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Partnership

This issue of Forum examines the topic of “partnership” from a specific vantage point. It addresses how love relationships, partnerships and sexuality are changing as a result of the Internet, and how they might continue to change. It also looks into the array of options this medium offers for getting to know people and how these options are used.

The medical historian Tilmann Walter contemplates the social-historical evolution of love and sexuality since the early modern era and shows how the availability of pornography on the Internet has radically changed sexual morals within just two decades, while the underlying moral conceptions of relationships have remained surprisingly stable.

Nicola Döring, who has carried out in-depth analyses of the social psychology of the Internet in her various research projects, describes in detail the characteristics, opportunities and risks of relationship initiation through the Internet.

Silja Matthiesen and Gunter Schmidt present their findings from a study on men and women aged 30, 45 and 60 which examined the intriguing question of how emotionality and sexual activity change over the duration of long-term relationships and whether the length of the relationship or the age of the couples is the decisive factor influencing this change.

Esther Perel, family and couples therapist in New York, uses numerous examples from her practice to aptly depict the changes which take place in the sexuality of young parents as well as ways to reconcile eroticism with parenthood.

A representative study sponsored by the Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ) [Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth], examines concepts of masculinity as well as male attitudes and behaviour in terms of helping with housework and childcare.

“What keeps couples together?” asks couples therapist, Astrid Riehl-Emde. She advocates that greater consideration should be given to a couple’s love for one another during therapy. This article deals with the topic of what love is and ways of talking about it.

The authors Melanie Größ and Eva-Verena Wendt have extensively studied love relationships in adolescents. They describe age-specific phases of partnerships, the subjective experience of first relationships and the potential problems associated with love during adolescence.

Claus Nachtwey, representative for same-sex lifestyles at the administration of the Senate of Berlin, describes the development, content and significance of the German registered partnership law [Lebenspartnerschaftsgesetz], which came into effect in Germany in 2001.

The editors

Social history of relationships and the World Wide Web

This article examines the social history of partnerships and sexuality under the influence of rapid changes in the media sector: Tilmann Walter's research stretches back to the early modern era, but his focus lies in the social changes of the last 20 years in relation to the Internet and the sexual and pornographic content distributed through this medium.

In general, historians accept without question the fact that media – especially newly emergent media – have an altering effect on the social environment. The question which remains, however, is how and to what extent they effect this change. The World Wide Web has enabled a massive increase in the distribution of sexual – often pornographic – content over the last two decades (on 22 May 2009, a search using the term “sex” resulted in 776,000,000 hits in 0.09 seconds.) Even though there is only limited reliable data on the reception and social acceptability of such content through this medium (cf. BUNDESZENTRALE FÜR GESUNDHEITLICHE AUFKLÄRUNG 2009), the speed and social dynamics of this change speak volumes. It was not until 1973 that the German Federal Republic rescinded the general prohibition of “indecent” literature in German criminal law. To this day, section 184 of the German criminal code prohibits adolescents from accessing pornographic material, with the aim of protecting minors (cf. WALTHER 2003). Sex shops, erotic cinemas and erotic catalogue companies which distributed the products found themselves at the fringes of society – which may even have enhanced the “dirty” allure of these establishments. Moreover, these types of product were not cheap. Sex videos cost over 100 Deutschmarks in the early 1980s. The situation in the former GDR was even more restrictive. There, *Das Magazin* was the only official medium that regularly published a number of nude photographs. Artistic erotica was traded for hundreds of Ostmarks (cf. *Die Nackte Republik* 1993). These circumstances must be called to mind when we consider that today millions of pornographic files are readily available on the Internet free of charge, and that the access restrictions that do exist barely function.

If the question of the presumed social consequences of such media changes is posed, as we are doing so here, one may ask the following poignant question: “Does the development of a global data network (which most of us have been familiar with for less than 20 years) mark the beginning of a new era in communication, or is it simply a modification of the ‘Gutenberg Galaxy’ (MARSHALL McLUHAN)?” This term alludes to the epoch-making success of the written word, which began with the invention of the letterpress around the year 1450, as well as the ever-growing significance of media as carriers of information and memories.

In line with the general liberal attitude toward issues of sexual morality which have gained increasing prevalence since the 1960s, pornography has intensified the trend in which sexual behaviour, which was deemed wrong or “perverted” by prevailing social standards around the year 1900, has increasingly been liberated from negative stigmatisation. “Perverted” behaviour was defined as anything which deviated from coitus within marriage and coitus associated with potential fertility. In accordance with the view that sex should occur in a social context, masturbation was long considered dangerous for the individual and for society. Due to the fact that pornographically induced arousal is almost solely caused by visual impressions (accompanied by moving images and auditory stimuli), sexual researchers had until recently denounced this interaction as “prosthetic sex” and dismissed pornography as “a service which caters to sexual misery” (SIGUSCH 2000, pp. 232, 242). Formulated in a more generous manner, pornography allows the individual to experience “risk-free lust” (MITCHELL 2004, p. 140) beyond any of the emotional responsibilities and risks which arise in interpersonal relationships. Empirically, masturbation (which may draw upon pornographic fantasies as stimuli) is no longer perceived as a substitute for sex which takes place outside relationships, but rather as a separate sexual realm practiced alongside sexual partnerships (cf. SCHMIDT et al. 2006, pp. 115–120). Seen in this light – and as criticised by SIGUSCH and others – pornography, which is now ubiquitous, fails to offer an adequate substitute for intimate partnerships – but the reverse is also true.

Those who wish to study the social history of sexuality are well advised not to take too seriously the excitement which develops around sexual issues and which sometimes escalates to the level of moral panics – as often witnessed in public debates. None of the practices in rebus sexualibus which were deemed extremely dangerous around the year 1900 – whether it be child masturbation, homosexuality, increased prostitution and venereal diseases or the political demands for the equal treatment of women – led to the demise of society as predicted by authorities from within and outside the field of sexology (cf. SIGUSCH 2008). So when more recent phenomena such as AIDS and (internet) pornography are analysed from a social historical perspective – which generally takes a broader view spanning decades or

generations – calm is what is called for, despite seasonal eruptions of excitement.

The crucial point lies in the question of whether the Internet and the pornography it distributes – as well as the industry behind this distribution – has permanently taken control of the sexual “scripting” of a considerable percentage of the population, or whether it will do so in the future. Learning how to conduct and experience satisfying sexual relations is considered a complex and challenging process in sex sociology, one which has to be implemented against the backdrop of a society’s specific cultural and moral values and norms (cf. a summarising account by GAGNON/SIMON 2000). Adolescents two decades ago, who were generally “under-scripted” due to the then prevalent moral, cultural and legal prohibitions (cf. SCHMIDT 2004, p. 323), may have occasionally picked a “dirty” magazine out of the rubbish bin or secretly helped themselves to the hidden stash of one of their family members. In contrast, today’s adolescents are potentially “over-scripted” in the face of the virtually limitless amount of sexual content in the media. This flood of implicitly or explicitly pornographic stimuli forces users to either train themselves to actively look away or to ask the question: “What (precisely) do I want to see?”

An initially unstructured desire thus becomes systematised pursuant to the preferred age, appearance or hairiness of the object as well as the preferred practices carried out during the sexual acts¹ – and the user interfaces of the specialist search engines provide these cognitive structures.

To highlight the historical differences one last time, it can be assumed that the increase in pornographic content has led to a corresponding reduction in the significance of “traditional”, educationally-oriented magazines such as *Bravo* (cf. SAUERTEIG 2007; HOFFMANN 2009, p. 11). It is a disconcerting thought that male adolescents may no longer be expecting the “cuddle sex” depicted in photo-love-stories (as propagated by *Bravo* from the end of the 1960s) for their “first time” – but something closer to hardcore sex.²

Social and sexological diagnoses of the current period which have based their analyses on a broader data set have, in the meantime, emphasised a countervailing tendency. Pursuant to (post)modern “negotiation ethics”, acceptable and desired sexual practices need to be repeatedly renegotiated in a consensus-oriented manner, because such practices are decreasingly subject to binding traditional values. The altered norms concerning how the genders interact with one another have long since found their expression through the adoption of legally prescribed power relationships in the civil code. Now that men and women formally enjoy equal rights, this trend away from earlier, (more or less) fixed gender roles, for which inequality was the central characteristic (cf. MARTIN/ZOEPFFEL 1989), currently seems irreversible.

The forms relationships take are changing and have, in the meantime, been pluralised. However, the underlying values or desires have proven to be surprisingly constant. The vast majority of today’s survey respondents still describe a stable, monogamous, emotionally and sexually satisfying relationship as the ideal³. The idea that sexuality should be combined with partnership, affection and taking care of one another therefore seems to be a timeless sentiment. Tales which combine “romantic” love and permanence are found in all world literatures, whether it be the biblical *Book of Kings*, Homer’s *Odyssey* or Cao Xueqin’s *Dream of the Red Chamber*. As these present highly challenging and internally contradictory goals, it is highly likely that real life has differed from

the ideal or desired state throughout the ages. Today, the reality born from the failure to achieve this ideal is usually “serial monogamy”. Individuals attempt to reconcile the ideals of passion and lastingness by forming a series of monogamous partnerships, which often last for only a few years until a person reaches middle age (cf. SCHMIDT et al. 2006, p. 26–30).

Moreover, it is possible to identify and specify typologically simplified – yet distinct – social-historical changes in comparison with the early modern era:

- Sexuality as a necessary requirement for a successful partnership is now an almost universally accepted precept⁴;
- Pre-marital sex is almost universally accepted⁵;
- Today, the emotional foundation of partnerships is expected to clearly outweigh the material aspects. Arranged marriages have almost totally lost their significance⁶;
- The indissolvability of marriage no longer applies in practice⁷;
- Historically, one type of serial monogamy has superseded another: forced separation due to the death of a partner has been replaced by self-induced social separation (cf. SIEDLER 1987, p. 60 or SCHMIDT et al. 2006, p. 57 among others).

The abovementioned manifest difficulty in reconciling emotional and material motives seems to have since taken on truly anthropological dimensions (cf. MEDICK/SEBEAN 1984). While romantic love is sometimes mistakenly understood as an “invention” of the 18th century, it can be shown that the predominance of material interests in relationships was already criticised during much earlier times. For example, the medical doctor from Basel, FELIX PLATTER (1536–1617), had nothing good to say about one of his colleagues who married a widow solely because she was wealthy while at the same time calling her “dirt” behind her back⁸.

In previous research, I have referred to the replacement of the agrarian societal order around the year 1900, particularly of male and female occupational roles, as the starting

1 This development is not new, but it has been quantitatively amplified through the Internet. It began with the development of a porno industry after legal liberalisation took place: cf. RENCHKOVSKY ASHLEY/Ashley 2000, p. 123

2 Interest in and use of pornographic content is strongly “gendered”: cf. Hoffmann 2009, p. 12. The warnings formulated by RENCHKOVSKY ASHLEY/Ashley 2000, pp. 121-124 are as indicated. The rhetorical differentiation between “bad” pornography and “good” erotica necessarily occurs pursuant to subjective judgements of taste and therefore perceive it as void of meaning.

3 Cf. Schmidt et al. 2006, pp. 31, 33, 40f.: 95% of those interviewed during this study stated a monogamous, life-long partnership as their ideal relationship.

4 This “life-worldly” norm can certainly be found in abundance in early modern-era poetry: cf. Walter 1998, pp. 151-285. With time, this element loses its significance in today’s partnerships as well: cf. Schmidt et al. 2006, p. 121-127

5 Schmidt et al. 2006, p. 60. Other explanations will have to apply for the cultural climate in the USA alone. Pre-marital courting often broke this norm as social practice and as a popular literary motif in the early modern era: cf. Mitterauer 1983, Walter 1998, p. 185-217

6 This may not fully apply to the immigrant milieu in Germany.

7 Different practice applied to protestant communities even during Luther’s lifetime. However, remarriage after divorce was virtually impossible.

8 Platter 1976, pp. 363f. Similar views are confirmed by the numerous warnings issued with reference to marriages between older men and young women, which were assumed to be based on material interests only. Cases of the opposite constellation were, unsurprisingly, assessed even more negatively: cf. Walter 1998, pp. 222-224

point of a societal evolution which has been codetermined by sexual reform and sexological impetus and is clearly associated with a new urban way of life. The increased emotionalisation of marriage and partnerships, “free love”, the equal treatment before the law of single mothers and children born out of wedlock, the introduction of the principle of irreconcilable differences in divorce law, easier access to contraceptives, and the decriminalisation of abortion and homosexuality were all items on the political agenda for sexual reform and sexological research around the year 1900 – and are now taken for granted in everyday life.

The fact that partnerships are no longer subject to traditional power inequalities between genders, be they culturally or legally defined, and have since become pluralistic, negotiable and fluctuating, is considered to be a characteristic of the “postmodern” family (cf. LÜSCHNER/SCHULTHEIS/WEHRSPANN 1988). However, even though gainful employment often no longer takes place within one’s own household (although it remains the case for farmers and many self-employed individuals), and even though women are now much more likely to earn their own living than compared to the year 1900, the “pure relationship” (ANTHONY GIDDENS) still remains an ideal – or even a phantasm. Even where partnerships strive towards equal roles or even reverse the traditional gender roles, practical questions soon arise such as who is to pay for the rent, groceries or holidays. This becomes even more apparent when couples have children who have to be taken care of. By this point, at the latest, partners have to arrive at a mutual arrangement to meet the needs of all family members (cf. HAUCH 2000, pp. 243f., SCHMIDT et al. 2006, pp. 97–99). Under the current occupational and legal structures, it is virtually impossible to achieve an equal allocation (division) of income between employment and family work.

With partnerships supposedly more pluralistic and “liberated”, the question regarding their success remains. It seems as though the increase in expectations is accompanied by an increase in possible disappointments. The question regarding the value of traditional or “postmodern” relationship forms, or lack thereof, can only be decided by means of a value judgment (cf. SCHMIDT et al. 2006, p. 152), depending on whether external stability or emotional quality and “self fulfilment” are recognised as the key criteria. The crucial point for me is that most likely none of these partnership styles offer sufficient grounds for the subjective success of a partnership. The high fluctuation of relationships certainly doesn’t make separation any easier. They often cause serious – and sometimes traumatic – distress to those affected, even today (cf. SCHMIDT et al. 2006, p. 24).

From a practical perspective, the secret of successful relationships has not yet been unravelled. Returning now to the significance of the Internet in questions pertaining to partnerships, this medium woos people with the promise

that this type of human happiness is purchasable, even with regard to intimacy and the initiation of relationships. It thus follows the megatrend of developed capitalistic societies in which human needs are transformed as far as possible into potentially tradable good-like entities (cf. SIGUSCH 2000, p. 239f.). Online dating sites are meant to facilitate the search for partners by means of asking the users to enter their personal preferences with regard to age, looks, (social) status and societal symbolism – which are then “fetishised” to supposedly increase the chances of a relationship .

The illusory confidence of at last being able to find the “right” partner thanks to this medium is the central sales pitch. The providers’ motive most likely lies in their commercial interests. In this point at least, there is no difference between the dating and partnership industry, on the one hand, and both legal and illegal pornography producers on the other.

The superficial rationality behind this procedure draws from the sheer amount of stored personal data and the multitude of possible combinations. This implies that the only reason one has not yet found “Mr. or Mrs. right” is because of a lack of candidates, and that he or she is waiting to be found somewhere in the vastness of the virtual community, pursuant to the credo that “for every love there is a heart to receive it”. Seen from this perspective, the stated promise may not just be illusory. The new methods of making acquaintances may actually enhance the social opportunities for shy individuals, superficially unattractive people, or for those interested in very specific categories. This sentiment is confirmed by the numerous socially segmented chat rooms for individuals with specific interests or those “affected” by a given matter. A society in which people establish such virtual contacts with one another seems to be the logical continuation of the anonymous, urban lifestyles of the classical modern era around the year 1900 . The most polar opposite of the occidental “night on the town” or “virtual chat” would be the rural community of an isolated alpine village where everyone knows each other – and in which it is practically impossible to make new acquaintances. By the way, this form of extremely isolated socialisation was the notable exception in previous epochs as well.

I recommend caution whenever these media phenomena are presented as fundamental and permanent changes, because diagnoses of the current period tend towards exaggeration – just like the phenomena which they attempt to interpret – and they often prove to be just as short lived. For instance, VOLKMAR SIGUSCH interpreted the “techno generation” of the 1990s and the then annually hosted Love Parade as symbols of what he termed a “neosexual revolution” (cf. SIGUSCH 2000, p. 246 and SIGUSCH 1998 for the fundamental analysis). The comments made by young people in surveys at the time were in line with the zeitgeist: they talked of sex as an “event” or a “kick”. Today, however, techno culture has almost died out altogether or has at least disappeared from public space. Its protagonists and followers will have adapted to the mainstream (and simultaneously transformed it) just like those of the “generation of 1968” and the “sexual revolution” before them.

If, in conclusion, I had to present one more media phenomenon which has followed this trend due to its foreseeable fleetingness, then it would be the general trend towards using media to record personal experiences – particularly in the visual sense – including situations involving one’s partner as well as sexual situations. This goes hand in

9 Cf. Walter 2004. Siedler 1987 and subsequently numerous other authors argued similarly.

10 Cf. the contribution by Nicola Döring in this brochure

11 As Blech (1996) had already identified

hand with a progressive loss of privacy. For those born during the era of private television, the Internet and wireless multi-media, it seems as though only occurrences which are made public via mobile telephones, SMS, MMS, the Internet or television etc. are really real. Symptomatic of this tendency is the phenomenon of young people logging-on to *schuelerVZ* or *StudiVZ* (German social networking sites for school children and students) every day to see what went on at the party they attended the night before and to check whether they enjoyed themselves (cf. KORTMANN 2009). This everyday behaviour seems to be pushed to the extreme in the media's "Superstar" franchise, which, if one were to take the behaviour of the participants seriously, would probably be of a clinical nature. The hope of being something "special" and to deserve societal attention without having to do anything beyond the ordinary could seriously burden these young people for the rest of their lives.

I doubt the severity of the social changes that have been incurred. The short duration of the careers of these supposed "superstars" and "top models" is enough alone to indicate the opposite (in the most favourable case, parting from their illusory expectations could enable psychological growth). What's more, not even the few media icons (such as Madonna, Boris Becker or Britney Spears) who manage to attract public attention for longer periods convey the impression of being particularly happy.

Although everyday communication habits are constantly changing, prompted by shifts in the media, the fundamental human conflicts seem to stay relatively constant. In principle, relationships largely amount to "black boxes" for external observers. What exactly goes on inside them remains difficult to discern – even with today's socio-scientific methods. It is easier to learn what the participants believe or hope for within their partnership. In general, after the relationship breaks down, many of these elements are assessed very differently. Even science cannot offer significant new insights into the crucial question of "can love last?" (STEPHEN A. MITCHELL), and the commercial dating agents on the Internet have long made the scientists' recorded statistical probabilities their own. At the end of the day, the factors which lead to success or failure can only be explicitly identified *ex post* and not *ex ante*. For this reason, Mitchell describes the process of making intensive infatuation the prerequisite for lasting "romantic" love as the art of building "sand castles for two" (MITCHELL 2004, p.208).

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Love by mouse click?

Opportunities and risks of partner selection on the Internet

“Has online searching for romantic partners and sex partners become a mass phenomenon or is it only practiced by very specific social groups? Are online dating platforms particularly helpful to those who are otherwise less successful on the relationship market? What do we know about the quality and lastingness of online relationships?” The present article looks into these and other questions without being able to answer them conclusively. It describes the characteristics, opportunities and risks of couple formation on the Internet on the basis of knowledge derived from prior and current research as well as submissions of people’s personal experiences.

Introduction

These days, ever more people are increasingly on the lookout for new romantic partners and sex partners. Instead of staying married to one person for their entire lives, most Germans have several committed relationships, one after the other. During the phases of being single – and sometimes during relationships – it is not seldom that these individuals, whether women or men, engage in casual sexual encounters. The Internet supports this development, and its commercial and non-commercial contact platforms and dating sites, its online chats, forums and virtual communities all offer new opportunities for users to reach a vast pool of potential partners at any time, anywhere, in a comfortable and anonymous manner. (DÖRING 2003, 2009)

Has online searching for romantic partners and sex partners therefore become a mass phenomenon, or is it only practiced by very specific social groups? Do compatible partners actually find each other via the Internet at all, or is the first offline meeting – provided it takes place at all – mainly characterised by disappointment? Are online dating platforms particularly helpful to those who are otherwise less successful on the relationship market? Or are those who benefit the most sociable anyway? What do we know about the quality and lastingness of “online relationships”, i.e. relationships which were initiated on the Internet? Do they differ in any significant manner from conventional “offline relationships”, in which the initial getting-to-know-each-other phase takes place offline?

Chance online meetings

Wherever people meet and interact, there is a chance that relationships will develop and couples will come together. School, college and the work place all constitute good opportunities for getting to know other people, because participants meet regularly and have a similar social background or similar interests. Comparable opportunities to meet others arise during leisure activities, sports events, in clubs and associations as well as among one’s own circle of friends and acquaintances. All of these unplanned meeting opportunities depend on spatial proximity and meeting in

person, and the number of potential partners that can be met in this way is (sometimes very) limited. What’s more, every flirt has associated risks, because the other person may not be looking for a partner, may have a different sexual orientation, and because both people will continue to encounter one another after a rejection takes place (should that be the case).

The Internet, which is now used by over two thirds of the population and by almost all young people in Germany (EIMEREN/FREES 2008), has generated numerous new opportunities to contact and get to know other people. Those who not only use the Internet to obtain information or carry out online shopping, but also use it to actively interact with others online, have good chances of expanding their social network. A new form of conviviality is offered by the innumerable chat rooms – which are often categorised by age group – where individuals meet to chat, joke around or flirt in real time via keyboard communication. This casual and primarily anonymous exchange, in which each participant remains unobserved as he or she communicates from home, is perceived as very relaxing. Shyness does not play a role and one’s hair need not be styled to perfection. Individuals often get more intimate more quickly than in face-to-face discussions. People often have the feeling that they can show their “true self” in a text-based chat environment, with less gloss-over and less compulsion to play a role or act “as one should”.

In addition to generic social chat rooms that can be on “any-topic”, the Internet also offers numerous topic-related online forums. Many couples who have found love on the Internet originally met on an online discussion forum for cycling, for example, or an online community of TV fans, an online self-help group for diabetes patients, an ethno portal for German Turks, or a global online game world such as World of Warcraft. Others meet like-minded individuals on Internet photo or video platforms, first talking shop with them and later moving on to more personal topics. Those who publish their own weblog or contribute to the Internet encyclopaedia Wikipedia encounter other “bloggers” and Wikipedians” – and sometimes a particular person proves to be “Mr. or Mrs. right”.

Casual encounters on the Internet mainly occur due to mutual interests and/or social online communication. It is

Sabine (38)

I have been chatting online for some years now. I was in a relationship for 12-years. One evening I was bored so I entered a chat room. I actually just wanted to blabber on a bit as I never took online chatting seriously. Then I started talking to a guy and we had a good long discussion.

This continued for several days. He was in a relationship which was then in its 16th year and he said he was happy. I knew that I wasn't going to wedge myself between them.

For three months, we spent every free minute chatting to each other. Then we began talking on the phone.

Sparks flew – even though we didn't know each other in person ... There were, of course, ups and downs... He split up with his girlfriend and I left my boyfriend. We only met each other in person one year later – and that is when sparks flew in reality as well. The only problem was that we lived 900km apart. But we found a way to be together and now we are a happy, small family. Our daughter is now eight weeks old and we have been together for almost two years ... I moved to him. That was the short version.

often described as “getting to know people from the inside out”, because, contrary to meetings in an offline environment, the person’s appearance is not the first contact filter. Instead, intellectual and emotional interaction takes centre stage, which can lead to an interest in the person behind the online pseudonym. This phenomenon allows for online communication between couples who would not have been interested in each other “at first glance”. With appearances out of the picture, deepening online relationships confirm the principle of partner selection that “like are attracted to like”. For it to be possible to conduct interesting dialogues over a long period, participants generally need to have similar hobbies, compatible world views and similar educational backgrounds. Just like in the “real world”, chance encounters on the Internet also rely on social competence. In order to win over other Internet users, one has to make constructive contributions, get involved and make oneself noticed through humour and friendliness. Those who are “good with words” have a clear advantage when it comes to online flirting.

Internet sites with an invitation for active participation have experienced a boom since 2005 under the heading of “Web 2.0”. These platforms are mainly used by younger generations. Those above 60 hardly participate and almost exclusively use traditional e-mails for their social contacts (see Table 1).

In order for casual and chance online flirts to develop into committed relationships, participants have to move on to other media, through which they can get to know each other better and through which more commitment can develop. Only in very rare cases do the participants explicitly wish to conduct an online-only relationship, which means that most individuals wish to engage in real contact beyond the Internet at some stage. After mailing and chatting with one another, individuals who find each other appealing talk on the phone, exchange photos and ultimately agree to a face-to-face meeting. On the other hand, participants may quickly lose interest if the other person, who was such a witty chat and e-mail partner, turns out to be untalkative and boring on the telephone, or if the photo that was sent is incompatible with one’s taste, or if both partners notice after meeting up that they just don’t get along.

If Internet flirting progresses to pleasant personal meetings (dates), then the further development of the relationship does not differ significantly from traditional dating. However, couples who meet by chance on the Internet are more often confronted by geographical distances or intercultural differences. On the other hand, they are often well-versed in open and intimate communication, which in turn, can have a positive effect on the quality of the relationship.

There is no representative data on how many users have chance encounters while using the Internet or participating in Web 2.0 activities which then develop into amorous and/or sexual relationships, or on how such relationships fare in the medium or long term. One must, however, assume that this method of couple formation is now common practice amongst the younger generation. Only taking the figures into consideration, chance encounters on the Internet probably play a greater role than targeted online partner searching via dating sites, which are only used by 10% of the young people in Germany (see Table 1). A survey in the USA reported that 74% of internet users searching for partners used the Internet in various ways to initiate contact, although only 37% of those searching for partners used dating sites. (MADDEN/LENHART 2006, p. iiif.)

Tab. 1

Internet use (including Web 2.0) for socialising

| <i>Internet use (including Web 2.0) for socialising</i> | <i>Internet users aged between 14 and 19</i> | <i>Internet users older than 60</i> |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Instant messaging | 85% | 5% |
| E-mail (e.g. GMX, Hotmail) | 75% | 81% |
| Online forums / Chat rooms (e.g. Knuddels) | 72% | 4% |
| Private networks / Social Networking (e.g. SchuelerVZ, StudiVZ) | 68% | 1% |
| Online communities (e.g. Bike-Community) | 63% | 2% |
| Online games (e.g. World of Warcraft) | 37% | 7% |
| Dating / Relationship sites (e.g. Friendscout24) | 10% | 1% |
| Professional networks (e.g. Xing) | 8% | 1% |

Source: Eimeren/Frees 2008

Mandy (16):*Boyfriend 1*

Met him on Bravo Chat and we had a long-distance relationship over one-and-a-half years.

Boyfriend 2

I met him on Knuddels Chat and the relationship held for 5 months.

Boyfriend 3

I met him in a disco and the relationship developed through chats and telephone calls. But there is a bit of friction at the moment ... I hope that it doesn't end too soon.

Targeted online partner search

There are not many options outside the Internet for those who do not want to leave their partner search to chance: "In" locations, clubs, bars and discos are primarily perceived as places to find sex partners and almost exclusively cater to younger generations. Platforms for targeted life partner searches include contact ads in the press, broadcasting media and television, singles' events such as parties, events and journeys as well as partner matching services. The use of these types of services requires a certain amount of commitment, demands a certain amount of effort, and can be relatively expensive while often only offering access to a comparably small circle of suitable partners.

Just as it did with chance encounters, the Internet has also greatly enhanced the realm of opportunities for targeted partner searches. In Germany alone, there are more than 2,500 different online dating sites, partner matching services, sex contact platforms ("adult dating") as well as

group-specific platforms (single parents, believing Christians, singles from the Gothic scene, men looking for wives from Eastern Europe or Asia, etc.).

Some services are advert-financed and thus free of charge for users (*finya.de*, *single.de*), most platforms, however, sell subscriptions at a fee. Payable services generally offer basic membership with limited user rights and premium membership with full user rights, with costs ranging from 10 to 30 euros per month. Online dating has established itself as one of the most successful and expanding business areas on the Internet. In 2008, in Germany alone, targeted online partner search sites had a turnover of 164 million euros. Approximately half of the amount went to dating sites (48%), followed by partner matching services (32%), adult dating (23%) and niche service providers (8%) (PFLITSCH/WIECHERS 2009).

In Germany, about 7 million individuals log on to dating portals every month. Most of these are among the 11 million singles in Germany, but there are also people on these sites who are in committed relationships or who are married. Some are openly on the lookout for affairs or relationships on the side (e.g. via affair dating agencies) while others present themselves as singles. Another group is comprised of couples looking for man friends or swinger partners. Finally, there is a vast number of "inactive members" who once registered for fun or out of boredom, but do not participate in any dating activities. Due to the extensive proliferation of online dating portals, participants are no longer stigmatised as particularly unsociable, unattractive or generally incompetent. In actual fact, they differ from the general population only insofar as they are generally intensive Internet users, younger, more often single, better educated and – particularly those who use the more expensive services – higher earners.

On online dating sites, participants create an online profile under a pseudonym, and use this profile to present themselves to other partner-seekers by stating facts about themselves as well as their expectations regarding future

Tab. 2

Selection of the largest, primarily heterosexual portals in Germany

| <i>Heterosexual portals in Germany</i> | <i>Number of members</i> | <i>Gender ratio (M:F)</i> |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Dating sites</i> | | |
| Friendscout24.de | 6,000,000 | 57 : 43 |
| Neu.de | 5,000,000 | 59 : 41 |
| iLove.de | 5,000,000 | 59 : 41 |
| Finya.de (free) | 500,000 | 50 : 50 |
| <i>Matching services</i> | | |
| Parship.de | 5,000,000 | 49 : 51 |
| B2.de | 2,000,000 | 43 : 57 |
| Elitepartner.de | 1,500,000 | 46 : 54 |
| <i>Adult dating</i> | | |
| Poppen.de | 2,000,000 | |
| AdultFriendFinder.com | 2,000,000 | |

Source: Figures provided by the portal operators and the comparison site www.singleboersen-vergleich.de (accessed: July 2009)

partners and their prospective relationship together. These online profiles are generally much more inclusive and revealing than traditional contact ads in the print media. They can be enhanced with photos which can either be made visible to all registered users or only made accessible to selected members. In the domain of adult dating, the online profiles often provide detailed information regarding sexual preferences and contain erotic photos.

The leading online dating sites targeting heterosexuals (see Table 2) contain millions of online profiles which users can browse through according to search criteria such as gender, place of residence, age, height or interests. If users discover an interesting profile, then they can leave a message and contact the person via the Internet. This occurs anonymously in the first stage, i.e. by use of an online pseudonym. It is even possible to initiate a nonverbal greeting. The user sees, for example, that someone has clicked on his or her profile and can then click on the other person's profile in return. Thus, similar to eye contact, mutual interest is signalled without the use of words. Some platforms offer the option of sending virtual roses or kisses. Online dating sites allow users to quickly, comfortably and discreetly contact dozens of potential partners directly.

Whether an actual relationship develops from one of these contact requests depends on many factors. A partner search cannot work "by mouse click" alone – not even on the Internet – because it requires social skill and positive self portrayal in order to win over the other person. With regard to the design of the online profiles, the person's chances increase if he or she uploads appealing photos in line with conventional beauty norms and compiles a telling, original text. Photoless and overly brief or clichéd profiles are not well received. Good looks, intellect, humour and friendliness are not only reflected in the online profile, but also in the subsequent contact. In general, the Mathew principle applies on the Internet, i.e. "to he who has shall be given more": Those who have good chances on the partner market anyway can further increase their success by means of online platforms.

The data regarding height, weight, age or income are often glossed over in a gender-specific manner, and particularly flattering photos are uploaded in order to ensure that the self portrayal on one's online profile generates a positive impression. Virtual pseudo identities (so-called "fakes") with completely fictitious characteristics are rarely created, because most users want to meet others face-to-face at some stage. Contrary to casual encounters on the Internet, which sometimes develop over weeks and months with users engaging in intensive online communication with a specific person, users of online dating sites are much quicker and more pragmatic when it comes to contact initiation and switching to other communication media. Many participants are simultaneously registered with several portals, cultivate numerous contacts to various possible dating partners in parallel, and aim to move on to telephone communication and face-to-face meetings relatively quickly in order to find out whether the chemistry works. This is because the litmus test for online partner searches is and always will be the impression gained at the first meeting in person. The diversity of contacts allows for and calls for stringent and quick selection, because one otherwise has to invest too much time. As soon as users become bored, annoyed or otherwise irritated by their potential partner in the run-up or follow-up of a date, they simply break off contact without comment.

Others do exactly the same, which means that online dating often alternates between enthusiastic initial contacts and unexpected ruptures in communication.

On some online contact sites and in the realm of adult dating, the period between the initial online contact and the real life meeting hardly bears any resemblance to the conventional method of computer-guided getting-to-know-each-another through intimate chats or e-mail exchanges. Users simply agree a meeting at short notice if they like each other's photos and mutual (sexual) preferences. Individuals who want to have fun do not simply go to the pub, bar, disco or other "in" location to meet someone. Instead, they search for someone on the Internet with a suitable profile in advance and agree a meeting with this person in a public place. The Internet has become a preferred cruising site among gay men of all age groups. For instance, *Gayromeo.de*, with almost one million members, has been dubbed the "gay registration office" because almost every gay person has created a profile on this site. The comfort and efficiency of online cruising has led both homosexual and heterosexual Internet users to launch spontaneous sex partner searches.

Online partner matching services for heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual target groups (e.g. *gay-parship.de* with 300,000 members), do not leave the searching to the users, but rather use comprehensive personality tests to make partner recommendations. This automatic "matching" aims to initiate contacts between psychologically compatible partners. All online partner matching services use their own personality tests devised by psychologists. However, the validity of such personality tests has yet to be demonstrated in a published scientific study. Online partner matching services are generally somewhat more expensive than online dating sites. They require users to fill in a personality test of several pages and are generally considered to be more serious. It is assumed that there are more individuals seriously searching for partners in online partner matching services than in dating sites, which are often simply used for purely sexual relationships. In comparison to traditional partner matching services (with fees amounting to several thousand euros and very small pool of members), online partner matching services are much cheaper and offer significantly larger client bases. Many partner-seekers nevertheless prefer to register with dating sites in which they themselves can carry out the search. In both cases there is a danger that potential suitable partners are eliminated from the outset on the basis of statistical data (e.g. matching points in a personality test, one's own age or height specifications in the search field).

Gender-specific role expectations are important on heterosexual dating sites. Men are generally expected to take the first step. Correspondingly, many men complain about the "arrogance" or "rudeness" of the women who do not reply to their contact requests. In turn, many women object to the fact that they are indiscriminately contacted by men. Seen in this light, it is clear that a sporty thirty-year-old woman looking for a similar-aged life partner will hardly feel compelled to reply to an overweight fifty-year-old father asking whether she would like to exchange nude photos. The fact that there is generally a female surplus on the partner matching portals and a male surplus on the erotic portals is also in line with traditional gender roles (see Table 2). If compatible partners do find one another and enjoy one another's company during the first face-to-face meetings, then the rest of the dating and courting process takes place in a

Iris (51):

My husband left me at the beginning of the year. He moved out within two weeks – after almost 10 years of marriage and a 17-year relationship... We have a child together as well. On a whim, I registered on an Internet dating site one evening and then got myself into a situation which I am now losing control of ...

While chatting on the dating site, I became closely acquainted with a married man (let's call him Mr. A). We enjoyed several wonderful evenings in the chat room, very sex-focused – to put it mildly.

I found this exciting, it was a new experience. I came across an erotic portal while surfing on the Internet and then actually registered. This portal is all about sex contacts, dates and the like. I then started flirting with men there, still with the inner notion of “just wanting to have virtual fun”, and I soon arranged a date with a particular man (Mr. B). It came as it had to come: we spent an exciting night together. Since then, hardly a day goes by without us chatting or sending each other text messages.

Since just over a week, there is also Mr. C ... who is also an Internet contact from a dating site. Very interesting, friendly, good looking – he also has a child and is looking for a new partnership.

And then there are Sirs D-Z ;-) who are looking for contacts and more on the erotic platform. I haven't logged onto this site for a few days because I would otherwise be bombarded by mails.

And if you now think that I am a sex-obsessed vamp, you are mistaken. I am a completely normal woman. I am inconspicuous in real life, was a respectable wife and am currently being overrun by my own transformation. I enjoy being desired, I enjoy the bodily closeness, I am playing with fire... But gradually, I am getting the feeling that I cannot control the situation any more. An affair with a married man? What if my sex date wants more? Am I ready to get involved with a possible new partner?

similar way to the beginnings of traditional offline relationships. In contrast to couples who have got to know one another on the Internet by chance, users who employ targeted online partner search tools are rarely confronted by large geographical distances, because they consider the place of residence right from the outset when formulating their search and selection criteria.

Instead, online daters are faced with a different challenge, i.e. uniting the challenges of an active partner search with those of relationship initiation. Someone who halts his or her partner search after a promising date to fully concentrate on the new potential partner may be annoyed and upset if the person in question continues his or her activities on the dating platform.

There are no systematic comparisons of the success ratios of targeted offline and online partner searches. A represen-

tative study from the USA showed that 43% of all singles who use online dating sites (7 million) had face-to-face dates with partners that they met there and 17% had entered a committed relationship or marriage with an online date (MADDEN/LENHART 2006 p. ii)

Opportunities and risks of online partner selection

Today, economic and social constraints play an ever decreasing role in partner selection and bonding. The Internet supports this societal trend towards individualisation and the ambivalence this brings. No longer being bound to conventional marriages of convenience or necessity means that individuals have the opportunity to manage their own lives in a more self-determined manner and to be together with partners who are compatible with them. This compatibility may vary from one stage of life to another. An optimistic interpretation of this change in love relationships would state how relationships of convenience have given way to pure relationships, which are conducted for their own sake on the basis of mutual affection and affinity (see “pure relationships” according to ANTHONY GIDDENS 1991). By radically expanding the pool of available partners, the Internet increases the chances of individuals finding someone personally compatible – whom one would otherwise never have encountered in one's restricted personal environment. This particularly applies to groups of people with specific interests, needs or preferences, who are able to contact one another directly via the Internet, but who would often remain isolated offline. In addition to facilitating committed relationships, the Internet also facilitates the initiation of discreet sexual relationships.

On the other hand, the freedom to choose and then end one's relationships at will entails the risks associated with a loss of feelings of safety, trust and security. A pessimistic analysis of today's love relations would note how sustainable, reliable attachments are being increasingly replaced by exchangeable, fleeting relationships (cf. “liquid love” according to BAUMANN 2003). If, at any given time, millions of individuals who are on the look out for new contacts are only a mouse click away, then one may be less willing to commit to a single binding and monogamous relationship, and may be quicker to end it if relationship problems arise (the same of course also applies to one's partner). The new abundance of alternatives could therefore endanger the stability of attachments (GESER/BÜHLER 2006).

To the extent that couple formation is increasingly the result of targeted partner searches among a vast offer of candidates, the economic market principle in the market for partners and marriages is becoming more apparent and prominent. Partner selection thus becomes a more rational procedure, with the entry of optimal search criteria into the partner databases being the key skill. On the other hand, with such an overabundance of competition, it becomes all the more apparent that one has to present and sell oneself as well as possible to prevent being “clicked away” or “deleted” in favour of a more attractive online contact. Browsing through dating portals can convey the luxurious impression of having abundant, fantastic options. The sheer volume and fast pace of online contacts means that they really do have to be well-managed. This can also lead to hectic and addiction-like overuse, fatigue, routinisation and cynicism.

From a psychological perspective, success and failure are not only decided through attractiveness, but particularly through the individual's expectations and behaviour when dealing with online contacts. Social competence can help people successfully initiate online contacts. Part of this process is to expect typical disruptions to the process and not to take these personally. Examples of such complications include the online flirt holding off on the desired date, the date going disappointingly wrong, or the date suddenly disappearing after a pleasant date because he or she is focusing on other dating contacts. These risks of disappointment and emotional pain are generally much more real than the danger of getting caught up with criminals, which is starkly exaggerated by the media. However, it is not only singles that face the challenge of balancing the opportunities and risks of online partner searching. Couples also have to increasingly renegotiate their "rules of the game" regarding online contacts – especially with respect to their concept of faithfulness.

The future of online partner selection

In the future, ever more people will use the Internet ever more frequently during their everyday lives. This will increase the probability for chance online encounters between prospective partners. Moreover, online exchanges and offline dating will increasingly go hand in hand. An initial encounter at the disco, on holiday or at a party – which earlier would have simply run cold – is now often followed up with online chats, mails, text messages, and communication via Skype – thus deepening contact with the person in question. Using the search engine *Google*, participants learn about the past and current life situation of their present flirt partner.

At the same time, targeted online partner searching will further increase in popularity. At the moment, the following technical trends are apparent:

"Mobile dating": Contacts from Internet dating sites are also administered using one's mobile phone. Individuals can see which contacts are currently nearby and available for a spontaneous date.

"Video dating": More elaborate methods of communication are being developed to compliment text-based online communication during Internet flirts, such as video chats, which give a more realistic impression of the appearance and charisma of a person than photos.

"Virtual dating": In order to prevent the online getting-to-know-each-other process being reduced to reciprocal questioning, participants are able to immerse themselves in graphical environments as avatars and undertake an activity together, such as going for a walk, playing a game or visiting an exhibition (*www.omnidate.com*).

"Social dating": In this form of dating, individuals are supported by their social network in their online partner search. Individuals can have acquaintances "introduce" them to or "set them up" with prospective partners (*www.engage.com*).

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Relationship length and passion

776 women and men aged 30, 45 and 60 were surveyed in this study which examined the development of sexual activity over the course of relationships. The study analysed changes in the couples' sexuality and the emotional quality of the relationships.

What has a greater influence on a couple's sexual activity, the participants' age or the length of the relationship? Clearly it is the length of their relationship, at least up to the age of 50 or 60 (BOZON 1998, 2001; SCHMIDT et al. 2006). Figure 1 presents the correlations as shown in our interview study on men and women aged 30, 45 and 60 from large cities¹.

- In all age groups, the frequency of monthly sexual intercourse² declines notably with the length of the relationship. This means that couples who have just got together sleep with one another more often than those who have been together for a longer period, no matter whether they are 30 or 60 years old.
- People aged 30, 45 and 60 who have been in relationships of similar length only show slight (and statistically insignificant) differences in the frequency with which they sleep with one another.

Put differently and more succinctly, a 60-year-old woman who has been together with her partner for two years is – measured by the frequency of sexual intercourse – sexually more active than a 30 year old man who has been in a relationship for 10 years.

The duration of a relationship, therefore, has a notable effect on a couple's sexuality. Figure 2 shows this correlation independent of age. The decline of sexual activity as the length of a relationship increases therefore does not present a continuous or linear phenomenon. There is a notable decline in coitus frequency after three to five years in a relationship. After the 10th year, however, a couple's sexuality remains surprisingly stable over the next 20 to 25 years. The chart shows average trends – the “mainstream” so to speak. Individual cases may show significant variation.

¹ A total of 776 women and men were interviewed using standardised interviews. They were randomly selected from the registration offices of Hamburg and Leipzig, according to the years of birth (1942, 1957 and 1972). The questions asked related to their relationship and sex lives and to their current committed relationship. For details cf. Schmidt et al. 2006

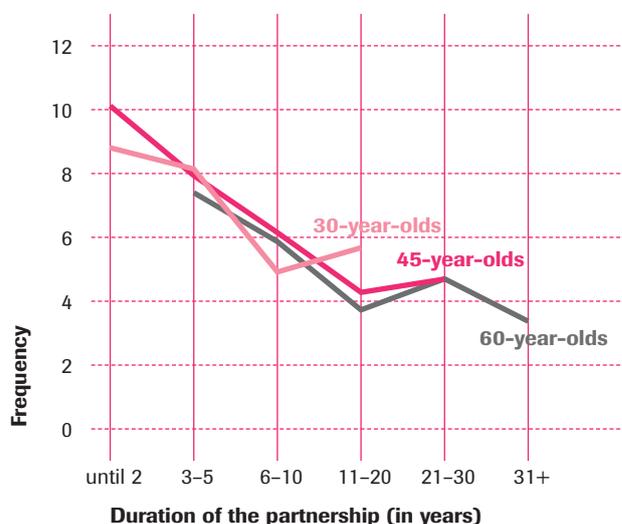
² The questions posed concerned the frequency of sex over the last 4 weeks. Heterosexual women and men largely equate “having sex” with “having coitus”; 95% of the sexual encounters included coitus.

Approaches to explaining the development of sexual activity

One might ask two questions in relation to these outcomes: Why do long-standing couples do “it” so rarely? This question defines the reduced activity of these couples in long-standing relationships as in need of explanation and their sexuality as somehow deficient, while the high frequency of those freshly in love is generally seen as desirable. The most frequent answers to this question all seem thoroughly plausible: Fading erotic excitement because of habit, or due to routine, repetition or increased everyday burdens, including children. The effect of children, however, is mostly secondary, since a decline in coitus frequency over the first ten years is also found in couples without children (KLUSMANN 2000).

Fig. 1

Frequency of sexual intercourse (averages) in the last four weeks during the course of a relationship – for three age groups



Source: Schmidt/Matthiesen/Dekker/Starke 2006

The second question is posed less often, but it is important in order to arrive at answers that go beyond explanations of “habit” and “burden”. Why do new couples do “it” so often? Clearly, sexuality has a different meaning for a couple during different phases of the partnership. During the period of couple formation, in which the participants are still new to one another, sexuality offers an opportunity to experience and express closeness and togetherness in a short – yet intensive – manner, to develop an intimate relationship and to explore whether this can be achieved with this partner. Frequent sex helps to legitimise the relationship through intensive experiences and is part of the emotional vivacity which is so typical (and demanding) of this phase. Long-standing couples have already decided (for the time-being) to stay together. They have a strong feeling of attachment, a mutual history, greater security and a larger repertoire of ways to experience togetherness, commitment and wellbeing. External circumstances (living together, mutual possessions, the same social networks) and children make relationships more difficult to terminate. Frequent sex becomes less relevant or important to confirm togetherness and coupledness. However, continued sexuality, which remains present during the couple’s everyday life, remains important in defining the couple as “lovers” and to differentiate them from other close relationships. This also explains why the decline in coitus frequency plateaus after approximately 10 years of a relationship and then stabilises at an average of four to five times per month. This frequency is clearly sufficient to designate the specialness of the partnership as one between lovers.

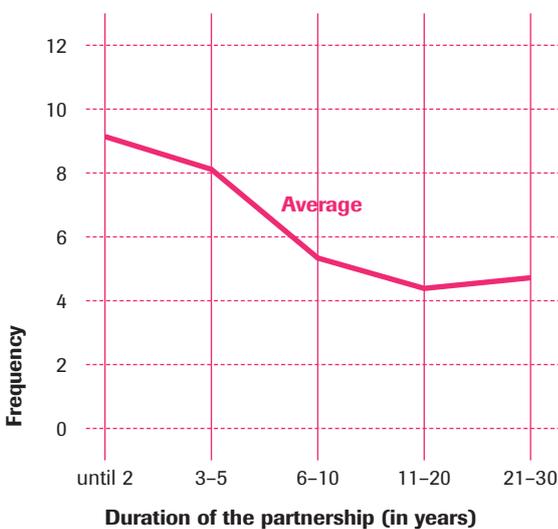
Most couples accept the situation with equanimity

Many couples nevertheless experience the decline in coitus frequency during the transition from infatuation to an established partnership as confusing, worrying and proble-

matic. They may question their relationship or their qualities as a lover – at least momentarily – until they acknowledge the fact that periods of sexual calm or boredom constitute integral parts of committed relationships. The couple can clear sex of its metaphorical meaning (“passion”, “adventure”, “hot or not”). Sex may now become more relaxed, more intimate, perhaps even more mundane and everyday. It becomes possible to decide to do “it” without being ablaze with passion, simply as a ritual to confirm the love relationship or as mutual undertaking when the participants have nothing to talk about etc. Many seem to master this transition. Sixty percent of the 30 to 45-year-old men and women who live in committed relationships stated that they or their partners occasionally had “too little desire” for sex during the past year. However, only every tenth person said that they were distressed or very distressed by this lack of passion. Most accept these instances with equanimity. Presumably, one reason for this is that a decline in frequency can coincide with a new quality of sex. “We lost the overflowing emotionality, the unknown, butterflies in your stomach” said a 45-year-old woman in our study who has been in a committed relationship with a man for 24 years, “but we know each

Fig. 2

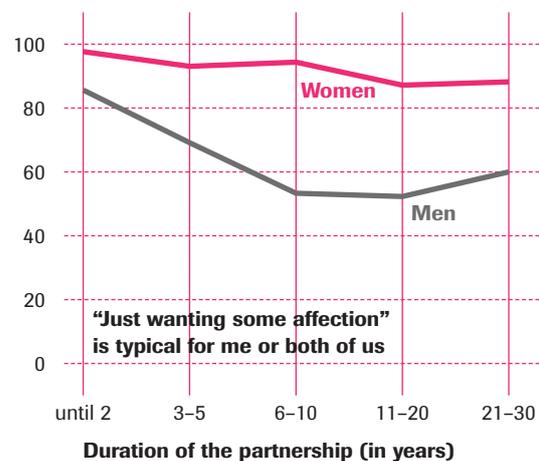
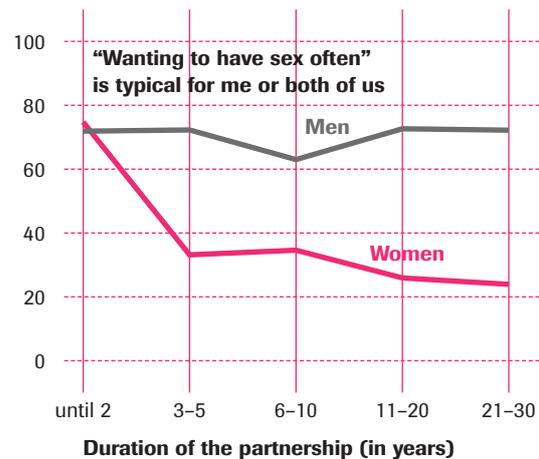
Frequency of sexual intercourse in the last four weeks (average) during the course of a relationship



Source: Schmidt/Matthiesen/Dekker/Starke 2006

Fig. 3

The desire for sex and affection during the course of relationships for men and women (in %)



Source: Schmidt/Matthiesen/Dekker/Starke 2006

| Tab. 1 Change in emotionality during established relationships* | | |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Lost</i> | <i>Gained</i> | <i>Interviewee</i> |
| "The tingling sensation" | "Deep sense of trust and security" | 30-year-old man from Hamburg in a committed relationship for 7 years |
| "Curiosity, spontaneity, the immediate feeling of infatuation, the excitement of novelty" | "Trust and familiarity, security, deeper form of love" | 30-year-old man from Hamburg in a committed relationship for 9 years |
| "I have lost the butterflies in my stomach, the desire to experience something new with regard to sex" | "A very well-functioning relationship in which one feels at ease" | 30-year-old woman from Leipzig in a committed relationship for 12 years |
| "The tingling sensation, spontaneous sex, attentiveness towards the other" | "Reliability, knowing and trusting one another more, having the heart to say something, openness, optimism" | 30-year-old woman from Hamburg in a committed relationship for 11 years |
| "Spontaneity, carefreeness, belief that everything is possible, infatuation has declined" | "Reliability, trust in one another, a feeling of security arising from this, affection, fondness towards each other" | 45-year-old man from Hamburg in a committed relationship for 13 years |
| "Spontaneity, routine has increased due to everyday life" | "trust, open sexuality, that you talk about it" | 45-year-old man from Leipzig in a committed relationship for 25 years |
| "Sexuality is lost, so is infatuation, butterflies in stomach" | "having a great partner, experiencing a balance, children, a lot of trust, affection, a feeling of being at home" | 45-year-old woman from Hamburg in a committed relationship for 17 years |
| "The overflowing emotionality, the unknown, butterflies in your stomach" | "We know each other better, are able to react more sensitively to each other, show more consideration, experience deeper sexuality" | 45-year-old woman from Leipzig in a committed relationship for 24 years |
| "Habit creeps in, one's curiosity for one another gets lost" | "Security, familiarity with one another" | 60-year-old man from Hamburg in a committed relationship for 26 years |
| "Extensive sexuality, carefreeness, wild passion, no more spontaneous kicks, not as exciting" | "Love, trust, knowing one another. More knowledge of the needs of the other, no orgasm problems because one knows how to achieve mutual sexual satisfaction" | 60-year-old man from Leipzig in a committed relationship for 30 years |
| "The fire which was ablaze at the beginning, the novelty is gone, spontaneity, a lot has become routine" | "Trust, self confidence, can be myself, have lost my fear of abandonment" | 60-year-old woman from Hamburg in a committed relationship for 8 years |
| "Butterflies in one's stomach, the surprises, routine has crept in" | "Calm, sense of security, satisfaction, happiness, gratitude" | 60-year-old woman from Hamburg in a committed relationship for 37 years |
| * Sample responses to the question: "In relationships it can happen that participants lose something but gain something else. What have you lost in your relationship?" "And what have you gained in your relationship?" Only applied to interviewees who were living in a committed relationship for 6 years or longer. | | |
| Source: Schmidt/Matthiesen/Dekker/Starke 2006 | | |

other better now, are able to react more sensitively to each other, experience more openness in our sexuality and enjoy deeper sexuality." Table 1 presents further examples from the "lost-and-gained balance sheet".

Division of labour in relationships

Sexual intercourse is a mutual activity for a couple and arises from a joint decision by both partners. If there is a difference in the sexual appetite of each partner, then one of them asserts himself (or herself) or they make compromises. In times before the gender debate (in the 1970s), i.e. under "patriarchal" conditions, it was usually the men who got their way. Today, in accordance with the ideal of reciprocal sexuality, in which sex is only considered acceptable if both participants want it and both benefit from it, the person with the

smaller sexual appetite generally asserts himself (or herself) (SCHMIDT 1998; CLEMENT 2004). The coitus frequencies that we have hitherto considered are, in either case, a joint product of the couple. The extent to which they correspond to the wishes of the man or woman cannot be interpreted from the data. For this reason, it is important to consider the course of sexual desire and other intimate wishes, e.g. for affection or non-genital intimacy for both partners. Figure 3 shows that at the beginning of a relationship, during the infatuation phase, both man and woman have a large appetite for a lot of sex and wish to experience a great deal of tender affection with one another. After this, there is a gender-specific division of sexual and affectionate desires. In established relationships, men's sexual appetite is greater than that of their female partners, while the desire for affection, on the other hand, is greater for women than for their male partners. This sounds like a tale from the

museum of gender stereotypes, yet other studies also arrive at the same conclusion (BOZON 2001) – and this even applies to young and well-educated men and women with reduced gender role clichés (KLUSMANN 2000). All studies only represent statistical trends, which in turn depict the situation for a “typical” heterosexual couple. There are of course couples which maintain reciprocity of desire and (somewhat more seldom) couples where the man is responsible for affection and the woman responsible for sex.

During the course of partnerships, a division of labour therefore develops between the partners. One (usually the man) takes on the responsibility for sex and makes sure that the couple does not forget this element of their relationship. The other (usually the woman) takes on the responsibility for non-sexual intimacy and reminds the couple of the importance of affection and loving communication. This division probably also takes place with established gay and lesbian couples, with the difference being that this allocation is not structured pursuant to gender. This division of labour in terms of sexual and non-sexual intimacy that takes place between the partners in a couple is probably functional and useful in ensuring that both of these important areas of a partnership are respected and kept alive. We should therefore not complain about such an imbalance, but rather view it as a stimulator for the vitality of the relationship. At the same time, this imbalance is also always precarious because the arrangement of the division of labour can derail entirely, with the wishes for affection and sex becoming increasingly one-sided – so that one partner demands offensively yet in vain, while the other defensively stands with his or her back to the wall and loses contact with his or her own desires. The results are the symptoms of the passionless couple which sings a typical lament: my husband (rarer: my wife) always wants to have sex – my wife (rarer: my husband) never wants to have sex. This type of couple will only enjoy sleeping with one another again if both parties manage to reduce the one-sidedness of the allocation of defensive and offensive roles.

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When Three Threatens two: Must Parenthood bring down the curtain of Romance?

Sexual disorders are a prevalent phenomenon with couples who become parents. Living with very small children is stressful – often to the point of exhaustion. This article, however, will discuss the underlying causes: it examines cultural and psychological patterns that enhance sexual lethargy and ways for couples to identify and overcome these obstacles.

Sex makes babies, and babies spell erotic disaster in couples. It is ironic that the child, the embodiment of the couple's love, so often threatens the very romance that brought that child into being. Why does parenthood so often deliver such a fatal blow?

The transition from two to three is one of the most profound challenges a couple will ever face. It takes time – time measured in years, not weeks – to find our bearings in this brave new world. Having a baby is a psychological revolution that changes our relation to almost everything and everyone. Priorities shift, roles are redefined, and the balance between freedom and responsibility undergoes a massive overhaul.

Eventually, most of us come to recognize ourselves again within this new context of family. For some of us, this is when romance starts to work its way back into the fabric of our lives. We remember that sex is fun; it makes us feel good, and it makes us feel closer. Yet, it's easy to forget that before we were parents, we were lovers. While some couples gravitate toward one another again, others slowly wander off on a path of mutual estrangement. Reclaiming erotic intimacy is not always easy.

We complain that we are too tired, too busy and stressed. Incidentally, we are no less busy when we fall in love, and we are never tired when we are consumed by passion. The same parent who falls asleep at 20h30 while reading bedtime stories, is suddenly filled with energy when bathing in the thralls of an affair.

It seems to me that in focusing almost exclusively on our overscheduled lives that are surely more stressful than they should be, we address only the most superficial reasons for the malaise so many are feeling, I think there is more to the story.

How we got there?

The institution of marriage has undergone an extreme makeover in the last century. Marriage has become a romantic arrangement where commitments are built on love. Our desiderata still include everything the traditional family was meant to provide – security, children, property, respectability – but now we also want our partner to be our best friend, our

trusted confidante and our passionate lover to boot. And we live twice as long. Romance and passion are the center of the marital plot. Not only do we have this endless list of expectations, which have exceeded the maximum allowance, but on top of it we want to be happy.

Today, our sexuality is a part of who we are, and no longer merely something we do. It has become a central feature of intimate relationships, and sexual satisfaction, we believe is our due. For the first time in history, we have sex not because we want eight kids or because it's the woman's marital duty; today, in the west, sex is primarily rooted in desire.

So why is it that our erotic connection with our partner winds up so demoted when we become a family? Why does sex so often remain at the bottom of the "to do" list? Does it really matter if the dishes aren't done, or is there something more beneath our mysterious willingness to forego sex? Perhaps there is something specific about our modern culture that reinforces the erotic muting of moms and dads. Or perhaps eroticism in the context of family is simply too difficult for anyone to embrace.

Allow me to clarify an important distinction. It isn't sex, the act that I am looking at, neither do I concern myself with the mechanics, the performance, or the frequency of sex. I want to move away from the over focus on the statistical approach to sexuality, obsessed with measurable results: how often, how long, how many, how hard? When couples complain about the listlessness of their sex lives, they sometimes want more sex, but they always want better sex. They want to recapture a quality of vibrancy and vitality. They want to feel the sense connection, renewal and playfulness that sex with their beloved used to afford them.

If sex is the pivot in the geometry of passion, eroticism is sexuality transformed by our imagination, the poetics of sex. It puts us in touch with our aliveness, our freedom and our desires. All these aspects of our lives which are an antidote to death. It is this mystical meaning of eroticism I embrace not just the narrow definition of sex that modernity has assigned to it.

Reconciling the erotic and the domestic?

We all share a fundamental need for security. We seek safety and predictability which propel us toward committed relationships, but we have an equally strong need for adventure and excitement. We relish the comfort of committed love, but we want both, the cosiness and the edge, familiarity and novelty.

When Nadia and Johann come to see me, their opening line goes: We love each other very much, but we have no sex. They describe a relationship as open and loving, yet sexually dull and they tell me of the paradox between their need for security and predictability, and their quest for excitement and mystery.

Safety and stability take on a whole new meaning when children enter the picture. For children to feel confident enough to go out into the world and explore on their own, they need a secure base. Parenthood demands that we become steady, dependable, and responsible. We plant ourselves firmly on the ground so that our kids may learn to fly.

We do it for our kids, but we also do it for ourselves. Facing the great unknown of parenthood, we try to establish as much security as we can. We seek to contain the unpredictable by creating structure.. In the process we cast aside what is frivolous, immature, irresponsible, reckless, excessive and unproductive, for these clash with the task at hand: building family. "I got rid of my motorcycle when Jimmy was born. I'm not allowed to die in a bike crash anymore." "No partying 'til 5a.m. for me anymore, not when I have to get up at 5:30 in the morning – 6:15 when the baby's feeling generous."

Family life flourishes in an atmosphere of comfort and consistency. Yet unpredictability, spontaneity, and risk are precisely where eroticism resides. Eros is a force that doesn't like to be constrained. When it settles into repetition, habit, or rules, it touches its death. IN effect, what eroticism thrives on, family life defends against.

Parenthood Inc.

Many of us become so immersed in our role as parents we become unable to break free, even when we might. "I knew we were in trouble when I couldn't even think about having sex until all the toys were put away," my patient Nadia reluctantly admits. "And then there are the dishes, the laundry, the bills, the dog. The list never ends. The chores always seem to win out, and intimacy between Johann and me gets lost in the shuffle. If someone were to ask me, 'What would you rather do, wash the laundry, or make love to your husband?' of course I would pick sex. But in real life? I push Johann away and grab that mop."

It's easy to disparage laundry, but I have met many mothers who like Nadia resent cleaning, even while they feel compelled to pursue the tidy household as an icon of successful motherhood. They find themselves irresistibly drawn to cleanliness, as if order on the outside can bring peace on the inside. And, to some extent, it does. As odious as her To Do list might be, there is something about getting things done that gives mothers a sense of control and efficacy: Enough granola bars to last three weeks of snack-time. Clean closets, shoes in the next two sizes up. These are activities with immediate and measurable results, far more manageable than the open-endedness and terrors of child-rearing.

"With a five year old and a two year old, I'm on mother duty 24/7 says Nadia. "If I have any time left, I just want it for myself. When my boyfriend approaches me, it feels like one more person wanting something from me. I know that's not his intention, but it's how I feel. I don't have anything left to give."

Do you miss the connection, too?" I ask her. She shrugs. "Not really. I keep thinking that it will come back, but I can't say I miss it."

Nadia is as a woman who's so constantly involved in caring for other, that when her husband initiates sex, she confuses offer and demand. She fails to see his advances as an invitation, and responds as if it is one more obligation. Instead of seeing a man, she reacts to him as if he is one more child who needs something from her. "I already have two children, I don't need a third one." She fails to see that his wish for a sexual connection is natural, that his pursuit is not only after her, but also for the couple. Unfortunately Johann has fallen into a common trap where invitation is rapidly turning into monitoring. It goes like this: "I let you sleep this morning, made breakfast for the kids, took them to the park, so you could go to yoga, you should feel better now, may be tonight I can get some. That of course, is a recipe for disaster.

Eros Redirected

Nadia's plight echoes many women. "After a day taking care of children, I just want to be left alone, I have nothing left to give.

In the physicality between mother and child lies a multitude of sensuous experiences. We caress their silky skin, we kiss, we cradle, we rock. We nibble their toes, they touch our faces, we lick their fingers, let them bite us when they're teething. We are captivated by them, and can stare at them for hours. When they devour us with those big eyes, we are besotted, and so are they.

This blissful fusion bears a striking resemblance to the physical connection between lovers. In fact, when Nadia describes the early rapture of her relationship with Johann – lingering gazes, weekends in bed, baby talk, toe-nibbling – the echoes are unmistakable. When she says, "At the end of the day, I have nothing left to give," I believe her. But I also have come to believe that, at the end of the day, there may be nothing more she needs.

Couples frequently make the point: "Sex after kids, you must be kidding." If we think of eroticism not as sex per se, but as a vibrant, creative energy, then we see families where the erotic pulse is alive and well, but it is channeled to the kids: Parents on the constant look out for new things to do with their kids – art projects, adventure parks, and puppet shows, while they make do with the tried and true. Same date each Saturday night: movie and restaurant. Children dressed in the latest fashion, but parents who walk around in clothes who's original color you can no longer recognize. Kids get languorous hugs, while adults survive on a diet of quick pecks. Parental love throbs with vitality, and the playful energy does not disappear, but it all takes place in relation to the children. They are the adventure now.

The transition to parenthood demands a redistribution of resources, both emotional and material. Playfulness, mystery, novelty, imagination, and anticipation are all the key ingredients of the erotic experience.

They enrich children's lives but at some point it is of vital importance to bring some of that energy back to the couple.

Nadia is consumed by motherhood, and she's quick to dismiss the inherent value of Johann sexual advances. The way I see it, Johann provides a consistent reminder that erotic intimacy matters.

What I see over and over is that the person who takes on the role of primary caretaker almost always undergoes changes similar to Nadia's: a total immersion in the lives and rhythms of the children, a loss of self, and a greater difficulty extricating him or herself from the chores (a compulsion which is simultaneously frustrating and grounding).

The role of the more autonomous parent is to help the primary caregiver disengage from the kids and reallocate energy to the couple. "Leave the toys for now, nobody is going to give you a medal, go take a nap." "You don't have to make these crepes from scratch, you've done enough today." "The kids are playing nicely together in the garden, let's sit down for ten minutes and share a glass of wine before they come back." There is a lot of merit to this systemic reorganization by which one parent is the frontline parent and the other, the keeper of the flame. It's a different approach to the traditional "division of labor," one which emphasizes shared responsibility and mutuality and honors the interdependent agency of both partners. My work with gay and lesbian couples has led me to recognize that this dynamic is replicated whenever one parent takes charge of the kids, gender notwithstanding.

With Johann, and through him, Nadia potentially can begin to disentangle from the symbiotic bond with her children and transfer some of her energy back to herself and her relationship. When the father reaches out to the mother, and the mother acknowledges, redirecting her attention, it serves to rebalance the entire family. Boundaries get drawn and new zoning regulations get put in place delineating areas that are adult only. Time, resources, playfulness, and fun are redistributed, and libido is rescued from forced retirement.

The Cult Status of Children

Nadia's plight is not a mere idiosyncrasy of her mothering style. It reflects the unprecedented child centrality that has swept through the west in recent years. Children used to be an economic asset, now they are an economic drain. Before they provided work, today they give us meaning. We have children vested with sentimental idealization and a culture of child-rearing that demands considerable emotional and material resources. But this unprecedented child-centrality is unfolding against the backdrop of romanticism that underscores modern marriage. Not only do we want to be perfect parents, to give our children everything, we also want our marital relationships to be happy, fulfilled, sexually exciting, and emotionally intimate.

Indeed, in our culture the survival of the family depends on the happiness of the couple. Cultivating the ideal relationship requires care and attention, and this competes directly with the "full-contact" parenting many of us embrace. Utopian romance butts heads with the realities of family life.

Many of the couples I see have stopped factoring their own needs. Simply put, they have not carved out the time and space they need to unwind and replenish, either as individuals or as a couple. No longer focused on one another, they

have turned to the children to compensate for what they are missing. I have noticed over the years that child-centrality isn't just a matter of lifestyle. It is sometimes an emotional configuration as well. Children are indeed a source of nurturance for adults. Their unconditional love and utter devotion infuse our lives with a heightened sense of meaning. The problem arises when we turn to them for what we no longer get from each other: a sense that we're special, that we matter, that we're not alone. When we transfer these adult emotional needs onto our children, we are placing too big a burden on them. In order to feel safe, kids need to know that there are limits to their omnipotence, and to what is surreptitiously asked of them. They need us to have our own loving relationship(s), in whatever form they take. When we are emotionally and sexually satisfied (at least reasonably so, let's not get carried away here), we allow our children to experience their own independence with freedom and support. If Johann and Nadia are going to get their groove back, they need to free themselves from the disproportionate focus on their kids, both emotionally and practically. On the extensive list of things the children's needs, parents who have sex should feature as one of them.

As much as spontaneity is desirable, the reality of family life demands planning. Couples without kids can initiate sex on a whim, but parents need to be more practical. Be it a regular date night, a weekend away every few months, or an extra half-hour in the car, what matters is that the couple cordons off erotic territory for themselves. The essence of the erotic space is that they meet not as responsible citizens, partners in the family management company or as mom and Dad, but as partners wishing for connection, in search of pleasure. I mean any kind of pleasure. What will occur in that space is open-ended, but the space itself is marked by intentionality. Sex can happen, but it need not happen.

Committed sex is premeditated sex. It is willful and intentional. Planning can seem prosaic, but intentionality conveys value. When you plan for sex, what you're really doing is affirming your erotic bond. It's what you did when you were dating. Think of it as prolonged foreplay – from twenty minutes to two days."

Planning has proven to be most useful for Nadia. "I need to go out. I want food that someone else has cooked, on dishes that someone else is going to wash. When we go out, we talk, we kiss, we joke. We can finish a sentence without being interrupted. He pays attention to me, and it makes me feel sexy." Not only do the rendezvous help maintain the emotional connection with Johann, they also help her make the transition from full-time mom to lover.

Being other directed, attentive to the needs of the family, and defined by caretaking makes it hard for her to retrieve the woman from behind the mother, to give herself the permission just to be sexual." For some, just taking off the T shirt filled with spit is enough to make the switch, others need to leave the house, either in their head or with the car.

Many women struggle to integrate sexuality and motherhood. Ours is a culture that equates maternal devotion with selflessness: self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, self-denial. They relinquish freedom and independence – both cornerstones of desire. Sexual identity changes as the result of pregnancy, childbirth, nursing and motherhood. In my work with women, we aim shift the focus from self-denial to self-awareness. We explore how to reclaim a right to pleasure, with its inherent threat of selfishness, in a way that doesn't leave them feeling like a bad mother.

Sex and Parenthood

Today we arrive at parenthood with a sexual identity that's often fully sprung. All of us benefited when sexuality was cut loose from reproduction. For baby boomers and all who have followed, parenthood throws a wrench into our liberated, self-gratifying lifestyle. The baby clash is all the more galling because we have something to compare it to. "You used to love sex," "We used to make love for hours," "I used to know how to turn you on," are laments I frequently hear. We're as flabbergasted as we are resentful when parenthood brings our fun to a screeching halt.

Both men and women face these changes, but not in the same way and certainly not equally. The liberation that so bolstered women's sexuality has yet to cross the threshold of motherhood, which has not lost the moralistic aura of sanctification it always had. The desexualization of the mother is a mainstay of traditionally patriarchal cultures, which makes the sexual invisibility of modern, Western mothers seem particularly acute. We have yet to let go of the cultural legacy that strips motherhood of its sexual components, convinced that lustfulness conflicts with maternal duty.

Despite the pervasiveness of this mindset, there are plenty of women who mount daily insurrections against the denial of eros. For them, motherhood heralds a newfound sexual confidence, a womanliness, and even the restitution of a wounded body.

Some tell me that after giving all day, nursing, carrying children, changing diapers picking up toys, and cooking, they can't wait to be yanked out of the messy hair, put the mother body to bed, and attend to their mounting desires.

Can't do "that" with the mother of my children

For every man who feels sexually abandoned when his wife becomes a mother, there is a man whose libido makes a break for it on the way home from the delivery room. He is the father who can no longer eroticize the mother of his children? The conflict evokes deep psychological roots. It feels too regressive, too incestuous, too Oedipal, to have sex with the mother of your children. The story comes in many variations, some bold, some barely noticeable. But the quintessential story of the Madonna/whore story I'd like to tell, happened in my office a few years back.

Carla and Leo had two sons 11 and 14, and it had been years since Leo could express ample sexual ardor for his wife, Carla was beginning to despair. She had tried the sexy lingerie, masturbation, affairs, but she wanted Leo to want her. I talked with Leo about the demise of his desire for his wife, and slowly we got to the root of it. "Like Robert De Niro in the movie "Analyze that" he too felt that raw, plain lustful sex is something you don't do with the woman you love and respect.

One day Carla took him y surprise. She asked: "do you want a blow job?" "yes, of course" he said. Do you want a regular or a special? She added. "A special, of course." He replied. So she delivered the heavenly pleasures and when she was finished she said: "That's going to cost you a hundred bucks. That way you'll no longer confuse me with the mother of your children. In one gesture she cleverly captured and subverted the whole dilemma: how to retrieve the lover from the mother.

Escaping the Siege of Family Life

When we become parents, and create our own family, it instantly brings back memories of the family we grew up in. To help you understand yourself, you can ponder the following questions: What was the place of sexuality in your family? Was it mentioned by its name, talked about, joked about, or just hinted at? Were boundaries violated? Was it seen as natural, pleasurable, an acknowledged stage of development? Or was it wrapped in shame and guilt? Were your parents physically affectionate with each other? Were your needs respected or did you have to continuously attend to the needs of others? Were you allowed to experience pleasure, to be happy? When did you feel most free? Was there any nudity? Sensuality?

Many people grow up learning to hide their body, their burgeoning sexuality, and their erotic reveries. Keeping our pleasures secret is a central component of our sexual socialization. We can recall the shame of getting caught as a child in a delicious moment of erotic exploration, and the disgust on the parent's face as he said, "Stop that right now." Even those of us fortunate enough to have parents who recognized that sexual play feels good are still likely to remember with a wince the admonishment to "Keep it private." It is hard to bring out in the open that which we spent years trying to hide. There are the many ways we shut ourselves down sexually in the family,

But children who see their parents at ease expressing their affection (discreetly, within appropriate boundaries) are more likely to embrace sexuality with the healthy combination of respect, responsibility, and curiosity it deserves. By censoring our sexuality, curbing our desires, or renouncing them altogether, we hand our inhibitions intact to the next generation.

Much of my work with couples involves addressing the shame and anxiety that surround people's sexuality, causing them to want to withdraw from their lovers for fear of being judged and rejected. I give permission, reduce anxiety, normalize fantasies and desires, and challenge the distortions of poor body image. Together we excavate the secrets and the silence that accompanied their sexual upbringing and confront the cultural and familial messages that block erotic expression. Therapy is a process of expanding sexuality by shedding inhibitions, encouraging physicality, and negotiating boundaries. Couples learn to dance step by step, and it takes as long as it takes.

There are so many reasons to give up on sex that those who don't are champions in their own right. The brave and determined couple who maintains an erotic connection is, above all, the couple who values it. When they sense desire in crisis, they become industrious, and make intentional, diligent attempts to resuscitate. They know that it is not children who extinguish the flame of desire, it is adults who fail to keep the spark alive.

Esther Perel



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Men today: Gender identities and behaviour patterns. Key results of a representative survey

In 2007, the social scientific research institute, Sinus Sociovision, surveyed 1,435 men on behalf of the Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ) [Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth] with respect to their concept of masculinity, their opinion on the subject of equality and their actual contribution towards housework and childcare. The following article summarises some of the central outcomes of this representative survey (cf. Wippermann et al. 2009).

Introduction

Popular diagnoses of the current period often find that while men may still have the upper hand, they are also in a crisis, often on the defensive and in search of orientation. This provokes questions such as whether today's men are confused when faced with the "new F-Class" (DORN 2006)¹ and self-confident "women on the rise" (ALLMENDINGER 2009), and whether they are simultaneously challenged to venture into the unknown and seemingly unattractive spheres of housework and childcare? Are men perhaps even deeply insecure? In the face of their expired and eroding role identity – and in spite of the many societal debates – has their search for a new concept of masculinity hitherto been in vain? Is the self-confidence of emancipated (post-) modern women provoking an identity crisis among the male gender? Is the previously "stronger sex" changing roles with the previously "weaker sex"?

These questions are very up-to-date. The answers that follow usually state that today women are self-confident, dynamic and offensively pursuing clear objectives. Men, on the other hand, are increasingly insecure, torn between several incompatible goals, and in a crisis regarding their identity (particularly in terms of gender and partnership) as well as their roles in the family, at the workplace, and in associations etc. While the path for women is successively being levelled for them to reconcile family life with career and to ensure that the still existent "glass ceiling" of professional advancement in the top management positions is shattered, men are expected to contribute more to housework and childcare, discover and show traditionally "female" attributes within themselves, and simultaneously meet their responsibility as (main) providers and keep their male attributes. The impression one gets is that women have advanced much further on their path to equal status and a holistic identity than men, who seem to still be at the beginning of this process.

However, does this discourse live up to everyday reality? It is clearly true that the self-image and life plan of men have changed. During the course of the women's movement it was not only the traditional conceptions of femininity that were deconstructed; the traditional concept of masculinity also increasingly became the focus of public discourse. This

appraisal of continuously evolving role conceptions led to talk of the "new man", who clearly distanced himself from the patriarchal role as the uncontested head of the family – as its sole provider and decision-maker. However, there is no need for a particularly powerful sociological magnifying glass to realise that the traditional conception of men has not disappeared entirely from society.

For this reason, the Sinus Institut carried out a broad empirical survey on behalf of the "equality" unit of the BMFSFJ to:

1. examine the area of tension arising from various conceptions of masculinity and the closely connected question of how men subjectively view the movement towards equality between men and women;
2. research the behavioural patterns of men with regard to household chores;
3. analyse the extent to which men's attitudes are reflected in their behaviour – specifically with regard to everyday household chores.

This article summarises several key outcomes of the representatively structured study².

- 1 "A new term has to be found for women who take new paths between feminism and their career. These are "women of class". Why not turn the tables, why not turn an innocent thought into a real concept?" writes THEA DORN in the preface to her book (the editors).
- 2 The methodical approach can only be summarised briefly here: The social-scientific reconstruction of the role and self-concepts was initially carried out through extensive, qualitative, explorative individual interviews and group workshops with men. This was followed by a quantitative, standardised representative survey, in which men were asked, among other things, which characteristics they found likable in other men. This gender likableness operates as an indicator of gender identity (knowing that gender identity is not entirely captured by this, but that it still offers enough information to point towards the role identity). The empirical analysis of behaviour patterns focused on the completion of chores in the household. The men were grouped according to whether and which chores they carried out. Both in the examination of gender identity and in the behaviour analysis, cluster analyses were able to identify four basic types. The representative samples were drawn from across the country pursuant to ADM master samples. The total population was defined as the German speaking residential population aged 18 and over in private residences.

Dominant gender identities of men today

The examination of today's dominant gender identities shows a broad spectrum of "male typologies". Based on the standardised survey, the researchers were able to identify – or quantify – four main types:

- the strong, main provider of the family (23%)
- the lifestyle macho (14%)
- the modern "new man" (32%)
- the postmodern, flexible man (31%)

The first two types continue to exhibit the traditional gender role. The more advanced types 3 and 4, however, constitute the majority of men (over 60%). They are in opposition to the traditional conception of men and present manifestations of the "new man". The typology names convey an idea of what characterises these men have. One significant finding is that the popular dichotomy of "traditional man versus modern man" is too superficial and cannot capture the complex reality of men and their development.

Table 1 offers an overview of:

- what each of the stated typologies believe constitutes a likable man or woman;
- the attitude of each typology towards equality;
- the social segments in which each typology is most prevalent.

When considering the distribution of these four basic typologies, it is surprising that the apparently traditional type of the "strong, main provider of the family" is only perceived as the role model for less than one quarter of men. It is important to note that the process of emancipation and changing role models has been underway for several decades, but that something of an "anti type", characterised here as "lifestyle macho", still exists. It would be rash to prematurely discredit these men as "relics" or "die-hards". The fact that a large group of men (14%) follow this gender identity model and the fact that not all of these are from a lower social stratum, but are also – and indeed above all – located in the higher

social segments of society (but only rarely in the centre), should cause us to contemplate the matter more seriously. It also leads to the question of what function this gender identity model has and what makes it especially attractive today.

The discourse of the "modern new man", which has recently been artificially inflated by both media and science, is by no means a chimera – and has a foundation in the reality of today's men. As promising and diffuse as this identity model may be, a third of all men show a strong orientation in this direction. This "new man", however, must be distinguished from a type which has received next to no exposure in public media and whose ownership has neither been claimed by the old or new women's movement. We named this type the "postmodern flexible" man. This title aims to convey that these men, like the "new men", have ventured on a journey, though without following the maxim that there is an unchanging self-image or rigid role pattern which must be bindingly adhered to in all everyday situations or life situations, or that the destination is predetermined.

Men in the household: behaviour patterns

The researchers identified (or quantified) various "behaviour types" regarding the division of roles with respect to household chores. Contrary to the largely equal distribution of gender identity typologies, there was a notable difference in the distribution of behaviour types (cf. Table 2).

The currently most prevalent behaviour type is "selective contribution to relieve the female partner" (49%). Here, the woman carries the main responsibility for the household, while the man carries out supporting activities. The "traditional housewife chores" generally remain untouched by this pattern. The female partners of these men are supported in the domain of leisure time activities and childcare or child rearing. These selective supporting activities are by no means spontaneous and dependant on the situation, but

| | Type 1: The strong, main provider of the family 23% | Type 2: The lifestyle macho 14% | Type 3: The modern "new" man 32% | Type 4: The postmodern flexible man 31% |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| <i>Profile of a likable man</i> | Strong, responsible man | Superior, tough, independent man | Discoverer of "soft" masculinity | Strong man with female attributes |
| <i>Profile of a likable woman</i> | Loving mother, attractive wife, competent housewife | Erotic, submissive, caring | Tough, self-confident, in employment | Self confident and goal-oriented, has rough edges |
| <i>Attitude towards equality</i> | OK up to now – but should not go no further | Doesn't matter – except that politics is for men | Openness to self-development – concerned about "harping on about principles" | Relaxed interest in new approaches |
| <i>Main milieus</i> | Traditional segment, mainstream and modern upper class | Modern lower class – but also in parts of the modern upper class | Post-material – increasingly also in the modern middle class | Experimentalists and some (postmodern) hedonists |

| | Men aged 18 years and over |
|---|----------------------------|
| Traditional delegation | 26% |
| Equal sharing of tasks | 7% |
| Selective contribution to relieve the female partner | 49% |
| Lone providers | 18% |

rather institutionalised within the partnership and family through the allocation of responsibilities and routines.

The second most common behaviour pattern is “traditional delegation” (26%). Here, the man transfers almost all of the household chores to his female partner in accordance with traditional role patterns. There are only few – yet “exclusive” – areas of commitment for the man (handiwork, technical repairs, asset management). Even young men practice a traditional division of roles – especially immediately after starting a family – even though this does not concur with their self-image and conception of a partnership.

Only 7% of men aged 18 and over carry out an equal division of labour. Within this relationship type, the “traditional housewife chores” (cooking, cleaning, washing, clearing up etc.) have become “partnership activities”, with both partners doing approximately the same amount of the work.

Another type is termed the “lone providers” (18%). This group includes men who live alone, in a shared flat or with their parents – or those who are single parents.

Relationship between self-image and behaviour

Table 3 shows which behaviour patterns are found for each male gender identity type as well as their prevalence (i.e. above or below average).

There is a strong correlation between the mental self-concept of men and their actual life in partnerships, family and the home. At the same time, there are also numerous gaps and inconsistencies, which means that one cannot infer a man’s commitment in the household from his stated gender identity.

Less surprising is the fact that an above-average amount of men in the “main provider” and “lifestyle macho” typologies delegate the housework to their female partners.

While these men with traditional male images may be far from achieving equality with regards to household chores, a relative majority of them already selectively support their partners in the household.

For the “modern new man” who confidently conceives of his male identity as advanced and visionary, the equal carrying out of the household chores in practice is far from the norm. While it is true that these men put equality into practice more often than many others, in terms of housework it is the selective support of their female partner that dominates. This group relatively often practices the delegation of housework along traditional lines – even though this is conceptionally rejected by their ideology or world-view. In this sense, many men who orient themselves in accordance with the model of the “modern new man”, are further developed in their attitudes than they are in practice.

There is a high empirical correlation between having a postmodern self-image and doing an equal share of housework. A view of the table above shows that carrying out an equal share of housework is strongly over-represented for

| Behaviour patterns in the home | Total | Identity | | | |
|--|-------|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | | The strong, main provider of family (23%) | The lifestyle macho (14%) | The modern “new” man (32%) | The postmodern flexible man (31%) |
| Traditionalist delegation to the woman | 26% | 32% | 36% | 19% | 22% |
| | 100 | 125 | 141 | 76 | 88 |
| Equal sharing of tasks | 7% | 4% | 1% | 8% | 12% |
| | 100 | 59 | 16 | 104 | 164 |
| Selective support to relieve female partner | 49% | 47% | 49% | 53% | 46% |
| | 100 | 95 | 100 | 109 | 94 |
| Lone provider | 18% | 17% | 14% | 20% | 20% |
| | 100 | 94 | 76 | 107 | 108 |

Values: Percent
 Index (Quotient from “percentage in subgroup”/“percentage in total” x 100)
 Indices show deviation from average (average = 100): index < 100 = below average; index > 100 = above-average

“postmodern flexible men”, and that this group has the highest value in comparison with others.

Conclusion

The central finding of this study is that there is no single category of “man”. The examination much rather highlights a broad field of opposing, sometimes antagonistic attitudes held by men. These range from the persistence of traditional male conceptions to “emancipation in small doses”, all the way to the unquestioned acceptance of flexible gender roles. On the one hand, men are interested in the topic of equality and sympathise with the attributes of the “new man” more enthusiastically than with the more traditional attributes of masculinity.

On the other hand, the practical, behavioural level shows that men mostly stick to a traditional division of roles. The reasons for this are clearly not to be found solely in men’s attitudes. The discourse should therefore not be considered uncoupled from the following aspects:

- a) Structural barriers, which are predominantly located in the labour market, have to be taken into account;
- b) Men hardly know of any actual positive “new man” role models which they can orient themselves towards;
- c) Women also reinforce the traditional gender image of the strong man, to whom they allocate the mandatory role of main provider, while they themselves have the choice of going to work or being housewives or a combination of both. The self-conception of many women as additional earners is a reflection and catalyst of traditional roles within a partnership.

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What keeps couples together? Love and partnership from a therapeutic perspective¹

The critical issues that lead couples to enter therapy are best understood as problems of love. Although a couple's love for one another cannot be invoked or restored through therapeutic support, couple therapy can create favourable conditions for a love relationship. Couples therapists become closer to the concerns of many couples if they pay more attention to their clients' love for one another. The following article will present various routes of appraisal and action when dealing with the subject of "love" in a therapeutic context – as well as reviewing possible pitfalls.

What keeps couples together – and is it possible to talk about it?

In our latitudes, love is the most important dimension for a couple's cohesion, for the quality of the relationship and for the partners' well-being (RIEHL-EMDE et al. 2003; SCHMIDT 2005). All age groups perceive a relationship based on love as the preferred option. It coincides with our longing for an emotional refuge and our need for a meaningful life. Marriage based on love exhibits an unbroken trail of success – even if empirical findings and couple therapy practice demonstrate a significant discrepancy between the desire for a love relationship and the reality thereof. The reasons for this are manifold. They also lie in the nature of a love relationship itself, the maintenance of which is considered a difficult – if not the most difficult – challenge in life.

For a long time, love was neglected in couple therapy. It is true that one of the most commonly employed therapeutic tools is to ask a couple about their love for one another at the beginning of therapy and to observe their nonverbal reaction to this as a prognostic indicator. However, there is still an unusually large reluctance to address a couple's love for one another per se – a reluctance which is understandable, since love can neither be prescribed, nor generated through will. It is sometimes said that one cannot talk about love without causing it to volatilise, and that a couples therapist is more likely to disturb a couple's love communication than facilitate it. The same voices say that love does not tolerate any openness, which is why it is better not to talk about love during couple therapy. So what needs to be taken into consideration if one does wish to enhance the focus on love? (RIEHL-EMDE 2003)

The therapeutic approach: love as the focus of couple therapy

The multilayeredness and complexity of this subject area shall be reduced to the following three areas, all of which are particularly relevant to couple therapy:

- What is love? Although love is difficult to describe, it is possible to distinguish specific types and facets during the therapeutic process. The question to be answered is how

the couple experiences and describes their love for one another, whether their descriptions are compatible with one another and what kind of love story connects them.

- Dealing with ambivalences within a love relationship: Ambivalences are a part of any relationship. The object is to establish a conductive way of dealing with the opposing tendencies and the often resulting disappointments.
- The complimentary relationship between love and partnership: The principles of love and partnership carry out different tasks within a couple's relationship. They should not be confused, but rather carefully distinguished.

What is love?

Love is full of contradictions; it is often ambivalent, sometimes paradoxical and is therefore difficult to define. It is considered a mystery, something unfathomable or even metaphysical – a dimension which reaches beyond the couple itself. Despite this, there have been attempts to operationalise love, such as the so-called triangular theory of love by ROBERT J. STERNBERG (1986).

According to the triangular theory, which is an empirically based model, love is comprised of an emotional component ("intimacy"), a motivational or drive-based component ("passion") and a cognitive component ("decision/commitment"). "Decision" refers to the short-term decision to enter a love relationship, while "commitment" refers to the longer-term commitment to maintain a relationship. This model argues that these constitute three important components of love which are statistically relatively independent of one another and that each can be more or less pronounced. This means that there are also types of love in which sexuality plays little or no role, types in which there is no commitment or types in which there is a lack of intimacy or emotionality.

¹ Abridged and slightly altered version of the article: RIEHL-EMDE, A. (2006): Die Liebe zum Thema machen? Vorschläge zur Erweiterung des paartherapeutischen Spektrums. *Familiendynamik* 31, pp. 111–129

The typology of 6 love styles (romantic, playful, amiable, possessive, pragmatic and altruistic) presents another empirical model, on which the Marburg Inventory of Love Styles (BIERHOFF et al. 1993) is based.

I personally like the constructivist perspective very much, which maintains that love changes the observer and his perspective. STENDHAL (1822, p. 45) used the metaphor of crystallisation to describe idealisation of a loved person as “the activity of the mind by which new distinctions are discovered in each and every trait of a loved person”. The sociologist, GEORG SIMMEL (1907, p. 230) also defined love as one of the great “structuring categories of life”. Imagination and fantasy are always crucially involved in all types of love, whether they are realised, idealised or imaginary. It is not only about viewing the other person; directing the gaze of a loved person towards oneself holds the opportunity of seeing and showing oneself in the best possible light.

Posing the question of what a couple understands by love enables one to explore individual descriptions of love and the love story of a particular couple. By knowing of the various types and styles of love, therapists have numerous theoretical and practical options at their disposal. For instance, from a phenomenological perspective, it is possible to distinguish between infatuation, loving-passion and love (PERSON 1990; WYSS 1988):

Infatuation is a temporary emotional state which often sets in suddenly (“coup de foudre”). The central guiding motivator is the idealisation of the loved person, which coincides with enhanced self-esteem and self-respect for the infatuated person as soon as he or she notices signs of requited love (SPECHT 1977). Both men and women describe notable changes in the way they feel when they are in love: an increase in vitality, a greater passion for life, a reduced need for sleep, intensified sensory perception, and a greater desire for affection and sexuality (RIEHL-EMDE/WILLI 1997). The distinctive characteristic of infatuation lies in its relative freedom from ambivalence.

(Loving) passion is accompanied by deeper and more forceful intensity of experience – and particularly of anguish – than infatuation. DIETER WYSS (1988) has described (loving) passion very vividly, whereby both the participants and external observers get the impression of “obsession”. The passion often leads to a life or existential crisis, causing mutual dependence. The “withdrawal” of a partner leads to anguish which has an intensity comparable to that experienced by addicts on drug withdrawal. It is this “pathic” character of (loving) passion – DIETER WYSS (1988) talks of “being inevitably and fatefully drawn in”, of being “pathically captured” – which has led to the comparison of (loving) passion with the psychopathological condition called mania. The “love-sick” individual becomes miserable, melancholic, or “depressive” whenever he is not close to his partner. When his passion is requited, however, then the person in love moves to the other extreme (“effervescent bliss”) and resembles a manic person (cf. the literary representations in “Professor Unrat” by HEINRICH MANN or “Animal triste” by MONIKA MARON).

Love, on the other hand, is defined as affection in all its forms arising out of affinity. The possibilities range from a purely intellectual relationship all the way to a sensual-erotic-sexual one. Infatuation and passion are latent possibilities residing within love, but they differ from love insofar as the infatuated or passionately-in-love person has lost his or her distance to the beloved person (WYSS 1988).

The love between a couple undergoes transformations. Love in long-term relationships is generally considered a special form of attachment comprised of a combination between affection, friendship, sexuality, commitment, joint problem-solving and a mutual network of children, friend and neighbours (GRUNEBAUM 1997; WILLI 1991).

Couples therapists are advised to recognise various types of love as equivalent options. Not all types of love present themselves in couple therapy. Infatuation usually only leads to couple therapy if it has taken place outside the marriage – leading to conflicts within the marriage relationship. On the other hand, individuals who are absorbed by (loving) passion – as described by WYSS (1988) – generally do not come to couple therapy. If at all, they will more likely call on an therapist who deals with clients individually – and both those in love and the therapist temporarily often have a hard time distinguishing between love and “blind infatuation” (GRUNEBAUM 1997). When love is at the centre of couple therapy, then it is often about the ambivalences of love, which will be described below, or about doubts about whether one is still connected through love or whether love can be revitalised.

In reality, the issue of ‘love lost’ is not easily distinguished from a constellation in which love ‘lies dormant’ (GRUNEBAUM 1997). According to today’s accepted opinion, psychotherapy cannot generate feelings of love. It can, however, help participants to awaken ‘dormant’ love or to “fan the embers” among the ashes – especially where specific individual or relationship problems are changeable. Moreover, love cannot be generated at will, no matter how suitable a partner seems to be. Finally, since passionate love cannot be generated or controlled at will, it cannot be terminated at will either (RIEHL-EMDE 2009).

Love can be described, but it defies satisfactory explanation. Most attempts at explanation originate from the domain of mythology (cf. Aristophanes’s globular sphere beings in Plato’s Symposium). The fact that its origin remains a mystery actually seems significant and constitutive for love relationships. For this reason, therapists should refrain from engaging in any attempts at explanation.

Ambivalence in love

Usually, ambivalences increase after the initial phase of infatuation. The issue is not only, for instance, that one’s partner’s snoring, which was initially delightedly and gratefully perceived as a sign of life, begins to become annoying. It is more about the fact that any love relationship inescapably confronts the participants with certain contradictions and paradoxes, which are fundamentally inherent within love itself. The goal is to tolerate these ambivalences – even where they are accompanied by tensions one would rather liberate oneself from. Ambivalence is not pathological in itself, but the capacity to tolerate it varies according to the person and the situation.

The principle ambivalence or paradox of love lies in the desire to eliminate existential loneliness and the simultaneous fear of this elimination, as it essentially signifies the “elimination” of the individual. Particularly in existential longing, which mythologically speaking originates from the separation of the globular sphere beings, love reveals itself as “being in want, as suffering from the impossibility of ever being fulfilled” (DIETER WYSS, 1988, p. 113). WYSS encapsulates

a further paradox when he says: “The bond towards which the love relationship naturally strives is what digs its own grave” (ibid., p. 82). This means that if the desire for continuous closeness is fulfilled, then the love is lost. A sense of obligation arises, mutual trust becomes a matter of course, boredom and indifference set in. When maintaining a love relationship, the aim is to strive towards closeness or union – and to simultaneously regulate proximity for the sake of love, which means allowing for distance. Other well-known opposing tendencies which need to be regulated are, for instance, autonomy versus attachment, making one’s own decisions versus letting decisions be made for oneself, or giving versus receiving. Seen from a developmental perspective, love not only confronts by means of opposites, it also opens up possibilities which reveal themselves when ambivalences are accepted, tolerated and used to aid personal growth.

The fact that love is neither harmless nor an exclusively positive occurrence, the fact that people can be overcome by it in completely inappropriate circumstances and that it entails destructive elements as well, make loving and maintaining a love relationship a challenging task. DIETER WYSS (1988) even calls it is the most difficult life challenge a person will ever encounter. In order to maintain their love relationship, each and every couple has to find a way of dealing with the opposing tendencies and the resulting disappointments in a mutually tolerable manner. It is therefore no wonder that many couples seek out couple therapy to help them achieve this. The message from C.G. JUNG that love is not only one of the great joys of humanity, but also one of its greatest woes, has received too little recognition.

Interpersonal love relationships are complex – and this is directly related to their reciprocal nature. Two individuals are simultaneously both subject and object of love – i.e. lover and loved one. According to HANS SANER (1999), a philosopher from Basel, the interpersonality of love relationships not only constitutes love’s field of tension, but also presents the reason for their instability. This is because the other person is equally a being with his or her own possibilities of freedom and thus has to also be recognised as a subject. This fact is the cause of other, darker, aspects of love. On the one hand, this can result in an urge to possess the beloved person – in order to “secure their love” – and on the other, it can create an inclination towards slavish submission or other obsessions (PERSON 1990). However, a beloved person can never be fully subdued and attempts to control have a negative effect on the relationship. As individuals influence one another, i.e. exert influence and allow the other to exert influence on them, the resulting interplay of power and powerlessness presents another characteristic of love relationships.

Talking about love in couple therapy means broaching the issue of ambivalences within the relationship and recognising their existence as normal and necessary. Often, support is needed to tolerate opposing and irreconcilable stances – or to at least endure them for a while. Disappointments and anguish regarding the respective partner also need to be addressed. Suffering, grief and disappointment in connection with love need room and can help enhance solidarity.

There are no simple solutions for couples with love problems. Even with well-developed tolerance towards ambivalence and perseverance, one may not always be in a positively stimulating relationship. The important question is whether the destructive potential within a relationship is

overshadowing – or in other words, whether staying together in certain circumstances would be worse for one or both partners than separation. And even in circumstances which, in the long term, inhibit development more than they further it, there is still room for love. In such cases the question which has to be raised is under which circumstances the maintenance or development of a relationship is possible with simultaneous development of the participating individuals? Under which circumstances can two people develop in a manner which is conducive for their own growth while at the same time promoting their love relationship? I am not aware of any criteria which can show whether, in a specific case, the relationship or the personal development of an individual should take precedence.

Complimentary relationship between love and partnership

From a sociological perspective, love and partnership are two different concepts or logics of action (cf. LEUPOLD 1983; LUHMANN 1982; KOPPETSCH 1998). Both love and partnership contribute towards the establishment and development of a relationship and fulfil different tasks during the interaction which takes place between the partners in a couple.

Partnership is a reciprocal, contractual relationship of exchange and assumes reason, understanding, lasting cooperation and equality. The purpose of this is to regulate everyday concerns regarding the allocation of responsibilities as well as solving conflicts etc. Love, on the other hand, is an existential relationship dimension. It has irrational elements, the beginning and end are only partially controllable, it is unconditional, engrossing and creates meaning. Love can make inequalities endurable and relationship burdens tolerable. The willingness to engage in reciprocal forms of partnership suffices as a motive for business relationships, but is not sufficient for a love relationship. It also fails to offer an answer to the question regarding the deeper (transcendent) meaning of the relationship. If a couple’s relationship foregoes love, then it loses its specific ‘bonding agent’.

The confusion of the two logics, i.e. that of love and that of partnership, often leads to misunderstandings, which is why there is need for clarification. When incidents concerning unfair treatment in everyday situations are raised during couple therapy, many therapists allow themselves to be quickly lured to the negotiation table. This usually happens “too quickly”, because most couples are not looking for a partnership, but a love relationship. It is useful to be clear of the reasons for acting within each of the logics. Those who push for the negotiation of living conditions in couple therapy, or insist on more equality or justice, do not treat the couple as lovers but rather as two individuals in a partnership. This can be useful at times. Reaching a balance by bartering can solve partnership problems, but it cannot solve love problems (RETZER 2002). Metaphors of equality and fairness remain within the logic of partnerships.

When maintaining a partnership, the aim is to achieve constructive communication and an expedient division of tasks. When it comes to enabling love, the aim is to realise principles in line with love itself, such as the inability to offset mistakes, forgiveness and devotion, and forgetting by forgiving. Dealing with ambivalences and disappointments as well as the reduction of demands are much more important

for the reconstitution of a love relationship than immediate reciprocity and balance within the relationship. Instead of insisting on equality in the sense of justice or fairness and instead of calculating, counterbalancing and demanding compensation, as partner logic would require, the focus within love-logic lies on hopes and wishes, on values such as humour or the willingness to forego satisfying one's own needs in favour of those of one's partner. These types of values cannot be calculated or offset against each other. The same applies to the ability to make a loving gesture to "save" a situation.

The history of couple therapy shows that by integrating concepts from behavioural psychology and communication theories, the focus has shifted towards the partnership (RIEHL-EMDE 2005). The areas which gained in importance were settlement and negotiation pursuant to exchange theory (*quid pro quo*)², communication, exercises, stress relief and problem solving. Both the unconscious and love have thereby been relegated to the back seat. This approach has, probably unwittingly, been supported by systemic therapy, which focuses on action-oriented intervention patterns and has difficulty with feelings when these are understood as intrapsychological phenomena. However, the systemic concept does allow for a relatively easy integration of love – and particularly its paradox elements – into the therapeutic process (RETZER 2004).

A plea for and warning about love

When I argue that love should become more central in couple therapy, I do not wish to make this the new dogma. What I mean to say is that independent of whether the couple mainly addresses the partnership or the issue of love, the therapist should complement the chosen focus by also introducing the countervailing principle. So when complaints are made about fairness and equality in everyday life, the therapist should complement this by addressing the love relationship, and when couples lament a lack of emotional or sexual intimacy and question their love relationship – while putting other aspects of their relationship on the back burner – then elements of the partnership should be addressed. These include the division of occupational work and housework, financial arrangements, and the allocation of time for work, family, the couple as a unit and for each individual. These areas often entail power and dependency relations which influence the love relationship. Therapists must also be warned about addressing the subject of love too quickly. If there are power issues at the forefront of the relationship or if individuals fear for their physical or mental safety within the relationship, then these issues must take precedence.

There are no patent remedies on how to establish and maintain love relationships. The fact that love cannot be generated through therapy is, however, no reason why it should not be addressed during therapy. Love can always be fostered and it is always possible to offer other options

alongside love (whatever a couple understands by this term). The aim is to enlarge the room for manoeuvre by therapeutically dealing with a couple's love for one another, which is often what is at stake. It is about relativising demands made towards the love relationship and thus expanding couple therapy to include the fundamental dimension of love. Shifting love towards the focus of couple therapy entails the possibility of deepening the therapeutic process and getting closer to the central concerns of many couples.

Astrid Riehl-Emde

² *Quid pro quo* (lat.: "something for something") is a legal rights principle and economic principle, pursuant to which a person who gives something should receive something of equal value in return (Eds. from Wikipedia, 23 June 2009)



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Going out – Relationships among adolescents

“How should I tell her that I love her?”, “I simply need more freedom!”, “I don’t know whether or not I should sleep with him.” A quick review of the Online issue of the magazine *Bravo* clearly shows that love, sexuality and partnership play a very important role in the lives of adolescents, but are also associated with a certain amount of insecurity and some risks. Current data from the German federal government confirm that an increasing number of adolescents experience their first sexual intercourse at a relatively early age and that, especially among younger individuals, this first encounter is often unplanned (BZgA 2006). This article examines the special features of love relationships among adolescents in terms of their development, their potential problems and their differences to adult relationships.

How do romantic relationships develop among adolescents? Stage and phase models

FURMAN’s framework concept for the explanation of the development of love relationships (FURMAN/WEHNER 1997) assumes that the purpose of the first romantic relationships in early adolescence is primarily to learn and practice interaction with the opposite sex and to experience one’s first sexual encounters. The focus of this stage is the exploration of oneself and one’s peer status connected to having a romantic partner. Satisfying needs after coming together and sexuality become the focus of a later stage of the partnership. The need to connect is also met within friendships, and this triggers the initiation of intimate relationships between individuals of the same age. Only during later adolescence does the partner also take on bonding and caring functions hitherto reserved by the parents.

Similarly, BROWN (1999) assumes that the “initiation” phase is there to enable individuals to integrate the role of being a partner in a romantic relationship into their self-conception and to acquire fundamental capabilities in dealing with the opposite sex. The relationships during this phase are generally superficial and short. During the “status” phase, the focus is shifted from the self to the peer group, which is where relationships typically take place, and in which status and popularity is gained with the aide of the romantic partner. Brown ascribes adolescents within the “affection” phase an established self-concept which enables them to risk more intensive and serious relationships. Relationships during this phase are described as more emotionally and sexually satisfying. During the “bonding” phase, adolescents have to enrich the passion from the “affection” phase with pragmatic and personal aspects in order to develop a truly mature relationship, which is characterised by lasting and strong commitment. This phase is generally not reached before early adulthood.

CONNOLLY and GOLDBERG (1999) also describe a development from “initial infatuation”, to “affiliative romantic relationships”, to a stage of “intimate romantic relationships” and finally, “committed romantic relationships”.

The establishment of relationships coincides with increasing individuation from one’s parents. Peers are

generally called upon as advisors in romantic matters. Friendship relationships present a “practice field” for the management of close relationships and serve as a means of acquiring relationship competence (cf. SCHARF/MAYSELESS 2001). The peer network plays a significant role in addition to close friendship relationships. For instance, having a large number of opposite-sex friends within one’s peer group increases one’s probability of having a love relationship (CONNOLLY et al. 2000).

How do adolescents conduct their partnership?

Partnership status

The older the adolescents become, the higher the probability that they will be in a partnership. According to a German longitudinal study, 40% of the 13-year-olds questioned were in a partnership, while this number rose to 67% by the age of 21 (SEIFFGE-KRENKE 2003). On the other hand, 16.3% of the 18-year-olds questioned in a representative US study said they had not had a partner for the last 18 months (CARVER et al. 2003).

The first date, the first time falling in love, and the first French kiss take place around the age of 13 to 14, while the first petting experience and sexual intercourse occur around the age of 15 to 16 (PLIES et al. 1999). Secondary school pupils in grammar schools (German: *Gymnasien*) have significantly less partnerships than adolescents in less-academic tiers of secondary education (cf. WENDT/WALPER 2006).

In general, it must be assumed that in addition to age, the biological maturity of an individual also has a significant impact on whether he or she gets involved in a partnership. The longer the adolescents have been sexually mature, the higher the probability is that they have had sexual intercourse (KLUGE 1998) as well as their first partnerships.

Duration and stability

During the course of adolescence, the duration of partnerships increases. This is confirmed, for instance, by a longitudinal study which showed an increase in partnership duration from an average of 3.9 months at the age of 13 to 21.3 months at the age of 21 (SEIFFGE-KRENKE 2003).

As age increases during adolescence, so too increases the stability of partnerships. While only 21.2% of all 14-year-old couples were still together after one year, this figure was 57.6% for those over 15 years old (CARVER et al. 2003) for the same period. As expected, adolescents show a higher risk of separation compared to young adults (WENDT/WALPER 2008). However, according to these data this risk declines significantly if the relationship last longer than 1.5 years.

Spending time together

Younger adolescents often meet their partners within their clique and do not spend much time together alone as a couple (FEIRING 1996). While only 37.6% of couples aged 14 have met up alone, 76.4% of couples over 15 have done so (CARVER et al. 2003). Compared to adolescents from the USA, however, German youths spend more time with their romantic partners than with friends (FLAMMER et al 1999), which may be related to the more formalised dating protocol in the USA.

So-called “social-romantic leisure activities” such as going dancing or talking on the phone with one another offer adolescents an opportunity to contact individuals of the opposite sex and promote an earlier engagement in love relationships (SILBEREISEN/WIESNER 1999). Social activities with one’s partner, such as shopping, dancing or dining are generally popular with adolescents in love relationships, while mutual leisure activities, such as playing sports together only increase when couples enter adulthood (MENKEN 2008).

Togetherness and autonomy

Younger adolescents highlight the importance of “being able to talk openly with one another” (PLIES et al. 1999). They emphasise the importance of common ground within a relationship (“mutual activities” and “few arguments” etc.) (FLEER et al. 2002), but reject long-term reciprocal commitment (FEIRING 1996). Older adolescents and young adults, on the other hand, wish for lastingness, stability, sexual fulfilment and fidelity (PLIES et al. 1999), but also emphasise the importance of freedom within a partnership (FLEER et al. 2002). This points to the desire of older adolescents to have a relationship with someone their own age.

Intimacy

As adolescents are able to form longer and more committed relationships with increasing age, this coincides with growth in emotional intimacy and mutual support (SEIFGE-KRENKE 2003). Another thing that improves with increasing age is the capacity to deal with romantic stress such as jealousy, fear of abandonment (NIEDER/SEIFGE-KRENKE 2001) and conflicts (VON SALISCH/SEIFGE-KRENKE 2008).

Girls report stronger emotional intensity, attachment, self-disclosure and support within their partnerships, but also more jealousy compared to boys (cf. SHULMAN/SCHARF 2000). An appraisal of the intimacy expressed during the confidential discussions of young couples shows, however, that girls and boys do not differ in the extent of their self-disclosure (VAN HEKKEN et al. 2000).

In comparison to adults, adolescents exhibit notably more serious emotional insecurities, which is conceptualised as fear of abandonment in this study (WALPER et al. 2008). Adolescent boys feel demonstrably more insecure in romantic matters than girls, and they particularly experience difficulty communicating romantic content, such as

declining a date or conveying a desire to their partner (GIORDANO et al. 2006).

Negative partnership experiences

Although love relationships during adolescence offer the possibility of gaining positive experiences with the opposite sex and thus of developing key relationship competences such as a positive self-image as a loving and competent lover (FUHRMAN/SCHAFFER 2003), the experiences made of love, sexuality and partnership are not always positive. A German study shows that experiences of sexual violence are widespread among adolescents (KRAHÉ 1999). The interviewed girls in this study (with an average age 18) reported that the most frequent experiences of violence included verbal pressure to coerce them into petting, and the attempted administration of alcohol and drugs to coerce them into sexual intercourse. These were the two methods that the boys in this study (who were solely interviewed as potential perpetrators) put forward as the most frequently used for coercion. An alarming 6.3% of the girls had experienced coerced sexual intercourse. The identified risk factors for the experience of victimisation – as well as for exercising sexual violence – included experience of abuse in one’s family of origin, feelings of inferiority and ambiguous communication of sexual intentions (in this case “saying no, but meaning yes”, or “saying yes, but meaning no”). The final point in particular was seen as an important starting point for the prevention of experiences of violence (KRAHÉ 1999).

Adolescents also have to learn to deal with emotionally difficult situations such as unrequited feelings, deciding the extent of emotional and sexual engagement, infidelity or separation. These factors are generally associated with depressive symptoms in adolescence, independent of personal attributes such as self-esteem, age, coping style or attachment style (WELSH et al. 2003). Researchers noticed a general connection between over-involvement in romantic relationships (conceptualised in this study as the number of partners to date) and poor psychosocial wellbeing at the age of 16 (ZIMMER-GEMBECK et al. 2001). Numerous partnerships in adolescence were found to correlate with more internalised and externalised problems as well as poorer academic achievements and a more negative self-appraisal. On the other hand, German studies show that the initiation and development of a love relationship can benefit the self-esteem of adolescents (WALPER 1991) and that adolescents with romantic experience perceive themselves as socially competent, good looking and as socially well-embedded (FEND 2000).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to present the specific features of young relationships. Current development models assume that the intensity of partnerships increases as adolescents get older. Ideally, the adolescents acquire relationship competences which enable stable and satisfying partnerships in adulthood.

The talk of “Generation Porno” (arte, 1 January 2008) and “Germany’s sexual tragedy” (SIGGELKOW/BÜSCHER 2008), which report an emotional deprivation of the young

generation can be countered by the fact that – despite the many sexual liberalisation processes – most sexual contacts during adolescence still take place in a committed partnership (BZgA 2006). Moreover, partnership, friendship and family still rank among the most important social entities for adolescents in Germany (SHELL DEUTSCHLAND 2006). Most adolescents thus master the challenge of establishing satisfying relationships very well. It seems as though the capacity to turn negative events into positive learning experiences is beneficial to this end (Gröss 2008).

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The German registered partnership law: full equality or a piecemeal approach?

This article describes how – and under which cultural and political conditions – the German registered partnership law [Lebenspartnerschaftsgesetz] was developed, what the law regulates and which disadvantages people in homosexual registered partnerships still experience. The article concludes with an appraisal of the current legal situation.

Same-sex partnerships have many faces

I. Gay men want to have financial security when the grow old

Detlev sees himself as part of “1968 generation” and has been politically active since then. He met his boyfriend Paul during a demonstration against Section 175 of the German penal code [the law that criminalised homosexual activities], which Paul had used as an opportunity to come out as a gay man. These men have since been in a long-term relationship and were very pleased when the registered partnership law came into force in 2001. The law, however, is not beneficial to their specific conditions, because, in the first instance, registered life partners have more duties than rights.

Detlev is a civil servant and Paul works as a mason in a medium-sized enterprise. The older they become, the more time they spend thinking about how to take care of each other in old age. When the Senate of Berlin amended the law on family allowances and provisions for surviving dependants to cover lesbian and gay civil servants in 2008, Detlev and Paul entered a same-sex registered partnership. The registered partnership brings them the long-awaited recognition of their relationship from co-workers, neighbours and parents. However, their hope of full equal status with married couples, for instance with regard to income tax, has thus far not been fulfilled.

II. Binational registered partnerships are part of our intercultural society

Jürgen is 32 years old and has enjoyed spending his holidays in Thailand since 1999. He fell in love with his then boyfriend, Trang, on his very first journey. At first, they maintained an intensive long-distance letter relationship, with Jürgen frequently travelling to Asia to see Trang. During the course of this, both partners developed the wish to one day live together in Germany, which is why they decided to enter into a registered partnership. However, it is

not exactly easy to gather the requisite documents for a “binational gay marriage”. Trang, for instance, had to submit a certificate of non-impediment which proves he is single. They went to a notary in Bavaria – because in this state it is not possible to hold a registered partnership ceremony in a civil registry office. Finally, they received a registered partnership certificate, which was the prerequisite for Trang’s residence permit¹. They concluded a marital contract with a property separation agreement.

Seven years later, Trang fell in love with a younger colleague from Vietnam. Both would like to stay in Germany and continue their partnership there. Trang and Jürgen dissolved their registered partnership in 2009.

III. The adoption of step children is possible within same-sex registered partnerships, but joint adoption is excluded.

Petra was married to a man for many years and has one child from this marriage. Petra noticed her homosexual sexual orientation after meeting Charlotte in the year 2000. In 2005, the government regulated step-child adoption in registered partnerships. This was the year that the two women moved to a farm with Petra’s daughter. Charlotte could theoretically adopt Petra’s biological daughter upon formation of a registered partnership, but the father refuses to consent to the step-child adoption before the guardianship court. Petra and Charlotte would like to form a “rainbow family” with further children and would like to be able to care for them as guardians who are equal before the law. They hope that the adoption law will be amended in the foreseeable future so that they can adopt children together.

The development of the German registered partnership law

Lesbians and gays have been demanding their civil rights for a long time – and this includes homosexual registered partnerships being placed on the same legal footing as marriage. In 1992, more than 250 lesbian and gay couples called attention to the discrimination within the law through the “Aktion Standesamt” [“civil registry campaign”]. The government felt obliged to act. During the subsequent

¹ Sections 27(2) and 28(1) of the Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz).

political debate, the Greens proposed to open marriage to same-sex partners. The CDU (Christian Democrats) rejected this proposal by indicating that marriage, which receives special protection from the state², can only occur between a man and a woman and is thus barred to lesbians and gays.

A working group comprised of members of the coalition parties of the SPD (Social Democrats) and the Die Grünen (The Green Party) drafted a proposal and submitted a draft bill to the German Bundestag in summer 2000. As the Bundesrat (Germany's upper chamber) had to approve some sections but not others, the draft was divided after the parliamentary negotiations. On 22 February 2001, the law ending the discrimination of same-sex unions [Gesetz zur Beendigung der Diskriminierung gleichgeschlechtlicher Gemeinschaften: Lebenspartnerschaften] was announced in the Federal Law Gazette (BGBl).³ The section of the draft law which required approval did not achieve a majority of votes in the Bundesrat, and the Federal States of Saxony, Thuringia and Bavaria instigated a judicial review procedure with the Federal Constitutional Court. Their petition was, however, rejected.⁴ Pursuant to this decision, there is no constitutional obligation to differentiate between marriages and registered partnerships. The latter may be considered of equal – but not of higher – status.

With the passing of the Registered Partnership Act, the then government comprised of the SPD and Greens initiated the long overdue removal of discrimination against lesbians and gays in the penal code, civil code and public law. At the beginning of the year 2005, the act amending the registered partnership law came into effect. This reform put registered partnership on a par with the legal institution of marriage in terms of family law. The key changes concerned the adoption of stepchildren, engagement provisions, the property regime for unions of joint ownership, maintenance provisions, pension rights adjustments after dissolution of registered partnerships, and the approximation of contribution periods upon separation. This reform also made the provisions that exist in the pension system for the support of surviving marital dependants applicable to registered partnerships.

This had important legal consequences. Here are just three examples: Tenancy law was amended to allow the surviving partner from a registered partnership to remain in the rented property that he or she was living in. The respective partners within a registered partnership are now included in statutory schemes for accident insurance as well as health and nursing insurance. Migration law was also amended to regulate the right of foreign partners to move to Germany, including provisions concerning their work permits.

What does the registered partnership law regulate today?

The registered partnership law allows two persons of the same sex to enter into a registered partnership in the Federal Republic of Germany. The sexual identity of the person is irrelevant, since the focus is on the fact that both partners are of the same sex. The registered partnership is established for life and is colloquially termed “gay marriage” (“Homo-Ehe”) – although it does not yet achieve the full equal status of conventional marriage. Registered partnerships are, similar to marriages, unions in which the

partners assume reciprocal responsibility for each other, and the participants must be of age. Both German citizens and non-Germans have equal rights to enter into a registered partnership, and there is no need for one of the two partners to possess German citizenship. Neither partner may be married (“impediment to marriage”), which foreign partners have particular difficulty in proving.

There has been much progress towards attaining equal status between registered partnerships and marriage over the last few years. The key legal fundamentals are:

- Except in Baden-Württemberg and Thuringia, registration of partnerships is carried out in civil registry offices.
- In terms of civil law, registered partnerships have completely equal legal status with marriages – except for adoption rights. Registered partners are therefore deemed to be “relatives” before the law and enjoy the respective privileges that this entails. This means, for instance, that they have the right to refuse to give evidence.
- Registered partners may adopt the biological children of their partners (stepchild adoption). During the given proceedings, however, the other parent has to consent to the adoption of the child and the stepchild adoption must be in the child's interest.
- The dissolution of a registered partnership is on a par with the divorce of a marriage. Lesbian and gay couples in a registered partnership have to have lived separately for at least twelve months prior to issuing the request for dissolution. After the separation, alimony law applies, for instance regarding pension rights adjustments.
- Within the framework of occupational pension schemes, the provisions for employed registered partners have been put on an equal footing with the scheme for married employees.⁵
- Under immigration law, foreign registered partners are generally treated like spouses – with few exceptions. They may join their partner in Germany (“right to unification”).
- Upon registration of the registered partnership, foreign partners receive the right of residence which is extended for as long as the registered partnership lasts (BERLINER SENATSVERWALTUNG FÜR BILDUNG 2006). After three years, registered partners are issued a settlement permit [Niederlassungserlaubnis]; previously they were issued with an indefinite residence permit [unbefristete Aufenthaltserlaubnis].

Where does discrimination still take place?

Although registered partnerships have largely achieved equal status to marriage under civil law, gays and lesbians still face serious discrimination. This includes the question of whether lesbians and gays may adopt a child together. Even if some sections of the public hold prejudices regarding the adoption rights for lesbian and gay couples, there is no reason for the legislator to refuse equal status in this domain. A reform of the adoption law would have to

² Federal Constitution, article 6 I

³ BGBl I p. 266

⁴ Federal Constitutional Court, Decision of 17 July 2002 – 1 BvF 1 and 2/01

⁵ Federal Labour Court, Decision of 29 April 2004 – 6 AZR 101/03 and of 14 January 2009 – 3 AZR 29/07

give both married spouses and registered partners the opportunity to adopt children – either as a couple or as individuals. Anything else constitutes discrimination.

Registered partnerships are still far from being on a par with marriage in terms of tax law. This particularly applies to income tax – but also concerns inheritance tax. Moreover, same-sex marriages which were legitimately carried out abroad are not recognised in Germany.

Under federal civil service law and in some federal states, civil servants in registered partnerships are still discriminated against compared to married couples. Although civil servants in registered partnerships have the same duties as married civil servants, they receive no benefits [“Beihilfe”], no family allowance and no provisions for surviving dependants. In its decision of 1 April 2008⁶ (the Maruko case), the European Court of Justice decided that employed registered partners could be eligible for a widow’s pension as part of their right to remuneration pursuant to Directive 200/78/EC. The family and marriage-based provisions regarding remuneration, maintenance and allowances must therefore also apply to registered partners. To this end, the law governing the civil service [Dienstrechtsneuordnungsgesetz] urgently requires amendment.

Equal status policies in the federal states

During the course of the reunification of East and West Germany, the constitutions of the new federal states and Berlin were amended. Article 12(2) of the Constitution of Berlin⁷, states that “Other life partnerships established for the long term are entitled to protection from discrimination.” Protection from discrimination due to sexual identity is now included in the constitutions of the federal states of Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saarland and Thuringia.

After the law ending the discrimination of same-sex unions [Gesetz zur Beendigung der Diskriminierung gleichgeschlechtlicher Gemeinschaften: Lebenspartnerschaften] came into force in 2001, all federal states became obliged to adapt their state laws to federal law. The Senate of Berlin fulfilled this duty as early as October 2001. Registered partnerships were placed on a par with marriage for all relevant state laws through the adoption of a law which adapted state law [Gesetz zur Anpassung des Landesrechts auf Grund der Einführung der Eingetragenen Lebenspartnerschaften].⁸ Corresponding amendments have been made to the state law on members of parliament [Landesabgeordnetengesetz], the state civil service law [Laufbahngesetz] and even the state hunting law [Landesjagdgesetz]. To date, amendment laws have only been passed in eight federal states.

Since the federalism reform in 2006, the competence for civil service law lies with the federal states. Until now, only a few federal states have seized the opportunity to grant equal status to registered partnerships in terms of provisions for surviving dependants and family allowances. This

means that among various federal states, registered partnerships enjoy very different degrees of equality in the areas of civil servant remuneration and salary law (which includes allowances, special leave, travel and relocation compensation, and separation allowance).

The ECJ Decision concerning the Maruko case⁹ motivated several federal states to establish equal status policies for registered partnerships in terms of provisions for surviving dependants within occupational pension schemes for freelance professionals (e.g. lawyers, physicians, dentists, architects).

The German registered partnership law – Piecemeal or privilege?

The short history of the German registered partnership law cannot be understood without taking the political and historical developments in Europe into consideration. The self-confidence and emancipation of the lesbian and gay movement grew dramatically during the 1980s. At the beginning of the 1990s, lesbians and gays demanded that life partnerships be placed on a par with marriages within the framework of the general civil rights movement. Initially, the legal form of marriage remained barred to lesbians and gays. Up to this point in time, lesbians and gays were only able to protect their wishes through contracts or letters of authority. It was only after the first successful lawsuit for an officially recognised life partnership was filed in Denmark that German homosexuals saw a chance of making similar demands towards policy-makers at home – and realising these in practice. In Germany, these initiatives led to the registered partnership law. Alongside this development, a societal transition towards greater and more embracing acceptance of lesbian and gay lifestyles has taken place, which has been followed by broad acceptance of the new laws and amendments. Both developmental strands – the societal transition, on the one hand, and the strengthening of the civil rights movement by lesbians and gays on the other – are, however, not free from contradiction:

Limited interest in registered partnerships

In a sample census carried out by the Federal Statistics Office of Germany¹⁰ in 2008, 68,000 homosexual couples reported that they lived in a joint household in a cohabiting partnership. Approximately 15,000 of these couples (about 22%) had entered a registered partnership. Of these about two thirds were men. Even though the number of homosexual individuals can only be estimated, these results lead one to the conclusion that “gay marriage” has been met with only limited interest among lesbians and gays in Germany.

There are two possible hypotheses which by no means exclude one another:

- a) Entering a registered partnership means making one’s lifestyle public. This may be a risky step for many lesbians and gays. Disadvantages in their private life – and especially in their professional careers – would probably follow. Employees in Catholic institutions must reckon with dismissal if they enter a registered partnership.
- b) During the battle concerning the realisation of a “gay-marriage”, there was a large minority which rejected any

6 ECJ, Ref. No. C-267/06

7 GVB Vol. 51 No. 69, 23 November 1995

8 GVB Vol. 57, No. 44, 20 October 2001

9 ECJ Decision C-267/06 of 1 April 2008

10 Press release of 16 September 2008

type of formalisation of their personal relationship – and consequently showed no interest in entering a marriage or marriage-like union. The options available for formalising the relationships are often unsuitable for the actual relationship structures. They are too rigid and not adaptable to the requirements and needs of many couples and relationships of choice. Legal provisions fail to represent the diversity of lifestyles and relationship types. This tendency can also be found amongst heterosexual people, which signals the remoteness of legal provisions drafted to regulate private life.

Continued discrimination in some areas

With rising societal acceptance towards lesbian and gay lifestyles, the public debate on violence towards lesbians and gays is becoming increasingly important. Anti-homosexual attacks are no longer being kept secret. This has shown a larger public that the increased acceptance has by no means permeated all segments of society. This also becomes apparent during the sometimes fierce disputes regarding individual, legally endorsed discrimination, such as that within tax law. The societal groups that would like to reverse the development of acceptance are still powerful.

It should be clear that putting registered partnerships on a par with marriage is part of an anti-discrimination policy which aims to promote the recognition of human rights for lesbians and gays. Achieving equal status and equal treatment cannot be achieved through special regulations for a specific part of society. Special regulations would favour a specific societal group for specific reasons – which may be justified. This, however, is not the case with the establishment of legal equality for lesbian and gay registered partnerships.

It would be more accurate to call the registered partnership law a piecemeal approach, due to the fact that the final step, i.e. opening access to marriage with all its rights and duties, has not been achieved.

However, the step of legalising lesbian and gay partnerships should not be underestimated. As imperfect as the German solution may be compared to other European or non-European countries¹¹, it influences the public debate and has a strong effect on the development of self-confidence within the lesbian and gay community. Registered partnerships irrevocably enter the public sphere as a lesbian and gay way of life and encourage debates concerning existing discrimination. From this perspective, the registered partnership law can be viewed as a pioneering piecemeal approach.

It is pioneering because it achieves official state recognition of lesbian and gay lifestyles. But it is also piecemeal – and has to be so – because the registered partnership law itself does not automatically change societal awareness or practice. The continued discrimination of lesbians and gays in many areas of everyday life shows this all too clearly. The task of promoting acceptance is far from having been accomplished.

After all, the ultimate aim is for lesbian and gay lifestyles to be recognised as indispensable possibilities of human existence. In the first instance, lesbians and gays must champion this cause themselves, but there is also a need for a large majority of society to join them in their effort. The decline in discrimination is an indicator of the success of

these efforts. Full equality will only be achieved once the registered partnership law is supplemented and once other laws, such as the German General Equality Law [Allgemeine Gleichberechtigungsgesetz], are amended to protect sexual identity.

Legal provisions can support and promote social movements, but they cannot replace them. For this reason, there is still much to be done within the area of education as long as same-sex lifestyles cannot be lived as a naturally accepted choice within society.

Claus Nachtwey

¹¹ Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada, and the US Federal States of Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut and have opened marriage for lesbians and gays.



Claus Nachtwey is a political and business economist. In 1990 in Berlin, he helped develop the first “department for same-sex lifestyles” to be set up in a public administration. Since this point in time, he has concerned himself with questions regarding the equal treatment of lesbian and gay couples in laws, guidelines and regulations. In his role as Advisor at the Anti-Discrimination Office of the State of Berlin, he works on legislative reforms for the equal status of registered partnerships on the federal and state level.

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www.berlin.de/lb/ads/gglw

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BROCHURES

Klapperstorch [Book recommendations for children]

The pro familia Ortsverband München [pro familia Regional Association in Munich] has published a brochure with book recommendations for parents and children on the subjects of friendship, family, feelings and sexual education. The recommended and reviewed books are aimed at children of preschool and primary-school age as well as at parents and educators. A key-word index facilitates the search of specific titles. The 136-page brochure on recommended children's books, picture books as well as sex education books and parenting guides is available for a nominal charge of 1 euro plus postage.

Ordering address:

pro familia Ortsverband München e.V.
Türkenstraße 103
80799 München
Telephone +49 (0)89 33 00 84 20
muenchen@profamilia.de

Untenrum gesund! [Healthy down below!]

The pro familia Landesverband NRW [pro familia Association of North Rhine-Westphalia] has a new information brochure on "protecting urogenital health" entitled "Untenrum gesund!" ["Healthy down below"]. In addition to factual information, the brochure also contains recommendations for preventive care.

The brochure can be ordered for 4.50 euros.

Ordering address:

pro familia Landesverband NRW
POB 130901
42036 Wuppertal
Telephone +49 (0)202 24 56 510
Fax +49 (0)202 24 56 530
lv.nordrhein-westfalen@profamilia.de
www.profamilia.de/nordrhein-westfalen

Homophobie in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft [Homophobia among immigrant communities]

The Landesstelle für Gleichbehandlung – gegen Diskriminierung (LADS) [State Office for Equality – against Discrimination] published a brochure entitled "Homophobie in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft" ["Homophobia among immigrant communities"] in April 2009, which presents various viewpoints in this area of discussion. The brochure documents the conference entitled "Gemeinsam für Anerkennung und Respekt" ["Together for acknowledgement and respect"], which took place in November 2008 in the Werkstatt der Kulturen in Berlin. The conference focused on how discrimination against lesbians and gays with and without a migration background can be prevented. The brochure elucidates various approaches to prevent anti-homosexual sentiments so that homophobia in German immigrant communities can be reduced as part of a sensitive process.

The brochure is available free of charge.

Ordering address:

Senatsverwaltung für Integration,
Arbeit und Soziales
Broschürenstelle
Oranienstraße 106
10969 Berlin
broschuerenstelle@senias.berlin.de
www.berlin.de/LADS

Schwangerschaft und Schwangerschaftsabbruch bei minderjährigen Frauen [Pregnancy and pregnancy termination amongst underage women]

In May 2009, the BZgA published selected findings of the study "Schwangerschaft und Schwangerschaftsabbruch bei minderjährigen Frauen"

["Pregnancy and pregnancy termination amongst underage women"] in a fourth, revised edition (cf. the journal series section and Forum 2/2007). The topics covered by the 12-page brochure include the frequency of pregnancy amongst underaged women, the influence of education level and social milieu, contraception and awareness levels of the "morning-after pill".

Ordering address:

BZgA
51101 Köln
Fax +49 (0)221 89 92 257
order@bzga.de
Order No. 13050300

EDUCATION TOOLS

Körperwissen und Verhütung [Knowledge about the human body and contraception]

The BZgA's new prevention folder "Körperwissen und Verhütung" ["Knowledge about the human body and contraception"], was especially developed for advisory services to migrants.

The folder contains a total of over 100 text and picture slides on the most important areas of sex education and family planning, including information on the human body, sexuality, contraception, pregnancy and birth. It is equally informative to youths as well as adult women and men. As the target group (immigrants) presents a very heterogeneous group, the editors took care to use straightforward, easily understandable language and reserved, sensitive illustrations. In practical counselling, the folder works as a two-way pedagogical tool, with the text information facing the counsellor and the illustrated figure facing the client.

The aim of this education prop is to sensitise physicians, advisors, teachers, people involved in education and midwives to the cultural particularities and concerns of individuals from a

migration background. In addition to the above, the folder also offers users the certainty that they are passing on accurate information.

A pilot test, in which experts from various areas of work tested the folder on about 300 people, resulted in a very positive evaluation of this new sex education instrument.

The preventive care folder “Körperwissen und Verhütung” is available for download at www.sexualaufklaerung.de/praeventionsmappe.

It can be bought for the price of 20 euros (including postage).

Ordering address:

BZgA
51101 Köln
Fax +49 (0)221 89 92 257
order@bzga.de
Order No. 13070000

POSTERS

**Verhütung im Überblick
[Contraception: an overview]**

The revised version of the multi-colour A2 size BZgA poster “Verhütung im Überblick” [“Contraception: an overview”], which offers text and image information on the most common contraceptives and the morning-after pill, is now available for order free of charge.

Ordering address:

BZgA
51101 Köln
Fax +49 (0)221 89 92 257
order@bzga.de
Order No. 13062000

**Plakatkampagne des LSVD
Nordrhein-Westfalen
[Poster Campaign by LSVD
Nordrhein-Westfalen]**

“Ümit is gay, Aleksej is gay, so is Kail”, “Ayse is lesbian, Nadija is lesbian, so is Vera!”

These are the headings (written in German, Turkish and Russian) of a campaign by the Lesben- und Schwulenverband, Landesverband Nordrhein-Westfalen e.V. [Gay and Lesbian Association of North Rhine-Westphalia], which promotes integration and acceptance of gay and lesbian adolescents with a migration background.

The campaign specifically addresses youths with a migration background

and aims to encourage them to organise themselves in self-help groups.

The posters are intended to be displayed in public spaces, government agencies, official departments for foreign nationals, schools and culture and integration associations.

They can be downloaded from the following links:

http://www.nrw.lsvd.de/downloads/2009/plakate_klein.pdf (A4)

http://www.nrw.lsvd.de/downloads/2009/plakate_gross.pdf (A3)

Contact:

LSVD Lesben- und Schwulenverband
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JOURNAL SERIES

**Schwangerschaft und Schwangerschaftsabbruch bei minderjährigen Frauen
[Pregnancy and pregnancy termination amongst underage women]**

In May 2009, the study “Schwangerschaft und Schwangerschaftsabbruch bei minderjährigen Frauen” [“Pregnancy and pregnancy termination amongst underage women”] was published in the BZgA journal series “Forschung und Praxis der Sexualaufklärung und Familienplanung” [“Research and Practice in Sex Education and Family Planning”].

The study is the result of a research project which was initiated by the Bundesverband der pro familia [Federal Association of pro familia] and sponsored by the BZgA. A research team from the Institute for Sexual Research and Forensic Psychiatry at the University of Hamburg carried out the research in collaboration with counselling centres of pro familia.

In addition to the use of contraception among underaged pregnant women – and the reasons for contraception failure – the study also investigated the social living circumstances as well as the resources and strategies the young women deployed to cope with the pregnancy conflict. In order to evaluate (benchmark) the results achieved, a further interview study was carried out in counselling units of the

“Diakonische Werke der evangelischen Kirche Deutschland” [“social welfare centres of the Protestant Church in Germany”].

By directly interviewing the affected individuals, the study achieves first-hand insight into the topic. This is one of the reasons why the journal offers valuable information for the field of counselling in particular. The publication is available as PDF file (www.sexualaufklaerung.de). The printed version is priced at a nominal charge of 11 euros.

Ordering address:

BZgA
51101 Köln
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Order No. 13300032

MAGAZINES

**Queer!: Wie geht nicht heteronormative Mädchenarbeit?
[Queer!: Non-heteronormative youth work for girls]**

Does youth work for girls consciously or unconsciously have the heterosexual girl as its starting assumption? How do lesbian girls live and how can youth work for girls make equal space for references to heterosexual and homosexual life and relationship designs?

An evaluation of 20 years of the journal “Betrifft Mädchen” showed that lesbian girls have hitherto never been the special topic of this magazine.

This gap has been filled by the issue “Queer! Wie geht nicht heteronormative Mädchenarbeit?” [“Queer! Non-heteronormative youth work for girls”] (issue 2/2009), authored by LAG Mädchenarbeit in NRW e.V.

Issue 3/2009 of *Betrifft Mädchen* was published on 1 July 2009 with a special focus on “Kein Thema!? Sexuelle Gewalt gegen Mädchen” [“Not an issue!? Sexual violence against girls.”]

Both issues can be ordered from Juventa Verlag for 6.50 euros plus postage.

Ordering address:

Juventa Verlag
Frau Steinmetz
Telephone +49 (0)6201 90 20 25
steinmetz@juventa.de
www.juventa.de
lag@maedchenarbeit-nrw.de
www.maedchenarbeit-nrw.de

BOOKS

Wild life

While a committed relationship is founded on familiarity and security, eroticism requires freedom and spontaneity.

What are the demands on modern partnerships, what conflicts result from these demands, and most importantly, what options do couples have to keep passion alive even in long-standing relationships? The New York psychotherapist, Esther Perel, author of an article in this issue of FORUM, uses numerous case studies in this book to show how people can use very different paths to find their own very personal form of eroticism beyond all conventional conceptions of “good sex”. The key elements include fantasy and insight into the fact that change may be the only constant in life. One of Perel’s key concepts is that “accepting uncertainty sometimes requires no more than relinquishing the illusion of security”. It is from here that unexpected perspectives of one’s partner and of playful sexuality may arise.

“Wild life. Die Rückkehr der Erotik in die Liebe” was published in 2006 by Pendo Verlag and costs 19.90 euros.

Purchase:
Bookstore

Sexuelle Selbstbestimmung als Menschenrecht [Sexual self-determination as a human right]

The topics of gender identity and sexual self-determination are becoming increasingly prevalent in the human rights discourse, but they are met with significant resistance as well. Reports from international human rights organisations confirm that numerous rights of people who do not meet gender or sexual norms – or who live in homosexual partnerships – are violated all over the world. At the same time, the practice of international institutions for human rights protection on a European and UN level demonstrate which human rights protection standards have thus far been developed.

The anthology “Sexuelle Selbstbestimmung als Menschenrecht” [“Sexual self-determination as a human right”] examines the fundamental human rights underlying the right to sexual

self-determination as well as the perspectives of various affected groups.

It was published by the Deutsche Institut für Menschenrechte [German Institute for Human Rights], Nomos Verlag and costs 49 euros.

Purchase:
Bookstore

WEBSITES

www.bzga-whocc.de

On its website www.bzga.whocc.de, the BZgA provides information on the work of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Sexual and Reproductive Health.

The BZgA has been a partner of the WHO Regional Office for Europe in the field of sex education and family planning since 2003. In this role, the BZgA makes its expert knowledge available to its partners and thus contributes towards the promotion of sexual and reproductive health in Europe.

The website offers insight into concepts and field reports from BZgA’s national and international activities. It provides information on theoretical backgrounds as well as specific projects and thus makes a significant contribution towards the improved integration of European experts in the field of sexual and reproductive health. In addition to the above, the website also offers an overview of the strategies and positions of the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

www.geilezeit.dortmund.de

After an extended development phase, the campaign “geilezeit” (which translates roughly as “wicked” or “sexy time”) administered by the Jugendamt Dortmund [Dortmund Youth Welfare Office] in collaboration with the Institut für Sexualpädagogik (isp) [Institute for Sex Education], has now gone online with its campaign website. The homepage revolving around “friendship, love and sexuality” mainly targets adolescents and offers a wide range of information – particularly for its target group of 12 to 16-year-olds as well as sex education facilitators. The site offers users a key-word-structured topics list covering all related areas, as well as project presentations and the opportunity for topic-related communication.

www.bundesstiftung-mutter-und-kind.de

The federal foundation “Mutter und Kind – Schutz des ungeborenen Lebens” [“Federal Foundation for the Protection of Mother, Child and Unborn Life”] has revised and updated its internet presence. The portal offers information on the support the foundation offers for women in need, as well as its goals, structure and application requirements. It is linked to the BZgA’s online services via schwanger-info.de.

Among other things, it offers pregnant women a post code search engine to help them find the closest pregnancy counselling centre which allocates funds from the foundation to pregnant women in need.

TRAINING

Qualitätssiegel in der Sexualpädagogik [Seal of excellence in sex education]

Since 1 January 2008, the Gesellschaft für Sexualpädagogik (gsp) [Association for Sex Education] has been awarding a seal of excellence to people working in sex education.

The aim of this award is to improve or secure the level of sex education in Germany and to thus contribute towards the professionalisation of sex education. By introducing this seal, gsp has shown a pioneering approach to quality assurance in sex education – even within a European context.

The seal signifies greater assurance and higher quality in the services offered for sponsors or contractors of sex educational services.

The awarding of the seal is based on clearly defined standards for training and practical experience. Both employees and freelancers will be in an improved position to distinguish themselves as specialists in their field through the seal of excellence.

Recipients of the seal receive the right to use the title “Sexualpädagogin/ Sexualpädagoge (isp)” [Sex Educator (isp)] after their name.

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PROJECTS

Aufklärung zu lesbisch-schwulen Lebensweisen [Sex education on lesbian and gay lifestyles]

KomBi, the Berlin education institute for diversity, gender and sexual identity, offers sex education and hosts information events for children and adolescents on lesbian and gay lifestyles. The projects are conceived for schools as well as other domains and examine gender roles and sexual identity – as well as same-sex love in an intercultural comparison. Moreover, they raise the participants' awareness of discrimination mechanisms and are specially designed to offer competent and authentic answers to the questions posed by children and adolescents.

KomBi has uploaded a teaching sequence titled "Sechs mal Vielfalt – was Vielfalt bedeutet und wie sie geschützt wird" ["Six times diversity – what diversity means and how it is protected"] to prepare classes for a school project with KomBi (www.kombi-berlin/05-vielfalt.pdf).

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Kondomführerschein [Condom driving license]

In the past, various institutes have discovered that a "condom driving license" presents an opportunity to engage in "condom work" with adolescents. As with an actual driving license, the teaching session is followed by a theoretical and practical exam, after which successful candidates are awarded a condom driving license. The youth work organisation LAG-Jungenarbeit

offers a materials set to carry out this instruction course. The "starter kit for the condom driving license" costs 75 Euros including shipping.

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