature sexual relations outside of marriage, was eventually discarded in the late 1960s and 1970s in favour of a more positive representation that depicted childbirth as also involving positive emotions. Increasingly, sex educators of the 1970s felt it unnecessary to deploy their narratives on childbirth to deter girls from pre-marital sexual intercourse; a shift heavily influenced by the introduction of the birth-control pill and general changes both in sexual morality and the sexual behaviour of the young since the mid-1960s.[110]

Another striking new feature which entered sex education in the 1970s was the children themselves who were represented as participants in the textual and visual narratives of reproduction, thereby facilitating the identification of young readers with the narrative. Authors of sex education books allowed children to discover pregnancy and childbirth for themselves and to comment on what they had seen and experienced to their peer group.

The narratives on reproduction played a central role in defining and naturalizing gender roles of femaleness and maleness. Throughout the period, women's role remained confined to the private sphere of the house, the family and childcare, whereas men were represented as acting in public and being the breadwinner and protector of the family. Significantly, it was only towards the end of the 1970s that these gendered images became less distinct.

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NOTES

1. Exceptions include D. Buckingham and S. Bragg, *Young people, sex, and the media: the facts of life?*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
2. For the significance of 'culturally-induced ignorance' (agnotology), see Crowther's chapter.
3. On the social construction of motherhood see, for example, E. Jeremiah: *Troubling Maternity: Mothering, Agency, and Ethics in Women's Writing in German of the 1970s and 1980s*, Leeds: Maney, 2003; E.A. Kaplan: *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*, London: Routledge, 1992.
4. L. Sauerteig, *Krankheit, Sexualität, Gesellschaft: Geschlechtskrankheiten und Gesundheitspolitik in Deutschland im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999, pp. 227–64; idem, 'Sex education in Germany from the eighteenth to the twentieth century', in F.X. Eder, L.A. Hall and G. Hekma (eds) *Sexual Cultures in Europe: Themes in Sexuality*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999, 9–33, pp. 15–19.

5. H. Wegener, *Wir jungen Männer. Das sexuelle Problem des gebildeten jungen Mannes vor der Ehe*, Königstein, Leipzig: Langewiesche, 1906, revised edition 1917.
6. Ibid., p. 46–47.
7. Ibid., p. 77. See E. Martin: 'The egg and the sperm: how science has constructed a romance based on stereotypical male-female roles', *Signs*, 1991, vol. 16, 485–501.
8. On the 'self-sacrificial mother', see P.R. Stokes, 'Purchasing comfort: patent remedies and the alleviation of labor pain in Germany between 1914 and 1933', in P. Betts and G. Eghigian (eds) *Pain and Prosperity: Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History*, Stanford: Standford UP, 2003, 61–87; C. Usborne, '"Pregnancy is the woman's active service." Pronatalism in Germany during the First World War', in R. Wall and J. Winter (eds) *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914–1918*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988, 389–416.
9. Wegener, *Wir jungen Männer*, p. 49.
10. E.M. Meyer, *Vor heiligen Toren. Ein Aufklärungsbuch der Jugend zum Eintritt ins Leben und in den sittlichen Kampf. Ein Vademecum auch den Erziehern und Jugendfreunden*, Stuttgart: Strecker&Schröder, 1913, repr. 1919.
11. Ibid., p. 57.
12. Ibid., pp. 64–65.
13. The book had three further reprints until 1922 and a new edition in 1938. On the dissolution of the family and the restructuring of gender relations, E. Domansky, 'Militarization and reproduction in World War I Germany', in G. Eley (ed.) *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870–1930*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996, 427–63.
14. Meyer, *Vor heiligen Toren*, pp. 44–49.
15. Ibid., p. 55–56.
16. Ibid., p. 59.
17. On the discourse of labour pain, see Stokes, 'Purchasing Comfort'.
18. For the same purpose, sex educators also employed narratives on VD. With examples from the 1950s, see P. Kuhnert and U. Ackermann, 'Jenseits von Lust und Liebe? Jugendsexualität in den 50er Jahren', in H.–H. Krüger (ed.) *'Die Elvis-Tolle, die hatte ich mir unauffällig wachsen lassen'. Lebensgeschichte und jugendliche Altagskultur in den fünfziger Jahren*, Opladen: Leske&Budrich, 1985, 43–83, pp. 51–54 and 72–80.
19. Meyer, *Vor heiligen Toren*, p. 60.
20. M. Hodann, *Bringt uns wirklich der Klapperstorch? Ein Lehrbuch für Kinder lesbar*, [revised 2nd edition of *Woher die Kinder kommen*, Rudolstadt: Greifenverlag, 1926], Rudolstadt: Greifenberg, 1928, reprint Berlin: Universitas, 1930.
21. On Hodann, see Sauerteig, *Krankheit*, pp. 170–71; Sauerteig, 'Sex education', pp. 21–22; and Lennerhed's chapter in this volume. Hodann's son, Jan Hodann, recalled being approached on several occasions by members of German trade unions, who had read Hodann's books during their childhood and found them very helpful (personal conversation, Stockholm, 21 November 2007).
22. Hodann, *Bringt uns wirklich der Klapperstorch?*, pp. 10, 12, and 14.
23. Ibid., pp. 15–16. The introduction of illustrations made *Bringt uns wirklich der Klapperstorch?* so contentious that a public prosecutor in Stuttgart tried to get an injunction against the book (and another of Hodann's sex advice books for adults) in 1928; see W. Wolff, *Max Hodann (1894–1946): Sozialist und Sexualreformer*, Hamburg: von Bockel, 1993, pp. 37–38.
24. On the concept of the uterus as a muscle, see E. Martin, *The Women in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*, Boston: Beacon, 1987, chapter 4.
25. Hodann, *Bringt uns wirklich der Klapperstorch*, p. 20.
26. Ibid., p. 23.

27. Ibid., p. 19.
28. Ibid., p. 22.
29. J.G. Giles, 'Straight talk for Nazi youth: The attempt to transmit heterosexual norms', in J. Sturm et al. (eds) *Education in Cultural Transmission: Historical Studies of Continuity and Change in Families, Schooling and Youth Cultures*, Gent: CSHP, 1996, 305–18; D. Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005, chapter 1.
30. Usborne, 'Pregnancy is the woman's active service'; P. Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism, 1870–1930*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
31. E.D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Post-War Germany*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, chapter 2; G. Czarnowski, 'The value of marriage for the *Volksgemeinschaft*: Policies towards women and marriage under National Socialism, in R. Bessel (ed.) *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996, 94–112. On Johanna Haarer, physician and author of popular NS educational and childcare advice books for mothers, which remained in print up until the 1980s, see S. Chamberlain, *Adolf Hitler, die deutsche Mutter und ihr erstes Kind. Über zwei NS-Erziehungsbücher*, Giessen: Psychosozialverlag, 1997.
32. A. Wolff: *Geschlechtliche Erziehung. Aufklärung, Hygiene. Gespräche mit einem Arzt*, Stuttgart: Süddeutsches Verlagshaus 1938, 2nd revised edition Stuttgart: Hädecke, 1943.
33. Ibid., pp. 34–39.
34. Ibid., p. 54.
35. Ibid., p. 41.
36. Ibid., p. 52.
37. Ibid., pp. 41–42, 45.
38. Ibid., p. 52.
39. Ibid., p. 54.
40. Ibid., pp. 55–60, quote at p. 60.
41. R. Woldstedt-Lauth, *Mädel von heute – Mütter von morgen. Gespräche zwischen Mutter und Tochter über das Liebesleben des Menschen*, Stuttgart: Strecker & Schröder, 1940, with three reprints in the same year.
42. Ibid., pp. 26–27.
43. Ibid., p. 21.
44. Ibid., pp. 16–17.
45. Ibid., pp. 35–37 and 50–51.
46. Stokes, 'Purchasing Comfort', pp. 69–70.
47. Ibid., pp. 65–68. Wolff, *Geschlechtliche Erziehung*, p. 55, at least informed his readers that women can relieve pain through special breathing techniques.
48. Stokes, 'Purchasing Comfort', p. 85.
49. Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, quote p. 102. Also see U. Herbert, 'Liberalisierung als Lernprozeß: Die Bundesrepublik in der deutschen Geschichte – eine Skizze', in idem (ed.) *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland: Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1945–1980*, Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002, 7–49, pp. 21–28, 35–49; Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?*, chapter 6; M. Niehuss, *Familie, Frau und Gesellschaft: Studien zur Strukturgeschichte der Familie in Westdeutschland 1949–1960*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001; R.G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 213; Kuhnert and Ackermann, 'Jenseits von Lust und Liebe'.
50. T. Bovet, *Von Mann zu Mann. Eine Einführung ins Reifealter für junge Männer* [*From Man to Man: An Introduction to the Age of Maturity for Young Men*], Tübingen: Katzmann, 1950, 3rd edition 1954; ibid, *Die werdende Frau. Eine*

Einführung ins Reifealter für junge Mädchen [*The Woman-To-Be: An Introduction to the Age of Maturity for Young Girls*], Tübingen: Katzmann, 1950, 3rd edition 1953. First published an 1948 in Switzerland, both books became very popular in West Germany with 12 editions in the 1960s. K. Tilmann, *Was du gern wissen möchtest. Eine Schrift von den Geheimnissen des Lebens für reifende Jungen* [*What You Would Like to Know: A Pamphlet on the Mysteries of Life for Maturing Boys*], Recklinghausen: Paulus, 1953; idem, *Damit du Bescheid weißt. Eine Schrift von den Geheimnissen des Lebens für reifende Mädchen* [*So that You Are in the Know: A Pamphlet on the Mysteries of Life for Maturing Girls*], Recklinghausen: Paulus, 1954; both saw seven reprints until 1966 and were subsequently adapted for Protestant children. See also Fenemore's chapter.

51. Bovet, *Von Mann zu Mann*, pp. 10–13; idem, *Die werdende Frau*, pp. 12–18.
52. Bovet, *Von Mann zu Mann*, p. 42.
53. Ibid., p. 14.
54. Bovet, *Die werdende Frau*, p. 18.
55. Ibid., p. 43.
56. K. Seelmann, *Woher kommen die kleinen Buben und Mädchen. Ein kleines Buch zum Vor- und Selberlesen für 9- bis 14jährige Mädchen und Buben*, Munich, Basel: Reinhardt, 1961, 9th edition 1966.
57. Ibid., pp. 37–42, quote at p. 39.
58. Children were also warned that not every stout woman was necessarily pregnant. Ibid., pp. 31–36.
59. Ibid., pp. 46–47
60. On the debate as to whether medicine has made childbirth safer, see P.A. Treichler, 'Feminism, medicine, and the meaning of childbirth', in M. Jacobus et al. (eds) *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, London: Routledge, 1990, 113–38; M. Tew, *Safer Childbirth? A Critical History of Maternity Care*, London: Free Association, 1998.
61. Seelmann, *Woher kommen die kleinen Buben und Mädchen*, pp. 43–44.
62. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, pp. 213–15.
63. 'Empfehlung zur Sexualerziehung in den Schulen', in *Sammlung der Beschlüsse der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1969, No. 659, 3 October 1968.
64. Bundeszentrale für Gesundheitliche Aufklärung (BZgA), *Sexualkunde-Atlas. Biologische Informationen zur Sexualität des Menschen*, Opladen: Leske, 1969; by the end of 1969 the *Atlas* was already about to be out-of-print. Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BA), B189/34085, brief for the Health Minister, 11 July 1969; B310/1106, M. Schreiber, 'Aufklärung ohne Scheu', *Die Zeit*, 20 June 1969.
65. BzgA, *Sexualkunde-Atlas*, p. 5.
66. T. Gass–Bolm, *Das Gymnasium 1945–1980. Bildungsreform und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Westdeutschland*, Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005, p. 377.
67. BzgA, *Sexualkunde-Atlas*, pp. 18–19, photographs at pp. 20–21.
68. Ibid., p. 22.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid., p. 27.
71. See Schwarz' chapter.
72. BzgA, *Sexualkunde-Atlas*, p. 26.
73. Ibid., pp. 26–27.
74. BA B310/1106, with Newspaper cuttings.
75. Ibid., press statement by the Government, Press Office, 7 August 1969, reporting the results of an opinion poll by the Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research from July 1969; J. Drews, 'Der Atlas', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1 July 1969.
76. BA B310/1114, statement by Dr M. Irle, Professor for Social Psychology, Mannheim University, 7 August 1969.

77. Ibid., Deutschlandfunk, manuscript of a radio feature on the *Atlas*, 28 August 1969; C. Hasenclever, 'Der Streit um den Sexualkundeunterricht', *Herder-Korrespondenz*, 1969, vol. 23, 433–38; B310/1110, W. Bombusch, 'Der Sexualkunde-Atlas und die Kirchen', manuscript of a radio programme, North-German Radio (NDR), 20 September 1969.
78. BA B310/1114, statement by Dr M. Irle, 7 August 1969; statement by the Catholic Institute for Marriage and Family Issues and the Study Group for Catholic Family Education; B310/1115, sex educator K.H. Wrage, 'Bloße "Aufklärung" reicht nicht mehr aus', *Evangelischer Kommentar*, 1969, No 9; B310/1106, H. Rahms, 'Wer mag da noch lieben? Sexualkunde in der Klempner-Sprache', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 June 1969.
79. BA, B310/1114, letters by the consultant Dr W. Freytag, 14 November 1969, and the sex educator Dr Parow–Souchon, 1 March 1970; expert opinion by Bremen's senator for education, Dr O. Bantje, 13 November 1969; article by a paediatrician from the Munich University Hospital, G. Biermann, 'Kann Aufklärung Kindern schaden?', *Selecta*, 1969, No 38, 3000–3004; B310/1115, expert opinion by K. Verch, lecturer at the Teachers Training Institute, Hamburg, and author of a sex education book.
80. BA, B310/1114, with reports by teachers from Nuremberg (H. Hußnätter, 22 February 1970; H. Bauer, 24 February 1970), and Altenberg (H. Herzog, 23 February 1970); expert opinion by Dr. W. Fischer, professor at the Pedagogical College of the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, 14 July 1969; reports and letters by students (Franz-Haniel-Gymnasium Homberg, 20 July 1970; B310/1110, Gymnasium Ludwigshafen, 24 November 1969); report by K. Plehn, Director of the Advisory Board on Sex Education at the Institute for Education of the City of Bremen, 18 March 1970; B310/1115, reports about comments by students, by Jörg Scheunemann, teacher at the secondary school in Otterndorf, 2 and 9 January 1970.
81. See, for instance, J. Brauer, G. Kapitzke and K.H. Wrage, *Junge, Mädchen, Mann und Frau*, vol. 1: *Für 8 bis 12jährige*, Gütersloh: Mohn, 1970, 4th edition 1972.
82. Examples include B.H. Claësson, *Vom Lieben und vom Kinderkriegen. Sexualinformationen für Kinder*, [Copenhagen 1973], [translated from the Danish by H. Lamprecht], Frankfurt/M.: Neue Kritik, 1974, 3rd edition 1979, e.g. p. 81.
83. Brauer, Kapitzke and Wrage, *Junge, Mädchen, Mann und Frau*, vol. 1. The first volume published in 1970 saw ten reprints in the 1970s and three editions by the popular Bertelsmann readers' ring.
84. Ibid., pp. 49–54.
85. Ibid., p. 55.
86. In 1971–72, the popular magazine *Eltern* (*Parents*) ran several articles on fathers attending childbirth.
87. Brauer, Kapitzke and Wrage, *Junge, Mädchen, Mann und Frau*, Vol. 1, pp. 39–47.
88. J. Brauer, G. Regel, *Tanja und Fabian. Ein Bilderbuch für 4 bis 8jährige*, Gütersloh: Mohn, 1974, 3rd reprint 1992.
89. Ibid., pp. 14–15.
90. BZgA: *Sexualkunde-Atlas. Biologische Informationen zur Sexualität des Menschen*, 2nd revised edition, Opladen: Leske, 1974.
91. 'Die Geburt dieses Babys', *Eltern*, 1971, No 2, 10–18; 'Fotobericht einer Geburt und ein Test für alle Ehemänner', *Eltern*, 1971, No 5, 22–32; BZgA, *Sexualkunde-Atlas*, 2nd edition, pp. 28–29.
92. For instance, H. Fleischhauer-Hardt, 'Erklärungen und Informationen', in W. McBride, *Zeig mal! Ein Bilderbuch für Kinder und Erwachsene*, Wuppertal: Jugenddienst 1974, 6th edition 1983, 157–94, p. 177. And even the more traditional sex education book by Brauer, Kapitzke and Wrage, *Junge, Mädchen, Mann und Frau*, p. 48, for instance, mentioned homebirth as an option for a healthy woman

whose physician did not object. See Treichler, 'Feminism, medicine, and the meaning of childbirth', p. 121.

93. Claësson, *Vom Lieben und vom Kinderkriegen*. The German translation was published in 1974 by a left-wing publishing house which had its roots in the socialist and Marxist camp of the 1960s students' movement. The significance of Claësson's book as an alternative representation of childbirth is underlined by the fact that the magazine *Eltern* reprinted some of the book's images in a coloured photo-documentary on homebirth; see S. Schwabenthan, 'Hausgeburt: Spricht heute noch etwas dafür?', *Eltern*, 1975, No 2, 28–33.
94. On documentrary photography, see A. Solomon–Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, part 3.
95. Claësson, *Vom Lieben und vom Kinderkriegen*, p. 86–101.
96. For a similar approach in representing pregnancy as a family event, see A. Becker: *Ich bekomme einen Bruder. Ein Fotobilderbuch*, Ravensburg: Maier, 1973, 11th edition 1987.
97. On this 'structural congruence of point of view (the eye of the photographer, the eye of the camera, and spectator's eye)', see Solomon–Godeau, 'Who is speaking thus? Some questions about documentary photography', in idem, *Photography at the Dock*, 169–83, p. 180.
98. Jacobi et al., *Sexfibel*, Opladen: Leske, 1972. Jacobi advised the BZgA on the *Sexualkunde-Atlas* and revised its second edition.
99. Ibid., p. 31.
100. The radical nature of the text was further indicated by the uncommon (German) usage of lowercase letters throughout the text.
101. Ibid., pp. 3–7.
102. McBride, *Zeig mal!*
103. H. Kentler, 'Kindersexualität', in ibid. 4–11, pp. 10–11.
104. W. McBride, *I, Will McBride*, Cologne: Könemann, 1997, pp. 369–73.
105. McBride, *Zeig mal!,* pp.144–45.
106. Fleischhauer–Hardt, 'Erklärungen und Informationen', pp. 175–77.
107. Ibid., pp. 164–65, 176 and 170.
108. McBride, *Zeig mal!*, pp.152–55.
109. B.H. Claësson, *Sexualinformation für Jugendliche*, [Copenhagen 1968], [translated from the Danish by J. Östreich], Frankfurt/M.: Neue Kritik, 1969, 5th revised edition 1976, pp. 102–33; G. Amendt, *Sexfront*, Frankfurt/M.: März, 1970, pp. 38–46; idem, *Das Sex Buch*, Dortmund: Weltkreis, 1979, 3rd edition 1979, pp. 84–99; R. Berger, *Erste Liebe, erster Sex. Intimreport für und über die Teenager*, Munich: Südwest, 1971, 2nd revised edition 1971, pp. 78–88, 123–24. Berger's book, written for adolescents aged 12–17, was in parts serialised in the popular youth magazine *Bravo* (1971, no. 31–34); J. Cousins, *Make it happy. Das Buch über Liebe, Lust und Sexualität für Anfänger, Ratlose, Daraufgänger*, [transl. from the English and revised by K. Albrecht–Désirat and K. Pacharzina], Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1980, pp. 102–51. See F.X. Eder, 'Die "Sexuelle Revolution" – Befreiung und/oder Repression?', in I. Bauer et al. (eds) *Liebe und Widerstand. Ambivalenzen historischer Geschlechterbeziehungen*, Vienna: Böhlau, 2005, 397–414, pp. 407–9.
110. On the changes in sexual morality and behaviour in the 1960s/70s, see L. Sauerteig, 'Die Herstellung des sexuellen und erotischen Körpers in der westdeutschen Jugendzeitschrift BRAVO in 1960er und 1970er Jahren', *Medizinhistorisches Journal*, 2007, vol. 42, 142–79.

9 Purity Redefined

Catholic Attitudes Towards Children's Sex Education in Austria, 1920–36

Britta McEwen

INTRODUCTION

Vienna's reputation as a city suffused with illicit, venal sex at the turn of the twentieth century has been well established in the *fin-de-siècle* historiography.[1] Contemporary critics such as Karl Kraus and Otto Weininger used the hypocrisy of Vienna's sexual culture as a synecdoche for Imperial corruption and degeneration. Sexual critiques in this period publicized to citywide audiences the perils of regulated prostitution, venereal disease, and multiple political sexual scandals. In Austria's First Republic (1918–34), however, 'healthy' sex became both a State concern and a popular reform movement. This shift was reflected in fervent calls for national regeneration, smaller but healthier families, and education in disease prevention.

Current historical research in other European contexts suggests that it was the disastrous effects of the Great War – weakened and hungry populations, an increase in infant mortality, and, most importantly, a generation of fallen young soldiers – that refocused State attention on sexual matters.[2] This development was especially marked in Austria. Vienna in the early twentieth century was a capital of sexual research: the laboratory for both Sigmund Freud and Richard von Krafft-Ebing. Whereas *fin-de-siècle* Viennese sexology had sought to classify and heal individuals as a medical science, sexual knowledge in the interwar years was employed to heal the social body: the truncated, diseased, and impoverished population of the newly-created Republic of Austria. This shift refocused sexual knowledge away from sexological taxonomies of aberrant sexual behaviours and towards advising heterosexual, reproductive couples, whom numerous social reform movements targeted as central to the regeneration of society.

Sex education for children was a central and contested sub-field of the project of sexual sanitation. Since the turn of the century, German-speaking sex-reformers had sought a more naturalistic and complete form of sexual *Aufklärung* ('enlightenment') for children.[3] Many leading Austrian Social Democrats championed this reforming stance during the First Republic. However, they were unable to teach sex education in most Austrian schools during that period, due in large part to the fact that the bulk of the country was still culturally and politically very Catholic.[4]

Catholic views on sex education during the interwar years remain neglected. General histories of education that cover this period stress the Catholic perception of a renewed *Kulturkampf* on the part of both the German and Austrian governments against general Christian morality in State schools.[5] Within the history of sexual reform, the Church and its teachings are represented as playing a stereotypical role: the bastion of tradition, unwilling to compromise children's purity in the service of science or the State. On an official level, it is certainly true that, in the early twentieth century, many pastoral letters and a papal encyclical from Pius XI rejected any sex education that discussed the biological aspects of reproduction.[6] These messages warned that any sexual knowledge would endanger the purity of individual children. However, we can uncover a more interesting and nuanced view of the Church by attending to the plurality of Catholic opinion in this period. Historians' assumptions of a monolithic Church response to the popularization of sexual knowledge in interwar Europe will be challenged by the Austrian case, which reveals a degree of convergence between Catholic and Social Democratic approaches to children's sex education.

My aim is to complicate our idea of Catholic attitudes about sexual knowledge by examining the delivery and content of interwar Austrian Catholic sex education. I have identified a range of authors that published guidelines for Catholic sex education for German-speaking audiences during this period. These include the German bishop of Breslau, Adolf Bertram; the University of Vienna philosophy professor, Dr Rudolf Allers; the Salzburg priest and member of the Society of the Divine Word, Peter Schmitz; the Jesuits, Dr Michael Gatterer and Dr Albert Schmitt, both professors of theology at the University of Innsbruck; and the anonymous 'Friend of the Young' who published in the Vigaun parish just outside of Salzburg.

These authors addressed themselves first and foremost to adults as parents, although the messages within these texts were probably also meant to influence a larger national audience of teachers and legislators.[7] None of the texts were intended to be studied by young people themselves. It is also important to note from the outset that these voices may not have harmonized with all local, parish-directed messages about children's education. However, the authors identified are priests, theological professors, and other authoritative voices. Furthermore, in keeping with the 1917 Code of Canon Law, a diocesan censor approved each text before it was published. Arguably, therefore, such texts are a valid basis for drawing some conclusions about the kinds of Catholic sex education conceived and recommended in interwar Austria.

All of the sex education materials this study draws upon are prescriptive by nature. They cannot tell us whether or not parents actually used them, nor can they illuminate the ways in which young people interpreted their messages. Further research needs to be done if we wish to contextualize these popular, published works of Catholic sexual pedagogy with localized pastoral messages across Austria. Ultimately, this work seeks not to gauge the application of sex

education, but rather to highlight the common cultural constructions that were used and modified in *Aufklärung* discourse.

PRIVATE *AUFKLÄRUNG*

In response to the interwar pedagogical debate regarding the site of sex education (home, school, or youth group), Catholic authors argued overwhelmingly for the right of parents to tell their children about sex. In the 'rare' situation that parents were incapable of educating their children, a priest or *Seelsorger* (literally, 'care-giver of the soul') was regarded as the only other appropriate provider of sexual knowledge. This was the opening salvo of Adolf Bertram's 1929 pamphlet, *Reverentia Puero! Catholic Reflections on the Problem of Sexual Pedagogy*. Bertram wrote from Germany but spoke to larger, modernizing developments in central Europe.[8] His Church career would later lead him to preside over the German Bishop's Conference and, ultimately, to the wartime post of Cardinal Archbishop of Berlin.

Reverntia Puero! was Bertram's response to a Prussian Ministry of Education conference held in April 1929. In it, he maintained that State schoolteachers, doctors, youth centre social workers and judges were not 'experts' to be consulted on the question of sex education, but rather interlopers in the terrain of parents and *Seelsorger*. Bertram warned against State-school teachers who 'knew no concrete, unchangeable moral norms', and were unfamiliar with the Christian codes of sexual conduct. He asserted that 'no teacher and no government [had] the right to undermine the commandments of God'.[9] He directly countered the argument used by the supporters of sex education in schools that parents were unable to properly explain sexual matters at home. To do this, Bertram shifted the emphasis of *Aufklärung* away from reproductive science and towards the realm of feeling, insisting that all parents had to do was simply engender the proper kind of self-respect and a healthy sense of honour and modesty (*Schamgefühl*) in their children.[10] The term Bertram used for modesty was useful: it suggested a feeling of shame, but also pointed to the pubic region of the body (*die Scham*), giving it a second connotation of guilt. These feelings were central to illustrating to children the gravity of sexual knowledge.

Likewise, Dr Rudolf Allers, philosophy lecturer and psychiatrist at the University of Vienna, insisted to readers of his 1934 text, *Sexual Pedagogy: Foundations and Fundamentals*, that only religious answers provided at home (and preferably reinforced at a religious school) could counter the rebellious questions at the heart of any sex education: 'Why should I do what I don't want to do, and why should I not follow my urges?'[11] Allers was a member of the last cohort of psychiatrists trained by Sigmund Freud, and by 1934 had worked with Alfred Adler for over a decade; he criticized both mentors for their secular approaches to the human psyche. Allers' larger body of scholarship attempted to synthesize psychoanalytic insight with Catholic teachings. *Sexual Pedagogy* is no exception, and was approved for publication by the Bishop of Salzburg.[12]

Parents were encouraged to trust themselves in their attempts to explain sexual matters to young people. Catholic sex education guides reassured them that neither special anatomical terminology nor teaching techniques were necessary. As the Jesuit theologian, Michael Gatterer, explained in his 1927 book, *In Faith's Light: Christian Reflections on Sexual Life*: 'Even when they have never read a "teaching-guide" and perhaps have never heard the word "pedagogy"', parents could deliver a 'first-rate education' to their children.[13] *In Faith's Light* was pointedly addressed to adult Christians who sought a faith-based understanding of sexual matters, yet it included empowering messages about parental abilities in the realm of children's sex education.

As was typical in early twentieth-century approaches to sex education, the Catholic authors identified in this study placed particular emphasis on the mother's role in *Aufklärung*. In his 1932 book, *At the Pure Source of Life: A Guide Through Children's Sexual Education for the Christian Mother*, Father Peter Schmitz claimed that mothers were usually the first to hear the question, 'Where do I come from?'. He reminded mothers that their response to this question sent a child down a permanent sexual path, 'determining to a large extent its entire future and enjoyment of life'.[14] Like Bishop Bertram, he explained that *Aufklärung* was not a response to a natural or biological set of questions, but rather was meant to teach young adults their responsibilities as people with sexual urges. Sex education, in Schmitz's estimation, was the 'high duty' of mothers, and, as such, was completely out of place in a state school setting:

> A few years ago, it was said that children should be taught about sexual matters in school. The results of this method showed its mistakes immediately. The degeneration among the youth increased to such an extent that today this idea, with the exception of certain socialist circles, has been almost entirely discarded. Syphilitic infections among school-age children, which were not only the result of hereditary transmission, served as a particularly crass example of the bankruptcy of these ideas.[15]

In this formulation, sex education at school, far from preventing disease and personal misery, actually encouraged the spread of venereal disease. In Schmitz's view, living with the sexual urges that came with puberty required a moral attitude that obviously had not been inculcated by State school *Aufklärung*. In contrast, he portrayed sex education in the home, overseen by the child's mother, as an investment that would yield a healthy, happy adulthood.

Daunted perhaps by the Papal encyclicals issued on sex and the family during the first Republic, some Christian parents were concerned about the appropriateness of anyone speaking to children about sex, including themselves.[16] In a 1933 pamphlet entitled *How to Teach Your Child*, signed *Von einem Jugendfreund* ('From a Friend of the Young'), the Salzburg diocese reassured parents that their participation in sex education was beyond clerical reproach. Parents were encouraged to speak to their children about bodies and reproductive parts in a non-censorial manner. Repeating the familiar refrain

that all parts of the body were created by God, the *Jugendfreund* reasoned that it could not be a sin to use any particular part of the body, so long as we use it according to God's will. He concluded: 'It is therefore also not a sin to speak to children or young people about these things, not to guide them towards [sexuality], but rather to illuminate the meaning of sexual life and to warn them away from sin.'[17] Emphasizing the sacrament of marriage achieved all of these objectives. It also provided children an alternative framework to popular culture (melodramatic novels, films, and radio soap operas) within which to evaluate the meaning of sex in modern life.

HOLY MATRIMONY

The German-speaking Catholic sex education material under investigation prescribed both method of delivery (parent or *Seelsorger*) and appropriate content. Matrimony received special attention among the topics approved by this literature. Indeed, Prince-Bishop Bertram defined the goal of Catholic sex education as preparation for marriage. *Aufklärung* should, in his words, 'prepare the path for the fulfilment of this goal [holy matrimony] and, in the middle of all their confusion and weaknesses, guide those without courage towards the sources of strength in our religion'.[18] Bertram's emphasis on the necessity of holy matrimony as the framework for sex was repeated throughout interwar Catholic sex education literature. The Innsbruck theologian, Michael Gatterer, even granted marriage the designation 'a category of chastity' within his otherwise very traditional *In Faith's Light*. 'Because Christian marriage partners avoid all prohibited sexual pleasures', Gatterer explained, holy matrimony constituted a state of purity for its participants.[19] He went on to portray chastity as a ladder in which marriage was a middle rung; holy matrimony was thus depicted as a sturdy and appropriate option for those seeking a righteous life.

Catholic authors used a language of duty and responsibility to describe marriage. In *How to Teach Your Child*, the young person 'properly enlightened in sexual life' was identified in the following manner:

> [H]e will regard marriage and married life from an ideal standpoint and guard himself from misusing this directive from God. He will know that man, in participating in sexual matters, is allowed to take part in God's ability to create […]. Thus he will understand sexual activity as an undertaking willed by God and therefore pleasing to God, *so long as this activity takes place within a marriage made legal by God*.[20]

The anonymous author of this text offered several pre-prepared speeches designed for mothers to deliver to their children according to age and gender, which further described marriage as a set of rights and responsibilities. For the young man, finished with school and preparing to enter a larger world, mothers were encouraged to elaborate on the sanctification of marriage by

Jesus Christ. The sacrament of marriage, she should explain, was part of a process in which men and women earned the right to participate in creation: 'Through this consecration as parents, they earn the right to cooperate with the good Lord in the creation of a child.'[21] The author explained that men and women possessed different body parts, and then continued with his description of mortal and divine cooperation in the marriage bed:

> In dedicating themselves as fathers and mothers, the marriage partners earn from the good Lord the right to unite themselves in the most intimate love, including by means of their sexual organs. Such relations through sexual organs are called 'sexual relations'.[22]

In this formulation, individuals earned the right to engage in sex only after dedicating themselves to God as willing parents. The author clearly rejected the attempts by Austrian sex reform movements to replace the 'dedication' of reproductive individuals to God with secular authorities, such as the State or medical professionals. In *How to Teach Your Child*, even the definition of intercourse ('sexual relations') was embedded within definitions of holy matrimony and its corollary, parenthood.

As Schmitz explained in *At the Pure Source of Life*, this emphasis on the rights and duties of marriage partners was all that separated a successful Christian *Aufklärung* from one that encouraged wilful (sexual) behaviour. Harnessing sexuality with reproduction in marriage was the key to a successful sex education according to Schmitz: 'Thus it is so terribly important to present sexual matters, and above all the sexual drives that come with adult life, as a *purposeful gift from God*, that also comes with *a heavy duty* for mankind.'[23] The 'heavy duty' alluded to by Schmitz was certainly the burden of child-bearing and, by extension, the responsibility of childrearing. Sexual activity was therefore only justified through reproduction within a Christian family. Yet these restrictions came with a second message of divine generosity, as well. Each of these pedagogical examples taught children that sex within marriage was a source of strength and joy created for humans by God. The 'heavy duty' that comes with sexual drives is not merely onerous, but also a privileged opportunity to co-create, with the divine, human life. Interwar Catholic sexual pedagogy thus suggested that sexual urges were intentional, healthy forces within individuals, even as it restricted the expression of these desires to marriage.

ABSTINENCE

All Catholic sex education literature in interwar Austria asked young people to abstain from sexual activity before entering into marriage. As we have seen, this demand stood above any State or social law as a mandate from God; any resulting self discipline in the abstaining child (such as work ethic, or an

ability to sublimate immediate desire for long-term goals) was of tertiary benefit. Although the strengthening of willpower in the young was lauded throughout Catholic *Aufklärung* literature, religious pedagogues were sensitive to charges from sexologists and sex reformers that even temporary chastity before marriage was an unnatural and unhealthy demand to make of the individual.[24] The authors identified in this study took pains to prove that Catholic teachings of sexual abstinence outside of marriage (and continence within marriage) were in fact compatible with the health of the individual. To do this, they reframed a popular conception of human nature and defended Church doctrine against misreading by both reformist opponents and the ill-informed faithful. Two main issues were contested: the idea that sex was a biological necessity and its corollary, the argument that chastity was unhealthy.

Dr Rudolf Allers reminded his *Sexual Pedagogy* audience that sexual matters belonged in a general framework of the body and mind and therefore should not be singled out for special meaning. Allers defended Catholicism from the popular criticism that the Church had, through the doctrine of original sin, poisoned man's ability to enjoy and fulfil naturally occurring sexual feelings. In response, Allers pointed to the example of the Church fathers, who had never separated sexuality from the flesh of man (thus keeping it 'natural'), and, contrary to what sex reformers might claim, had never referred to sexual matters as inherently 'damned' or 'sinful'. He repeated and clarified the words of Saint Paul, who 'never said that the flesh was in itself sinful, but rather that it was weak'.[25] Speaking for Catholic educators, Allers stated: 'We want to insist most forcefully that the demands of Catholic morality not only in no way are contrary to nature […] but rather that the fulfilment of these challenges is a condition of the perfection of this very nature.'[26]

Father Peter Schmitz, responding to sex reformers as a spiritual advisor and educator, took issue with the image of Christianity forwarded in their literature. He directly quoted progressive *Aufklärung* literature in order to characterize sex reformers:

> [They] cannot seem to do enough in the last decade to swamp Christendom with the strongest and ugliest accusations, because 'it has fused the concepts of guilt and sexuality in our Western traditions', and therefore should be held responsible for modern immorality.[27]

Such an opinion could not be further from the Church's teachings, insisted Schmitz, who repeated throughout his second book on sex education (*Lad and Lassie in the Hands of God*, 1936) that sexual urges were natural, that they came from God, and that there was nothing debasing or sinful in them. 'We seek not to be free of these feelings', Schmitz assured his readers, 'but rather to have the will to control them'.[28] This control and the ability to abstain from sex when mandated by God in no way endangered the health of the individual. Directly contradicting a favoured reformist analogy, Schmitz asserted: '[T]he satisfaction of sexual urges is not a biological necessity, as is the staying of

hunger or thirst.'[29] Even more boldly, Schmitz attacked the reformers and medical authorities that had forwarded such notions:

> The youth of today have been persuaded of the biological necessity of sex via the argument that this satisfaction [of sexual drives] is a *human right*, an argument often made with the banal phrase: 'one simply cannot deny such things.' To this end, irresponsible elements [of society] still claim that sexual abstinence is dangerous to one's health, although the opposite has been established by the most famous medical authorities. A pure, chaste lifestyle, particularly while one is young, has never harmed anyone who was already healthy.[30]

Here, Schmitz's rejoinder to the 'irresponsible' literature that saw sexual satisfaction as a human right was based (in this instance) not on the will of God but in the health of the individual. Thus, even as Schmitz contradicted the message of 'irresponsibility' within reform-based *Aufklärung*, he employed its most popular means of establishing morality: the preservation of health.

As an incentive to practise sexual abstinence, Catholic *Aufklärung* advertized the special kind of willpower developed by children who had received proper sex education. Learning to control sexual drives, according to Catholic authors, involved both avoiding temptation and sublimating urges. The education of the will in the service of sexual *Aufklärung*, according to Schmitz, empowered the young individual

> […] to let dirty books fall from his hands, to break with depraved schoolmates, to walk right by theatres and movie houses of ill-repute, to shun pleasures that might cause degeneration, to avoid alcohol, etc. This [discipline] alone can protect him from sexual mistakes.[31]

Thus a proper (Catholic) sex education was also a kind of education for living in the modern world of popular culture. Even a well-disciplined young Catholic, however, had to learn to deal with sexual energies already in his or her body. Instead of disparaging these divinely placed desires, interwar Catholic pedagogues asked children to (temporarily) sublimate them. Prince-Bishop Bertram suggested substituting sport, gymnastics, and 'hiking through God's green earth' as an aide against the disquieting awakening of sexual urges.[32] Bertram, Allers, and Schmitz all insisted that the emotional confusion common among young people during adolescence was only exacerbated by the false notion that sexuality played the central role in adult character formation.

What is most interesting about the work of these authors is that they stress the naturalness of a sexed body to children even as they ask such young people to abstain from acting upon their sexual urges. This method demystified hormonal changes and justified abstinence as a positive, healthy alternative to sexual activity at any stage in life. It also highlighted the 'unnaturalness' of popular culture's depiction of sexuality.

SEX, GENDER, AND THE SELF

We have already seen that some Catholic educators blamed the modern practice of separating sexuality out of everyday needs for placing undue emphasis on sex's role in the psyche. Allers, in particular, argued that the sudden 'sexual crisis', or 'sexual question', that had sparked international conferences and inspired countless articles and books was a hoax that led pedagogues and social scientists into a mistaken idea of human development.[33] Because sexuality has been posed as a special and separate condition within man, Allers explained, modern thinkers had wrongly treated it as something relatively independent within human personality.[34] Allers' position allowed individuals to be fully developed people without being sexually active.

This was, of course, important to Catholic educators who were concerned with defending the life-long chastity of nuns, monks, and priests. Father Peter Schmitz de-emphasized the importance of sex in shaping the individual in plain language: 'Displaying one's sexual abilities *is not the be-all and end-all of human life*.'[35] Schmitz admitted to his audience of young Catholics that a healthy sex-life within marriage was one of the most important sources of joy for mankind, but he carefully limited the value of sex in self-development and self-understanding. Insisting on individual completeness, with or without a sexual component in one's life, Schmitz wrote that:

> It is an overstatement, a conscious glorification of urges, to place sexual life as the most important aspect of human life. It is totally misleading, and furthermore contradicted a thousand times in history and in daily experience, to suggest that an active sexual life is necessary for the shaping of human personality. Man is a complete person, even when he renounces marriage and sexual love.[36]

Understandably, Schmitz's 'complete person' was only made whole within the framework of faith. However, Catholic sexual educators writing in the interwar period increasingly responded to the Freudian theories of psychological development that had been popularized by Alfred Adler and the socialist pedagogy he helped to create in Vienna. These developmental theories prioritized sexual feeling and expression as measures of children's progression to maturity. As the above quote shows, Schmitz met this new challenge by removing sexual activity from the stages of personal development and instead placing sex within concepts of responsibility, reproduction, and spiritual community. Man and wife, in Schmitz's pedagogical works, were called by God not only to people the earth with their offspring, but also to send new souls to heaven.[37] Sexual joy in marriage was subordinate to this 'highest goal' of sex; therefore, 'the sexual drive has an extra-individual meaning'.[38] Schmitz illustrated the 'extra-individual' in sex most dramatically by arguing that, on a mystical level, even our bodies were not individual, but rather extensions of Christ himself. The faithful, he warned, were in some ways never alone with

themselves: 'In Christians, sexual energies are absorbed into the mystical body of the Lord. Our bodily members no longer belong to ourselves, but rather belong to Christ. Their abuse is therefore desecration of a part of Christ's body.'[39]

Although Schmitz believed that the individual was complete even without a sexual component to his or her life, gender did not appear as optional in Catholic teachings. Schmitz, in opening his *Lad and Lassie in the Hands of God: A Ministerial and Pedagogical Contribution to the Sex Problem*, invested holy authority in sexual difference, stating that: 'The polarity between the sexes comes from God.'[40] Throughout Catholic literature, gender was reified as an aspect of God's plan, a natural, complementary system that invited man and wife to live together in harmony and, in particular, beckoned women to become mothers. The Innsbruck Jesuit, Albert Schmitt, provided a common construction: 'The two separate genders act as co-workers and representatives of God in this worldly life, just as the priest is co-worker and representative of God in the supernatural life.'[41] Because the sexes must work together as parents and stewards of the earth, women deserved respectful treatment. Again, Schmitt explained: 'Woman is so elevated [by this worldview] that Man does not simply see her as a doll with which to satisfy his passions, but rather as an equal partner and the mother of his children.'[42]

The crown of motherhood is here the ultimate expression of women's worth, both to her husband and to the world. This is certainly the prevailing message of Catholic sex education materials. Thus, the work of Peter Schmitz, the Salzburg missionary, is especially interesting because he, unlike other Catholic pedagogues, separated the supposed natural role of girls as mothers from the changing gendered realities they faced in interwar Austria. While the majority of Catholic *Aufklärung* literature concerned itself with the construction of masculinity through willpower and chastity, Schmitz paused to consider modern forms of femininity.

In common with most Catholic sex educators, Schmitz wrote in a voice that was male-centred. However, he did make frequent breaks that addressed the special needs of girls. *Lad and Lassie* is unusual in that it advocated (sexual) education for girls that could be adjusted to fit a future life without marriage and children. Indeed, in his earlier sex education guide for mothers, Schmitz had begged his audience not to send their 'daughters out to work in the office or at the serving table' without explaining to them the facts of life.[43] In contrast to most other Catholic voices, Schmitz refuted the idea that (physical) motherhood was the eventual vocation for girls and imagined an education that would prepare them for either marriage or a profession:

> The ideal education for girls does not one-sidedly place the main emphasis on preparation for marriage, for the family is not *the* calling, [and] sexual love is not *the* love for women. Rather the goal should be, most importantly, a general development and strengthening of personality for a self-supporting carrier that reflects the soulful nature, the spirit of motherliness, and the

> feminine ability to love. Our girls must be brought up in a way that they may take not only the path of marriage, but also the path of celibacy. In the latter case a freely chosen profession should replenish their strength and bring them inner satisfaction.[44]

This language was very much in keeping with Catholic justifications of celibacy for nuns or priests who nurtured a wider, spiritual family and thus fulfilled their duties to God and society. Yet, in unseating the family and reproduction as the highest goals for women, Schmitz's argument reshaped the gendered nature of interwar *Aufklärung*. This may reflect the increasingly impoverished and unemployed status of men and family providers in the late interwar period and/or a delayed acceptance of the kinds of social-motherhood activities and occupations German-speaking feminists and Catholic women's auxiliaries had been demanding since the *fin-de-siècle*. The education Schmitz advocated for girls does not have as its end point fulfilment in holy matrimony as Prince-Bishop Bertram imagined it in *Reverentia Puero!*

Furthermore, although Schmitz's *Lad and Lassie* imagined a future for women outside of marriage, his guide for mothers, *At the Pure Source*, fell back on more traditional roles. For girls experiencing their first period, he claimed that the simple comment that 'this is a sign that perhaps, in ten years, the good Lord will also make you a mother', often 'works wonderfully to soothe them'.[45] This message, intended to comfort, surely reinforced girls' belief that their highest calling was motherhood. Yet, Schmitz's ability to imagine an education that allowed for different female fates is evidence that Catholic *Aufklärung* authors did not merely repeat Church laws to their audiences, but rather developed their arguments from within the shifting discourse of health, gender, and nation in the interwar period.

CONVERGENCES BETWEEN CATHOLIC AND SOCIALIST SEX EDUCATION

Catholic responses to the interwar *Aufklärung* movement raised several arguments, all of which supported the central tenet of sex's sanctification only within an indissoluble marriage. The challenge of the sex reform movement during the First Republic prompted the Catholic Church to re-embroider upon familiar themes of purity, heavenly love, and the sanctity of marriage. To this end, Catholic educators and *Seelsorger* maintained that sex was not a biological necessity, that Catholic teachings of chastity were not at odds with nature, and that an individual's sex life was not the most important aspect of his or her personality. Catholic sex education literature affirmed the right of parents to participate in the private *Aufklärung* of their children, and emphasized the role of the Church in the construction of both healthy individuals and healthy marriages.

In Vienna and in other cities where the Social Democrats held majorities during the interwar years, published materials from parent-teacher nights and associational meetings suggest a very different 'State-sponsored' approach to sex education. The task of this socialist-informed children's education was to extract sex from the religious and bourgeois structures that controlled children's sexual knowledge. To achieve this, reformers recommended both public and private *Aufklärung*; ideally, children would learn about sex from their parents and augment that knowledge with biological lessons at school.

The central points raised by this socialist literature included the naturalness of sex, the need for coeducation and sex education among State school students, the reproductive functions of women in the new State, and the value of sexual sublimation for culture-building. All of these tenets were, on the surface, divergent from Catholic sex education goals; coeducation (in the classroom and the sports hall) was particularly abhorrent to Catholic pedagogues. However, in reality, there were marked convergences between Catholic and socialist sex education in interwar Austria. Although Austrian socialist pedagogues were eager to wrest sexual authority away from the Catholic Church, the replacement messages they proposed were steeped in a language of responsibility.

Socialist sex education taught that pleasure and self-fulfilment were to be found in cooperation and civic duty rather than sexual affairs. Furthermore, as with Catholic sex education materials, the Socialist discourse emphasized the naturalness of sexual desires. To be sure, the presence of these desires was explained differently (created by a benevolent God rather than a product of biological necessity), yet both Catholic and socialist pedagogues agreed that sexual desire in young people should ultimately be sublimated through physical exertion, with emphasis on outdoor exercise and gymnastics. Similarly, both sides emphasized the importance of sex within the framework of marriage, linking it irrevocably to reproduction and family life. Harnessing sexuality with reproduction in marriage was the key to successful sex education; on this point both Catholics and socialists agreed.

Father Schmitz asked Christian mothers to describe sex to their children as a gift that came 'with *a heavy duty* for mankind'.[46] The 'heavy duty' of reproduction, and the importance of securing (healthy) future progeny when choosing one's marriage partner, was also a prominent aspect of socialist sex education for all ages. Healthy families were described by Austrian socialist literature as the building blocks of society; they alone could provide the base from which to rebuild war-torn Central European society.[47] Catholic messages about the family were strikingly similar. The Innsbruck theologian, Albert Schmitt, explained in his book *The Catholic Marriage and the Christian Family*: 'All virtues are rooted in the family, particularly social virtues and the sense of duty. Thus must children be taught from an early age to work with others and for others [...].'[48] Be this message Jesuit or socialist in origin, interwar Austrian parents were advised to teach their children about sexual matters within the framework of productive family service.

CONCLUSION

The evidence therefore suggests that both Catholic and socialist texts, responding to widespread outbreaks of venereal disease and the perceived loosening of sexual morals following World War I, instructed mothers to prepare their daughters for reproduction by emphasizing health and purity. Even the most progressive socialist texts portrayed motherhood as the 'natural' occupation of women, and encouraged both boys and girls to honour it as a sacred oasis. Thus, sex education in the interwar period was also a means to communicate appropriate gender roles for young people.

What is perhaps most surprising about the literature analysed in this study is that Catholic pedagogues such as Schmitz used sex education materials, in some cases, to theorize a more progressive stance towards gender than his socialist counterparts. Through his sexual pedagogy books for parents, Schmitz taught Austrian girls that their destinies might lie outside of marriage and a family. Socialist sex education, perhaps in response to an under-employed and anxious constituency, never suggested that girls should be taught about sex so that they might more safely work outside the home.

Finally, both Catholic and socialist sex education called for a re-assessment of the role of sex in the individual's life, and thus provided an alternative model of self-formation from that suggested by the interwar world of cinema, radio, and sensationalist print media. Yet importantly, neither Catholic nor Socialist sex education in interwar Austria tried to deny that this world of popular culture, replete with sexualized messages, existed. The result was that both kinds of literature rejected the older model of children's purity that demanded sexual ignorance. Instead, both approaches to sex education redefined purity as an informed choice. Father Peter Schmitz, as we have seen, claimed that Catholic sex education, with its attendant emphasis on will power, would help young boys and girls 'walk right by' the temptations of the street and theatre, armed as they were with knowledge. In both Catholic and socialist interwar formulations of sexual knowledge for young people, sex was thus a powerful force within individuals and society that demanded sober yet compassionate explanation.

NOTES

1. See K. Jusek, *Auf der Suche nach der Verlorenen: Die Prostitutionsdebatten im Wien der Jahrhundertwende*, Wien: Löcker, 1994; F.X. Eder, 'Erotisierendes Wissen. Zur Geschichte der „Sexualisierung" im Wiener Fin de Siècle', in *Erotik, Versuch einer Annährung. Austellungskatalog des Historisches Museums der Stadt Wien,* Wien: Historisches Museum, 1990, 20–28; E. Timm, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: Cultural Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986; C. Sengoopta, *Otto Weininger: Sex, Science, and the Self in Imperial Vienna*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
2. See S. Koven and S. Michel, 'Mother Worlds', in S. Koven and S. Michel (eds) *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 1–42; M. Pollard, *Reign of Virtue: Mobilizing Gender*

in Vichy France, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998; V. de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992; B. J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

3. Following its usage in nineteenth and twentieth-century German-speaking pedagogical literature, I use the term *Aufklärung* throughout my paper to refer to sex education.
4. M. Zeps, *Education and the Crisis of the First Republic*, Boulder: East European Monographs, 1987, pp. 75–81. See also C. Gulick, *Austria from Habsburg to Hitler,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948, pp. 554–82.
5. See M. Lamberti, *The Politics of Education: Teachers and School Reform in Weimar Germany*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2002; Zeps, *Education and the Crisis of the First Republic*.
6. See L. Sauerteig, 'Sex Education in Germany from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century', in F. X. Eder et al. (eds) *Sexual Cultures in Europe: Themes in Sexuality*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, 9–33, pp. 17 and 22–23.
7. All but two of the texts used in this study are explicitly about sex education. The exceptions are Albert Schmitt, *Die katholische Ehe und die christliche Familie*, Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1921 and Michael Gatterer, *Im Glaubenslicht: Christliche Gedanken über das Geschlechtsleben,* Innsbruck: Felician Rauch, 1927. Both of these include sex education as part of a larger set of messages about proper sexuality; indeed, Gatterer's 1927 book is a reworking of an earlier pamphlet of his, entitled *Educating for Purity*.
8. As always, the question of what was Austrian and what was German is relevant here. German Catholics had been formally separated from Austrian politics since the *Kaiserreich*, and yet their shared community remained strong, at least until the rise of Fascism. Furthermore, every native political party in interwar Austria called for unification with Germany in their party platforms until 1933, including the very powerful Austrian Catholic Socialist party.
9. Adolf Kardinal Bertram, *Reverentia Puero! Katholische Erwägungen zu Fragen der Sexual-Pädagogik*, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1929, pp. 9 and 11.
10. Bertram, *Reverentia Pureo!*, pp. 35–36.
11. Dr Rudolf Allers, *Sexualpädagogik: Grundlagen und Grundlinien,* Salzburg: Verlag Anton Pustet, 1934, p. 269.
12. The copy of Allers' book held in Columbia University's collections also suggests that the work was later approved by the National Socialist party. It was stamped for the 'Race and Settlement Department Archive' and part of the 'Aryan Ancestral Library'. This is puzzling, given the author's flight from Austria in 1938 following the *Anschluß*. Allers' subsequent academic career was spent in the USA teaching at the Catholic University of America and Georgetown.
13. Gatterer, *Im Glaubenslicht*, p. 2. Gatterer was one of the earliest to work on the theme of sex education from within the Church. Extracts of *Im Glaubenslicht* were published separately as pamphlets and translated into many languages. See the article on Michael Gatterer in *Biographisch-Bibliographisch Kirchenlexicon*, <http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/g/gatterer_m1.shtml > (last accessed 20 October 2006).
14. P. Schmitz, *Am reinen Quell des Lebens: Eine Anleitung zur geschlechtlichen Aufklärung der Kinder für die christlichen Mütter*, Mödling: Missionsdruckerei St. Gabriel, 1932, p. 4.
15. Schmitz, *Am reinen Quell*, p. 10.
16. The most far-reaching messages are found in *Casti connubii*, 31 December 1930.
17. Author anonymous ('Jugendfreund'), *So belehre dein Kind: Ein Schriftchen für Eltern und Erzieher*, Salzburg: Verlag des Pfarramts Vigaun, 1933, p. 3.
18. Bertram, *Reverentia Pureo!*, p. 4.
19. Gatterer, *Im Glaubenslicht,* p. 82. This designation is also prominently displayed on the first page of Gatterer's pamphlet *Virginity,* which reprints excerpts from *In*

Faith's Light. See also M. Gatterer, *Die Jungfräulichkeit*, Innsbruck: Felician Rauch, 1927, p. 1.
20. *So belehre dein Kind*, p. 4. Emphasis in original.
21. Ibid., p. 12.
22. Ibid.
23. Schmitz, *Am reinen Quell*, p. 29. Emphasis in original.
24. For a fuller treatment of the debate over abstinence and its possible dangers, see L. Sauerteig, *Krankheit, Sexualität, Gesellschaft: Geschlechtskrankheiten und Gesundheitspolitik in Deutschland im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999, pp. 264–80; A. Hill, '"May the Doctor Advise Extramarital Intercourse?": Medical Debates on Sexual Abstinence in Germany, *c.* 1900', in R. Porter and M. Teich (eds) *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: A History of Attitudes to Sexuality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 284–302.
25. Allers, *Sexualpädagogik*, p. 15.
26. Ibid., p. 169.
27. P. Schmitz, *Bursch und Mädel in Gottes Hand. Ein Seelsorglicher und Pädagogischer Beitrag zum Geschlechtlicher Problem*, Innsbruck und Wien: Tyrolia Verlag, 1936, pp. 11–12. Here, Schmitz was quoting from an oft-reprinted booklet by G. Manes, *Die Sexuelle Not unserer Jugend*.
28. Schmitz, *Bursch und Mädel*, p. 12.
29. Ibid., p. 14.
30. Ibid., pp. 14–15. Emphasis in the original.
31. Schmitz, *Am reinen Quell*, p. 30.
32. Bertram, *Reverentia Pureo!*, p. 19.
33. Allers always placed these terms (*Sexualnot, sexuelle Frage*) in quotes, as if to question their strength in the scientific and sexological texts that employed them. He may have been mocking the 1930 congress in Vienna of the World League for Sexual Reform, which took *Sexualnot* as one of its organizing themes.
34. Allers, *Sexualpädagogik*, p. 15.
35. Schmitz, *Bursch und Mädel*, p. 16. Emphasis in the original.
36. Ibid., p. 17.
37. Ibid., pp. 19–20. Schmitz also very clearly stated that the use of birth control was against God's will.
38. Ibid., p. 20.
39. Ibid., p. 22. A looser translation would be: 'Our penises no longer belong to ourselves, but rather are Christ's.'
40. Ibid., p. 11. Not only is Schmitz's language aimed at a popular audience, but also his book was reissued many times.
41. Schmitt, *Die katholische Ehe*, p. 14.
42. Ibid.
43. Schmitz, *Am reinen Quell*, p. 13. Tellingly, his parallel message about boys entering the larger world mentioned 'gymnasium and trade school' rather than the low-level service jobs he envisioned for girls.
44. Schmitz, *Bursch und Mädel*, p. 15.
45. Schmitz, *Am reinen Quell*, p. 20.
46. Ibid., p. 29. Emphasis in original.
47. See, for example, the central role of marriage and the family in Julius Tandler, *Ehe und Bevölkerungspolitik*, Wien: Verlag der Moritz Perles, 1924. Tandler was the head of interwar Vienna's ambitious welfare program.
48. Schmitt, *Die katholische Ehe*, p. 27.

10 The Partial Picture

Framing the Discourse of Sex in British Educative Films of the Early 1930s

Barbara Crowther

INTRODUCTION

Film's potential as an educational medium was recognised from its earliest days. By the 1930s, educational films were used to enhance many areas of work and classroom learning in Britain such as technical and medical training, laboratory techniques, physical education, economics and geography.[1] The perceived importance of film to educate young people was indicated as early as 1932 by the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films (CECF), which reported, 'the school cannot afford to neglect so important a factor as the film in the education of a generation which goes regularly and naturally to the cinema';[2] and, in considering their health, the *Health Education Yearbook* reiterated in 1939 that 'the value of film as an impressive visual medium of education needs no emphasis'.[3] However, this did not seem to apply to sex education, where films were almost non-existent until the 1970s.[4] The CECF report does not even include it as a potential (let alone current) subject for an educative film for young people, inside or outside the classroom.[5]

In theory, the early 1930s in Britain should have provided a highly opportune moment for the introduction of sex education films, with continuing high pregnancy and peri-natal mortality rates, significant shifts in social attitudes towards sexuality, and the rapid growth of the film industry. Certainly, film was used extensively in other areas of public health education, and, to a lesser but growing extent, in schools.[6] Indeed, according to research by Tim Boon, between 1911 and 1939, and predominantly in the inter-war period, as many as 350 health films were produced by various bodies – the Ministry of Health, local authorities and numerous voluntary organisations – to educate the British public in countless health-based issues. Yet, although these films addressed a wide range of concerns, only a tiny proportion of them touched on sex or reproduction as a health subject in its own right (as distinct from Venereal Disease, VD).[7]

The marginal status of sexual health and behaviour in the public health arena must be seen in the context of running disputes about responsibility for areas of public health education and priorities. According to Boon, 'there was widespread agreement about the importance of public education in health', but 'health education in general (as opposed to single disease) was contested

territory'; moreover, there was no agreement about what the boundaries of 'health' were.[8] In particular, the question of how far sex education was a public or family responsibility – a question still unresolved today – contributed to evasion of the issue.

Histories of early twentieth century sexuality in Britain outline the hegemonic struggle between rival groups and movements, particularly the Social Purity and the Social Hygiene movements, a struggle that was instrumental in the form sex education was to take.[9] Much of the distinction between these poles had eroded well before the 1930s with the British Social Hygiene Council (BSHC) taking a lead in promoting broader sex education,[10] although its activities were still subject to internal moral and political disputes. Indeed, as Lesley Hall records, responsibility for providing sex education (and birth control advice) was batted about not only between health, medical and educational bodies but also between central government, local authorities and voluntary groups, and 'central direction was woefully lacking'.[11] The debates of this era suggest that this reflected broader anxieties about the possible impact on sexual behaviour of young people's exposure to sexual knowledge.

In the historiography of early twentieth-century sexuality in Britain, there is scarcely a reference to films except in the context of eugenics and those films made to combat the problem of VD. This testifies to the minimal use made of film to formally encourage understanding about sexual matters, a position which remains unchallenged in histories of film.[12] The most valuable work in this context, though restricted to the pre-1925 period, is Annette Kuhn's study of cinema and the regulation of sexuality.[13] She offers an account of the complex relationships between screen representations of sexuality, the various branches of the film industry, the civil and medical authorities involved, and the arbiters of public morality. Besides VD propaganda films aimed at the armed services and re-styled for civilian men and women, Kuhn examines other short fictional films (now called 'health propaganda' films) on abortion and birth control.[14] Yet, these films, while certainly informative, were not as broad or basic as the term 'sex education' might imply. Certainly, they did not offer what young people in their (largely) pre-sexual years needed – information and discussion about their own bodies and sexuality.[15]

There is, then, no body of films in the inter-war years in Britain that could be categorized as 'sex education films'. As was the case through most of the twentieth century, film's role in teaching young people about sex was more likely to be indirect: they absorbed inferences embedded in the narratives and images of Hollywood feature films – or, more discreetly, in British films. Such indirect (rather than informal) education, however, lies beyond the scope of this chapter, which looks at those few British films of the 1930s produced specifically to address and explain matters of sexual behaviour or reproduction, in order to identify what was deemed appropriate informational style and discourse for the public domain – and, equally importantly, what was omitted or obscured.

This last aspect provides the theoretical underpinning for this chapter. While close analysis of the films may reveal what young people could learn

from them, it is salutary to study them through the slightly different perspective of *agnotology*; that is, what they did *not* learn, what they were prevented from knowing, and how and why knowledge was restricted. Agnotology is the study of culturally produced ignorance, a recently formulated branch of epistemology, with useful links to discourse theory.[16] It is concerned with systems and strategies for sustaining ignorance and the restrictive formulations that construct knowledge. Its validity as an analytical tool here may be confirmed by the definition given by Londa Schiebinger, one of its 'founders': 'Agnotology refocuses questions about "how we know" to include questions about what we do *not* know, and why not. Ignorance is often not merely the absence of knowledge but an outcome of cultural and political struggle.'[17]

Discourse theory, as associated with Michel Foucault, maintains that knowledge is produced through the power relations of communication; thus, who speaks (or writes), what is spoken about, and where and how it is addressed, all contribute to the production of a 'Truth', or in Foucault's term 'Knowledge/Truth'.[18] This includes, of course, what is not talked about. Individual texts and bodies of texts often need close analysis to denaturalise and draw out the implications of the power/knowledge/truth matrix. Agnotology takes this further, examining the implications *for ignorance* of the artistic and material choices (whether deliberate or 'commonsense').

With the evidence of three very different films from the 1930s, this chapter sets out a case that, in the way and to the extent that they made use of film, the organizations committed to public health at that time allowed the perpetuation of ignorance among young people about sex and reproductive matters. The responsibility for sex education as an aspect of health, particularly for young people, was never satisfactorily apportioned or agreed, nor were its parameters set, despite considerable concern about it during this period. The agnotological approach does not seek out villains here, but tries to explain how, in the available cultural context, and with a thriving film industry, channels to valuable sex education were closed off – and how film, where it was acknowledged, handled the subject.

Foucault's claim that discourses are constituted through competing areas of 'expertise' is reflected in the various different ways health workers, social reformers, priests, doctors, schoolteachers and, indeed, parents exercised and articulated this power/knowledge. Young people were exposed to many 'truths' and many zones of exclusion. The discursive field is further defined by its being virtually excluded as a subject for film treatment when other 'intimate' subjects were addressed (e.g. maternity, VD). As will be shown, the few films that do address sexual issues contribute to the particularly restrained form that the discourse of 'sex' took at that time, colluding in a broader culture of opaqueness and evasion.

THE SEXUAL AND CINEMATIC CLIMATE

By the end of the 1920s, social attitudes to birth control and sexual relations before marriage, though still disapproving, were gradually beginning to relax.

Sexology had recently been constituted as a field of science, and women's health and fertility issues were starting to be specifically addressed.[19] Significant shifts in the public understanding of the sexual were visible both in medical practice and private behaviour, but the focus of interest was on the *sexually active* – that is, married women or couples, and service personnel. But as Porter and Hall explain, even for adults, despite the growing awareness of the importance of sexual understanding in the period,

> many of the works available to the inquiring reader were of dubious informative value. The numerous books and pamphlets distributed widely through religious organisations and youth movements were seldom likely to have been of much practical assistance to anyone in search of usable information about the sexual act […]. It seems probable that much of what the average person – or even doctors – might learn, often with considerable difficulty, about sex was either mystifying, misleading or irrelevant.[20]

As for young people, it was even more difficult. For decades, the question of children's sex education had been discussed, but despite a recognition of a growing need, there was still no consensus about the timing, content and delivery of enlightenment of the young about sexual matters.[21]

The continued acceptance of this level of ignorance may be ascribed to a variety of factors. First, there was the wide range of tensions between different interest groups and public bodies, each with different moral, pragmatic and political positions.[22] In a climate of constantly contested responsibility, any coherent policy for youth sex education had little chance of fertile development.

Perhaps more important was the tenacity of the old moral order. The authority of the Church was still strong, and neither Church nor Establishment, including the medical profession, wanted to take a liberal line on sexual matters. Among ordinary people, pressure was strong to conform to the old morality. Ethnographic studies of contemporary sexual attitudes testify both to the enduring moral censorship of sexual activity, and to the absence of sex education, formal or informal.[23] Lucinda Beier reports that 'parental silence about sexual matters was normative', driven by a desire to protect the family 'good name', with women's reputations based as much on their sexual knowledge as on their actual behaviour.[24] Oral testimonies indicate, however, that this 'modern puritanism' was preached more emphatically than it was practised.[25]

The provision of sex education was also hampered by the absence of a common discourse for communicating about sexual matters and behaviour. Frank Mort notes that the spread of VD in the previous two decades had 'hastened the growth of the discourse of sex', but this had not speeded up the development of non-moralistic sex education.[26] Similarly, Porter and Hall observe that advocates of sex education used the rhetoric of 'protection (rather than enlightenment)', the dangers and penalties of sex quite obliterating its pleasures.[27] As a transgressive area, shrouded in secrecy, shame and embarrassment, no way

had been found of loosening the discursive stranglehold, especially for young people.

It was the threat of Hollywood's influence on this discursive regime, and on sexual morals (especially those of the working class), that most concerned the British establishment. Stuart Hanson details the efforts of authorities in both Britain and the United States to prevent the perceived depravity of Hollywood films, which contained more conflict, romance and 'moral and emotional intensity' than the British product.[28] Of particular concern were the so-called 'exploitation' movies which managed to find exhibition (albeit limited) in Britain despite 'dealing with topics that censorship bodies and the organised industry's self-regulatory mechanisms prohibited'.[29]

The popularity of American films (and the efforts made to suppress them) is indicative of film's potential as a site for education about sex, however indirect. But the energy expended on preventing the undesirable influence of American feature films was not mirrored in efforts to create an alternative 'British' discourse in regard to sexual behaviour, responsive to public interest, public sensibilities and the vagaries of the censor. There was huge scope for initiative in both feature and factual filmmaking which could have opened up more informative exchanges between the bearers of sexual 'truths' and young people, many of whom were avid filmgoers. Instead, their ignorance was unnecessarily maintained by the failure of health and other voluntary bodies – who would have seen the sometimes tragic results of unwanted pregnancies and diseases – to exploit the full potential of this highly popular medium.

Going to the cinema was a far more frequent and widespread cultural activity in Britain between the wars than it is now, among all classes, ages and regions.[30] In the commercial cinemas, children often accompanied adults to early evening showings, where the content and genre of material exhibited was extremely varied: Alongside the main feature and B-feature films were informational films, newsreels, travelogues, sports reports, cine-magazines and various types of documentaries.[31] This programme of material was, according to the CECF report, often unsuitable for children, as was 'the type of film to which a child goes on Saturday afternoons with his friends'.[32] There were also Saturday morning or matinée shows, particularly designed for children, 'organised by the trade, by philanthropists, by film societies or by the local education authorities'; these shows might include documentaries and nature films.[33] But nothing was geared specifically to older children, who devised devious strategies for sneaking into adult-classified films.[34] Smaller privately-owned movie-houses, clubs and film societies complemented the programmes of the larger municipal cinemas, but there were many other non-theatrical outlets for film exhibition. Mobile vans with projection facilities toured the country, serving and entertaining widespread communities.

Many village and church halls (and some schools)[35] had their own projection facilities, though often quite primitive. Schools' use of film was mostly educational and subject-specific, though occasional 'general interest' films were shown in school halls.[36] Organizations of various kinds exhibited films, often with an

accompanying lecture, for specific groups such as the Women's Institute, the Boy Scouts, Youth Groups and the Mothers' Union, or for the wider local community.[37] These, predictably, favoured non-fiction informational films. According to John Grierson, a leading documentary film-maker who 'relied upon similar non-theatric avenues to reach [his] audiences', were even 'more important and more solidly founded than the ordinary cinema'.[38]

Besides being both a popular and widespread phenomenon, films served an important function in conveying information and instruction. Their reach was probably far wider than their actual or intended audiences, as the content was discussed and passed on. Audiences were also, on the whole, less cynical than now about the 'message' of films and the authority of information they transmitted, so the potential of the medium for education and influence was, therefore, perhaps at its highest in this inter-war period.

The film industry, meanwhile, was growing in size, confidence and artistic range, and not just within the major studios. It was the heyday of the British Documentary movement, whose creative directors and technicians profoundly influenced the development of film form and political cinema.[39] Many small companies – and an eager body of young film-makers – undertook commissioned work for voluntary organizations and public bodies. A much larger production company, British Instructional Films (BIF), from 1933 called Gaumont-British Instructional (G-BI), specialized in producing what Low calls 'good cause' films, many of them for the BSHC, with whom they had an 'ideological affinity'.[40] But the nettle of sex education films was not grasped.

Boon's analysis of inter-war health films identifies three main '*styles* of film chosen by advocates of different approaches to public health [which] can be seen to exemplify the differences between them'.[41] These styles he terms 'moral tales', 'documentary' films, and 'instructional' films. Moral tales were 'fictional stories presented as entertainment films using moral narratives […] intended to convey a health implication' and were associated with the rather paternalistic attitude of the voluntary health bodies, such as the BSHC.[42] Documentaries, however, addressed audiences directly with an authoritative figure or voice presenting an argument or a political position: Documentary producers hoped 'that the audience would be as discerning in cinematic technique as it was expected to be in political matters'.[43] Meanwhile, the instructional style was 'dominated by the third person address of factual exposition' and 'designed to teach supposedly neutral facts about health subjects'.[44] These three stylistic classes are pertinent to the different representations and discourse of sexuality in the films examined below, and will be discussed more fully there.

The effectiveness of one mode over another, however, is far from established. Hanson, remarking on cinema audiences generally, argues that 'what motivated most cinema-goers was a desire for entertainment and not education'.[45] Kuhn's research also indicates that, even before 1920, it had been realized that the public could be made aware of the realities (and moral lessons) of VD by embedding them in fictional narratives, rather than using training or medical films.[46] On the other hand, Paul Rotha commented in 1936 that: 'After

watching documentaries being shown to audiences of the most conflicting types in various parts of Britain, it is my impression that your audience gives greater attention to documentary than to story film.'[47]

Although each film was made in a different style, the same production company, BIF/G-BI, lay behind the three films examined as case studies below.[48] They all deal with the issue of sexual information or knowledge, and, though none is specifically youth-targeted, they are indicative of what was considered appropriate discourse for young people to learn about sexual matters, even if, as is likely, these films did not themselves function as teaching material.[49] Indeed, as with the earlier films studied by Annette Kuhn, all of which 'may be read as dealing with aspects of "the sexual": abortion, VD, birth control', the concept of 'the sexual' in the early 1930s may be said to be *constituted* in these three films. In Kuhn's words, 'The sexual […] does not so much inhabit the content of these films as become produced in specific ways in the discourses and practices which surround them.'[50] Perhaps as significant as the content of the films, however, is the partiality, evasion and displacement in the sexual knowledge they impart (what is *not* there).

THE PARTIAL PICTURE – PRESENCE, ABSENCE AND IDEOLOGY: THREE CASE STUDIES

Although it is the most recent of the three, and strictly a VD propaganda film, Vernon Sewell's 25-minute film, *A Test for Love* (1936), serves as a frame of reference against which to assess the two earlier (1931) films. Throughout the previous two decades, films like Sewell's – part of an established genre of cautionary 'moral tales' – had both reflected and influenced the discursive field within which sex education took place.[51] According to Kuhn, these moral tales share with other types of fiction cinema 'certain codes of characterisation and […] narrativisation' connected with sexuality, typically 'female innocence and its ever-threatened loss', using 'representations [that] draw upon and recirculate through contemporary social discourses which operate outside cinema'.[52] *A Test for Love* follows the fortunes of a young single woman; the narrative construction of sympathy clearly addresses women particularly. While still evasive in its particulars, it is less condemnatory than some earlier VD propaganda films, and the woman's downfall appears not to be inevitable. Indeed, it is both sensitive and informative about the emotional and practical issues surrounding sexual diseases.

A shop-girl, Betty, spots her devoted boyfriend, Jim, paying attention to another young woman (later revealed to be his aunt), and, in revenge, reluctantly agrees to go out with a cad, George, despite her colleague Sally's warning about him. Betty and George go to a country club where she has beer, brandy and cigarettes; jazz, and cocktails shown served by black hands, combine to signify a dangerous bohemianism. Suggestively, too, the swimming pool is a

focus of entertainment, full of lively, predominantly female, scantily-clad bodies. Betty drowns her sorrows in drink and agrees to go off with George in his car; before the headlights (and the increasingly frenzied film music) are summarily switched off, we see them kissing.

In the next scene, back at the shop, Betty tells Sally she has a venereal infection – but so evasively it could just as easily be a pregnancy.

SALLY: 'You've been like this for days […]. Are you ill?'

BETTY: '[…] Yes, I think I am. You know when I went out that time with George, you know I told you what happened. I think it's something to do with that.'

SALLY: 'Oh Lord. Have you seen a doctor?'

BETTY: 'No, I haven't yet but I'm going tonight.'

[CUT TO DOCTOR'S SURGERY.]

BETTY: 'Are you sure you're not mistaken?'

DOCTOR: 'No doubt about it. It seems very hard that your only slip should be so severely punished. But don't worry, we'll put you right. Now first of all you must realise this, that there is no magical cure for this condition […] It can only be cured by skilled, patient and regular treatment. Regularity is most important so as to give the germ no chance of recovering. It's fortunate you came to me when you did. […] What you're suffering from can only be caught from someone who already has the disease, and this young man is either a knave or a fool.'

A Test for Love, verbatim

The doctor in this scene is positioned behind a desk, which gives him distance and the power of authority – 'convey[ing] rectitude, sternness, strictness and rigorously unbending correctness'[53] – a classic pose of the VD propaganda films. Their mode of address, as Kuhn explains, works through positioning the audience as lacking the knowledge that the protagonist needs, and procuring it, with her, through the agency of a professionally-placed medical source. In this scene, therefore, we are positioned with Betty, as the receiver of the doctor's information, either with an over-the-shoulder shot or with a close-up of his face. This shot composition is echoed in three later scenes where she is similarly the recipient of information from people of professional status.

These scenes come after she has sought lodging with her aunt in Manchester (to attend a twice-weekly clinic). The stern, gaunt aunt calls her a 'wicked girl', and treats her with conventional step-mother-like cruelty and disdain, tolerating her only for the memory of '[her] poor mother'. Driven out, Betty returns to her own town and reluctantly but desperately approaches a local benefactress whom she had previously heard talking about a 'home for girls who are alone and have no friends'. This woman – good-hearted and pudgy, eating cream cakes and chocolates (stereotyped to contrast with the lean aunt) – is a member of the Public Health Committee and quickly arranges her a place in a hostel 'for [her] condition'. She, like the doctor (though more

effusively), delivers advice and encouragement, with exaggerated upper-class enunciation; this same form is repeated later by the clinic nurse and then the Sister at the hostel where she is cured, who talk both about her courage in seeking help, and also, gently, her folly. In her discharge speech, the Sister includes the broader social perspective and reality, and a message of hope, which demonstrates the discursive shift that the BSHC wanted to promote:

SISTER: '[…] There's one thing I want you to remember, that although you've had this unfortunate experience and all has come right, every girl who dashes thoughtlessly after adventure or acts as impetuously as you did runs the same risks and the results may be very much more serious. Well, you're quite well again now. I hope you find a nice young man, get married and have a family.'

BETTY: 'No, I'm afraid that's impossible. There's only one thing left for a girl like me and that's work.'

SISTE: 'Nonsense, there's no reason now you shouldn't marry and be happy.'

A Test for Love, verbatim

Narratively, all ends well: George, the cad, 'got very ill and had to go away', and trusty Jim, realising the misunderstandings and guessing what had happened, seeks Betty out and, contrary to her expectations, does not label her as 'damaged goods',[54] but proposes marriage. The non-judgmental attitude of Jim and of all the authority figures, particularly the female ones, to Betty's 'only slip', may be designed to encourage attitudes to sex, disease and woman's misfortune more generous than those of the old morality, represented by Betty's aunt.

The demands of the drama, however, cannot accommodate bio-medical discourse. For all their kindly advice and information, Betty's disease itself is not referred to, only her 'unfortunate experience'. While the doctor observes that, 'The symptoms are the same as a very common condition of women', he does not tell us what they are, though he is more informative about the treatment. This evasiveness, together with Betty's oblique explanation to Sally that 'it's something to do with' what she did with George, and thus could be pregnancy, suggests the film's ambiguity may be intentional. Filmgoers faced with unplanned pregnancies might have been equally as grateful as those with sexual transmitted diseases, the ostensibly targeted group, for the information about getting months of treatment in a secure hostel with 'other girls from the same walk of life who've also had unfortunate experiences' where 'you'll only be known as number 87'.

While its fictional format allows for viewers to distance themselves from the central protagonist, Betty, there is also some attempt at encouraging identification. She is not represented visually as the traditional 'loose' girl (heavy eyes, flirtatious manners, provocative dress), but played by a particularly pretty actress, made up, dressed, lit and shot in a manner reminiscent of 'pure' and 'innocent' heroines of contemporary British films, and she is given the excuse of a (putative) two-timing boyfriend for her ill-judged dalliance. The narrative

certainly encourages identification with her plight, and thus, presumably, extension of sympathy to those who became pregnant rather than infected.

The fictionalized story of *A Test for Love* is framed within both medical/social-work and moral discourses. It strives to find an appropriate language and style to bridge scientific, medical and popular knowledge about sex, without upsetting public sensibilities or the censors, and still to be informative and educative. Its achievement is undermined by its evasiveness about actual sexual behaviour, an obstacle the earlier films had also had to face.

The 1931 film, *How to Tell*, also commissioned by the BSHC, is more explicitly about sex education and directly addresses the question of what and how parents should tell children about sex. More about teaching children than young adults, it combines fictional format with instructional mode, framing the educational material within the setting of a young couple's family life.[55] The first scene shows a woman playing in the nursery with a baby girl and a boy toddler; next, in the context of cosy domestic firelight, she nervously raises the key question with her husband:

MOTHER: 'Jim's just begun to ask questions. We haven't decided what we are going to tell the children about babies and things.'

FATHER: 'Let's tell them the truth. My early life was a misery from the lies they told me.'

How to Tell, verbatim

This leads on to flashbacks of an autocratic-looking father lecturing the child, whom we then see digging in the cabbage patch, having 'a rotten time' at school (where other boys are laughing at chalked drawings in the playground), and finally 'not understanding what [he] was feeling when he fell desperately in love' at seventeen. The couple decide that: 'They shan't suffer the agony of mind we suffered.'

A handful of scenes show their attempts at enlightening their child. In the first, the mother explains to the boy simply that baby 'began so teeny tiny she was not as big as a pin's head'. Next the children, older now, are looking at their pet rabbits. The little boy tells the girl that: 'Mothers keep the babies safe until they're big enough to be born – Mother told me so.' Thus we infer continuing dialogue, though couched in nursery euphemisms.

Next, at school, a woman teacher, pointing to inscrutable diagrams on the blackboard, explains to the class about plant reproduction. The children are all holding pussy-willow wands, the conventional teaching trope for such plant reproduction lessons:

TEACHER: 'So you see, children, that from the pollen and the ovule a seed is formed. The ovule is just a possible seed until the pollen grows down into it, for it is then that a new life begins. Seed finds its way into the ground and then becomes a new plant.'

How to Tell, verbatim

The children look amazed. Back home, this excitement – and the rabbits – gives the father his chance to give his talk. This is delivered at only a very slight angle to the camera. While cut-aways show the children listening, he is very clearly including us, the audience, in his address. Thus we receive the sex education designed for 'our' children.

FATHER: 'You've just learned there are father and mother flowers. You know too that you have a buck and a doe rabbit. When the doe rabbit – the mother – wants little ones, the buck – the father rabbit – has to help. He does this by passing from his body into the body of the doe very very very small living particles which are called sperm cells. Inside the doe there are also very small cells called egg cells each about the size of a small pin's head. A sperm cell and an egg cell join together to become one, and from this there begins to grow a baby rabbit. In the same way human beings have sperms and ova which by joining together form the beginning of the life and growth of a human baby inside the body of the mother.'

How to Tell, verbatim

Father, with his pipe, has the role of authority. Mother's visible role is little more than family support, providing meals and so on. Despite having a daughter, she has no corresponding moment of spoken authority; Jim transmits her knowledge to his sister. Menstruation, for instance, or other bodily changes, are not mentioned.

The last section of the film moves from sex to VD. It continues with the question and answer format building on the father as the source of knowledge. Jim, a teenager now, asks his father why another man walks with a limp, and learns that 'he had an accident at football some time ago'.

JIM: 'Oh! It's nothing to do with Venereal Disease?'

FATHER: 'What do you know about Venereal Disease?'

JIM: 'Well nothing really … the boys talk at school. What is it?'

FATHER: 'Venereal diseases are caused by germs which attack the organs of reproduction.'

JIM: 'How do people get it?'

FATHER [WITH FURROWED BROW, NODS]: 'You know what mating means […] the diseases are spread by mating with an infected person.'

JIM: 'Do you mean marriage?'

FATHER: 'The diseases are usually contracted before marriage by men and women who have not learned self-control.'

JIM: 'You mean when some girls have babies before they are married? [*Father* nods, looking troubled.] Then I suppose if an infected man married, he might give the disease to his wife.'

FATHER: 'Yes, and through her to his children.'

JIM: 'I'm glad I know. What luck I can talk to you about these things, Dad.'

How to Tell, verbatim

The final shot is of the children doing homework, older still, with their parents in front of a glowing fire; an intertitle 'TRUE KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING MAKES FOR A HAPPY HOME' is superimposed.

A number of significant aspects of the film's discourse stand out. Scientific authority is perhaps the most important. The explanation the father gives the children is a key discursive moment. Not only is it delivered in 'talking head' mode, without any interventions or questions, but it also draws on scientific terms which give it added weight. Like *ovule* and *pollen*, and *doe* and *buck*, the human activity of sex is described in biological vocabulary – *particles, cells, sperm* and *ova*. But these terms are embedded in a cosier (and not altogether appropriate or accurate) anthropomorphic discourse of human family relations: female and male flowers (and rabbits) are called 'mother and father' even before they reproduce. Religious ideology is also involved, the phrase 'joining together to become one' invoking the Christian marriage service.

The question of how exactly the sperms and ova 'join together' or are 'pass[ed] from his body into the body of the doe' is avoided, as is the issue of timing: 'When mother rabbit wants little ones, father rabbit has to help.' Yet, while this description is certainly evasive, there is in it a suggestion that both sexes contribute to sexual-reproductive activities rather than the common narrative of 'male penetration' and the 'adventurous sperm'.[56] The female is not just a passive vessel for sex and embryos, she even initiates the act ('and father rabbit has to help'). But it is still (predictably) 'little ones' she wants, not sex. So, while this film was designed to combat the lies and the 'agony of mind' of the parents' generation, it also created its own lacunae and avoided a number of key sex-specific topics around puberty.

The reproductive imperative and heterosexual assumptions of sex education are embedded in the nature-analogy model which was – and perhaps still remains – the preferred teaching model for human reproduction. Even today, parents admit to using television wildlife films to tell their children the so-called 'Facts of Life', claiming it saves embarrassment on all sides; it also, however, relieves them of having to talk about the activities and emotions of human bodies.[57] Indeed, the potency of the phrase, 'the Facts of Life', comes through its suggestion of a finite universally-applicable body of knowledge, immutable scientific truths, and simultaneously a no-frills approach to sex; it centralizes the reproductive function of sex, drawing on the ambiguous meaning of 'life', and privileging that over its social function and pleasure base. This approach is what *How to Tell* both achieves and promotes through the certainty and authority of its style of address and visual reference to scientific modes of explanation.

It is arguable that, if a nature-analogy model is to be followed, the 'birds and the bees' approach is preferable to myths of the cabbage patch or the stork. Yet, the danger (and attraction) of this paradigm is that it can disguise the ideological implications of the material selected to illustrate the filmmakers' argument, and masks the huge diversity of reproductive behaviour

across species in the natural world – some of which would hardly serve as a model for self-control, monogamy or responsible parenthood.[58]

The Mystery of Marriage is a nature-analogy film.[59] It is far more of an entertainment than informational piece, but like documentary films, it has an argument (that there are parallels between human sex-related behaviours and those found in nature), an authoritative narrative voice, and visual support for the claims of its script. BIF, the production company, had 'a reputation as scientific film makers with their use of specialised techniques of time-lapse photography (used to present the growth of plants), cinemicrography (presenting highly magnified images of organisms) and animated diagrams'. Consequently, these films ('both popular and critically acclaimed') were in big demand for educational purposes, and enjoyed wide exhibition, not so much in cinemas as in other venues such as schools and town halls.[60]

Although *The Mystery of Marriage* was seen as hugely innovative at the time,[61] today the popularity of sociobiology, and its easy adaptation to film structure, has made its format all too familiar. The film intercuts specially created scenarios (played by actors) with footage of various species of animals, birds, insects and even plants, and with library footage of people from non-Western societies. This is edited to illustrate that human courtship, marriage and family behaviour mirrors that of the natural world. The little scenes, though artificial and culturally specific, are thus implied to be natural and universal. The accompanying commentary is sometimes questionable in its accuracy, and its interpretations thoroughly patriarchal (and indeed racist); but it is also rather wry and certainly humorous, which should serve to undermine claims to scientific authority.

Space only allows for selective reference to the voice-over commentary. The film's first sequences examine attraction and courtship:

> 'Now the stickleback proves a real he-man. He chases the lady sticklebacks to drive them into accepting his attentions.' *[Fish footage]*
>
> 'In other species the males rely largely on their appearance for attracting a partner, and new spring clothes can encourage the shyest suitor to take up a courageous attitude in courtship.' *[In long shot and bright lighting, a young woman waiting near a telephone box is jauntily approached by a young man wearing plain but spruce clothes.]*
>
> 'In the spring the amorous pheasant has a ruff of white feathers and this makes him bold enough to press his suit upon a not-at-all-forthcoming lady.' *[Caged pheasants are engaging in pursuit-and-rejection behaviour, the female, clearly uninterested, having nowhere to escape to. The next sequence shows a young man in a stripy blazer blocking the path of a young woman walking in the country, harassing her and chasing her around a haystack before kissing her.]*
>
> *The Mystery of Marriage*, verbatim

This final sequence has, in fact, the effect of legitimizing sexual flirtation and harassment by males with the woman's clear and sustained resistance eventually broken down (see Figures 10.1 and 10.2).

Figure 10.1 *The Mystery of Marriage*, still no. 453: The amorous pheasant and a not-at-all-forthcoming lady.

Figure 10.2 *The Mystery of Marriage*, still no. 474: 'A courageous attitude in courtship': trapping a young woman against a haystack.

Obviously, this film would not be classed as conventional sex education material, but it makes its impact through suggesting the universality of certain comparisons; and its rhetorical power (where images appear to verify the script) has an indirect persuasive effect that may be uncritically absorbed. While the film is informative in many ways, and recognizes the important peri-sexual world of courting, rivalry and family responsibilities, it predictably omits the central facts of sexual arousal, pleasure and intercourse, and takes heterosexuality and marriage for granted, as 'natural'.

Close observation of the discourse of *The Mystery of Marriage* raises some further ideological points. First, the use of the term 'marriage' (as in the film's title) is an example of the way euphemistic language can contribute to sexual obfuscation. For instance, a passage on plant fertilization contains the following commentary, accompanying a series of montage shots of a man in morning-dress (groom), extreme close-ups of a flower and a bee pollinating it, a woman in a dazzling head-dress (bride) and the man and woman locked in a kiss:

> 'Here are the anthers, the male parts of the flower which are covered with a light powder called pollen. The flower is now the bridegroom. […]The pistil lifts the pollen from the anthers and transfers it to a bee […]. The anthers curl up, the plant becomes female and the flower becomes the bride [see Figure 10.3]. The mature pistil picks up the pollen from another flower off the back of a second bee [see Figure 10.4]. The marriage has now been solemnised [see Figure 10.5].'
>
> *The Mystery of Marriage*, verbatim

Figure 10.3 The Mystery of Marriage, still no. 890: 'The flower becomes a bride'.

Figure 10.4 *The Mystery of Marriage*, still no. 901: The flower's pistil picks up pollen off a bee.

Figure 10.5 *The Mystery of Marriage*, still no. 913: 'The marriage has now been solemnised'.

By not talking clearly about having sex, the connection between having children and being married is glossed over. Cultural discourse here interferes with scientific and physiological discourse.

Secondly, there is constant slippage between sex and gender. This is an entertaining rhetorical device; but superimposing 'masculine' and 'feminine' (gender terms) on to the biological 'male' and 'female' has the effect of naturalizing and reinforcing the (selected) gender roles of the status quo. For example, labyrinth spiders are used to illustrate that (human) males need to be constantly vigilant to keep their female partners from straying, by cross-cutting with a scene in a bar: 'it's fatal to allow anything feminine to become bored' (*The Mystery of Marriage*, verbatim). Even allowing for humour, unchecked androcentric (and often culturally-specific) interpretation of animal (or plant) behaviour such as this is educationally suspect, and particularly disadvantageous to women, but it is a tenacious tradition.

Thirdly, the film operates in an ideological frame of lower and higher life-forms. This has a knock-on effect in sequences designed to show continuity across ethnicities, reflecting the background of deep racist ideology in British society during the 1930s. For example: 'Animals in herds don't make homes because the young can walk almost as soon as they're born. Some creatures, however, who are constantly on the move, arrange to carry their babies about with them' (*The Mystery of Marriage*, verbatim). Here a kangaroo is shown, then nomads (possibly Afghan) and then bare-breasted African-American women, picking cotton, their babies strapped to their backs. Later, a sequence of a squirrels' twiggy drey, 'African' tribal village house-building techniques, and then a white British couple watching 'Miniature Manorial Mansions' being built, serves to illustrate that 'the more developed the creature the more complicated the lair' (*The Mystery of Marriage*, verbatim). References like these, however oblique or ironic, are – when noticed – considered offensive today, but historically need to be recognized as part of the assumption of social hierarchies – of class, race, and gender – against which the materials of education were produced.

CONCLUSION

With so little film material to draw on it is hard to fully assess the contribution it made to formal sex education in the 1930s. Clearly the medium, despite its popularity, ubiquity and versatility, was not effectively harnessed for the purposes of disseminating really useful material to young people, partly because it was not considered enough of a priority in the inter-war health economy,[62] partly because of political and pragmatic differences among potentially interested parties, and partly because of a fear that sexual knowledge could bring sexual licence. The collective will, in short, was not there; maybe the hurdles, including maintaining regulatory levels of morality and decency, were, despite a vibrant film culture, too high. Moreover, as Kuhn notes (referring to a

slightly earlier generation of VD films), no control could be exerted over the meanings taken from a film:

> A reluctance to countenance cinema as a means of disseminating socio-sexual knowledge could be justified by reference to certain 'problems' arising from the prevailing conditions of exhibition and reception. Since meaning is never fixed, a film may be open to a variety of readings – and in the case of films of the sort dealt with here, not all of them in accord with the intentions of those working for the cause of sex reform or moral enlightenment.[63]

The three films examined above embody the dominant public discourses in which young people could engage with sexual matters. Most inter-war films that acknowledge sexual activity focus on the dangers and repercussions of transmitting disease. The convention of linking sex only with disease and punishment – or with parenthood at best – does not, however, address the reality of young people's hormones, bodily changes, feelings and curiosity. As contemporary surveys bore witness, more basic questions mystified teenagers and young adults such as what exactly 'sex' meant, why it was prohibited and how pregnancy might be averted.

This was a period of considerable change in attitudes to sex. Films understandably fought shy of direct explanation (or depiction) of erections, penetration and ejaculation; it is less understandable for such issues as menstruation or safe forms of sexual expression not to be addressed. Given the energies and talent of the British film industry, it is quite conceivable that imaginative and artistic ways could have been found for countering the myths and ignorance that crippled people's lives and relationships, and especially curtailed women's freedom, sexual activity, and pleasure.

This chapter has aimed not just to show what the few informative films available tried to teach about sex in the 1930s, but also to understand how young people were prevented from learning more. In this context, why their ignorance was allowed, and at times actively promoted, becomes a matter of historical significance. To repeat Londa Schiebinger's observation: 'Ignorance is often not merely the absence of knowledge but an outcome of cultural and political struggle.'[64]

NOTES

1. R. Low, *Documentary and Educational Films of the 1930s,* London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979; Commission on Educational and Cultural Films (CECF), *The Film in National Life*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932.
2. CECF, *The Film in National Life*, p. 58.
3. Central Council for Health Education (eds) *Health Education Yearbook*, London, 1939, p. 111.

4. L. Hall, 'Birds, bees and general embarrassment: sex education in Britain, from Social Purity to Section 28', in R. Aldrich (ed.) *Public or Private Education? Lessons from History*, London: Woburn Press, 2004, 98–115, p. 108.
5. CECF, *The Film in National Life*, p. 59.
6. Ibid, p. 63.
7. T. Boon, *Films and the contestation of public health in interwar Britain*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1999.
8. Ibid., p. 3.
9. See for example, F. Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-moral Politics in England since 1830,* 2nd edn, London: Routledge, 2000; R. Porter and L. Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995; Hall, 'Birds, bees and general embarrassment'. Broadly speaking, the Social Purity movement deployed a moralistic discourse, using arguments from both religion and science, to try to regulate working-class sexual behaviour and criminalize those that spread VD. The Social Hygiene movement sought to reduce family size by changing attitudes to sex, including 'training the sexual instinct', and to stem the spread of VD through the education of both military and civilian populations, a preventative rather than punitive approach.
10. Named the National Council for Combatting Venereal Diseases until 1925, the BSHC 'generated, or handled British distribution of, as many as 46' of the 350 or so health films made in the inter-war era. Boon, *Films and the contestation of public health*, p. 46.
11. Hall, 'Birds, bees and general embarrassment', p. 103; Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, p.145.
12. See, for example, Boon, *Films and the contestation of public health*; A. Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality 1909–1925*, London: Routledge, 1988; Low, *Documentary and Educational Films;* M. Landy, *British Genres,* Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991; J. Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace,* London: Routledge, 1984. *Maisie's Marriage*, a film made in 1923 by birth-control activist Marie Stopes, a key figure in the history of British sex education, is about the benefits of limiting family size (especially working class families) and is not about the mechanics or the responsibilities of sex, or the link between sex and reproduction.
13. Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality*.
14. Kuhn argues that, in this context, 'the term "health" may be understood as a veiled reference to sex', ibid., p. 49.
15. Indeed, according to the late Rose Hacker, an active campaigner for birth control advice in the 1930s, young people were not seen as a separate target group from adults until after the Second World War, (personal interview, conducted 27 October 2005).
16. See especially, L. Schiebinger, *Plants and Empires: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.
17. L. Schiebinger, 'Agnotology and exotic abortifacients: the cultural production of ignorance in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world', Lecture given at Department of Rhetoric, Princeton University, 1 April 2005, p. 4, http://www.princeton.edu/~hos/Workshop%20II%20papers/L.%20Schiebinger.doc.pdf (last access 25/06/2007); R. N. Proctor and L. Schiebiuger (eds) *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, Stanford/Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008.
18. M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977,* Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Ltd and Harvester Press, 1980.
19. See, for example, J. Thomas and A.S. Williams, 'Women and abortion in 1930s Britain: a survey and its data', *Social History of Medicine,* 1998, vol. 11, 283–309; Porter and Hall, *The Facts of Life, p. 291.*
20. Porter and Hall, *The Facts of Life,* pp. 260–61.
21. Hall, 'Birds, bees and general embarrassment', p. 102.

22. The Ministry of Health, for example, hampered the BSHC's attempts to extend their work beyond the VD area alone to sex education more generally, by de-centralizing the Council's funding (in 1929) and making grants discretionary. Ibid., p. 102.
23. S. Humphries, *A Secret World of Sex*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1988; E. Stanley, *Sex Surveyed, 1949–1994: From Mass Observation's 'Little Kinsey' to the National Surveys and the Hite Reports*, London: Taylor and Francis, 1995; Thomas and Williams, 'Women and abortion in 1930s Britain'. Significantly, neither 'film' nor 'the cinema' was cited as a source of sex education by any of the informants in these ethnographic surveys. Rather, they reveal that young people were deeply ignorant about sex, and mostly relied on the Chinese-whispers of their peers and siblings.
24. L. McCray Beier, '"We were green as grass": learning about sex and reproduction in three working-class Lancashire communities, 1900–1970', *Social History of Medicine*, 2003, vol. 16, 461–80.
25. Porter and Hall, *The Facts of Life,* p. 270.
26. Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, p. 140.
27. Porter and Hall, *The Facts of Life*, p. 238.
28. S. Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen: A History of Cinema Exhibition in Britain Since 1896*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007, chapter 3. Hanson quotes R. Durgnat, *A Mirror for England: British Cinema from Austerity to Affluence*, London: Faber, 1970, p. 6.
29. E. Schaefer, *'Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!' A History of Exploitation Films 1919–1959*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999, p. 2. Many of these 'exploitation' films dealt quite frankly with sexual matters, and included topics such as abortion and rape.
30. See S. Rowson, 'A statistical survey of the cinema industry in Great Britain in 1934', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 1936, vol. 99, 67–129.
31. As an early example of film niche-marketing, between 1921 and 1933, Pathe produced *Eve's Film Review*, a regular cine-magazine specially targeted at women, with ever-changing items. Significantly, it failed to address sexuality at all. J. Hammerton, *'For Ladies Only': Eve's Film Review*, Hastings, Sussex: The Projection Box, 2001.
32. CECF, *The Film in National Life*, p. 72. The report also mentions 'Messrs. British Instructional Films Limited' as one of a handful of organizations launching 'ventures' to make public film provision for children more educative or improving.
33. Ibid., p. 75; Low, *Documentary and Educational Films*, p. 15.
34. S. Smith, 'A riot at the palace: children's cinema-going in 1930s Britain', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 2005, vol. 2.2, 275–89, p. 276.
35. '[A]bout 300' in a 1930 survey. CECF, *The Film in National Life* p. 63.
36. Ibid, p. 59. The quotation continues: 'To many of these the film is a form of recreation, and only some 100 of them at most use a modern projector for any kind of classroom projection.'
37. See Boon's account of the activities of the Health and Cleanliness Council's travelling cinema, in Boon, *Films and the Contestation of Public Health*, p. 165.
38. S. Brown, 'Coming soon to a hall near you: some notes on 16mm road-show distribution in the 1930s', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 2005, vol. 2.2, 299–309, p. 300.
39. See, for example, Low, *Documentary and Educational Films*.
40. Boon, *Films and the Contestation of Public Health*, pp. 148–49.
41. Ibid., p. 7.
42. Ibid., p. 134.
43. Ibid., p. 22.
44. Ibid., pp. 25, 134.
45. Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen*, p. 104.

46. Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality*, p. 49.
47. P. Rotha, *Documentary Film*, London: Faber, 1936, pp. 142–43, cited in Boon, *Films and the contestation of public health*, p. 19.
48. By the time *A Test for Love* was produced, BIF had amalgamated with Gaumont Pictures to form G-BI.
49. Unfortunately, no contemporary reviews of the films are available in the British Film Institute periodical records to indicate how widely or in what circumstances they were exhibited, or how they were received.
50. Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality*, p. 10.
51. The BSHC claimed that 'several million people per annum [are] reported to have attended showings of VD films in the early 1930s' (Boon, *Films and the Contestation of Public Health*, p. 18).
52. Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality*, p. 64.
53. Ibid., p. 57.
54. The title of a widely-circulated 1919 VD propaganda film.
55. Twenty minutes long, it is silent, so all the dialogue is consigned to written intertitles.
56. See E. Martin, 'The egg and the sperm – how science has constructed a romance based on stereotypical male-female roles', *Signs*, 1990/91, vol. 16, 485–501.
57. B. Crowther, 'Viewing what comes naturally: a feminist critique of natural history on television', in *Women's Studies International Forum*, 1997, vol. 20, 289–300; B. Crowther, 'The birds and the bees: natural history television programmes naturalising heterosexuality', in D. Epstein and J. Swires (eds) *A Dangerous Knowing: Sexuality, Pedagogy and Popular Culture*, London: Cassell, 1999, 43–58.
58. Analysis of the discourse of wildlife films indicates that, while their narration claims objectivity and authoritativeness, they tend to maintain a masculine focus and to use phraseology that reflects the assumptions and experience of the (overwhelmingly male) research and production teams. See Crowther, 'The birds and the bees'.
59. www.britishpathe.com (accessed 31 January 2005). It is 32 minutes long, with a sound-track. To a large extent it is a showcase for the cinematography of Percy Smith. Mary Field, who wrote and directed the film, was responsible (with Smith) for a long-running series of short nature films (also produced by BIF) between 1929 and 1933, *Secrets of Nature*, whose format *The Mystery of Marriage* largely copies (R. Low, *Documentary and Educational Films*, p. 20). Although Low says other films made for BIF were designed for classroom use, I have found no evidence that this film was actually intended as a sex education film, as Pathe's later publicity suggests (see website above).
60. Boon, *Films and the contestation of public health*, pp. 149–50; CECF, *The Film in National Life*, p. 71.
61. Low, *Documentary and Educational Films*, p. 22.
62. To take another perspective, sex education was not included in the programme of the Federation of Workers' Film Societies, formed in 1929 by a communist-led trade union organization, the Minority Movement, in order to facilitate not only the showing of films, but to 'encourage the production of films of value to the working class'. B. Hogenkamp, *Deadly Parallels: Film and the Left in Britain 1929–39*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986. Cited in Hanson, *From silent screen to multi-screen*, p. 46.
63. Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality*, p. 112.
64. Schiebinger, 'Agnotology and exotic abortifacients', p. 4.

11 *Helga* (1967)

West German Sex Education and the Cinema in the 1960s

Uta Schwarz

INTRODUCTION

In 1956, Karl Saller, the director of the Anthropological Institute in Munich, complained about the 'eroticisation and hence sexualisation of public life, especially in towns'. He referred to the 'poisons of civilisation', such as radio, television and cinema, and especially 'the excessive and shameless advertising' that, he claimed, was causing moral decline and an individualism in which sexuality lost 'its population-related biological and natural purpose for the future of mankind'.[1] This type of complaint was typical of the conservative cultural climate of the 1950's in West Germany. Thus, the fiction film, *The Sinner* (*Die Sünderin*, West Germany, 1950) was frequently cited by conservative and catholic politicians in their campaign to promote more self-censorship by the film industry and to introduce new regulatory legislation (the *Jugendschutzgesetz*) in the early 1950s for the protection of the young.[2] In contrast, when a decade later, after the infamous fiction film *Silence* (*Das Schweigen*, Sweden, 1963) had been released in the Federal Republic, conservative members of parliament attempted, with their 'Initiative for a Clean Screen', to re-tighten what they perceived to be the slackened screws of cultural censorship, their efforts proved abortive.[3] In this respect, it is arguable that the mid-1960s represented a watershed in the social and media politics of youth sexuality in West Germany.

In many ways, this shift was paralleled by shifts in the provision and content of sex education within the West German educational system. In the 1950s, apart from some cities such as Hamburg and Berlin, where the educational authorities had set guidelines for sex education as part of the regular school programme, hardly any formal sex education was taking place in the schools.[4] All other school authorities had refused to address an issue considered to be the privilege and duty of parents. Where sex education did take place, it was strongly informed by Christian and conservative values and by the ideal of chastity before marriage as a preparation for family life and parenthood.[5]

However, the shortcomings of the existing ideology and provision of sex education became increasingly apparent, and a new generation of educationists and psychological experts emerged in the mid-1960s who blamed the system

for moral bankruptcy.[6] The experts now advocated that the sexuality of the young should be acknowledged and that a 'non-repressive sex education' should be provided that would not suppress, but cultivate young people's sexuality.[7] In the ensuing debate, a central issue emerged as to how far not only parents and school teachers, but also priests, social workers, doctors and other commentators, would/should participate in the process of sexual enlightenment.[8]

At this juncture, the initiative in sex education shifted from the regional school authorities to the federal government, and in addition to school initiatives, the mass media became involved. The film *Helga: On the Origins of Human Life* (*Helga: Vom Werden des menschlichen Lebens*), shown for the first time in the Universum Film Theatre in Frankfurt/Main on 22 September 1967, represented a radical departure. In effect, it employed mass media film to impart the sex education programme of the federal government with a nation-wide distribution outside the control of school administrations or the mediation of teachers and parents. It represented a new synergy of public health and mass media, and it focussed on a bio-medical approach to reproduction. The 77-minute film was produced in 1966/67 by a Munich film producer on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Health in Bonn, represented by the German Health Museum (*Deutsches Gesundheitsmuseum*, DGM), a central institute for health education based in Cologne. The film was promoted as a film on sex education, and released by the *Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft*, an organisation responsible for film classification, as suitable viewing for those over 16 years of age. In West Germany, four million people had seen the film within a few months in 1967/68.[9] Rewarded with a 'Golden Screen' award from the German Cinema Board, and exported to many European and overseas countries, including France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Finland, Denmark, the USA, Great Britain, and countries of the British Empire, the film became one of the biggest national and international commercial successes of West German cinema.

This study examines the film, and taking *Helga* as a starting point, explores the broader implications of the interface between sex education, governmental action and the mass media in Germany between 1965 and 1970. Given the large number of young people and adults who watched the film in schools and in cinemas, and the reactions it triggered, it can be assumed that the film had some influence on people's thinking. The film can be studied as an example of how and why Germany's federal health authorities got involved in the politics of sex education via film and cinema, and of the type of content they endorsed in sex education. A closer analysis of the film also raises important issues of gender. How, for example, did *Helga* blur traditional boundaries between the private and public spheres, putting themes and situations widely regarded as feminine, intimate and serious in front of a sexually heterogeneous and anonymous public in the distractive atmosphere of cinema halls. Furthermore, it has to be asked how a film on sex education was so commercially successful given its lack of well-known actors and of a romantic and sensational plot.

THE CONTEXT

While the two decades following the end of World War II witnessed profound socio-economic changes in Western Germany affecting values and assumptions relating to sexuality, it was not until the early 1960s that, due to a variety of factors, the issue of the sexual enlightenment of the young moved to the centre of public debate.[10] First, the shift partly reflected the growing commitment to a more scientifically planned society.[11] Secondly, the erection of the Berlin wall in 1961 also resulted in more attention being focussed on a more domestic programme of social reform within the Federal Republic, including the reform of school education. Meanwhile, the introduction of the pill placed contraception and family planning, along with sex education, on the public health agenda. This was strongly reinforced by the impact of the mass media. In particular, it was *Bravo*, the most popular commercial youth magazine, that, albeit cautiously, began after 1962 to highlight issues relating to adolescent sexuality.[12] Finally, while previously public health had been primarily a matter for the regional authorities (*Länder*), the newly established Federal Ministry of Health constituted a new influential actor in health policy, informed by new concepts of citizenship.

The new concept of an informed citizen meant that health-related arguments were now oriented to the well-being of the individual and the family rather than the State. Instead of direct expert intervention, the principles of self-governance and informed individual decision-making prevailed. The experts' role was now to provide technical solutions and knowledge, and the role of the State was to assure that this interplay could work.[13]

Moreover, to ensure the success of this new policy, Käte Strobel, the Social Democrat health minister of the Grand Coalition (1966–69), made the task of providing health information through the mass media a national one and transformed the non-governmental German Health Museum into a federal authority, the Federal Centre for Health Education (*Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung*, BZgA) in July 1967, two months before the release of the *Helga* film. Thus, the public health concept of the enlightened citizen that the Ministry of Health propagated assumed that radio, film, television, newspapers and magazines would now act as the disseminators of health information along with traditional agents of sexual enlightenment such as parents and schools.[14]

In addition, medical progress (such as the pill) and the dissemination of knowledge for the informed citizen were now perceived as transforming sexuality from a possible threat to public health and public morality into a means of empowering and realising the potential of the citizen. In a post-war society where austerity had been replaced by the 1960s by a culture of availability and consumption, reproductive and sexual health were now viewed as a function of informed and legitimate pleasure and not merely of discipline and abstinence, and this was clearly reflected in changing perceptions of the role of sex education.

It is arguable that *Helga* represented part of a more general attempt by the Ministry of Health to use the mass media to counterbalance West Germany's regionalised structures of public health and educational administration, which had formerly enabled local authorities to reject federal health initiatives that were seen to threaten their cultural autonomy.[15] Such a film could therefore enable the federal government to override constitutional sensitivities in the interests of a national policy for the sexual enlightenment of the young.

However, *Helga* represented the transgression of boundaries in more than one sense. Initially conceived in 1963 as an instruction film on antenatal care, then reconfigured as a film on sex education to be used in school lessons and refresher courses for teachers, the film was finally released for commercial distribution. Not only did it represent the first occasion on which a film claiming to convey a progressive sexual enlightenment had been sponsored by the government, *Helga* broke the conventions of cinema tradition by blurring the different genres of educational documentary and fictional entertainment. In the past, documentaries had occasionally been screened as the support programme, but *Helga* was shown as the main attraction, exhibited, without the mediation of teachers and parents, to everyone aged 16 or over.

This innovative, multi-faceted nature of the film was duly reflected in the press. Newspaper advertisements presented *Helga* in erotic terms, as depicting 'the intimate life of a young woman', and film hoardings showed a highly stylized figure of a naked woman covering her breasts with her arms, accompanied by an apple as the symbol of female seduction.[16] Moreover, the very title of the film served to highlight its varied connotations. The name 'Helga' can perhaps be seen to echo the Nordic racial traditions that made the name so popular for a generation of German girls born in the 1930s and to that extent could also be associated with the idea of a sexuality liberated from Christian moral constraints. In contrast, the subtitle 'On the Origins of Human Life' was more in keeping with the traditional genre of instructional films in biology and other life sciences.

HELGA: THE FILM

The following sections will give a brief overview of the film's contents and structure and will then analyse the most spectacular sequences – the microscopic shots of egg and sperm, ovulation and fertilisation, and the depiction of the embryo.[17]

In the first section of the film, the images switch from animal scenes to young heterosexual couples in love, claiming that 'all living beings reproduce themselves' and that human parental love stands high above the biological sphere. Employing images of schoolgirls of 12–15 years of age, the commentary then points to possible dangers resulting from the gap between their physical and less advanced intellectual development. The pictures illustrating this statement include a scene with a girl hitch-hiking. The need to practise sex education by open and age-appropriate answers to children's questions is also

stressed and is depicted with sequences giving model answers to parents for children of different ages, showing sex education as part of the normal family life, and representing nakedness within the family environment as perfectly healthy. In addition, against the backdrop of a shot of a Swedish sex education lesson, delivered by a male teacher, the question is raised as to whether schools should undertake sex education given that parents would often fail in this task 'because they did not know enough about their own bodies'.

Referring to the increasing public interest in the topic in Germany, the film then switches to a fictionalized scene where a female practitioner gives biological information on reproduction to her daughter and two of her classmates (illustrated by stills and animated drawings depicting the male and then the female reproductive organs). Helga, a patient coming for premarital health advice, is then depicted joining the group. An image of her schematised body then serves as an illustration to explain the biological processes at work. The menstruation cycle, ovulation, fertilisation, and egg proliferation are explained by means of drawings, and via film shots done by a microscopic film camera. Long sequences of such microscopic shots, enlarged to full screen size, show eggs and sperm, the moments of ovulation and fertilisation, several stages of the cell division, and the movement of the Fallopian tube, followed by pictures of the embryonic development during pregnancy. The commentary explains: 'Here in the mother's womb lies a new human being, long before it comes to the light of the world.'

By the end of this long sequence on the embryo, the voice of the commentator has switched to a male voice which is then in the second part of the film identified as belonging to a male physician addressing a larger mixed audience. This part begins by stressing the need for responsible family planning in the context of global population pressures, as well as the extent of individual suffering reflected in the abortion figures. Family planning is declared to be a measure of preventive public health with Helga and her partner shown participating in a course designed to prepare young couples for marriage. The physician mentions the 'rhythm method' of contraception, stressing that only the pill, administered under medical supervision, gives full protection. The pill is defended against moral criticism on the grounds that: 'We want the healthy family admitting responsibility for the child.' The practitioner then observes that many pregnant women behave inappropriately by ignoring their physiology while, in contrast, Helga is depicted as accepting her pregnancy: 'We wanted it [the baby].' She participates with her partner in a course given by a Red Cross nurse, including instruction on the female body during pregnancy, diet, clothing, breathing and other exercises, preparation for breastfeeding, and on the need for medical check-ups and blood tests. The nurse explains that birth-related mortality in Germany would be lower if more pregnant women would regularly seek medical advice, and she assures both her fictional and cinema audiences that delivery in the hospital, under medical supervision, is 'desirable'.

Film shots of Helga's breathing and other antenatal exercises are then shown, underlining that the woman has to prepare herself for the hard labour

of delivery. At home, as mental self-preparation for the approaching birth, she re-assures herself by remembering how perfectly she has followed all medical and paramedical advice received during her pregnancy. This scene depicts Helga as a person appropriating health-related knowledge to assure her own well-being and that of her baby. Thereafter, she is filmed arriving at the hospital with her partner. A training session for midwives is then illustrated by models and by an animated cartoon film explaining the different steps of a birth. This is followed by an anonymous delivery, filmed with the camera placed at a short distance from the vulva of a woman in labour. Inserted in the birth sequence are shots of Helga's face simulating some pain corresponding to the different phases of the delivery. Further shots display the midwife taking care of the newborn baby, with a male doctor's voice confirming to Helga that she has given birth to a son, explaining the procedures taken with the baby (the use of eye drops etc.) and ensuring her that 'everything is perfect'. Helga is then shown breastfeeding and resting as a means of recovery. Later she is instructed on exercises to firm up her abdominal muscles so that she will 'soon be slim and beautiful again'. The final sequence depicts Helga at home supported by her partner who takes over some household chores. She is happily caring for and talking to the baby, using all the advice given to her in her antenatal classes. In the final scene, Helga, breastfeeding with a low neckline, appears like a hedonistic Madonna.

Clearly the film raises a wide range of issues. However, three central features are worthy of particular attention: the open form of the film; the sensational aspects of the micro-biological film sequences, and the delivery scene; and the implications of the film for the provision of sex education to young people in West Germany in the 1960s.

THE FILM'S STRUCTURE

It is difficult to categorise *Helga* because the film displays an extremely hybrid structure. On the one hand, it is a conventional documentary. The pictures serve to illustrate an authoritative commentary spoken by an omniscient voice. On the other hand, the fact that the names, not only of the production team (cameraman, experts, film director etc.), but also of actors and actresses, are acknowledged indicates a fictional film.[18] Documentary material was inserted within a fictional story about Helga, a young woman preparing to start a family with her partner, and thus the perspective of the film's narrative changes constantly from Helga's to that of the narrator.

To integrate both modes of representation, the film focuses the gaze of the fictional characters on scientific images. Thus, the attention of Helga, and by inference, of others in need of enlightenment, along with that of the experts and of the cinema audience, is directed at schematic drawings, film shots made by the microscopic medical camera, or sequences from already existing instruction films.

In addition, the film constantly changes the level of observation. For example, when the practitioner in the first part of the film explains the reproductive organs and their function, we first see her daughter and other girls looking at medical drawings in a book before these drawings appear in an animated full screen version, and we as spectators are then directly instructed.

Another distinctive technique in *Helga* is to blur the boundaries between schematic image and real (fictional) film. For example, in the beginning of the sequence with the practitioner, Helga is first a member of the female group, then she changes via film animation techniques into a full screen medical demonstration figure, standing upright and naked against a dark background isolated from the social world. Nevertheless, this figure raises her arms – like a gesture of invitation – to receive onto her womb a projection of animated images of the medical model of the ovaries and the uterus, illustrating the practitioner's explanations. In this sequence, the difference between the animated medical drawing and the social figure is elided, thus effecting the imaginative transfer between the schematic images and the physical-social reality of the human body. At the same time, it transforms Helga's role from an appropriator to a demonstrator of biomedical knowledge. She, the prototype of the 'enlightened citizen', becomes here the equivalent of an automated doll, representing the experts' power to inscribe new, rational views onto her body, behaviour and thinking and to erase any personal attitude or history this figure could possibly evoke. Consequently, Helga is not endowed with any will or aim; she is a bloodless model animated only by medical authority.

The range of narrative techniques and representational strategies employed in the film is anarchical: documentary collages, didactically fictionalized scenes, expert talks, still and animated coloured drawings, microscopic shots, shots of wax models, etc. This open structure can be understood as a function of the filmmakers' intention to serve the professional interests of all those involved in the production of the film: the federal government, the Red Cross (who promoted antenatal classes), the expert advisers, and the filmmakers themselves. The montage process integrated existing sex education material, such as drawings taken from specialist works or wax models coming from the DGM, and combined these with a new and genuinely cinematographic form of sex education, with film shots taken of the process of human reproduction.

This lack of a unifying structure reflects also the fact that a precise definition of the target group was missing. Initially the film was planned primarily for adolescents and young adults to be addressed in non-theatrical screenings, introduced and monitored by teachers, other educationists or physicians. But with the growing public and political interest in the topic, from November 1966, increasing attention was paid by the production company to its commercial screening. However, in order to be screened publicly in cinema halls, the film had to face different conditions for distribution and reception. Now a much more varied audience could be targeted, varying in age and generation, marital status, professional expertise, social background, gender and religious

orientation, and this increased the risk that elements of the audience would either reject or criticize the film.

It could be argued that in the case of *Helga*, the new sensational but positive cinematographic images of the biology of human reproduction were the main attraction of the film around which consensus might be built in a similar way as in a fiction film the star actor or actress served as a point of identification for the audience. The microscopic film images of the human embryo attracted general approval as they made an affirmative statement about reproduction, and rejected abortion, and established a new common ground for the representation of the 'origins of life'.

THE SPECTACLE OF HUMAN REPRODUCTION AND BIRTH

In the first part of the film, the camera captures the biological steps of procreation: the ovulation, the interaction of eggs and sperms, the process of fertilisation, and the development of the embryo. The meticulous preparation and composition of these sequences suggest that the filmmakers wanted to create a sensational aesthetic effect. For example, the swarm of human sperms is spectacularly depicted against a vivid red background.[19] In contrast, the eggs and the process of egg division surrounded by a light blue background appear to be filmed from drawings in a watercolour-like violet. For the depiction of the embryonic development, the camera pans in on the face, eyes and hands of the specimens, focussing on their human features, and light is used to create the impression of plasticity, movement and vitality. Within this depiction, the embryo appears as a living entity of its own, related to mankind in general and independent of the maternal body; in effect it represented the medico-cinematographic 'bringing-to-life' of the human embryo.

To understand the sensational impact the film had on the contemporary society, it is necessary to compare it with previous cinema traditions of documentary films relating to nature. From its beginnings before 1900, scientific cinema aimed to make technically accessible a world invisible to the human eye. The continuous technical improvements during the first half of the twentieth century testified to the enduring commitment to this exploration of nature, not only as a means of advancing scientific knowledge but also as a means of documenting the mysteries of nature for the wider public. Within this process of innovation, new breakthroughs both in film technique and its social application might, at critical junctures, be as significant as the content of the film itself.

In this sense, the sensational aspect of the microscopic sequences in *Helga* was not only what they showed – hitherto unseen 'actors' of human reproduction such as egg, sperm and embryo in their 'original' state – but that they had been filmed at all and in a fashion which could easily be appropriated by a mass audience. *Helga* was viewed by critics as a significant advance in the technical representation of human reproductive medicine that made it part of

common experience. By means of film technology, and combining animated photography, light and colour, spoken language, music and sound, the experience of actually witnessing the reproductive process at first hand was conveyed with a new reality.

Significantly, however, with the emphasis placed on the more sensational images of the 'biological actors' produced by the medical filmmakers, the female procreating body, as the site of these processes, lost visibility. The film depicted the embryo as an independent being, like an astronaut in his transparent amniotic sack, and the subtitle of the film, 'On the Origins of Life', referring to a sort of extra-social, botanical world of vital forces, only served to reinforce this impression.

If the depiction of human reproduction was the most compelling aspect of the first part of *Helga*, the most sensational shots in the second part of the film were those of the act of childbirth which had never been previously shown on a public screen in Germany.[20] To film a delivery was still a very sensitive and contentious operation in the early 1960s. The national medical congress in 1958 had clearly banned the film camera from the operation and delivery room.[21] However, as the filming of *Helga* shows, individual doctors broke the collective professional taboo, tolerating the presence of a camera or even introducing it. For the film, the delivery takes were shot in the third week of August 1966 in the public hospital in Munich-Harlaching.

In the sequence, we see only the opening vulva and then the labour pains of an anonymous woman, with the emerging head of the baby assisted by a midwife's hands. These images remind one of animal documentary films previously used for sex education.[22] This effect is created especially by the use of silence or reduced volume, and by the distortion of time. The complete or partial silence of the scene separates it from the surrounding social world, and the time distortion created by compressing the whole process of birth into shots of its last moments strengthens this impression, conveying an atmosphere of secrecy and social exclusion.

EXPERTS IN SCIENTIFIC COMMUNICATION

The production of such images in *Helga* had been made possible by the involvement of medical experts from a variety of fields. Dr Erwin Burcik, who appeared in the film credits as the expert adviser on the use of the so-called 'micro-camera', had been working in the 1950s in agricultural research institute near Stuttgart. The DGM had offered to use its collection of embryo models for the film, but Burcik decided to look for 'natural foetuses'.[23] In the search for such foetuses, several institutions became involved, including the anatomical institute of the University of Göttingen, pharmaceutical company G*rünenthal* in Stolberg,[24] and the gynaecological hospital of Cologne-Kalk.

Meanwhile, Professor Gerhard Döring, senior gynaecologist at the local hospital of Munich-Harlaching, was 'ready – despite earlier reservations [over

technical issues] – to place operation material[25] for the planned scenes of fertilisation' at the disposal of the film makers.[26] Dr Fritz Zimmer, an embryologist from the gynaecological hospital of the University of Munich was also prepared 'to observe appropriate operations and to manage the transfer of the material'.[27] Döring had written specialised books now regarded by the DGM as providing the basic script for the film, 'to give a unified scientific vision'.[28] He had also authored standard works on natural methods of contraception and articles for the popular magazine *Parents* (*Eltern*, founded in 1966).[29] Zimmer had previously worked on the cell division of animals.[30]

The specialists involved in the making of *Helga* thus played a dual role in the expanding field of scientific mass media communication. As medical doctors and laboratory researchers, they not only published in their specialist fields of research of gynaecology and reproductive biology, but also enabled the camera to gain access to their specialisms in order to present information at first hand to the public at large. They were, in effect, film advisers and communications experts speaking – or at least receptive to – the vernacular of the mass media.

In these respects, one could argue that *Helga* marked a transition in twentieth-century relations between science and society as a whole in West Germany and reflected a fundamental shift from a paradigm of scientific enlightenment to one of the public understanding of science.[31] The film represented a new synergy between the representational agendas of biomedical research innovation, public health initiatives, and commercial documentary film production and distribution.

It may be speculated that the production of images of human embryos and the box-office success of *Helga* in 1967/8 might have been related to the *Contergan* disaster a few years earlier.[32] Media coverage of the tragic victims of Thalidomide and of the mismanagement of the episode by the Federal Ministry of Health had seriously undermined the hitherto prevailing trust in medical progress, triggering a profound crisis of confidence within the pharmaceutical industry and the medical world.[33] *Helga* could have been an attempt by medical researchers, the health administration and media professionals in some way to mitigate the impact of *Contergan* on the public psyche by presenting more positive and optimistic images of birth and contraception, so as to create a new confidence in health politics and medical science.

THE RECEPTION OF THE FILM *HELGA*

Analysing the reception accorded to any film is problematic as the historian can only rely on the selective comments of those who chose to articulate their views.[34] However, on the basis of a limited amount of material – mainly preserved at the Federal Archives at Koblenz and at the German Film Museum (*Deutsches Filmmuseum*) Frankfurt/Main – it is possible to give a tentative account of how *Helga* was received in West Germany.

In the general press, although the film did not meet with unanimous approval, in the main it received a positive response, especially from the conservative daily press. Thus, the conservative broadsheet *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), published in Frankfurt/Main, where the film had its first screening, praised *Helga* as 'enlightening in a comprehensive and rational manner, without hypocrisy and false shame'.[35] The writer for the FAZ enthused that:

> The cell proliferation is an aesthetic pleasure, an opal-like miracle of colour with effects of light and backlight, a piece of art from the era of Tachism [a style of modern painting in the 1940s and 1950s]. The colours are so nice, the fast changes so wonderful that one nearly forgets the subject. Other processes [e.g. the representation of the different stages of the embryo] were still far more difficult to represent, some shots succeeded here for the first time; experts will rack their brains over how this was achieved […].[36]

This journalist, blurring the roles of the medical researcher and film artist, clearly considered the film's artistic qualities to be more important than the 'objectivity' of its technically produced images.[37] However, another conservative newspaper, the *Mindener Tageblatt*, published in the town of Minden in North Germany, stressed instead the scientific calibre of the film. It reported that the 'really scientific information' had been conveyed 'in a flawlessly proper manner, without prudery' and without arousing inappropriate sexual feelings.[38]

Other reviewers were more ambivalent, especially in Austria and France, but also in Germany. While criticising various aspects of the film's content and style, they welcomed it as a much-needed response to the lack of sex education materials previously available.[39] Meanwhile, the most strident criticisms of the film came from leftist-liberal newspapers and intellectuals. The most prestigious daily broadsheet, the Munich based *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), lamented that 'we are on the point of wasting one of our basic rights: the right to keep silent and to privacy [*verschlossene Türen*]' about certain aspects of life which should not be revealed to the public eye as they belong to the private sphere of human nature.[40] Journalists at the press conference prior to the film's release criticised the film for its 'ridiculous frame action', 'heavy didactic tone' and 'lack of contraceptive information'. Female correspondents were especially incensed by what they regarded as the 'double lie' of the delivery scene, arguing that Helga in her perfect make-up did not adequately depict the real pain of the anonymous woman in labour.[41] The cinema-loving community represented by the monthly *Protestant Film Observer* was even more critical of the style and content of the film, and especially of its lack of information on family planning, contraception and abortion.[42]

Teachers and other educators tended to evaluate the film on the basis of how it might assist any sex education programme they were already

implementing or intending to offer to teenagers. Their reaction was extremely varied; some issuing dire warnings about the film, while others strongly recommended that it should be shown even to children under 16. However, reports of discussions held with adolescents and young people following educational screenings indicate that there was a range of concerns about *Helga*. The crucial issue appears to have been the delivery scene. Thus, during one such discussion in the town of Münster,[43] teenage girls expressed their shock at seeing the placenta clearly removed by the midwife, and disgust at the thought of its subsequent use by cosmetic firms.[44] A girl aged 19, for instance, regretted having seen the film at all.[45] The responses of young men in the same discussion were more ambivalent. On the one hand, some young men felt that, since they were not allowed to attend childbirth, they should at least all witness the film's birth scene 'so that they were better informed'. On the other hand, one young man did not want his pregnant wife to see the film as he thought it would frighten her. Criticism was also levelled at the demonstration of medical instruments in the delivery room and the camera perspective which, it was alleged, gave the impression of a horror film.[46]

Even where adolescents were *prima facie* in favour of the more explicit scenes being shown,[47] the evidence suggests that they may have only been complying with their teacher's expectations, while feeling secretly shocked by the images.[48] It is clear that the manner in which young people experienced and integrated what was shown in the film depended not only on their previous knowledge of and attitudes to the subject, but also on what their cultural and social environment permitted them to express in public.

Other educationists were also critical of the film. A review by one media educationist, written on behalf of the Länder's Institute for Educational Film (*Institut für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*), criticised the film for its bad technical and cinematographic quality and lack of educational sensitivity.[49] The author expressed 'objections' to showing *Helga* to young people. Here too, the harshest criticism was levelled at the delivery scene as a serious misrepresentation of the truth, conveying 'no trace of the true pains and the hard work of a woman in childbirth'. As a media and education expert, the reviewer criticised the frontal positioning of the camera as 'a perspective that a women in childbirth does not experience and probably does not need to'. It could, he added, be shocking for sensitive young girls 'and probably also for sensitive young men' and have a negative impact on their sexual development.

The delivery scene was the truly problematic part of the film for many pedagogues (and reportedly for many of their pupils). Indeed, given the prominent role labour pains played in the discussion of *Helga*, it is striking that the issue of pain relief barely surfaces in the recorded reactions to the film. The film itself mentions breathing techniques and physical exercises, and in the delivery room, Helga is pictured being on a drip, but presumably only those who were familiar with painkilling drugs would have understood the implications of this.[50] The issue therefore arises as to whether the violence of the delivery scene was perceived as preventing young people, especially young

girls, from participating in pre-marital sex and, if so, whether this effect was intended or tolerated by the federal government, thus ensuring conservative approval for the film. Certainly *Helga* preserved the conventional link between motherhood and pain strongly rooted in West German ideology.

The media and the teaching profession viewed the film from different perspectives. For the press, the scientific sensationalism and biological voyeurism of the film were its key aspects, and high news value was given to the technically advanced medico-biological images of human reproduction. Teachers and educationalists, faced with the immediate reactions of their adolescent audiences, had other expectations of a film on sex education for the young. While the purely biological orientation of the film, which omitted any reference to behaviour and personal relations, was certainly in tune with conservative thinking, it did not meet the expectations of more liberal educators.[51] In particular, they felt that *Helga* had failed to deliver on the most difficult aspect of sex education for young people – the cultural and behavioural perspective[52] – that might have provided a new social and ethical framework for sex education that recognised and empowered the sexuality and sexual identity of the young.

CONCLUSION

Helga was a product of federal health politics aimed at advancing general scientific information and awareness about biological aspects of reproduction and family planning. Avoiding issues of sexual behaviour in social settings, the film presented highly aesthetic, microscopic pictures of human procreation. They served as a platform for the consensual representation of human fertility and its control by medical power, echoing contemporary progress in human genetics and hormonal contraception. The consensus included silent consent that medical film cameras would enter the bodies of women or at least use cell material removed during operations, and that film teams would enter the operation or delivery room.

From the standpoint of the general public, consensus was motivated by the desire, especially among the younger generation of childbearing age, to have information about reproduction and family planning, increasingly important in a consumer society where women were heavily engaged in employment. Contemporary educators were afraid that the voyeuristic violence of the delivery scene could possibly have traumatic effects on young people. But they also admitted that the film could foster a greater understanding on the part of husbands for the ordeal experienced by their wives.[53] In representing pregnancy and childbirth as a female activity meriting recognition, planned preparation and medical support, the film showed a new social model of motherhood emphasizing knowledge, the use of public prevention programmes and individual responsibility. At the same time, the prototype of the 'enlightened citizen' was identified as a female *tabula rasa* figure. Her modernity and

'exit from self-imposed immaturity' was, on the level of representation, equated with her voluntary submission of her reproductive health to the dictates of medical expertise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

1. K. Saller, *Zivilisation und Sexualität*, Stuttgart: Enke, 1956, p. 73.
2. S. Buchloh, '*Pervers, jugendgefährdend, staatsfeindlich*'. *Zensur in der Ära Adenauer als Spiegel des gesellschaftlichen Klimas*, Frankfurt/M.: Campus, 2002, pp. 81–140 and 188–90.
3. See the series of statements in G. H. Theunissen, *Das Schweigen und sein Publikum. Eine Dokumentation*, Köln and Duisburg: DuMont Schauberg and Atlas Filmverleih, 1964; P. von Hugo, '"Eine zeitgemäße Erregung". Der Skandal um Ingmar Bergmanns Film 'Das Schweigen' (1963) und die Aktion 'Saubere Leinwand', *Zeithistorische Forschungen*, online edition, 3 (2006) (http://www.zeit-historische-forschungen.de/16126041-vHugo-2-2006, last access 26 February 2007).
4. For sex education guidelines in Hamburg and Berlin and regulations in other *Länder* before 1968, see *Erziehung zur Sexualität. Vorträge gehalten auf dem 6. Kongreß der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Sexualforschung in Verbindung mit der Evangelischen Akademie Loccum in Loccum 1960*, Stuttgart: Enke, 1961, appendix pp. 158–67; Willmann-Institut (ed), *Sexualpädagogik der Volksschule*, Freiburg et al: Herder, 1967, pp. 365–409.
5. For a list of contemporary advice material, see F. Koch, *Positive und negative Sexualerziehung. Inhaltsanalyse und Kritik zur Didaktik gegenwärtiger Broschürenliteratur für die sexuelle Unterweisung*, Hamburg: Hamburg University, 1970, pp. 194–201.
6. Amongst these educationalists were the physician and psychologist, Klaus Thomas, later author of Berlin's new guidelines for sex education in schools, the sociologist, Christa Rohde-Dachser, who represented Catholic sex education for the young as constituting moral indoctrination, the psychologist, Helmut Kentler, who had a scientific and pedagogical background and worked on new concepts for Protestant social youth work, and Horst Scarbath, an assistant professor at Frankfurt/M. University who had studied pedagogy and Protestant theology.
7. H. Kentler, 'Repressive und nichtrepressive Sexualerziehung im Jugendalter', in H. Kentler et al. (eds) *Für eine Revision der Sexualpädagogik,* 3rd ed., Munich: Juventa, 1969, 9–48, p. 47.
8. K. Thomas, *Sexualerziehung. Grundlagen, Erfahrungen und Anleitungen für Ärzte, Pädagogen und Eltern*, Frankfurt/Main et al.: Diesterweg/Thieme, 1969, pp. 1–30.
9. Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BA) B310/24, internal note DGM, 16 April 1968.
10. D. Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. However, Herzog's account on *Helga* (ibid., p. 143) is incorrect (e.g. she ascribes *Helga* erroneously to Oswalt Kolle). On the history of sex education in early twentieth century Germany, see

L. Sauerteig, 'Sex education in Germany from the eighteenth to the twentieth century', in F.X. Eder, L.A. Hall and G. Hekma (eds) *Sexual Cultures in Europe: Themes in Sexuality*, Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1999, 9–33.

11. G. Metzler, *Konzeptionen politischen Handelns von Adenauer bis Brandt. Politische Planung in der pluralistischen Gesellschaft,* Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005, pp. 130–53.
12. L. Sauerteig, 'Die Herstellung des sexuellen und erotischen Körpers in der westdeutschen Jugendzeitschrift BRAVO in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren', *Medizinhistorisches Journal*, 2007, vol. 42, 142–79.
13. P. Weingart, J. Kroll and K. Bayertz, *Rasse, Blut und Gene. Geschichte der Eugenik und Rassenhygiene in Deutschland,* Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1988, p. 631–32.
14. The key role played by the mass media was expressed in a talk given by the Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Health, Ludwig von Manger-König, in November 1967, only weeks after *Helga* had been released: 'Enlightenment addresses the broader public via the mass media. As in the eighteenth century, the idea behind it is that the rational human being will behave correctly if certain contexts of cause and effect are made understandable to him.' 'Familienplanung – eine Aufgabe der Gesundheitspolitik', *DPWV-Nachrichten*, ed. by Deutscher Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband e.V., 1968, vol. 18, No 1/2, 3–6, p. 4.
15. U. Lindner, 'Chronische Gesundheitsprobleme. Das deutsche Gesundheitssystem vom Kaiserreich bis in die Bundesrepublik', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 2003, No B33–34, 21–28; S. Stöckel and U. Walter (eds) *Prävention im 20. Jahrhundert. Historische Grundlagen und aktuelle Entwicklungen in Deutschland,* Weinheim, München: Juventa, 2002.
16. See Deutsches Filminstitut DIF e.V., Frankfurt/Main, 12 U 70 (documentation on *Helga*) and image No 1–008300.jpg (film poster). The DIF keeps drafts of the posters and advertisements used by the press.
17. Based on a VHS copy of the BZgA. For a film summary, see U. Schwarz, '"Der Schmutzfink" und "Großalarm bei Kundi". Film und Gesundheitsaufklärung nach 1945', in S. Roeßiger and H. Merk (eds), *Hauptsache gesund! Gesundheitsaufklärung zwischen Disziplinierung und Emanzipation*, Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1998, 154–68, especially pp. 160–62.
18. The distinction between documentary and fiction film can be defined in relation to both formal and practical criteria. R. Odin, 'Du spectateur fictionnalisant au nouveau spectateur: approche sémio-pragmatique', *Iris*, 1988, No 8, 121–39.
19. Some stills from the film were used as illustrations for the *Sexualkunde-Atlas. Biologische Informationen zur Sexualität des Menschen*, Opladen: C.W. Leske Verlag, 1969, edited by the Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung. See also L. Sauerteig's chapter in this volume.
20. An attempt to exhibit a Swiss film entitled *Frauennot – Frauenglück* (*Women's woes – Women's fortune*), produced in 1929/30 and showing a delivery, had been also censored in Germany, see U. von Keitz, *Im Schatten des Gesetzes. Schwangerschaftskonflikt und Reproduktion im deutschsprachigen Film 1918 bis 1933*, Marburg: Schüren, 2005, pp. 280–316.
21. 'Aufklärung', *Die Welt*, 22 September 1967.
22. See, for example, the documentary produced in 1966, 'Geheimnis Leben, Wunder Fortpflanzung. Werden, Wachsen, Weitergeben', *Evangelischer Filmbeobachter*, 1967, 557–58.
23. BA B310/23, DGM to Grünenthal, 8 September 1966.
24. BA B310/23, anatomical institute of the University of Göttingen, 21 September 1966.
25. Medical experts referred to the human parts necessary for the representation of fertilization as 'operation material' or simply 'material'. This suggests that eggs,

tubes, or maybe other parts of the female body, were filmed, either in the body during gynaecological surgery, or removed and then used, together with sperm whose provenance is unclear, for the staging of the drama of ovulation, fertilization, cell division and embryonic development.

26. BA B310/23, internal note on a meeting on 20 February 1967, DGM, 28 February 1967.
27. Ibid., internal note on a meeting on 23 February 1967, DGM, 28 February 1967.
28. Ibid., internal note on a meeting on 20 February 1967, DGM, 28 February 1967. Döring had written widely-circulated brochures on non-pharmaceutical contraception: G. K. Döring, *Die Bestimmung der fruchtbaren und der unfruchtbaren Tage der Frau mit Hilfe der Körpertemperatur*, 6th ed., Stuttgart: Thieme 1963; G. K. Döring, *Empfängnisverhütung*, 4th ed., Stuttgart: Thieme 1969.
29. BA B 310/23, internal note on a meeting on 20 February 1967, DGM, 28 February 1967.
30. Ibid., internal note on a meeting on 23 February 1967, DGM, 28 February 1967.
31. See P. Weingart, *Wissensschaftssoziologie*, Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2003, pp. 113–25.
32. Thalidomide was produced by *Chemie Grünenthal GmbH* and labelled *Contergan* in Germany. See F.U. Niethard, E. Marquardt and J. Eltze (eds) *Contergan. 30 Jahre danach,* Stuttgart: Enke, 1994; B. Kirk, *Der Contergan-Fall: eine unvermeidbare Arzneimittel-Katastrophe? Zur Geschichte des Arzneistoffs Thalidomid,* Stuttgart: Wissenschaftliche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1999.
33. On the management of the *Contergan* crisis by the federal health administration, see W. Steinmetz, 'Ungewollte Politisierung durch die Medien? Die Contergan-Affäre', in B. Weisbrod (ed.) *Die Politik der Öffentlichkeit – Die Öffentlichkeit der Politik. Politische Medialisierung in der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik,* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2004, 195–228, especially pp. 222–27.
34. On the reception of films, see D. Dayan, 'Les mystères de la réception', *Le Débat*, 1992, vol. 71, 146–62.
35. 'Aufklärung für Fortgeschrittene', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 September 1967. For a similar statement, see 'Aufklärung', *Die Welt*, 22 September 1967.
36. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 September 1967, 2.
37. On the role of imagination in science, see L. Daston, *Wunder, Beweise und Tatsachen. Zur Geschichte der Rationalität*, Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2001 (Engl. *Wonders and the order of nature, 1150–1750*, New York: Zone Books 1988), pp. 105–9.
38. *Mindener Tageblatt*, 17 November 1967.
39. 'Geburt im Kino', *Die Zeit*, 29 September 1967, no 39, 58.
40. 'Helga. Zum Beispiel', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 5 October 1967, 26.
41. BZgA, Film VI B, internal note on the press release conferences in Munich and Frankfurt/Main, 14 September 1967.
42. 'Helga', *Evangelischer Filmbeobachter*, 1967, 540.
43. For the following statements reported by a regional social youth worker, see BA B310/24, Landesjugendamt Münster, 25 October 1967.
44. Ibid. The particular focus on the placenta was arguably due to the filmmakers' intention to highlight the professional training of midwives and to produce a film which could be used in such training. The association made between placenta and cosmetics was perhaps inspired by the advertising campaign for Hormocenta, a popular facial cream in the 1960s, which promised rejuvenating effects from its hormonal ingredients.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Thus, one 14-year old girl in the industrial town of Leverkusen claimed that, while her mother had 'always painted delivery in the most horrible way', she now knew

how it really was and she was 'less worried'. *Kölner Stadtanzeiger*, 13 March 1968, part on 'Leverkusen'.

48. See the report from a regional social youth worker, BA B310/24, Landesjugendamt Münster, 17 October 1967.
49. For the following statements, see BA B310/24, Institut für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unterricht (FWU), Besprechung des Films 'Helga', Vom Werden des menschlichen Lebens, by Dr Brudny.
50. As therapies to ease labour pain spread relatively late in Germany, knowledge was limited. See P.R. Stokes, 'Purchasing comfort: patent remedies and the alleviation of labour pain in Germany Between 1914 and 1933', in P. Betts and G. Eghigian (eds) *Pain and Prosperity: Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, 61–87.
51. *Film-Dienst*, 1967, vol. 20, No. 14472–5154, review No 15019 (Düsseldorf, Haus Altenberg 1967).
52. BA B 310/24, Landesjugendamt Münster, 17 October 1967.
53. Ibid.

Mapping the Sexual Knowledge and Ignorance of the Young

12 The Social Politics and Experience of Sex Education in Early Twentieth-Century Poland (1905–39)

Magdalena Gawin

INTRODUCTION

During the 1990s, there was a significant shift in the research agenda of Polish social historians, with increasing emphasis on the history of sexuality and the body, and on gender and women's studies. Associated with this has been an increasing interest in the history of sex education for the young in nineteenth and twentieth-century Poland.[1] This chapter seeks to supplement this recent research in two main respects. First, it will survey the social politics of sex education in the period 1905–39. In particular, it will examine the social and political context in which a demand for the sex education of the young was first made, as well as contemporary debates surrounding the timing, content and delivery of information on 'the facts of life'. Secondly, using memoirs and contemporary surveys, it will discuss the individual experiences of children and adolescents in the early twentieth century.

THE SOCIAL POLITICS OF SEX EDUCATION IN POLAND 1905–14

Throughout the nineteenth century, Poland remained under the rule of three powers: Prussia (from 1871, Germany), Austria (from 1876, Austro–Hungary) and Russia. In the late nineteenth century, whereas in the Austrian partition (Galicia), the Poles enjoyed autonomy in cultural and economic matters, in the other two partitions, they had virtually no influence in shaping the education system. Instead, the intensification of centralist tendencies in Bismarck's Germany and growing Russian nationalism made the educational system a vehicle of discrimination against the Polish people. As a result, although the earliest manuals and pamphlets in Polish on sex education were published in the opening years of the twentieth century,[2] prior to 1905, all teaching initiatives, including sex education, were discussed by the progressive intelligentsia outside the framework of the existing educational establishment, in illegal societies, in circles of friends and in the press.[3]

It was not until the 1905 revolution in the Congress Kingdom of Poland, which led to the legalization of voluntary societies, that the issue of sex education could be fully articulated. As Leon Wernic, the venereologist and social activist, and one of the most ardent promoters of sex education for the young, observed, the first wave of social and political change had been followed by a complementary 'ethical movement' that had highlighted the issue of child-rearing, and especially the question of explaining the facts of life to young people.[4]

This emergence of sex education in popular debate was attributable to a number of factors. First, the support for Social Darwinism among the Polish intelligentsia, particularly in the circle of Warsaw positivists, had a profound effect on the treatment of the issue. Positivists became acquainted with it at the Main School (1862–69), and later at its successor, the Imperial University of Warsaw.[5] Herbert Spencer was especially influential. His short work, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, Physical*, was reissued six times between 1879 and 1908, and under his influence, Polish commentators appealed for the broadening of school curricula in the natural sciences, physical education and hygiene.[6] In addition, despite obstacles imposed by tsarist authorities, a variety of campaigns were organised to promote hygiene and improve public health.[7]

Secondly, the associated rise of theories of heredity and urban degeneration impacted on debates surrounding sexual enlightenment. The theories of August Weismann and Ernst Haeckel, as well as the celebrated works by Cesare Lombroso, Francis Galton and Karl Pearson, were discussed in meticulous detail.[8] Fears of inherited physical and mental degeneration underpinned calls to extend control over the sexual life of young people. It was believed that, by instilling the principles of hygiene and sexual ethics (particularly in young men), one could stem the epidemic of venereal diseases (VD), which was perceived, along with alcohol and drug abuse, as an essential factor in the process of degeneration.[9]

Moreover, motivated by similar fears, a eugenics movement began to emerge after 1905, initially centred around journals such as *Cleanliness* (*Czystosc*) and *Future* (*Przyszlosc*), and after the revolution of 1905, evolving within the framework of associations such as the Society for Combating Venereal Diseases and Promoting the Principles of Abolitionism and the Boleslaw Prus Society for Practical Hygiene. One department of the latter was transformed into the Polish Society for Combating Prostitution and Venereal Diseases in 1917; renamed the Polish Eugenics Society in 1922. It was headed by Leon Wernic.[10]

Thirdly, the demands for sex education also resulted from changes in scientific paradigms, namely in pedagogy and psychology. New trends in education, stressing the role of early childhood in personality development were picked up in particular by the circle of followers of the outstanding Polish educator, Jan Wladyslaw Dawid (1859–1914), editor-in-chief of *Educational Review* (*Przeglad Pedagogiczny*) in the period 1890–98.[11] In addition, the emergence of sexology as a new academic discipline contributed to the promotion of sex education. In particular, the works of Havelock Ellis and August Forel were widely read.[12] In Poland, Walenty Miklaszewski, the author of the pioneering

works *The Sexual Life of our People* and *The Marriages of Privileged Women and their Nervous Diseases*, wrote on sexuality and was another leading advocate of sex education for the young.[13]

Fourthly, the demand for sex education was articulated by the women's movement that had been developing in Poland from the late nineteenth century under the influence of British liberalism. The first feminist circle in Poland centred around the magazine *Helm* (*Ster*), published first in Lvov (now Lviv, Ukraine, 1895–97) and later in Warsaw (1907–14). Two leading promoters of sex education, Iza Moszczenska (1864–1941) and Teodora Meczkowska (1870–1954), came from the *Ster*-group.

Finally, the early twentieth-century debate on the sex education of children and adolescents in Poland was inspired by foreign literature, most importantly by English and German writings. This literature emphasised values such as pre-marital abstinence, moral purity and attention to physical health. Thus, the work of the eminent French venereologist, Alfred Fournier, which became available in a Polish translation in 1905, warned readers against VD and encouraged them voluntarily to seek medical advice before marriage. Similarly, two English books, translated into Polish at the beginning of the century by Ellis Ethelmer and the purity reformer, Ellice Hopkins, gave practical advice to parents on how to enlighten their children on the facts of life in a warm atmosphere of mutual trust.[14]

Within the debate over sex education in Poland after 1905, the most contentious issue centred on the timing, content and delivery of the basic facts of human reproduction.[15] The progressive intelligentsia would generally charge mothers, but also biology teachers and hygienists, with the task of sex education. It was recommended that the facts of life should be conveyed from the point when children's natural curiosity was aroused and when they raised the subject, and that this timing should neither be hastened nor artificially delayed. It was argued that the overriding need was to tell the truth without creating an atmosphere of embarrassment and indiscretion. The mother's response should be appropriate to the child's age, mental ability, sensitivity and environment. It was believed, for instance, that rural children (not only from peasant families, but especially from the landed gentry), exposed daily to the sight of farm animals, would start asking questions at an earlier age.

The views of the progressive intelligentsia were heavily based on the educational ideology of the philanthropist school, established in Dessau in the late eighteenth century. The school's founder, Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724–90), created his own educational system. Discussing sexual questions with pupils openly and frankly was an element of the new system. Basedow also recommended showing pupils drawings and charts demonstrating the development of the embryo and foetus and the process of childbirth. A central feature of this approach was to make sex education a process rather than the *ad hoc* provision of information.[16]

Meanwhile, representing the feminist viewpoint, Iza Moszczenska suggested that the process of explaining the facts of life should begin very early on at

home.[17] She argued that, in a relaxed atmosphere, the child should first be instructed in the origins of plant life, and then of animals, so as to develop in the child a habit of putting together related facts from the plant, animal and human worlds, and of perceiving human beings as subject to the laws of nature. Moszczenska believed that, starting from an early age, the child should be made aware that every living thing came from a similar older being. In her opinion, the appropriate moment for explaining the facts of life to a child was when the mother was expecting another baby. The following conversation illustrated her argument:

> 'Who is Mummy making these little shirts for? For they are too small for me?'
> 'For a little brother or sister that will soon be born.'
> 'Indeed? And how do you know, Mum, that it will be born?'
> 'Because this baby is already living inside me, and as soon as it gets big enough to be able to live on its own, it will come out into the world.'
> 'And did I live inside you, too, Mummy, before I was born?'
> 'Yes, my darling; every child first comes into being in its mummy's body, and remains inside for as long as it is very small and fragile, so that it could not stand the cold air, for as long as it is unable to see or eat or breathe. It then feeds through the blood of its mother, and the healthier and calmer she is, the healthier it grows until it is born.'[18]

For older children, Moszczenska recommended the inclusion of information on puberty (in the case of girls, specifically on menstruation) and the provision of more exhaustive answers, including information on human anatomy. Nonetheless, she cautioned that answers to questions on childbirth should be limited to an explanation that the mother pushes the baby out with the force of her muscles.[19]

Within the contemporary literature, there were two pamphlets addressed to boys of secondary-school age: the authors were two physicians, Aleksander Herzen and Walenty Miklaszewski.[20] Written in the form of lectures delivered by a physician, they could either be used for individual perusal or discussed in hygiene classes at school. Characteristically, the pamphlets offered no information concerning conception, and it was assumed that teenagers were knowledgeable about the basic facts of human reproduction. The emphasis was on moral and ethical issues, such as instilling respect for women, premarital sexual abstinence, and marital fidelity (including the avoidance of prostitutes). VD were discussed at some length as reflecting licentious and promiscuous behaviour. The authors stressed the hereditary character of VD, notably syphilis, pointing out that the consequences of sexual indulgence had a bearing not only on their partners' lives, but also on their offspring. These warnings were illustrated by evocative examples, such as that of an apparently perfectly healthy adolescent girl, in whom the syphilis inherited from her parents suddenly manifests itself following a minor knee injury.[21] Both Herzen and Miklaszewski went to great lengths to deny the popular belief that sexual activity was beneficial for, and abstinence detrimental, to a man's health, a

belief which Herzen claimed still persisted even among some physicians, whose prescription of sexual activity as a remedy against all sorts of ailments, only served, he alleged, to drive their patients to brothels.[22]

The clergy took a different position in the debate over sex education. Roman Catholic priests believed that no information on the basic facts of human reproduction should be provided to young children under the age of seven. They suggested telling them only that God was the beginning of all life and that the child's presence in the world was the best evidence of the existence of God's will. In the case of older children, they staunchly opposed the Basedow method, seeing in it the danger of equating the human with the animal world. Creationists within the Catholic hierarchy stressed the privileged position of man in the natural world and they argued that using the natural world as an analogy in sex education constituted an attempt to denude man of his spirituality and present him merely as a function of a biological process.[23] A metaphorical approach, in which the mother figure was depicted as carrying under her heart a baby that fed on her blood and then in the course of time disconnected itself to live independently, was supposed to fully satisfy the child's curiosity.[24]

Liberal educators and the conservative clergy shared the view that sex education was not only about revealing the secrets of sexuality to the child; it also involved moral education and proper upbringing. The parents' responsibility was to protect the child from any premature, uncontrolled arousal of the sexual drive, and first and foremost from masturbation, which was believed to be detrimental to physical and mental health.[25] Masturbation was regarded by all the writers on the subject as a serious addiction, leading to blindness, deafness, epilepsy, anaemia, nervous disorders, excessive libido, arrhythmia and a number of other conditions. In order to prevent masturbation, with boys and girls alike at risk, parents were recommended to keep their children on a special low-fat, alcohol-free diet, with little red meat, and rich in starchy foods, fruit and vegetables.[26] A hygienic lifestyle was also recommended: a hard mattress to sleep on and light bed linen, light clothing to wear and cold baths to counter sexual urges. Constant supervision of children was also advocated to inhibit any touching or irritating of their genitals, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Thus, according to a popular pamphlet:

> […] one must forbid any stimulating movements: to those on foot: riding astride a stick, swinging, swinging on chairs, sliding down handrails, 'playing horsy' riding on other children's or grown-ups' backs, rubbing against furniture or doors; and to those seated: crossing their legs, shaking their knees with their feet, and the like.[27]

According to this view of the sex education of children, idleness was considered to be a major enemy. It was considered vital to fill up the child's time almost completely with mental and physical exercise: gymnastics, playing outdoors or gardening.[28] In addition, members of the household, especially governesses and domestic servants, required close supervision. There were

warnings against nannies who, it was claimed, might handle a child's erogenous zones to make it fall asleep, thus developing in it a habit of forbidden practices.[29] Parents were warned not to discuss sex openly in front of the child, and to protect their offspring from the crudeness of domestic staff. It was alleged that the tendency to engage in masturbation was to some degree hereditary.[30] Indeed, in advice for expectant mothers to refrain from sexual intercourse throughout pregnancy, there was an underlying suggestion that the child acquired habits of sexual (mis)behaviour even from the foetal stage.

THE SOCIAL POLITICS OF SEX EDUCATION IN INTER-WAR POLAND

A second wave of debate surrounding sex education occurred in the late 1920s, in a very different political environment. In 1918, an independent Polish state, composed of the former three partitions, was proclaimed, and the Polish government decreed full political rights for all citizens, regardless of sex, along with a range of benefits relating to employment, health and education. At the same time, the new generation growing up in the 1920s challenged nineteenth-century social conventions relating to leisure, sexuality and sexual relations.[31]

In the late 1920s, liberal and left-wing groups launched three press campaigns to decriminalize abortion and to promote birth control, civil marriage, and the sex education of the young.[32] The subsequent debate involved well-known writers, journalists, physicians, eugenists, feminists, social activists and Roman Catholic priests and was much stormier than that which took place at the beginning of the century.[33] In the new debate, the intelligentsia not only represented its own opinions, but, by the 1920s, constituted a very real influence on the State's educational policy. The central issues were whether or not to include sex education in school curricula and what kind of information should be conveyed.

Less than a year after the papal encyclical, *Divini illius magistri* (1929), the issue of sex education for children was discussed at a national religious instruction course in Cracow, involving 500 teacher-priests from across Poland. The meeting produced a declaration that the Polish Episcopate considered that explaining the facts of life to children was exclusively the parents', and particularly the mother's, concern. It was argued that educators were obliged to carry out this task only if parents were unable to do so.[34]

However, underlying an apparent unanimity amongst the Polish Roman Catholic clergy on sex education, there was in fact a diversity of opinion. The Reverend Dr Karol Mazurkiewicz, Ph.D., the author of a pamphlet, *Pedagogy on the Sexual Question*, regarded it as the parents' responsibility to enlighten the child on the facts of life; a task from which they should not shirk.[35] He warned parents that, if they failed to make the effort of transmitting sexual knowledge to their children, the 'street' would do it in their stead in the most vulgar and crude manner. In addition to parents, individuals entitled to discuss the subject with children and adolescents included guardians, priests and, in

exceptional circumstances, schoolteachers. However, he stressed that instruction at school should be on an individual basis in private and never in a group.[36]

The Reverend Henryk Werynski took a similar position. He also considered sex education to be primarily the mother's responsibility. In his view, the first stage should occur around the age of 7, though this age-limit might be changed depending on the level of the child's development. He recommended using metaphorical language initially, with the fertilized egg referred to as 'a human seed', the uterus as 'a cradle', and the mother depicted as carrying the baby 'under her heart'.[37] After nine months, the baby would be presented as leaving the 'cradle'. Childbirth was described as follows:

> When the baby comes out of mummy's body, mummy is in a lot of pain. Sometimes mummy will scream and writhe in agony. There is always a lady with mummy to help her. We call her a midwife. She helps the baby to get out, then she washes the baby and takes care of it until mummy recovers completely.[38]

As before, priests rejected the use of analogy to the world of nature while explaining human biology to the child. A talk with the child should, it was argued, highlight the mother's sacrifice and the love that both parents have for the baby. Moreover, in talks with boys, mothers were recommended to warn the child against masturbation.[39]

By contrast, the more conservative priests clearly disapproved of the idea of transmitting sexual knowledge to children and adolescents, even by parents. Stanislaw Podolenski, a Jesuit priest, permitted it only because, much as he was reluctant to admit, it was impossible to keep children completely ignorant for too long.[40] In his view, the child should be equipped with the basic knowledge that God is the beginning of all life, and that the mother carries the baby under her heart until it is able to live independently. He warned parents against overestimating sex education in the process of child-rearing. It was willpower and faith that protected one from depravity, rather than sexual knowledge. Father Ireneusz Kmiecik went even further in criticizing sex education, arguing that even the most tactful enlightening of children on the facts of life by their parents would provoke the child's sexual activity.[41] He believed that it was the parents' responsibility to divert the child's attention from sexual questions for as long as possible. Only when the child started asking persistent questions and showed an unhealthy interest in the matter, should parents offer him/her some advice. As far as Father Kmiecik was concerned: 'The less children know, the better for them. A religious upbringing makes explaining the facts of life unnecessary for a long time.'[42] For adolescents, he recommended providing basic guidance on issues relating to sexual relations.

In the works of the progressive intelligentsia, sex education was assigned quite a different function. Proposals to include sex education in school curricula were put forward by eugenists, including Leon Wernic and Teodora Meczkowska (a feminist, biology teacher), sexologists such as Albert Dryjski,

the psychoanalysts Michal Friedländer and Gustaw Bychowski and the educators Cecylia Bankowska, Maria Benislawska, Stanislaw Bohdanowicz, as well as by a circle of writers connected with the influential journal *Literary News* (*Wiadomosci Literackie*); most importantly, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński (an outstanding writer, poet, translator and propagator of French culture) and Irena Krzywicka (a writer, translator and journalist).[43]

It was Boy-Żeleński and Krzywicka who inspired the creation of the Polish branch of The World League for Sexual Reform in 1933. The contributors to *Literary News* promoted the ideas of sexual reform as proposed by Norman Hair, Magnus Hirschfeld, Margaret Sanger, Bertrand Russell, Havelock Ellis and others. Accordingly, their demands for sex education for children were part of a wider programme of moral reform, involving birth control, the de-criminalization of abortion, the provision for civil marriage in national legislation and, most importantly, the weakening of the influence of the clergy on social life in Poland.[44]

In view of survey evidence that indicated that parents did not take it upon themselves to provide sex education,[45] the liberal intelligentsia argued that schools should assume this responsibility, not only for practical reasons, but because the school, as an institution, was seen as central in the process of socializing the younger generation. As one author noted: 'If, according to the principles of modern pedagogy, school is to exert its educational influence on the child as a whole, how can it exclude from its educational activities a sphere as crucial as the sexual sphere?'[46] Similarly, another writer argued that, if schools were supposed to ensure the physical and moral health of citizens, they would fail in their mission if they did not include sexual matters in the curriculum.[47]

In the case of physicians, especially those of eugenic persuasion, the main motive for supporting the sex education campaign was to confront the continuing VD epidemic. It was estimated that, at independence in 1919, there were over 1,100,000 cases of VD in a population of 25 million people.[48] Eugenicists believed that school sex education within hygiene and biology lessons would help, in the long term, to check the rising incidence of VD.[49]

In plans to include sex education in school curricula, social hygienists and eugenicists left a good deal to the school's discretion. Thus, Teodora Meczkowska, member of the board of the Polish Eugenics Society, recommended that, at each school, a board, made up of a physician, a psychologist and teachers, be established under the patronage of the head teacher to develop its own sex education curriculum.[50] Wernic had similar ideas; he pointed out, though, that school reform (which, in his scheme, also included parents) ought to be preceded by appropriate training for teachers. In such initiatives, the main object of sex education at school was to postpone sexual initiation, reduce the number of partners and instil in pupils responsibility for the health of their offspring.[51]

The ethical principles proposed by Albert Dryjski may be considered representative of the collective stance of the progressive intelligentsia involved in the debate.[52] He recommended sexual abstinence for men until the age of 24–25, and for women until the age of 20–21, bodily hygiene, and moderation and

self-restraint in sexual life with few sexual partners.[53] He shared the popular belief that infrequent sexual intercourse was conducive to producing healthy offspring.[54] Progressive medics and educationists also considered masturbation as detrimental to the physical and mental health of the young.[55]

What was notable within the debate over sex education was the mounting wave of distrust over any intimacy shown to the child. In child-rearing manuals, children were forbidden from becoming overfamiliar with the servants, from sharing a bed with siblings and from assisting in the daily hygiene of a sister or a brother. One priest recommended that children wear special aprons for washing to cover their private parts, and that such parts should never be touched by the mother with a bare hand.[56] It was almost universally believed that showing excessive tenderness towards children and caressing them was harmful. The Reverend Karol Mazurkiewcz recommended that parents 'closely supervise the child's games and companions', show 'moderation in washing and bathing the child', and in 'caressing, swinging and suddenly tossing the child up'.[57] Even liberal educators, such as Adolf Klesk and Cecylia Benislawska, stressed the need to show moderation in caresses, which, it was believed, would needlessly and prematurely arouse the child's sex drive.[58]

The repeated cautioning of parents to keep at a safe distance from the child and to avoid provoking sexual precocity was in accord with the perception, articulated by the conservative clergy, that the body was an enemy to be subdued and defeated. One priest advised young people to practise 'mortification of the flesh' by getting up early, limiting food and drink and denying the body pleasures.[59] Clerics criticised co-education and the new leisure pursuits (such as spending time at the beach, dances, and parties) and post-war fashions as factors spreading moral depravity among the young.[60] Yet, this did not necessarily testify to the toughening of moral discipline in the interwar years. It is arguable that, in important respects, it also signified the loss of social influence by the Roman Catholic Church, and its attempts to muster its failing strength to slow down the pace of sexual change in Polish society.

Nonetheless, despite the efforts of the liberal intelligentsia and the intensity of the press debate, sex education continued to be excluded from formal educational curricula in interwar Poland. We do find occasional references to the use of Aleksander Herzen's and Walenty Miklaszewski's pamphlets in boys' schools, and Irena Krzywicka's fictional *The First Blood* in girls' hygiene lessons,[61] but the decision as to whether sex education should be provided to children in school remained at the whim and discretion of teachers and parents.

SURVEYING SEXUAL ENLIGHTENMENT

The Male Experience

The first scientific survey on the sexual life of young people in Poland was conducted in 1903 in Warsaw by Dr Robert Bernhard. The results were

published in the journals *Health* and *Cleanliness* and later analysed in a pamphlet by two students, Konrad Sawicki and Tadeusz Lazowski, one a medical student and the other a student at the Warsaw Technical University.[62] The anonymous survey was conducted with a population of male students of two higher education institutions: the University of Warsaw and the Technological University of Warsaw. The questionnaire included 38 questions on how the facts of life had been acquired (i.e. who explained the facts of life to the respondent and at what age), sexual initiation (mainly the age of initiation), the methods and substances used to suppress the sexual drive, and the association of sexual intercourse with drink and alcohol abuse. Other questions addressed the issue of VD (if the respondent had ever been infected, and if so, at what age, under what circumstances, and with what form of the disease?) Where appropriate, the type of therapy and hygienic measures adopted were also recorded.

With a response rate of under 9 per cent, it is uncertain how representative the survey was. Even so, the findings were suggestive. Over 20 per cent of young people polled had started to become sexually active before the age of 15, over 60 per cent between the ages of 16 and 19, and less than 20 per cent over the age of 19. The same survey showed that children were mostly (58 per cent) enlightened on the facts of life between the ages of 9 and 12 by schoolmates and domestic servants. Over 45 per cent of the respondents declared they had suffered from VD.[63]

The findings were employed by Iza Moszczenska in her 1904 pamphlet entitled *What We Do Not Know About Our Sons*. She deliberately used them so as to provoke a debate on the need to address the issue of sex in child-rearing. Deploying specific examples taken from the survey, she demonstrated the corrupting influence of schoolmates and domestic servants, and encouraged parents to take over the initiative in conveying sexual knowledge to their sons.

> The point is in a fact simply to reverse the existing state of affairs. Rather than discuss sensitive issues only with friends, corrupt cousins, etc., while keeping the matter strictly secret from their parents, as has been the case so far, boys would discuss them only with their parents, while being discreet in relations with their friends and other people.[64]

In 1934, the Polish Eugenics Society conducted a survey in cooperation with the Union Against Venereal Diseases. They sent 23,000 copies of the questionnaire to most institutions of higher education and student dormitories across Poland. 2,227 completed questionnaires were analysed. Two thirds of the respondents came from military academies, most probably signifying that pressure was exerted on the respondents to participate. The very few questionnaires returned by women were so incomplete that they were eventually ignored in the analysis.[65]

The questionnaire included questions about sex, marital status, heredity and VD, the age of sexual maturity, sexual initiation, the contraception used by

the respondent, and in what circumstances and from whom information on sex had been acquired. As many as 64 per cent of respondents said they had learnt the facts of life from schoolmates, 5 per cent from school, 8 per cent from medical literature and only 4 per cent from parents. The proportion of young people instructed about sexual life by domestic servants had decreased markedly (merely 2 per cent of respondents). Sexual initiation mostly occurred between the ages of 16 and 18, with 13 per cent of respondents admitting to having contracted VD, of whom a large majority claimed to have been completely cured.[66]

Attention should be drawn to those questions that were missing from both surveys. Characteristically, no questions on homosexuality were included. Nor, despite the fact that the 1934 survey was also intended for women, were there any questions on issues relating to rape and sexual violence. Furthermore, there were no questions concerning sexual pleasure or satisfaction. It appears that physicians and social activists were interested in the sexual life of young people, including the transmission of sexual knowledge, principally from the point of view of public health and reproduction. Nevertheless, the surveys do cast some light on young men's sexual lives, revealing the chasm between the values promoted in public discourse and the practice of everyday life.

The Female Experience

While we are able to obtain limited information on the sex education of men from surveys, for the female experience we have to rely instead largely on memoirs. The generation of women living in the first half of the nineteenth century had clearly been denied access to elementary information on sexuality. Aleksandra Tarczewska (born in 1792) did not conceal in her diary the shock and disappointment that she had experienced during her wedding night:[67] 'Whatever poets may write, whatever women may say, in my opinion there is no-one more unhappy than a modestly brought up girl in the first few days after her wedding.'[68] The ignorance of Anna Potocka (1846–1926) was no less; when she was pregnant for the first time, she thought that every delivery was effected by Caesarean section.[69]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women's sexual knowledge was growing, though one could hardly describe it as exhaustive and complete. Throughout the nineteenth century, peasant women seem to have been the female group best informed on sexuality. The sex education of peasant girls was believed to be a spontaneous process, based on the observation of animal behaviour. Meanwhile, their peers from cities and towns, coming from the intelligentsia, bourgeoisie, and even aristocrats resident in the country, were much less aware of the basic facts of human reproduction.[70]

The aristocrat, Maria Czapska (1894–1981), described the strict rules observed at her parental home.[71] One principle of child-rearing was to separate the offspring completely from the sight of animals for fear they might be given

an 'object lesson'. The stable and the barn were out of limits for young masters and young ladies, and all dogs were removed from the manor house at the author's mother's request. Czapska recalled being severely reprimanded as a young child by her minders for exclaiming cheerfully at the sight of a bull: 'He has a paintbrush on his belly!'[72] A similarly strict discipline was observed at home. Her younger brother always had his nappies changed behind a screen, and the siblings were not allowed to assist in their brother's bath or other hygienic procedures. The girl, brought up in a deeply religious atmosphere, was confused and unable to understand the commandment: 'Thou shalt not commit adultery'. The first sex education lesson was given to the 10-year old Maria and her sisters by an aunt, a mother of eight, who quoted the Biblical tale of the original sin and expulsion from paradise. The aunt shouted emphatically: 'It's all because of Eve!'[73]

As the girls were leaving the aunt's house, they felt even more disoriented. Thus, they decided to talk to their eldest, newlywed sister. She told them that babies were not brought by the stork, but that they were carried under the heart. 'But how does a child come out into the world?' asked Maria, and her sister passed over the question in silence.[74] Maria's sex education was completed when she was 16. She borrowed a medical pamphlet, a 'manual for women' from the local library, and was truly shocked. She recalled that, what for a child brought up in the country among domestic animals was 'a natural phenomenon' became 'a degrading revelation' obtained, 'moreover, without the knowledge and against the will of [her] elders and educators'.[75]

Compared with the experiences of other girls, even Czapska's knowledge seems relatively advanced. Halina Korn–Zulawska (1902–83), from an assimilated Jewish family and the daughter of an affluent Warsaw civil servant, presents in her autobiographical novel the utter confusion she experienced before reaching sexual maturity. Her sexual knowledge was a blend of overheard lewd comments made by servants. After visiting a park in which male sculptures were displayed, the cook laughed: 'These naked men are not real, the real ones do not have a leaf, but a pipe with which babies are made.'[76] On another occasion, she recalls the 'big' and 'dirty' caretaker, Antoni, whose duties included lighting up the stoves and who would take her on her lap and stroke 'her back, her legs and her belly' when her parents were out. Antoni was subsequently fired, but it is unclear whether this was because of his liking for alcohol or his inclination to touch little girls. However, Halina remained haunted by questions to which she could not find answers:

> 'Can one have a baby even though one does not want to?', 'Can little girls have babies, too?', 'What is "an attractive woman"?', 'What is the secret that girls get to know at the age of 13?', 'Can one have a baby without having a husband?'

The only person to answer her questions was a brusque chambermaid: 'What are you in a hurry for, Miss? In due time, your tits will grow, Miss, and then a

husband will turn up.'[77] Shocked, Halina turns with her question to her private tutor, and she answers 'that Mummy carries the baby in her stomach, and the baby eats what Mummy drinks, and it is hers. Then, when the time comes, a doctor cuts Mummy's belly open and takes out a little brother or sister.'[78] Halima keeps trying to complete her knowledge from the fragments of overheard conversations between her elder siblings, and from reading scandalous fiction and Gabriela Zapolska's dramas.[79] As a result, equipped with such fragmentary information, she is greatly shocked and surprised to find that she is menstruating for the first time.[80]

The experience of young Maria Eiger (1896–1983), the daughter of a well-to-do Jewish industrialist from the city of Lodz (Lotz), was an exception. When she was 12 and just before her brother was born, her mother took her out to the country and explained the facts of life to her:

> She did it very skilfully […] Mother pointed out to me how flowers are made, she showed me the pistil and the stamens and explained their functions. I liked the process of pollination very much. In the figures in a botanical book I saw a cross-section of the pistil and the pollen getting inside. By contrast, when I was shown a mare with foal a little bit later, it left me completely indifferent, I did not have any unhealthy associations. I received my sexual maturity, which came a few months later, as a natural fact, for which I had been prepared in advance […].[81]

Irena Krzywicka, born in 1899, and also coming from a Jewish family, could boast similar knowledge. She recalls being told the facts of life at the age of 11 by her mother, who read natural history books to her.[82] A few years later, Krzywicka, irritated by the naivety of her schoolmate, decided to give her the 'birds-and-bees' talk herself. However, the effect was disappointing: 'Having learnt what it is all about, the poor thing went away in tears […] My only consolation is that I had not shown sexual matters in some repulsive, shocking light, but in a scientific light.'[83] All her theoretical knowledge of sex notwithstanding, Krzywicka got a real shock while studying some ancient pictures she had happened upon. 'What did the Greeks use to tie on to their bellies?', was a question that kept bothering her for a long time. Eventually, she admitted her ignorance to a close friend, a psychology student. The following day, he brought a large anatomy chart and resolved whatever doubts she had had.

Thus, the understanding of sexuality among Polish girls in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seems to have been suspended somewhere between complete ignorance and fragmentary information gradually derived from their mothers, schoolmates and servants, or directly from medical pamphlets. The women's accounts were influenced by when and where they were written. A woman coming from the intelligentsia or the landed gentry who recalls the years of her youth in the communist Poland of the 1960s or 1970s, will generally not tend to focus on such an intimate aspect of her life. It is not by accident that the two fullest accounts of sex education, by Czapska

and by Krzywicka, were written after emigrating to France, after the experiences of the revolution of 1968, when sexuality had moved to the forefront of public discourse.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that, in early twentieth century Poland, sex education was designed to postpone sexual initiation (especially in the case of young men) and to shape new, more honest relations between the sexes. There is some continuity between the Polish sex education debate at the turn of the nineteenth century and the one in the 1920s. It was still believed that in the chain, sex drive-disease-inheritance-degeneration, it was stage one that could be controlled. The sex drive was to be civilised, brought under control, and rationalized according to eugenic principles. Contemporary proposals were not driven by moral permissiveness and young people were not instructed about sexual techniques or methods of contraception. Books on sexual practice, such as *The Ideal Marriage* by Theodore van de Velde (translated into Polish and reissued several times in the interwar years) were targeted only at an adult readership.

Some shifts in the ideology and practice of sex education can be detected. The progressive intelligentsia of the interwar period campaigned for sex education to be included in the school curricula. There was also a minor relaxation of sexual ethics, with the ideal of sexual abstinence prevalent at the turn of the nineteenth century no longer so forcefully imposed. The possibility that young people might become sexually active before marriage was increasingly recognized. However, such activity remained a subject for censure and, just like cold baths, sex education in interwar Poland continued to be primarily focused on character formation and the strengthening of self-control in young people.

It is characteristic that, in Poland, public debate on the subject of sex education was dominated by an interest in male patterns of behaviour. The first questionnaire was addressed exclusively to men. The analyses of a second questionnaire from the 1930s were likewise based solely on responses sent in by men. There is not a single instance of a separate questionnaire investigating the level of knowledge and sexual behaviour of women. It seems that this asymmetry reflected the prevailing perception of the male sexual role as an active one, and thus key to reforming social attitudes towards sex, while the role of the woman was viewed as quintessentially passive and therefore, by implication, less significant.

What were the consequences of the lack of sex education in Polish schools during the interwar period? The evidence suggests that it represented a serious obstacle, not so much for the individualistic programmes proposed by the writers associated with *Literary News* (including those advanced by Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński and Irena Krzywicka), as for the eugenist proponents of a collective vision of social order. It was through their programme of sexual enlightenment that the sexual behaviours of individual youths were to be

profoundly transformed in the interest of the racial health of society and the nation. However, from memoirs it is evident that such a vision of sexual citizenship and conformity remained largely unrealized and thus, among the Polish urban youth of the 1930s a spirit of moral revolt rather than one of discipline and control continued to reign.[84]

NOTES

1. M. Gawin, 'Spor o wychowanie seksualne dzieci i mlodziezy w dwudziestoleciu miedzywojennym', in E. Mazur (ed.) *Od narodzin do wieku dojrzalego w Polsce, cz. 2, Stulecie XIX i XX*, Warszawa: IAE PAN, 2003, 163–84; A. Weseli-Ginter, 'Wychowanie seksualne dzieci i młodzieży na ziemiach polskich w drugiej połowie XIX i w pierwszych dziesiecioleciach XX wieku', *Katedra*, 2001, no. 4, 52–79; J. Sikorska-Kulesza, 'Skad sie wzial twoj braciszek? Poczatki dyskusji o wychowaniu seksualnym dzieci i mlodziezy na ziemiach polskich', in A. Zarnowska and A. Szwarc (eds) *Kobieta i malzenstwo, Spoleczn-kulturowe aspekty seksualnosci. Wiek XIX i XX*, Warszawa: DiG, 2004, 25–41.
2. M. Bell [I. Moszczenska], *Co kazda matka swojej dorastajacej corce powiedziec powinna?* (*What Should Every Mother Tell her Adolescent Daughter?*), Warszawa: M. Arct, 1904; idem, *Jak rozmawiac z dziecmi o kwestiach drazliwych. Wskazowki dla matek* (*How to Discuss Sensitive Issues with Children: Guidance for Mothers*), Warszawa: M. Arct, 1904; idem, *Czego nie wiemy o naszych synach* (*What We Do Not Know About Our Sons: Facts and Figures for Parental Use*), Warszawa: M. Arct, 1904; W. Miklaszewski, *Odezwa do mlodziezy dojrzewajacej* (*An Appeal to Adolescents*), Warszawa: Drukarnia Naukowa, 1904.
3. M. Gawin, *Rasa i nowoczesność. Historia polskiego ruchu eugenicznego (1880–1952)*, Warszawa: Neriton, 2003, pp. 79–83.
4. L. Wernic, 'O uswiadomieniu plciowym młodziezy w okresie szkolnym i przedszkolnym' ('On Explaining the Facts of Life to School-age and Preschool Children'), *Zdrowie* (*Health*), 1907, vol. 8, 455–62, p. 455. This shift was reflected in the sudden increase in the number of publications on sex education after 1905. While merely one book on sex education was published in Polish in 1901, as many as 17 appeared in 1906. See A. Karbowiak, *Bibliografia pedagogiczna* (*An Educational Bibliography*), Lwow: Ksiaznica Polska Towarzystwa Nauczycieli Szkolnych, 1920, pp. 175–76.
5. Prof. Benedykt Dybowski (1833–1930) had taught Darwinism at the University of Warsaw since the 1860s. Exiled to Siberia for participation in the anti-Russian uprising of 1863–64, known as the January Insurrection, he was amnestied in 1884 and returned home. He taught anthropology and evolutionism at Lvov University until 1906.
6. B. Skarga (ed.) *Polska mysl filozoficzna i spoleczna*, Wroclaw: Nasza Ksiegarnia, 1966, pp. 13–14.
7. M. Janowski, *Polska mysl liberalna do 1918 roku*, Kraków: Znak, 1998, pp. 195–97.
8. J.R. Nussbaumowie, 'Nowsze poglądy na istotę dziedzicznosci', ('The New Views on the Theory on Heredity'), *Wszechświat* (*Universe*), 1887, vol. 40, 40–51.
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15. This discussion is primarily based upon the following contemporary journals: *Zdrowie* (*Health*), *Przeglad Higieniczny* (*Hygiene Review*), *Lekarz* (*Physician*), *Przewodnik Pedagogiczny* (*Educational Guide*), *Ster* (*Helm*), *Nowe Slowo* (*New Word*), *Czystosc* (*Cleanliness*), *Przyszlosc* (*Future*), *Swiat Plciowy* (*Sexual World*), *Dwutygodnik Katechetyczny i Duszpasterski* (*Religious Instruction and Pastoral Service Bi-weekly*).
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13 The Experience of Sex Education in the Netherlands and Flanders in Childhood Memories from the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Hugo Röling

INTRODUCTION

Despite contemporary anxieties over racial health and moral degeneration, at the end of the nineteenth century the majority of experts in educational philosophy and practice in the Low Countries favoured an absolute minimum of information on sexual matters for children and adolescents. At that time, there was a solid consensus that what little needed to be told to prevent disasters, such as premarital pregnancies and venereal diseases, should be left to parents. While sexuality was increasingly seen as a medical hazard, it was also seen as the centre of private life. Thus, there was a continuing conflict between, on the one hand, the urge to intervene, and on the other, a reluctance to bring this domain under any kind of external or governmental control.

Moreover, well into the twentieth century, the pressure from confessional political parties (in particular the Catholics) to prevent sex education in school remained strong, and this had a decisive impact upon the health and education authorities. Only slowly did the mindset of policy-makers shift as they became convinced that the likely damage inflicted by untimely sexual enlightenment was small compared with the real risks of secrecy and ignorance.

The history of sex education in the Netherlands and Flanders during the twentieth century has been addressed from a number of perspectives. Some authors have focused on the general impact of shifts in social politics and sexual culture in shaping sex education policy over the century as a whole.[1] More contemporary historians and social scientists have explored this experience in a comparative perspective, concentrating in particular on the effect of varying policy approaches on the implementation of sex education curricula in the schools.[2] However, for the most part, the actual experience of young people of their first exposure to sexual knowledge is either absent from the literature or lacks systematic analysis.[3]

This chapter seeks to rectify this omission by means of a review of the memories recorded of early sexual experiences in some of the six hundred or more Dutch and Belgian autobiographies surveyed. From the later eighteenth century, autobiographers began to recall aspects of their childhood, but issues relating to sexuality were almost absent, perhaps reflecting wider cultural

taboos surrounding the subject. However, during the second half of the nineteenth century, memoirists increasingly focused on their childhood experiences, and although sexual issues still remained a sensitive area for discussion, a growing number recorded their awareness of this, often accompanied by reflections on the lack of sex education and its impact on their early lives.[4]

The use of such sources by the historian is, of course, problematic and raises a range of methodological issues. First and foremost, as many scholars have demonstrated, memory is highly selective, often for reasons that we cannot readily comprehend, let alone measure.[5] As a result, any autobiographical account only reveals a very incomplete picture of reality. Secondly, as with other aspects of our life histories, accounts of childhood experiences may be distorted by the need in later life to seek self-knowledge or self-justification. Moreover, many memoirs deliberately (and often explicitly) exclude material on sensitive and intimate matters such as sexuality. However, in many respects these caveats also apply to a range of other historical sources and, *faute de mieux*, the historian of childhood and sex education cannot ignore the rich body of material contained in autobiographies.

THE MYSTERY OF THE UNKNOWN AND THE FORBIDDEN

The dominant childhood memory that many writers recalled was that sex was a mysterious domain whose mention prompted an agitated response from adults. Given the frequent silence surrounding sexual issues in the home, the earliest admonitions relating to sex tended to be delivered by church or school authorities. Catholic institutions were especially zealous in their deliverances. Thus, Jan van Nijlen (born [b.] 1884) recalled that, 'from the beginning', in his boarding school 'we were emphatically reminded that it was a great sin to look downward while urinating'.[6] Similarly, Marnix Gijsen (b. 1899) remembered with considerable resentment how his confessor had striven to alienate him from his sexual feelings.[7] Meanwhile, girls in catholic schools in Belgium had to wear two aprons when climbing a stepladder to wash the windows. According to Jeanneke Boon (b. 1915), the nuns 'really were sexually obsessed', exhorting girls at the foot of the ladder not to look up as it offended 'against morality'.[8] In Amsterdam, Bertus Aafjes (b. 1914) was frequently subjected to frightening sermons. Masturbation and birth control were 'condemned in the most venomous and hard-hearted way', with the threat of eternal hellfire rendering the 'breathless audience' speechless with fear.[9]

Members of the Reformed Church also recalled that sexual enlightenment had only become problematic once the church intervened. As Fedde Schurer (b. 1898), a carpenter's apprentice, and later poet and politician, remembered:

> The boys from the farms informed us […] about the relation of man and wife, taught us the correct words too and instructed us in the technique of

> masturbation. It happened as a game and one experienced it as a naughty joke at first, and there was no need for the adults to be aware of anything. The adults, incompletely acquainted with the problem themselves, never spoke about these things […] or condemned it in one breath as 'filth'. That's how it went, until one came suddenly across the seventh commandment in confirmation class, that appeared to mean a lot more than destroying a marriage. You were not even allowed to think of things associated with these feelings and the catechism contained the terrible and untranslatable word 'impurity' for it. Acts, gestures, words, thoughts and anything encouraging sexual excitement, [were] cursed by God. How miserable and rejected I felt after each fall. How despair and remorse consumed me with every sensation of pleasure or spontaneous erection. I could not talk this over with the boys, I think they would have laughed at me. Nor with father and mother, because they lived with the tacit assumption that such things did not exist or ought not to exist. One cannot break such a code.[10]

A feeling of agonizing loneliness was the result. Mischa de Vreede, a vicar's daughter (b. 1936), characterized her parental home as an 'environment in which much was suppressed, especially physicality. […] Sexuality was never mentioned, "pregnant" was a dirty word. […]. In my father's encyclopedia the department "The Human Body" was sealed up. People were not permitted to be called "beautiful"; at most they had a "spiritual" face.'[11]

Incomprehensible incidents left a legacy of mystery and apprehension. What, for example, was wrong with a classmate who had been rebuked, 'because she had her hand in her underpants. The nosy voice of the teacher sounded austere and upset, the class became deadly quiet. I wondered why it was not permitted to touch one's underpants if it itched. There was a mysterious horror in the voice of the teacher we did not understand.'[12] Apie Prins (b. 1884) was similarly bemused at the evasive reaction he encountered on reporting an incident at school to his father, a distinguished doctor in Haarlem:

> Jupi had pulled a boy out of the john by his ear and took him away, a really mean trick. 'What did the boy do?' 'Nothing of course, he only had to make a small one.' 'Well, come to my study after dinner.' When I had entered hesitantly and stood in front of him he asked me in a severe voice: do you ever masturbate? By his question I understood it was something bad, the way he asked it. I said: no […] and when he said nothing and kept looking at me in the same way: at least I don't think so. 'Do you know what masturbation is?' 'No.' 'You can confide in me, I am your father and a doctor.' O jeez, I thought, I thought that it might refer to urinating because that boy had to go to the privy, or showing your prick to someone, a girl, and I had done that sometimes and that's what the other boys did too, we showed it to each other […] of course that was bad but not so terribly bad I thought and I coloured and said […] yes.

> 'What is it then?' 'Well […] when […] you show your prick to a girl.' Well, then he did his utmost not to laugh aloud and said: 'Hm! But that other thing you must never do! You can get spinal paralysis and tabes dorsalis and that's incurable.' He took up his newspaper again and I left the room reluctantly but in the corridor I stopped and tried to imagine what it could be. It had to do something with your sod, that was for sure, but what for god's sake?[13]

Often, the reaction of adults to words employed unknowingly by children could seem incomprehensible. Roeland A. Kollewijn (b. 1857) recalled his older brother as a young child playing horses with his sister Hermine and him in the great hall. Niko shouted: '"Roes is the stallion and Mien the mare!" […] Grandmother was quite angry. Niko should not use such dirty words! No decent child did!'[14] Moreover, children often repeated words they suspected might be taboo. On hearing members of her family exchange risky jokes, Carel Scharten (b. 1878) interjected that he also knew 'a jingle'. '"Recite it for us, my boy" said uncle Frans with his solemn, sonorous vicar's voice, eager to hear it. Then I said my jingle – I had learnt it from my schoolmates – a jingle, incredibly filthy, so that the whole family was bewildered at first, then burst out in uncontrollable laughter.'[15]

Parents' reactions to certain postures in their children could be equally mysterious. Thus, Jeanne van Schaik-Willing (b. 1895) remembers her mother 'in those years facing me with an enigmatic, searching, terrifying look; she gave me orders I did not understand at all and that were impossible; I could never, never, never, do you hear, sleep with my hands under the cover, always over the blanket.'[16] 'And every day I woke up again with my hands cuddled before my chest and I knew I was a bad girl.'[17] Likewise, the psychiatrist, Frank van Ree (b. 1927), remembered that when keeping his hands in his pocket, 'Ko [his mother] thought it dirty and I had to take them out.'[18]

THE LACK OF SEXUAL EDUCATION

Almost all Dutch and Flemish autobiographers who address issues of sexuality mention the lack of sex education and instruction. Lodewijk Christiaan Schuller tot Peursum (b. 1847), aristocrat and vicar in the Dutch Reformed Church, is an early example of generations of children who could not recollect being 'informed about sexual matters in a clear and serious fashion' and who instead gleaned information from other less appropriate sources. In particular, the birth of siblings was frequently the occasion for evasion and misinformation and for a growing awareness that some vital information was being withheld. Thus, Schuller tot Peursum recalled that when a sister was born, his 'naïve, childish questions' were left unanswered.[19] Similarly, Annie Romein-Verschoor (b. 1895) recollected the ignorance and confusion surrounding the birth of her siblings. She recalled that, at around six years old, she was so inadequately informed that:

> the birth of my second sister came as a complete surprise. I had failed to notice all the signs, but when I woke up early in the morning […] and father came in to tell us enthusiastically that the stork had brought a sister that night, I knew we were supposed to believe the story. I did not ask any irritating questions about the details of what was going on even though I understood the meaning of the 'terrible toothache' my mother had moaned about the night before. […] When a new pregnancy became apparent […] in the spring of 1906 we followed this process, less innocent than the time before, with prurient and resentful attention, because we were not told anything, not a word. […] Looking backward I am a little surprised that it did not occur to us to make even one allusion to our secret knowledge. The persistent silence on the subject had clearly left such a strong impression of how taboo the subject was.[20]

Autobiographers often recalled with amazement how ignorant they had been at the birth of siblings. Jeanne van Schaik-Willing recollected that: 'One morning I was playing in the corridor when Miss D. came along with a bunch of blankets in her arm. "Do you know what I have here?" she asked, "a little sister." "Poo-oo!" I cried out and gave a slap against the blankets. Nobody had ever mentioned the possibility that a brother or a sister was in store for me. I could only think Miss was fooling me.'[21] Anton van Duinkerken (b. 1903), son of a wealthy brewer in Brabant, was equally surprised when his mother gave birth for the eighth time: 'My youngest brother was born when I was fourteen. He was born shortly after the holidays.' Van Duinkerken had been at home from boarding school.

> I had no indication that something like this was about to happen. I know how improbable this sounds. My own children can't believe it. Still it is the absolute truth. I know from later confessions that contemporaries of mine, coming from large families as well, remained ignorant in the same way of what was on the verge of happening right before their eyes without them noticing anything.[22]

At times it is evident from autobiographies that, as a result of the silence surrounding sexual issues, children actually feigned ignorance as a defence against parental censure. Thus, the politician, Christine Wttewaall van Stoetwegen (b. 1901), recalled being ridiculed by the older brother of a friend when she affected not to know where her new baby brother 'came from'. 'At home', she wrote, '"nothing" was discussed and you pretended to be innocent because you thought it the thing to do.'[23]

In other cases, even when a child was vaguely aware of the process of reproduction, lack of any discussion of sexual issues might inhibit curiosity. The writer, Anna de Savornin Lohman (b. 1868), recalled that

> I grew up amongst boys; I listened to reading from the Scriptures daily; I had a dog, who gave birth to young dogs, several times in succession, […]

> and yet I still knew at sixteen nothing about the facts [of life] […]. Oh certainly, I knew that it was the woman who bore the children, just as my dog did, and I cannot remember ever having believed the fairy tale of the stork, […] I *saw* everything around me, but I *thought* really nothing of it.[24]

Frequently, the dismissal of curiosity by veiled messages or by fragmentary or misleading information could also create deep anxiety coupled with lasting resentment, and by the time information was tentatively conveyed, the barriers to communication within the family had often become insurmountable. Thus, Romein-Verschoor recalled 'the confused feeling of pity and contempt' because of the deceit surrounding the birth of a sibling.[25] Similarly, Jan van Nijlen, recollected:

> No young Faust was I, ah!, not at all. I was looking for something, without knowing what. I recall witnessing the mating of a pair of snakes. I recognised the phenomenon at once: I had seen it represented in an old book from the library of my grandfather. […] Of course I understood nothing – I who did not even know how children were born. I did not dare to think about such matters. Besides my parents did their very best to keep these secrets from me. I can still see it: they were sitting in the garden in the afternoon. Pigeons perched at our feet […] Then a cock-pigeon mounted a pigeon after a lot of tripping steps and cooing. My parents looked at each other rather bashfully and my mother said: they 'give a salute to art' which I did not understand of course.[26]

Some male witnesses recall the clumsy stammering of their father in belated and embarrassing attempts to enlighten their offspring. Leonhard Huizinga (b. 1906) recollected that: 'My good father [the celebrated historian, Johan Huizinga] failed to do more than produce an incomprehensible formula [on masturbation] he brought up with a blush, adding: "Something like that is very wrong. You must never do it."'[27] In the case of Frank van Ree, his father did not even try. 'I don't remember the occasion, but when in university I wanted to bring up sexual education, he had his answer ready: "Houseflies fuck too and they have never received instruction. Nature takes care of itself, the rest is smutty talk."'[28]

Even attempts to explain what smutty talk meant could lead to evasion and disappointment. In the recollections of Chris Schriks (b. 1931), in response to his seeking an explanation of why a boy had been expelled from school for using bad language, his father had merely replied that these were words one did not use in public. The son then complained that he still did not 'know what a cunt is'. At this, the father looked displeased and said he must have seen it written on walls. 'Sometimes, but I don't know what it is. I've seen merely the word prick a thousand times. He gave me a tight look. Prick is a filthy word too. Do you know what a prick is, he asked suspiciously. I nodded with conviction. Well what is a prick with the man, is a cunt with the woman and both are filthy words. Do you get it? I looked at him disappointed and shrugged my shoulders. Is that all? Yes that is all.'[29]

Even on the eve of the sexual revolution of the sixties attempts by more progressive fathers to enlighten their sons could prove abortive. Nicolaas Matsier (b. 1945) recalls being called to his father's study when his parents discovered he had copied a naked goddess from a book on Greek mythology.

> When I came home after playing in the street […] my mother told me I had to go upstairs because my father wanted to speak to me. I have not the slightest idea after all these years, what he actually said to me there, in his study. […] In some miraculous way my parents had succeeded in never addressing the issue of sexuality with me. They did not even have words at their disposal to do so. […] There is a complete gap in my memory into which my father's words must have vanished.[30]

These boys often recall this lack of communication on issues relating to sexuality with amused detachment. However, scattered evidence suggests that, for many girls, equally poor communication with their mothers could be very much more damaging. Jeanne van Schaik describes the agonizing fear experienced by some girls starved of sexual knowledge. Even at the age of 19 she was still 'ignorant of the relation between man and wife'.

> Not long before she had panicked because her uncle Leo had kissed her on the mouth and she was afraid that she could have become pregnant as a result. When a boy entered her daydreams and she noticed a vague, physical feeling as a consequence of that, she smothered it, deeply worried, with shame and a sense of guilt.[31]

Likewise, Margaretha Ferguson (b. 1920) was already 18 when the subject of sex was brought up and, as a result of her ignorance, found the experience deeply disturbing:

> Sexually all kind of things were going on. As soon as daddy and mamma mentioned the subject I lost my temper. They had nothing to do with it. What were their feelings – after all they were mid-forty – I did not want to know. To think of it filled me with horror and […] I repelled possible 'confidences' in a panic. But I have never been able to forget that mamma thought that people valued 'all the bother' far too much.[32]

She recalled an overwhelming pity for what her mother had had to endure as a result of sex and, as an only child, felt a 'tremendous rusty nail of pure discontent' being turned around inside her. 'I should not have been there after all. I originated from something I did not want to belong to.'

SEXUALITY AS THE GREAT GAP BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Such episodes clearly often represented a fundamental breach in the absolute trust children placed in their parents. The autobiographies often reflect on

sexuality as the source of distancing and alienation between parents and children. In part, as we have seen, this was a function of the feelings of resentment and deceit produced by parental silence and evasion with respect to sexual issues. However, it was also due to increasing awareness of the need to hide alternative sources of sexual knowledge and experience from parental surveillance and censure. For example, Louis Couperus (b. 1863) discovered a new world in the colonial society of the Dutch East-Indies, where he went to live at the age of nine. He was immediately aware that there were matters that he should 'conceal at home, should never speak about it, not even with my mother':

> Life itself opened up for me there; the boys […] taught me hidden things and the wise words never pronounced among the adults, and all of them were, either in love with little girls, or very daring with the native nursemaids of their mothers or sisters at home, or they had friends at school, very close friends. All this made an impression on me, as if life opened up for me, as if I had insight in life in the full, if only the life of boys and girls […]. I realized I had to take care at home to give no inkling of all that I already knew; though there were things I did not fully understand.[33]

Likewise, the vicar, J.C.A. Fetter (b. 1885), encountered at the Barlaeus gymnasium in Amsterdam 'a vocabulary, in which time and again the image was evoked of mysterious actions between men and women, which I had never heard of before, and of which they possessed small photographs; I thought those repulsive at first, afterwards awfully attractive.' He walked around in Amsterdam's the red light district with these friends who also taught him how to masturbate. 'Thus all at once I found myself in a dark world, of which my parents were not aware and about which I did not dare to talk to anyone for many years.'[34]

This distancing was perhaps felt most keenly by those young people who did possess some sexual knowledge but who were met with evasions and misinformation when they did try to talk with their parents. Pszisko Jacobs (b. 1917) recalled that:

> The information I received about how children are created was quite a shock to me. I could not swallow that grown up people did such funny things. But even in this respect I was not slow to learn. […] I lost a great deal of my confidence in grown-ups. It was clear they wanted to keep all kinds of things a secret from you. One day the question came up where children come from. 'Out of their mothers' belly'. […] Then I put the question the answer to which I knew by now: how the child got into the belly. My mother obviously was at a loss how to handle this direct confrontation, failed to make use of this favourable moment and answered: 'You will hear that some time later.' At that moment a door was slammed in my face. The retreat into my own sexual life had begun. She was not aware of the sexual games frequently played by us, although she must have suspected something.[35]

Sal Santen (b. 1915) felt equally inhibited and alienated by the sexual taboos that operated within his family. He recalled how, in response to his younger brother's announcement at dinner that 'I know what fuck means', his mother hastily retreated to the kitchen and his 'father began talking of something else'. As a result, when Sal later agonised over a bout of mutual masturbation and needed advice, the sense of an unbridgeable distance between him and his parents was overwhelming.[36]

DISBELIEF

It is evident in the autobiographies that perhaps the most difficult adjustment for children in addressing sexual information was the sudden awareness that it applied to their own parents. Piet Bakker (b. 1897) recalled that:

> Birth was still more mysterious than death. As becomes decent people my parents had kept me ignorant. Sexual enlightenment was unknown at home. […] I had never believed stories of the stork and the cabbage. But what was it then! […] At best they said: 'You'll hear that as a matter of course and now stop this funny talk immediately.' I had to gather my knowledge from the gutter and the gutter did not disappoint me. I can still see the illuminated confectioner's shop window before my eyes, in front of which a precocious friend explained the whole business to me in meticulous detail. […] I do not recall anything that left such a devastating impression on me as the delicate secret of birth. Stained with the mud from the gutter the mystery came to me. I hardly dared to look my father and mother in the face any more. I had to think all the time of that […] Shame! bah! – like dogs! Other parents might do it, but mine too! It took a long time before I was able to behave normally with them again. What misery one quiet conversation with my father could have spared me.[37]

Similarly, André van Praag (b. 1904) recollected from his childhood a few streets away in Amsterdam that: 'there was this playfellow in the park, the son of the chemist […] some years older than I was. He initiated us into the secrets of procreation. I vividly recall the reaction of another boy: "Must be mere invention! That my parents could do such dirty things […] I won't believe it!"'[38] Marnix Gijsen was also deeply repelled by the sudden awareness of the parental role in procreation. About 10 years old, he stumbled by chance into some children of the same age feigning copulation in the park. Overcome with fright he asked: '"What are you doing?" And the girl, pressed on the ground by the boy, laughed aloud and said: "We are playing father and mother. We are making a child."' Gijsen fled.

> Now I had witnessed something I could not even tell my brother. Now I was for the first time in my life all alone. 'We play father and mother,' the

> child had said and when I came back to the kiosk and saw my parents sitting on the bench […] I looked at them as if I had never seen them before because how could I forgive them for having begot me as those children had simulated in the brushwood? […] It took weeks before the image of the municipal park was slowly erased from my retina. When I had calmed down I finally mustered up my courage to ask my brother how children come into the world. He told me simply and clearly.[39]

Moreover, this reaction was not confined to the early years of the twentieth century. As late as the 1950s, Freek de Jonge (b. 1944) came across a boy in his neighbourhood, an 'unfortunate wretch' given to dirty jokes who evinced the same reaction. 'Not long ago he wanted to make me believe father and mother did it too. I ran as fast as I could […] and shouted indignantly: – Not true, not true at all! Not them! Dirty Harry! Dirty Harry!'[40]

A leitmotif of many of the memories (especially those of boys) is the disbelief that often greeted the dissemination of sexual knowledge, often reinforced by the insecure enlightenment of the informants. Thus, Jaap Hemelrijk recalled that he had given the process of birth some thought when his half-sister had been born. However, he could not believe that 'the stork had bitten mamma in the leg', and the only solution he could think of was that 'parents, who wanted a child and prayed for it […], received one all of a sudden as if by miracle.' The attempts by a new boy in school from Amsterdam, inclined to dirty talk, to enlighten him by discussing the meaning of the word 'whore' met a sceptical response:

> 'You only talk rubbish and are lying just to make us believe', I said. […] His clarification dumbfounded me and unsettled me. It so drastically revised my previous view of a miracle birth that I was at a loss and could not readily digest the information. [Moreover] even Gerrit could not tell us how the child entered [the mother] let alone, how it came out. This made me suspicious.[41]

Such suspicion was often reinforced by ridicule from innocent and half-disbelieving children. Siegfried van Praag (b. 1899) recollected that: 'It was the same P. who as a small boy of about eight informed me on human procreation. He did this in such a preposterous way, that I shook with laughter and believed nothing. He did know something about the genital organs, but told me merely about a drop of urine, from which man arises.'[42] Nicholas Matsier (b. 1945) was equally dismissive: 'Walking along the Mient, from school on our way home, Kees van A. told me the ins and outs […].' Without considering whether there might be a grain of truth in the story, Matsier sought to 'refute this whole idea once and for all' by countering – 'What about Queen Emma? […] Well, he shut up.'[43] Queen Emma was the highly respected Queen-mother in Holland and the mere idea that a person of her quality could have had anything to do such with such behaviour was viewed as proof positive of the falsity of the information.

Significantly, on occasions, efforts by disbelieving children to confirm their doubts were often censored. Ab Visser (b. 1913) still believed in the stork at the age of 10 and overheard his mother, a midwife, referring to a delivery as 'butchery'. Months later, he spoke about it with a friend:

> I asked him: 'Do you know where children come from?' He said: 'From your mother's belly.' I said: 'Ha, listen to him. Who fooled you with that?' 'My mother,' he said. 'You don't believe in the stork, do you?' 'Of course not,' I replied indignantly, but with some reservations, because I had never been told anything at home about these things. 'But it has to do something with the butcher too. I overheard my father and mother; they were talking about William's new brother and my mother said that it was butchery and mother knows best for she is always there when a child is born.'

Later, Ab spoke with another friend about the facts of life, but this only resulted in his friend's father coming 'over to talk with mine' and admonishing me, 'in front of the complete family, that I should not teach bad things […].'[44]

OTHER CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL IGNORANCE OR ENLIGHTENMENT

Sexual knowledge not only shaped family relationships but could also inform peer-group relations both at school and in the workplace, where such knowledge or lack of it could easily become the focus of embarrassment, teasing and harassment, especially for young girls. While some girls such as Louise Kaiser (b. 1891), the daughter of a physician, were relatively impervious to the efforts of her peers to impress her with their sexual knowledge,[45] others felt repelled and intimidated. Thus Mia Boissevain (b. 1878) recalled the gradual distancing of adolescent boys and girls as sexual feelings developed:

> the sexual instincts began to awaken with some, with the boys in the well-known obscene manner, with the girls by an enhanced feeling of shame that made them a better target of teasing. Some developed an interest in everything that had to do with human procreation, those who knew something handed out their knowledge to the others. In that way a most unpleasant atmosphere developed there.[46]

Similarly, Gerard von Brucken Fock (b. 1859) recorded that one had to watch out not to be too obviously ignorant because boys and girls he met in dancing lessons who were more sexually aware liked to exclude him from their circle: 'In general, I was at that time what is called very "green". I heard boys using words I did not understand. If I inquired shyly after the meaning, I only

received loud laughter as an answer […].'[47] Sometimes, even serious requests for information were not honoured. Hilda van Praag-Sanders (b. 1899), for instance, recorded that 'The mystery of life and death occupied me like all young children. Thus I asked a girl sitting beside me in the first and second grade whether she knew where children came from. […] She denied it, though I found out later that she was certainly informed […] I keenly held this against her for years.'[48]

Young girls could also experience sexual harassment in the workplace arising out of their sexual ignorance and the deployment of sexual knowledge by co-workers. Eva Asscher (b. 1867) was apprenticed in a workshop to learn sewing before she was allowed to study music. She found herself amongst milliners, who constantly pestered her: 'I was asked highly immoral questions and my ignorance provoked their laughter and merely incited the girls to become increasingly debauched in their language and to display obscene pictures. I was overcome with disgust.'[49]

Even when children were favoured with parents who took a more enlightened view of sex education, the experience could often be a mixed blessing, producing for some sexual precocity and for others social stigma and isolation. The case of Lili van Kol (b. 1884), daughter of the progressive teacher and commentator on women's issues, Nellie van Kol,[50] was perhaps a notable example. Lili recalled indulging a dangerous curiosity in sex in spite of her mother's liberal attitude towards sex education. Growing up in the Dutch East-Indies she remembered instructing the servants to perform 'the silliest things', possibly intercourse, to satisfy her prurience. Her mother suspected what was going on and in response:

> Calmly and simply she told me what I could understand and I knew I could get a serious answer to all my questions, but still – the sultry, the forbidden there, it pulled at me strongly. Where possible, she let me spy on nature. I recall a sunny, hot day, I was resting on a pavement, when a goat lay down close by to give birth to her young ones. Ma came bye by chance, she wanted to take me away quickly, but she pulled back the hand she held out. Hugging me she told me again something about the deep mystery of motherhood […].[51]

However, she further recalled that, back in Europe at the age of about twelve years, her 'unhealthy sensuality' resurfaced:

> Again my sharp eyes peeked around and found plenty to see. Explicit things were written on walls about immorality between girls and boys. I did not understand, but it had an irresistible appeal to me, and my search went on. I met a girl soon who knew more and in secret we did, if not vile, certainly hazardous things, until I suddenly realised what I was doing and left.[52]

Receiving sex education at a time when the subject was still taboo in many homes could also distance children from their peers. Hilda Verwey-Jonker

(b. 1908) remembered that, in her home, 'sexual education was not neglected' but that this was very much an 'exception at that time'. As a result, she caused outrage in the neighbourhood when her brother was born. 'A neighbour asked whether the stork had paid a visit and I answered pedantically: "Small children are not brought by the stork, they come out of their mother's belly."'[53] Louka Wolf Catz (b. 1930) encountered similar rejection in her neighbourhood: 'I did not realise I had received an enlightened education. I did not know that some of the many friends and girlfriends were not allowed to play with me any more, after I had said there was a brother or sister in their mother's belly.'[54]

CONCLUSION

The unreliability and selectivity of memories are notorious, and their use as a source in social history is controversial. Nevertheless, from this survey of children's memories in the Netherlands and Flanders in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century a central paradox emerges that, at a time when social attitudes and professional discourses were becoming more favourably disposed to a more intimate relationship between parents and the young, sex education became increasingly problematic. Issues of sexuality, and in particular, the way in which they were addressed, clearly continued to inhibit communication between the generations, to erode the trust children had placed in their parents, and, in some instances, inflict what was perceived in retrospect to have been lasting emotional damage.

From the memoirs, it is clear that this lack of open and frank sexual enlightenment – this 'discourse of silence' – often created a profound distancing between the adolescent world and that of the adult, which merely served to reinforce the impression in the young of sex as constituting a frightening and transgressive secret. As a result, children often received illicit or mis-information from their peers which, coupled with the contemporary exhortations to genital hygiene, firmly conflated sexual activity and pollution in the minds of the younger generation. In this respect, the process of obfuscation entered a vicious circle, in that the more the child acquired prurient information and language from the street or the playground, the less she/he felt able to discuss such matters with their parents.

Three final points of significance emerge from these memoirs. First, what are notable for their absence are any references to child sexual abuse in the recollections of the young prior to the late twentieth century. Clearly this is a function of a range of editorial and psychological factors, as well as shifts in the social construction of childhood and sexual abuse and almost certainly does not reflect the actual experience of many children.

Secondly, there is seen to be a lack of correlation between their major concerns and those articulated by the contemporary media and policy-makers. The issues that most worried the medics, educationists and social purists who participated in the debate over sexual education in the early twentieth century – extramarital

pregnancy and venereal disease – are not to be found in any autobiography in this survey. Finally, where early experiences of sexual enlightenment or ignorance are recalled, the dominant memory is one of distrust or even contempt for parents who lied and concealed information.

NOTES

1. See especially, H. Röling, 'The Problem of Sex Education in the Netherlands in the Twentieth Century', in M. Gijswijt-Hofstra and H. Marland (eds) *Cultures of Child Health in Britain and the Netherlands in the Twentieth Century*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003, 243–63; idem, 'Sexual knowledge as the boundary between youth and adulthood and the ideal of innocence in the Dutch debate on sexual instruction 1890–1960', *Paedagogica Historica*, 1993, vol. 29, 229–40; idem, *Gevreesde vragen. Geschiedenis van de seksuele opvoeding in Nederland,* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994.
2. See, for example, J. Lewis and T. Knijn, 'The Politics of Sex Education Policy in England and Wales and The Netherlands since the 1980s', *Journal of Social Policy*, 2002, vol. 31, 669–94.
3. An exception is the work of M. du Bois-Reymond ('Eltern-Kind-Beziehungen zwischen 1900 und 1920 am Beispiel der Sexualerziehung. Aus einer Oral-History-Studie in Leiden/Niederlande', *Bios. Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung und Oral History*, 1992, vol. 5, 49–62), based on oral history interviews conducted with citizens from Leiden born into working-class families between 1890 and 1920.
4. In contrast, by the later years of the twentieth century, a genre of recording, often with pride, the history of one's wayward youth, including the more salacious details of sexual enlightenment and initiation, had become fashionable, thus fully reversing traditional inhibitions and taboos.
5. See, for example, J.N. Kotres, *White Gloves. How We Create Ourselves Through Our Memory*, New York, Free Press, 1995; R. Dekker, *Childhood, Memory and Autobiography in Holland: From the Golden Age to Romanticism*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.
6. J. van Nijlen, *Druilende burgerij*, Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 1982, p. 17.
7. M. Gijsen, *Allengs, gelijk de Spin*, Den Haag: Nijgh en Van Ditmar, 1962, pp. 98–99.
8. J. Boon, *Memoires*, Antwerpen: Houtekiet, 1990, pp. 21–23.
9. B. Aafjes, *De sneeuw van weleer*, Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1987, p. 63.
10. F. Schurer, *De beslagen spiegel*, Amsterdam: Moussault, 1969, pp. 26–27.
11. M. de Vreede, *Persoonlijk*, Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1986, p. 33.
12. E. Keesing, *Op de muur*, Amsterdam: Querido, 1981, pp. 19–20.
13. A. Prins, *Ik ga m'n eige baan*, Amsterdam: Bezige Bij, 1963, p. 27.
14. R.A. Kollewijn, *Herinneringen*, Santpoort: C.A. Mees, 1932, p. 12.
15. C. Scharten, *Het verloren paradijs*, Amsterdam: Strengholt 1939, pp. 121–22.
16. J. van Schaik-Willing, *Ondanks alles*, Amsterdam: Querido 1955, pp. 21–22.
17. Idem, *Dwaaltocht*, Den Haag: Nijgh en Van Ditmar, 1977, p. 24.
18. F. van Ree, *Dicht op de huid*, Amsterdam: Balans, 1990, p. 40.
19. L.C. Schuller tot Peursum, *Weggevlotene jaren*, Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1917, p. 33.
20. A. Romein-Verschoor, *Omzien in verwondering*, Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1970, pp. 35, 38–39.
21. Schaik-Willing, *Ondanks alles*, p. 41.
22. A. van Duinkerken, *Brabantse herinneringen,* Urecht: Spectrum, 1964, p. 100.
23. C.W.I. Wttewaall van Stoetwegen, *De freule vertelt,* Baarn: Bosch en Keuning, 1973, p. 23.

24. A. de Savornin Lohman, *Herinneringen,* Amsterdam: Holkema, 1909, pp. 35–36.
25. Romein-Verschoor, *Omzien in verwondering*, p. 35.
26. Nijlen, *Druilende burgerij*, p. 89.
27. L. Huizinga, *Mijn hartje wat wil je nog meer,* Den Haag: Leopold, 1968, p. 37.
28. Ree, *Dicht op de huid*, p. 40.
29. C. Schriks, *Nondeju! (On)bezorgde jeugdherinneringen,* Amsterdam: Uniepers, 1986, pp. 29–33.
30. N. Matsier, *Gesloten huis,* Amsterdam: Bezige Bij, 1994, pp. 122–24.
31. Schaik-Willing, *Dwaaltocht*, 1977, p. 48.
32. M. Ferguson, *Zeven straten en een park*, Den Haag: Leopold, 1977, p. 58.
33. L. Couperus, *Zo ik iéts ben …* , Amstrerdam: CPNB, 1974, p. 22.
34. J.C.A. Fetter, *Herinneringen,* Arnhem: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1958, p. 13.
35. P. Jacobs, *Weerbarstige herinneringen,* Haarlem: L. Peetoom, 1988, p. 27.
36. S. Santen, *Jullie is jodenvolk,* Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1969, pp. 49–50, 53.
37. P. Bakker, *Jeugd in de Pijp*, Amstrerdam: Elsevier, 1946, p. 122.
38. A. van Praag, *Een parkje in het oude Amsterdam*, Den Haag: Nijgh en Van Ditmar, 1975, pp. 17.
39. Gijsen, *Allengs, gelijk de spin*, pp. 74–76.
40. F. de Jonge, *Zaansch Veem,* Amsterdam: De Harmonie, 1987, p. 15.
41. J. Hemelrijk, *Mijn kinderleven,* Arnhem: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1969, pp. 100–102.
42. S. van Praag, *Een lange jeugd in Joods Amsterdam,* Den Haag: Nijgh en Van Ditmar, 1985, p. 69.
43. N. Matsier, *Gesloten huis,* Amsterdam: Bezige Bij, 1994, pp. 124–25.
44. A. Visser, *De buurt,* Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1953, pp. 42–45.
45. Louise Kaiser, *Een persoonlijk witboek,* Amsterdam: Polak, 1968, pp. 41–42.
46. M. Boissevain, *Een Amsterdamsche familie,* unpublished manuscript, Amsterdam University Library, p. 29.
47. G. von Brucken Fock, *Een mens van twee werelden,* Zeist: De Haan, 1959, pp. 9–10.
48. H. van Praag-Sanders, *Meedoen,* Den Haag: Leopold, 1975, pp. 18–19.
49. E. Asscher, *Jeugdherinneringen,* Amsterdam: Maatschappij voor Goede en Goedkope Lectuur, 1925, p. 143.
50. Nellie van Kol made a stir with the pamphlet *Moeder en kind (Mother and child)* in 1898 with detailed examples of conversations with her children explaining procreation in almost all its aspects.
51. L. van Kol, 'Jeugdherinneringen', *Het Kind*, 11 July 1914, 112.
52. Ibid., 5 September 1914, 142.
53. H. Verwey-Jonker, *Er moet een vrouw in*, Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1988, p. 44.
54. L. Wolf Catz, *Kind in de schaduw*, Den Haag: Nijgh en Van Ditmar, 1985, pp. 18–19.

Notes on Contributors

Ann Blair, Senior Lecturer in law at the School of Law, University of Leeds, UK. Her numerous articles on education rights include 'Calculating the Risk of Teenage Pregnancy: Sex Education, Public Health, the Individual and the Law', in N. Harris and P. Meredith (eds) *Children, Education and Health: International Perspectives on Law and Policy* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2005).

Barbara Crowther, Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Wolverhampton, UK. Her publications include 'The Birds and the Bees: Natural History Television Programmes Naturalising Heterosexuality', in D. Epstein and J. Swires (eds) *A Dangerous Knowing: Sexuality, Pedagogy and Popular Culture* (London: Cassell, 1999).

Roger Davidson, Emeritus Professor of Social History, School of History and Classics, University of Edinburgh, UK, and Leverhulme Emeritus Fellow. He has widely published on the social history of venereal diseases and sexuality. His publications include *Dangerous Liaisons: A Social History of Venereal Disease in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000) and (with L. Hall) (eds) *Sex, Sin and Suffering: Venereal Disease and European Society since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2001). A former editor of *Social History of Medicine*, he is currently working on a co-authored monograph on *The Sexual State: Sexuality and Governance in Scotland, 1950–80*.

Mark Fenemore, Senior Lecturer in Modern European History at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. His publications include *Sex, Thugs and Rock 'n' Roll. Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (Oxford, New York: Berghahn, 2007).

Magdalena Gawin, Assistant Professor at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland. She has published on the racial hygiene movement in Poland. Her publications include 'Dispute over the Sex Education of Children and Young People during the Inter-War Years', in *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 79 (1999) and 'Progressivism and Eugenic Thinking in Poland, 1905–39', in M. Turda and P. Weindling (eds) *Blood and Homeland. Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast*

Europe, 1900–1940, Budapest: CEU PRESS, 2007. She is currently working on the reception of the idea of women's emancipation in the Polish press and literature.

Lesley A. Hall, Senior Archivist at the Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine and Hon. Lecturer in History of Medicine at University College London, UK. Her numerous publications on the history of sexuality include (with R. Porter) *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950* (Yale: Yale UP, 1995) and (with R. Davidson) (eds) *Sex, Sin and Suffering: Venereal Diseases and European Societies since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Lena Lennerhed, Senior Lecturer at Södertörn University College of South Stockholm, Sweden, where she teaches the History of Ideas and Gender Studies. Her many numerous publications on the history of sexuality in Sweden include *Frihet att njuta. Sexualdebatten i Sverige på 1960-talet* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1994).

Britta McEwen, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Creighton University, Los Angeles, USA. Her publications include 'Teach Your Children Well: Sexual Education Debates in the Austrian First Republic,' in P. Pasteur, S. Niederacher and M. Mesner (eds) *Sexualität, Unterschichtenmilieus und ArbeiterInnenbewegung*, (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 2003). She is currently working on a history of sexuality in interwar Austria.

Daniel Monk, Senior Lecturer, School of Law, Birkbeck College, University of London, UK. He has published a number of articles on children's rights and law and sexuality and co-edited *Legal Queeries* (Cassell, 1998) and *Feminist Perspectives on Child Law* (Cavendish, 2000). He is the assistant editor of *Child and Family Law Quarterly*.

Hugo Röling, was Assistant Professor in History of Education at the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands. He has widely published on the history of sex education in nineteenth and twentieth-century Netherlands. His last book *Zichzelf te zien leven. Herinneringen aan Nederlands en Vlaams gezinsleven* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006) deals with memories of youth written in the Dutch language as a source for the social history of children and the family in the Netherlands and Flanders.

Lutz D. H. Sauerteig, Lecturer in History of Medicine at Durham University, UK. He is currently working on a history of sex education of the young in Germany and England (1880s-1970s) and has widely published on the history of venereal diseases in Germany and England. His publications include *Krankheit, Sexualität, Gesellschaft: Geschlechtskrankheiten und Gesundheitspolitik in Deutschland im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999) and 'Die Herstellung des sexuellen und erotischen Körpers in der westdeutschen Jugendzeitschrift BRAVO in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren', *Medizinhistorisches Journal*, 42 (2007).

Uta Schwarz, associate Research Fellow at the Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires sur l'Allemagne, Paris, France, and consultant and producer in the audiovisual department of the Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne, Germany. She is currently working on a history of cinema, hygiene and eugenics in Germany and Western Europe. Her publications include 'Film und Gesundheitsaufklärung nach 1945', in Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden/Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung (eds) *Hauptsache gesund! Gesundheitsaufklärung zwischen Disziplinierung und Emanzipation* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1998) and *Wochenschau, westdeutsche Identität und Geschlecht in den fünfziger Jahren* (Frankfurt/M.: Campus, 2002).

Bruno P. F. Wanrooij, Academic Director of Villa Le Balze, the Georgetown University Programme in Fiesole, and Professor at the Syracuse University in Florence, Italy. He has widely published on the history of sexuality in Italy including *Storia del pudore: la questione sessuale in Italia (1860–1940)* (Venice: Marsilio, 1990) and *La mediazione matrimoniale: il terzo (in) comodo in Europa tra Otto e Novecento* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2004).

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