

The first seven or eight postwar years, in sum, were a time of libertarianism and of open possibilities. And they were a time that can aptly be described, in sociologist Y. Michal Bodemann's words, as "the late Nazi phase" (*spätnazistische Phase*).¹⁵¹ The moment of admission of the non-normalcy and genuine difficulty of heterosexuality coincided with the mobilization of numerous conservative and restorationist efforts that experimented with different strategies in the effort morally to justify in new terms a very particular combination of misrememberings of Nazism and continuities with it.

CHAPTER THREE

Desperately Seeking Normality

THE CULTURE OF SEXUAL CONSERVATISM

Why would the Federal Republic of Germany, so soon after the end of Nazism and the Holocaust, direct so much moral energy to the reorganization of sexual relations? While the immediate postwar years were a time of remarkable sexual freedom and avid and open public discussion of sexual issues, the early to mid-1950s saw an abrupt shift toward far greater sexual conservatism. Within a short time, liberal commentators on sexual matters were on the defensive, and conservative politicians, religious leaders, journalists, and legal and medical authorities took an aggressive lead in promoting normative notions of sexual and familial relations. And these conservatives quickly won a series of significant victories at local, state, and national levels. Concerted church and political campaigns at the municipal and state level to shield adolescents from any exposure to nudity or sexually suggestive images led in 1952 to the passage of a national law that censored the display and sale of pornographic images and texts. After a brief postwar period of relative tolerance and uncertainty in legal decisions regarding men accused of homosexual acts, the 1950s witnessed an escalation of police persecution and punitive sentencing. In several states, the Himmler order of 1941 (banning the advertisement and sale of all birth control products except condoms) remained in effect, and efforts to decriminalize the marketing of birth control products failed; from the mid-1950s on, court decisions made access even to condoms more difficult in some regions. Meanwhile, an unusual convergence of efforts between more right-wing Christian Democrats in the Bundestag and otherwise more left-leaning Christian intellectuals had successfully defeated attempts to liberalize abortion laws.

Yet it was not only in the realm of law that conservatism was ascendant. The popular media, especially illustrated magazines, and marriage and sex advice books, were enormously influential in elaborating conservative ideas about gender roles, familial relations, and sexual mores. Politicians' and church leaders' rhetoric in favor of reestablishing female submission to male authority and children's deference to their elders, and popular magazines' idealization of a wife's selfless delight in pleasing and nurturing her husband, worked in conjunction. The conservative sex advice and

pedagogical literature soon flooding the market in millions of copies emphasized the values of sexual purity, restraint, and fidelity, taught that premarital heterosexual sexual experiences would result in miserable marriages, and consistently treated homosexuality as a pathological condition. Some texts expressly instructed young people to fear and loathe male homosexuals (and to turn in suspected individuals to the authorities). In sharp contrast to the late 1940s and early 1950s, frank and detailed discussion in print of sexual practices—including sex within marriage—was heavily censored.

Vigilant monitoring by parents and neighbors intensified the restrictive atmosphere. As sociologist and sexologist Martin Dannecker would observe cuttingly in 2001: “When one looks at the early Federal Republic one really gets the impression that it had no other concern aside from putting sexual matters in order.”¹ And, indeed, many who came of age in this climate would subsequently recall their childhoods as suffocating and claustrophobic and the 1950s as a time when external adherence to propriety was strictly enforced. The New Left writer and education professor Ulf Preuss-Lausitz would describe in 1989 what a 1950s adolescence had been like in this way: “The postwar child was *surrounded*, under the motto ‘that just isn’t done,’ *with prohibitions and injunctions, with the compulsion to a fictive normality*. . . . The postwar German family (or what was left of it) was fixated on conformity, on not standing out.” Children coming of age in the wake of the war were constantly confronted with the era’s “restoration of prefascist ‘apolitical’ values, full of hostility to the body and sexuality.”² Yet the “prefascist” tradition to which conservatives in 1950s West Germany sought a return was not the sex-radical tradition of Weimar. Nor was it the pre-World War I Wilhelminian culture either. Rather, it is more helpful to see 1950s conservatives as constructing a fantasized version of past security and stability—an era that had never existed, yet was represented as one of timeless value.

Scholarship on the 1950s in West Germany routinely acknowledges the decade’s extraordinary sexual conservatism. Many simply assert or assume that this conservatism was an inheritance from the Third Reich. Others emphasize the significance of the negative counterexample of female “emancipation” in Communist East Germany; the pressure exercised by the East German government to make women work outside the home was taken to be yet another instance of the pernicious “Marxist” tendency to exploit female labor power and disrupt the private sphere of the family. When further explanations for the “yearning for normalization” or “search for ‘moral’ restabilization” are sought at all, these are identified as logical responses to the intensely disruptive experiences of war and its immediate chaotic aftermath.³ Yet what remains unaddressed

is how sexual conservatism served as a crucial strategy for managing the memory of Nazism and Holocaust.

The reasons sexual and familial relations became premier sites for memory management in 1950s West Germany are multiple, and the result was ultimately overdetermined. One powerful initial impetus for sexual conservatism in postwar Germany lay in the fact that incitement to sexual activity and pleasure had been a major feature of National Socialism. Turning against nudity and licentiousness in the early 1950s, especially in the name of Christianity, could, quite legitimately and fairly, be represented and understood as a turn against Nazism. The narrow emphasis on sexual morality to the exclusion of other moral concerns, within the version of Christian discourse that became politically dominant, was not merely a matter of political expediency but also one of deeply held belief. Restoring conservative sexual mores was important to Christians not only because sexual morality had for centuries been one of Christianity’s major concerns and because sex had been a main element in Christians’ specific conflicts with Nazis, but also because under Nazism sexual licentiousness and genocide had in truth become integrally linked.

At the same time, also many more secular postwar commentators shared Christians’ convictions that Germany had experienced an unprecedented and cataclysmic spiritual crisis. There was a broad postwar consensus among intellectuals, politicians, and church leaders that what Germany desperately needed was to “turn back to the foundations of Christian-Western culture.” Nazism was represented as “the falling away of the world from God.” What Germany required was a profound “conversion”—away from Nazism and its “nihilism,” “animalistic vitalism,” and “practical atheism.”⁴

In general, re-Christianization was a logical countermove to the secularization so manifestly furthered by Nazism. Insisting that there was a God in heaven who not only gave people strength in conditions of adversity but also made demands on human beings to be concerned with peace, justice, and care for the weak and vulnerable was a powerful moral claim to make in the wake of an era in which human beings had set themselves up as the lords of life and death, in which the so-called German race had treated itself as divine and the Führer had acted as though he was God, and in which every moral value had been perverted into its opposite. That believing Christians had been among the most articulate outspoken opponents of and courageous Gentile resisters against Nazism also added to Christianity’s postwar moral stature. So too did the important solace and sustenance that both Christian churches had increasingly provided to ordinary Germans as they lost loved ones in the later years of the war.⁵

The move to re-Christianize postwar German culture also provided an unexpectedly effective way of adapting to the expectations of the American

occupiers. Above all, the pressure from the rest of the West to come to some kind of terms particularly with the Judeocide cannot be underestimated as a key cause for the renegotiation of moral concerns that occurred in early 1950s West Germany. Shifting moral debate away from mass murder and onto sexual matters was one of the major tactics used by West Germans both in domestic politics and international relations.

For significantly, a main effect of “the normalization project of the 1950s” was precisely that the sexually inciting aspects of Nazism were largely forgotten.⁶ Admitting to their children or to the rest of the world that they had had any particular pleasures during the Third Reich increasingly did not fit with one of postwar Germans’ most successful strategies for dealing with guilt (whether internally felt or externally imposed) about the Third Reich: the tendency to present themselves as victims of Nazism rather than its supporters and beneficiaries. Stressing that familial and sexual conservatism were timeless German values that transcended political regime changes offered a way of hiding from view and subsequent memory one’s own youthful departures from traditional norms, as these were facilitated by Nazism, and one’s own enthusiasm for Nazism more generally. In other words, although the populace in many parts of Germany held not only anticlerical but also more thoroughly secularized views, also those not particularly involved with the churches had their own reasons for not challenging the ascendancy of sexually conservative rhetoric and laws.

Certainly, the dynamic whereby the moral crisis engendered by Nazism was resolved via enforcement of sexual conservatism had to do as well with the powerfully felt needs to repair individual partnerships and to reconstruct families to the extent that either was possible after the intense disruptions of total war and mass death. “Nesting” and reprivatization were completely reasonable responses both to years of wartime and postwar deprivation, separation, stress, and loss and to the Nazi state’s aggressive invasion of the private realm alike. Yet as the psychoanalyst Sophie-ette Becker has pointed out, there was also a more insidious side to this withdrawal into privacy. Dating the onset of the move toward privatization already to the years when World War II was going badly for Germany while the war against the Jews was moving ahead with terrifying speed and effectivity, Becker sees in this privatization a strategy for denial of responsibility for and knowledge of mass murder.⁷

Moreover, the official re-Christianization of West German culture as it concretely ensued—as sociologist Y. Michal Bodemann especially has pointed out—itself needs to be seen as a way to manage the metaphysical crisis engendered by mass murder by casting questions of concrete German complicity in cruelty, expropriation, and genocide in deliberately uni-

versalizing (and hence no longer specifically German) existential categories of suffering, guilt, and redemption.⁸ Re-Christianization too, then (and however perfunctory it might have been), became a way of avoiding responsibility. Many clergymen made this connection explicit when they argued angrily against the Allies’ war crimes trials and denazification efforts that only God could judge human transgressions.⁹

Furthermore, and by a paradoxical though thereby no less crucial turn, postwar Christians’ emphasis on cleaning up sexual mores also provided a convenient strategy for erasing from view and from popular memory both Christian churches’ own very strong complicity with Nazism—not only with its anti-Bolshevism but also explicitly with its antisemitism. Meanwhile, in stressing the need to clean up sexual mores, postwar politicians and church activists speaking in the name of Christianity were—significantly—stimulating the very same punitive affects toward open or nonconventional expressions of sexuality that sexually conservative Nazis had originally, in the early 1930s, addressed as well and that had been absolutely central to Nazism’s early political success (notwithstanding the regime’s subsequently more complicated handling of sexual matters).¹⁰ Indeed, it could be argued, however chillingly, that what was achieved in the 1950s was the realization of a promise originally made, but not kept, by the Nazis. The National Socialists had promised to set right again what Weimar had wrought, but instead they developed further major elements of Weimar trends and also drove the nation into catastrophic disaster. Now, in the postwar era, the “cleanup” was finally possible.

In addition, and in some ways even more disturbingly, the relentless emphasis placed by postwar Christian spokespeople on the moral requirement of premarital heterosexual chastity (this point indeed represented a manifest reversal of Nazi standards) functioned successfully to distract attention from the *continuities* between Nazis and postwar Christians in values relating to the issues of eugenics, birth control, abortion, and homosexuality. Stressing the importance of premarital chastity allowed postwar Christian commentators to delineate their difference from Nazism in especially stark terms, since Nazis had been so particularly eager to celebrate premarital sex and challenge the churches for their “prudery” on this matter. Yet the manifest postwar departure from Nazi values with respect to premarital heterosexual sex was often accompanied by unapologetic perpetuation of Nazi-era laws and attitudes especially as homophobia and eugenics both were refurbished and given renewed legitimacy under Christian auspices.

Meanwhile, some conservative laws and attitudes that had been promulgated during the Third Reich were experienced by the majority of young people as more directly oppressive in the 1950s than they had been before

1945. Key among these was the Nazi ruling prohibiting pimping (*Kuppel-eiparagraph*), which—although only infrequently formally enforced—still served in the 1950s as the backdrop against which parents, landlords, and hotel managers had reason to fear that neighbors might have them arrested if their children, renters, or guests received overnight visitors of the opposite sex. (By contrast, during the Third Reich parents had been exempted from the “pimping paragraph.”) At the same time, the insistent hypervaluation in the 1950s of family life and self-sacrificial maternalism coupled with fierce hostility to women’s emancipation (whether in the form of reproductive control or pursuit of work outside the home), the general climate enforcing petty bourgeois respectability and the secrecy and shame surrounding all sexuality outside of marriage, the prevalence of physical violence directed at children, and a general distinctive kind of animus toward anything deemed nonnormative were all experienced so viscerally in the 1950s that they seemed to many to be just as much evidence of failed denazification as the reappearance of former Nazis in positions of political and expert authority in every level of government and in all the professions.

Precisely this complicated combination of rupture and continuity between Nazism and postwar conservative politics, together with the sense that the hyper-preoccupation with sexual morality only thinly veiled some deeper entanglement in national guilt—as well as ongoing anger and resentment at the fact of that guilt—was unnervingly palpable to more critical young people coming of age in this climate. In 1983 the poet and art historian Olav Münzberg (born 1938) tried to express how it felt to grow up in post-World War II West Germany. Describing how parents who had lived through the Third Reich treated their postwar children, Münzberg observed: “One’s own offspring did penance for Auschwitz with ethics and morality forcefully jammed into them, with notions of cleanliness that constantly broke against reality and had to break.”¹¹ Few comments capture so well the double truth of the circuitous indirectness *and* the tangible intensity of postwar youth’s relationship to the Holocaust. And yet at the same time the connections became difficult to decipher.

What many young people were left with was a profound sense that theirs was a society defined by hypocrisy. That the atmosphere was “stuffy” (*muffig*) and “philistine” (*spiessig*) was powerfully felt by many. What was perplexing was the disconnect young people experienced between official Christianization and popular disaffection, even disdain, for the churches. For the transition to a more Christianized culture was often only a superficial transition in an already partially secularized society (only one in four West Germans attended church regularly in the late 1940s, and these numbers dropped over the course of the 1950s), a fact

that was not lost on many postwar observers.¹² As novelist Hermann Peter Piwitt (born 1935) would sardonically write many years later:

After all, the churches were that which offered postwar Germans the most convenient solution for that which had happened. What had led to fascism? “Dearth of faith.” “A turning-away from God.” “After the collapse of the state to be embraced by the church” ([a comment from Protestant politician and longtime Bundestag president] Eugen Gerstenmaier), that was the yearning of many. And the business of selling indulgences went correspondingly well. Churches sprung up, as though there was nothing else to build, and every village architect developed the sweeping fantasy of a Corbusier. . . . But then it turned out that these churches did not function at all. They stood around like freshly dedicated train stations at tracks that have just been shut down. And the people made their jokes: “Soul-rocketing ramps.” “Christ’s power plant.” Here too one had only “kept up appearances.”¹³

Just as unnerving was the lingering sense that many older Germans were not really remorseful at all. Privately, vicious antisemitism was still routinely expressed. And an (only barely contained) aggressive sense of national pride and feeling of superiority toward the military occupiers was part of public discussion in the media and politics as well. Günter Grass, eight years older than Piwitt and a soldier in the Wehrmacht during World War II, was able to look critically on his own generation and those somewhat older from the perspective of 1980s hindsight: while some West Germans might subsequently have felt nostalgia for this decade of apparently successful democratization, integration into the West, and the “economic miracle,” Grass reminded his cohort “how much Christian hypocrisy lay like mildew on the society,” “how corrupt and full of lies it was,” “how sassily the murderers stood among us,” and “how it stank in the fifties so, it took one’s breath away.”¹⁴ Not only was nostalgia completely inappropriate; it was itself a strategy of misremembrance.

The point here, then, is not to deny manifest continuities across 1945. Rather, as noted already in chapter 2, what requires critical attention is the complex and ever-shifting mixture between eras of continuity *and* rupture, of retrieval and reconstruction *and* new departure. Yet in many ways even more crucial, however, are the subtler dynamics of *redefinition* and *reinterpretation*, the development of new legitimations for old practices (in other words, a continuity presented as a change), as well as the opposite (something new introduced in the name of tradition). The ultimate success of the normalization strategies of the 1950s lay not least in one of their main long-term consequences: the construction of a wholly new version of the Third Reich, one on which parents and children, leftists, liberals, and conservatives could all agree, although for completely different reasons and with utterly divergent investments.

THE PROTECTION OF YOUTH

As the Federal Republic was just achieving sovereignty in 1949, one of the first moves made in the realm of sexual politics involved restricting the circulation of nude images. The ever-growing proliferation of cheap pornographic magazines and photographs displayed at newsstands all across the western zones was a major source of aggravation, puzzlement, and irritation to numerous observers in the late 1940s and early 1950s. No sooner had the currency reform of 1948 stabilized the economy than a flood of naked pictures became available for purchase. Most typical were pictures of females, breasts fully visible, with some object—a ball, a teddy bear—coyly held in front of their crotch, but some were full frontal shots. There were also others that pictured heterosexual couples engaging in intercourse, though these were not usually openly displayed. As much as freedom of the press was to be appreciated as a concept, one commentator lamented, surely these images were not what that concept had been intended to safeguard.¹⁵

Already in December 1949, the governing council of the Evangelical-Protestant Church in Germany took the initiative to develop a draft proposal for a federal law banning both the sale of pornographic products to youth and the open display of such products. Fines and jail terms were proposed for violators.¹⁶ Under conflicting pressures from, on the one hand, some of the more conservative state governments (Bavaria, for example, was already formulating a similar state law in late 1949) and, on the other, the U.S. military occupiers (who were exceedingly dubious about permitting any infringement of freedom of expression in this nation only recently liberated from Nazi censorship), the Christian Democratic leaders of the fledgling Federal Republic initially sought to steer carefully, advocating the passage of a law constricting the advertising, sale, and display of pornography but framing the legislation as an urgently needed measure to protect Germany's vulnerable and morally disoriented youth.¹⁷ Within two months, the text of the proposed law had become "one of the most controversial items in the session rooms of the Bonn parliament" and was being treated as "an affair of state of the first order."¹⁸ Already by April 1950, five of West Germany's eleven states (specifically those in which the majority of the populace was Catholic) had either passed or were in the process of developing laws restricting the display and sale of sexually explicit materials.¹⁹ The federal government was thus starting to face dilemmas of constitutional as well as moral authority: having barely come into existence, it was now confronting the possibility of profound divergences in the legal developments of the Federal Republic's component states, and it was being put in the awkward

situation of having to appease conservative state leaders whose insubordination it was also striving to rebuke.

The law was popularly referred to as a law against "trash and smut" (*Schund und Schmutz*), language already used in Weimar and earlier to describe the combination of pornography and lowbrow romance, adventure, and crime novels, and terms that the Nazis also adopted to describe any literature they deemed politically offensive. Yet precisely because of government defensiveness about censorship in view of Germany's recent past, it eventually acquired the supposedly less morally normative name of "Law about the Distribution of Youth-Endangering Publications" (*Gesetz über den Vertrieb jugendgefährdender Schriften*). In this way the law was aligned with another passed at the end of 1951, the "Law for the Protection of Youth in Public," which provided police with the authority to scour park benches at night for young couples making out, ask minors to leave certain bars and even some street corners where sexually loose or deviant people (e.g., prostitutes) were known to gather, and in some cases turn in the names of arrested youth to the local social welfare offices for further supervision.

For the first three years of the 1950s, until the Law about the Distribution of Youth-Endangering Publications was finally passed and put into effect in 1953, its content and legitimacy were objects of recurrent debate in the West German press. Certainly opponents of the new law had every reason initially to be optimistic, for public opinion as well seemed generally opposed to the law, and numerous groups and individuals had risen to the defense of freedom of expression. Critically minded journalists and legal scholars, along with publishers' interest groups and writers' associations (under the courageous leadership of the liberal and pacifist poet and children's author Erich Kästner, who had suffered censorship under the Nazis), vociferously attacked the planned legislation. They pointed out that the antipornography law passed in Weimar in 1926 had been used to censor even canonized literature and that surely it was obvious that the Nazis' even harsher censorship law (which replaced the Weimar law in 1935 and shifted the emphasis away from sexual matters specifically to any publications which "endangered the cultural will of National Socialism") showed how frightening and abusable such loose terms as "the healthy sensibility of the Volk" (*das gesunde Volksempfinden*) were.²⁰ At first unable to believe that such censorship could possibly be instituted in a democratic society, but then increasingly aware that its passage was simply a matter of time, many liberals expressed repugnance at this renewed constriction of press freedom, now under the aegis of Christianity rather than Nazism. In light of this liberal pressure, the federal government continually modified the law and the justifications for it and ultimately, in mid-1952, adapted it to include not only sexually explicit

materials but also (in a never adequately explained but quite indicative move to outflank left-leaning and liberal intellectuals and politicians on their own ground) any material “glorifying crime, war, or racial hatred.”²¹ The Bundestag debate of September 1952 about this proposed law made abundantly clear that the inclusion of racism and militarism had been appended by the Christian Democrats for strictly tactical purposes.²²

Significantly, moreover, once it was passed, this provision of the law was rarely enforced. Not until 1960 were any books “glorifying war” censored.²³ Instead the law served above all to prohibit the advertisement and distribution of sexually explicit materials. Contemporaries remember how abruptly (and thoroughly) all nude images disappeared from public display after the law was passed.²⁴ In yet another odd and indirect but nonetheless definitive way, then, sexual issues in the postwar period were connected to issues of racism and mass murder. And this occurred even as, gradually, official discourses of morality got effectively diverted away from the racism and mass murder in the nation’s immediate past to the perceived sexual conundrums in its present.

The law, going into effect in 1953, established a Federal Evaluation Office for Youth-Endangering Publications (Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Schriften). Composed of representatives from the churches, youth welfare groups, and teachers’ associations, as well as booksellers, publishers, artists, and writers, this office (which still exists) operated for most of the 1950s and well into the 1960s as the branch of government that censored sexual materials. Nor was it beholden to any superior judicial oversight. Some publications were directly censored and could not be sold to anyone; others were put on an “index,” or blacklist, and they could not be sold to minors or advertised anywhere minors might see them. Serious scholarship on sexuality was affected as well. As late as 1963, for example, the Kinsey report could not be made available to a minor by a librarian without a notice of official permission.²⁵

In the aftermath of the war, the very fact that liberals and Social Democrats were stunned when passage of the Law about the Distribution of Youth-Endangering Publications became inevitable showed how open-ended history had temporarily seemed. Initially unsure whether to mock the hypermoralism implicit in the proposed federal law and appeal to popular resentment against (or sense of superiority to) such moralism, or whether to emphasize forcefully the potentially grave dangers of censorship, some progressive commentators veered between both tendencies.²⁶ Others just treated postwar conservatives as buffoons. A writer in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, for instance, made sarcastic fun of Bavarian minister of culture Alois Hundhammer’s declaration that Bavarians needed to lead the way in the antipornography fight because the extant federal law only addressed “the coarser sexual literature, but not the more refined

shamelessness”: what exactly was “refined shamelessness,” and how was it that people in the “lovely” and “tradition-rooted” Bavaria were so expert in identifying it?²⁷ Along related lines, although he also had more serious points to make, Erich Kästner noted that the appeal of the law for “reactionaries of every stripe” was to turn attention away from the society’s real problems—among them catastrophic unemployment, widespread poverty, and a severe housing shortage—to a “pretend problem” which could be solved more easily: “Hocus pocus—finally, a law. Finally the youth have been saved! Now the poor little ones can no longer buy porn photos at the kiosk and instead carry their money to the bank!”²⁸

A few liberals insisted on the grave dangers to freedom of art and literature caused by efforts to prohibit the representation of sex. Legal theorist and Social Democratic (SPD) Bundestag representative Carlo Schmid averred that the threat to democracy, if an antipornography law was passed, would be considerable. “There is simply no such thing as a democracy without freedom of art and scholarship, and this freedom is an extraordinarily fragile entity that can be attacked in numerous direct and very many more indirect ways.”²⁹ And Kästner also declared that the whole aim of the law was not just a ridiculous effort to “force citizens once again to blush and to get outraged, where it used to be enough just to laugh or shrug one’s shoulders.” The real goal was absolutely to suppress art and literature, and the law constituted a deliberate assault on and the “infantilizing of modern human beings.” Severe damage could be done by even the most patently foolish laws, Kästner asserted. However laughable Weimar-era censors might have appeared to be, they were the ones who had emotionally prepared the German people for Nazi censorship.³⁰

But the evolving debate, as it played out in the pages of the media, and in the Bundestag itself, also revealed just how unimaginative and timid about sexual matters most representatives in the large opposition party, the Social Democrats, and in the minority liberal center party of Free Democrats turned out to be. Social Democrats in particular emerged as continually fearful of being associated with the sex radicalism of Weimar-era socialism. Instead of defending sexually explicit materials as either beneficial to youth and adults alike or as unfortunate and unpleasant but tolerable by-products of a free and open society, critics of the law tried to argue that it would be better to provide more high-quality literature for youth than to censor smut, or simply tried to suggest that there were matters more urgent for those who cared about Germany’s youth (like young people’s generally miserable economic prospects). Indeed, when they talked about sex at all, Social Democrats often confined their criticism of Christian Democrats to sarcastic exposés of Christian Democratic hypocrisy (e.g., citing various Christian Democratic municipal politicians

who supported organized prostitution). The Social Democrats thereby reinforced precisely the conservative sexual values they might better have challenged.³¹

A mere handful of liberals assertively rejected the idea that sexual explicitness posed any social threat. It would be better, a writer for the *Frankfurter Rundschau* suggested, if Germans started worrying about protecting youth from the renewed rise of right-wing elements. These, he noted acidly, “may contribute far more to the moral degradation of youth than nudities have ever been able to do.”³² Another journalist pointed out that “the orgies of smut and trash” that had as their subject “the stupidest gossip about former Hitler cronies” was more worrisome and deleterious than nakedness to a young person’s psychological health.³³ But aside from Kästner no one appeared to have the courage or wherewithal actually to defend nudity or literary pornography directly.

Not only did no politician on the left or in the middle of the political spectrum make progressive arguments either in favor of nude imagery or in defense of the naturalness of sexual activity with the earthy self-confident directness with which many Nazis had. But the very fact that Nazis had ever done this was itself thoroughly erased. Instead, and remarkably, conservative supporters of the law unapologetically echoed and repeated other far more aggressive elements of Nazi language. A raft of antipornography brochures published between 1950 and 1952 by conservative activists and youth organizations put forth in especially nasty and personal terms the case for suppressing sexual representations in print and image. In one 1950 brochure, for example, opponents of censorship were compared both to homosexuals and to murderers, with the suggestion that only criminals themselves ever opposed laws. Kästner was also denigrated directly; the brochure declared that his poetry was “far worse than smut and trash” and openly called for his writings to be censored once again.³⁴ These intimidating tactics were often quite successful.

The terms of debate shifted quickly and noticeably and most of even those who formally went on record against the law nonetheless implicitly endorsed the view that sexual images posed a threat to youth. Thus, for instance, a state prosecutor who opposed the law nevertheless spoke of the damage to young people’s “character development” that resulted from “strong sexual stimuli.”³⁵ Along related lines, the Protestant theologian Helmut Thielicke, another of the law’s opponents, nonetheless concurred that some sort of antipornography activism was required, for it was important that “the erotic fantasy of our youth not be unnecessarily stimulated and intensified into the pathological through picture and print.”³⁶ Even a newspaper as liberal as the *Frankfurter Neue Presse* still affirmed that kiosk displays with their nudes “solely fabricated for sexual purposes” were for youth “real poison.”³⁷ Similarly, *Die Zeit* in 1952 in

a strongly worded attack on “this miserable law” (after a first version passed the Bundestag), nonetheless opened its editorial this way: “That it is necessary to protect youth against the influence of indecent or shameless texts and pictures: on this point all conscientious quarters are in agreement.”³⁸

Although Protestant Church leaders had been the first to formulate an antipornography law, Catholic activists became increasingly important in moving the law through the political process. For example, in August 1950 the archbishop of Cologne wrote directly to the Bundesrat (Federal Council) urging swift passage of the Law about the Distribution of Youth-Endangering Publications.³⁹ The conservative media were influential as well. For the *Münchener Allgemeine*, for example, the prevalence of pornography in postwar Germany was an indication of “the lost state of human existence,” and the government had every right to suppress it. Politicians, the paper averred, *must* “form their consciences in accordance with natural law and God’s sacred revelation.”⁴⁰ Even more influential were lay activists who took matters into their own hands: Catholic youth groups in Württemberg and the Rhineland set fire to piles of magazines or burned down porn-displaying kiosks on their own initiative.⁴¹ In reaction, a Social Democratic newspaper in the Rhineland went on the offensive, asserting that it was “high time” that the government took “energetic measures” against such “bigoted moralists.” Alluding to the color black associated with Catholicism, the paper declared: “This ‘black terror’ deserves the same contempt and stigmatization as the ‘brown terror’ of past years.”⁴² Yet Catholic conservatives were hardly deterred by such jabs. Bavarian CDU/CSU representative to the Bundestag Franz Joseph Strauss in 1952 demanded that the Bundestag representatives vote openly, one by one, for or against the law. “In this way it will become apparent who among the representatives of the people still has a Christian conscience.”⁴³

In the course of the process by which the law gradually became reality, liberals found themselves caught completely off guard. As one commentator noted in 1952, he found it “incomprehensible how a proposal that had already been declared half-dead can now cheerfully and even with the endorsement of the Federal Council be brought forward to the parliament.”⁴⁴ Arguments that with this law West Germany would only embarrass itself, or that the law would inevitably be abused in order to control also the nonpornographic press, proved ineffectual. Within the parliament, efforts that insisted measures like support for quality youth literature would do more good than an antipornography law, or a move to keep organized nudist clubs’ publications from automatic censorship when the law went into effect, did not gain widespread support. In September 1952 the law passed the Bundestag by a vote of 165 to 133 with 7 abstentions.⁴⁵ Chancellor Konrad Adenauer showed up in person to help ensure the

government's majority. As one paper editorialized after the vote: "No one can deny that youth today, in the aftermath of National Socialism and the Second World War, is in more moral danger than before, and that therefore it needs to be protected more than before."⁴⁶ The transition from a morality concerned with the aftereffects of fascism to a morality concerned above all with the restriction of talk about and representations of sex was now well underway.

Even more significantly, and precisely via the campaign to suppress pornography, the rewriting of the memory and meanings of fascism also proceeded apace. A 1952 brochure for the censorship law, *Jugend in Gefahr* (Youth in Danger), made this task explicit: "We turn to all those who care about the future of the German *Volk* and who are prepared to help German youth in their search for new life-forms. Every German is convinced of the necessity of a clean spiritual guidance of youth so that the unhappy inheritance of our past may be overcome. We thus may not make ourselves guilty once more by being silent in the face of the attempt being carried out by profit-hungry smut publishers, and escalating constantly in extent and intensity, once again to assassinate the souls of our youth."⁴⁷ In this interpretation, the assault on youthful minds represented by pornography was no different from the "assassination" of souls undertaken by Nazism.

Throughout the remainder of the 1950s, the campaign against youth-endangering publications continued to rewrite the past. While the passage of the law effectively ended the circulation of sexually explicit materials, it proved less effectual in the suppression of cheap adventure and crime novels for adolescents. Over the course of the decade, in dozens of spectacular local campaigns, churches and conservative youth organizations announced that they would offer young people a trade: five (or ten) trashy books could be traded in for one "good" one. The "bad" books would then be buried in a mass grave (usually an old quarry) or burned in a public bonfire. Indeed, the organizers often unabashedly made the planned bonfire itself a titillating lure for youth. These events were well advertised, and pastors and priests often participated by delivering "anti-smut" sermons from the pulpit the Sunday before the trade-ins began. In this context too, the deliberate revision of the Nazi past and its import was crucial. In one well-publicized case in Frankfurt in 1957, for instance, opponents of censorship who criticized a planned bonfire (which had been heavily advertised) and who expressed horror that any book could ever again be burned on German soil, were in turn themselves accused of having been Nazis, who now wished to avoid a bonfire because it might stir unpleasant memories for *them*.⁴⁸

Another effect of the censorship of sex-related materials, including sex advice magazines, was that conservative literature quickly came to domi-

nate the sex advice market. These books and tracts—whether directed at adolescents or their parents or teachers—communicated several key messages. One was that girls were by nature less sexual than boys. Premarital chastity was necessary for both boys and girls, but for girls any lapse had even more ominous consequences than for boys; girls destroyed their chances at successful marriages if they were no longer virgins on their wedding day. Meanwhile, and this message was directed more at boys than at girls, masturbation was deleterious to one's emotional health and potential for long-term happiness. In general, youth were educated to self-restraint and alienation from their own bodies. Through their newfound dominant role in the market for advice literature and through their considerable influence on government policies and school curricula, conservative publicists were able to set the terms of public debate about sex in West Germany until well into the mid-1960s. Whether they themselves or their families were believers or unbelievers, young people could hardly avoid a climate where it was routine to hear that homosexuality and premarital sex were sins, or that masturbation had the most severe psychological consequences.

SEX EDUCATION FOR ADOLESCENTS

In endless variations, advice authors insisted that in their rejection of masturbation and premarital sexuality alike, they were only offering youth the latest in scientific insights. Restraint was not only a matter of morality but also of health. "Modern doctors and psychologists are of the opinion that every premarital sexual experience makes more difficult the lasting bond of a future marriage and the proper stance toward sexuality in general," one parenting advice writer argued in 1955.⁴⁹ Well-known expert Heinrich Oesterreich, director of the North Rhine-Westphalian State Working Group for the Combating of Venereal Disease and for Sex Education (Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten und für Geschlechterziehung)—which supplied thousands of teachers with sex "enlightenment" materials for their own information and for classroom use—informed readers that "through strict moral guidance and influence youth should deny themselves sexual activities, so that they do not damage their future capacity for marriage."⁵⁰ Oesterreich admonished mothers and fathers to "never tire" of emphasizing to their "daughters especially . . . the value of untouched virginity and fulfilled motherhood. Encourage your sons to value that femininity which saves itself for marriage."⁵¹ Another expert announced not only that to engage in premarital sex meant to "rip God's gift [of sex] greedily out of His hands" but also that marital sex would be enhanced by premarital abstinence.⁵²

Meanwhile, although a range of experts in the Weimar and Nazi and early postwar years had emphasized not only the harmlessness of youth masturbation but even its value as a preparatory experience for later sexual relationships, the majority of 1950s experts with forcefulness and unanimity insisted on the opposite. The Protestant physician Erich Schröder devoted the bulk of his 1956 book, *Reif Werden und Rein Bleiben* (Becoming Mature and Staying Pure), to the importance of the individual's war against masturbation. The practice was addictive, he asserted, and this was cause for "highest alarm": "Here a dependency develops—reflexes that are conditioned by external circumstances, that are dangerous for later life. Someone who for years sought to satisfy himself, with all the fantasies that accompany that, can later only with difficulty make the transition to having sex with his wife in marriage."⁵³ For Catholic pedagogue Heinrich von Gagern, masturbation was an activity "in contradiction to the natural purpose of the sex organs." Female clitoral masturbation, moreover, made girls incapable, once they became women, of experiencing anything in their vagina and uterus in their marital relations—and these sites alone "contained in them the fullness of delight."⁵⁴ Another Protestant writer, although noting that "almost all boys (and numerous girls)" engaged in onanism, also declared it a "reprehensible practice" that should definitively not be tolerated; repeated masturbation could lead to the incapacity ever to love another human being. A young person must learn to do "battle" against temptation so as not to "demean" him- or herself into becoming a "slave to the deformed drive."⁵⁵

The rhetoric of cleanliness and the restrictions on open speech about sexuality, and the lack of sex education in schools beyond the abstract descriptions of reproductive organs, had quite concrete consequences. As one boy who had been given a popular antimasturbation manual in early adolescence remembered decades later, "We were all *terrified*. We did masturbate, but we were sure our bodies would degenerate as a result. And even when we started to have sexual relations later, there was a lot of conflict in those relationships, a lot of anxiety that it was not acceptable to masturbate in addition to having the relationship; the women felt hurt, and the men couldn't justify it to them; it ended up being hidden, or a source of pain and confusion."⁵⁶ For girls, the situation was worse. The awkwardness and self-involvement of many of the boys, the misinformation even more than the absence of information, the fear of losing one's reputation, and above all a terror of pregnancy cast long shadows over many early sexual encounters.

In an extraordinary essay based on interviews conducted in the 1980s with men and women of the working and middle classes about their adolescences in the 1950s, Peter Kuhnert and Ute Ackermann painstakingly reconstruct the diverse ways people remembered negotiating the conser-

vative climate of the 1950s. In these accounts, for many middle-class boys, girls were an intimidating other species. If one girl did finally permit coitus, often it either did not go well the first time (leading to insecurities about performance and further awkward encounters) or led to a situation in which boys absorbed the society's double standard about female sexuality. Girls who permitted coitus were somehow "yuck" (*bäh*), good enough for acquiring experience or releasing tension but not acceptable for loving or marrying or even treating well during (or after) sex; relationships with other, more parentally protected girls who had internalized the injunctions about virginity often did not work out either. Of the working-class boys, some hung out in male cliques and did not have sexual relations until their late teens, often marrying soon thereafter, though not always for love, either because a child was on the way or because they were looking for someone to take care of them. Other working-class boys, however, usually self-identified as "young toughs" (*Halbstarken*), as part of their larger rejection of societal norms, worked actively to develop a sexually confident style, which involved aggressive seduction techniques together with absolute refusal of romantic involvement. "The goal was somehow to develop a protective wall against the girls."⁵⁷

And what was sex like for the girls? As one man retrospectively admitted, "we swung ourselves on and banged away in the most impossible positions, but really doing that with feeling and, let's say, really stimulating the woman, that was not part of it at all. Fucking and then falling off [of her] like a dead man. That was it. Or quick back on the moped and then onward." Condoms were intimidating to purchase, or perceived as too inhibiting of sensation to use. The girls were left on their own to keep track of the time of the month, or to seek out an illegal abortion if they got unlucky. Many middle- and working-class women recalled that as girls they had lived in fear not just of parental rage but also of acquiring a bad reputation. Middle-class girls in particular believed, or were afraid to be too skeptical of, the idea that giving themselves away to a boy would cause that boy to disrespect them. But the greatest fear of all, in this prepill world, was absolutely the fear of getting pregnant. "Then you've destroyed your life. It can happen so fast." This searing anxiety dominated the experience of sex; for many it ruined all possibility of pleasure. "This fear alone . . . one had such fear [of pregnancy], one always felt uptight [*verkrampft*]." Middle-class girls, feeling they had more to lose because they still hoped to pursue an education and perhaps even a career of their own, were often hesitant to attempt coitus at all, while those middle-class girls who did risk coitus were often, like their working-class counterparts, confronted with the misogyny of the boys and men with whom they slept. The men were so fixated on an unimaginative version of coitus and basically so preoccupied with themselves and their own masculine image,

“that had nothing to do with tenderness.” And again, because of a climate of shame and taboo surrounding sexual matters, it was difficult for young women even to talk with each other about their experiences.⁵⁸ None of these developments constituted especially encouraging preconditions for lasting and happy marriages.

MARRIAGE IN THE 1950s

Nevertheless, the romantic ideal of the mid-1950s was a marvelous and monogamous and moderately reproductive marriage where only the husband worked for wages and the wife was the nurturing homemaker. Yet this ordinary and traditional ideal actually represented a major shift for West Germany, given the many ways sex had escaped the familial framework already for the first half of the century—and then, more dramatically, in the years of war and its aftermath. The ideal was, crucially, also not widely realizable. Half of all women did work outside the home, millions of men had died, and many marriages—particularly for those couples separated during the war or during postwar imprisonments—ended in divorce. Significantly, moreover, the apparent innocence of elaborations of this ideal came together with laws enforcing women’s dependence on husbands, psychologically and economically; strong ambivalence among experts about the use of birth control even within marriage; and utterly incoherent advice about achieving sexual happiness. Although equality between men and women remained anchored in the Basic Law, an assumption of gender difference permitted numerous exceptions in subsequent legislation. While a law passed in 1957, for example, was called the Equal Rights Law (*Gleichberechtigungsgesetz*), in reality it gave the father final authority to adjudicate decisions about the children whenever husband and wife disagreed. Although this ruling was declared unconstitutional in 1959, the ideal of the “housewife marriage” that undergirded marriage, divorce, and family law was not revised completely until 1977. Divorce became expressly more difficult to obtain with a law passed in 1961.⁵⁹

The messages about sexual happiness within marriage in popular magazines and advice books, as in professional literature, were contradictory. On the one hand, advice literature continually raised expectations of the oceanic pleasures marital coitus (if based on true love) could provide. Allusions to the importance of women’s orgasms appeared in a remarkably broad range of contexts. Indeed, the discussion of sex in the 1950s can be understood also as an important precedent for the celebration of sex so often associated with the 1960s; in this way, the sexual culture of the later 1960s might be interpreted not just as backlash against 1950s

culture but also as an extension and expansion of several of its elements. On the other hand, the popular advice and professional literature relentlessly intoned that it was women who needed above all to transform themselves if marital bliss was to be achieved with their men. The feminist historian Hanna Schissler, building on the work of sociologist Norbert Elias, has accurately summarized the marital ideal of the 1950s as one of “harmonious inequality.”⁶⁰

Franz Josef Wuermeling, appointed minister of the family in 1953, and a Catholic, was explicit in his expectation that women needed to sacrifice themselves and to stand by their men. Wuermeling wished housework could be treated with more respect, but he never offered women a real choice: “*The mother-career is a main career like every other career and has a higher worth than any salaried career. And nobody can do two main careers fully at the same time. . . . Save our mothers for our families and our children! Their absence there can never again be rectified!*”⁶¹ Protestant spokespersons made similar arguments. In 1957 the Protestant theologian Wolfgang Metzger, for instance, called just as forcefully for the idealization of faithful femininity and the need to “lead mothers back to the children.”⁶² In numerous lecture series and counseling services run by civic organizations and Protestant and Catholic churches, couples seeking guidance to improve or save their marriages were urged to ask God to help them forgive one another and to devote themselves more fully to each other. Even seriously depressed women were discouraged from speaking or acting out. A “few weeks of vacation” to restore themselves, and soon they could once again dedicate themselves to their families’ happiness, or so they were instructed.⁶³

Although it has received scant attention, what remains striking even now is not only how crassly commentators in 1950s West Germany appealed to female masochism but also how forthrightly they thematized the vulnerabilities and shortcomings of men. Wuermeling was quite blunt in his insistence that the wife’s function was to compensate for any indignities experienced or insecurities felt by the husband at his workplace.⁶⁴ Popular advice magazines discouraged women from expressing opinions of their own but declared that a wife should learn to listen “when he tells you something, even if it seems boring to you.”⁶⁵ A questionnaire printed in one of these magazines captured adroitly the ensuing pressures on women: “Are you a perfect wife?” The twenty tendentious questions included the following: “Are you free of petty jealousy and can you bear it—without immediately making a scene—if your husband occasionally admires another woman?” Also asked: “Do you attend to your clothing and your appearance as much as you did during your honeymoon?” But fully five of the questions underscored the requirement that women be more tolerant of male weaknesses: “When you have company or are visiting others

together with your husband, do you see to it that you do not shine at your husband's expense and draw all attention on to yourself? . . . Do you succeed in holding back your anger if your husband makes a mistake or is clumsy? . . . Do you contain your own impulse to laugh about his fears and frailties . . . ? In order not to wound your husband in his sensitivity, can you hold back a sharp comment . . . ? . . . Do you carefully avoid at all occasions putting your husband in a bad light or making him look ridiculous in front of the children?"⁶⁶ Although the husband's potentially roving eyes are the only explicit reference to sex here, the general sentiment expressed—that if things were not going well, women should above all suppress their own needs and nurture their husband's ego more thoroughly—inevitably carried over into the bedroom as well.

At the same time, advice literature stoked a woman's desire to be overwhelmed by male strength and tenderness, while it held out hope for lifelong passion in bed. Simultaneously, however, Christian and secular literature alike continually elaborated normative notions that placed the blame for any sexual problems in a marriage on women. One common feature of this literature (as with the sex education materials directed at youth) involved disturbing descriptions of the consequences of premarital sex, declaring again and again that difficulties women encountered with their husbands were the result of their premarital experiences. Among other things, authors argued that women were permanently imprinted by their first sexual encounter and that, if this experience was with someone other than the future husband, the woman remained psychologically conflicted and unable to give herself fully to (and thereby enjoy raptures with) her spouse. Alternatively, if the woman had slept only with her future spouse, she nevertheless had sullied herself in his eyes and, by preempting what should only have occurred in the context of formal lifelong commitment (and thereby failing to train him to master himself), made herself responsible if he subsequently lost interest in her. Meanwhile, although lesbianism was rarely discussed openly (not least because it was not illegal), when it was addressed, it was most often represented as pathetic, a miserable substitute for heterosexual sex.⁶⁷ Yet popular marital advice, when addressing the possible sources of a woman's sexual unhappiness in marriage, listed female masturbation, lesbianism, or a general maladjustment to the female role (rather than male incompetence or selfishness) as its potential root causes.

A main theme especially in Christian advice literature, moreover, involved the absolute link between reproduction and marital happiness. Although "modern" (in the sense that it did not advocate childbirth every year, but rather suggested that the spacing of children was best for both mother and family), this literature insisted that no child or only one child was inadequate. Two or three children was the minimum number if the

goal was proper joy. For instance, the postwar Christian advice book *Mann und Frau* (Man and Woman) expressly acknowledged the conflicts within marriages caused by years of wartime separation, by the long-term exhaustion of both partners, and by the weakness of men who were damaged by war and un- or underemployment. But *Mann und Frau* also invoked the biblical charge to be fruitful and multiply as it announced that there could be "no blessing" in childlessness. Even when they shared professional interests, childless couples easily ended up taking themselves too seriously, getting "all knotted up and hysterical." Nor would the sex be good. Without the "fundamental openness to the child" the "glorious tension between the sexes, which in accordance with God's will is a powerful force," became only a "shallow," "paltry self-purpose."⁶⁸

As they made their case for procreation, postwar Christian commentators struggled particularly over how best to specify the differences between Nazi and Christian values. Thus, for instance, the *Frankfurter Hefte* already in 1946 had argued that, in contradistinction to Christian attitudes, the Nazi-encouraged "joy in children" was actually "the opposite of the true order of life, that is realized in humble acceptance and not in the goal-orientation of a state's hubris."⁶⁹ The prominent Protestant bishop Hanns Lilje ran into similar conundrums in 1954 as he attempted to articulate the distinctions between Nazi and Christian ideals. On the one hand, he pointed out that Nazism was ultimately about a "fundamental denial of the family . . . despite all wordy pro-family declarations." And he insisted that it must be self-evident that "it is the end of all ethics in this matter, when one wants to make a biological breeding institute out of marriage and family." On the other hand, however, he urgently wanted his readers to understand that having the "will to the child" (*Wille zum Kind*—a term frequently used in Weimar and even more in the Third Reich and which Lilje employed unselfconsciously) was a powerful act of Christian faith.⁷⁰ And also in 1954 a Catholic commentator in a "sexual-pedagogical lecture series" sponsored by the city of Bad Godesberg near Bonn made arguments for reproductive rather than "egotistical" marriage. Rejecting the models provided not only by Nazism but also by the Weimar Republic and the German Democratic Republic, his main purpose was to show that the Catholic Church's teachings not only had outlasted all political fashions but were essential for restoring healthy marriages in his present as well. Nazis had seen in sex only "the biological function . . . the breeding purpose." While this was offensive, reproduction *was* central to marital life; spouses fundamentally violated their bond "if they say no to the child."⁷¹

Another recurrent strand in Christian advice literature, indicatively often intertwined with remarks on the miseries of childlessness, involved the central importance of mutuality in bed. In this way commentators

worked over and over to suture aspirations for lasting happiness, passion, and love to anxieties about nonnormative sexual practices and pregnancy prevention strategies. Anything directed solely at (what commentators regularly referred to as) “egotistic drive-satisfaction” was deemed unacceptable, both from the moral point of view and—crucially—also from the point of view of pleasure. Couples were informed that even intercourse in the missionary position, if one’s thoughts were not completely focused on the spiritual bond with the partner, was little more than “reciprocal masturbation” (*gegenseitige Onanie*). But more than that, any emptiness a couple might feel, any vague sense of incomplete satisfaction or ambivalence about one another had its source in an inability fully to focus on the other person.⁷² Christian advice givers styled themselves (in a manner that could be construed as protofeminist) as dedicated to women in their forceful insistence that men should never treat women like objects. But they also and repeatedly emphasized that women needed to give themselves fully, both in the sense of being selfless and in the sense of being receptive and open to the man. This openness (and hence real pleasure) was not possible if fear of pregnancy dominated sexual encounters. The solution, however, was seen in neither noncoital practices nor mechanical or chemical birth control products, but rather joyful receptivity to the possibility of procreation.⁷³

BIRTH CONTROL AND ABORTION

Postwar West German culture was peculiarly inhospitable to open discussion of birth control products or practices. In comparison with the United States in the 1950s, for instance, there were in West Germany fewer family planning clinics, and sales of such objects as diaphragms or spermicidal jellies were proportionally lower; there was also less medical literature on the subject available to specialists, and of what literature there was, much expressed strong criticism of birth control.⁷⁴ There were several reasons for this hostility. One was that in a number of the Federal Republic’s states, including North-Rhine Westphalia, the Rhineland-Palatinate, Bavaria, and (after a number of legal skirmishes) even the SPD-ruled state of Hesse, the Himmler order of 1941 banning the sale and advertisement of all birth control products besides condoms formally remained on the books. (Condoms had been exempted from the order during the Third Reich because of their usefulness in preventing the spread of venereal disease.) Yet another reason was that many doctors in postwar Germany had received medical training during the Third Reich and so had imbibed a fair amount of skepticism about birth control. In addition, there were also more subtle inherited forms of misogyny, and of unreflected anxieties

about the declining German birthrate, that affected physicians’ willingness to educate themselves or their patients about effective strategies. Meanwhile, when companies eager to market pessaries or contraceptive powders or gels sought to circumvent or challenge the law, some courts, openly defensive about reconfirming the validity of a ruling inherited from Nazi population policy, nonetheless at times repeated ideas that would be hard to distinguish from Nazi beliefs. Thus, for instance, a court in Frankfurt in 1955 argued that “not every legal measure that serves population growth has a National Socialist tendency. . . . For every healthy state . . . a growth in population is absolutely desirable.”⁷⁵

This resistance to fertility control among doctors, judges, and politicians was not solely an inheritance of Nazism, however. There was also the indirect, but no less powerful, impact of the conservative Christian backlash *against* Nazism’s sexual incitements. For instance, condom vending machines had been fairly familiar aspects of the streetscape, of public toilets, and the backs of bars or barbershops in many German towns throughout the Third Reich and after the war—as soon as rubber was available again—also into the mid-1950s; symptomatically, however, the years from the mid-1950s into the early 1960s saw heated discussion among jurists and journalists over the desirability of these machines and their potential for corrupting the morals of youth. Even the neutral display of condoms in vending machines could be interpreted—as some courts did—as an offense to “morals and decency” (*Sitte und Anstand*), a vague but for that reason all the more effective traditional legal category employed by conservative jurists in their efforts to deter youth (and inevitably also adult) access to fertility control.⁷⁶ Again, Catholic activists set the terms of the conversation. While in 1951–52 conservative Catholic youth organizations had demonstratively burned down kiosks that marketed pornography, in 1953 they initiated “actions” against condom vending machines. And, once again, far from being legally censured, this activism itself inspired conservative jurisdiction.⁷⁷ Yet it is crucial also to note that the major opposition party of Social Democrats did not provide much of an alternative to the Christian Democrats on sex-related issues but rather, into the 1960s, remained quite wary of challenging the churches. SPD politicians might vote against one or another repressive measure, but they did not offer an energetic defense of individual sexual freedom or self-determination.

Meanwhile, however, popular mores were decidedly at odds with official mores. This was true both with respect to Christian values more generally and with respect to sexual morality per se. Germany was a more secularized society than either the United States or Great Britain, and Nazism had done its part to further that secularization. Meanwhile, even believers and churchgoers had their own opinions about sexual matters

that diverged from both the churches' official stances and from those advanced by religious conservatives in the government; for example, popular mores, even in quite religious regions, could often make room for acceptance of durable nonmarital relationships. Moreover, in a survey conducted in 1949, also among regular churchgoers, fully 44 percent were of the opinion that premarital sex was acceptable.⁷⁸ Although the numbers admitting to and endorsing premarital coitus had dropped by approximately ten percentage points by the time the survey was repeated in 1963—and this was no doubt due precisely to the conservative cultural vigilance of the 1950s—numerous more informal estimates offered in the course of the 1950s and early 1960s suggested that anywhere between 80 and 90 percent of young people were practicing premarital coitus.⁷⁹ These numbers are much higher than the comparable figures for the United States or Britain. In short, in spite of all of the official and semiofficial rhetoric that adamantly insisted on female virginity before marriage, and which pleaded also for boys to desist from premarital experimentation, actual practices in Germany strayed sharply from formal norms. In no area of sex-related discussion was there so wide a gap between prescription and actual behavior, even as the prescriptions had profound consequences for how the sex people did have was engaged in and experienced.

Two national peculiarities, then, came together: a low level of information about and access to birth control and a high rate of premarital coitus. Yet another national peculiarity was crucial as well. Whereas American youth were internationally notorious for the practice of petting—mutual manual sexual play often leading to orgasm, a practice developed for the purpose of combining sexual intimacy and pleasure with pregnancy prevention (and the maintenance of technical virginity)—the conservative publicists who dominated the sex advice market in West Germany were tireless in their insistence that this form of sexuality, while seemingly offering “pleasure without regret” (*Genuss ohne Reue*), would nonetheless ruin the capacity for future sexual happiness in marriage. They were certain that girls who engaged in petting would prove to be frigid in their marriages.⁸⁰ Also more liberal German commentators found American petting practices bizarre. As one postwar journalist disapprovingly summarized the general attitude, “this ‘petting’ cannot possibly offer any sort of deeper satisfaction.”⁸¹ And, strikingly, although interviews with individuals who were adolescents in West Germany in the 1950s certainly reveal activity that could be defined as petting, it was almost always seen (by the participants themselves) as a brief transitional phase before the onset of coital activity and/or as a sad, even pathologically perverse, substitute for “real” sex. While in a study conducted in the early 1960s, for example, 72 percent of young men and 44 percent of young women between the ages of twenty and thirty admitted to having at some point

engaged in petting, only a small minority voiced approval of the practice. Although it was “okay for the start of a relationship,” they declared, it was also something basically “unnatural.”⁸² Even into the mid-1960s, when the sexual revolution was well underway, West German working-class youths in particular continued to feel that any sexual contact other than coitus was “perverse.”⁸³ Here the advice givers and their public were in complete accord.

In sum, the messages could only have been experienced as contradictory and confusing. On the one hand, coitus was represented as the only natural sexual activity and all alternative or even supplemental practices were disdained or (more frequently) not mentioned at all and thereby treated as simply unimaginable. For example, with the exception of the sex advice magazine *Liebe und Ehe*—which had been shut down in 1951—no periodical in West Germany in the 1950s ever mentioned oral sex as a possible alternative to coitus. The contrast to Weimar era sex advice, when for instance the well-known physician Max Marcuse not only endorsed both oral and anal sex as pleasurable ways of avoiding pregnancy but also noted that their use was widespread, could not be more striking. Yet, at the same time, almost all advice writers treated female orgasm during coitus as an important desideratum. Indeed, some of the most sophisticated arguments put forward by medical doctors *against* birth control practices and products had to do with the idea that these practices or products would inhibit *female* pleasure. Simultaneously, however, the literature, whether Christian or secular, continually elaborated normative notions about gender. Even when the literature acknowledged that coitus, especially with a selfish man, might not always be a wonderful experience for a woman, it did not detail possible supplementary practices but rather declared that women simply did not like or seek sex as much as men did.

Aside from condoms, birth control products were difficult for unmarried people to procure. But birth control was not easily available for married people either. Access depended not only on the laws of the state in which couples lived but also on whether one lived in a big city or a little town, had a sympathetic and well-informed family physician or a local pharmacist from whom one could purchase spermicidal powders or jellies without embarrassment, and/or had the wherewithal to order birth control products and information from mail-order catalogs.

The *only* method in 1950s West Germany energetically endorsed by medical literature was the rhythm method, first discovered and refined during the 1930s. And although many doctors fiercely attacked the method as (variously) ineffective or unhealthy for a relationship, it was the sole form of birth control officially permitted believing Catholics.⁸⁴ A general familiarity with which days were likely to be “safe” and which were not was also fairly common knowledge among all strata of the population.

But so too was the knowledge that the method was not fully reliable, especially if one tried to “stretch” the days when coitus might be okay beyond a supersafe minimum, or if any untoward event (like stress or illness) threw the cycle off. Widely held beliefs that coitus during a woman’s menstrual period was not normal or acceptable shortened the number of available days even more. And, again, the hostility to, or ignorance and utter lack of imagination about, possible alternatives to coitus on the “unsafe” days remained manifest in both the professional medical and the popular advice literature. Thus, for instance, a prominent physician analyzing the value of the rhythm method in 1953 could only recommend the method as a means of family planning “to that group of advice seekers who have at their disposal a considerable amount of conscientiousness and self-discipline,” for (in his opinion) the period of “abstinence” required by the method could prove an “unbearable burden” on marriages.⁸⁵

The single most widely used birth control in the pre-pill era, both before and within marriage, was withdrawal during intercourse (i.e., coitus interruptus). “My husband is careful” (*Mein Mann nimmt sich in acht*) was the standard way women phrased it when queried by a doctor about how they managed to space the births of their children.⁸⁶ And as a young man who grew up in 1950s West Germany remembered in 2001, speaking of himself and his girlfriend: “We thought this American petting business was *dumb*. We were in love; we talked about it. We decided to use withdrawal.” (And when the girlfriend did get pregnant, this teenage couple married.)⁸⁷

This last story points to a much larger phenomenon of premarital heterosexual activity among teens: *Frühehen* (early marriages), also colloquially called *Mussehen* (must marriages). Marriages among minors (which reached extremely high rates by the late 1950s) were almost always entered into solely because a child was “on the way.” Among the approximate average of 500,000 marriages entered into annually in the early 1960s, 88,000 spouses per year were between the ages of sixteen and twenty; 20,000 brides annually were seventeen years old or less. Unsurprisingly, statistics showed that these marriages were also uniquely vulnerable to divorce.⁸⁸ But also among young couples who were no longer minors, unplanned pregnancy often led to a marriage that would otherwise have been delayed or not entered into at all. Numerous memoirs and oral history testimonies describe the social pressures within local communities that made rushed marriages the norm. At the end of the 1950s, it was found that approximately one-third of West German brides were pregnant on their wedding day. By the early 1960s, studies variously found that anywhere from 40 to 70 percent of firstborn children were conceived out of wedlock; more than 50 percent of all marriages and fully 90 percent

of early marriages (with spouses between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one) were entered into solely because the bride was pregnant.⁸⁹

Frühehen—or, if already married, another (sometimes only half-wanted) child—were, however, not the only consequences of a climate in which birth control products and information were not easily accessible to everyone. Many professional physicians’ discomfort with or hostility to dispensing birth control information and products contributed not only to the popularity of coitus interruptus. It also resulted in an environment in which abortion, despite its illegal status under Paragraph 218, was nevertheless widespread.

In West Germany in the 1950s and early 1960s, the most prevalent method utilized to keep family size small—aside from withdrawal—was abortion. This was in stark contrast, as observers noted, to both France and Britain where there was much stronger public support for family planning.⁹⁰ As one doctor put it bluntly in 1953, Germany was in the midst of an “abortion epidemic,” while still a full decade later another doctor matter-of-factly referred to “the abortion plague.”⁹¹ Over the course of the 1950s, estimates of abortion rates fluctuated and also varied by region, but there was general agreement among medical professionals that the rates remained extraordinarily high, or were even climbing. Midwives, quacks, and pregnant women themselves performed most of the abortions (sometimes using knitting needles or injections of soapy water or poisonous herbs or chemicals), but it was also no secret that there were doctors who were willing to break the law for a price. As some patients, when questioned gently by a trusted physician about what they had done in those instances when withdrawal had not worked, confided: “Well yes, a few times I did let myself get scraped out” (*na ja, ein paarmal habe ich mich ausschaben lassen*).⁹² A frequently used technique was to go to a physician for a routine brief walk-in office visit, have him or her induce a miscarriage mechanically, and then be rushed to either a public hospital or a private clinic with “sudden” bleeding. In 1959 alone, 5,400 individuals were each sentenced to several years in prison for performing abortions.⁹³

Experts assumed that for every case that came to the attention of authorities, either the police or a hospital (where women sometimes ended up not just because of induced miscarriages but also after botched operations or in instances of life-threatening complications), there were at least 100 abortions that went unrecorded. In a case that made national news in 1963, a doctor who had served time in prison a year earlier for the first time a woman in his care had died and was now committed to an insane asylum in the wake of his second fatality, admitted to having performed approximately 2,000 abortions over the prior decade.⁹⁴ Other ways of obtaining estimates involved asking women about their prior reproductive history, in confidential intake exams during visits to their gynecologists,

and then extrapolating from this sample. Based on a total of between 10 and 11 million women of reproductive age in the Federal Republic between 1950 and 1957, estimates found that in any given year between 5 and 10 percent of all German women had an abortion. Experts repeatedly spoke of an average, for the duration of the 1950s, of anywhere between 500,000 to 1 million abortions in the Federal Republic each year. Some studies found a yearly ratio of 1 abortion to every birth; an oft-quoted 1953 study undertaken by a Hamburg gynecologist identified in his region an annual ratio of 3 abortions to every birth.⁹⁵

By the early 1960s, the mainstream press and medical journals repeatedly referred to an annual average of anywhere between 750,000 to more than 1 million abortions. Some physicians even estimated 2 million abortions per year, and it also became routine for mainstream periodicals to note as common sense that there was an illegal abortion for every birth in the Federal Republic.⁹⁶ Contemporaries variously speculated that 1 of every 2 German women faced the decision of whether to abort at some point in her life, or indeed that every year 1 in 4 women was affected.⁹⁷ One prominent gynecologist interviewed in 1964 noted that abortions were available not only in every major city but also in the smallest villages, and that the methods used, also by nonprofessionals, had become so sophisticated (*geschickt*) that doctors had no chance of keeping track of the rates in their area.⁹⁸ While doctors had pointed out already in the 1950s that death rates from abortion were much lower than they had been in previous decades because of the widespread use of antibiotics, numerous observers in the 1960s still noted that health problems arising from illegal abortions were nonetheless widespread. This was so not least because the illegality made proper follow-up care unlikely, and there is no question that the furtive and not always clean conditions under which abortions were performed exacerbated the likelihood of both physical and psychological damage. Insurance records from the 1950s also reveal that, every year, an average of 10,000 West German women died from complications due to their abortions.⁹⁹ Only the invention and widespread dissemination of the birth control pill brought an end to this scandalous state of affairs.

SEXUALITY AND CRIME

To bring down the culture of sexual conservatism, however, it would take more than the medical-technological invention of the pill. The sexual liberalization of West Germany depended on three other crucial dynamics. One was the ever-intensifying use of sexual stimuli (including nude and seminude images and titillating narratives) in advertising and journalism—in other words, a dynamic largely intrinsic to economic processes.

The second dynamic, in complex interaction with the first, was a process of direct political mobilization against the official culture of sexual conservatism. This political mobilization, beginning in the late 1950s and escalating in ardor and strategic effectiveness in the first three or four years of the 1960s, involved both prominent liberal public intellectuals and younger, often left-leaning student activists. And there is no question that liberals and leftists, while on the one hand exceedingly critical of the commodification of sex and its role in consumer capitalism, also used the space opened by the manifest contradictions between conservative norms and sexualized marketing to press their own claims. Yet nothing was more important in helping liberals and leftists redirect the *moral* terms of debate about sex in West Germany than a third dynamic: the return with full force to public discussion of the Holocaust as its details were made public in the postwar trials of perpetrators. Preeminent among these was the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 and the trial, held in Frankfurt am Main from 1963 to 1965 of twenty-two SS men and one prisoner Kapo—all perpetrators in Auschwitz. Especially the Auschwitz trial provided a focal point for rewriting the memory and lessons of the Third Reich for liberal-left purposes and was a singularly important radicalizing event for the generation that came of political age in the later 1960s. Yet even before the Auschwitz trial began, the political mobilization against the culture of sexual conservatism had already gained considerable momentum.

A proposed reform of the Federal Republic's criminal code with respect to sexual matters served as an early occasion for the coordinated emergence of critical liberal voices. The development of a new criminal code had been underway since 1954, when a commission comprising of jurists and politicians had been established for this purpose. Medical and legal experts were consulted at various stages, and in 1960 a first draft was published, with a revised version of the draft appearing in 1962. This revised draft rapidly won approval from the cabinet of the Christian Democratic government and thereafter the Bundesrat. By 1963 discussion of the draft was immanent also in the Bundestag.

The 1962 draft was profoundly conservative. The draft expressly maintained the criminalization of adultery, as well as of pornography and mechanical sex aids. It constrained the advertising and marketing of birth control products and products designed to prevent the spread of venereal disease if this occurred in a manner that could be construed as offending "morals and customs." It criminalized both striptease and consensual partner-swapping (while noting that both were on the rise).

The commission's draft also recommended that male homosexuality remain a crime. It justified this recommendation on the grounds that the "overwhelming majority of the German population sees sexual relations

between men as a contemptible aberration that is likely to subvert the character and destroy moral feeling.” The commission averred that homosexual men affected by Paragraph 175 did not act from an “inborn disposition,” but rather were “overwhelmingly persons who . . . through seduction, habituation, or sexual supersatiation have become addicted to vice or who have turned to same-sex intercourse for purely profit-seeking motives.” The commission concluded that homosexuality was communicable and contagious. It argued that Paragraph 175 functioned as a successful and necessary deterrent to this threat, and it held that to decriminalize male homosexuality would result both in the further spread and ever-greater visibility of this aberrant condition. It also expressed the view that homosexuals should be in most instances capable, if they made enough of an effort, of suppressing their desires and hence living lives in accordance with the law. The commission also went so far as to announce that “wherever same-sex immorality has run rampant and grown to great proportions, the degeneration of the people and the deterioration of its moral strength has been the consequence.” Once again, as advocates of Paragraph 175 had already done in the immediate postwar era, the commission underscored the special vulnerability of teenage boys and young men. Thus, the law served as a “barrier” especially to dissuade youth from the enticements of same-sex activities.¹⁰⁰

Finally, and not least of all, the commission opposed the legalization of abortion. The only exemptions might be cases when the mother’s life was in danger or there were incontrovertibly severe health risks to the mother if the pregnancy continued. The commission emphatically rejected any exemptions not only in cases of anticipated congenital disability or cases of anticipated hardship (whether economic or psychological) for the mother but also in cases when conception resulted from rape (because, in its view, a woman’s rape claim could often not be proved, and thus there existed grave concern that exemptions in this regard would be open to abuse). Moreover, the commission felt that it was by no means a settled matter whether a raped woman might not after all develop maternal feeling for the child.

The commission sidestepped any reference to the Third Reich in its discussion of homosexuality, even though it had relied heavily on concepts and language drawn from Nazi homophobic policies. On the subject of abortion, however, the commission did address Nazism, albeit in contradictory ways. The commission emphasized the liberality of its own proposals in comparison with the more punitive laws of the Third Reich, which had instituted lengthy prison terms, as well as the death penalty, for some abortionists. By contrast, the commission urged jail time of three to five years for women who performed abortions on themselves or for abortionists who did not accept money for their services. (For paid abor-

tionists, the commission set ten-year prison terms.) Yet the commission did little to distance itself from Nazi rhetoric to the effect that abortions impaired “the life-force of the German *Volk*.” It also forcefully denounced Weimar-era campaigns to liberalize abortion laws. It held that Weimar-era liberalization efforts had been consistently insensitive to the supreme need to guard “life-in-the-making,” and that the protection of “unborn life” was a matter of utmost importance “in the life of the individual, the family, and the *Volk*.”¹⁰¹

Unsurprisingly, given both the content of and the legitimations advanced for these proposed reforms, older liberals and younger leftists alike condemned the commission’s draft of a new criminal code. They criticized both the general world view upon which the draft was based and the positions expressed about birth control and abortion and especially about male homosexuality. The Frankfurt-based student newspaper *Diskus* referred to the commission’s draft as taking “an undisguised restorationist approach” and described the draft as aggressive and affect-laden rather than informed by judicial impartiality and fairness.¹⁰² The left-leaning Hamburg-based newsmagazine *Konkret* observed that the purpose of the so-called reforms was apparently to avoid any and all reform. *Konkret* argued that the commission’s draft relied not on scientific research but rather on “a Christian-theological image of humanity as weighed down by guilt.” And *Konkret* saw in the proposed “reform” not just misogyny and homophobia but also a “hostile stance toward everything sexual.”¹⁰³

The commission’s defense of Paragraph 175 drew particular fire. The recommendation that male homosexuality continue to be criminalized was both found by critics to be the single most offensive aspect of the draft and seen as symptomatic of the commission’s broader antisexual attitude. Critics of the commission repeatedly noted that this defense of ongoing criminalization directly bucked the tide of international Western developments. In Britain, both the Catholic Griffin Report of 1956 and the government-sponsored Wolfenden Report of 1957 had recommended decriminalizing sexual acts engaged in by consenting adults. Fifteen non-communist European countries (including France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden) criminalized male homosexuality only in the context of laws that addressed the protection of minors but left consensual adults free to do as they pleased in private. In general, a number of these countries, also predominantly Catholic ones, based their legal codes on the premise that the strictest of distinctions must be maintained between the realm of morality (the concern of religion) and the realm of crime (the business of the law).

The single most influential rebuttal of the commission’s proposed criminal code was the 1963 anthology, *Sexualität und Verbrechen* (Sexuality and Crime). Although it included two contributors who tended toward

more conservative views, the book brought together the reflections of more than twenty critically minded psychologists, medical doctors, jurists, theologians, and philosophers. *Sexualität und Verbrechen* appeared in an affordable paperback series with the popular Fischer press in Frankfurt; the book rapidly garnered nationwide notice, was widely reviewed, and was frequently quoted. Its inspirational impact especially on the emerging younger generation of New Left activists was considerable.

The anthology brought together Jewish reémigrés like Frankfurt School philosopher and sociologist Theodor Adorno and the jurist Fritz Bauer (soon to be the main prosecutor at the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial) with ex-Nazis like the head of the family planning association ProFamilia, Hans Harmsen, and the sexologists Hans Giese and Hans Bürger-Prinz, together with gentile non-Nazis like the liberal jurist Herbert Jäger. In so doing, the book itself provided a key instantiation of the intense cultural energy produced in postwar West Germany precisely by the mix of Jewish and ex-Nazi and non-Jewish liberal intellectuals.¹⁰⁴ It also demonstrated by example how *all three* of these constituencies were essential to the democratization of West Germany. (And at the same time, the enthusiasm with which young activists received this book opens an important window onto the intimate interrelationship between liberalism and New Leftism and the transgenerational affiliations that are often neglected in scholars' tendency to overemphasize intergenerational conflict in the 1960s.)

The most notable and oft-cited contributions to *Sexualität und Verbrechen* were those by Adorno and by the Berlin-based professor of education and psychotherapist Wolfgang Hochheimer. Hochheimer offered the most outraged condemnation of the commission. He pointed out that empirical reality in no way lined up with the commission's conservative ideals. The vast majority of West Germans—perhaps 90 percent—were not virgins when they married. Moreover, 40 percent of sexually mature individuals were not married at all. Nor did sexual behavior within marriage match normative expectations. Hochheimer also contended that homosexuality was a natural variant of human sexuality and far more prevalent, also among so-called heterosexuals, than either the extant law or the conservative commission acknowledged. Hochheimer was also appalled by the commission's presumptive position that women would develop maternal feeling for an unwanted child. Abortions, he said, had negligible negative impact on a woman's psychic state; on the other hand, legally to require that a woman carry a child to term against her will could cause grievous damage to both the mother and child. Invoking the Third Reich, Hochheimer made plain as well how offensive it was for the commission to justify its conservative opinions with repeated references to such concepts as "the moral sensibility of the people" (*sittliches Volksempfinden*). Hochheimer observed acerbically that "just yesterday" (i.e., during the

Third Reich), "the 'sensibility of the people' was addressed and unleashed quite differently . . . in order cruelly to annihilate 'those of a different nature' like 'insects,' 'lice,' 'devils,' 'animals,' 'subhumans.' Also the sexually 'abnormal' were expressly included here."¹⁰⁵

Adorno also invoked Nazism and its legacies to promote the liberalization of contemporary West German sexual mores. Adorno did remind his readers that Nazism had sexually inciting aspects, as he noted the "breeding farms of the SS" and "the injunctions to girls to have temporary relationships with those who had declared themselves . . . as the elite." Yet he made clear as well that the Third Reich was no "kingdom of erotic freedom." Disgusted by the lack of courage evinced by so many otherwise progressive postwar German intellectuals whenever the subject turned to sex, Adorno decisively defended sexual freedom. "Precisely when it is not warped or repressed, sex harms no one," he wrote, adding that this view of sexuality "should also saturate the logic of the law and its application." But Adorno was also intent on pointing out how, specifically in the midst of both the growing commodification of sex and the increasingly popular attitude that coitus was natural and healthy, taboos against "perversion" (*Perversität*) and "sophistication" (*Raffinement*) were intensified. This was bad for everyone, because this narrowing of what sex was and could be, this single-minded emphasis on "pure genitality" (*pure Genitalität*), made sex into a pitifully "shriveled" and "dull" thing. But these taboos were truly dreadful in the way that they fueled hostility to minorities like prostitutes and homosexuals. Just as bizarre but revealing was the fact that even though taboos against sexuality outside of marriage were becoming, in practice, so outdated, the taboos could still be mobilized at any moment. Sexually conservative, even aggressively punitive, messages still reached a wide audience—all the more reason to be suspicious that the one kind of nongenital sexuality that was not just permitted but actively cultivated in the society was voyeurism. And Adorno noted caustically that the sexual taboos that still prevailed in his postwar contemporary moment were a piece of the same "ideological and psychological syndrome of prejudice that helped to create the mass basis for National Socialism and whose manifest content lives on in a depoliticized form."¹⁰⁶

Sexualität und Verbrechen did not singlehandedly defeat the commission's proposal for a revised criminal code. But it did provide opponents of the commission with new ways of thinking that would alter substantially how both sexuality and the memory of the Third Reich would be read and interpreted by a new generation of young West Germans. For now, and increasingly, rather than placing their emphasis on Nazism's sexual excess and inducements, as Christians had done in the more immediate aftermath of the war (and the ways these excesses had been connected with genocide), liberals and leftists began ever more frequently to

stress Nazism's conservative and sexually repressive aspects. This collective move would deal a staggering blow to the commission's draft for the new criminal code and would finally cause the Bundestag first to set the matter aside—and fail eventually ever to return to it.

Among the groundswell of criticism that accrued around the commission's draft proposal, there were further contributions that deserve mention. Already in August 1962, for instance, *Diskus* criticized the persistence of sexual taboos in postwar West Germany. In this context, it noted that “without taboos there is no drive-denial, and without this there are no accumulated aggressions, which can, at the appointed moment, be directed against minorities or external enemies—Jews, capitalists, communists.”¹⁰⁷ And in December 1962 the historian of religion Hans Joachim Schoeps, like Adorno and Bauer a Jewish reémigré, stressed the significance of his own Jewishness for having sensitized him to the German treatment of homosexuals. As Adorno was, Schoeps too was repulsed by the widespread cowardice evident among postwar German intellectuals when it came to taking a stand for homosexual rights.¹⁰⁸ Schoeps called for the abolition of Paragraph 175 and demanded that the members of the Bundestag closely examine their own conscience if they intended to continue to criminalize homosexuality:

Since the persecution of the Jews during the Third Reich, in the eyes of the world the German people stands under the suspicion that it has a tendency to torment, persecute, and terrorize its minorities. Of course homosexuals are not an ethnic-religious minority, but certainly they are a biological-anthropological minority within the *Volk* as a whole. Since the gas ovens of Auschwitz and Maidanek burned . . . one should think twice, or three times, whether one also in the new criminal code wants to continue to treat the minority of homosexuals as people for whom there must be separate laws.¹⁰⁹

Here then were new ways to theorize the relationship between sexuality and crime; in a reversal of the postwar formula that had linked sexual expression with cruelty and murder, now cruelty and murder were linked with sexual repression. Over and over again, West Germans began to argue that sexual repression was at the root of all evil.

POST-HOLOCAUST MEMORY

It was in this context above all that liberal and leftist students, public intellectuals, and journalists increasingly highlighted the problem of conservatives' constriction of questions of morality to sexual matters and called attention to the far more profound moral ugliness of war and genocide. Youth magazines not only documented the concrete damages done

by laws that criminalized consensual sexual activity and its consequences but also, and with increasing fervor, challenged what they saw as the hypocrisy of sexual conservatives and religious leaders the moment moral discussion turned to questions of racism and murder. It was the project of struggling to liberalize sexual mores in West Germany in the early 1960s that brought a different version of the Third Reich into public discussion. The convergence of debates about the Holocaust with debates about sex entered the mainstream media as early as 1963, when *Der Spiegel* approvingly cited a comment made by one of the prosecutors in the Frankfurt trial of Auschwitz perpetrators, to the effect that Auschwitz had been built by *Spießler*—the term typically used by liberals and leftists to describe not only generally banal and conventional but also sexually uptight conservatives¹¹⁰ (fig. 3.1).

Liberals and leftists also began to contend that the right to sexual activity was a fundamental human right and that the desire for sex was something for which no one needed ever again to apologize. Rather than having to argue defensively that sex was something people would engage in whether it was forbidden or not (the standard liberal strategy for most of the 1950s), in the early 1960s liberals started forcefully to assert that sexual pleasure was itself a moral good. Sick of a decade of talk when “pleasure craving” (*Genussucht*) had been routinely treated as self-evidently morally repugnant, even when pursued within marriage, enraged at also the Social Democrats' “servile currying of the churches' favor,” especially young left-leaning students increasingly declared that there was nothing wrong or sinful or indecent about pleasure—indeed, that the pursuit of pleasure was a genuinely just pursuit.¹¹¹

The lesson that linked Nazism to sexual repression provided an especially important resource for turning the moral tables on conservatives. Already in 1964, for instance, *Konkret* railed against opponents of birth control, and especially against those who would deny the pill to unmarried women. The pill, conservatives posited, was morally unacceptable for casual “weekend relationships” and for the unmarried in general, because they did not have “the will to the child” (*Wille zum Kind*). *Konkret* sarcastically commented:

Apart from the Nazi-racist origins of this concept what is revealed here is a contempt for human beings and [especially] for young people. . . . [Here there is] still the idea that sexual intercourse is a sin, only permitted for the purpose of making babies or (already very enlightened) for preserving the marital happiness that is necessary for raising children. . . . The pill is no good for a weekend relationship? Why on earth not? Since most do not want to get married, here the pill is especially suitable. What do they mean, young people who only seek pleasure? What else should they be seeking in this land?¹¹²



Tor zum KZ Auschwitz: Eine Stätte des Schreckens . . .



. . . von Spießern erbaut: Auschwitz-Kommandant Höß, Bewacher

Figure 3.1. *Der Spiegel*, 18 December 1963, p. 47. The captions read: “The gate to the concentration camp Auschwitz: A place of horror . . .” “. . . built by philistines: Auschwitz-commandant Höss, guards.” (Reprinted by permission of *Der Spiegel*, Höss photo reprinted by permission of AP/World Wide Photos.)

Similarly, in 1965, under the heading “Philistine Morality” (*Spießermoral*), *Diskus* scathingly analogized between conservative campaigns like the mid-1960s effort of Christian Democratic politician Adolf Süsterhenn to “clean up” the film industry, the brutal “cleanup” that the United States was at that moment conducting in Vietnamese villages, and West German conservatives’ efforts to scrub clean “the memory of even worse conditions in a filthy German past.” *Diskus* expressed special repugnance at Süsterhenn’s reliance on such notions as “the healthy sensibility of the Volk,” as though this term had not been contaminated by Nazism.¹¹³ Along related lines, also in 1965, *Konkret* pointedly juxtaposed pictures of topless and nude women (labeled “filth,” “immoral,” and “dangerous to youth”) with antisemitic captions from the *Nationalzeitung*, a preferred venue of former Nazis (labeled “not filth,” “not immoral,” and “not dangerous to youth”). The aim, of course, was to underscore the hypocrisy of right-wing political views that found nudity more immoral than antisemitism.¹¹⁴ But it was not just ex-Nazi *Konkret* abhorred. Increasingly, *Konkret* made a mission of exposing the persistence of popular antisemitism in postwar Germany—indeed, the *upsurge* of public expressions of antisemitism in the context, of all things, of the Eichmann and Auschwitz trials.¹¹⁵ The magazine also documented in detail the entanglement of the Christian churches with Nazism and with Nazism’s aggressive war on the eastern front.¹¹⁶ All of this was intended rhetorically to ask: how could any conservatives in the older generation, and not least religious conservatives, possibly claim that they had the right to judge what was moral and what was not?

Conservatives did not give up easily, and would not immediately cede to liberals the right to reinterpret the significance of the Nazi past for the liberalized sexual politics of the 1960s. Incredibly, for example, the Christian Democratic politician Hermann Kraemer in 1964 denounced the brief incidents of masturbation and sexual intercourse shown in an Ingmar Bergman film as reflecting “the same spiritual stance” as “the concentration camp Auschwitz.” Referring directly to the trial of Auschwitz perpetrators taking place in Frankfurt, he contended that “the degradation of the human is nowhere so clear at this moment than in this trial. This degradation of the human finds its continuation in the sexual acrobatics of the Swedish filmmaker.”¹¹⁷

Yet a clear trend toward a reading of the Third Reich as above all marked by sexual repression proved unstoppable. The Marxist intellectual journal *Das Argument* in 1965 advanced the view that the insights of psychology were especially valuable for understanding fascism because what required investigation was “the connection between the suppression of sexual drives on the one hand and the antisemitic persecution mania and its raging in manifest cruelty on the other.”¹¹⁸ In 1966 *Der Spiegel* firmly



Sex-Kritiker Hitler
Erstickendes Parfüm

Figure 3.2. *Der Spiegel*, 2 May 1966, p. 58. The caption reads: “Sex-Critic Hitler: Suffocating Perfume.” (Reprinted by permission of *Der Spiegel* and akg-images)

aligned itself with the side of sexual liberation and for this cause, crucially, it not only attacked the churches but also invoked Adolf Hitler as a negative counterexample of sexual self-repression and repressiveness. Offering a one-sided reading of *Mein Kampf*—which quoted Hitler’s disgust with the “suffocating perfume of our modern eroticism” but did not mention that in the same sentence he had criticized “unmanly” prudery—*Der Spiegel* printed a photograph of Hitler demonstratively captioned “Sex-Critic Hitler”¹¹⁹ (fig. 3.2). While in the early 1950s, Christians had been able to present themselves and their sexually conservative agenda as the antithesis of Nazism and its sexual politics, *Der Spiegel* here represented Christians and Nazis as comparable in their visceral hostility to sexual freedom. This rewriting of the past would prove remarkably durable.

From 1966 on, it was hard to find anyone who disagreed with an analysis of Nazism as inimical to sexuality. Philosopher Arno Plack, in his magnum opus of 1967 indicatively entitled *Society and Evil: A Critique of the Reigning Morality*, asserted: “It would be wrong to hold the view that all of what happened in Auschwitz was typically German. It was typical

for a society that suppresses sexuality.”¹²⁰ And the journalist Hannes Schwenger in his influential 1969 book criticizing the “antisexual” politics of the Christian churches, specifically identified the postwar churches’ attacks on “free love, premarital intercourse, adultery, and divorce” as speaking “the language of fascism.”¹²¹ The New Left held these ideas of a thoroughly sex-hostile Third Reich quite dear, and these assumptions strongly informed New Left experimentations in communal living, non-monogamy, and antiauthoritarian childrearing. But the New Left was hardly alone. These convictions were ubiquitous in West Germany by the late 1960s. They have rarely been challenged since.

Yet, and in all the ways I have been suggesting, the sexual conservatism of the mid- to late 1950s was itself a postfascist invention rather than inherited tradition. In its own way, this sexual conservatism was an attempt—and a remarkably successful one—to master the past. Coming of age, as they did, at a moment when liberals struggled to dismantle the hegemony of sexual conservatism in West Germany by linking sexual conservatism with Nazism and the Holocaust, politically critical young people in particular would be especially drawn to explanations of Nazism and Holocaust that found both phenomena rooted in sexual repression. And although the student movement that transformed the political landscape of West Germany after the mid-1960s would style itself as antifascist, it is crucial to understand it first and foremost as an antipostfascist movement, a protest against the postfascist settlement in West Germany, and postwar young people’s own experiences coming of age among the suffocating pieties and claustrophobic philistinism of the 1950s.

The 1950s were a sexually conservative time also in other Western countries, and there, too, this decade was followed by student rebellions and sexual liberalization. But nowhere else was the insistence on sexual conformity and restraint experienced as so intensely hypocritical and inexcusable; nowhere else could a stifling sexual morality seem to the young such a patently obvious displacement of a deeper unresolved guilt. The New Left labor organizer and feminist activist Barbara Köster in the 1980s retrospectively summarized her own and her generation’s coming-of-age in the 1950s this way:

I was raised in the Adenauer years, a time dominated by a horrible moral conformism, against which we naturally rebelled. We wanted to flee from the white Sunday gloves, to run from the way one had to hide the fingernails behind the back if they weren’t above reproach. Finally then we threw away our bras as well. . . . For a long time I had severe altercations with my parents and fought against the fascist heritage they forced on me. At first I rejected their authoritarian and puritanical conception of childrearing, but soon we came into conflict over a more serious topic: the persecution of the Jews. I identified with the Jews, because I felt myself to be persecuted by my family.¹²²

This can be read for what it is: a disturbing and simplistic, even offensive, appropriation of the suffering of others. But it can also be read for what it also is: an important, urgent, even desperate flailing to free oneself from the cloying and everywhere inadequately acknowledged toxicities of the supposedly clean post-1945 period.

At the same time, this passage reveals as well the deeply held conviction about the “fascist” quality of the sexual conservatism and propriety pre-occupations with which Köster was raised. That there had been a displacement of the discourse of morality away from murder and onto sex was clear to critical young people in the early 1960s. What they were not, could not have been, aware of was how very recent the shift to sexual conservatism had been.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Morality of Pleasure

THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

The sexual revolution arrived on the West German scene in the mid-1960s, escalating in extent and intensity throughout the remainder of the decade and into the early 1970s. The sexual revolution in all its dimensions demolished the postfascist culture of sexual conservatism. In making this revolution possible, the commercialization, liberalization, and politicization of sex were inseparable developments. While the sudden mass availability of reliable birth control in the form of the pill certainly contributed mightily to the change in sexual mores, it did not on its own create the revolution. Just as important was the thorough saturation of the visual landscape with seminude (and soon completely nude) images of women’s bodies as well as the unabashed marketing of a multitude of objects via these images, together with an extraordinary boom in the market also of overtly pornographic pictures and narratives. This “sex wave,” as West Germans called it, was joined by a broad liberalization of popular values around nudity and pre- and extramarital sex. What had previously been done surreptitiously and in hiding was brought out in the open and loudly defended. There was a far greater willingness to publicize liberal values and to attack sexual conservatism vigorously and directly. Finally, in the midst of these wider trends, there was also the emergence and rise to cultural prominence of a New Left movement as well as incipient feminist and gay and lesbian rights movements, each of which, albeit in divergent ways, sought radically to politicize questions and issues surrounding sexual relations. None of these phenomena was unique to West Germany. Rather, West German developments during the late 1960s and early 1970s moved in tandem with developments across the Western world, as throughout Western Europe and the United States youth countercultures and student rebellions exacerbated and spurred further already existing trends toward sexual liberalization.

Yet there were also crucial dimensions of the sexual revolution that were specific to West Germany. There was a distinctive force and fury to West German debates over sex and a heightened drama to the resulting social transformations. The new consensus developed in the early to mid-1960s by liberal intellectuals and New Left activists that the Third Reich