The Economic Miracle in the Bedroom: Big Business and Sexual Consumption in Reconstruction West Germany*

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INTRODUCTION

In 1950, *Internationales Versandhaus Gisela* (International Mail-Order House Gisela) printed on its letterhead: "The leading mail-order house." A decade later, Gisela's main competitor, Beate Uhse, advertised with the slogan, "Every 15 seconds, someone turns to Beate Uhse."[1] Gisela and Beate Uhse were part of a remarkable chapter in the history of sexuality, business, and consumption: the emergence in West Germany in the 1950s of big firms offering everything from A to Z, as long as it was related to sex and was legal. While Hugh Hefner was building an empire around a single product marketed to a single sex,[2] the people behind Gisela and Beate Uhse were creating empires whose innovation was the breadth of their offerings and whose potential customer base was all adults.

This essay explores the growth of the erotica sector in reconstruction West Germany. A generation before the legalization of pornography in 1975, informational texts and contraceptives were the mainstays of an industry serving a population struggling with the economic, physical, and psychological aftermath

* For their careful readings of earlier versions of this essay, I thank Robert Moeller, Johanna Schoen, Annette Timm, Jonathan Wiesen, and the anonymous readers of *JMH*. Jane Gerhard, Erik Jensen, Paul Lerner, and Patricia Stokes shared ideas or references on crucial points in this essay. I am especially grateful to the erotica firms that permitted me to examine their papers, industry veterans who agreed to interviews, consumers and their descendents who made materials available, research assistant Christine Brandenburger, and the *Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg* (FZH), particularly archivist Angelika Voß-Louis, for creating an archive and library of West German erotica and sexual science. With the exception of the Beate Uhse papers and library, which are at the FZH, industry papers are at their respective corporate headquarters; locations are provided in parentheses at their first appearance in the notes. The FZH also holds the erotica and sexual-scientific library, though not the corporate papers, of the Walter-Schäfer-Gruppe. Page numbers for interviews refer to uncorrected transcripts; tapes and transcripts are at the FZH. Funding from the German Academic Exchange Service, the National Endowment for the Humanities (FA-36988-02), the Howard Foundation, the Obermann Center for Advanced Study, and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Iowa supported this research.

[1] *Preisliste Nr. 25*, Gisela (n.d.; ca. 1950), Fa. Walter-Schäfer-Gruppe (Schmiden bei Stuttgart; hereafter WSG), loose papers. *Gesunde Ehe—glückliche Ehe* (Flensburg, 1963), 4.

[2] *Playboy* premiered in 1953. See Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, NY, 1983).

The Journal of Modern History 78 (December 2006): 846–877

of war and Nazism. By increasing women's access to goods and providing a new forum in which couples could discuss sex, big erotica firms played a major role in the renegotiation of gender and sexuality within the couple. They did so in part through their product line and their language about sexuality and sexual consumption. Equally important, however, were features that had nothing to do with sex: the sheer size and solidity of the firms, the department-store-like breadth of their offerings, and the mail-order format for purchasing. This essay thus argues for a broad vision of the interplay of business, consumption, gender, and sexuality.

Challenging the common portrayal of Nazi Germany and the West Germany of the 1950s as sexually repressive, Dagmar Herzog notes that contemporaries described both the Nazi and the early postwar periods as permissive. Only in the mid-1950s did West Germans, who linked this permissiveness to both Nazism and postwar disorder, consolidate the conservative attitude that sexual revolutionaries later decried.[3] West Germans' patterns of sexual consumption suggest a slightly different trajectory, however, one not revealed in published pronouncements about sex. Following wartime separations and postwar shortages, West Germans used sexual consumption as one of many strategies to recover from material want and emotional strain. While activist and official attentions focused on more visible aspects of sexual (mis-)behavior, mail-order erotica very nearly flew under the radar, capturing a large market as restrictive legislation limited the offerings of other outlets. Thus West Germans continued to shop for erotica despite the triumph of sexual conservatism in public life. By the time the media discovered a "sex wave" in the early 1960s, mail-order erotica firms had served half of all West German households, which were progressing from recovery to plenty as the economic miracle finally reached the working class.[4] When it entered the public eye, sexual consumption was thus associated with affluence. Its role in recovery had been experienced as "private" and went unnoticed on the public stage.

To illustrate sexual consumption in the early years of recovery, let us consider Herr G., who placed an order with Gisela in April 1952: one pessary, one tube of ointment to combat premature ejaculation, and a set of thirty photographs representing lesbian sex scenes.[5] Herr G.'s shopping list illuminates not only his sex life but also his relationship with his intimate partner, probably his wife. The couple had surely conferred about the pessary, since Herr G. would not have ordered such an expensive item without being confident that his wife would use it. The couple had probably discussed frustrating experiences: although he had the satisfaction of orgasm, Herr G. knew enough about Frau G.'s discontent to seek a remedy. Neither the pessary nor the ointment had much use outside the

[3] Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 2005); see also Maria Hoehn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002).

[4] Michael Wildt, *Am Beginn der "Konsumgesellschaft": Mangelerfahrung, Lebenshaltung, Wohlstandshoffnung in Westdeutschland in den fünfziger Jahren* (Hamburg, 1994).

[5] Two order forms filled out by H. G. and mailed together, WSG, loose papers.

context of intercourse, most likely with a committed partner. The pictures, by contrast, were open to multiple uses. Probably Herr G. used them for his own pleasure; he might have passed them on to friends. The couple may have looked at the pictures together. Perhaps Frau G. was the true fan of lesbian erotica, though asking her husband to obtain the pictures would have been an unusual strategy for pursuing lesbian fantasies.

Herr G.'s history also would have informed his consumption. At thirty-seven, Herr G. was not a newcomer to sex. His access to goods, the meanings he and his peers ascribed to them, and his ability to coordinate purchases with his partners varied over time. Although Herr G. did not reveal details of his sexual history in his order form, we can reconstruct likely contexts of prior consumption. Before the war, Herr G. might have obtained his ointment or condoms in an apothecary—if he did not mind having others in his small town know about his sex life. But then, enjoying a youthful romance in the heady mid-1930s, he might not have worried about contraception or premature ejaculation. He and the future Frau G. might instead have purchased a marriage manual, composed in accordance with Nazi racial ideology, or they might have read their parents' Weimar-era manual. If the couple practiced contraception during the war, they would have used the condoms Herr G. obtained in the military to enable him to visit prostitutes safely. Erotic photos might have circulated at the front and in prison camp. Without contraceptives and in poor health after the war, Frau G. might have had a miscarriage that made future pregnancies dangerous. Memories of all these events, and the products associated with them, would have informed the couple as they perused Gisela's offerings in 1952.

The widespread association of material objects with sex, the growth of mass consumption more generally, and the postwar reconstitution of the family, gender, and sexuality constituted the immediate backdrop for Herr and Frau G.'s purchases. By the twentieth century, bought objects were an unavoidable part of sexual experience for Western populations, thanks to technological advances, state activity, and increasing consumer wealth. Improved control of fertility meant replacing withdrawal with condoms, which became reliable and affordable with improved materials and mass production in the late nineteenth century, and which became familiar to a generation of men in the First World War.[6] With universal literacy, the production of limited runs of erotic literature for a male elite turned into mass production of titillating works for both sexes. Cheap photographic reproduction made circulation of sexual pictures a rite of passage combining sexual education, arousal, colonial fantasy, and male bonding.[7] Between the wars, the

[6] James Woycke, *Birth Control in Germany, 1871–1933* (London, 1988); John d'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago, 1997).

[7] Sarah Liberty Leonard, "The Cultural Politics of 'Immoral Writings': Readers, Peddlers and Police in Germany, 1820–1890" (PhD diss., Brown University, 2001); Lisa Z. Sigel, *Governing Pleasures: Pornography and Social Change in England, 1815–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2002).

popular sexological work became an important part of ever more people's sexual education.[8] In short, even leaving aside fashion and cosmetics, whose connection to sex was implied rather than explicit, material objects mediated sexual knowledge, arousal, and health for most denizens of industrialized society. The intervention of material objects in personal sexual histories, as well as the larger struggles to obtain them, make them available, or limit their distribution, helped to define sexuality in the late modern era.

In Germany, the rise of mass consumption proved a unifying phenomenon in a century of sharp political caesuras.[9] The late Wilhelmine era and the middle years of the Weimar and Nazi periods offered tantalizing glimpses of mass consumption, promises that were spectacularly fulfilled during West Germany's economic miracle. In between, however, were periods of dire scarcity: the second half of the First World War and the early Weimar years, the Great Depression, and the "crisis years" 1943–48.[10] Sexual consumption was a hotly contested part of this trajectory, serving important functions in times of both "pain and prosperity" but also provoking anxieties about both wealth and poverty.[11] During the Weimar era, daring cabarets were a marker of urban modernism; abortifacients, contraceptives, and erotic literature could be had from peddlers and mail-order firms; 1,600 vending machines sold condoms in barracks, men's restrooms, barbershops, and pubs.[12] Decency advocates abhorred this sexual marketplace, and the Nazis came to power partly on a promise to "clean up the streets." Once in power, the Nazi regime attacked products that appeared contrary to its racial utopia: gay magazines, modernist literature incorporating erotic themes, contraceptives that did not also prevent disease. But sexual consumption could also serve regime goals. Condoms prevented sexually transmitted disease (STD). Sex manuals taught the importance of race consciousness in selecting a mate. Risqué books and pictures enhanced popular support by making a beloved form of entertainment a benefit of economic recovery. Even as the military distributed condoms and erotic literature to its troops to boost morale, however, the war reduced supplies to civilians, and the defeat brought catastrophic shortages to all. After the war, renewed access to condoms helped to mark the end of shortages posing existential threats. Small luxuries, like lingerie, could symbolize the transition to

[8] Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920–1950* (New York, 1995).

[9] Alon Confino and Rudy Koshar, "Regimes of Consumer Culture: New Narratives in Twentieth-Century German History," *German History* 19, no. 2 (2001): 135–61; Konrad Hugo Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, NJ, 2003).

[10] Arne Andersen, *Der Traum vom guten Leben: Alltags- und Konsumgeschichte vom Wirtschaftswunder bis heute* (Frankfurt, 1997), 93–97.

[11] Paul Betts and Greg Eghigian, eds., *Pain and Prosperity: Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History* (Stanford, CA, 2003).

[12] Cornelie Usborne, *The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany: Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1992); Woycke, *Birth Control in Germany,* 113; Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

greater plenty. Eventually, pornographic magazines and films would appear as markers of simultaneous consumer and sexual excess.[13]

After half a century of upheaval, a conservative family policy became a strategy for achieving social stability throughout the cold-war West. Most West Germans dreamed of a return to "normalcy," even if they had never experienced what they understood as normal: a married couple living together; the husband earning enough to provide a few extras; the wife caring for just the right number of offspring; and children untraumatized by war, bereavement, or hunger.[14] This private vision of "normalcy" coincided with theories of the "traditional" family as a bulwark against totalitarianism, whether Nazi or Communist, and it helps to explain the power of ideologies of domesticity across Western Europe and North America.[15]

Yet the fact that so few Germans had ever experienced "normalcy" had a flip side: Germans *had* lived through many other things. Oral historian Lutz Niethammer suggests that memories of emotionally laden experiences left a yearning for something more than predictability and security—at least, once these were assured, and as long as they were not endangered in the search for "something more."[16] Thus it makes sense to expand our exploration of postwar family life beyond its restorative, defensive functions. Associated with stability, the family was a safe place in which to seek intensely felt experience—unlike the mass political movements where so many Germans had earlier sought "something more" and which still constituted a frightening counterexample in East Germany. The Federal Republic saw fewer married mothers working for pay than ever before, an ideology of masculinity that served the family rather than the nation, and the domestication of leisure. In this setting, spending more time with children

[13] Discussions of consumption within the field of cultural studies often theorize from an ahistorical association of consumption solely with desire for objects, status, or meaning completely beyond subsistence. See, e.g., Jean Baudrillard and Mark Poster, *Selected Writings* (Stanford, CA, 2001). While cultural conservatives in Germany had decried the intersection of materialism and "sexualism" for decades, the "sex wave" and legalization of pornography in 1975 led sexual revolutionaries, academic sexual scientists, and feminists also to criticize the commercialization of sex represented by pornography. *Die Gefahren des Sexualismus und ihre Überwindung* (Cologne-Klettenberg, 1952); Günter Amendt, *Sexfront* (Frankfurt am Main, 1970); Volkmar Sigusch, "Lean Sexuality: On Cultural Transformations of Sexuality and Gender in Recent Decades," *Zeitschrift für Sexualforschung* 15 (2002): 121–41; Alice Schwarzer, *PorNO: Opfer & Täter, Gegenwehr & Backlash, Verantwortung & Gesetz* (Cologne, 1994).

[14] Lutz Niethammer, "'Normalization' in the West: Traces of Memory Leading Back into the 1950s," in *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949–1968,* ed. Hanna Schissler (Princeton, NJ, 2001), 237–65.

[15] Robert G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley, 1993); Klaus-Jörg Ruhl, *Verordnete Unterordnung: Berufstätige Frauen zwischen Wirtschaftswachstum und konservativer Ideologie in der Nachkriegszeit (1945–1963)* (Munich, 1994); see also Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988); Claire Duchen, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France, 1944–1968* (London, 1994).

[16] Niethammer, "'Normalization' in the West."

was one way of intensifying family experience.[17] Forming deeper bonds with one's spouse was another. For established couples, the search for a more powerful erotic bond could be part of striving for intensely felt experience in a contained, stable setting. For West Germany's many never-married women, widows, and divorced people of both sexes, the right erotic relationship promised both passion and security. At a time when nearly all political parties and public intellectuals proclaimed women's equality while insisting on distinct roles for men and women, concern for erotic pleasure made men and women equally important, even as it permitted—even celebrated—biological difference and unique functions within the family.

To understand sexual consumption, this essay draws on several analytical frameworks. The first concerns the gendering and the eroticization of consumption. Historians have examined women both as consumers and as objects of consumption. Yet, as Victoria De Grazia notes, we know little about "the process of negotiation among persons with an affective as well as material stake in this joint enterprise"—the heterosocial and intergenerational household dynamics in which consumption is embedded.[18] The material stake in contraception and affective stake in pleasurable sex made joint decision making vital in sexual consumption. Yet state regulation and social convention gave men privileged access to goods, making sexual consumer goods an exception to the rule of consumption as "women's work," while shame and poor sexual education complicated couples' communication. In postwar West Germany, however, the rise of mail-order "department stores" facilitated sexually integrated consumption. This was not just a matter of access to goods: it also improved consumer education, eased commu-

[17] On women, see n. 15; on men and the family, see Till van Rahden, "Democracy, Fatherhood, and Authority: The Politics of the Family in West Germany, 1945–1970" (paper presented at the Gender and Sexuality Studies Workshop, University of Chicago, 2003); Robert G. Moeller, "The 'Remasculinization' of Germany in the 1950s: Introduction," and "'The Last Soldiers of the Great War' and Tales of Family Reunions in the Federal Republic of Germany," and Heide Fehrenbach, "Rehabilitating Fatherland: Race and German Remasculinization," *Signs* 24, no. 1 (1998): 101–6, 121–45, 107–27; on leisure, see Axel Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten: Freizeit, Massenmedien und "Zeitgeist" in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre* (Hamburg, 1995); Wildt, *Am Beginn der "Konsumgesellschaft."*

[18] Victoria De Grazia, "Introduction," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria De Grazia and Ellen Furlough (Berkeley, 1996), 1–10, 8. On shifting household dynamics of consumption during times of crisis, see Susan Porter Benson, "Gender, Generation, and Consumption in the United States: Working-Class Families in the Interwar Period," in *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century,* ed. Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judt (Cambridge, 1998), 223–40; Shannon L. Fogg, "Foreigners, Undesirables, and Strangers: Material Shortages and Social Interactions in Vichy France" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2003), chap. 2. On consumption as "women's work" in West Germany, see Katherine Helena Pence, "From Rations to Fashions: The Gendered Politics of East and West German Consumption, 1945–1961" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1999); Erica Carter, *How German Is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1997).

nication between partners, and provided a greater voice for women in family decision making.

Discussions of gendered consumption often bleed into analyses linking erotic and consumerist desire. Yet the connection often appears mainly metaphoric: aside from shared use of the word "desire" and the association of women, sex, consumption, and irrationality, it is not clear what links sexual drive with the wish to "get and spend."[19] With sexual consumer goods, the connection initially appears more transparent: people buy them to improve their erotic experience. Yet sexual consumption reflects rational decision making (to use contraceptives, to educate oneself) or even humor (to present a gag gift) as much as it concerns a yearning for pleasure outside rational calculation. An examination of sexual consumption thus illustrates the need to approach the links between the two types of "desire" with caution.

A further framework is the investment of objects with meaning. Broad symbolic meanings are at issue, but so are meanings that evolve from routinized use in everyday life.[20] In analyzing the meanings of sexual wares, scholars have focused on distinct categories of objects such as contraceptives, pornography, and sexual aids.[21] Yet Herr G.'s easy integration of these objects in a single purchase order suggests that the coexistence of various goods, as much as the availability of any single type, informed the couple's sexual world. To understand the meanings of sexual consumer goods, we must consider the marketplace as a whole.

Reflecting on the nineteenth-century United States, Andrea Tone describes an integrated sexual economy offering a wide array of goods and services.[22] Governments often applied a single obscenity statute to contraceptives, objects enhancing sexual pleasure, and representations that might be interpreted as sexual. Even exceptions carved out for items that served public health, art, or science linked such goods by imposing restrictions that did not apply to nonsexual items.[23]

[19] The term is from Strasser, McGovern, and Judt, *Getting and Spending.* On the history of linking (feminized) erotic and consumerist desire, see, e.g., Jennifer Jones, "Coquettes and Grisettes: Women Buying and Selling in Ancien Regime Paris," in De Grazia and Furlough, *The Sex of Things,* 25–53.

[20] Useful discussions of this phenomenon include Baudrillard and Poster, *Selected Writings*; Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986); Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Minneapolis, 1998); Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley, eds., *Material Memories* (Oxford, 1999).

[21] The literature on contraception and pornography is large; standard works include Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana, IL, 2002); Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (New York, 2001); Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*; Lynn Avery Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800* (New York, 1993); Sigel, *Governing Pleasures*; Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley, 1999). The literature on sexual aids, by contrast, is scant; see Rachel P. Maines, *The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction* (Baltimore, 1998).

[22] Tone, *Devices and Desires.*

[23] In Germany, the *Lex Heinze* of 1900 banned "obscene" writings, images, and objects until 1975, when "pornography" was legalized but regulated. Under the *Lex Heinze,* sci-

Moral purity associations recognized little difference between prophylactics, "unclean" magazines, and potency formulas. Yet prior to the Second World War, distribution was largely specialized in North America and Europe: apothecaries sold condoms, peddlers sold erotic literature, and so on. This pattern changed especially rapidly in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG): no other land had firms like Gisela or Beate Uhse until the 1970s.[24] Like the shift from corner markets to self-service grocery stores, comprehensive mail order brought a simultaneous explosion of product choice and increased consumer autonomy.[25] The big erotica firms provided both discursive and practical frameworks for bringing together "racy" and "mainstream" goods, items linked with rational calculation and items appealing to irrational desire, objects gendered female and objects gendered male. Gisela and Beate Uhse moved consumption from sexually segregated to heterosocial spaces, invested familiar products with new meanings, and brought distinct categories of products into the pages of a single catalog. By redefining the relationship among objects, not just the meanings of particular items, erotica firms recast the larger phenomenon of sexual consumption.[26]

This essay begins with the growth of mail-order firms after the Second World War. Church-based decency advocates tried to limit the expression of sexuality in such media as film,[27] and those same activists challenged the erotica sector. Yet mail-order firms grew enormously. Rather than detailing the battles over erotica and its regulation, this essay will trace the industry's spectacular growth by focusing on its two most successful firms, Beate Uhse and Gisela.

The essay then turns to marketing and consumption. Advertising aimed to

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entific and artistic representations of sex were permitted but dissemination was restricted. The 1927 Law to Combat Sexually Transmitted Disease legalized the sale of condoms but restricted their advertisement and display. The 1926 Law Regarding Trash and Filth and the 1953 Law Regarding Youth-Endangering Writings restricted the advertisement and display of literary and visual representations deemed trashy, filthy, or youth-endangering (but not quite obscene) without making their production and dissemination illegal.

[24] Large-scale but more specialized mail order existed elsewhere: Harry Cocks, "Saucy Stories: Pornography, Sexology and the Marketing of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, c. 1918–1970," *Social History* 29, no. 4 (2004): 465–84. The first big comprehensive erotica firm in the United States was Adam & Eve, founded in 1970 (Philip D. Harvey, *The Government vs. Erotica: The Siege of Adam & Eve* [Amherst, NY, 2001]).

[25] Michael Wildt, "Consumption as Social Practice in West Germany," in Strasser, McGovern, and Judt, *Getting and Spending*, 301–16. Consider also department stores: Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850–1939* (Aldershot, England, 1999).

[26] Nevertheless, this essay too draws boundaries, focusing on material objects the consumer obtains. It thus includes genres of entertainment where the consumer typically gains physical ownership over the entertainment (a book, nude photographs) while excluding genres where the consumer does not (a film in a theater, a striptease show). While including commerce in sexual representations of human beings, including representations whose making involves live humans (e.g., nude photographs), this essay excludes commerce in live persons (prostitution).

[27] Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995); Karl Werner Bühler, *Die Kirchen und die Massenmedien: Intentionen und Institutionen konfessioneller Kulturpolitik in Rundfunk, Fernsehen, Film und Presse nach 1945* (Hamburg, 1968).

attract business, but it also expressed entrepreneurs' self-perception and communicated with employees.[28] The mechanics of marketing also shaped the gendered and social parameters of this marketplace. Purchasing behavior revealed consumers' priorities: controlling their fertility, remedying a deficient sexual education, and experiencing greater pleasure in heterosexual partnership.

Sexual consumption did not become an egalitarian activity in the 1950s. Rather, the new firms provided, and consumers exploited, a vocabulary of options for understanding the gendered and social contexts of sexual consumption. This breadth, however, constituted a real opening in comparison to earlier decades. Women's access improved, couples could shop in tandem more easily, and the imaginative gap between "legitimate" and "dubious" articles narrowed. The large scale and complex gendering of sexual consumption helped to reshape gender relations, sexuality, and domesticity in the aftermath of World War II.

"Mail-Order Houses for Marital Hygiene" Become Big Business

Germany ended the Second World War as a land of rubble. Roughly 4 million military personnel were dead, and additional millions languished in prison camps. Millions had fled or been expelled from eastern territories, and refugee casualties added to the toll of civilian losses. Refugees arrived in a truncated Germany whose economy had collapsed, whose cities had been destroyed by bombs, and which already housed millions of displaced persons. This was also a land of sexual suffering. The first postwar census of October 1946 showed 7 million more women than men. Mass rapes had accompanied the Soviet conquest in the East; hunger, prostitution, and sexually transmitted disease followed across occupied Germany. Malnutrition and illness brought high rates of miscarriage, abortion, and maternal and infant mortality. Starvation, injury, and psychic trauma in war and prison camps took a toll on men's sexual response. Memories of one's own wartime liaisons or suspicions about those of one's partner complicated reunions. The fact that such liaisons had often crossed "racial" lines (with prostitutes and sexual slaves in occupied territories for men, with prisoners of war [POWs] and slave laborers on the "home front" for women) made illicit sex a deeply taboo part of individuals' "coming to terms with" the Nazi past.[29]

In her 1989 "as-told-to" autobiography, Uhse described shortages of sexual

[28] Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley, 1998). On West German entrepreneurs' self-perception and public relations, see S. Jonathan Wiesen, *West German Industry and the Challenge of the Nazi Past, 1945–1955* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001).

[29] Frank P. Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 2006); Atina Grossmann, "Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood: Germans and Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-Nazi Germany, 1945–1949," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 38 (1998): 215–39; Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley, 1999), 75–136.

consumer goods in this environment. A black marketeer dealing in toys, she saw women's joy upon their husbands' return crumble when they promptly became pregnant. They wanted abortions, and they wanted to know how to protect themselves since "there weren't any condoms (any more)." Daughter of a physician, Uhse had learned of the rhythm method as an adolescent. A trip to the library helped her to recall the details, and she decided to publish a pamphlet describing the method. But paper was scarce, and the printer demanded five pounds of butter. It took Uhse three weeks to collect enough butter to print two thousand copies of "Schrift X" (Text X) and ten thousand fliers to advertise it.[30]

Uhse's story contains reminders of sexual consumption and knowledge in Nazi Germany. Women had had access to condoms until recently; the library still held a book on the rhythm method.[31] Postwar shortages, not twelve years of Nazi rule, were the problem. The scarcity of paper slowed production of Uhse's pamphlet, and condoms seemed to have vanished. In fact, condoms were available—for a price, and for those in the right place at the right time. As Uhse was peddling "Schrift X," Walter Schäfer, son of a Stuttgart shoe salesman, recently released from prison camp, was acquiring condoms in black-market transactions in the Soviet zone. Shortly after currency reform, Schäfer would use those condoms to found Gisela.[32]

Basic goods dominated the black market, and Germans sought sexual wares that could protect them from new burdens: condoms and writings on "natural" methods of contraception. Yet in one way, the marketplace in sexual consumer goods was atypical. For the most part, consumption had been women's work, and women had learned to negotiate emerging black markets during the war. The military, however, had distributed sexual wares to men even as those goods disappeared from civilian sites. The first major changes to this marketplace were thus a relative equalization of consumer opportunity and sharing of consumer space—not because women's opportunities expanded, but because men's contracted. New distribution networks would have to accommodate a civilian world in which women played an unusually visible role.

With currency reform in June 1948, shops began to display tempting wares. The effect on sexual consumer culture was equally visual: racy magazines suddenly hung from every newsstand. Covers listed articles like "Sexuality without

[30] Beate Uhse, with the assistance of Ulrich Pramann (Bearb.), *Mit Lust und Liebe: Mein Leben* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), 100–103, quote on 100. Beate Köstlin married Hans-Jürgen Uhse in 1939 and was widowed in 1944. Her 1949 marriage to Ernst-Walter Rotermund ended in divorce in 1972. Although friends and family knew her as "Beate Rotermund," her public identity continued to be "Beate Uhse" even after her second marriage. In these pages "Beate Uhse" refers to the firm and "Uhse" to the person.

[31] Uhse recalls the book as Hans Jakob Gerster, *Die natürliche Geburtenregelung nach Knaus* (Dischingen, 1950). Since this book was published after Uhse's trip to the library, she probably saw an earlier version of the same work, most likely Hans Jakob Gerster, *Die Empfängnisverhütung auf natürlichem Wege nach Knaus* (Basel, 1937).

[32] Urteil, 4. Große Strafkammer Landgericht Stuttgart, Sitzung 3. 5. 1960–29. 7. 1960 (V KMs 21/58) (V KMs 1/59) (V KMs 8/59), Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein (hereafter LASH), Abt. 351 Nr. 3310 (hereafter "Schäfer/W.F.L. Urteil"), 6–7.

Love?" and "Aphrodisiacs and Their Uses"—when those covers were not simply pinups.[33] Next to them lay comic books and cheap paperbacks, both violent and sexy, with colorful covers to attract passersby.

Decency advocates, seasoned by the fight against smut before 1933 and reinvigorated by their campaign against postwar prostitution and "fraternization," were horrified by this consequence of economic recovery. Drawing on one of their greatest prior victories, they lobbied for a revival of the 1926 law regulating "filth and trash" in print. Following a campaign that grabbed national headlines, the Bundestag obliged with the 1953 Law on the Distribution of Youth-Endangering Writings (GjS).[34] If a federal commission indexed a work, then newsstands, peddlers, and bookstores could not advertise or display it. This was an important triumph for postwar sexual conservatism, and activists applauded the transformation of news kiosks.

Lobbying against a single—but very visible—object, decency advocates were late to recognize the real revolution in sexual consumer culture: the transformation of mail order from a marginal activity to big business. Since the nineteenth century, mail-order firms had offered "rubber goods," virility tonics, and books and pictures about sex. These were typically small operations run from the home, and this is how Uhse got her start. In earlier times, these firms remained relatively small. By the time the GjS became law, however, Uhse had fourteen employees and a hundred thousand customers.[35] But the real giant was Walter Schäfer's *Internationales Versandhaus Gisela,* part of a conglomerate including pharmaceutical laboratories (which among other things made virility tonics), cosmetic producers (breast creams), food processors (aphrodisiac-filled chocolates), publishing houses (books on sex), printing presses (catalogs for all these items)—and, reflecting the father's legacy, shoe stores. Already in the winter of 1949–50, Gisela served two hundred thousand customers, sixty thousand of them monthly or biweekly; by the late 1950s, Schäfer's firms collectively constituted the largest mail-order business of any type in Europe.[36] By the early 1950s, Gisela,

[33] "Sexualität ohne Liebe?" *Dr. Faust*, no. 18 (1949); "Sexualanregungsmittel und ihre Anwendungsmöglichkeiten," *Liebe und Ehe*, no. 6 (1951); for a cover with only a pinup, see *Cocktail*, no. 11 (1950).

[34] Gesetz über die Verbreitung jugendgefährdender Schriften vom 9. 6. 1953 (BGBl. I S. 377). The 1926 law had been superseded by Nazi censorship; with the demise of the Nazi regime and the relaxing of Allied censorship, no controls remained. Kaspar Maase, *Prädikat wertlos: Der lange Streit um Schmutz und Schund* (Tübingen, 2001); Adelheid von Saldern, "Kulturdebatte und Geschichtserinnerung: Der Bundestag und das Gesetz über die Verbreitung jugendgefährdender Schriften (1952/53)," in *Die janusköpfigen 50er Jahre,* ed. Georg Bollenbeck and Gerhard Kaiser (Wiesbaden, 2000), 87–114; Stephan Buchloh, *"Pervers, jugendgefährdend, staatsfeindlich": Zensur in der Ära Adenauer als Spiegel des gesellschaftlichen Klimas* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002).

[35] Angela Delille and Andrea Grohn, "Hauptmann der Aufklärung," in *Wild Women: Furien, Flittchen, Flintenweiber,* ed. Baerbel Becker (Berlin, 1992), 112–18, 115.

[36] Schäfer/W.F.L. Urteil, 7–9; StA Wekenmann, Vortrag, Ausführungen der Sachverständigen am 18. Februar 1960, 10. Ausschuß, DBT 3. Wahlperiode, 55, Parlamentsarchiv (hereafter PA), III/296/A. For early sales figures of Beate Uhse, see Uhse, *Mit Lust und Liebe*, 107.

Beate Uhse, and dozens of other firms offered all manner of goods: contraceptives, erotic literature, birds-and-bees books for children, solid sex manuals and titillating exposés for adults, devices for calculating fertile days, nude photo series, services for developing home photos, lingerie, aphrodisiacs, genital prosthetics, breast enhancers, mechanical sex aids, chemical remedies, and gag items.[37] The big firms also supplied smaller retailers and exported wares—yielding up to 50 percent of revenues, in Gisela's case.[38] But their greatest impact was in their contact with West German customers.

Mail-order erotica firms did not display their goods in newsstands or shop windows, nor did they advertise in places obvious to the casual passerby. Their literal invisibility helps to explain why organizations dedicated to eradicating indecency barely noticed the growth of big firms selling things like textured condoms and dildos. The Catholic *Volkswartbund* was alarmed by mail-order firms but was unable to convince the larger community of decency advocates or the parliament of their significance.[39] The GjS forbade bookstores, newsstands, and peddlers from advertising or displaying indexed works, but it made no mention of mail-order business.[40]

Consumers trained in earlier decades, however, knew they could find mail-order opportunities in magazine ads.[41] But the real innovation was direct marketing. In 1947, Uhse mailed ten thousand fliers for "Schrift X" to addresses copied from address books. Professional directories, registries of marriages and births, and address lists from commercial agencies all provided new contacts. West Germans who approached a firm, even if they made no purchase, were added to mailing lists. By the mid-1950s, Beate Uhse mailed one hundred thousand ads per week, and Gisela advertised items like the *Kama Sutra* and virility formulas with mailings of millions.[42] (Mailings went out in neutral wrappings.) As rising costs and legal constraints prohibited the mailing of unsolicited catalogs later in the decade, firms sent unsolicited letters inviting recipients to request a catalog.[43]

[37] The Catholic decency association *Volkswartbund* counted roughly fifty mail-order firms and nearly as many publishing houses specializing in "indecent" works in 1951 (Robert Schilling, *Das Geschäft mit der Erotik auf dem Gebiete des Zeitschriften- und Inseratenwesens* [Cologne-Klettenberg, 1951]).

[38] This figure emerged in an oral history and must be considered imprecise. No written records on exports survive. Lore Schumacher and Jörg Dagies, interview with the author, September 4, 2003, 14, 16.

[39] Schilling, *Das Geschäft mit der Erotik.*

[40] Decency advocates made the regulation of mail order the central feature of the 1961 revision of the GjS; e.g., 2. Juni 1961, Bundesministerium für Justiz betr.: Tagung der Leiter der Zentralstellen zur Bekämpfung unzüchtiger und jugendgefährdender Schriften vom 7.–9. Juni 1961, Bundesarchiv (hereafter B Arch), B141/26579. The now-powerful firms were able to survive this new regulation.

[41] See the back pages of racy magazines such as *Dr. Faust*, *Mephisto*, and *Cocktail*, but also such mainstream magazines as *Illus*, *Heim und Welt*, and *Stuttgarter Magazin.*

[42] Beate Uhse, *Lustvoll in den Markt: Strategien für schwierige Märkte* (Planegg, 2000), 183–84; Schäfer/W.F.L. Urteil, 61, 83.

[43] This appears to have been an innovation of Uhse; Uhse, *Mit Lust und Liebe*, 162.

In other words, erotica firms, which had no storefront to attract customers, which had to keep their magazine advertisements modest, and which could not hang placards in public places, pioneered the flood of junk mail that has become such a familiar part of consumer society.

Erotica firms faced legal hazards other than the GjS, like the ban on obscenity, prohibitions against insult, and limitations on the marketing of medicinal products. Trials were burdensome, and firms often had to alter their practices in response to legal judgments. Gisela and Beate Uhse, however, had good lawyers and the resources to appeal guilty verdicts, and in the absence of such high-profile campaigns as the drive for the GjS, courts (particularly higher courts) frequently favored free speech and unfettered commerce. Even negative rulings were helpful: by clarifying imprecise standards of "obscenity," they enabled prepublication vetting of materials, which was much cheaper than defending them after production.[44]

Mail order grew rapidly after the war, accounting for 5 percent of all retail sales in 1955, over twice the prewar figure.[45] Still, household names like Neckermann, whose offerings resembled those of Sears, never dominated their sectors the way mail-order firms dominated erotica. The GjS gave mail-order firms a monopoly in "youth-endangering" writings, and they were essentially the only outlets for truly racy lingerie and sexual aids. They found a hungry market. Millions lacked a basic sexual education. Poverty made contraception crucial. People who would not have sought a mechanical or chemical aid before the war reconsidered in light of stress or injury. More leisure meant time to read erotic literature. But, most importantly, mail order reached millions who could not patronize alternative outlets: customers in rural areas or in towns with strict local controls and customers afraid to purchase in a public place. "Until now," a new mail-order customer wrote, "my local source knew every intimate detail of my married life."[46] At least he had persisted: many had found neighbors' scrutiny too high a price to pay.

By roughly 1957, 8 million West Germans—out of a population of 54 million—were on erotica firms' mailing lists.[47] Many purchased for themselves and their partners, making the true circle of consumers larger. Five years later, industry insiders felt that by conservative estimate half of West German households had

[44] On prepublication vetting, see Dr. E. Strohm Rechtsanwalt, WSG, passim; Prof. Dr. Eberhard Schomburg, Gutachten, 10. 11. 1961, FZH, 18-9/1.3(1); Gutachter-Gremium für Versandhandels-Publikationen, Gutachten, 30. 1. 1962, FZH, 18-9/1.3(1). Uhse chronicles her legal battles in *Mit Lust und Liebe.*

[45] "Neckermann: Kataloge gegen Kartelle," *Der Spiegel*, October 26, 1955.

[46] *. . . sie sind glücklich! Rund um die Liebe: Ein Helfer und Führer für das Liebes- und Eheleben* (Flensburg, 1958), 10; see also ". . . *das mußte ich Ihnen einmal schreiben . . .*" (Flensburg, 1963), passim.

[47] ". . . Alles Ansichtssache," aus einem Vortrag von W.L., Vereinigung westdeutscher Versandunternehmen (n.d., ca. 1957), Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg (hereafter StAL), EL 317 I, Bü 2339. These data include people who had made an inquiry or ordered once or twice; regular customers were a smaller number.

patronized a mail-order erotica firm.[48] These were large numbers, and they represented dominance of the sector. In 1960, Walter Schäfer's firms accounted for 30–40 percent of all condom sales in West Germany,[49] and mail order surely commanded a larger portion of sales of items that were not also available in vending machines and apothecaries. In a decade and a half, mail order had grown from a marginal business to West Germans' primary source of sexual consumer goods.

Telling Stories about Sexual Consumption: Gender, History, and Marketing

Catalogs were mail-order firms' primary means of presenting themselves and their products. A large collection of fliers and catalogs permits us to examine Beate Uhse's advertising from the firm's origins to the present. In the case of Gisela, only a few fliers from the late 1940s and a handful of catalogs from the mid-to-late 1950s survive. Yet even this limited collection reveals features common to the big erotica firms as well as distinct corporate profiles.

Gisela and Beate Uhse offered similar wares, both based their descriptions on suppliers' blurbs, and portions of text in their catalogs were identical. Weimar-era sexology informed both firms' advertising in the early years. Uhse, the product of a reformist household, educated herself by reading Weimar-era classics, and even in the early 1960s she educated new employees by giving them Emilie and Paul Fried's 1929 *Love Life and Marital Life.*[50] Bibliophile Walter Schäfer made his collection of old sexological works available to staff members working on advertising, product development, or legal defense. Yet the two firms communicated different messages about sexual consumption. Identifying her person with her firm, Uhse emphasized women's burdens after the war, urged customers to end women's sexual misery, and made the companionate couple the imaginative context for sexually oriented products. This was one model for "integrating" the sexual marketplace: not only did the firm bring all products under one roof, but it also created a narrative framework that placed all products into a holistic sexual world. By contrast, although there was a real Gisela (Walter's wife), Gisela was not associated with any identifiable individual, nor did it explicitly locate customers' needs in time and place. It addressed not only the couple but also men measuring themselves against their peers. Gisela offered a different model of integration: a single firm offering multiple products and interpretive frameworks to consumers with varied sexual wants.

[48] Dr. med. E. L., "Statistisches Material aus dem Alltag," talk delivered at the conference "Das Süsse Leben," Evangelische Akademie Tutzing, Bundesverband Erotik Handel (Hamburg), April 7, 1962.

[49] Schäfer/W.F.L. Urteil, fol. 52.

[50] Emilie Fried and Paul Fried, *Liebes- und Eheleben: Ein praktischer Berater für die gesunde und harmonische Ehe* (Wolfenbüttel, 1929). Beate Uhse's press revised and reissued the book in 1957.

Distinct corporate personalities explain the firms' divergent messages. Having started with one woman's black-market activity, and later informed by her husband's business expertise, Beate Uhse had the feel of a family business.[51] The firm was the sole project of its founder, who publicly identified herself with it. Even as she hired specialized staff, Uhse strictly controlled the firm's external image, devoting painstaking attention to advertising materials. She also worked to compensate staff for the firm's dubious reputation in its small home city of Flensburg, in the poor, rural province of Schleswig-Holstein. Superior pay and benefits were part of the answer; assuring employees that they were embarked on an important social mission, not a dirty business, was equally important.[52] A delicate tone, free of vulgarity, attracted customers, but it also expressed the founder's self-image and bound personnel to the firm.

With fliers and short catalogs, Uhse built a solid customer base between 1948 and 1951. These largely unillustrated catalogs, authored in part by Uhse's husband, emphasized conjugal harmony. Yet they did not address both partners equally, instead appealing to men as the presumed leaders in sexual matters with phrases like "the foundation for success in life is a peaceful home and a satisfied wife."[53] In 1952 Uhse authored and released a thirty-two-page catalog that eliminated such sex-specific addresses and, even more significantly, introduced the trope that would become the firm's trademark: the identification of the firm with the person.[54] In general catalogs for the next fifteen years, the founder's biography linked the firm to a feminized history of the recent past and a philosophy of sexuality identifying women as the anchor of conjugal life.[55] The firm thus drew on the language of Weimar reformers, popular memories of the "hour of the

[51] Ernst-Walter Rotermund grew up in a Flensburg shipping family; he returned from POW camp with a fully formed plan for a mail-order hair tonic business in his head. He was active in Beate Uhse in the early years.

[52] Hans-Werner and Bärbel Melzer, interview with the author, September 9, 2003, 91; Uhse, *Lustvoll in den Markt,* 57; see also "Liebe Mitarbeiter!" *Absender Beate,* 2, no. 2 (April 1963): 1, FZH 18-9/2.3.

[53] *Durch einen glücklichen Zufall* (Flensburg, n.d., ca. 1951), back cover. See also *Stimmt in unserer Ehe alles?* (Flensburg, 1951). The 1952 catalog of the same name is a different work.

[54] *Stimmt in unserer Ehe alles?* (Flensburg, 1952). In contrast to general catalogs, specialty catalogs focusing on a particular sexual problem sometimes employed sex-specific titles. *Frau Müller will sich scheiden lassen? Die Frigidität der Frau: Ursachen und Überwindung* (Flensburg, n.d., ca. 1953–1955); *Mit Herrn Krüger stimmt was nicht! Die Impotenz des Mannes: Formen und Abhilfe* (Flensburg, n.d., ca. 1953–55); *Was ist nur mit Renate? Das Notwendigste über zuverlässige Geburtenregelung* (Flensburg, n.d., ca. 1953–55).

[55] The following description draws on the following general product catalogs. All appeared for many years with relatively minor revisions; these notes give the probable date of first publication: *Die besten Jahre unseres Lebens: Ein Helfer und Führer für das Liebes- und Eheleben* (Flensburg, 1958); *Gesunde Ehe—glückliche Ehe* (Flensburg, 1963); *Glückliche Ehe, gesunde Ehe* (Flensburg, 1964); *. . . sie sind glücklich!* (Flensburg, 1958); *Stimmt in unserer Ehe alles?* (Flensburg, 1952). Specialty catalogs usually omitted the framing texts; see, however, *Liebe: Uralt und immer wieder jung* (Flensburg, n.d., ca. 1962), 16–17.

women," and a broad consensus that the family was crucial to a secure future.[56] Yet the firm quietly but persistently omitted sexist subtexts to these popular discourses: Weimar reformers' instructions regarding male leadership in sexual matters, the notion that women required rescue from their "forced emancipation" during and after the war, and metaphors of the man as "head" and the woman as "heart" of the family.

The 1952 catalog, the first to use photography, featured on its cover the head of a woman, dramatically lit in the style of Weimar-era expressionism (which had enjoyed a renaissance in early postwar film), staring intently into the camera and implicitly posing the question of the catalog's title: "Is Everything All Right in Our Marriage?" In describing the firm's origins, Uhse's setting was the immediate postwar period. Couples had grown apart, and pregnancy was a disaster. As Uhse explained, "it's the woman who suffers the most from [sexual] dissonances." Although she was a happily married mother of four, Uhse had heard from a doctor of his patients' problems. Inspired to "help married couples in need," Uhse found that "for me as a woman I could only think of promoting women's happiness and the preservation of marriage in this way with the greatest idealism."[57]

This telling made Uhse less proactive than she seemed in her 1989 story, in which she learned of women's distress by talking to them herself. But Uhse's "taming" of her autobiography went farther. In fact, she knew the world of male comradeship as well as the world of domesticity. The only woman among sixty students in her pilot-training course in 1937 (she was seventeen), Uhse spent the war in the overwhelmingly male environment of the Luftwaffe, experiencing her first sexual contact, marriage, and motherhood while she was "one of the boys."[58] In the 1950s, though, Uhse did not market this history, drawing instead on the image of wife and mother and memories of the postwar "hour of the women." She was equally selective in describing women's strategies for ensuring family harmony. While some needed contraceptives upon their husbands' return, Uhse knew from customers' letters that others hoped to prevent pregnancy to avoid betraying their infidelities during their husbands' imprisonment.[59] But there was no need to broadcast the firm's aid to adulterers.

Product presentation underlined the goal of saving marriages by improving women's sexual experience. Descriptions of goods continually returned to one

[56] On Weimar reform: Grossmann, *Reforming Sex.* On memories of women as victims: Elizabeth D. Heineman, "The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's 'Crisis Years' and West German National Identity," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 2 (1996): 354–95. On hope for the family in the early FRG, see Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*; Ruhl, *Verordnete Unterordnung*; Merith Niehuss, *Familie, Frau und Gesellschaft: Studien zur Strukturgeschichte der Familie in Westdeutschland, 1945–1960* (Göttingen, 2001).

[57] *Stimmt in unserer Ehe alles?* (1952), back cover.

[58] Uhse, *Mit Lust und Liebe,* 62–91. On the evolution of Uhse's self-presentation, see Elizabeth D. Heineman, "Der Mythos Beate Uhse," *WerkstattGeschichte* 14, no. 5 (2005): 69–92.

[59] Hans-Dieter Thomsen, interview with the author, June 17, 2003, 29.

point: women should have orgasm during sex, but men's practices meant that this was too rarely the case. Using exquisitely delicate language, Beate Uhse's catalogs made the following points: Men who rush lovemaking because their minds are cluttered by work disappoint their wives. (An erotic novel would get them into the mood.) Without contraception, women sought unsafe abortions. Furthermore, fear of pregnancy made women emotionally incapable of orgasm, while withdrawal made it physiologically impossible. (Couples might consider a wide array of contraceptives.) If a woman appeared "frigid," it was probably because her husband didn't know how to make love to her. (He should read a sex manual and perhaps try a device to increase the stimulation his wife experiences during intercourse.) Impotence or genital injury might diminish a man's confidence, but his wife also suffers if intercourse is no longer possible. (A hormone pill, a pneumatic device, or a genital prosthetic [dildo] might compensate.) If he climaxed too quickly, he would frustrate his wife, whom nature has equipped to take more time to reach orgasm. (An ointment to prevent premature ejaculation would help.) The 1952 catalog did not offer photos of nude women, and its single sketch of a lingerie-clad woman was modest. Catalogs avoided mention of condom use against STDs, which implied illicit sex.

As the decade continued, customers and the firm alike progressed from recovery to abundance. Catalogs made far greater use of photography and by 1958 had grown to 162 pages.[60] Covers no longer showed customers anxiously questioning whether everything was all right in their marriages. Portraying couples happily embracing or talking, they instead optimistically declared, "You're happy!" "The best years of our lives," or "Healthy marriage, happy marriage." Images of presumptive customers within the catalogs were sometimes content, sometimes worried, but always dressed in style. Such customers not only expected prompt service and quality goods; they also had the kind of hectic lives that made it useful to get some help in the romance department. Sometimes the very comforts of the economic miracle—heavy food or too much drink—interfered with their sex lives.[61] But Beate Uhse, likewise at home in the fast-paced world of the economic miracle, could help. Illustrated "tours" of the firm showed a busy mailroom, a nicely decorated reception area, and a sea of filing cabinets, while graphs of fertility cycles and stages of arousal underlined the firm's scientific approach.

Yet even as the catalogs portrayed a successful firm, they domesticated the image of the entrepreneur behind it. Rather than dwelling on Uhse's long hours, professional drive, and rational decision making, the firm's literature featured photos of Uhse and her sons at the beach or washing the car, mentioned her homey touch of sending foreign stamps (from international orders) to offspring of customers who ordered her "birds and bees" book for children, and—despite her tendency to hire men in top positions—showed a feminized workplace with women answering phones, opening mail, and perusing the firm's library.[62] Linking

[60] *Die besten Jahre unseres Lebens.*

[61] See, e.g., . . . *sie sind glücklich!* 72; *Gesunde Ehe—glückliche Ehe*, 18.

[62] Stamps in . . . *sie sind glücklich!* 9; photo of children in *Liebe: Uralt und immer*

women's agency with the firm's approach to sexuality, the catalogs declared that "courtesy and honest engagement with the cares and concerns of others" had given the firm the "face"—what Roland Marchand calls a "corporate personality"—that earned it a good reputation.[63]

Still, the firm knew that men dominated its customer base (see below). Uhse was inclined to fulfill men's requests for photos of nude women, even if they shared those photos with their friends, not their wives. It would have been senseless to ignore impotent men, even if their main concern was their own virility, not their wives' pleasure. If men could cause their wives distress, the catalogs granted, the reverse was also true: a woman's neglect of her appearance or criticism of her husband might explain his apparent impotence. But Beate Uhse wove male-centered wishes into its narrative of companionate harmony, in which women's experience was always equally important. Photographs' ability to arouse men was a physician-recommended way to enliven a marriage dulled by routine.[64] Of men whose war wounds left them incapable of coitus, the catalog declared: "These people—and certainly their wives as well—have a particular right to help."[65]

By emphasizing women's satisfaction, Beate Uhse did not ignore men's desire for pleasure. Rather, the firm created a less guilty language for such pleasure while also tending to men's real concerns about their marriages. Men seeking goods for solitary pleasure, exploitative relationships, or circulation among male friends could find what they wanted with Beate Uhse. Established customers received specialized catalogs with images of nude and near-nude women that were absent from the general catalogs that went to new contacts.[66] Yet however pleasurable passing risqué photos among friends and using condoms with prostitutes may have been, such activities did not create the happy marriages that male customers also wanted. Furthermore, some men rejected illicit sex and "obscenity" outright but cared about good sex with their wives. Or they were conflicted: they liked arousing images and texts, they accepted nonmarital sex, they sought pleasure for themselves and not just for their partners, but they felt guilty because it was so hard to interpret such pleasures as legitimate. Beate Uhse's emphasis on "marital hygiene" and good sex for women offered an alternative not only to the condemnatory language of decency advocates but also to the "dirty" talk of the Wehrmacht and the pub.

Beate Uhse's "clean," companionate sexuality helped the firm attract more female customers than its competitors (see below) while also providing a less guilty language for men. Most of all, it made sexual consumption compatible with

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wieder jung, 16; on the 1955 use of photos of her sons, see Uhse, *Lustvoll in den Markt,* photo insert following 96. See also *Liebe, das schönste Wort auf Erden!* (Flensburg, n.d., ca. 1960).

[63] . . . *sie sind glücklich!* 5; Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 26–35.

[64] . . . *sie sind glücklich!* 106.

[65] *Stimmt in unserer Ehe alles?* (1952), 22.

[66] See, e.g., a catalog with a photograph of a stripper on the cover: *BU* (Flensburg, n.d., ca. 1958); *Eros, Glück und Liebe* (Flensburg, n.d., ca. 1962).

customers' hopes for a "normal" family life blending security and deep feeling: a family that bore healthy children, but not too many, and that fulfilled the equally intense, if distinct, erotic passions of both partners. Using this strategy, the business grew to serve 1.5 million customers and to employ 200 people by 1962.[67]

With a different tone, Gisela grew even bigger. When twenty-two-year-old Walter Schäfer founded Gisela in 1948, he had already run firms employing 320 people doing DM 300,000 of business per month.[68] His first best seller was a cure for corns; later, a dieting aid made him a fortune.[69] Schäfer's pharmaceutical firm was among the largest in Baden-Württemberg, and he ran an imposing group of publishing houses and shoe stores. Schäfer's diverse business concerns reflected the catholic interests of this avid reader and traveler.[70] He discovered in erotica a profitable line, but he neither depended on erotica for his livelihood nor identified personally with this sector.

Beate Uhse's male managers had to contend with a dynamic female boss. The men at the top of Schäfer's firms circulated among themselves, independent of authoritative female voices. Schäfer's admen drafted texts to sell erotica, pharmaceuticals, and shoes; they did not share their competitor's focus on shaping a positive image for sexual goods. The village near Stuttgart that housed the firm was even more provincial than Flensburg, but the conglomerate's breadth meant that the staff's self-perception and social reputation did not depend on Gisela.[71] The catalog needed to sell products and avoid legal trouble. It did not need to tell stories about sexual consumption that pleased the boss or reassured his staff.

In its earliest years, Gisela distributed fliers for a pessary arguing that, in these hard times, women must be empowered to control their fertility. It also advertised the type of photo series that circulated among men and claimed no role in women's emancipation: "Rita and the Whip," "Rita and the Donkey," "Rita with Jo and the Negro."[72] As business grew, Gisela developed comprehensive price lists and, by 1956 at the latest, illustrated catalogs. In that year, Schäfer acquired two more erotica firms under the condition that they retain their own names: Einhorn and Maison. The ensuing catalogs carried nearly identical text and illustrations for a nearly identical product line. They did not craft a narrative to establish a "face" for the firm as Beate Uhse did.[73]

Both firms started with manufacturers' descriptions, but Beate Uhse altered

[67] *Gesunde Ehe—glückliche Ehe*, 6.

[68] Schäfer/W.F.L. Urteil, 6–7; *Unsere Firma und wir* (Schmiden bei Stuttgart, 1958). The figure in DM is for the first months after currency reform.

[69] "Das muß man erlebt haben," *Der Spiegel*, November 5, 1958, 56–57.

[70] Schumacher and Dagies interview.

[71] The firm moved from Stuttgart-Cannstatt, a small but ancient town, to the farming village of Schmiden in 1956.

[72] "Was viele Frauen NICHT wußten!" "Fotos und Zeichnungen für Sammler," advertising fliers, Internationales Verandhaus Gisela, ca. 1948, WSG, loose papers.

[73] See Einhorn's *Was wir alle von der Ehe oft nicht wissen* (Stuttgart, 1957) and *Glück oder Unglück in der Liebe? Unglückliche oder glückliche Ehen?* (Fellbach-Württemberg, n.d., ca. 1957); Gisela's *Preisliste Nr. 7* (Stuttgart, 1957); Maison's *Wollen wir ein offenes Gespräch unter vier Augen führen?* (Stuttgart, n.d., ca. 1957).

language to ensure its delicacy and consistency. Schäfer's catalogs more often copied descriptions verbatim, untroubled by raw language or inconsistencies.[74] The same difference characterized ads for products of the firms' own make. Thus Schäfer's catalogs advertised an ointment to delay ejaculation by explaining that men's too-rapid climax was behind most supposed female frigidity. Pages later, readers learned that many women, "due to some nervous physical or psychological cause or other," did not experience orgasm, leaving their husbands to feel that they "may as well be married to a refrigerator."[75] Following the refrigerator analogy with a command to leave "all jokes aside," the catalog employed a humor banned from Beate Uhse's catalogs. Most illustrations, like Beate Uhse's, portrayed products or "everyday people" displaying distress or joy, but Schäfer's general catalogs also included nearly nude women whose flirtatious winks indicated their availability.

While Gisela, like Beate Uhse, sold heterosexual companionship, Schäfer also offered a second setting for sexual consumption: the male group. Gisela's 1957 catalog opens with a fictional talk between two friends over a beer that leads one of the men to seek the advice of a salesman at Gisela.[76] In the ensuing man-to-man session, "Rainer" and the reader learn of sexual problems and products to alleviate them; all gain their meaning in the context of male comradeship. Rainer is not alone with his potency problems: 80 percent of men suffer from impotence at some point. Rainer's friends laugh at his inexperience and his inability to keep up with their dirty talk. The salesman advises Rainer to read scholarly works to correct his ignorance and erotic fiction so he can brag about sexual adventures he has never had. The catalog offered gag items for men to share, with the suggestion that the customer buy in bulk and sell extras to his friends. Even on birth control, the text highlights neither Rainer's wife nor the couple as (potential) parents; rather, it concludes that Rainer's approval of contraception places him in a society of forward-looking thinkers. Photographs indirectly identified Rainer's community as men of the war generation. Rainer, his buddy, and the salesman are middle-aged, and Rainer is haggard and drawn. The talk in a pub evoked images of men recounting war stories (and wartime affairs) in that environment, and contemporaries would have recognized the trope of sexual problems among veterans.[77] The catalogs' headlining of condoms as "Strong Weapons in the Battle against Sexually Transmitted Disease," using martial imagery and relegating contraception to a secondary function, drew on condoms' military legacy.

Yet this emphasis on men's satisfaction, friendship, and experience of war did not exclude the accent on female satisfaction, marital harmony, and women's postwar trials made familiar by Beate Uhse. Pages offering contraceptives noted women's distress at unplanned pregnancies, and descriptions of aids invoked the

[74] See also Beate Uhse to Freyja-Verlag, January 14, 1964, WSG, Beate Uhse.

[75] *Was wir alle von der Ehe oft nicht wissen*, 58, 61. See also Gisela's *Der Schlüssel zum Glück* (Stuttgart, n.d., ca. 1956), n.p.

[76] *Preisliste Nr. 7*, passim.

[77] Biess, *Homecomings.*

importance of women's sexual satisfaction. Gisela mailed 30 million leaflets for an aid ("invented by a woman") with the catchy slogan, "Marital strife will be no more / if you have O-GARANT in store!"[78] Einhorn offered a subscription for the monthly delivery of tampons and sanitary napkins,[79] and Schäfer's catalogs promoted the works of Pro-Familia (Planned Parenthood), which one of his presses published. The covers of the 1957 Einhorn and Maison catalogs resembled Beate Uhse's 1952 "Is Everything All Right in Our Marriage?" (which remained in circulation throughout the decade), with a woman posing an intimate question as she stared piercingly into the camera.[80] An Einhorn catalog with products, illustrations, and descriptions identical to those in the "Rainer" catalog replaced the dialogues with an interview with an American marriage counselor that had originally been published in the *Ladies' Home Journal.*[81]

Beate Uhse anchored its products in a single context and employed a consistent, delicate tone. Walter Schäfer's firms described two sites where its products found meaning and alternated between seriousness and slightly ribald humor. Still, Schäfer's approach was hardly a free-for-all. Gisela and its sister firms, like Beate Uhse, avoided mention of settings that might attract legal trouble or alienate too many potential customers. Neither firm acknowledged homoerotic uses for its products, although both sold books and photographs suited to homoerotic fantasy. Nor did they acknowledge customers' likely assumption that their "women's teas" (to "regulate menstruation") were abortifacients.[82] Neither firm mentioned solitary sex, despite the common use of erotic materials for this purpose. There was no female equivalent to Gisela's image of men bragging and joking about sex.

A defined vocabulary of options—neither a single, prescriptive rhetoric nor complete openness—characterized large firms' marketing of sexual consumer goods. Erotica firms' depictions of wifehood challenge historians' emphasis on motherhood's centrality to 1950s domesticity.[83] According to erotica firms, partnership with the husband, not motherhood, was paramount in women's domestic experience; erotic pleasure was as important as security; and sexual partnership must be egalitarian, even as it recognized men's and women's differences. By emphasizing women's sexual pleasure, the industry brought to the forefront a goal that had been marginal in prior consumer regimes.

Yet the industry's "vocabulary of options" also displayed continuities in the gendering of sex. Historians have traced a postwar shift from militarized to paternal masculinity: from violence to nurturing, from the homosocial group to the

[78] *Die richtige Wahl*, flier, Einhorn-Versand, ca. 1957. *Mancher Ehekrach bleibt aus—hast du O-GARANT im Haus!* ("O-Garant" means guaranteed orgasm.) The number of leaflets is taken from Schäfer/W.F.L. Urteil, 72.

[79] *Glück oder Unglück in der Liebe? Unglückliche oder glückliche Ehen?* 62.

[80] Ibid.; *Wollen wir ein offenes Gespräch unter vier Augen führen?*

[81] *Was wir alle von der Ehe oft nicht wissen*, 3–12.

[82] Schäfer/W.F.L. Urteil, 291; *Die besten Jahre unseres Lebens*, 102; *Wollen wir ein offenes Gespräch unter vier Augen führen?* 34; *Glück oder Unglück in der Liebe? Unglückliche oder glückliche Ehen?* 38; *BU*, n.p.

[83] Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood.*

family.[84] And, indeed, the sexual consumer goods industry declared that a good man satisfied his wife sexually. But sexual consumption could also enhance men's standing with their friends.

For all their differences, both firms aided the "domestication" of sexual consumption. If Gisela did not describe a purely domestic sexuality as Beate Uhse did, consumption for the sake of conjugal harmony did share the stage with consumption for the sake of naughty male pleasure in the pages of Schäfer's catalogs. Furthermore, language about sex, gender, and history was only one factor determining catalogs' appeal to customers. Customers complimented Beate Uhse's "tasteful" presentation,[85] but there were enough for whom taste was a lesser concern (or who preferred a different taste) to ensure spectacular growth for Gisela as well. In the end, careful composition of ad copy was not critical in those years.[86] After long periods of shortage and highly regulated access, consumer demand was high. It sufficed to publicize a product's availability and to deliver quality goods promptly so that first-time customers would become repeat customers. Customers who had many catalogs might seek ad copy that spoke to their desires—whether for conjugal eroticism, illicit sex, or opportunities to brag. Customers with only one catalog could overlook displeasing or irrelevant language to obtain the goods they wanted.

Nevertheless, catalogs shaped customers' understanding of sexual consumption. If the military and men's restrooms were the outlets for condoms, then obtaining condoms was men's job. Catalogs that arrived in the home and proclaimed women's interest in contraception declared that women could buy condoms. If bookstores sold works by sexologists but only fly-by-night businesses sold sexual aids, then a vast gulf separated "legitimate" from "illegitimate" goods. If catalogs offered both products on the same pages, then the distance between them was not so great. Mail order integrated a variety of goods, opened the door to women, and placed consumption in the home. The medium of the catalog was as important as its tone.

Consumers in the Domesticated Marketplace

For Germans whose sources had been sex-segregated (the military, men's restrooms), meager (the black market), public (apothecaries, newsstands), and fragmented (with different sources for different products), mail order brought profound change. The catalogs of the 1950s offered a cornucopia of goods from basic to luxurious, and they inhabited a space that was both private and sexually integrated. Millions ordered from them, but catalogs were also texts on sexuality

[84] Biess, *Homecomings*; Fehrenbach, "Rehabilitating Fatherland"; Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2001).

[85] *". . . das mußte ich Ihnen einmal schreiben . . . ,"* passim.

[86] Lore Schumacher, interview with the author, September 16, 2003; Dirk Rotermund, interview with the author, September 8, 2003.

and consumption in their own right, perused by readers who placed orders seldom or not at all.

Mail-order firms served West Germans of all social classes. Condoms came three for a mark, and customers could find aids, cosmetics, and nude photo series for under five marks. (A kilogram of bread cost 66 *pfennig,* the same as two condoms.) Short paperbacks could be had for four marks, and best-selling hardbacks for less than ten marks were common.[87] Both firms, however, also carried expensive, limited-edition books. Items that were handmade, like genital prosthetics, also were pricey. When, in the late 1950s, Beate Uhse began selling short films showing striptease or nude gymnastics, the firm also offered film projectors (up to DM 224.50) and screens (up to DM 70)—extravagances when millions still lived in cramped housing.[88] In the early years, Uhse targeted professionals, but by the early 1960s customers reflected the population in class composition, with professionals being only slightly overrepresented.[89]

How sexually integrated were these customers? The names on "customer cards" were overwhelmingly male. A 1954 analysis of 691 customer records of two firms carrying a wide variety of items but no contraceptives found over 96 percent male customers.[90] A 1957 seizure of mailings for customers of Gisela yielded 185 stuffed envelopes, 84 percent addressed to men.[91] Veterans of Beate Uhse recall that about 70 percent of customer cards listed male names.[92]

Yet such data mask as much as they reveal.[93] In previous decades, couples in need of condoms dispatched the man to the apothecary. Now, when couples agreed to purchase erotica by mail, the woman might do the work of filling out the form but then pen in her husband's name, as she did with other catalog shopping. The 1954 study—the only surviving data that includes marital status—illustrates the veiling of wives' purchases. Twenty-one percent of male customers but 53 percent of female customers had never married. Either single status made women two and a half times as likely as men to buy erotica, or wives ordered

[87] Special book catalogs carried a wider variety than the general catalogs; these book prices are from *BU Bücher* (Flensburg, n.d., ca. 1960).

[88] *Die besten Jahre unseres Lebens*, 141–50.

[89] Schöffengericht Flensburg, Sitzung vom 28. Juni 1961 [5b Ms. 31/51 (142/51)], FZH, 18-9/1.2(1); Dr. med. E.L., "Statistisches Material aus dem Alltag." No comparable data for Schäfer's firms survive.

[90] W. Pohl, "Der Bezieherkreis unzüchtiger Schriften und Bilder," *Kriminalstatistik* 8 (1954): 237–39; "Die Jugend ist besser als ihr Ruf!" *Der neue Vertrieb* 7, no. 152 (August 20, 1955): 453; Hans Giese, Fachwissenschaftliches Gutachten, 26. November 1960, StAL, EL 317 I/2343 fols. 1024–35.

[91] Landeskriminalpolizei Hildesheim Tgb. Nr. 3811/57, Vermerk, 25. 7. 1957, StAL, EL 317 I/2342 fols. 332–39.

[92] The data on Beate Uhse emerged in an interview and is more vulnerable to distortion than the written records for the other firms. Hans-Dieter Thomsen, interview with the author, March 5, 2003. Written records from Beate Uhse suggest similar sexual ratios for 1969 and 1988. No. 36, PR Foto-Archiv, FZH, 18-9/2.6; "Öffentliche Anhörung der SPD-Bundestagsfraktion zur Problematik der Pornographie am 13. und 14. September 1988, Ausführung von Beate Uhse," FZH, 18-9/2.3.

[93] Hans-Dieter Thomsen, interviews with the author, March 5, 2003 and June 17, 2003.

under their husbands' names, leaving unwed women overrepresented.[94] Beate Uhse's mailings to new mothers in the late 1950s showed mail order's appeal to women, prompting a response rate 50 percent higher than mailings to newlyweds and three to five times greater than mailings to "general" potential customers.[95]

But the "new mothers" campaign was exceptional. The simplest explanation for men's overrepresentation in customer files is that nearly all mailings to potential customers went to men. When she culled address books, Uhse found men: couples appeared under the husband's name, and few single women had their own apartments. Professional directories were another heavily male source.[96] Firms rented addresses of proven customers from commercial services and bought address lists from failing erotica firms—two practices that recycled largely male lists.[97] By the early 1970s, most men had received a catalog at some point, even if they had never approached a mail-order firm. Women had received catalogs only if they had requested them or had purchased under their own names.[98] When a couple responded to an unsolicited mailing, the man's name or a number keyed to it was already on the order form.

How did catalogs circulate inside the home? Most landed in the trash without any purchase being made: response rates for nontargeted mailings were in the single digits.[99] Men could easily discard catalogs without their partners' knowledge or hide them and order goods to be sent to a post office box.[100] Yet after the Second World War, wives' voice in family decision making grew.[101] In this setting, catalogs eased consultation. Erotica firms urged couples to discuss the catalogs; Metropol, a short-lived Stuttgart firm, recommended that they read them in bed.[102] Customers described joint shopping in letters to Beate Uhse: "My wife and I read your little booklet with great interest. Both of us agreed that it contained very good tips that could be decisive for a marriage."[103]

[94] Pohl, "Der Bezieherkreis." The "married" category included divorced and widowed women.

[95] Melzer interview, 21–24; Dirk Rotermund, interview with the author, June 19, 2003, 27.

[96] Kohlhaas, "Keine sittlich schwere Gefährdung der Jugend?" *Unsere Jugend* 8, no. 2 (1956): 82–85.

[97] See, e.g., Oberstaatsanwalt (5 Js 1089/58) Strafkammeranklage gegen Beate Rotermund, March 17, 1959, fols. 2–24, 11, LASH, Abt. 786, Nr. 2421.

[98] "Beate Uhse: Eine kombinierte Motiv-Image-Studie" (Frankfurt am Main: PMS Institut für psychologische Markt- und Sozialforschung, 1972), 24, Orion-Versand GmbH (Flensburg), Geschäftsführer.

[99] Landgericht Flensburg denial of Berufung der Staatsanwaltschaft [5b Ms 179/51—Ns—(IB 107/52)], FZH 18-9/1.2(1); 14. 9. 1952, Ernst Beckman to Walter Schäfer, WSG, loose papers; Melzer interview, 21–24; Rotermund interview, June 19, 2003, 27.

[100] Melzer interview, 25.

[101] Sibylle Meyer and Eva Schulze, *Auswirkungen des II. Weltkrieges auf Familien: Zum Wandel der Familie in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1989).

[102] *Intim: Der interessante Katalog für Eheleute* (Stuttgart-Untertürkheim, n.d., ca. 1959), 43. On Metropol, see StAL, FL 300/31 I Zugang 22. 3. 1982, Teil IV 6470, passim.

[103] *". . . das mußte ich Ihnen einmal schreiben . . . ,"* 26. The only hard data on the subject come from a much later date: a 1996 survey of customers of Beate Uhse showed

Privacy was only one advantage of mail order. Time was another: couples could extend delicate discussions with no pressure to buy or get out of the store. Sometimes erotica firms joined conversations that were already underway. A veteran wrote to Gisela, in 1953, that a wartime injury had left him incapable of penetration despite arousal. At fifty-three, he could adapt, but his younger wife suffered from unrelieved sexual tension. Perhaps Gisela could suggest something to give him a firmer erection.[104] But catalogs could also prod couples who shied from discussing sex. "Even between spouses, sexual questions are wrongly suppressed," wrote a customer who knew from experience. "Your catalogs forced us to have a 'heart-to-heart' talk."[105]

By the second half of the 1950s, many catalogs included lengthy expositions on sexuality. Beate Uhse's catalogs evolved into full-length primers covering sexual development, response, and dysfunction; conception and contraception; and social problems of sexuality such as nonmarital births, divorce, the "population bomb," and which partner should take responsibility for contraception.[106] Gisela's catalogs were less thorough but included informative introductions and digressions. Millions of households owned no other literature on sexuality, or they had a work they found difficult. In such cases, catalogs, mailed by the millions, with their accessible language and concise format, could become reference works to be reopened as new questions came up.

Customers bewailed their sexual ignorance in their letters to erotica firms, but West Germans did have frameworks for thinking about both sexual pleasure and reproduction. Erotica catalogs were compatible with existing frameworks but offered a novel blend of information, accessibility, and promise of easy solutions. Readers found enough that was familiar to make the catalogs convincing and enough that was new to make them exciting.

Older customers would have recognized Weimar reformers' language of "marital hygiene" in erotica catalogs. Younger readers, too, absorbed this idiom as Weimar-era classics came back into print and new works echoed their language.[107] But developments since 1933 also made West Germans receptive to the language of erotica catalogs. The emigration of much of the psychoanalytic community

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that 60.7 percent of customers examined their catalogs with their partners. John David Prescott, "Beate Uhse Company Report," 1996, FZH 18-9/2.3. At the time, some 80 percent of customers lived in steady relationships. "The Story of Beate Uhse," PR Broschüre August 1992, FZH 18-9/2.3.

[104] H. W. to Fa. Gisela, January 7, 1953, WSG, loose papers.

[105] *". . . das mußte ich Ihnen einmal schreiben . . . ,"* 34.

[106] The "primers" evolved not only as new information on sex emerged but also as social concerns changed; reference to the "population bomb" appeared first in 1963 in *Gesunde Ehe—glückliche Ehe.*

[107] In addition to reprints, readers could find knockoffs of the classics like Von D. Felder, *Die idealste und vollkommenste Ehe: Das Buch für Verlobte, Eheleute, und alle, die es werden wollen!* (Braunschweig, 1952). Best-selling postwar works showing the influence of Weimar-era sexology include Dr. med. M. Rinard, *Unter vier Augen: Die hohe Schule der Gattenliebe* (Heidenheim, 1949); Richard Wunderer, *Hygiene des Sexuallebens* (Karlsruhe, 1951).

meant that psychoanalytic explanations for sexual problems were not as broadly popularized in Central Europe as in the United States.[108] Psychoanalytic models rendered sexual education, better communication between partners, and improved sexual technique irrelevant in addressing unhappy sexual lives—yet these were the solutions West German erotica firms recommended. In contrast to psychoanalysis, West German sexual science focused on physiology (with particular attention to hormones, as in the Nazi period), criminality, and deviance.[109] The latter two subjects lent themselves to sensationalistic books, and the first was compatible with erotica firms' efforts to inculcate faith in performance-enhancing potions. In the United States, Freud's theory that a mature female orgasm was a vaginal orgasm evolved into a pathologization of the clitoris, leaving Americans to wait for Masters and Johnson to "discover" the complementarity of vaginal and clitoral stimulation in the late 1960s. Spared this privileging of vaginal orgasm, West Germans could easily accept erotica catalogs' agnosticism about clitoral versus vaginal stimulation, as they offered aids and informative texts to exhance both.

Erotica catalogs also spoke to healthy reproduction, a long-standing concern. Weimar Germany, like many states, had tried to improve maternal and infant health, at least partly along eugenic lines. Race-conscious breeding had been central to the Nazi project. While rejecting Nazi racism, the FRG pursued pronatalist policies. It also maintained the eugenic indication for abortion and warned of the demographic danger posed by "asocials" like promiscuous women and by Germany's lower-than-average birthrate. When West Germans turned to erotica firms, they saw a sunnier vision, one that celebrated healthy reproduction but was less fraught with danger. There were no Germans who endangered reproductive health in erotica catalogs, nor were there threatening races. Non-Europeans' rare appearances were in ads for the genre "sexuality in foreign lands," in which (female) "exotics" might titillate the reader but were irrelevant to reproductive concerns. Customers were thus spared worries about racial-eugenic danger (and uncomfortable confrontations with racist-eugenic rhetoric) as discussions of reproduction turned inward and thus assumed whiteness. They also saw their faith in their sound genetic stock confirmed: economic or emotional factors, not eugenic indications, made some people limit the size of their families.[110]

In light of West Germans' sense that the Nazi years had left them behind the rest of the Western world, translations of foreign authors like the British Eustace

[108] Sander Gilman, "The Struggle of Psychiatry with Psychoanalysis: Who Won?" *Critical Inquiry* 13 (1987): 293–313; for the continuing history of psychoanalysis in Nazi Germany, see Geoffrey Cocks, *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich: The Göring Institute* (New York, 1985). On U.S. developments, see Jane F. Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (New York, 2001), 13–80.

[109] See *Beiträge zur Sexualforschung* (1952ff.), the organ of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sexualforschung.*

[110] See also Uli Linke, *German Bodies: Race and Representation after Hitler* (New York, 1999).

Chesser were popular.[111] But the most influential import was the Kinsey Report. Years before it was available in German, a cover story in West Germany's major newsweekly disseminated some of Kinsey's findings.[112] Although critics bemoaned his lack of romance, Kinsey's preference for dispassionate descriptions of sexual experience rather than interrogations into his subjects' emotional lives—much less deep psychological questions—complemented the language of erotica firms. Kinsey's teachings also included a reassuring subtext for customers: if sexual behavior was so varied, then buying erotica was probably not deviant, and curiosity about sexual practices beyond the missionary position was reasonable.

Even the churches, which excoriated sexual consumption and sex outside marriage, taught that sexual harmony within marriage was important, even sacred. Christians might feel justified in buying a "marriage manual"—perhaps one whose author was identified as a Christian marriage counselor—to strengthen their matrimonial bonds.[113] Catholics might feel reassured by clerical defenses of birth control reprinted in erotica catalogs, even if those clerics had the rhythm method in mind. The pious customer could always bypass the condoms and instead buy a book explaining the rhythm method.[114]

By using recognizable languages of sexuality but offering confident solutions to all problems, erotica catalogs gained the trust of millions of West Germans. So assured did customers feel of the firms' expertise that they became favored addressees for questions about sex. Early on, Beate Uhse hired a physician to answer such letters; fulfilling requests for advice soon required assembly-line procedures employing prefabricated paragraphs and dozens of letter writers.[115] The responses offered accurate information and referred to products in an enclosed catalog. True to form, Walter Schäfer created another firm to meet this need: "Frau Renate," built around an older woman whose qualifications lay in her experience as wife and mother, her reliability as a long-standing employee, and her forthright yet tactful approach to sexuality.[116]

For erotica firms, education had an instrumental function: knowledgeable people would feel more comfortable as consumers, would understand the benefits of

[111] Eustace Chesser, *Die befreite Ehe: Freiheit in der Ehe und durch die Ehe*, trans. Karl Friedrich (Stuttgart, 1952).

[112] "Wie die Frauen sind," *Der Spiegel*, August 3, 1950, 24–27.

[113] *Die besten Jahre unseres Lebens,* 20. The book was Theodor Bovet, *Die Ehe: Das Geheimnis ist groß* (Tübingen, 1958). On postwar churches' promotion of marital sexuality, see Herzog, *Sex after Fascism.*

[114] *Stimmt in unserer Ehe alles* (1952), 10; *Gesunde Ehe—glückliche Ehe*, 81; *Was wir alle von der Ehe oft nicht wissen*, 77.

[115] In the first half of 1960, one firm (probably Beate Uhse) received some 225 letters per day requesting advice (Giese, Fachwissenschaftliches Gutachten). See also "Wen interessiert das schon? Wir dachten: zum Beispiel SIE!" PR Brochure Beate Uhse (1962), Stadtarchiv Flensburg XIII Dr. 25. On techniques of responding to this correspondence, see Ove Müller-Neff, "Sexuelle Hilfsmittel durch den Versandhandel: Analyse eines modernen Spezialversandhauses" (Med. diss., University of Hamburg, 1967). Only isolated letters survive.

[116] Schumacher and Dagies interview.

particular products, and would be loyal to the firm that had answered their questions. In terms of social impact, however, the provision of information—via catalogs, books, and correspondence—was anything but secondary. In the 1950s, when there was no sexual education in the schools, when the popular media had yet to take up sex, and when the GjS had effectively banned books about sex from bookstores, these firms were West Germany's sexual educators. In 1963, both the Humanistic Union, a prominent voice of liberalism, and the leading women's magazine *Constanze* credited erotica firms with doing the work performed in other countries by publicly supported facilities for contraception and sexual education.[117]

What do purchasing decisions tell us about what customers hoped to achieve? Skeptics mocked customers' faith in performance-enhancing potions, but this reflects mainly noncustomers' exaggerated sense of such products' popularity.[118] Most sales fell into categories where the chances of success were good. Books and photos instructed or aroused the reader; contraceptives prevented pregnancy. Customers' choices reveal not only their perceived needs but also what they thought bought goods could achieve.

Customers prioritized contraception, knowledge, and heterosexual compatibility over improved experiences for one individual. Slightly over 30 percent of the big firms' sales in the early 1960s were in contraceptives, overwhelmingly condoms. Books accounted for 25–30 percent of sales; basic manuals dominated this category. Also selling well were items promising to enhance both partners' experience, such as books describing good technique; ointments to prolong erection, extending both partners' pleasure; and supposedly aphrodisiac chocolates, which helped to create a setting of erotic foreplay and which functioned only if both partners wanted them to function.[119] Objects to enhance one partner's experience or solitary sex fared less well. Mechanical aids claimed to help women whose husbands' injury or impotence prevented penetration or for whom penetration provided inadequate stimulation. Yet textured condoms, dildos, and pneumatic devices reduced the man's sensitivity or marked his inadequacy; they accounted for only one-tenth of sales. Photos of nude women claimed under 8 percent of sales. Erotic fiction, described by Beate Uhse's medical advisor as "an introverted form of pleasure-seeking . . . 'experienced' in the realm of one's own fantasy," was the least popular type of book.[120]

[117] Humanistische Union, petition to the Bundestag (n.d., late 1963), B Arch, B117/2; "Geburtenregelung in Europa (5. Teil)," *Constanze*, October 1, 1963, 7–9, 52.

[118] Criticizing erotica firms for misleading advertisements regarding chemical aids: Interessengemeinschaft Heilmittelwerbung e.V. to BMI, 21. Oktober 1955, B Arch, B142/1439. For admissions of ineffectiveness by industry sympathizers: Landgericht Flensburg Rechtsurteil vom 15.–16. Juli 1952 [5b Ms 179/51—Ns—(IB 107/52)] FZH, 18-9/1.2(1); "Sex per Post," *DM*, no. 12 (1968), 12, 34–37. On customers' lesser interest in these products: "Beate Uhse: Eine kombinierte Motiv-Image-Studie," 144.

[119] Hans-Dieter Thomsen, interviews with the author, March 5, 2003, 40–43, and June 17, 2003; Rotermund interview, June 19, 2003, 31, 34, 41; Uhse, *Mit Lust und Liebe,* 131.

[120] These data come from 1960 to 1962. We have no equivalent information for earlier

These figures do not perfectly reflect the larger marketplace. Taking into account other outlets, the proportion of mechanical and chemical aids would probably drop, while that of books, contraceptives, and photographs would rise. Still, these figures reveal the priorities of customers who utilized the dominant form of commerce in erotica: contraception and information first, better sex for both partners second, and greater pleasure for one partner or a solitary pleasure-seeker last.

This consumer behavior does not permit us to characterize 1950s eroticism as safely domesticated—or the 1950s domicile as refreshingly erotic. Purchasing behavior does not transparently expose customers' use of their purchases, and illicit uses could range from loving to exploitative. Erotica firms recommended contraceptives to improve family life, but customers surely also used condoms for nonmarital sex. "Artificial members" [*Kunstglieder*] sold as aids for wounded men turned up in "educational" films and in photo shoots of lesbian sex scenes in brothels.[121] Still, the domestic setting for purchasing; the evidence of joint decision making; the high priority given to contraception, information, and mutual pleasure; and customers' reliance on erotica firms for advice all suggest that customers hoped mail-order erotica would enhance stability and pleasure within the family.

Customer letters, too, reveal erotica's role in remedying shortcomings and supplying greater marital pleasure. In 1955, a man wrote to Beate Uhse (upon receiving an unsolicited catalog) that "my wife and I have little experience due to our upbringing, and I would like to obtain books that give thorough information about all questions relating to marriage." He asked that Theodor van de Velde's *Ideal Marriage* and Richard Wunderer's *Hygiene of Sexual Life* be sent to his wife's address, since sexual ignorance was not the couple's only problem: lack of housing meant that he roomed near his workplace and visited his wife when he could. Five years later, he had solved his housing problem and was ordering lingerie.[122] Other customers described sexual consumption itself as the factor saving a marriage: "So much is clearer now. My marriage is saved, and I have my wife back. . . . If I'd had your books before, this crisis would never have occurred."[123]

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years. Giese, Fachwissenschaftliches Gutachten; E. L., "Statistisches Material aus dem Alltag" (quote on 7); *Gesunde Ehe—glückliche Ehe.* E. L.'s data is from Beate Uhse, and the 1963 catalog probably drew from the same research (with some shuffling of categories). The Giese study does not name the firm, but professional relationships between Giese and Uhse make it likely that his data, too, came from Beate Uhse.

[121] Niederschrift über die Tagung der Leiter der Zentralstellen zur Bekämpfung unzüchtiger und jugendgefährdender Schriften vom September 22–24, 1965, Referat, "Vertrieb von Godemiches," 1. StA Bohm, Zentralstelle Bremen, B Arch, B141/26581.

[122] W. P., letters to Beate Uhse, March 26, 1955, and December 17, 1960, in the author's possession.

[123] *". . . das mußte ich Ihnen einmal schreiben . . . ,"* 18.

Conclusion

For postwar West Germans, sex was a cheap pleasure at a time when memories of pain were near and more extravagant pleasures were still out of reach. Of course, sex was not cheap if the result was unwanted pregnancy, and it ceased to be pleasurable if it led to domestic tensions. But if these hazards could be avoided, then a good sex life could help make the family not only a refuge from a dangerous world but also a site of passion. In the early years of reconstruction, the sexual consumer-goods industry addressed West Germans' simultaneous quest for security and intense feeling.

Three factors converged to make this possible. One was the form of consumption. The domestic site of mail order and the inclusion of all wares in a single catalog made it easier for women to consume erotica and for couples to consult. The second was erotica firms' role as sexual educators. In attaching the language of conjugal harmony and women's sexual and reproductive empowerment to consumption, erotica firms insured a broader dissemination of such language than sexual reformers of the 1920s could achieve. The third was the appeal of the family as a location for passion (emotional as well as physical) after the Second World War. Indeed, the very breadth of the erotica industry enhanced its appeal to couples seeking security and stability on the one hand and heightened experience on the other.

This combination of factors was unique in the early FRG, but it suggests frameworks for thinking about gender, sex, the family, and consumption more generally. With erotica, the tension between women as consuming agents and women as objects of consumption takes an extreme form. Access to contraceptives is crucial to women's control over their bodies, while pictures of nude women offer those very bodies to the marketplace. To understand the impact of the industry on the hierarchies of gender, we thus must consider the industry as a whole. Seen in this light, the mechanics of the marketplace can be as important as specific goods. Marketing practices can locate consumption in sites of conjugal partnership or limit it to sites of illicit sex; they can make goods easily available to both sexes or only to one.

Consumer intent also shapes the social contexts of consumption. Consumers (particularly men, the more powerful consumers) seeking deeper family ties approach the erotica industry differently than those seeking pleasure elsewhere. In considering the gendered work of consumption and the impact of consumption on gender, we must look beyond realms of consumption gendered male and realms gendered female. Negotiations between partners, and even the question of whether the couple is the locus of decision making, can be equally important.

Finally, this world of consumption suggests ways to interrogate the part sexual pleasure plays in couples' emotional lives. Do individuals expect parenthood, conjugal partnership, or a combination of the two to be the heart of family life? How do sexual education, the ability to separate sex from reproduction, and the use of arousing texts or images shape the role of sexual pleasure in the quest for family fulfillment?

The 1950s, when young firms battled hostile courts and church organizations to bring contraceptives and information to a needy public, can easily appear as the "heroic age" of the West German erotica industry. But the "private" experience of sexual consumption was about to go public. During the economic miracle, contemporaries described West Germans as embarking on consecutive "waves" of consumption: the food wave, the clothing wave, the housing wave, the car wave, the vacation wave. In the mid-1960s, the media discovered a "sex wave."[124]

With the older generation having educated itself via erotica firms and young people learning about sex from the mass media and then the schools starting in the mid 1960s, West Germans needed basic manuals less and less.[125] The introduction of the birth control pill in 1961 moved a large part of the contraceptive market into physicians' hands. As fewer consumers turned to erotica firms for sexual education and contraceptives, those firms sold ever more explicit texts and images. With the legalization of pornography in 1975, pornography became the industry's mainstay.[126] This made it harder to attribute to firms like Beate Uhse—now the world's largest erotica firm—an underdog status or a compelling social function, even for those who favored the dismantling of the obscenity statutes. Yet even antipornography feminists of the 1980s, who reviled Uhse, lauded her role in sexual emancipation in the 1950s.[127] Indeed, the emergence of big mail-order erotica a generation before the legalization of pornography gave West Germans a form of sexual consumption whose relative (if incomplete) egalitarianism was unique. When big comprehensive firms emerged elsewhere in the 1970s, they replicated neither the product line, nor the language, nor the functions of the West German firms of the 1950s.

Historians of postwar Western Europe have located major changes in sexual mores and behavior in the sexual revolution and feminist movement. West Germans' adoption of the metaphor of waves, however, indicates that they linked a new sexual world with familiar consumer trends.[128] By the early 1960s, most

[124] Adolf Kloeckner, "Kesseltreiben gegen das GjS," *Jugendschutz* 11, no. 1 (1966): 8–13; "Wohin rollt die Sex-Welle?" *Der Spiegel*, November 18, 1968; Klaus Gabler, "Die 'Sex-Welle'—Befreiung oder Manipulation," *Kommunität* 13, no. 52 (October 1969): 137–40; "Thema eins," *Der Spiegel*, August 3, 1970, 32–46. On the language of "waves," see Andersen, *Der Traum vom guten Leben.*

[125] Magazines like *Jasmin* and *Twen* were particularly important in educating young people. On "enlightenment films," see Annette Miersch, *Schulmädchen-Report: Der deutsche Sexfilm der 70er Jahre* (Berlin, 2003).

[126] The revised Criminal Code of 1973 legalized pornography but delayed the implementation of this provision until 1975. Few courts prosecuted under the old obscenity statutes in the interim.

[127] Cornelia Filter, "Bomber Pilotin und Porno Produzentin," *Emma*, March 1988, 26–31. On this bifurcated treatment of Uhse, see Delille and Grohn, "Hauptmann der Aufklärung." Beate Uhse absorbed Gisela in the late 1960s, probably 1969 (WSG, Umsatzmeldungen).

[128] The sex wave and sexual revolution are usefully distinguished in Sabine Weissler, "Sexy Sixties," *CheSchahShit: Die sechziger Jahre zwischen Cocktail und Molotow* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1989).

West German adults used sexual consumer goods. Just as consumers could enjoy meat after years of having staved off their hunger with potatoes, so they could think about sexual "luxuries" once access to condoms and informational works became routine.

This transition from a consumer regime of subsistence to one of plenty helps to explain the next generation's difficulty in understanding their parents' sexual worlds.[129] Young adults of the 1960s, absorbed by their own questions about sexuality and the German past, misapprehended recent sexual history and sexual consumption. Interpreting a sexually conservative environment as a critical link between fascism and postwar bourgeois society, sexual revolutionaries found in the term "marital hygiene" an easy target, saw their parents' manuals as hopelessly moralistic, and considered sexual aids to be evidence of sexual repression.[130] Yet the marketplace transformed West Germans' experience of sex while sexual revolutionaries were still children. Mail-order firms sold "marital hygiene" but also enabled single people to buy condoms without alerting the local druggist to their activity. Even when they addressed men, erotica firms made it easier for women to shop. Mail-order firms routinized access to good information about sex, helped to normalize the goal of women's sexual satisfaction, and eased the way for couples to talk about sex. By the time commentators described the "sex wave" and then the sexual revolution, erotica firms had reshaped sexual knowledge and experience for millions of West Germans. They did so by offering something that Nazism had failed catastrophically to provide: excitement and passion in a setting that promised to enhance, not endanger, stability.

[129] Victoria De Grazia, "Changing Consumption Regimes in Europe, 1930–1970: Comparative Perspectives on the Distribution Problem," in Strassen, McGovern, and Judt, *Getting and Spending*, 59–84.

[130] On sexual revolutionaries, Herzog, *Sex after Fascism.* A sexual revolutionary's take on erotica appears in Amendt, *Sexfront*, 157–70.