

Feeling Like a Child: Dreams and Practices of Sexuality in the West German Alternative Left during the Long 1970s

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THE 1960S AND 1970S ARE popularly known as a “time of sexual challenge to the prudery, hypocrisy and stolid family conservatism dominating the post-war Fifties’ world.”¹ Scholars have often depicted these years as an era of sexual liberalization or even, especially in the context of the student revolts around 1968, as a time of sexual revolution.² In West Germany, the focus of this article, premarital sexual relations became a new norm, as a 1971 study by the Hamburg sexologists Hans Giese and Volkmar Sigusch noted.³ Behavior surveys of this period found that the number of male students between the age of twenty and twenty-two without coital experience decreased from 49 percent in 1966 to 28 percent in 1981; among female students, the change was even more dramatic, as the numbers fell from 54 percent to 18 percent.⁴ The introduction of the pill in 1961 untied heterosexual sexuality and reproduction to a hitherto unknown degree. Though this did not cause a sexual revolution, it made

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¹ Lynne Segal, “She’s Leaving Home: Women’s Sixties Renaissance,” in *1968 in Retrospect: History, Theory, Alterity*, ed. Gurinder K. Bhambra and Ipek Demir (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 33.

² See, for example, Gert Hekma and Alain Giami, eds., *Sexual Revolutions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). For a critical perspective on the term “sexual revolution,” see Franz X. Eder, “Die lange Geschichte der ‘Sexuellen Revolution’ in Westdeutschland (1950er bis 1980er Jahre),” in *Sexuelle Revolution? Zur Geschichte der Sexualität im deutschsprachigen Raum seit den 1960er Jahren*, ed. Peter-Paul Bänziger et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 25–59.

³ Gunter Schmidt and Volkmar Sigusch, *Arbeiter-Sexualität* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1971), cited in Jens Elberfeld, “Von der Sünde zur Selbstbestimmung: Zum Diskurs ‘kindlicher Sexualität’ (Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1960–1990),” in Bänziger et al., *Sexuelle Revolution*, 254.

⁴ Eder, “Die lange Geschichte,” 78.

talking about both sexual pleasures and contraception easier.⁵ More generally, sexuality became more visible in the public sphere, not least through an increase in the availability of pornography.⁶ At the same time, people were encouraged to talk openly about their sexuality and sexual problems in therapeutic contexts.⁷

Attitudes toward children's sexuality changed as well, as liberal and left-wing educators challenged the conviction that children are asexual. For example, Lilly Schuh-Gadmann, pedagogue and psychologist at the University of Zurich, argued in the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* that "the pre-school child has the same sexuality as an adult human being," and even the youngest children have "sexual impulses" that society simply dismissed.⁸ In 1970 members of the German parliament charged with reforming criminal law even listened to radical education scholar Helmut Kentler, sexologist Volkmar Sigusch, and other sociologists and psychologists, who declared that children would not suffer from sexual relations with adults and that those relations should not be punished, because they are a "crime without a victim."⁹

While such calls for legalizing sexual relations between children and adults were not successful, other legal norms changed. The prosecution of adult male homosexual acts ended in September 1969, with the age of consent set at twenty-one. Although this was lowered to eighteen in 1973, it was still much higher than for heterosexual relations, where the age of consent was fourteen.¹⁰ Three years later, after massive protests by the women's movement, abortion laws were reformed, and abortions within the first twelve

⁵ See Eva-Maria Silies, *Liebe, Lust und Last: Die Pille als weibliche Generationserfahrung in der Bundesrepublik 1960–1980* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010), 124–81; and Dagmar Herzog, "Between Coitus and Commodification: Young West German Women and the Impact of the Pill," in *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960–1980*, ed. Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried (New York: Berghahn, 2006), 273–75.

⁶ See Pascal Eitler, "Die 'Porno-Welle': Sexualität, Seduktivität und die Kulturgeschichte der Bundesrepublik," in Bänziger et al., *Sexuelle Revolution*, 94–98; Herzog, "Coitus," 270–73; and Elizabeth Heineman, *Before Porn Was Legal: The Erotica Empire of Beate Uhse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 101–60.

⁷ The foundational study of the therapeutization of sexual selves in Germany is Sabine Maasen, *Genealogie der Unmoral: Zur Therapeutisierung sexueller Selbst* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), 49–129. For case studies, see Annika Wellmann, "Instruktionen für ein sensibles Selbst: Sexualtherapie und Zärtlichkeitsregime um 1980," in *Das beratene Selbst: Zur Genealogie der Therapeutisierung in den "langen" Siebzigern*, ed. Sabine Maasen et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), 183–202; Annika Wellmann, *Beziehungssex: Medien und Beratung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2012).

⁸ "Sex vor sechs," *Der Spiegel*, October 2, 1972, 76–79, quoted in Elberfeld, "Von der Sünde," 264.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 266.

¹⁰ See Michael Kandora, "Homosexualität und Sittengesetz," in *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland: Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1945–1980*, ed. Ulrich Herbert (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002), 370–401.

weeks became legal under specific conditions.¹¹ All these developments contributed, scholars have claimed, to a liberalization of social attitudes and legal norms concerning sexuality during the 1960s and 1970s.¹²

The narrative of a successful sexual liberalization in postwar Europe, however, has recently been challenged. Dagmar Herzog has argued that there were “moments of renewed sexual conservatism” during this era that represent backlashes “against the sexual revolution.” As an alternative to the “liberalization paradigm,” she has called historians’ attention to the “*syncopated*” quality of sexual developments in Western Europe,¹³ by which she means that we need to pay attention to the ambivalences of the process—its “tangled texture of emotions”—and its variety of expression in different national contexts.¹⁴ Although her critique is convincing, the narrative she offers instead remains embedded within what one might call the liberalization framework.¹⁵ The question is still whether there was more or less liberalization and how conservative setbacks could undo steps toward a liberalized sexuality. Informed by Michel Foucault, scholars such as Andrea Bührmann, Andrea Trumann, and Sven Reichardt have offered a more radical critique of this liberalization story. They emphasize that the allegedly liberated sexuality that developed within the context of the women’s movement and the broader alternative Left entailed its own set of internalized rules and norms, which required men and women both to constantly talk about their sexual desires and to question the truth and authenticity of these desires. Seen from this perspective, sexuality was not liberated at all. Instead, as Trumann notes, the internalized norm of the “primacy of the orgasm” merely replaced the social norms of reproductive sexuality. The new imperative dictated enjoying sex, which made sex part of consumer capitalism.¹⁵

¹¹ Eder, “Die lange Geschichte,” 49–50.

¹² Franz X. Eder, *Kultur der Begierde* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002), 224.

¹³ Dagmar Herzog, “Syncopated Sex: Transforming European Sexual Cultures,” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (2009): 1287–1308, 1295, 1297. For another critique of the liberalization narrative, see Benno Gammerl, “Frau Muskeltyp, Herr Hexe und Fräulein Butch? Geschlechtlichkeiten und Homosexualitäten in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts,” in *Zeitgeschichte als Geschlechtergeschichte: Neue Perspektiven auf die Bundesrepublik*, ed. Julia Paulus, Eva-Maria Silies, and Kerstin Wolff (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2012), 225–45; and Benno Gammerl, “Ist frei sein normal? Männliche Homosexualitäten seit den 1960er Jahren zwischen Emanzipation und Normalisierung,” in Bänziger et al., *Sexuelle Revolution*, 223–43.

¹⁴ See Peter-Paul Bänziger and Julia Stegmann, “Politisierungen und Normalisierung: Sexualitätsgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts im deutschsprachigen Raum,” *H-Soz-u-Kult*, November 5, 2010, <http://www.hsozkult.de/literaturereview/id/forschungsberichte-1120>. The authors criticize Herzog for not moving beyond the liberalization paradigm.

¹⁵ Andrea Bührmann, *Das authentische Geschlecht: Die Sexualitätsdebatte der neuen Frauenbewegung und die Foucaultsche Machtanalyse* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1995); Andrea Trumann, *Feministische Theorie: Frauenbewegung und weibliche Subjektbildung im Spätkapitalismus* (Stuttgart: Schmetterlingsverlag, 2002), 37–49, 175–79, quote at 49; and Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 656–59. For a

These studies offer important insights. However, by focusing on internalized sexual norms, behavioral patterns, discourses, and the construction of sexual identities, they leave sex as a bodily practice with its own historicity unexamined.¹⁶ The bodily practice of having sex, or, rather, *doing sex*, remains, so to speak, a black box. We seem to know what sex is (what people do with their genitalia, how they reach orgasms, how they reproduce), and we seem to know what it is not (harmless snuggling or holding hands). When we think of sex, we tend to think of sexual intercourse, be it anal, oral, or vaginal, or we think of masturbation or, less commonly, of sadomasochistic practices. These usually unexpressed assumptions about what sex is need to be called into question. Instead of having a preconceived notion of what it meant (and means) to “have sex,” we need to examine how “having sex” changed with regard to both how people *did* sex with their bodies and how they imagined their sexual bodies.¹⁷ What I propose, then, is a study of sexuality as practice, by which I mean both bodily practices (that is, what people did with their bodies when having sex) and the production of a knowledge about (sexual and nonsexual) bodies.

Examining sexuality as a bodily practice will shed new light on radical sexual politics within the so-called alternative Left in West Germany during the 1970s.¹⁸ This alternative Left was not a coherent organization but an amorphous milieu that included a diverse variety of political groups, ranging from nondogmatic leftists to gay activists and women’s groups. Throughout this article, I will refer to all of these groups simply as leftists. The loose structures of the milieu mean that no definite numbers of its size exist. However, the number of alternative left-wing periodicals—some 390 titles by 1980, with a combined print-run of 1.6 million—indicates that it

critique of this Foucauldian perspective on the women’s movement, see Ilse Lenz, “Aufbruch ins Reich der Sinne nach dem Überdruß im Käfig der Anforderungen? Der Wandel der Thematisierungen von Sexualität und Körpern in der Entwicklung der neuen Frauenbewegung in Deutschland,” in *Reflexive Körper? Zur Modernisierung von Sexualität und Reproduktion*, ed. Ilse Lenz, Lisa Mense, and Charlotte Ullrich (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2004), 30–31.

¹⁶ Victoria Harris, for example, notes that “sex has become all but absent from discussions of sexuality” (“Sex on the Margins: New Directions in the Historiography of Sexuality and Gender,” *Historical Journal* 53, no. 4 [2010]: 1085–1104, 1096). Henriette Gunkel and Olaf Stieglitz make a similar point in “Sex haben / Sex machen,” in *What Can a Body Do? Praktiken und Figurationen des Körpers in den Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Netzwerk Körper (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2012), 98.

¹⁷ See Will Fisher, “Wantoning with the Thighs’: Thigh Sex in England, 1590–1730,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 1 (2015): 1–24, 4. Fisher notes that “notions of sexual identity and orientation” have been historicized, but not “sex itself.” Discussing “thigh sex” in early modern England, he complicates the assumption that “sexual practice is transhistorical.” In contrast to Fisher, however, I believe that we can go beyond reconstructing how “sex was rhetorically constructed” in the past.

¹⁸ On the need to further understand “activists’ linking of sexual and political revolution,” see Dagmar Herzog, “Sexuality in the Postwar West,” *Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 1 (2006): 144–71, 168–69.

was not a marginal phenomenon, in particular among students, a quarter of whom declared in the late 1970s that they followed at least partially alternative lifestyles.¹⁹

Questions of sexuality played a fundamental role for the politics of this alternative Left, as scholars have often noted.²⁰ Most recently, Sven Reichardt stressed in his monumental study of the alternative milieu that leftists considered sexuality a deeply political issue. Drawing mostly on material from the student revolts of 1968 and the early 1970s, Reichardt claims that leftists tried to overcome the restrictions of monogamous relations, regarded genital orgasms as a “panacea” for all political problems, and were therefore constantly on the search for the “greatest orgasm” and the “most orgasmic sex.” Importantly, and despite leftists’ claims to be liberating sexuality from bourgeois norms, this politicization of sexuality effectively created “new norms,” Reichardt emphasizes, that required activists to discuss the “most intimate details” of their lives in public.²¹

However, by focusing on the new norms this alleged sexual liberation created, Reichardt misses the crucial issue that leftists went beyond challenging sexual norms in that they criticized the very form sexuality took in capitalist societies and envisioned and tried to practice a radically different form of sexuality. Under conditions of capitalism, leftists argued, sexuality was subject to restrictive categorical distinctions that divided the body into sexual and nonsexual organs and that distinguished between adults’ and children’s sexuality or between hetero-, homo- and bisexuality. Collapsing these categorical restrictions was at the core of leftist sexual politics, visions, and practices. Leftists of the late 1970s thus longed for a sexuality that Herbert Marcuse, an influential thinker for the West German New Left in the 1960s and 1970s, had described as a “reactivation of all erotogenic zones and, consequently, . . . a resurgence of pregenital polymorphous sexuality and . . . a decline of genital supremacy.”²² Following Marcuse, West German leftists argued that practicing such a polymorphous sexuality was inherently political, since it constituted one way of contesting the categorizing rationality that dominated modern capitalist society. At the heart of leftists’ sexual-political project was thus

¹⁹ All numbers according to Sven Reichardt, “Das Alternative Milieu: Konturen einer Lebensform,” in *Das alternative Milieu: Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa, 1968–1983*, ed. Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), 13–14.

²⁰ On sexuality and the radical West German Left, see especially Timothy C. Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Antiauthoritarian Revolt, 1962–1978* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 286–329; Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 141–83, 220–58.

²¹ Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, 650–98, 718–20, quotes 652, 658, 719.

²² Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955; London: Routledge, 1987), 201.

not simply a critique of bourgeois norms but the development of what I call a decategorized sexuality.

Understandings of children's sexuality played a crucial role for this project of sexual decategorization. Questions of children's sexuality had occupied leftist activists since the 1960s. Educators in left-wing kindergartens, called *Kinderläden* (children shops) because they were often housed in urban storefronts, who emerged in the wake of the student revolts of 1968 had actively encouraged children to explore both their own and adults' sexuality, for example, by examining and touching adults' genitalia.²³ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, activists, not least in the emerging Green Party, supported the legalization of sexual relations between adults and children, as journalists and scholars have recently revealed.²⁴ Indeed, such positions in defense of pedophilia were not uncommon amongst left-leaning education experts and intellectuals in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.²⁵ In this article, I will also turn to arguments by left-wing writers in defense of pedophilia. However, the influence of pedophiles within the alternative Left is not my primary concern here. Rather, I will demonstrate that it is not enough to argue, as Reichardt does, that leftists simply paid too little attention to the "dark sides of free sexuality."²⁶ Their sympathies for pedophiles will remain only partially understood, I argue, unless they are considered in the wider context of leftists' attempts to decategorize sexuality. Leftists believed that children had a more complete and still uncategorized sexuality because they related to the world "with feelings" and not, as adults would, solely rationally.²⁷ Children, in other words, epitomized the ideal sexuality leftists longed for. In that sense, leftists wanted to feel like children when they developed a "boundless" sexuality.²⁸ It was thus not simply an ill-conceived vision of a radical liberalization of sexual norms and a belief in children's (sexual) autonomy that led leftists to sympathize with pedophilia; the fact

²³ See Christin Sager, "Das Ende der kindlichen Unschuld: Die Sexualerziehung der 68er Bewegung," in *Seid realistisch, verlangt das Unmögliche: Wie 1968 die Pädagogik bewegte*, ed. Meike Sophia Baader (Weinheim: Beltz, 2008), 61–62; Herzog, *Sex*, 162–70.

²⁴ On pedophilia in the alternative Left and especially the Green Party, see Franz Walter, Stephan Klecha, and Alexander Hensel, eds., *Die Grünen und die Pädosexualität: Eine bundesdeutsche Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); and Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, 762–77.

²⁵ See Julian Bourg, "Boy Trouble: French Pedophilic Discourse of the 1970s," in Schildt and Siegfried, *Between Marx and Coca-Cola*, 287–12; Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 168–79; and David Paternotte, "Pedophilia, Homosexuality and Gay and Lesbian Activism," in Hekma and Giami, *Sexual Revolutions*, 264–78.

²⁶ Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, 777.

²⁷ See Herbert Röttgen, "Kinderrevolution," *Das Blatt*, April 22–May 5, 1977, 14–16, for an example of such an argument about children's sexuality.

²⁸ See Helmut Rödner, *Männergruppen: Versuche einer Veränderung der traditionellen Männerrolle. Ursachen, Wege, Schwierigkeiten* (Berlin: Editora Queimada, 1978), 39, who characterized the sexuality alternative leftists wanted to develop as "boundless."

that they did so arose out of a peculiar sexual project that took children's allegedly boundless and complete sexuality as an ideal.

I begin with a discussion of leftist ideals of a boundless sexuality and the fundamental role understandings of children's sexuality played for these ideals. Shifting the focus from abstractly discussed ideals to bodily and communicative practices, I then discuss how leftists practiced this boundless sexuality. Most importantly, this meant moving beyond a sexuality that was, as leftists would argue, limited to genitalia. By the late 1970s, however, as I will discuss in the final section, an increasing number of leftist activists complained that promoting a merely "affectionate" (*zärtliche*), that is, nongenital sexuality, was just as much of a reduction of sexuality as a limitation to genitalia would be. To make these arguments, I will draw on a variety of books and periodicals published by alternative leftists. These include magazines published by men's, women's, and gay groups, as well as key local leftist publications such as the *Pflasterstrand* from Frankfurt, *Das Blatt* from Munich, and *Info BUG* from West Berlin.²⁹ Including such a broad spectrum of publications that cover both heterosexuality and homosexuality will show that visions of an alternative sexuality were of great concern for the alternative milieu as a whole.

DESIRES THAT KNOW NO BOUNDARIES: ENVISIONING A DECATEGORIZED SEXUALITY

In April 1977 Herbert Röttgen, writer for *Das Blatt*, made a bold assertion: the "most radical and imaginative revolution," a children's revolution, was on the horizon. His text, titled "Children's Revolution," is worth presenting in some detail, as it highlights why radical leftists were so fascinated with children and their sexuality. During the 1970s, Röttgen claimed, the wish for "autonomy" had become ubiquitous. Not only did women "demand autonomy," but an increasing number of revolts were also occurring "in the institutions of confinement, the prisons and mental hospitals." Even the elderly had successfully stood up for their needs. Only children had remained silent, "even though it was they whose wishes had been cut off most radically, whose ideas for life had been curbed most thoroughly, and whose sexual desires had been cut into pieces without mercy." "But why would they remain silent?" Röttgen asked. The simple answer might have been that children were not allowed to speak. But Röttgen argued that a deeper reason lay in the language of politics itself. Discussions and verbal communication were not "the main forms of communication between children and between children and their environment."³⁰ He continued:

²⁹ On the alternative press, see Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, 223–315.

³⁰ Röttgen, "Kinderrevolution." The text was republished in *Pflasterstrand*, July 13–Mid-September 1977, 18–20.

What men's groups have to relearn [*sich wiederaneignen*] after several meetings—that is, [the ability] to physically touch each other—children naturally know how to do. They have not yet lost their “innocence,” because they practice sexuality without guilt, everywhere and whenever they feel like it—at least if the family police doesn't intervene. And what a multidimensional and splendid erotic life they have! It's just total—it reaches from shitting to fondling, kissing, grabbing, and glances. For children, the dick and pussy are [two] organs of lust among many, many others. In their sexual personality structure, they have long overcome our one-sidedness and narrowness.³¹

It was, Röttgen claimed, a “‘leftist’ deception that the primordial [*ursprüngliche*] world of children has anything to do with our world.” Children “experience their environments emotionally, they want to conquer the world with feelings, they remain entirely body and soul rather than consciousness. Alienated and without ‘understanding,’ they face a society based on cold rationality and calculation. Almost all children would rather flee from this world ruled by the idols of rationality,” Röttgen alleged. For this very reason, Röttgen argued that children are not “little democrats” who want to discuss everything in meetings. “They are, by nature, deeply ‘antirational.’” From his perspective, the adult logic underlying current education represents not only a “crippling of wishes and affects but also a downright attack on the child's body, above all upon sexual behavior.” Although not citing Freud directly, Röttgen was arguably drawing on Freud's argument that children's sexuality was not concentrated in a specific region when he claimed that the “child naturally loves in a polymorphous way, it has a universal eroticism,” whereas “adults' sexual desires are basically reduced to genitalia.”³²

In Röttgen's mind, children's polymorphous way of sexually relating to the world made them, especially the ten- to twelve-year-olds, the “protagonists of a new children's revolt.” Children of this age, he claimed, can still “launch fantasies, desires and feelings against the adult world of work, but they are already old enough to make themselves heard.”³³ The children's revolt would thus be a revolt of the “party of feelings and senses against the party of rationality and alienation, [. . .] of the party of playing against the party of work. All we crippled adult beings can do is to imagine the explosive force hidden in children's eroticism.”³⁴ And Röttgen saw reasons for hope. In Italy, the age of those protesting “against the state and the family” was steadily decreasing. In France, according to Röttgen, a charter for children's rights had stirred significant support

³¹ Ibid., 14.

³² Ibid., 13. For Freud's theory, see Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905; London: Penguin Books, 1977), 99–100.

³³ Röttgen, “Kinderrevolution,” 15.

³⁴ Ibid., 16.

from children, who demanded their right to enter (homo)sexual relations and were refusing to take adults' opinions on sexuality seriously. Although Röttgen was excited about the prospects for this revolt, he nonetheless worried that the "forces of reaction" were keenly aware of this "subversion of children" and had already developed new "weapons" like Ritalin to "cure" "hyperactive" children.

Röttgen's article was exceptionally explicit in describing children's sexuality as polymorphous and in depicting this as a foundation for a revolt against the rational world of capitalism. It can serve as an apt summary of alternative leftist thinking concerning children, feelings, and sexuality. Leftists divided the political world into friend and foe along the axes of feelings, desires, and senses, on the one hand, and the rational and alienating world of capitalism, on the other. This juxtaposition was an organizing trope of much leftist writing during the late 1970s. For example, an editorial in the Frankfurt magazine *Pflasterstrand* argued in 1977 that the "destruction of phantasy," which "does not count for much in this country," was evidence for the prevalence of "internalized violence: relations of domination—man over woman, the dick over the head, reason over feelings."³⁵ Along similar lines, after attending the funeral of recently deceased Red Army Faction (RAF) terrorists, three anonymous women from Munich wrote in *Das Blatt* that they had felt that, "together with [deceased terrorists] Gudrun [Ensslin], Andreas [Baader] and Jan-Carl [Raspe], the rebellious child was to be buried, [the child] who is aggressively curious, who asks without restraint and stands up against a lifeless and petrified world of adults."³⁶ In September 1980, to give a last example, a "girls commune" (*Mädchenkommune*) from Berlin bemoaned the fact that the world they lived in had put a "love-ban on pedophilia, children's love, girls' love." "We are living," they proclaimed, "a nonviolent guerrilla war against the emotion-destroying woman- and manworld, against the adult culture of concrete [*Betonkultur*] with its suicidal shopping streets, its world of plastic, where our desire for free love relationships and cohabitation has no space, particularly for girls."³⁷

These texts all indicate that alternative leftists saw themselves in a struggle against an adult world dominated by rationality. In this world of rationality, leftists argued, an originally all-embracing sexuality was crippled and categorized according to allegedly rational principles. A certain Klaus, for example, claimed in *Das Blatt* in February 1982 that sexuality was increasingly being fragmented. "Special kinds of desires, still called perversions," were being split off from "the complex of free sexuality." These fragmented desires could then be marketed more easily to "isolated human beings." An

³⁵ [Redaktion Pflasterstrand], "Taylorisierung des Menschen," in *Pflasterstrand*, May 4–17, 1977, 30–32.

³⁶ Drei grell geschminkte Frauen, "Grell geschminkte Lippen—Ausdrucksloses Gesicht: Das macht geil!," *Das Blatt*, November 4–17, 1977, 13.

³⁷ "Mädchenkommune," *radikal*, September 1980, 18.

example for this fragmentation was, Klaus believed, the tendency amongst prostitutes to specialize and offer their services as dominatrices or “oral specialists.”³⁸ To achieve a complete sexuality that was not subject to commodification, his argument implied, it would be necessary to overcome the categorization of sexual desires as either “normal” or “perverse.”

The struggle against this domination of rationality, leftists believed, necessitated that desires be freed from all restrictions. Sexual desires could then become a revolutionary force that had the potential to break through the limitations and categorizations of heterosexual rationality. Already in 1976, “a couple of women” made such an argument in *Das Blatt*. The article, entitled “Women and Pederasty—That Hasn’t Happened Before,” appeared in the context of a debate about pedophilia after one of the magazine’s editors, Peter Schult, had been convicted for sexually abusing an eight-year-old girl.³⁹ While a quote from Schult at the beginning of the article suggests that the female authors supported him, the article itself discussed desires more generally: “In the images of our dreams, [of] our fantasies, the boundary of the ‘normal,’ of heterosexuality, collapses. Everything is possible in [these dreams], traces of a liberated desire that knows no boundaries.” But within capitalist society, desires remained restricted, even though there had been some progress, at least within the leftist scene. The authors claimed that homosexuality had “become part of the everyday life in the scene. But pederasty seems to be much more sinister for us.” The shocked reactions to pederasty were only, they argued, the result of a “bourgeois morality inside us that invents perversions for the millionth time to enforce the timeless laws of heterosexuality.” These bourgeois laws of morality limit desires, they argued, such “only the mother is allowed to lust after [her] children. Lusting after women is something forbidden for women and men in equal measure due to the boundaries on which heterosexuality is based. Lusting after oneself, that’s something one has to first rediscover how to do.”⁴⁰ Given this repression of desires, the women argued that “living an illegality of desire against this morality is a rebellion, it is the repeatedly occurring revolutionary event that turns our everyday life on its head, that lets feelings break out and that shatters the basis of our thinking.” By “transgressing

³⁸ Klaus, “Piep,” *Das Blatt*, February 26–March 11, 1982, 16–17.

³⁹ See Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, 768. On Peter Schult more generally, see Florian Mildenberger, *Beispiel: Peter Schult: Pädophilie im öffentlichen Diskurs* (Hamburg: Männerschwarm Verlag, 2006).

⁴⁰ Ein paar Frauen, “Frauen und Päderastie—das gabs noch nie,” *Das Blatt*, November 12–25, 1976, 10. Note on the translation: the German term *Lust* can have multiple meanings, ranging from “pleasure” to “interest,” “desire,” and “lust.” The authors here used the phrase “Lust haben an,” which is slightly uncommon in German. It implies rather unambiguously that someone or something becomes an object to generate physical and sexual pleasure—one’s own body, women, or children, in this case. The complete German original reads: “Lust haben an Kindern darf nur die Mutter. Lust haben an Frauen ist durch die der Heterosexualität zugrundeliegenden Schranken Verbotenes für Frauen und Männer gleichermaßen. Lust haben an sich selbst, das muss man sich erst wieder zusammensuchen.”

the forbidden,” “the passion of ‘perverse’ desire [*sic*, singular]” was seen to have a subversive potential that could undermine “bourgeois morality with its analytical reasoning and prudish motherliness.”⁴¹

As disturbing as it may seem, the authors even saw a parallel between their own struggles as women and the struggle of “so-called perverts,” by which they meant pedophiles. Their very existence was, the women claimed, a “provocation of the family,” because they demonstrated that a “life outside the family” is possible. Once this was understood, it would be possible to see that both the “so-called perverts and the witches, the excluded women [*die ausgeschlossenen Frauen*] who refuse to subordinate their desires to the services of fertility or the role-play of wife/lover” are among the “excluded” and hence “subjectively revolting,” the women argued. In that sense, they likened their liberation as women to the liberation of perverts, since the “liberation of women, *too* [my emphasis] . . . threatens the familial, patriarchal role-play that turns us into mothers, lovers and conveyors of affection, as it is socially defined. Our refusal constitutes an intrusion of revolutionary desire that knows no role, no boundaries.” What exactly this meant, what kind of relations and physical interactions between adults and children the authors propagated and whether they would have constituted what we would now call pedophilia, remains unclear. After all, they wanted to destroy distinctions between genitalia and the rest of the body upon which adult sexual morals rested. Theirs was a more general point: to be revolutionary, sexual desires had to negate “any boundaries of the usual relationship structures.”⁴²

The central problem of this restricted sexuality under capitalism was, leftists argued, its “fixation” on (genital) orgasms, particularly on male orgasms. The Frankfurt-based student magazine *diskus* argued, for example, that boys were only learning to “jerk off” rather than “to caress their entire bodies affectionately. This form of sexual activity inevitably results in a genital fixation. The rest of the body remains dead.” Male onanism, the authors charged, “is utterly goal oriented: the only thing that counts is ejaculation, though whether this is an orgasm is anything but clear.”⁴³ In the same vein, Helmut Rödner argued in a study of men’s groups that men were fixated on orgasms, while the “rest of the body remains unaddressed, all feelings and emotions are repressed.”⁴⁴ Female activists, too, claimed that the focus on orgasms limited lesbian sexuality. A woman

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Männergruppe Frankfurt, “Tod dem Patriarschismus [*sic*], es lebe der Mann,” *diskus*, November 1975, 26–28. For a similar argument, see Klaus Mecking and Heino Stöver, *Männersexualität: Gespräche, Bilder, Notizen* (Bremen: Verlag Roter Funke, 1980). Popular left-wing sex-advice author Volker E. Pilgrim, by contrast, advocated masturbation for both men and women. See Volker Elis Pilgrim, *Der selbstbefriedigte Mensch* (Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1977).

⁴⁴ Rödner, *Männergruppen*, 44.

writing for the short-lived women's magazine *Erotik und Umbruch* from Aachen, for example, noted that the myth of the vaginal orgasm had simply been replaced with an obsession with clitoral orgasms. Instead of "in and out [*rein und raus*]," they now practiced "rub, rub [*rubbel, rubbel*]." ⁴⁵ An anonymous author for the *Hamburger Frauenzeitung* argued along similar lines. Lesbian sex could indeed be "much more lively" than heterosexual sex, which was "adapted to the man's needs." But the author also worried that "we [that is, women] still think, feel, and act within patriarchic patterns that do not correspond with our true feelings and needs." Women's sexuality was still, she claimed, defined by the "male performance principle [*Leistungsprinzip*]," since an "obligation to orgasm [*Orgasmuszwang*]" had also become common between lesbians. "By adopting this orgasm insanity, we accept the sexuality of men, which is performance-oriented but devoid of feelings. Being lesbian is then not much more than a reformed version of heterosexuality," she concluded. ⁴⁶

These examples demonstrate that alternative leftists of the late 1970s did not consider "genital orgasms" to be a "panacea" for all problems, nor were they on the hunt for "super orgasms," as Reichardt claims. ⁴⁷ Rather, they were deeply critical of an understanding of sexuality that was limited to genital sex, including oral and anal sex. Statistically tracing at what age and with how many partners people had coital sex, as Reichardt does, ⁴⁸ does not help us understand how sexuality changed in the alternative milieu. Indeed, leftists viewed this kind of quantification of sexual intercourse as an indication that sex itself had been commodified. As a man named Egbert argued in the gay magazine *rosa*, counting how often one had sexual intercourse made "the exchange process possible." ⁴⁹ In this situation of commodified sex, genital sex, particularly as practiced by men, lost any subversive power and constituted merely a "permanent verification of the somatic productive power," Frank Böckelmann wrote. ⁵⁰ Given these critiques of genital sexuality, we cannot simply presume that genital practices, most notably intercourse but also masturbation, constituted sex. ⁵¹ Instead, we need to

⁴⁵ Sylvia, "Die Last meiner Lust," *Erotik und Umbruch: Zeitung zu Sexualität*, Midsummer 1978, 32–33.

⁴⁶ "Lesben und Orgasmus," *Hamburger Frauenzeitung*, July 1976, 17–18. On the debates about orgasms and lesbianism within the women's movement, see also, with a Foucauldian perspective, Bührmann, *Das authentische Geschlecht*, 155–57, 182–95.

⁴⁷ Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, 652, 658.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 676–77.

⁴⁹ Egbert, "Die schwule Zweierbeziehung zwischen Ehe und Emanzipation," *rosa*, April 1978, 4–11. For a similar critique of commodified sexuality, see Mecking and Stöver, *Männersexualität*.

⁵⁰ Frank Böckelmann, "Aspekte der Männlichkeit," in *Maskulin—Feminin: Die Sexualität ist das Unnatürlichste von der Welt*, ed. Anita Albus et al. (Munich: Rogner und Bernhard, 1972), 23.

⁵¹ For an understanding of sex that is limited to genital practices, see Eder, "Die lange Geschichte," 43–45.

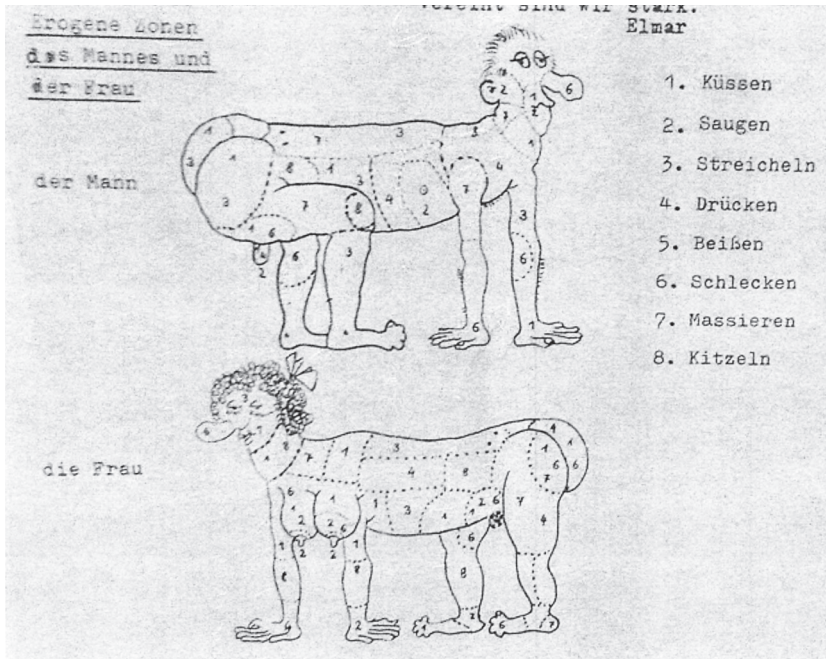


Figure 1. "The Erogenous Zones of Man and Woman," *HAW-Info* 11 (July 1973): 9.

inquire more precisely what the ideals of a decategorized sexuality implied, not least with regard to what people *did* with their bodies when they had "boundless, subcoital sex," as Helmut Rödner put it.⁵²

Leftists were particularly eager to overcome the distinction between erogenous zones (genitalia and female breasts) and the rest of the body. The *Hamburger Frauenzeitung*, for example, proposed that a "free sexuality" would "only be possible once we stop categorizing everything into evaluation schemes ('harmless' fondness, erogenous zones, arousal curves . . .). An orgasm should have no more meaning than holding hands, massaging the back or dancing closely."⁵³ As figure 1 shows, gay activists argued for the sexualization of the entire body of both men and women, though the drawing also suggests that different parts should be treated differently—kissed, sucked, tickled, and so on. Sexual practices should not be limited to genitalia, and having sex should be more than "dick fucking" (*Schwanzficken*), as penetrative intercourse was called in the leftist scene. As women from Stuttgart wrote in the local 's *Blättle*: "We do not think of

⁵² Rödner, *Männergruppen*, 39.

⁵³ "Lesben und Orgasmus."

sexuality as ‘getting fucked’ [*gebumst zu werden*].” They defined sexuality much more broadly as “a *mutual* exchanging of caresses [*Zärtlichkeiten*] and physical sensations of desire [*körperliches Lustempfinden*] between two human beings.”⁵⁴

Writing for *Das Blatt*, Wolfgang Thempel, an otherwise obscure author, argued similarly that his “spontaneous sexual feelings” reached beyond “screwing” and included a “colorful palette” of practices: “laughing at each other, talking, screwing, stroking, dancing, touching.” According to Thempel, sexuality should involve the entire body and include a broad variety of bodily and, interestingly, nonbodily practices, such as talking.⁵⁵ Discussing left-wing pedagogical material on sexuality, Egbert from Hamburg, mentioned above, developed an even broader understanding of sexuality, defining it as a form of communication. Quoting from the pedagogical material, he argued that “touching, kissing, being affectionate, smiling, looking at each other, playing, talking and listening, fondling, snuggling, [and] having desires [*Lusthaben*]” are all “forms of sexuality.” Both soccer players hugging each other and fathers and husbands who beat their children and wives were doing something sexual, he claimed, thus implying that not all kinds of nongenital sexual practices were necessarily emancipatory.⁵⁶

This broad understanding of sexuality also had consequences for the distinction between sexual and nonsexual relations. Much like the lesbian author of the article in the *Hamburger Frauenzeitung*, Egbert argued that his approach to sexuality meant that distinctions “between a sexual relation (with a partner) and several asexual relations (with friends and acquaintances) can no longer be maintained. If all my social relationships are sexual relationships,” he wrote, “they differ still in terms of their intensity, the amount of trust, and with regard to the role sexuality plays in the relationship. To emancipate relationships therefore means to learn to recognize and accept the sexual component of friendships and also to express feelings like trust, affection, and so on physically-sensually-sexually.” Egbert therefore believed that “genital sexuality” was only one form of a “sexual communication” that he could enjoy with various friends. Ultimately, he hoped that a “nongenitally fixated” sexuality would also enable men and women to interact without fear and violence, as women could cease experiencing male sexuality as a threat.⁵⁷

Whereas Egbert wanted to overcome the distinction between nonsexual friends and sexual partners, others wanted to move beyond the distinction between heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality. American

⁵⁴ Frauen aus dem Frauenzentrum, “Boykottiert Jack the Ripper,” 3 *Blättle*, March 25, 1978, 7.

⁵⁵ Wolfgang Thempel, “Gedanken zum Pfingstkongress,” *Das Blatt*, July 2–15, 1976, 20.

⁵⁶ Egbert, “Die schwule Zweierbeziehung.” He was quoting from Dorothea Assig et al., *Sexualität ist mehr: Eine Unterrichtsreihe zum Thema Sexualität* (Wuppertal: Jugenddienst Verlag, 1976).

⁵⁷ Egbert, “Die schwule Zweierbeziehung.”

feminist author John Stoltenberg provided German activists with inspiration in this regard.⁵⁸ In a translated essay that was published in February 1975 in the men's magazine *Mann-o-Mann*, Stoltenberg explained why he refused to describe himself as hetero-, homo-, or bisexual, though he found the latter category the most problematic. Male bisexuality, he reasoned, is only "another form of phallic imperialism (an extension of the power of the dick)—just another adventure on the search for masturbation [*Selbstbefriedigung*, literally, self-satisfaction]—and yet another escalation of male sexual aggression." He thus distinguished between orgasm and ejaculation.⁵⁹ A German leftist named Heiner, writing for another men's magazine called *Mannsbild*, apparently picked up on this reasoning: "Over the last years, I have experienced the categories hetero-, homo-, bisexual (which are given a very concrete meaning, a concrete social definition, which takes on . . . the entire heterosexual, patriarchic content and conceptualization) as an oppression of my sexuality, above all the potentialities of my tenderness [*Zärtlichkeit*]." Focusing on a specific group of people and reducing his own sexuality to "having a dick, this phallic functionalization" would destroy his potential for personal development and relegate his desires for cuddling to the realm of day-dreaming.⁶⁰ Categorizing sexual desires according to gender, Heiner, Egbert, and their fellow leftists believed, imposed limitations on their sexuality, which should ideally be boundless.

Children, who, as leftists believed, experienced the entire body as a source of sexual pleasure, personified this ideal of an all-inclusive and decategorized sexuality. This understanding of children's sexuality made leftists sympathetic to pedophile arguments that called for eliminating the distinction between children's and adults' sexuality. In particular, left-wing gay magazines opened their pages for debates about pedophilia. In the fall of 1976, the Berlin gay magazine *Schwuchtel*, for example, devoted an entire issue to pederasty, allowing two self-professed pedophiles from the Netherlands to explain their sexual desires. Adults, including himself, one of them declared, "associate sexuality with the dick. We make a distinction between genital and nongenital sex. That's an idea of the adults." He claimed that children, by contrast, are interested in genitalia, but not

⁵⁸ A collection of his early writings can be found in John Stoltenberg, *Refusing to Be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice* (Portland: Breitenbush Books, 1989). Given that most of his writings were published only in the later 1970s and 1980s, German activists were remarkably early in their reception of Stoltenberg. On his influence in the United States, see Till Kadritzke, "Bewegte Männer: Men's Liberation und Autonome Männergruppen in den USA und Deutschland, 1970–1995," in *Feminismus in historischer Perspektive: Eine Reaktualisierung*, ed. Feminismus Seminar (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 221–51.

⁵⁹ John Stoltenberg, "Ich weigere mich, 'Mann' zu sein," *Mann-o-Mann*, February 1975, 4–5. An English version of this essay is published as John Stoltenberg, "Refusing to Be a Man," in *For Men against Sexism: A Book of Readings*, ed. Jon Snodgrass (Albion, CA: Times Change Press, 1977), 36–41.

⁶⁰ Heiner, "Männersolidarität," *Mannsbild*, n.d. [1976], 20–25.

exclusively: "They make much less of a distinction between genitalia and the rest of the body." According to these two pedophiles, the law's distinction between genitalia and the rest of the body fails to reflect how children relate to their bodies—and, we might add, how leftists *wanted* to relate to their own bodies.⁶¹ This vision of children's sexuality made it an ideal for the sexuality leftists wanted to develop for themselves. Writing in the leftist gay magazine *Emanzipation*, an anonymous man who was clearly interested in young boys' genitalia explicitly stated that he wished to be like a child: "Talking with children, playing with them, bathing with them, stroking them, sleeping with them, entering their world, becoming a child myself again, that's what makes me attracted to small boys."⁶² Other authors in left-wing magazines rarely stated similarly explicitly that they wanted to become a child again, and only a minority of leftists professed being sexually attracted to children. Nevertheless, it was arguably the much broader desire to develop an unbounded and decategorized sexuality within the alternative Left that explains why leftists not only praised children's sexuality but also sympathized with pedophiles to the degree that they defended convicted pedophile Peter Schult in Munich.⁶³

To sum up, radical leftists in 1970s West Germany considered an "adult" sexuality that focused on achieving orgasms as limited and crippled. Instead, they developed what I have called a vision of a decategorized sexuality that considered the entire body (not just the genitalia) to be an erogenous zone, a sexuality that would encompass a variety of bodily and nonbodily practices, not just penetrative sex and coitus, and that would eliminate distinctions between sexual and nonsexual relationships, as well as between different categories of sexuality. Alternative leftists wanted, in short, to feel like children, whose sexuality they viewed as not being limited to genitalia and orgasms.

PRACTICING A BOUNDLESS SEXUALITY

As the discussion above has shown, leftists dreamed of transgressing the boundaries of genital sexuality and liberating themselves from stable and limiting categories. But acting upon these dreams and thus practicing a liberated sexuality proved far more difficult. Reflecting on a large women's congress in Brussels in the spring of 1976, a female author of the West Berlin *Info BUG* lamented "how few guys are actually ready to leave dick-fucking behind and to instead learn new sexual forms that are much more

⁶¹ Ruud and Paul, "Die Unschuld der Knaben," *Schwuchtel*, Fall 1976, 5–6. The text was republished in *Das Blatt*, October 15–28, 1976, 12–14.

⁶² "Wenn Jungen balgen," *Emanzipation* 1 ([January] 1978): 26–27.

⁶³ For support for Peter Schult in left-wing circles, see, for example, *Das Blatt*, October 15–28, 1976, 10–11, February 24–March 3, 1978, 14–15, and May 4–17, 1979, 12–13; *Pflasterstrand*, February 2–15, 1977, 23; *3 Blättle*, December 1979 / January 1980, 23; *Info BUG*, January 1, 1977, 10.a

communicative, affectionate, and sensual.”⁶⁴ A week later, a male author responded that “changing behavior takes time and patience. If we really want to change, then we have to accept that we will often (and that’s not meant as an excuse) act like ‘tough guys’ [*mackerhaft*] [who are] ‘fixated on the dick’ [and] ‘insensitive.’” In such cases, he expected women to react with “solidarity-inspired critique,” that is, to critique his behavior without pushing him away or retracting their love or appreciation.⁶⁵ As we shall see, some men resisted these new demands, while others engaged in a variety of bodily and communicative practices to help them change their behavior and to develop a boundless, nongenital sexuality.

The most important opportunities for leftist men to reflect on their experiences with new sexualities and at times to practice sexuality in a different way were so-called men’s groups.⁶⁶ Given the scattered and informal nature of these groups and the fact that they rarely kept records, it is impossible to provide any statistics about how many men joined them. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that men’s groups became a common phenomenon in West German university cities during the mid-1970s. In these groups, men tried to reflect on their “tough guy” behavior and overcome their heterosexual “dick fixation.” Men discussed both how they might change their sexual relations with women and how they might overcome inhibitions about being affectionate, especially in a physical way, with other men. One group from West Berlin, for example, asked in its founding statement: “Where does one see openly affectionate behavior between guys? Where are men able to sleep together and be affectionate toward one another without immediately lapsing into a gay trauma?” In line with leftist visions of a boundless sexuality, the goal of these meetings was to “get the scandalous tripartite division of sexuality (he-bi-ho) out of our head and body.”⁶⁷ Of course, it would be easy to see such men’s groups as yet another example of a therapeutization of sexuality during the 1960s and 1970s that turned sex into a problem that required advice and therapeutic treatment.⁶⁸ While this is certainly true, I want to emphasize here that in the process, sexuality itself changed.

The detailed reports many of these men’s groups published about their activities and experiences provide us with insights into how men practiced all-embracing and nongenital sexuality. A group that organized a men-only party in Kiel in the mid-1970s may serve as an example. They put candles in the room to create a cozy atmosphere, but it took awhile for a “tender

⁶⁴ “Reflexionen zur Frauenfrage,” *Info BUG*, March 15, 1976, 6.

⁶⁵ “Probleme mit Normen,” *Info BUG*, March 22, 1976, 8.

⁶⁶ See Rödner, *Männergruppen*; Autorengruppe, *Männerbilder: Geschichten und Protokolle von Männern* (Munich: Trikont Verlag, 1976); and Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, 703–11.

⁶⁷ Shirley, “Ende eines Traums,” *Mann-o-Mann*, February 1975, 2–3.

⁶⁸ See Maasen, *Genealogie der Unmoral*, esp. 49–129; and for a West German case study, see Wellmann, “Instruktionen.”

and emotional atmosphere” to develop. A man called Pustefix blew out the candles, and then men started touching each other in the darkness, “first roughly, but then also more affectionately. In a break from dancing,” the author wrote about his own experience, “I cuddled with him [Pustefix], which I liked.” Later on, party guests helped each other to put on makeup in order to further overcome inhibitions to touch each other. The “red-painted finger nails were incredibly tempting to stroke,” the anonymous author reported, and the “dark eyebrows and lashes somehow made the facial expressions more sexual but also somehow more alien.”⁶⁹ Other men reported that they had fondled each other in men’s groups. A certain Wieland from Berlin summarized the experiences in his group: “And since we liked each other, we touched each other, fondled each other, and were happy about it.” It made them aware, he argued, that men had “dumped everything affectionate, everything tender and (wow) everything erotic off on women, that women in our lives are and will be responsible for the rubric of ‘physicality,’ and men for other rubrics.” Like many other leftist men, Wieland wanted to overcome the distinction between hetero- and homosexuality and be able to relate to both men and women on a bodily level.⁷⁰ Simply depicting such forms of physical contact as “brotherly,” as Reichardt does,⁷¹ and thus asexual would miss the point. Instead, I propose that these men were *having sex*; they were engaged in a noncoital and nongenital form of sexual practice that conformed to their ideals for a transformation of sexuality. It was not only sexual behavior that changed but what constituted having, or rather *doing*, sex.

Sex between men and women underwent a similar transformation. In 1976 a man from Berlin named Manfred discussed how the relationship with his girlfriend had developed: “We have very few sexual problems. We cuddle quite a lot, but rarely fuck. Only if we are both relaxed and not tired, that is, mostly on the weekend.”⁷² The point here is not that they had *less* sex but that they had *different* sex, since they counted cuddling as sex even if they did not have coital sex. A seventeen-year-old girl described a similar experience in a text for the widely read left-wing magazine *Kursbuch*. After she had stopped taking the pill, she also stopped having intercourse with her boyfriend. Now, she said, they were getting to know each other much more “intensely.” “Since tenderness [*Zärtlichkeit*] can no longer be focused on genitalia, we experience every piece of skin, we have much more time, and I’m no longer under this awful pressure to sleep with him, even though I don’t want to, which was something I could never say.”⁷³ Leftist sexual

⁶⁹ “Kieler Männerfest—Fest nur für Männer,” *Mannsbild*, n.d. [1976], 10–11.

⁷⁰ Wieland, “Antwort,” *Mannsbild*, n.d. [1976], 42.

⁷¹ Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, 684, similarly 706.

⁷² Manfred, untitled report, *Mannsbild*, n.d. [1976], 5–6.

⁷³ Ulla/Birgit/Susan/Sabine/Barbara, “‘Ich möchte lernen, ich selbst zu sein’: Siebzehnjährige Oberschülerinnen schreiben über sich,” *Kursbuch*, March 1977, 143–58, 156.

therapists also argued for developing sexual practices that did not focus on genitalia. In 1976 two therapists argued in *Das Blatt* that it was utterly normal if women did not reach orgasm or if men did not have an erection. This was only a problem if the woman never climaxed or if the man always lost his erection too early. To treat these problems, the therapists advised their clients to abstain from coital sex—the act that resulted in failure—and replace it with “only caresses.” “Most partners,” they claimed, “find this unexpectedly pleasant. Why? Because there is no longer the pressure to have coital sex. They experience a lot in a new, better, and more intense way than when coital sex was the absolute aim behind every act of affection.”⁷⁴ Ultimately, however, and somewhat in contrast to the leftist sexual ideals discussed so far, these therapists considered such exercises only as a means to help their clients achieve orgasms, which remained the final goal of the therapeutic process.

To overcome their “dick fixation,” some men even took the drastic step of going through a sterilization procedure. In the mid-1970s, for example, a “sterilization group” from Berlin claimed: “A common experience [after the sterilization] is that cuddling, fondling, and similar caresses are, for us, no longer degraded to ‘foreplay,’ because the dick has mostly lost its dominance.”⁷⁵ Others were more skeptical and argued that sterilization would only allow men to continue “putting their dick into women” who refused to take the pill and would thus do nothing to change male behavior. As one author in *Mannsbild* put it: “To be a real man at least in bed, he is even willing to give up part of his masculinity.” Instead, the author proposed that men should simply “stop fucking.” Only after doing this had he “really gotten to know my own body and the body of others. . . . This way, sexuality has become much more erotic, affectionate, more full of fantasy, playful, and pleasurable [*lustvoll*].”⁷⁶ These men thus developed, or at least tried to develop, forms of sexuality that included sexual relations with both men and women. This did not, however, mean that they identified as homo- or bisexual; rather, they considered themselves to be simply “sexual.” Trying to act on the visions of a boundless sexuality that included the entire body, they focused on “affectionate,” nongenital bodily practices. At times this resulted in a paradoxical desexualization of genitalia. They tended to view every part of the body as sexual except the genitalia, a development that later became the subject of harsh criticism.

The new sexuality between women looked somewhat different. As we have seen, lesbian activists also criticized orgasm-focused sex between women. At a meeting in West Berlin in the spring of 1977, a group of activists claimed that it was common in the lesbian subculture to just pick

⁷⁴ Uta, “Die Sache mit der Sexualität,” *Das Blatt*, April 2–15, 1976, 15–16.

⁷⁵ Rainer, Jürgen, and Joachim, “Sterilisationsgruppe,” *Mannsbild*, n.d. [probably 1976], 53.

⁷⁶ Juppi, “Sterilisation ist keine Alternative,” *Mannsbild*, n.d. [probably 1976], 49.

someone up, have quick sex, and “enforce the orgasm.”⁷⁷ These critiques of an orgasm-focused sexuality notwithstanding, reaching orgasm without men remained a key goal for many women active in the women’s movement. Women’s accounts describe how little they felt having vaginal sex with men, how difficult it was at first to reach a climax with women, but how great this was once it was achieved. Such accounts emphasized that women had learned to touch each other “wherever we like it,” that no “vaginal arousal” was necessary, and that “long and copious kissing” (particularly, as one woman wrote, after relaxing with some glasses of wine) often preceded the “first orgasm with a woman. Totally different, more beautiful, more intense than when masturbating.”⁷⁸ For other women, reaching an orgasm required more laborious efforts. One woman from Aachen, for example, described in the magazine *Erotik und Umbruch* how she learned to masturbate only after reading the book *For Yourself* by Lonnie Carfield Barbach and by using “lots of concentration and some drops of oil.”⁷⁹ But after this experience, she quickly became skeptical about orgasms again; she became concerned about the pressure to achieve orgasms during sex and the fear of failing. Would the brief feeling of climaxing be worth all the “inferiority complexes,” she wondered? Ultimately, she concluded that “the orgasm is too puny to produce happiness.” Happiness was something she achieved through “quiet, affectionate cuddling.”⁸⁰ Another woman claimed that the orgasm “prevents me from developing my own corporeality, sensuality, and tenderness, autocratically killing these things off in the same moment.”⁸¹ “Snuggling, quietly, relaxed, extensively, goalless, . . . smelling bodies, tasting, feeling them, sinking into each other countless times,” all these acts were essential elements of practicing a sexuality that was not focused on genital orgasms.⁸² The woman who had learned how to achieve an orgasm from Barbach’s book, for example, recalled that she had had “a completely exceptional” experience when she “smooched with herself [*Schmuseerlebnis mit mir*]”: “I was loving my entire body, stroking myself wherever I could reach myself. I was happy, completely and profoundly happy. I remember the nicest smooching situations with men when it was explicitly agreed upon: the genital area stays out of it.”⁸³ Just like their male comrades, these

⁷⁷ Protokoll vom Pfingsttreffen 1977, Ordner LAZ [Lesbisches Aktionszentrum] Archiv 12, Lesbenarchiv Spinnboden, Berlin.

⁷⁸ I.M., “Von keiner zu meiner Sexualität,” *Erotik und Umbruch: Zeitung zu Sexualität*, Midsummer 1978, 16–23; “Ich bin lesbisch,” *Erotik und Umbruch: Zeitung zu Sexualität*, Midsummer 1978, 25–27.

⁷⁹ “Orgasmus . . . Zweifel und Verunsicherung,” *Erotik und Umbruch: Zeitung zu Sexualität*, Midsummer 1978, 35–37.

⁸⁰ “Orgasmus . . . Zweifel und Verunsicherung,” *Erotik und Umbruch: Zeitung zu Sexualität*, Midsummer 1978, 35–37.

⁸¹ Sylvia, “Die Last meiner Lust.”

⁸² “Oh, Orgasmus,” *Erotik und Umbruch: Zeitung zu Sexualität*, Midsummer 1978, 34.

⁸³ “Orgasmus . . . ”

leftist women practiced a sexuality that involved the entire body, sometimes to the exclusion of genital sex.

As noted above, it was this ideal of developing an all-encompassing sexuality that made children and their sexuality so fascinating for radical leftists. After all, as the Dutch pedophiles Ruud and Paul claimed, children were “interested in the dick, but not fixated on it,” unlike most adult men.⁸⁴ Of course, this did not mean that pedophiles writing in left-wing publications were not interested in children’s genitalia. They frequently and openly wrote about such encounters. In the text published by *Schwuchtel* in the fall of 1976, Paul described how he had touched a boy’s penis (the boy’s age remains unclear) but noted that the boy had “barely reacted to it.”⁸⁵ However, it is more important for our purposes here that left-wing pedophiles described encounters with children as opportunities to live and practice what they imagined to be a more complete form of sexuality. In the text just cited, Paul also recounted how he had played a game with a group of ten-year-old boys in the woods. “Since it was warm, they were wearing short pants. We were sitting under a tree, and I had a hard dick. They realized this, and I was curious to see what would happen. They told me: ‘You have captured us, and now you have to tie us to the tree and beat us.’ I did this, and they wriggled. It was very horny [*geiles*] play.” Describing another encounter with a boy named Francis in Greece, he claimed that a “relationship with a boy often starts with horniness. But the longer the contact lasted, the more important playing became: how he walked, talked, his voice, all this was more interesting than his dick. The erotic is then much more important. On the first evening, Francis really smooched with me. Afterward it was more or less over for him. The first sex is a sort of encountering ceremony.” (Note that he describes the smooching as sex; what exactly they did remains unclear.) “Children like to smooch, on their cunts, their asses, their dicks, they like to feel with their fingers, to be lifted up by their hips, to pee down bridges, and so on.” All of this was part of what not only self-professed pedophiles but also alternative leftists considered the deeply fascinating complete sexuality of children. To be clear, this is not to trivialize such games, whether they involved genitalia or not. The important point, however, is to understand why alternative leftists sympathized with pedophile sexuality: not simply because of an ill-conceived desire to radically liberalize sexual norms, as, for example, Reichardt has claimed,⁸⁶ but because children symbolized a radically different, more wholesome, and unrestricted form of sexuality.

In all of these situations, leftists tried to shape their own sexuality according to the ideal of the allegedly uncrippled sexuality of children. But

⁸⁴ Ruud and Paul, “Die Unschuld.”

⁸⁵ Ibid. See also “Wenn Jungen balgen.”

⁸⁶ Sven Reichardt, “Pädophile im linksalternativen Milieu: Die Freude am Tabubruch,” *taz*, June 12, 2013, online at <http://www.taz.de/!5065737/>.

children's sexuality was, of course, not naturally uncrippled, leftists' beliefs notwithstanding. Leftists had to shape children's sexuality, just as they had to shape their own sexuality. Children and teenagers, too, had to learn that sexuality should involve the entire body. Forming children's sexuality in such a way was the goal of left-wing sexual pedagogues. For example, *Sexualität ist mehr* (Sexuality is more), a small booklet published by the Pädagogische Beratungsstelle (Pedagogical Counseling Service) in Dortmund in 1977, provided educators with instructions for how to teach children above the age of twelve an "extended notion of sexuality."⁸⁷ Students were told to list which parts of the body they considered "sexually attractive," ranging from the penis and vagina to the male buttocks and the female breasts, and even to the foot, neck, elbow, and forefinger. They were then told to rank a variety of activities, such as "kissing a girl," "kissing one's mother," "drinking from the same cup," "combing a (female) friend's hair," "painting one's fingernails," or "coming to blows with someone" according to their sexual content.⁸⁸ The goal was clear: students "should realize that not only some particular part but that all parts of the body are sexual."⁸⁹ Remarkably, the authors also felt the need to stress that extending the understanding of sexuality should not imply that sex was everything other than coital sex.⁹⁰

The booklet also included practical instructions for an exercise in the classroom. Children and their teacher would sit in a circle, with one empty chair. The person sitting on the left of the empty chair would ask someone to move over and sit on this chair, then the person sitting left of the newly emptied chair would invite someone over, and so on. A variation of this game for "more experienced" groups would work merely with eye contact. Students (and their teacher, who would also participate in the game) were instructed to physically show their emotions toward the person calling them: hugging and fondling to show sympathy, holding up one hand to show indifference, or holding up two hands to show antipathy.⁹¹ According to the "extended notion of sexuality" the book propagated, all these bodily and communicative acts were to be understood as sexual. The classroom thus became a site not merely of talking about sex but of *doing* sex.

Unfortunately, we have no knowledge about how widely this material was circulated and used in actual teaching situations, nor is a print run of the booklet given. We know more about another attempt to teach children about sexuality: *That's Something You Don't Talk About: A Play for Sexual Education*, developed by the Berlin leftist theater group Rote Grütze.⁹² The group was mostly active in West Berlin, where it performed for school classes

⁸⁷ Assig et al., *Sexualität ist mehr*.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 23.

⁹² Kinder- und Jugendtheater Rote Grütze, *Darüber spricht man nicht: Ein Spiel zur Sexualaufklärung* (Munich: Weismann, 1973).

and daycare centers with the explicit support of the Berlin Senate.⁹³ The group also toured through other cities in West Germany, though regional governments were not as supportive as the Berlin Senate.⁹⁴ The notoriously conservative Bavarian government, for example, explicitly banned teachers from attending the play with their students.⁹⁵ As Norbert Burkert, consultant on sexual education at the West Berlin Pedagogical Center, put it, the play aimed at conveying that sexuality was not only a “biological fact” but also “an emotional, social experience.”⁹⁶ Watching the play and participating in the interactive games the actors initiated, children were to develop a positive, nonshameful relationship to their entire body, without distinguishing between sexual and shameful genitalia and the rest of the body. To achieve this, children were invited to chant all the names they knew for vagina and penis, thus, as Burkert put it, “legalizing” these usually forbidden words.

In a second step, the actors then encouraged the children to invent names for other parts of the body, such as the nose or belly. As a commentary explained, the play was meant to “extend the fantasy and the pleasure of playing with words to the entire body. After all, dick and pussy are not special organs. The fixation on the hidden parts of the body should be loosened through the game, and a desire for the entire apparatus, anything that can be set in motion, should be awakened.”⁹⁷ Later in the play, the actors explained to children how much they enjoyed cuddling, kissing, and fucking (they made an explicit point of using the word). Once the children had overcome their fears and shameful feelings, the actors invited them to come onstage to enjoy physical contact through a broad variety of activities, ranging from cuddling and stroking to boxing and pinching. While the actors felt comfortable stroking children’s buttocks, they usually refrained from touching their genitalia, thus tacitly revealing that a limit they deplored still existed for them. The authors emphasized that these experiences would render the distinction between adults’ and children’s needs meaningless: “Fondness, enjoying touching each other is not a question of being a child or an adult. This can be made clear and experienced most sensually when adults and children are affectionate with each other, when they move with each other, play, dance, and romp.”⁹⁸ The play was thus meant to help children develop the sexuality that leftists portrayed as innate to children and that they desired for themselves—a sexuality that entailed diverse forms of physical contact, including but not confined to genital coitus.

⁹³ Ibid., unpaginated preface. See also “Theater K: Rote Grütze,” *Das Blatt*, November 14–27, 1975; “Rote Grütze,” *Heim- und Erzieherzeitung*, June 1973, 29–30.

⁹⁴ See, for example, reports in *Stadtzeitung für Freiburg*, April 1980, 46; *Klenkes*, March 1981, 3; and *3 Blättle*, October 30–November 19, 1975, 1.

⁹⁵ Oppodok-Peter, “Theater: Darüber spricht man nicht,” *Das Blatt*, April 2–15, 1976, 18.

⁹⁶ Rote Grütze, *Darüber spricht man nicht*, unpaginated preface.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 9–17.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 69–73.

THE DIFFICULT PLEASURES OF GENITAL SEXUALITY

In March 1977 an anonymous female author published an article in the Heidelberg left-wing student paper *Carlo Sponti* about “time, commitment, [and] sexuality.” She bemoaned the lack of committed and sexually fulfilling relationships in the leftist scene. In the women’s movement, she claimed, only those who had suffered under the “dick fixation of male fucking” had spoken up, while the men’s movement provided a forum to those men who were “sick of defining themselves with their dicks” and who therefore “refused to put it in [*reinstecken*].” “But who represents female horniness?” she asked. She, at least, liked “dick fucking,” because she “experienced the bodily unification [*körperliches Einssein*], the penis inside me, as pleasurable.” The pleasure had a psychological side but also—“believe me or not,” she wrote—a very physical one, because she enjoyed “the horniness in my vagina” and ultimately the orgasm that “whirls me into the universe with countless sparks.” Being able to have orgasms and enjoying penetrative sex, however, she had frequently felt a lack of solidarity with the women’s movement. She embraced leftist complaints about the effects of restrictive definitions of sexuality, but she used this argument to challenge the critique of coital sex that many leftists propagated. “I no longer want to let my sexuality be reduced to vagina or clitoris or whatever, since this fragmentation prohibits us from realizing that woman [*frau*] can feel arousal in her entire body, that a real orgasm is only possible if woman participates with the total involvement of all her senses.”⁹⁹ In other words, she longed for an unrestricted sexuality, but she insisted upon including genital sex.

Hers was not the only text that praised genital sexuality in the late 1970s, though it was one of the very few written by a woman.¹⁰⁰ Already in 1976, Wolfgang Thempel had noted in *Das Blatt* that he liked penetrative sex, as well as alternative forms of sexuality. But he worried that one day women might no longer need him or his sexuality and that only an asexual man would ultimately be considered a “good man.”¹⁰¹ At the same time, a debate about the “softie” type of man, a man who practiced a “tender” form of sexuality and abhorred genital sex, raged in Berlin.¹⁰² In *Info BUG*, a gay man mocked heterosexual men for having a “negative relationship” to their penises. By excluding the penis from their sexuality, they still remained “fixated on their dicks,” he charged, and he railed against the

⁹⁹ “Zeit, Verbindlichkeit, Sexualität,” *Carlo Sponti*, March 1977, 4.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Birgit Klarner, “Ich lecke mir Honig und Gift von den Lippen,” *Courage Sonderheft* 5 (1981): 28–33; and Barbara Sichtermann, “Der Mythos von der Herbeiführbarkeit: Zur feministischen Diskussion um den Orgasmus,” *Freibeuter* 2 (1979): 94–100. See also Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, 711–18.

¹⁰¹ Thempel, “Gedanken.”

¹⁰² For “softie” types, see various articles in *Info BUG*, Winter and Spring 1976. See also the series “Der neue Mann” and the reactions by readers in *Das Blatt*, Winter 1977, Spring 1978.

implied prescription that “whatever you do, the dick can’t be part of it.” In his view, this was a denial of the fact that “sexuality is lively, animalistic, something that has in the first instance nothing to do with domination. All your affectionate behavior is making you asexual.”¹⁰³ By the late 1970s, these sentiments seem to have become more common. “Suddenly, one reads and hears about a newly awakened need for ‘dick fucking’ in the scene,” Siegfried Knittel observed in the Frankfurt *Pflasterstrand* in January 1978.¹⁰⁴ By 1980 sexologist Günter Amendt, author of the influential 1970 book *Sexfront*, complained in a special volume of popular leftist magazine *konkret* devoted to sexuality that all the talk about sexuality being more than coitus was keeping teens from having sex. Mere affection, he argued, could not replace sexuality.¹⁰⁵ These critics recognized that rejecting genital sexuality only imposed another limitation on sexuality, another set of rules to which one had to adhere. The rejection of a tender and nongenital sexuality can thus highlight the ambivalence of radical leftist sexual politics: liberating and constraining moments were inherently tied together.

CONCLUSION

In an influential article published in 1982, Michel Foucault noted that a “struggle against the forms of subjection—against the submission of subjectivity—is becoming more and more important.”¹⁰⁶ Radical leftist sexual politics can be interpreted in such terms. As we have seen, activists struggled against having their sexual bodies and desires subjected to categorizations like heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality, all of which they regarded as restrictive. Instead, leftists tried to imagine and practice a sexuality that was not subject to any limitations. And yet, it would be an oversimplification to confine our understanding of leftist politics of sexuality to a narrative of liberalization that tracks the development of more tolerant attitudes toward different forms of sexual relations outside heterosexual marriages. The sexuality leftists called for was liberating because it had the potential to untie individuals from constraining sexual identities. However, as scholars such as Sven Reichardt have been quick to point out, leftists’ liberated sexuality entailed its own set of practical rules that prohibited genital sex and required leftists to talk openly and critically about their sexuality. In other words, this “boundless” sexuality did not mean that one could simply do whatever one wanted. Rather, it required that one engage

¹⁰³ (ein schwuler), “Zum Vorwort und Artikel: Pilgrim, der verunsicherte Mann, aus Info 110,” *Info BUG*, June 28, 1976, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Siegfried Knittel, “Vom Ende der matriarchalischen ‘Emanzipations’ moral,” *Pflasterstrand*, January 12–25, 1978, 20–22. For critical reactions to the fantasies of violently raping women Knittel’s article revealed, see *Pflasterstrand*, February 9–22, 1978.

¹⁰⁵ Günter Amendt, “Nur die Sau rauslassen?,” *konkret Sexualität*, 1980, 23–30.

¹⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 777–95, 782.

in specific practices. From this perspective, liberated sexuality does not look that liberated at all. Trying to escape from restrictive subjectivities, leftists only created, it seems, new and perhaps equally repressive sexual ones. Yet, such a perspective would be just as one-sided as an uncritical celebration of an alleged sexual liberation. The “boundless” sexuality leftists called for indeed required specific practices. But rather than unmasking these rules to show that the boundless sexuality was not really free, I propose that we study these rules and practices as producing a boundless sexuality. In other words, the fact that practicing a boundless or, to use a different term, liberated sexuality required leftists to engage in very specific practices makes this sexuality no less boundless. Seen from this perspective, the debate about whether there was a liberalization of sexuality or simply the creation of a new set of rules is rather unproductive because it simply opposes rules to freedom. By contrast, I have argued here that it makes more sense to analyze the specific forms and practical rules that facilitated a liberated or decategorized sexuality.

It might indeed be worthwhile to put questions of liberation and power (a term that I consciously avoided in this essay) aside and instead ask how the practice of *doing* sex changed. This approach has the advantage of making the body and what people do with their bodies central for a history of sexuality. The German alternative Left provides a particularly interesting example in this regard because leftists challenged an understanding of sexuality focused on genitalia and orgasms. They envisioned a sexuality that would dissolve categorizing boundaries—the distinctions between sexual and nonsexual parts of the body, between genital and nongenital practices, and between childhood and adult sexuality; the sex they claimed to practice engaged the entire body. This vision of a boundless sexuality also sheds a different light on why leftists believed that sexuality was politically subversive. In contrast to radical students around 1968 who had argued that the repression of genital sexuality resulted in sadistic characters and ultimately in fascism, radical leftists of the late 1970s saw a revolutionary potential in desires that “know no boundaries” because they believed that this boundlessness provided a countervailing force against the categorizing rationality of modern society. By disrupting this rationality, unrestrained desires could deploy their subversive potential.

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