



PROJECT MUSE®

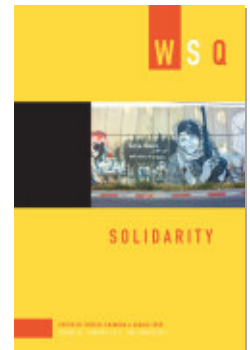
Pedo-Sexuality: An Especially German History

Meike Sophia Baader, Nicholas Levis

WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly, Volume 43, Numbers 1 & 2, Spring/Summer 2015, pp. 315-322 (Article)

Published by The Feminist Press

DOI: [10.1353/wsqa.2015.0017](https://doi.org/10.1353/wsqa.2015.0017)



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/wsqa/summary/v043/43.1-2.baader.html>

Pedo-Sexuality: An Especially German History

Meike Sophia Baader

Translated by Nicholas Levis

Controversies about pedophilia continue to unfold in many countries. In no small measure, this is due to the coming to light in recent years of many incidents of abuse involving the Catholic Church. These scandals have posed a serious challenge for the Church and have been treated in various national case studies.

The ongoing public debate on pedophilia in Germany, however, has been cast as a problem of the Left and of liberalism, almost certainly making for a unique circumstance internationally (Herzog 2014). To understand how this happened, we must take a closer look at the German discourse since 2010, which has gone through different waves and displayed a variety of discursive elements. The narrative that has been reinforced since 2013, especially, portrays the Left and liberalism as particularly apt to adopt pedophilic positions.

Though the waves of public debate have been complex, since 2013 there has been an almost complete failure to distinguish between actual practices of sexual abuse and the adoption of pedophilia-defending positions in the debates about sex crime laws during the 1970s and 1980s. These controversies are deeply embedded in the specificities of German history. They return us to the 1960s and 1970s, the sexual revolution, and the post-1968 antiauthoritarian education and children's *Kinderladen* (day care) movements in West Germany—and thus also to the “paradoxes of sexual liberalization” that still concern us today (Herzog 2013). From the perspective of historical scholarship and a history of education that considers the longer term, even more fundamental questions arise about how very differently child sexuality and the relationships between adult and

child sexualities have been discussed and assessed at various points over the centuries (König 2014).

Stages of the German Debate Since 2010

Starting in early 2010, the German public learned of numerous incidents of sexual abuse at Catholic boarding schools in prior decades. This served to revive interest in another earlier scandal involving the sexual abuse of children and adolescents at the Odenwald School, an institution famous within the educational reform movement. Odenwald had been founded in 1910 as a pioneering coeducational boarding school closely associated with the life reform (*Lebensreform*) and youth and women's movements of that time. In the 1970s, Odenwald became a model for a new West German movement for educational reform. Stories about sex abuse incidents at Odenwald in the 1970s and 1980s first emerged in the late 1990s, but without major public, let alone legal, consequences. The full terrifying extent of what had transpired was only revealed after 2010: more than 130 mostly male students were sexually abused by Odenwald teachers, with the headmaster playing a prominent role. How could this have been concealed for so long? Among the reasons advanced are that Odenwald was an elite school as well as a model school of the reform movement. The school enjoyed a kind of institutional protection, and the headmaster similar personal protection. These unwritten rules were respected by the media and still very much followed in the late 1990s.

In the meantime, a series of publications by victims, journalists, and social scientists have considered how such a high number of abuse incidents could occur over a period of so many years without discovery. The practice of abuse enjoyed a level of discursive legitimation at Odenwald. The school's agenda of educational reform was wrapped up in a specific dynamic, both drawing connections to Greek antiquity and Plato's ideal of "pedagogical Eros," and appropriating the arguments and vocabulary of the sexual revolution (Baader 2012a). In the wake of the abuse controversies, a thorough scholarly examination of "pedagogical Eros" explored its origins and development through the German and English life reform movements around 1900 and in the ideas of the English sexologist Havelock Ellis (Oelkers 2011). The Odenwald incidents also became the subject of a German feature film released in September 2014, *Die Auserwählten*. Directed by Christoph Röhl, "The Chosen" portrays the head-

master who sexually abused male students as an autocratic hippie who refutes criticisms of his own behavior by citing Plato.

The story of abuse at the Odenwald School is a West German history, but it is also the history of an elite, one with very specific social and gender dimensions. The immense public scrutiny directed at these cases of abuse within an elite institution contrasts starkly with the comparatively weak public response to prior revelations of child sexual abuse within state institutions for orphans and/or juvenile delinquents from the 1940s to the 1970s (Wensierski 2007). These stories emerged in the early 2000s and resulted in a 2008 roundtable on education in state institutions, but less advantaged children at state residential institutions never garnered the same interest from the media and public as the children of the educated elite at Odenwald. How much attention the media pays to violence, sexualized violence, suffering, trauma, and injuries suffered by schoolchildren has depended entirely on the identities of these children and adolescents, and on the status of their families. This illustrates Judith Butler's recent insights on war, suffering, violence, and vulnerability: not every case of suffering is equally grievable (Butler 2009). That observation applies also to the vulnerability of children.

The New Left and Liberalism Stand Accused

The 2013 Theodor Heuss Prize for political achievement was awarded to Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a Green party politician, member of the European Parliament, and former German-French protagonist of the May 1968 events in Paris. The speech was to be delivered by Andreas Vosskuhle, chief justice of the German constitutional court. He refused this assignment, pointing to a 1975 publication by Cohn-Bendit, *Der grosse Basar* (The grand bazaar). This autobiographical work, written while Cohn-Bendit was working at an antiauthoritarian *Kinderladen* in Frankfurt, described an eroticized relationship between himself and the children. A few years earlier, Cohn-Bendit was the subject of a French debate that also raised allegations of pedophilia (Bourg 2006). Also in 2013, an election year in Germany, the Greens were confronted with further accusations of pro-pedophilia sympathies, based on a series of party conference resolutions in the 1980s that had called for the abolition of the age of consent for sexual relations between children and adults. The Greens responded by commissioning a group of political scientists to prepare a study (Walter, Klecha,

and Hensel 2015), which prompted a new round of discussion. Since the abolition of the age of consent was advanced in the 1980s and early 1990s not only by the Greens but also by the Free Democratic Party (the FDP, also known as the Liberals), the taint is seen as extending to the left-liberal spectrum as a whole and is referred to as the “shadow side of liberalism.”

Detabooization or Transgression?

The 1970s and 1980s saw a tension between a necessary breaking down of taboos and a problematic dissolution of boundaries between childhood and adult sexuality. Very much focused on politics and party history, the Green-commissioned study has far less to say about the debates and contexts of childhood and upbringing in West Germany in the 1960s to the 1980s. Within the antiauthoritarian *Kinderladen* movement, which was closely associated with the early phase of the new women’s movement (Baader 2008), great significance was assigned to the idea of liberating child sexuality. This was linked to a vision reaching back especially to Wilhelm Reich, who held that the liberation of child sexuality would lead to the liberation of human beings. The idea fit in with the “politicization of desire” in the context of the 1968 movements (Herzog 2007) and can be seen analogously as a “politicization of childhood sexuality.” The proclamation of their liberation (Sager 2008; Baader and Sager 2010) was expected to contribute to their childhood happiness (Baader 2012b). A number of texts from the West German antiauthoritarian educational milieu did not distinguish between childhood and adult sexuality, but sought to flatten sexual distinctions between the generations.¹ While these texts did not represent the entire *Kinderladen* and antiauthoritarian education movements, which were inherently heterogeneous, they do point to certain blind spots (Baader 2012a). Within the circles of these movements, “the alternative milieux,” and the emancipatory sexology of the 1970s, texts and documents on child sexuality lacked perspectives that reinforced a child’s right and ability to say no to sexual conduct. Especially conspicuous from a present-day perspective, their very narrow definition of violence implicitly legitimates sexuality between children and adults if it is consensual. Thus it must be acknowledged that this problematic dissolution of the boundaries between childhood and adult sexuality was among the discursive positions—and thus among the serious blind spots—in the antiauthoritarian education project scene. At least some of the pedagogical

cal concepts of the 1970s assigned significance to sexuality as an element in successful childhood development that is clearly exaggerated, from today's perspective.

These blinders to the transgression of boundaries between child and adult sexuality were not only found in the West German countercultural and "alternative milieus" (Reichard and Siegfried 2010; Reichard 2014), but also generally in West German educational and social sciences, as well as sexology. These tendencies furthermore display an international dimension. In the West German case, the women's movement played an important role in criticizing positions that dissolved the boundaries between childhood and adult sexuality (Amendt 2010; Baader 2012a). In the 1980s, the women's movement raised awareness of the problem of child abuse, especially within families, also insisting on the right of the child to say no to sexuality. Learning to perceive the boundaries of one's own body, and to understand one's right as a child to say no, is central to current pedagogic concepts for preventing sexualized violence and child abuse.

If efforts to break down the distinctions between childhood and adult sexuality met only weak opposition within the West German leftist atmosphere of the 1980s, the journalist Jan Feddersen attributes this in part to the male gay rights movement and its fundamental struggle against sexual prohibitions and tabooizations (Feddersen 2012). One crucial factor contributing to this nexus was that, even after the criminal law reform of 1969 abolished the longstanding prohibition on male homosexuality in Germany (the infamous Paragraph 175), the age of consent for homosexual contact at first remained at twenty-one, although heterosexual contact was consentable from age eighteen.

Prospects

With regard to the boundaries between child and adult sexuality and issues of sexual violence and child abuse, it is crucial that we differentiate between discourses, on the one hand, and sexual practices and actions, on the other. The increased sensitivity since the 1990s with regard to violence against women and children is associated (at least in the history of the Federal Republic) with the increase in the rights of women and children since the 1970s. The transformation in the gender order has also played a role in enhancing sensitivity to the issue of pedo-sexuality. The Italian feminist Luisa Muraro puts it succinctly: "Among the ancient Greeks, male

pedophilia was an allowed practice regulated by custom; in our society it is forbidden by law and morality, but was until recently tolerated by custom as part of the male privileges within the family and in family-like associations" (2001, 190). At the same time, she voices skepticism about new forms of hysteria and witch hunts.

The greater sensitivity to the sexual abuse of children must not become a reason to turn childhood sexuality once again into a denied theme, an "ana-thema" (Quindeau and Brumlik 2012). That would mean a retreat to the 1950s, when every form of child sexuality was denied. This tabooization provoked the detabooization of child sexuality during the period of sexual liberalization. Lifting taboos went together with the problems, ambiguities, and blind spots described above. Re-tabooization and retreat to the 1950s cannot be the answer, however. By no means have we settled the pedagogical questions of what is an appropriate and wholesome approach to childhood sexuality, or what corresponding concepts will do justice to sexual variety.

Notes

1. See, for example, Bookhagen et al. (1969); Cohn-Bendit (1975); Amendt (1970); and a 1973 issue of the magazine *betrifft erziehung* titled "Abuse—A Crime Without Victims," discussed in Baader (2012a). Within the *Kinderladen* movement, the sex education book *Zeig Mal (Show Me!)*, McBride and Fleischhauer-Hardt, (1974) also omits thematization of the difference between childhood and adult sexuality (see Sager 2015, 156).

Meike Sophia Baader teaches at the University of Hildesheim where she is executive director of the Institute for Educational Studies. She is member of the review board "Education Sciences" of the German Research Foundation (DFG). Baader has authored, coauthored, and edited more than a dozen volumes, most recently (with coeditors Florian Eßer and Wolfgang Schröer), *Kindheiten in der Moderne: Eine Geschichte der Sorge*.

Works Cited

- Amendt, Günther. 1970. *SexFront*. Frankfurt am Main: März.
- . 2010. "Sexueller Missbrauch von Kindern: Zur Pädophiliediskussion von 1980 bis heute." *Merkur* 12:1161–72.
- Baader, Meike Sophia. 2008. "Das Private ist politisch. Der Alltag der

- Geschlechter, die Lebensformen und die Kinderfrage." In *"Seid realistisch, verlangt das Unmögliche". Wie 1968 die Pädagogik bewegte*, edited by Meike Sophia Baader, 153–72. Weinheim: Beltz.
- . 2012a. "Blinde Flecken in der Debatte über sexualisierte Gewalt." In *Sexualisierte Gewalt, Macht und Pädagogik*, edited by Werner Thole, Meike Sophia Baader, Werner Helsper, Manfred Kappeler, Marianne Leuzinger-Bohleber, Sabine Reh, Uwe Sielert, Christiane Thompson (Hrsg.). Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich.
- . 2012b. "Childhood and Happiness in German Romanticism, Progressive Education and the West German Anti-Authoritarian Kinderladen Movement of the 1968." *Paedagogica Historica* 48(3):485–500.
- Baader, Meike Sophia, and C. Sager. 2010. "Die pädagogische Konstitution des Kindes als Akteur im Zuge der 68er-Bewegung." *Diskurs Kindheits- und Jugendforschung* 5(3):255–69.
- Bookhagen, Christel, Eike Hemmer, Jan Raspe, Eberhard Schultz, and Marion Stergar. 1969. *Kommune 2. Versuch zur Revolutionierung des Bürgerlichen Individuums*. Berlin: Oberbaumpresse.
- Bourg, Julian. 2006. "Boy Trouble: French Pedophilic Discourse of the 1970s." In *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960–1980*, ed. Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried (287–312). New York: Berghahn.
- Butler, Judith. 2009. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.
- Cohn-Bendit, Daniel. 1975. *Der grosse Basar*. Munich: Trikont.
- Feddersen, Jan. 2012. "Schlüssel zu einer besseren Welt." In *Zerstörerische Vorgänge: Missachtung und sexuelle Gewalt gegen Kinder und Jugendliche in Institutionen*, ed. Sabine Andresen and Wilhelm Heitmeyer (243–50). Weinheim: Beltz-Juventa.
- Herzog, Dagmar. 2007. *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 2013. *Paradoxien der sexuellen Liberalisierung*. Göttingen: Wallstein.
- . 2014. "Sexuelle Traumatisierung und traumatisierte Sexualität: Die westdeutsche Sexualwissenschaft im Wandel." Keynote presented at Internationale & interdisziplinäre Tagung "Zwischen notwendiger Enttabuisierung und problematischer Entgrenzung." Sexuelle Revolution und Kindheit im historischen Kontext der 1970/80er, Stiftung Universität Hildesheim. September.
- König, Julia. 2014. *Kindheit - Sexualität – kindliche Sexualität. Eine historische systematische Untersuchung zum Verhältnis dreier zentraler erziehungswissenschaftlicher Begriffe*. Frankfurt am Main: Unpublished Thesis.

- McBride, Will, and Helga Fleischhauer-Hardt. 1974. *Zeig mal! Ein Bilderbuch für Kinder und Erwachsene*. Wuppertal: Jugenddienst.
- Muraro, Luisa. 2001. *Die Menge im Herzen*. Rüsselsheim: Göttert.
- Oelkers, Jürgen. 2011. *Eros und Herrschaft. Die dunklen Seiten der Reformpädagogik*. Weinheim and Basel: Beltz-Verlag.
- Quindeau, Ilka, and Micha Brumlik, eds. 2012. *Kindliche Sexualität*. Weinheim and Basel: Beltz-Juventa.
- Reichardt, Sven. 2014. *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Reichardt, Sven, and Detlef Siegfried. 2010. "Das Alternative Milieu." In *Das alternative Milieu: Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa 1968–1983*, ed. Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried. Göttingen: Wallstein.
- Sager, Christin. 2008. "Das Ende der kindlichen Unschuld. Die Sexualerziehung der 68er-Bewegung." In *Seid realistisch, verlangt das Unmögliche. Wie 68 die Pädagogik bewegte*, ed. Meike Sophia Baader (56–68). Weinheim: Beltz-Verlag.
- . 2015. *Das aufgeklärte Kind: Zur Geschichte der bundesrepublikanischen Sexualaufklärung (1950–2010)*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Walter, Franz, Stephan Klecha, and Alexander Hensel, eds. 2015. *Die Grünen und die Pädosexualität: Eine bundesdeutsche Geschichte*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht.
- Wensierski, Peter. 2007. *Schläge im Namen des Herrn: Die verdrängte Geschichte der Heimkinder in der Bundesrepublik*. Munich: Goldman.