

Emotional States: Marriage and the Pursuit of Happiness in East and West Germany,
1949–1989

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the institution of marriage in East and West Germany from 1949 to 1989. It traces the attempts by state representatives, religious organizations, and a wide variety of other groups to shape the meaning of marriage in the postwar period. I argue that changes in people's views and behavior related to the institution of marriage were not fundamentally influenced by the ideologies of East and West Germany. Instead, other forces, active on both sides of the Iron Curtain, caused the general changes in people's attitudes toward marriage in the forty years this study covers. I show how these shifts were the result of phenomena such as consumerism and growing individualism rather than a consequence of religiously and politically motivated attempts to change people's lives. I further demonstrate how the East and West German states were very similar in their conservative approach to marriage, their opposing political systems and ideological differences notwithstanding.

Contrary to previous studies on marriage in modern Germany, this dissertation pays special attention to the role emotions played in people's imagination of a happy life with a partner. I show how in the early postwar years, marriage experts were more interested in rational decision-making and ensuring that people chose the "right" partner than they were in spouses' emotional bonds. By the 1980s, though, virtually all experts were convinced that romantic love needed to be the foundation on which a happy marriage is built. Finally, whereas East and West Germans followed many of the same traditions and slow transformations in their changing views on married life, they differed in one key aspect by the end of the Cold War. Although marriage was still popular among East Germans in the 1970s and 1980s, it was generally not considered to be the supreme

form of relationship it had once been. Marriage also lost ground in the Federal Republic, but its almost mystical powers as an institution binding people together for life never quite disappeared from the imagination of West Germans.

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INTRODUCTION

From the moment East and West Germany were founded in 1949, state representatives, religious organizations, and wide variety of other groups fought for power, influence, and the right to interpret the meaning of marriage. These actors were all united in their belief that marriage is an essential component of a good life. But while they shared the conviction that marriage needs special protection, they differed greatly in their interpretations of what a good life actually means, just as they disagreed about what the ideal society should look like. This study examines the ways these interest groups tried to shape the meaning of marriage in East and West Germany from the foundation of the two German states to the fall of the Berlin Wall forty years later.

Throughout this period narratives of “the good marriage” were engines of national, group, and individual self-consciousness and identity. We can see this in legal debates, in Churches’ struggles to hold on to their traditional authority, and in attempts by social scientists to reshape the institution of marriage in their ambitions to build a better future. How did these narratives overlap and influence each other? And equally important, to what degree did the various undertakings to reshape the meaning of marriage change people’s everyday behavior? In my attempts to answer these questions, I have mainly focused on elites and their aspirations to form the opinion of the general public. But if we want to understand how the meaning of marriage changed between 1949 and 1989, we also need to examine how ordinary East and West Germans imagined a happy and fulfilling life together with a partner. By consulting advice columns in popular magazines, opinion polls, marriage manuals, and a number of other sources I have, as far as possible, tried to find places where the ideas of these groups converged.

Historical work on marriage in the German context has, with a few exceptions, tended to approach the topic with questions of how marital status, norms, and legal definitions influenced views on sexuality, morality, and other cultural and social aspects of life.¹ In one of the most thorough studies of marriage in postwar Germany, Elizabeth Heineman argues that it determined women's position and experience as much as race, gender, sexual orientation, and class.² She notes that in the early postwar decades, women were in large part defined by whether or not they had a husband. By the time of reunification, however, a spouse was much less important for the life and status of most women. While Heineman does not treat the institution of marriage as a static category, her main interest is still its impact on the legal, social, and cultural status of women. In similar ways, excellent histories of sexuality have discussed what consequences different views of marriage had on changing sexual behaviors and norms in modern Germany.³ Much like Heineman's study, this body of research is often quick to point out that marriage was by no means an institution fixed in time. Historians, such as Josie McLellan and Dagmar Herzog, both of whom have written influential studies on sexuality in the postwar period, and Donna Harsch whose perceptive *Revenge of the Domestic* explore women and the family in the GDR, have all contributed to our knowledge of marriage in postwar Germany.⁴ Their studies have, among other things, explored how the institution

¹ Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Josie McLellan, *Love In the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality In the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality In Twentieth-century Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Elizabeth Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?: Women and Marital Status In Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

² Heineman, *What Difference?*.

³ For a good overview, see Mark, Fenemore, "The Recent Historiography of Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Germany," *The Historical Journal* 3 (2009): 763-779.

⁴ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*; McLellan, *Love In the Time of Communism*; Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*.

of marriage shaped opinions about sexuality, gender roles, and family patterns.

This approach has proved to be a powerful way to address a variety of cultural aspects of German life. But the method of using marriage as a lens through which one reads other phenomena sometimes forces the historian to freeze its meaning in time. This makes it easier to study the influence of marriage on, for example, gender issues and sexual norms, but it also diminishes, or simply disregards, its fluid nature.⁵ In contrast, I have tried, as far as possible, to show how the categories of marriage were much more ambiguous than they may first appear. Moreover, while these scholars have added crucial knowledge to our social, cultural, and political perception of marriage, they have left its significance for people's emotional lives virtually unexplored. Yet marriage, both as an idea and as a human practice, abounds with emotions. In light of this lacuna in the history of marriage in postwar Germany, I have sought to understand the role of emotions in both the *lived experience* and as a crucial component for the *idea* of what a happy marriage meant to different historical actors.

In the following chapters I make four main claims. The first is that changes in people's views and behavior related to the institution of marriage were not fundamentally influenced by the ideologies of East and West Germany. Rather, these changes were connected to broader trends visible on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In principle I agree with Elisabeth Heineman, whose most important conclusion is that marital status still created a larger difference between women than did the separation of East and West Germany. But whereas Heineman is interested in women's status, I point to a more general shift in attitudes in the postwar period that was clearly noticeable in public

⁵ Jessica, Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Weiss' study tries to reverse this order of inquiry, but it does not explore any themes in the German context and is mostly focused on the 1950s.

discussions of married life on both sides of the German border. This was the growing focus on individual and personal needs for a fulfilling life, often influenced by expanding consumer cultures.⁶ Justifications for individualism surely looked different in the East and in the West. Still, the general move in the direction of viewing marriage as a place of personal fulfillment unfolded on a more or less similar time scale. This not only suggests a limited influence of the state and state ideology, despite persistent efforts to change the meaning of marriage and control people's family lives through legislations and other measures. It also points to a driving force of change that extended across national boundaries as well as contrasting ideological regimes.

The second claim this study makes is closely related to the conclusions we can draw from studying the state's limited influence on marriage ideals. Their opposing political systems and ideological differences notwithstanding, the East and West German states were, throughout their existence, very similar in their conservative approach to marriage.⁷ Although an increasing openness to divorce can be detected in the 1970s and 1980s, legislators and policy makers in the GDR and the Federal Republic alike were much more interested in preserving a traditional view of marriage than they were in progressive alternatives such as civil unions. One of the perhaps most obvious symptoms of such attitudes were state representatives' and other elite groups' constant proclamations of an impending marriage crisis that would supposedly destroy the institution itself. Although the perceived threats changed over the years, the anxiety about a crisis in the offing never went away.

⁶ In the realm of sex, this began already in the 1950s. See Elizabeth Heineman, *Before Porn was Legal: the Erotic Empire of Beate Uhse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁷ For conservative tendencies in the GDR, see David Priestland, *The Red Flag: a History of Communism* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), 307.

Thirdly, discussions about marriage were teeming with notions of romantic love. Even documents with an otherwise sober and bureaucratic language, such as legal records and economic plans for counseling clinics, were filled with thoughts about people's emotional lives. But while historians have been exploring the history of emotions in modern Germany for some time now, studies on marriage have not been equally interested in the topic. As we shall see, though, the nature of love and its importance for a healthy and happy life was of great concern to those who wanted to shape the future of marriage. What is more, the popular view of romantic love as *the* basic premise for meaningful life together with a partner changed in the forty years under investigation here.⁸ East German marriage advisors argued that marital happiness was an integral part of "Socialist morality," which in turn demanded scientific knowledge about the human mind and rational thinking.⁹ At the same time, they described the joy of marriage as a deeply emotional experience, impossible to define because of its "unknowable mystique." In the West, theologians, in order to reach out to an increasingly skeptical public, resorted to social scientific models to explain the inner workings of God's design for married life. I thus show how advisors and health educators endeavored to scientifically explain the emotional experiences of love and marriage, while at the same using these models of rationality to fill married life with almost magical meaning.

Finally, whereas East and West Germans followed many of the same traditions and slow transformations in their changing views on married life, by the end of the Cold War they differed in one key aspect. For a number of reasons, which I will get to in the

⁸ This was of course not only a German phenomenon. See for example Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: an Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth Century Britain* (London, Atlantic Books, 2003).

⁹ On "Socialist morality," see McLellan, *Love In the Time of Communism*, 116 and 188, and Simon May, *Love: a History*, (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2011).

following, young East Germans lost the belief in marriage as a sacrosanct institution that needed to last for a lifetime. Although marriage was still popular among East Germans in the 1970s and 1980s it was generally not considered to be the supreme form of relationship it had once been. To be sure, marriage also lost ground in the Federal Republic, but its almost mystical powers as an institution binding people together for life never quite disappeared from the imagination of West Germans.

I trace these developments by trying to find ways of navigating between the various levels on which this study operates – between the everyday and the extraordinary, between state and society, and between institutions and the individuals who make up these social and cultural structures. Woven into these structures were ideological principles, religious convictions, emotions, and negotiations between the individual and the common good. Consequently, a study about marriage in postwar Germany must be contextualized within the historiography of these themes.

Marriage and Emotions

Throughout the period under consideration in this study most Germans would have agreed with East German marriage advisor Rudolf Neubert, who in 1957 argued that one of the main objectives in life is a happy marriage in which partners can cultivate a close emotional understanding with each other.¹⁰ Indeed, the fact that marriage and emotions are intimately linked might seem like a truism. Still, a thorough discussion of the subject is typically missing from works on marriage in the German context. Nevertheless, the

¹⁰ Rudolf Neubert, *Das neue Ehebuch: Die Ehe als Aufgabe der Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Rudolstadt: Greifenverlag, 1957), 7.

history of emotions has been a growing field of interest in the last decade.¹¹ By studying emotions, we can find out much more about human motives, about what triggers actions (and non- actions), about what influences decisions (and non-decisions), about what causes people to bond (or to tear up bonds).¹² Inspired by earlier research, such as that of Lucien Febvre and Norbert Elias, and encouraged by new findings in psychology and medicine, historians have argued that feelings are also heavily influenced by social and cultural factors.¹³

Expression of emotions in the past could be found, basically, everywhere – magazines, newspapers, advertisements, court cases, advice books, and personal letters. The question is how to read these sources. In the following I have chosen to listen to and rely on people’s assessments of their feelings as far as possible. Research from a variety of fields shows us that humans are notoriously unreliable at correctly reporting their emotions, even in clinical settings. Yet the fact that individuals and groups of people

¹¹ We can see this in a variety of fields and periods ranging from the Middle Ages to the Cambodian Genocide. See for example Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions,” *Passions in Context* 1 (2010): 1-32, and Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?: Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005)

¹² Frank Biess, “Forum: History of Emotions,” *German History* (2010) 28 (1): 67-80.

¹³ Lucien Febvre, “Sensibility and History: How to Reconstitute the Emotional Life of the Past,” in Peter Burke ed., *A New Kind of History* (London: Harper Row, 1973), 12-26; Elias, Norbert. *The Civilizing Process*. (New York: Urizen Books, 1978); William Reddy, “Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions,” *Current Anthropology* 38 (1997): 327–51; William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Ute Frevert, “Angst vor Gefühlen. Die Geschichtsmächtigkeit von Emotionen im 20. Jahrhundert,” in Paul Nolte, Manfred Hettling, Frank-Michael Kuhleemann and Hans-Walter Schmuhl eds., *Perspektiven der Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000), 95–111; Ute Frevert ed., *Vertrauen. Historische Annäherungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003); Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 821-845.; Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Birgit Aschmann, “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Emotionen in der Geschichte. Eine Einführung,” in Aschmann ed., *Gefühl und Kalkül: Der Einfluss von Emotionen auf die Politik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 9–32; Jakob Tanner, “Das Rauschen der Gefühle. Vom Darwinischen Universalismus zur Davidsonschen Triangulation,” *Züricher Jahrbuch für Wissensgeschichte* 2 (2006): 129–52; Daniela Saxer, “Mit Gefühl Handeln. Ansätze der Emotionsgeschichte,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichte* (2007), 15–29; Daniel Wickberg, “What is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New,” *The American Historical Review*, 112 (2007): 661-684.

chose common ways of describing how they felt, and that these emotional responses changed with the passing of time, suggest that although we cannot know for sure whether these were “genuine” feelings, we can still assume that East and West Germans adhered to slowly shifting emotional regimes.

In German historiography scholars of the emotions have identified various types of anxiety in the postwar era, such as abhorrence of war, fears of a possible destruction of the domestic order, forebodings of economic collapse, and concerns about the ambivalence of progress and modernity.¹⁴ Frank Biess, for instance, has suggested a postwar emotional regime of fear growing out of the threat posed by Cold War nuclear strategies in West Germany.¹⁵ In another excellent study, comparing East and West German reactions to American music and fashion in the first postwar decades, Uta Poiger shows continuous outbreaks of adult panic about the alleged effects of jazz and rock and roll on the morality, sexuality, and national identity of Germans.¹⁶ In the realm of religion, Andrea Meissner has recently pointed to specific gendered aspects of emotions in Germany, arguing that men, at least in religious circles, “found emotions” much earlier than what studies of popular culture would suggest.¹⁷

As these examples show, many of the attempts to explore the world of emotions in German history has been concerned with fear and anxieties. In contrast, I have chosen

¹⁴ For studies with a specific focus on modernity, see Lutz Raphael, “Ordnungsmuster der ‘Hochmoderne’? Die Theorie der Moderne und die Geschichte der europäischen Gesellschaften im 20. Jahrhundert,” in Ute Schneider and Lutz Raphael eds., *Dimensionen der Moderne. Festschrift für Christof Dipper* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 73–91, esp. pp. 82, 86; Ulrich Herbert, “Europe in High Modernity: Reflections on a Theory of the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Modern European History*, 3 (2006): 5–21; Detlev J.K. Peukert, “Das Janusgesicht der Moderne,” in Peukert, *Max Webers Diagnose der Moderne* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 55–69.

¹⁵ Frank Biess, “‘Everybody has a Chance’: Nuclear Angst, Civil Defense, and the History of Emotions in Postwar West Germany,” *German History* 2009 27: 215–243.

¹⁶ Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture In a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Andrea Meissner, “Against ‘Sentimental’ Piety: The Search for a New Culture of Emotions in Interwar German Catholicism,” *German History* (32) 2014: 393–413.

to explore an equally important, but quite different aspect of human life – the search for happiness and wellbeing in relationships with other people.¹⁸ Biess’ thorough research on the topic of “German angst” plausibly suggests an apprehensive emotional regime in the postwar period. This, however, does not necessarily mean that Germans were constantly anxious or fearful. The institution of marriage was one, albeit far from the only, domain where we can find ideas of happiness, wellbeing, and the search for stability and normalcy after a recent chaotic past. Immediately after the war, experts from variety of fields and ideological backgrounds set out define or redefine what it meant to be happily married, and at the same time distance themselves from the Nazi past. But as soon as they did so they also began to express fear of an imminent marriage crisis.

Adding to the feeling of unease was a sense that no matter how much specialists and experts strived to influence people’s behavior, individuals did not seem to comply with these designs for how to manage one’s emotions in married life or when choosing a future partner. Although operating from very different viewpoints, people concerned with a marriage crisis wrestled with a similar set of problems. While they shared a deep conviction that marriage is an essential source of human happiness, they were at the same time involved in reinterpreting and crafting its political meaning after mass death and national defeat. By closely tracing this history as it unfolds, I hope to show how the history of marital happiness in postwar Germany often takes us back to narratives of fear and anxiety.

¹⁸ Happiness has been studied in a variety of contexts, both as a history of emotions and intellectual history. Few, however, have connected it to the institution of marriage. See, Darrin M. McMahon, *Happiness: a History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006); Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons From a New Science* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005); Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth In Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

Ideology and Religion

The closer we get to the end of the twentieth century, the more concepts such as the individual, contingency, and choice make themselves heard in discussions about marriage and a fulfilling, happy life. Just as these changing values were being reflected in popular media, they were also visible in the ways Christians were becoming increasingly reliant on social scientific theories. “Every person is a stone with multiple facets,” Hanna Wolff wrote in her 1978 book *Jesus as Psychotherapist*, which pointed to individual needs as the foundation for human happiness.¹⁹ The book came out in 35,000 copies and seven editions between 1978 and 1986 – a time when the public debate about love and marriage was dominated by notions of individualism and self-realization. Compared with the attitudes of most Christian marriage advisors of the 1950s, however, Wolff’s standpoint was quite radical. I have sought to explore the reasons so many theologians and other Christians turned to the social sciences for answers about marriage and family life after the 1950s and how this development related to the broader marriage debate.

In the first two decades after the war – a time most historians have interpreted as the highpoint of Christian conservatism – leading theologians began to express worries about losing authority over a variety of aspects of human life. This led representatives from both Catholic and Protestant organizations to search for new ways of communicating with the general public. As we shall see, many advisors turned to sociological models of explanation, such as the “social function of the family,” and similar concepts to get their Christian message across. As one theologian in the early 1960s reasoned when discussing the role of women in family life: “We need to listen

¹⁹ Hanna Wolff, *Jesus als Psychotherapeut: Jesu Menschenbehandlung als Modell moderner Psychotherapie* (Stuttgart: RADIUS-Verlag, 1978).

carefully to anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists, lest we run the risk of painting a picture of the world built on our own preconceived notions of reality.²⁰

In the minds of many theologians this development served to update Christian family norms to the expectations of an increasingly modern society. For others, modernizing the message of the Bible spelled the end of Christianity as a serious social institution. It soon became clear, though, that in order to appear credible to a population distrustful of emotionally based prewar narratives, Christian marriage advisors had to find ways to mediate between traditional dogmatism and social scientific interpretations of marriage and family. This eventually resulted in a less uncompromising stance toward questions about married life than had been the case in the past. In a somewhat ironic twist, then, the narratives on which many churches based their arguments for a Christian marriage were ultimately dependent on social scientific explanations of the world.

Proponents of the so-called secularization theory have argued along similar lines, contending that developments within modern states inevitably lead to ever-more rational social solutions that, by their share logic and functionality, diminished the importance of religion.²¹ Moreover, because secularization theories often assume an increasing rationalization of the world, religion is associated with the emotional and irrational.²² This study, by contrast, while attentive to the expansion of scientific explanation of marriage, love, and family, also point to a re-enchantment of these aspects of human life. As Monica Black has shown, alternative forms of more or less esoteric belief systems

²⁰ Hermann Ringeling, *Die Frau zwischen Gestern und Morgen* (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1962) 9.

²¹ Detlef Pollack, "Historische Analyse statt Ideologiekritik: Eine historisch-kritische Diskussion über die Gültigkeit der Säkularisierungstheorie," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 37, 4 (2011): 482–522.

²² Pascal Eitler, Bettina Hitzer, and Monique Scheer. Feeling and Faith—Religious Emotions in German History. *German History* Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 343–352 (2014)

challenged organized religion already in the 1950s.²³ Even more important for the changing views of marriage was a rapidly expanding consumer culture. This process, which lies at the very heart of modernity, worked to re-enchant the meaning of marriage, not least through the development of the wedding industry. What we see, then, are two parallel stories. On the one hand, a reduced significance of organized religion, and on the other hand, a growing consumer culture mixing tradition with new messages of eternal love that evoked almost magical and quasi-divine powers.

As the example of Hanna Wolff's book *Jesus as Psychotherapist* shows, much of the guidance coming from Christian advisors relied on conclusions that social scientists drew about marriage and family. These conclusions, in turn, rested on general imaginations of "society" – imaginations that were constantly changing over the forty years this study covers. During the "long 1950s" we see interpretations of society as a strong and integrative force in both East and West Germany. The general assumption was that human beings are born into social norms where the social structure is much more important in shaping people's lives than were the autonomous will of the individual.²⁴ West German sociologists such as Helmut Schelsky discussed the family as a "function" of larger systems, and in the GDR most of what was said about marriage and family was expressed in structural Marxist terms.²⁵

Fairly soon such views, including those of Schelsky, became the foundation of ideological key concepts in the East German marriage debate such as "Socialist

²³ Monica Black, "Miracles in the Shadow of the Economic Miracle: The 'Supernatural '50s' in West Germany," *The Journal of Modern History*, 4 (2012): 833-860.

²⁴ Compare this with a broader assessment of Western (mostly American) notions of society in the latter half of the twentieth century, Daniel T. Rogers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

²⁵ Helmut Schelsky, *Wandlungen der deutschen Familie in der Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1954).

morality.” Indeed, ideology in the GDR served many of the functions religion did in the Federal Republic. Similar to Western theologians, the ruling party used scientific language to justify the ideological system of the state. For historians of modern Germany the use of ideology as an explanatory framework in the last two decades has perhaps been most evident in the study of the Holocaust and the Third Reich.²⁶ In the Third Reich, as in East Germany, ideology was certainly important. It functioned as justification for autocratic political systems as well as a driving force changing people’s basic economic and social conditions. But if, as some scholars would have it, the nature of East German society was controlled by state ideology alone – a party dictatorship – there is little left to explain.²⁷ If the study of East Germany takes as its starting point SED’s ideological doctrines, the history of the GDR becomes static.²⁸ By examining questions of marriage, love, and family – none of which were specific to either national boundaries or to the postwar era – we can see beyond the language of ideology that saturated public life in the GDR until its collapse without disregarding its importance.

As much as the history of marriage in the GDR is about ideology, it is also a story of modernity.²⁹ Party leaders and marriage advisors saw themselves as working in a rapidly changing and modernizing world, which they had the powers to shape according to their own liking.³⁰ Up until the late 1960s many of them felt they possessed the blueprint as well as the manual to form this world according to the predictions of Marx,

²⁶ Alon Confino, *A World Without Jews: the Nazi Imagination From Persecution to Genocide* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 3.

²⁷ Priestland, *The Red Flag*, xxi.

²⁸ A good example of a study that tries to move away from the often black and white accounts of the East German regime is Hester Vaizey, *Born In the GDR: Living In the Shadow of the Wall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁹ See for example Jürgen Kocka, “The GDR. A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship,” in Jaraus, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience. Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 17-26.

³⁰ Priestland, David, *The Red Flag*, xxff.

Lenin, and other giants of the Socialist pantheon. The family, held together by the glue of marriage, was the foundation on which this new society would rest.³¹ But though this rhetoric barely changed in the forty years the GDR existed, people's attitudes toward marriage and toward the institutionalized language of the party did indeed change. Some historians have even argued for a "normalization" of the East German state in the late 1960s and early 1970s, claiming that the partly unsuccessful attempts to indiscriminately politicize society left the general population cynical at best and in many cases indifferent to the language of ideology.³² In chapters three and four, I examine how although the state held on to its conservative family politics, people began to adopt a much more open view of marriage. At the same time counseling clinics became increasingly pragmatic, following scientific models rather than ideological programs. While still using central ideological tropes such as "Socialist morality" in their reports, marriage counselors usually disregarded them altogether in their day-to-day practice. As dogmatic as it seemed on the surface, then, Socialist ideology in the GDR was rather pliable in the last two decades of the regime.

Consumerism and Individualism

I have already alluded to the power of a growing wedding industry for the re-enchantment of marriage in both German states. However, the consumption of new marriage ideals did not always involve financial transactions. Pop culture often functioned as a channel through which many new ideals were passed on to younger generations of East and West Germans. As Victoria de Grazia has noted, the "marketing

³¹ McLellan, *Love In the Time of Communism*.

³² For further discussion of the "normalization" of East German society in the 1960s and 1970s, see Mary Fulbrook, *Power and Society In the GDR, 1961-1979: the 'normalisation of Rule'?* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

empire” had the power of creating new norms far beyond economic spheres of interest.³³ Its impact becomes evident not least in critical attacks on consumerism and materialism throughout our period of investigation.³⁴ As we shall see, the unease about an increasingly commercialized society in the West created unlikely allies such as conservative Christians, worried that materialism would destroy the true essence of marriage, and leftist radicals who argued that capitalist consumption was the end of authentic love. Similar arguments were raised by SED loyalists in East Germany. At the same time the party felt the pressures of consumer desires among its population.³⁵ Historians, such as André Steiner, have shown how policy-makers in the GDR partly gave in to such pressures and tried to facilitate mass consumption on the individual and family level.³⁶ Mostly agreeing with Steiner and other scholars pointing in the same direction, I show how material benefits became one of the appeals for young people to marry in the last two decades of the GDR.³⁷

However, the impact of markets did not only concern consumerism and other capitalist ventures. It also influenced the ways people met their partners. Traditionally,

³³ Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 7. Also see, Konrad Jarusch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 270-271, and William H. Sewell, “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation,” *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1992): 1-29.

³⁴ It should be pointed out that concerns about consumerism was not new to the postwar period. Warren G. Breckman has shown that it was present already in the German Empire. Warren G. Breckman, “Disciplining Consumption: The Debate about Luxury in Wilhelmine Germany, 1890-1914,” *Journal of Social History* 3 (1991): 485-505.

³⁵ Mark Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand: the Politics of Consumerism In East Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

³⁶ André Steiner, “Dissolution of the ‘Dictatorship of Needs’?: Consumer Behavior and Economic Reform in East Germany in the 1960s, in Strasser, Susan, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judt ed., *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies In the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 167.

³⁷ See for example Anne Kaminsky, “‘True Advertising Means Promoting a Good Thing through a Good Form’: Advertising in the German Democratic Republic,” and Greg Castillo, “Promoting Socialist Cities and Citizens: East Germany's National Building Program,” in Swett, Pamela E., S. Jonathan Wiesen, and Jonathan R Zatin. *Selling Modernity : Advertising In Twentieth-century Germany* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2007).

marriage has been negotiated horizontally. Partners were chosen from within one's social group. This system had begun to dissolve long before the 1950s.³⁸ Compared to the end of the period examined here, though, the first postwar decade displayed much more traditional arrangements in which future partners had to be carefully considered on both moral and financial grounds. This holds true for both East and West Germany, although the moral norms were justified by different ideological and religious systems. By the 1980s, however, socio-economic status and religious affiliation were no longer formal obstacles to the choice of a future spouse. The result was that the number of potential partners became considerably enlarged.

As sociologists have pointed out, by the end of the twentieth century everyone competed with everyone else for the most desirable mate on a given social field.³⁹ Thus, desirability was increasingly defined in individualized terms and meeting another becomes a matter of personal taste. By the end of the 1980s, marriage had become as much an idea about individual happiness as it was a pretext to form a family. This was perhaps most obvious in the wedding industry's attempts to promote the white wedding as the happiest day in life. Not so much for the partners together, but for the bride, and sometime for the groom (mostly for making his partner happy by letting her plan her fantasy wedding). More subtly, though, marriage had, at the end of the 1980s, become closely related to the notion of self-realization. This happened in both German states. But as with most other structural similarities, arguments about the virtues (and disadvantages) with self-realization were wrapped in contrasting ideological discourses.

³⁸ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy, Or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2005).

³⁹ Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation* (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2012), 52. Also see Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 112ff.

To speak of individualism and self-realization in the GDR may seem to contradict the alleged totalitarian nature of East German society. Historians have long debated the question of whether the GDR was a Socialist dictatorship, a totalitarian state, a Stalinist society, or a modern welfare state.⁴⁰ In popular consciousness after the fall of the Wall, these debates have mainly turned into two extreme characterizations of what it meant to live under Socialism. In part, the GDR has been depicted as a Stasi-run surveillance state. On the other extreme, nostalgic portrayals of the recent past suggest a society where people did not have to worry about much, and where there was always full employment and food on the table. Such characterizations only serve to underscore how interpretations of private and public, and political and personal in East Germany are difficult to understand outside the world of moral values, methodological concerns, and the political-ideological context in which debates take place.⁴¹ In order not to get too hampered by ideological and theoretical debates historians, such as Hester Vaizey, have tried to offset these often dichotomous interpretations. They have attempted this by carefully reconstructing the lives of people who suffered under the abuse of the Stasi and the discriminatory state bureaucracy, while at the same time including the stories of those who did not feel particularly oppressed by the regime.⁴²

Following Vaizey's example, I have labored to balance the diverging views of East German citizens on the one hand, and the intents and actions of the state and state run agencies on the other. I have done so without trying to impose an all-encompassing theoretical framework on these narratives. Despite people's experiences often being at

⁴⁰ For the still best overview of this debate, see Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives In the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold, 2002), 19-43.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴² Vaizey, *Born in the GDR*.

odds with one another, we can nonetheless see larger trends develop over time. Self-realization did not mean the same to East Germans as it did to West Germans. Still the power of the idea that the self was the natural starting point for a happy life, which began to take hold in the 1970s, was strong enough for the SED to find ways to justify certain aspects of individualistic fulfillment through state run programs.

* * *

By considering how Germans envisioned the institution of marriage as being part of a happy life between 1949 and 1989, I hope to contribute to the growing body of historical works on family, marriage, and sexuality that have challenged traditional political narratives over the last twenty years. First, studying the role of emotions in people's everyday lives, as well as their importance for dreams and hopes for a happy future together with a partner, adds crucial knowledge to a little explored area in the history of marriage in modern Germany. Second, historians of emotions often point to emotional regimes of anxiety and fear in the postwar period. While I generally agree with their conclusions, I have tried to call attention to the other side of the emotional spectrum – the pursuit of happiness and wellbeing in life. Thirdly, by examining these specific emotions, this study also aspires to better understand how feelings became increasingly accepted, and by the end of our period expected, in discussions about marriage among most East and West Germans.

Studying the changing views of married life in two German states divided by the Cold War also reveals the limited powers of state actors and ideologically driven experts to change the meaning of marriage in the minds of ordinary Germans. This leads me to the final point. While their efforts were not entirely fruitless, other forces were far more

significant for the increasingly individualized and commercialized marriage discourse than were ideologically incentivized programs. The two different systems under which East and West Germans lived for four decades certainly had an enormous impact on a wide range of everyday practices and even on people's entire worldviews. Marriage, however, was not one of them. The move toward ever more individualistic notions of marital happiness in both German states indicate the presence outside forces that cannot so easily be explained without taking transnational aspects of, for instance, the spread of consumer cultures into consideration. The following chapters, then, do not only tell a story of marriage in two states separated by the Iron Curtain. They also lay bare tectonic shifts in attitudes that transcended the partition of postwar Europe.

CHAPTER ONE

The “Crisis of Marriage” 1949–1961

INTRODUCTION

“We are no miracle doctors of love,” a West German marriage counselor claimed in 1952, continuing, “we just want to learn about the reasons for the current marriage crisis.”¹ Five years later East German health advisor Rudolf Neubert echoed similar concerns. In his view the institution of marriage had been on the decline for almost a century. Already in the 1880s, Neubert asserted, “complaints about broken marriages [were] as common as complaints about broken windows.”² Although adhering to ideologies diametrically at variance with one another, self-proclaimed experts of marriage from both sides of the German border agreed that something needed to be done lest the true values of marriage get lost in a rapidly changing modern world.³ But was the institution of marriage really in decline in the first postwar decades? And if not, how are we to understand the growing anxieties expressed by an increasing number of advisors?

This chapter examines the causes behind the unease many Germans felt about marriage in the 1950s. It shows that contemporary concerns with a supposed marriage crisis, as well as later narratives painting the 1950s as the apogee of stable, happy marriages, need to be regarded with some skepticism. New meanings of marriage and its

¹ “Keine Wunderdoctoren der Liebe,” *Cellesche Zeitung*, 2/2, 1952.

² Rudolf Neubert, *Das neue Ehebuch: Die Ehe als Aufgabe der Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Rudolstadt: Greifenverlag, 1957), 13. Neubert attributed this quote to a judge from Vienna.

³ Not only experts in family issues were concerned about the state of the family. In 1956 Dr. Clemens Münster, director of the Bavarian Broadcasting Company expressed his dismay over the fragmentation of the German family. See Joe Perry, “Healthy for Family Life: Television, Masculinity, and Domestic Modernity during West Germany’s Miracle Years,” *German History* 25/4 (2007): 560.

relation to a happy life took very different forms depending on the ideological, political, and religious backgrounds of those involved in the debate. Such differences were, needless to say, most evident in an East-West perspective. Historians have often pointed to a connection between the recent past of war and mass death and the process in which marriage, sexuality, and other social practices were redefined in the new German states.⁴ By calling attention to people's perceptions of the future in general, and about their anxieties about modernity in particular, this chapter will suggest an alternative perspective.

With a particular focus on the role of emotions, this chapter also endeavors to explore the opinions of those who were not part of the elite project of redefining marriage after the war. These men and women, on both sides of the German border, did not reinvent the institution of marriage just because they happened to find themselves in new political environments. To be sure, many tried to live up to the new expectations spread by political propaganda, marriage advice literature, and popular culture. But old traditions by no means vanished into thin air with the establishment of a new postwar order. As we shall see, East and West Germans were not always so eager to follow the advice of marriage experts and social engineers, who in the early 1950s set out to rebuild the institution of marriage on the foundation of rational thought.

In many ways, the “long 1950s,” paved the way for one of the most striking commonalities between East and West Germany that would last until the 1980s.

Throughout their existence, both German states actively promoted conservative marriage

⁴ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), and Elisabeth Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Post-War Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

ideals. A view of marriage as the essential glue holding families together. Alternatives to marriage were, in the GDR as well as in the Federal Republic, met with skepticism at best, and in some cases actively discouraged. While this might not seem particularly surprising, the ways in which state sponsored agencies and leading intellectual groups sought to uphold such ideals is all the more intriguing. Despite their strong standing, and in some cases altogether dominating social position, the groups and individuals representing and advancing conservative marriage ideals constantly feared an impending marriage crisis. Though such fears were sometimes justified, some of the most outspoken misgivings were expressed during times of broad political and social consensus in the West and a strong standing of the ruling party in the East. This is, as we shall see, the second long term commonality between the two German states established during the 1950s.

WEST GERMANY

Asked in a *Spiegel* interview in 1954 what family values he thought most important, Konrad Adenauer's Family and Youth Minister Franz-Josef Wuermeling answered: with "one Hail Mary per day" any marriage would be fine.⁵ A few years earlier, the seventy-sixth and fully revised edition of the *Der gute Ton*, a widely read manual of etiquette, was published in West Germany.⁶ It informed its readers that keeping a good home was first and foremost a wife's duty. Husbands, the manual continued, made their wives happy by giving them little gifts and a bit of attention now and then. As for the wife, she needed to keep herself clean and tidy so her husband would not look at her unfavorably when comparing her to other women.⁷

We are used to looking at the 1950s as a period in which Christian and social conservative ideals set the agenda for marriage and family life. Historians have described the 1950s as a time of polarizing gender roles circumscribing the choices available to women who aspired to an independent career and personal freedom.⁸ Wives served their husbands by taking care of the household, giving birth to children, and on top of this they had to find time to care for their own emotional needs. Some historians, though, have suggested that the early 1950s was a period when women seemed happy to leave their wartime experience behind them and take on their new roles as housewives and homemakers in stable postwar marriages.⁹ Even though both these views hold a lot of

⁵ Front Cover, *Der Spiegel*, 8/1, 1954.

⁶ The first edition was published in 1900.

⁷ Konstanze von Franken, *Der gute Ton: ein Brevier für Takt und Benehmen in allen Lebenslagen*, 76th ed. (Berlin: Deutscher Musikliteratur-Verlag, 1951), 195.

⁸ Elizabeth Heineman, "The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's 'Crisis Years' and West German National Identity," in *The Miracle Years: a Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*, Hanna Schissler, ed., (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁹ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy, Or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2005), 225.

merit, adopting one over the other runs the risk of portraying the 1950s as being either good *or* bad for the prospect of a happy marriage.

This chapter uses a number of different vantage points – political attitudes, religious arguments, social scientific positions, and views expressed in popular culture – to argue that while the West German marriage discourse was mainly driven by Christian conservative values, these values were not as stable as later commentators would like to believe. In many ways they were too diverse and shaped by too many variables to allow for meaningful historical generalization.¹⁰ This lack of stability led to anxiety and a scramble for new ways to reach out to an increasingly skeptical public. By adopting the language of the social sciences, Christian spokespersons discussing the meaning of marriage accomplished their short-term goal of finding a new a framework with which they could promote religiously based marriage values in the form of psychological and sociological insights.¹¹ But as we shall see, such practices also started a process of diluting the Christian message, which would have repercussions for decades to come.¹² The blending of religion with the social sciences in the fields of politics, marriage counseling, and Christian advice literature – which in many cases amounted to one and the same – created a formula for married life that was certainly both religious and conservative, yet never quite as influential as its authors would have

¹⁰ A similar argument has been made By Frank Biess about the experience of returning German POWs after WWII. Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat In Postwar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 64.

¹¹ In German research on transformations in religious practices after 1945, a number of more or less useful concepts have been suggested such as *Entraditionalisierung* and others. See Uwe Kaminsky and Andreas Henkelmann, “Beispiel für die Transformation von Diakonie und Caritas,” in *Soziale Strukturen und Semantiken des Religiösen im Wandel. Transformationen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949–1989*, Wilhelm Damberg, ed., (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 2011), 89.

¹² This is not to say that it was less religious. As will be clear in arguments throughout this and the following chapters, I only agree in part with what secularization theories have to say about the importance of religion in modern Germany.

wanted. The expert view of marriage that grew out of this “body of knowledge” centered on such themes as rationality, functionality, and how the right kind of relationship would benefit the greater good. In this process, the multilayered emotional aspects of marriage, as well as the needs and wishes of individual West Germans were often forgotten, or in some cases neglected for not fitting the general consensus.

Political Consensus

Even before the decade had come to an end, the 1950s had been both praised and denounced as a socially conservative decade, particularly in its attitudes toward sexuality, child rearing, and family life.¹³ Examples from women’s magazines, marriage advice books, and manuals of etiquette all seemed to confirm the notion of marital happiness built on a more or less devout wife tending to her breadwinning husband’s needs and desires. Having different ideological agendas for why they wanted to reach this goal, leading politicians of the Social Democrats (SPD) as well as the Christian Democrats (CDU) nonetheless agreed that the chaos caused by the war made it imperative to build a society in which stable families could prosper.¹⁴

This political unanimity helped pave the way for the phrasing of paragraph 6 in the Basic Law, which declared marriage and family to be under special protection of the state.¹⁵ In addition, the law also specifically protected mothers and the upbringing of

¹³ Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, 101ff. Explanations for why such attitudes were so prominent in the 1950s range from the claim that people sought to counterbalance Nazi morals, to arguments pointing to a continuation of values from the Third Reich.

¹⁴ Robert G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family In the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3.

¹⁵ *The Bonn Constitution: Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany* (Washington D.C.: U.S. State Department, 1949), 3.

children.¹⁶ While it was clear that paragraph 6 owed part of its wording to the influence of Christian organizations, we must not read more into the law of 1949 than was actually there. That the state cared a great deal for marriage and family in Germany was nothing new, nor was it particularly German. Lawmakers in the 1950s often compared the protection of marriage in the Basic Law to the Weimar Constitution. For obvious reasons, those in charge framing the Basic Law did not mention the Nazi tradition of protecting (Aryan) motherhood and other less flattering analogies to the recent past. In this way, a bridge to a democratic past could be forged that increased the legitimacy of West German family politics.

Pointing to similar legal continuities, scholars have shown how marriage and family have been intrinsic to the self-image of a number of modern states.¹⁷ Consequently, ideas of marriage as the cement holding in place an “essential building block of the state,” or marriage as the “smallest cell” of society, were not uniquely West German. Still, the connection between family and state was particularly strong in the early Federal Republic. One of the reasons for this was that many West Germans saw a stable institution of marriage as a way of returning to “normalcy” after the chaos caused by the war.¹⁸ Strong marriages would make sure that the “cell,” that is, the family, was healthy, which in turn made for a healthy, safe, and happy society. Thus, the emotional health and nuptial joy in private life was thought to have a direct impact on the happiness of society as a whole.

¹⁶ As Robert Moeller has shown, the widespread idea that mothers needed to be protected against led to a situation in which social policy-makers narrowly circumscribed women’s rights and responsibilities. See Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 5.

¹⁷ Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life In the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 89.

¹⁸ Lutz Niethammer, “‘Normalization’ in the West: Traces of Memory Leading back into the 1950s,” in *The Miracle Years: a Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*, Hanna Schissler, ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 237-265.

Apart from the philosophical and ideological aspects of marriage, there were also immediate demographic issues influencing the debate. These included migrants from the East, returning POWs, and the “excess of women” after many men had perished during the war years. Moreover, the “crisis years” of military occupation and collapse when men were at war, imprisoned, missing, or dead had also been a time when women were standing alone. This had the effect that marital status divided women less than ever.¹⁹ The census of 1946 showed seven million more women than men on occupied ground. In the 1950s, West Germany had three million more women and the corresponding number for East Germany was two million. While the numbers only declined slowly over the next decade, the number of single women continued to go down.²⁰ Very soon after the foundation of the Federal Republic, then, demographics merged with ideological arguments for the reinforcement of the family. In some cases it also led to calls for a “re-masculinization” of West German Society, which fitted well with Christian conservative ideals of strong father figures and male breadwinners. This seemed even more urgent with the return of POWs who appeared emasculated and unable to take on the role expected of them.²¹

Such general attitudes and political programs are important clues to how people imagined married life in the first decade of the Federal Republic. But party politics and federal legislation were only parts of a larger social structure that gave meaning to love and marriage during the 1950s. Legal scholars have argued that when the law is in harmony with other social and cultural forces, the synergy effect will be greater than the

¹⁹ Heinemann, *What Difference*, 8.

²⁰ For these and more statistics of “surplus women” in the 1950s, see Heinemann *What Difference*, 210-11 and Appendix A, and *Statistisches Jahrbuch* (SJ)-DR (1953): 43; SJ-BRD (1962): 47; SJ-DDR (1955):19, Fig. A.1.

²¹ Biess, *Homecomings*, 102.

force of the law itself.²² But when the prevailing culture runs contrary to the message communicated in the law, its impact on people's lifestyles could be negligible.

Consequently, we must ask in what ways groups and individuals from the established elite sought to shape West Germans' understanding of marriage in the first decade and a half after the war.

Religious Anxieties

In light of the strong Christian conservative tendencies in family politics, it seems natural to examine the influence of religious organizations and established Churches. Some scholars have argued that Family Minister Wuermerling, a devout Catholic, as well as protestant spokespersons such as Wolfgang Metzger and others put a distinct mark on the debates about marriage, in particular when it came to question of sexuality. According to historian Hanna Schissler, this even led to an institutionalized inequality between men and women.²³ In Schissler's words, the marriage ideal of these years was one of "harmonious inequality."²⁴ We can add numerous examples where leaders of the Christian community played an active part in forming West German family politics and even the wording of the Basic Law.²⁵ But while historians have been eager to explore this irrefutable connection between religious organizations and family politics, they have

²² Mary Ann Glendon, *The Transformation of Family Law: State, Law, and Family In the United States and Western Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 312.

²³ Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, 118-119.

²⁴ Hanna Schissler, "'Normalization' as Project: Some Thoughts on Gender Relations in West Germany during the 1950s," in *The Miracle Years: a Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*, Hanna Schissler, ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 368.

²⁵ Family Minister Wuermerling contributed to a number of publications by primarily Catholic organizations in which he discussed his views on family politics. He also frequently attended meetings with these organizations, although it was not always clear whether he did this as a representative of the West German government or as a private citizen. For an example, see Hauptarbeitsstelle für Männerseelsorge und Männerarbeit in den deutschen Diözesen, *Der Friede unsere Sorge: Ordnung in Ehe, Volk und Völkern als Voraussetzung des Friedens*, Fuldaer Vorträge Band XII (Augsburg: Verlag Winfried Werk, 1954).

been less interested in asking how the West German Christian community perceived their own role as moral authority on marriage related issues. Instead, there seems to be a silent consensus among historians that because of the obvious Christian values in West German family politics, Church representatives were self-assured and confident about the future. But in spite of their apparent success to influence the public debate about marriage – in particular compared with the situation in the Third Reich – the religious community, Protestant as well as Catholic, expressed a growing insecurity about their ability to make their voices heard.

During a Bishops' meeting in Fulda in 1954, Hans Edgar Jahn, speaking both as Adenauer's public relations consultant and as a man of the church said, "it is a fact that people do not come to us anymore these days. This is true for politics, but even more so for the church." He went on to argue that not only was religious authority itself waning, but the church was also losing ground in contemporary politics.²⁶ This, and similar statements, seem to contrast sharply with a story of a postwar decade in which Christian values were the rule rather than the exception. Theodor Bovet, a Swiss neurologist, Christian marriage advisor, and one of the most common references in both scientific and popular works on marriage in West Germany summed up the qualms many people in his position felt. There had always been marriage crises, Bovet noted, but "today we see a crisis of the very idea of marriage."²⁷ He continued with the assertion that the current existential crisis of marriage had to do with some of the most beloved qualities of modern life such as individual freedom, the development of a unique personality, and the deliverance from collectivism. In short, Bovet concluded, the controversy over marriage

²⁶ Hauptarbeitsstelle für Männerseelsorge, *Der Friede unsere Sorge*, 69.

²⁷ Theodor Bovet, *Die Ehe ihre Krise und neuerdung: Ein Handbuch für Eheleute und ihre Berater* (Tübingen: Furche-Verlag Dr. Katzmann KG., 1946), 8.

touches on some of the most deeply held values of our modern worldview and the only remedy to the crisis was a “return to Christian beliefs.”²⁸

For Bovet, as well as for most West German Christians actively taking part in advising the public about virtues of marriage, defining the problem was part of its solution. The recent war and the evils of Nazism, they argued, had certainly been detrimental to the current situation. But looked at from a broader perspective, these tragedies were not the actual causes of the crisis. The real culprit, as Bovet had already noted, was modernity. It corrupted both the soul of individuals and society as a whole. Moreover, it had made marital happiness into a selfish enterprise that would inevitably deteriorate and fail. Indeed, many Christians saw the pursuit of happiness itself as highly suspicious. They deemed it an illness built into the very fiber of modern society and this society’s propensity toward consumption and marketing. As one priest explained: It “is fundamentally wrong to think that you can find happiness in marriage just as easy as you can pick a flower.” It might be the very focus on happiness, he continued, that was leading people astray. The only way to authentic happiness in marriage was to understand that we “live in the garden of God,” and until people realized this simple fact, the “contemporary divorce addiction” could not be halted.²⁹

The aversion to “modern love” that many Christians expressed in the 1950s must be understood in a larger context in which Churches felt they were beginning to lose their authority in society as a whole. It is also important to note that the general doubt about the merits of modernity among Christians was not anything new. It had been

²⁸ Ibid., 234.

²⁹ Saturnin Paulese, *Eheglück Lebensglück: Gedanken zur Einheit und Unauflöslichkeit der Ehe* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1951), 9.

present as long as there has been a distinct modernity to worry about.³⁰ In Imperial Germany, for example, similar debates to those seen in the 1950s about the future of marriage and anxieties about surplus women functioned as an emotional outlet through which apprehensions about modernity could be expressed and explained.³¹ Finally, despite the fact that much of the Christian discourse on marital happiness appeared to be concerned with modernity in general, Cold War tensions and distrust of the newly formed East German state (justified as the apex of modern development), were never far away.

There was also another reason as to why Christian groups felt they were losing control over the institution of marriage despite a clear increase in church attendance and Christian sway in politics and culture compared to both Nazi Germany and the Weimar Republic. It had to do with a lingering sensation among leading Christians that they were losing the authority of interpretation, the *Deutungsmacht*, of what marriage meant.³² One way to deal with this problem was to adopt some of the language and theories of the social sciences that were quickly gaining credibility as institutions conveying the truth about the human condition. This was also what a growing number of theologians and others within the church did. Sometimes they employed sociological or psychological theories of marriage as a way of communicating with secular scholars of marriage and family. But more often they used social scientific theories as an integrated part of getting their own Christian message across to an increasingly skeptical population.³³ As the

³⁰ On Christianity and modernity, see Leszek Kolakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), 61-128.

³¹ Catherine L. Dollard, *The Surplus Woman: Unmarried In Imperial Germany, 1871-1918* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 215.

³² Leszek Kolakowski has argued that one “of the functions of the sacred in our [modern] society was to lend an additional significance, impossible to justify by empirical observations alone, to all the basic divisions of human life and all the main areas of human activity [including] marriage.” Kolakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial*, 69. I believe it is this function that is felt to be lost in the Christian community.

³³ See for example EZA 2/4344 – Ehesachen und Eherecht (1949-1950).

practice became more common, it was slowly beginning to be acknowledged from within the Christian community. When theologian Hermann Ringeling discussed the issue in relation to the modern family, he noted that Christian thinkers were dependent on others in order to avoid mistakes based on their tiny world of prejudice. There is no other way for theologians than to listen carefully to anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists, Ringeling argued. “Otherwise we run the risk of painting a picture of the world built solely our own preconceived notions of reality.”³⁴

Predictably, many traditionally inclined Christians abhorred this tendency and saw the integration of sociological and psychological analogies to explain Christian marriage values as a clear threat to the Church. In the words of priest and author Theodor Blieweis, marriage is a barometer of the moral standing of a *Kulturvolk*. According to Blieweis, “the one who loves his people and those who have as their work to care about the men and women, fathers and mothers of tomorrow, that person also knows that only healthy marriages and families can be the base of a healthy people and a viable state.”³⁵ The problem, he maintained, is the harms brought on by modernity, such as the emancipation of women, secularization, and, just as important, the new sociology of marriage.³⁶

In contrast to many other religious issues that seemed to lose importance in modern consumer societies, marriage was something everyone could relate to. Because of this fact, it also became especially important to Christian organizations that wanted to

³⁴ Hermann Ringeling, *Die Frau zwischen Gestern und Morgen* (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1962), 9.

³⁵ On the importance for moral ideas of good and evil in attitudes toward the early West German democracy, see Till van Rahden, “Clumsy Democrats: Moral Passions in the Federal Republic” in *German History* 29 (2011): 485–504.

³⁶ Theodor Blieweis, *Ehen die Zerbrachen: Bekenntnisse Geschiedener* (Munich: Verlag Herlold, 1960), 11-22.

spread their view of how to live a happy life in the new West German state. And since marriage had traditionally been within the auspices of the church, some Churches felt it was particularly important to regain their authority in this domain. In short, when the feeling of losing touch with the general population increased, being able to define one of the core institutions of society became all the more important.

The Social Scientific Viewpoint

It is important to bear in mind that when Christian marriage advisors referred to the social sciences in the 1950s, they were mostly interested in the scientific method and not the actual results of sociological and psychological research. To be sure, many Christian commentators felt their ideas of nuptial joy to be threatened by modern society, but they were nonetheless certain that path to true happiness was one of religious wisdom, which would not benefit much from scientific insights. Still, while individual actors within the Christian marriage discourse may have acted and reacted on strong religious impulses they were also being part of a larger pattern of formal rationality offered by social scientific practices at the time.³⁷ The reason why this overlap was not always apparent could partly be explained by the fact that theologians and social scientists were essentially interested in different aspects of marriage.

In contrast to Christian concerns with questions morality, most sociologists of the family in the 1950s directed their attention to the relevance and function of marriage for society and the state. Instead of finding formulas for marital happiness, they asked what

³⁷ Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: an Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber* (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1988), 183.

kind of family constellations were better for the future of the new West German state.³⁸ A catchword in this research was *Funktionsverlust*, which meant that the modern family had lost much of its importance vis-à-vis the state. In the modern state, families were no longer trusted with education of their children and similar tasks. Simultaneously, social security and care for the elderly had been transferred to specialized state run agencies and private markets. What remained was a *Restfunktion* of the family.³⁹ That is, the function of the modern family was primarily to fill in the few responsibilities that were not already carried out by the state or other social institutions.

Still, the family and the institution of marriage were important to sociologists in the 1950s. As Angela DeLille and Andrea Grohn have shown, and as we have seen in the Basic Law, stable marriages were recognized as one of the most important elements in keeping West Germany away from the chaos caused by the war and the emotional politics of Nazism.⁴⁰ In fact, immediately after the founding of the Federal Republic, social scientists set out to explore effects of war on family life.⁴¹ These studies, in turn, built on even earlier attempts to understand the postwar confusion in the first years after 1945.⁴² Despite a clearly “traditional” understanding of gender, the relationship between men and women was taken very seriously by these sociologies. In the widely read 1954 study *Wandlungen der deutschen Familie in der Gegenwart*, Helmut Schelsky, one of the

³⁸ Andrea Grohn and Delille Angela, *Blick zurück aufs Glück. Frauenleben und Familienpolitik in den 50er Jahren*, (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1985), 52

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴¹ See for example Gerhard Wurzbacher, *Leitbilder gegenwärtigen deutschen Familienlebens. Methoden, Ergebnisse und sozialpädagogische Folgerungen einer soziologischen Analyse von 164 Familienmonographien*, (Dortmund: Ardey, 1951).

⁴² One such study was René König, *Materialien zur Soziologie der Familie*, (Bern: A. Francke Verlag 1946). Also see Oliver König, “Die Rolle der Familie in der Soziologie unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Familiensoziologie René Königs”, *Familiendynamik* (3) 1996: 239-267.

most influential sociologists at the time, argued that a certain arrangement based on gendered skillsets was needed since the stability of the family could only be kept if everyone tended to their natural place. Men were natural breadwinners whereas the place for women was as keepers of the household.⁴³ The urgent situation the war had created, Schelsky wrote in *Wandlungen*, made material needs more important to people than solidarity within the family, including sympathy and emotional connections as was normally the case.

While Schelsky may well be the most famous sociologist of the 1950s and 1960s, he was not alone in focusing on the material circumstances of human life.⁴⁴ The family had become a cog in the machinery of modern society and as such, according to many sociologists at the time, only had one really important task – to procreate. And although the child’s “social and cultural personality” began in the family, the task of further developing children’s civil disposition was quickly taken over by social institutions.⁴⁵ Along the same lines Jürgen Habermas wrote about family and marriage in terms of *Desintegration* and *Ausgliederung*.⁴⁶ In this fairly mechanistic worldview, emotions played a negligible role. In cases where emotions did figure, they were confined to the private sphere and in particular to women.

Consequently, sociologists in the 1950s had little if anything to say about marital happiness from an emotional point of view. This can be interpreted as a reaction against what many in the field saw as an all too emotionally driven politics during the Third

⁴³ Helmut Schelsky, *Wandlungen der deutschen Familie in der Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1954), 290ff.

⁴⁴ Gerhard Baumert and Edith Hünigler, *Deutsche Familien nach dem Kriege* (Darmstadt: Eduard Roeter Verlag, 1954); Dieter Claessens, *Familie und Wertsystem* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1962); Renate Mayntz, *Die moderne Familie* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1955).

⁴⁵ Schelsky, *Wandlungen*, 56.

⁴⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Arbeit – Erkenntnis – Fortschritt. Aufsätze 1954-1970* (Amsterdam: de Munter, 1970) 31-46.

Reich. Some even argued that the promiscuity and immorality, which they saw as an inherent component of Nazism, had led to a complete disintegration of traditional family values.⁴⁷ There was, then, a tendency among sociologists to portray their own research as a fundamentally different from Nazi-sociology. If this was a thoroughly moral reaction is hard to say since some of these sociologists had been actively involved in the state apparatus of the Third Reich. What can be determined with certainty, though, is that groups such as the Frankfurt School, reestablished in 1953 after almost two decades in exile, had strong ideological and personal reasons for opposing Nazism.⁴⁸ Even so, the urge to distance themselves from the recent past that many sociologists felt in the 1950s was not as apparent in all social sciences. Nor was their habit to avoid the topic of people's emotional lives.

In contrast to sociology, West German psychologists were, by the very nature of their discipline, more willing to discuss the emotional aspects of marriage.⁴⁹ Still, most psychologists in the 1950s were highly skeptical of people's ability to get in touch with their feelings. The problem, family psychologist Kurt Böhme wrote, was that people lacked the ability to feel strongly enough, especially in respect to the feeling of love. This lack of emotional capability, he continued, was a result of the countless conflicts people had gone through in the recent past. Adding to the problem was that "normal" emotional capacities was hampered by popularized versions and romanticized views of love, which, in the opinion of Böhme and other psychologists, had gained an unfortunate strong place

⁴⁷ Dagmar Herzog suggests that much of the sexual conservatism during the 1950s was a *reaction* against Nazism and not a continuation of conservative sexual morality in the Third Reich, which the New Left argued in the late 1960s. Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, 8.

⁴⁸ Dirk A. Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴⁹ For a brief overview of the development of Psychology in the Federal Republic, see Lothar Sprung & Helga Sprung, "History of modern psychology in Germany1 in 19th- and 20th-century thought and society" in *International Journal of Psychology*, 2001, 36 (6): 364–376.

in the minds of the youth in the postwar years. In this, they shared the view of many left leaning sociologists' who meant that society had been taken over by commercial interests, which made it well-nigh impossible for people to find the true essence of life.

With its emphasis on love and marital happiness, Böhme's book *Unsere Lebenskonflikte: Beruf, Liebe, Ehe* is a characteristic example of the doubts many psychologists expressed about the possibilities of finding emotional harmony in marriage. This did not mean that psychologists had anything against the institution as such. On the contrary, the outspoken goal was to save the "current marriage crisis" from within.⁵⁰ Simply complaining about the many divorces and unhappy relationships was pointless, Böhme wrote. Instead, psychologists needed to go to the bottom with the problems that had caused the current situation.⁵¹

The somewhat unexpected answer to why people were unhappy when they were together with their partners was their ostensibly false understanding of what it meant to be happy. "The pursuit of happiness," Böhme wrote, "could in itself be a sign of neurosis; an emotional abnormal attitude, leading to functional dysfunctions." For instance, when someone thought of marrying a rich person, or someone famous, he or she showed signs of a false happiness ideal. Applying this logic to his view of married life, Böhme insisted that whenever modern man dreamt about a shortcut or a quick fix to nuptial joy he needed to look for help from a psychiatrist to get rid of his "false happiness pursuits."⁵² It was only by getting in touch with their *true* emotions confused individuals could find real love. Unfortunately, according to many psychologists at the time, modern consumer

⁵⁰ See for example, Walther von Hollander, *Das Leben zu Zweien: Ein Ehebuch - Ratgeber und Wegweiser* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1955).

⁵¹ Kurt Böhme, *Unsere Lebenskonflikte: Beruf, Liebe, Ehe. Der Mensch: Schriftenreihe Für Psychologie Und Psychotherapie*, (Berlin Zehlendorf: Verlag Psyche, 1951).

⁵² Böhme, *Unsere Lebenskonflikte*, 24.

society had corrupted and defiled people's feelings to a degree that authentic emotions of intimacy were extremely difficult to cultivate.⁵³

Consequently, whereas sociologists argued that the modern family had few significant functions beyond procreation and childrearing, most psychologists saw it as a place where one might escape the evils of modern society. The family became the place in which West Germans could cultivate true emotions, separated from both the traumas of the past and the confusions created by modernity. But for it to play this role, the family needed to be held together by a strong institution of marriage. Thus, in a somewhat circular argument Böhme asserted that to find marital happiness people had to learn the essence of love, which in turn could only be achieved for someone being brought up in a happy marriage. In a time when the world was changing at a rapid pace, psychologists were more important than ever for teaching people how to find a way to real love. This was at least the consensus in most marriage advice coming from the profession in the 1950s.

In contrast to most sociologists, who had tried to distance their discipline from the stigma of the Third Reich, medical doctors did not show similar attempts – at least not on issues concerning family and marriage.⁵⁴ While the latter certainly did not refer directly to Nazi medicine, we can still see a number of implied continuities from the 1930s and early 1940s. Most physicians involved in marriage advice and family counseling continued to be in favor of eugenics and aptitude tests for future spouses. These tests

⁵³ In their criticism of modern society, West German psychologists were in agreement with most Christian marriage advisors. For yet another point of view in which modern consumer society was perceived as threatening to marriage and the family, see Healthy for Family Life: Joe Perry, "Television, Masculinity, and Domestic Modernity during West Germany's Miracle Years" in *German History* (4) 25: 560-595.

⁵⁴ There were also those who indeed tried to bridge the Nazi era by reaching back to the Weimar period for new a beginning, but they belonged to a minority. At least in the early to mid 1950s.

were designed to gauge if people suffered from heretical deceases and thus were unfit to enter into wedlock.⁵⁵ Still, comparisons with the Third Reich should not be overstated. Nazi eugenics were carried out and justified by a distinct racial agenda whereas discussions about a (re)introduction of marriage certificates (*Ehescheine*) and similar policies in the 1950s much more centered around Christian values and norms. For those physicians who took part in this debate, a return to Christian marriage values was seen as a larger project of building a morally strong society after the war and the chaos that followed.⁵⁶

An important part of this social project was to establish a federally funded and centrally governed marriage counseling bureau, run and supervised by licensed doctors. This way physicians would be able to influence not only the moral aspects of marriage, but also provide a form of scientific expertise about the human nature that the social sciences lacked. Because of the threat of an impending marriage crisis, most people involved agreed that all this needed to happen quickly.⁵⁷ As a result, the early years of the Federal Republic saw a number of studies conducted by both medical doctors and public health experts. The main objective of these studies was to assess how marriage counseling could contribute to people's general health and wellbeing, but also how stable and happy marriages could add to the wellbeing of society as a whole.⁵⁸ As could be expected, though, doctors were far from the only ones feeling entitled to have a say in the establishment and development of West German marriage counseling.

⁵⁵ These tests were to lead to the issuance of an *Eheschein*.

⁵⁶ The Christian foundation of marriage morality lived on among some West German marriage advisors active in the 1950s long after the changes in the late 1960s. For one example, see Lothar Loeffler, *Einführung in die Eheberatung* (Grünwald: TVZ, 1971), vi.

⁵⁷ *Mitteilungen des Niedersächsischen Landesgesundheitsrates - Jugend- und Eheberatung* (Hannover, 1952), 5.

⁵⁸ The Committee of *Bevölkerungswesen, Gesundheitspflege und soziale Hygiene*, for instance, were often involved in these studies.

Marriage Counseling and Memories of the Past

Founded in 1949, the *Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Jugend- und Eheberatung* (DAJEB) became by far the most important organization of West German marriage counseling. It was a place where theologians, social scientists, medical doctors, and political representatives converged. Thus, already at its initiation the DAJEB was a microcosm of West German marriage ideals. As the first head of the DAJEB, physician Carl Coerper endeavored to link the Weimar tradition with the new German democracy by adopting parts of his own program for marriage counseling, which he had developed in 1928.⁵⁹ Coerper, like many of his colleagues in the 1950s, had been active during the Third Reich. Admittedly, not all doctors working between 1933 and 1945 were supporters of the Nazi state, nor of its ideology. However, Coerper had been both a member of the NSDAP and a professor of racial hygiene at the University of Köln. He had also been responsible for some of the deportations to the Hadamar Euthanasia Centre where an estimated 200,000 people were killed.⁶⁰ Accordingly, Coerper had good reasons to call attention to his Weimar credentials and leave the years in the service of the NSDAP unmentioned. The same was true for Jochen Fischer and Lothar Loeffler, who made up the remaining two members of the founding troika of the DAJEB. Both Fischer and Loeffler had a recent past in Nazi eugenics and sterilization programs. Still, this connection between the racial marriage ideals of the Third Reich and marriage counseling in West Germany was not always apparent. Especially since many of those involved in

⁵⁹ References to the Weimar program can be seen in numerous documents regarding the DAJEB. For one example out of many, see BArch, B 189/2815, *Bericht der Jahrestagung der DAJEB in Detmold vom 8.-10.5 1953*, 4ff.

⁶⁰ Gerald Schwalbach, "'Der Kirche den Blick weiten!'" *Karl Pawlowski (1898–1964) – diakonischer Unternehmer an den Grenzen von Kirche und Innerer Mission* (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 2012), 313, and Horst Schütz, *Gesundheitsfürsorge zwischen humanitärem Anspruch und eugenischer Verpflichtung: Entwicklung und Kontinuität sozialhygienischer Anschauungen zwischen 1920 und 1960 am Beispiel von Prof. Dr. Carl Coerper* (Husum: Matthiesen Verlag, 2004).

organizing the initial program of the DAJEB were eager to discard some of the most discredited sides of Nazi family policy and replace it with a fervent Christian morality.

Despite Fischer's influential role in the development of West German counseling centers and close ties to a number of powerful politicians, not much is known about him. Fischer was a physician and a devout Christian who was genuinely concerned with the state of marriage in West Germany, which he believed was threatened by secular powers. As one of the leaders of the DAJEB, Fischer travelled to a number of European countries in the late 1940s to find inspiration for the work of the organization. In a letter from a visit to England dated 1949, he asserted that German counselors needed to learn from their British peers. What he found particularly inspiring and urgent to incorporate in the German context was sex education, which was "part of England's outstanding methods for marriage counseling."⁶¹ Whether this was another attempt to distance himself with the recent past is hard to say, but Fischer's sudden fondness for English ideals was certainly in line with Adenauer's efforts to firmly tie West Germany to the Western sphere of influence in the early Cold War. Some marriage values in the postwar years, though, were not bound to specific ideological standpoints or Cold War allegiances. For example, the West German emphasis on keeping families together by a strong institution of marriage, since it was in the family children ultimately learned how to be good citizens, was widely shared by their neighbors in the east.⁶² The type of citizens Fischer and his colleagues had in mind were of course radically different from that of their East German counterparts, yet both understood marriage to be the basic foundation for a happy and healthy life.

⁶¹ BArch, B Rep. 012 Nr. 176, *Letter by J. Fischer*, 1949.

⁶² BArch, B Rep. 012 Nr. 176, *Detmold Program*, 1950.

Such general statements connecting marriage with a happy life and a strong state could be seen in various official publications, including the Basic Law.⁶³ By studying the DAJEB, we can also get a sense of the moral principles and assumptions about the human nature on which both the law and West German family politics in the 1950s was based. “The goal of the education [of marriage counselors],” the DAJEB program statement begun, “is to make the students aware of the human body-soul-spirit nexus.”⁶⁴ For all the medical expertise in the DAJEB leadership, the education of new marriage counselors was much more centered around philosophical and morality questions, than on biological and scientific issues. A government report from 1950 reveals the nature of some of the basic values that were taught at the DAJEB’s educational center in Detmold. In May that year, Dr. Durand-Wever wrote her superiors at the department of Family and Health that she was thoroughly impressed with the instruction of new marriage advisors.⁶⁵ What made the greatest impression on Durand-Wever was the high ethical level of the education, in particular the teachings of Pastor Bodecker. She also found Jochen Fischer’s lectures on eugenics to be excellent, and argued that eugenics had been discredited by an earlier abuse of its usage, but that Fischer had shown how important eugenics could be for the marriage advisor of the future.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, she did not go into detail of how eugenics could be used to promote marital happiness or any aspect of marriage, but what seems clear, though, was Durand-Wever apparent urge to distance Fischer’s teachings from eugenic practices in the Third Reich.

⁶³ *The Bonn Constitution*, 3.

⁶⁴ BArch, B Rep. 012 Nr. 176, *Detmold Program*, 1950.

⁶⁵ Anne-Marie Durand-Wever is most famous for the founding of Pro Familia in 1952. See, Helmut Müller-Enbergs, *Wer war wer in der DDR?* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2010).

⁶⁶ BArch, B Rep. 012 Nr. 176, *Letter from Dr. Durand- Wever to the West German Department of Health and nn*, May 1950.

Fischer represented many of DAJEB's core values. During a short period after 1945 he had been advising investigations of Nazi eugenics and sterilizations, though he continued to be an advocate for eugenics in marriage politics into the 1960s. Apart from being a medical doctor, he also held a number of leading positions in the German Evangelical Church (EKD) and was active in its lobbying for stronger Christian influences in West German family politics.⁶⁷ In the person of Fischer, then, we can discern one of the most important developments among Christian advisors in the 1950s and 1960s, which led to a shift toward less doctrinaire ways of arguing: the mixing of Christian ideals with medical practices and social science. But despite its impact on how many Christian marriage experts communicated their version of marital values, which few cultural or social historians interested in marriage, family, and related issues have explored this question at any length.

The other omnipresent trend in Fischer's writings was the conviction that the practices and ideas necessary for creating happy marriages could only be communicated in a top-down hierarchy. In this chain of command, experts such as doctors, priests, and marriage advisors acted as nuncios in the name of the state, and as such, agents for an objective greater good. This sentiment was mirrored in a wide variety of DAJEB documents.⁶⁸ In 1951, for example, Fischer lamented the decline in marriage morality after the war. "Grundlegende Faktoren menschlicher Gemeinschaftsordnung [sind] ungesund geworden!," he continued.⁶⁹ The only way to come to terms with promiscuity, premarital sex, and flawed marriage standards, was to educate the masses. With help

⁶⁷ EZA 104/990 - *Kommission für Fragen der Sexualetik* – 1967; EZA 99/697 *Ehe- und Familienberatung* 1960.04 – 1967.07; EZA 104/989 - *Kommission für Fragen der Sexualetik* – 1966-1967.

⁶⁸ See for example the wide variety of documents deposited in BArch, B Rep. 012 Nr. 176.

⁶⁹ BArch, B Rep. 012 Nr. 176, *Gesundheitsfürsorge – Zeitschrift für die gesundheitlichen Aufgaben im Rahmen der Familienfürsorge*. Sonderdruck, 1. Jahrgang, April 1951, Heft 1.

from experts, the institution of marriage needed to be made strong enough to support a stable environment in which healthy and happy citizens could thrive. In the words of the *Zeitschrift für die gesundheitlichen Aufgaben im Rahmen der Familienfürsorge* “we cannot expect a higher level of social order without healthy relationships between men and women. This means, quite simply put, that there will be no order before at least our marriages are kept intact.”⁷⁰

But despite its outspoken objective of making unhappy marriages function and, in the best-case scenario, happy, DAJEB focused surprisingly little on people’s emotional lives. A move from social hygiene (Sozialhygiene) to mental hygiene (Psychohygiene), championed in Fischer’s writings, could perhaps be seen as a move toward a greater focus on individual concerns, including emotional questions.⁷¹ But despite this rhetorical shift, the primary interest of those who designed the program of the DAJEB was a healthy society and well functioning state. Not surprisingly, the sitting CDU government backed the program of the DAJEB, and from 1953 Family Minister Franz-Josef Wuermeling promoted it personally and even contributed with his own in books edited by Lothar Loeffler and others closely associated with DAJEB.⁷²

In all their efforts to make marriage an institution in which people could seek safety, support, and a happy life, the experts of the DAJEB, as well as the planners in various government agencies, seemed to have lost track of the individuals without whom there would be no marriage in the first place. When the *Cellesche Zeitung* wrote about the “first scientific Institute of Marriage Research” in Nuremberg, it neatly captured this general trend of large-scale thinking. Heading the institute’s research program was one

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Lothar Loeffler, *Arbeit, Freizeit, und Familie* (Stuttgart: Georg Thieme Verlag, 1955), 1.

psychologist, one physician, and one pastoral worker. After these three experts were done with analyzing the individual counseling cases they passed on their results to the head of the institute. The head researcher then compiled and analyzed all the data to find common themes and concerns among those who suffered from marital problems. This way, marriage councilors throughout the country could be equipped with even more efficient cures for the marriage crisis, which in the minds of DAJEB and politicians plagued West Germany in the 1950s.⁷³ In this scheme of things, the concerns of individual needs all but disappear for the benefit of a greater social good.⁷⁴

Private Love

But no matter how closely we examine political and social ideas of how West Germans were supposed to live together in harmony, the crucial question of how ordinary people really felt about love and marriage, and the ways in which they acted on these feelings, remains uncertain. Couples speak their own language, an invented tongue that deepens or dies out over time. This is a communication whose hidden etymologies extend far beyond what is said or shown in public media, let alone government reports and the educational programs of the DAJEB. Yet, sources such as letters, personal ads, and readers' questions to columns in popular magazines might still provide at least a glimpse into people's private thoughts and concerns about marriage during this time.

Early in 1951, *Süddeutschen Rundfunk* broadcasted an interview between a caller and a psychologist on the topic of "the good marriage".⁷⁵ Asked what she thought

⁷³ "Keine Wunderdoctoren der Liebe," *Cellesche Zeitung*, 2/1, 1952.

⁷⁴ This also mirrors the contemporary approach to political theory in the Federal Republic. See Stephen K. White, "Reason, Modernity, and Democracy", in Stephen K. White (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3-16.

⁷⁵ "Wann ist eine Ehe eine gute Ehe?," *Brigitte*, Heft 1, 1951.

constituted a good marriage, the caller said it was one in which both partners felt happy with each other. This was not at all to the liking of the psychologist who remarked that it was a pity to see how common such simplistic ideas were among the general public. In his view, people were all too eager to buy into a commercialized views of marital happiness, which meant they failed to grasp the subtleties of relationships. According to the psychologist, partners have to have things in common, but they still have to be different enough to make marriage interesting. What is most interesting with this interview, though, is not so much the content of the advice as the way the psychologist disregarded and belittled the caller's answers and arguments. Like state sponsored marriage counselors and others who saw themselves as authorities in the realm of marital happiness, much of the popular media and the experts they consulted showed scant faith in the abilities of individual West Germans to make sensible decisions about their relationships.

Needless to say, such sources as personal letters and interviews do not corroborate this view. Instead, they show that people were not at all as oblivious about what they wanted in a happy marriage as expert advisors would lead one to believe. And why should they have been? Marriage, after all, was not reinvented after the war. It was not a new institution with which people had to get reacquainted. However, Nazism had left a political and cultural vacuum to be filled. When this gradually began to happen, marriage, a central human cultural and economic activity, was redefined by those in a political, legal, or cultural position to do so. And although it appears as if the general attitudes toward marriage became increasingly conservative and religious in the 1950s, it would be misleading to judge ideas of marital happiness solely by the words of the self-

proclaimed experts who had the privilege of presenting their view as undisputed fact.⁷⁶ Indeed, letters to popular magazines indicate that many West Germans found it highly problematic to adopt some of the new ideas of how to find the right partner and be happy together. One reason for this was the contradictory nature of much advice.

If political and religious marriage ideals in the 1950 could seem contradictory and not entirely logical, guidance offered through popular culture was often even more contradictory. A constant source of confusion for many readers of West German popular magazines was the glorification of love at first sight. One letter from an upset mother told a story of her son proposing to essentially every girl he fell in love with. In an almost resigned tone the mother explained that her son was now “convinced that every new girl he meets is the ‘right one’”.⁷⁷ He would not give up until he was engaged to her, just to realize a few weeks later that she was not the one after all. Other letters told similar, albeit not quite as dramatic stories.

Young women and men throughout the Federal Republic reported feeling confused and not sure of how to act if a serious relationship did not lead to marriage, or at least to an earnest consideration thereof. Many said they knew the relationship they were in was not a good fit for marriage, yet they felt compelled to marry because they knew this was “the right thing to do.”⁷⁸ The contradictory nature of marital happiness in popular media was nicely reflected in the reply to the mother who was worrying about her son’s excessive engagement habits. It was published in *Brigitte*, one of the largest women’s magazines at the time, and argued that on the one hand, the actions of the son

⁷⁶ For a parallel transition in attitudes toward sexuality, see Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*.

⁷⁷ “Fragen Sie Frau Brigitte – Ohne Verlobung geht es nicht...,” *Brigitte*, Heft 18, 1953

⁷⁸ The status of marriage and all the advantages that came with it was of course also very important. See Heineman, *What Difference*.

were both civil and respectable. By holding the women he loved in such high esteem that he was willing ask for their hand in marriage was noble indeed. On the other hand, though, *Brigitte* continued, breaking up with his fiancés showed an equal lack of respect and should not be condoned.⁷⁹ There were of course other opinions out there as well. One article from 1953, for example, told about a woman who was “not married – but still happy.” Still, this was not presented as an alternative ideal, but as a fluke that could only happen in the rarest of circumstances.⁸⁰ But by and large, in popular media, the rule was that happiness came as a natural consequence of marriage.

Personal ads suggest that this was also a view widely shared among West Germans seeking a future partner. “As an engineer and a man with a big heart, I’m looking for marital happiness (Eheglück) ... I also need heart by my side and an abundance of love!” one ad from 1953 read.⁸¹ Another one from the same year, this time posted by a woman seeking a husband, asked for a “home of the heart (Herzenheimat) somewhere in the world,” while an engineer from Bremen proffered a somewhat more flowery language, writing “[w]ie würde ich Dich umsorgen und mit Liebe umgeben, wenn Du mir, kleines, einsames Mädels, Dein Herz anvertrauen würdest. Bist du heiter und sonnig, so wird das Glück bei uns sein und bleiben.”⁸² These, and hundreds of other personals seem to confirm the standards set in numerous popular magazines. They also show that the emotional aspects of marriage, usually expressed as an almost mystical force emanating from the heart, appeared to have been much more important to the general public than they were to marriage experts. As we have seen, the latter group

⁷⁹ “Fragen Sie Frau Brigitte – Ohne Verlobung geht es nicht...,” *Brigitte*, Heft 18, 1953.

⁸⁰ “Unverheiratet – aber glücklich,” *Brigitte*, Heft 19, 1953.

⁸¹ “Mit Brigitte ins Glück,” *Brigitte*, Heft 1, 1956.

⁸² *Brigitte*, No 2, 1956.

looked at the role of emotions in a stable marriage with great skepticism, or just as often, as an issue not really worth serious consideration.

This, however, does not mean that marriages in the 1950s were happier, more equal, and less conservative than most historians have argued. The way people perceived of emotions was heavily gendered, as was family life in general during this time. A 1953 letter from a distressed man to *Brigitte* shows how such gendered expectations, combined with built in assumptions about marital happiness and love, often resulted in tensions and quarrels.

I have been married for two years now and it is a true love marriage. I love my wife just as much today as I loved her the day we got married, but she makes my life a living hell with her inability to keep things clean. She cannot organize her time, she is not rational in her bookkeeping, and she is always looking for something she has misplaced. When I reproach her, she starts crying. She becomes so touchingly helpless that I promise to help more, but I am afraid that this problem will not go away.⁸³

Although marriage experts wanted it differently, the family was a place of strong emotions, not only in reality, but also in the imagination of young people who were looking for a future spouse. Young men and women seemed able to express their appreciation of romantic love in all of its popular semblances while wooing a potential partner. But once they had entered into wedlock, as the above letter and many similar ones attest to, a patriarchal family hierarchy – influenced by religious and political ideals, but ultimately determined by older traditions and gender roles – was quickly put in place. In this miniature version of West German society, men were supposed to uphold a rational standard by controlling their wives excessive feelings.⁸⁴

⁸³ “Meine Frau ist unordentlich,” *Brigitte*, Heft 23, 1953.

⁸⁴ Sibylle Meyer and Eva Schulze, *Von Liebe Sprach Damals Keiner: Familienalltag In Der Nachkriegszeit* (München: C.H. Beck, 1985), 179; Ute Frevert, “Umbruch der Geschlechterverhältnisse? Die 60er Jahre als geschlechterpolitischer Experimentierraum. In *Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften*. Schildt, Axel and Detlef Siegfried, eds., (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 2000), 652,

These general attitudes did not change much as we move into the 1960s. It was only during the second half of the 1960s that a new generation of West Germans began to question the family and marriage values of the first postwar decades. If conservative Christians had been anxious about their authority over the future of the institution of marriage in the 1950s despite not having had any real opposition, the student movement and the rise of the New Left would be all the more menacing. Before we get to the end of the “long 1950s” in West Germany, we need to examine the state of marriage in the East. Somewhat unexpectedly, perhaps, the traditional, or conservative, perspectives of marriage that were part of the political consensus in the West were equally present in the GDR. Despite their fundamental ideological differences, the two Germanys showed a number of similarities in how they related to issues of family and marriage in the first decade after the war. Yet the ways in which East German state officials and party sanctioned marriage experts went about to justify their ideal views of married life differed greatly from their neighbor in the west.

EAST GERMANY

In the spring of 1950, *Neues Deutschland*, the official newspaper of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), reported that liberal and conservative media outlets were increasingly critical toward the SED's policies encouraging women to enter the work force. In the view of the critics, a transition of women from the home to the work place was a threat to the institution of marriage "as we know it."⁸⁵ According to the *Der Morgen*, the central organ of the Liberal Democratic Party in the GDR, employed women constituted nothing short of an "Ehedämmerung" – a twilight of marriage. If the East German government did not do anything to stabilize the situation, *Der Morgen* continued, the GDR would be in deep trouble.⁸⁶ *Märkische Union*, the publication of The East German Christian Democratic Union (CDU), along with a number of conservative and center-right leaning newspapers on the West German side of the border expressed similar concerns.⁸⁷

Taken together, such observations seem to suggest that in stark contrast to the Federal Republic, marriage in the GDR in the 1950s was indeed facing a crisis. As we shall see, this was far from the truth. In great contrast to liberal and conservative polemics, marriage, both as an organizing principle of society and a way to a happy life, was of considerable importance to the SED in the first decade of the German Democratic Republic. Indeed, many of the themes from the West German marriage discourse were echoed in the East German Debate. Far from being limited to postwar capitalist democracies, rationality, functionality, and a widespread skepticism of the potential erratic behavior strong emotions could lead to were also major topics in the GDR. Still,

⁸⁵ *Neues Deutschland*, 2/19, 1950.

⁸⁶ *Der Morgen*, 12/ 4, 1949.

⁸⁷ *Märkische Union*, 1/25, 1950.

experts strived to retain some of the meaning or mystique marriage had lost in the process of being rationalized, mechanized, and “explained” by science. Because of this ambivalence, romantic love and other emotional aspects of relationships were always difficult for official advisors to deal with. On the one hand emotions were obvious sources of irrational behavior. On the other hand, though, they bestowed a certain ethereal shroud to marriage, which was such an integral part of its appeal.

“The Smallest Building Block”

Just as in the Federal Republic, the East German constitution declared marriage and family to be under the protection of the state. Article 30 even went so far as to state that marriage forms the foundation of all communal life in the GDR.⁸⁸ This, and similar pronouncements, indicated an apparent desire from the state’s side to early on make marriage an essential element of East German society. Another example of marriage’s importance to the SED was the *Mother and Child Protection Law* from 1950. It asserted that the support of marriage and family was “one of the most important tasks of the government of the GDR.” Similar notions could be seen in a variety of both official and popular publications at the time.⁸⁹ But no matter how many laws of the SED drafted and implemented, state protection did not automatically make marriage a stable institution.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, East German divorce rates rose by 20%, and in Berlin alone the numbers were closer to 30%. However, since these patterns were discernable long before the 1950s, it would be somewhat misguided to read these

⁸⁸ *Die Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 7. Oktober 1949* (Thüringen: Verlag Rockstuhl, 2009), Artikel 30.

⁸⁹ As Paul Betts has noted, the will to strengthen the institution of marriage was not uniquely East German. A similar logic could be seen in the cultural imagination of modern states everywhere. Betts, *Within Walls*, 89.

statistics as representative of a distinct socialist problem, as did a number of both East and West German observers at the time.⁹⁰ Divorce rates in the region that was to become East Germany had largely been determined by class, religion, and urbanization since the nineteenth century onward and span a number of different political regimes.⁹¹ Moreover, many of the reasons people separated, as well as the intensity of divorce rates, were similar to those in West Germany.⁹² The historical trajectory notwithstanding, the SED felt that it needed to take further action to come to terms with what seemed to many a growing predicament.

Consequently, in the mid-1950s the party made new attempts toward a more active strengthening of the institution of marriage. An increasingly rigorous set of criteria for divorce, primarily codified in the Decree on Marriage and Divorce (*Eheverordnung*) from 1955, was one of a number of ways in which this manifested itself in the law.⁹³ An unforeseen side effect of the *Eheverordnung* was that courts slowly began to assume a role in which they were not only representing the law, but also acted as marriage advisors of sorts. In the latter function they followed the stated agenda of the SED, which contended that the GDR benefitted from as low a divorce rate as possible, since marriage is one of the fundamental building blocks of the East German society. This led most judges to seek reconciliation between partners whenever possible.⁹⁴ Accordingly, keeping

⁹⁰ *Märkische Union*, the CDU paper in Brandenburg, was particularly vociferous of their criticism of the way the SED was dealing with the issue of marriage.

⁹¹ Dollard, *The Surplus Woman*, 215, and Betts, *Within Walls*, 88.

⁹² *Statistisches Jahrbuch* for East and West Germany 1955/1949 to 1961.

⁹³ In 1957, this decree was given an addendum in which it was emphasized that the courts should specifically discourage disbanding long marriages. See Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 221.

⁹⁴ Betts, *Within Walls*, 97.

families together was the main concern among state officials dealing with marriage related issues throughout the decade.

The reasons behind the obsession with keeping marriages intact were both pragmatic and ideological. However, socialist and authoritarian aspects of the felt need to protect the institution of marriage were less prominent than were the similarities with contemporary late modern states on both sides of the Iron Curtain. To be sure, this general conviction took on specific shapes depending on ideology and material circumstances of each country. In the GDR, the state incentive for calling attention to the importance of marriage could be summed up thus: Children are born in stable marriages, or at least they should be. These children, who constitute the future generation of East Germans, need to be brought up as good socialists. In a society where “real socialism” has not yet been reached, children need an ideologically sound education, and the family, bound together by a strong institution of marriage based on socialist principles, is the place in which the lion’s share of the political education was thought to occur.

Expert Advice

As we move into the second part of the 1950s, the precedence set by the law and the courts began to be expressed in East German marriage advice books. These books were not merely parroting the word of the law. They were often elaborate tracts on how to live life that took a variety of aspects of the human condition into consideration. They were also written in an accessible prose that clearly appealed to the general public. In fact, many of the advice books published in the 1950s and 1960s were to become bestsellers in

the GDR, remaining popular until the fall of the regime in 1989.⁹⁵ It was clear from the outset, then, that in contrast to lawmakers and judges, psychologists and doctors dedicating their careers to either the study of marriage, were not going to completely restrict themselves to the official party line. This did not mean that they operated against the will of the SED, but rather that other issues, such as the emotional lives of married people – something the political and legal discourses left almost untouched – took more of a central role in the advice literature. Where the state, in its policies and judicial proceedings, was concerned with putting outside restraints on keeping marriages from falling apart, doctors and psychologists were much more interested in how marriage could be strengthened from within, posing questions of how mental and physical health could lead to happier, more stable relationships.

Convinced that the “marriage problem” could be solved, medical doctor Rudolf Neubert assured his readers that in contrast to other advice books, his was not one of ready-made recipes and quick fixes. Instead, by offering insights gained by many years of counseling couples in need, *Das Neue Ehebuch*, which quickly became an East German bestseller, intended to provide essential methods with which to work towards a good marriage. The basic message was that people need to think for themselves in order to resolve chaotic love relationships. This would allow them find a way to long-lasting, happy marriages in a society of rapid transformation.⁹⁶ Ironically, *Das Neue Ehebuch* sounded very much like other East German publications from which it wanted to distance

⁹⁵ Josie McLellan, *Love In the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality In the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 85.

⁹⁶ Rudolf Neubert, *Das neue Ehebuch: Die Ehe als Aufgabe der Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Rudolstadt: Greifenverlag, 1957), 7.

itself. And, if we disregard the ideological content, it also resembled a number of decidedly social conservative West German advice books.

From the very outset Neubert made clear the guiding principle of the book stating that people's "*main objective [in life] is happiness in marriage and through marriage.*"⁹⁷ To achieve this "main objective," couples needed to know more about the inner workings of marriage. Knowledge of psychology, physiology, and anatomy was of particular importance. Of course, millions of people were happily married without knowing even the basics about their bodies and minds. Yet, Neubert maintained, many young people who were engaged to be married could not understand why they were not so "unconditionally happy about their wedding as they should be."⁹⁸ What, then, was it that Neubert thought people needed to know?

Keeping to Marxist tradition, *Das Neue Ehebuch* argued that marriage was first and foremost a social phenomenon, and only secondarily a biological one.⁹⁹ But instead of evoking SED ideology-speak, Neubert stuck to what he saw as strict scientific reasoning.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, *Das Neue Ehebuch* had numerous positive references to the prominent West German sociologist Helmut Schelsky and other non-Marxist scholars. Neubert wrote that even though Schelsky had a different ideological, historical, and economic basis for his understanding of the world than that held in the GDR, he still saw quite clearly that the marriage of human beings was a social phenomenon.¹⁰¹ In this way, West German sociological research meant to find functioning models for marriage and

⁹⁷ Ibid., 9. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁰⁰ Here, as in other cases, scientific, and science, must be understood in the German sense of *Wissenschaft*.

¹⁰¹ Neubert, *Das neue Ehebuch*, 24.

family in the Federal Republic was used to reinforce the *ideological* meaning of marriage in East Germany.

For Neubert, as for most of East German marriage counselors, reproduction is one of the mainstays of a healthy marriage, just as it is the backbone of a strong state.¹⁰² However, having children in the GRD was as much an ideological issue as it was a question of sheer survival. During the first decade of its existence, over three million, predominantly skilled people, left the GDR for a life in the West. This was not only a blow to the sectors in which well-educated people were needed, it was also an embarrassment to the East German state. Thus, for the SED to show that happy marriages are those in which many children are born was just as much a Cold War propaganda tool as it was of critical importance in the face of the depopulation of the country. The logic of the official discourse was fairly simple: If people have more children than their neighbors to the West, they do so because the SED has created a state in which its citizens had more confidence in the future. According to the same line of reasoning, families with many children also prove that people can rely on a health care system allowing them to make rational reproductive decisions.¹⁰³

Keeping these political aspects of reproduction in mind, it is not hard to see why Neubert and others like him were not attracted to the idea of the small family.¹⁰⁴ This also explains how *Das Neue Ehebuch*, in accordance with the official party ideology, came out against single motherhood, since this was often equivalent (or thought to be

¹⁰² One example out of many is Wolfgang Bretschneider and Wolfhilde Dierl, *Liebe und Ehe* (Berlin: Urania, 1962).

¹⁰³ Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility In Twentieth-century Berlin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 289-290.

¹⁰⁴ This was also something they had in common with their West German counterparts.

equivalent) to having only one child.¹⁰⁵ As historian Elizabeth Heineman has noted, married women “provided invaluable (and free) assistance to husbands and children, and they bore offspring much more readily than did single women.”¹⁰⁶ Consequently, marriage was, in the GDR as in West Germany, the officially sanctioned context for reproduction. People could still have children out of wedlock without any major social stigma (which was not always the case in the Federal Republic), provided they had the intentions to get married sometime in the future. “If a child is conceived before marriage and it is made out of love, then it is not important when the parents get married,” since this “marriage now has the conditions and requirements to be happy,” Neubert wrote.¹⁰⁷ Thus, although this and similar statements gave no set timeline for when a marriage was to be initiated, it was nonetheless assumed that most parents of children born out of wedlock would eventually decide to be wed.

Closely related to the issue of reproduction, and a widely discussed aspect of marital happiness, was sexuality. From early on, East German sexual advice was much less restricted by Christian morality than it was in the Federal Republic.¹⁰⁸ This did not mean that the topic of sex was entirely free from moral restraints. Writing in 1976, Rudolf Neubert recalled that the way he presented sexual matters in the late 1950s met with disapproval from a number of friends and colleagues. Some expressed concern that an open discussion about marriage and sexual problems would be a distraction from the political struggle, while others contended that such issues were “just not appropriate” to

¹⁰⁵ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 151.

¹⁰⁶ Heineman, *What Difference*, 177.

¹⁰⁷ Neubert, *Das neue Ehebuch*, 129.

¹⁰⁸ Mark Fenimore, “The Recent Historiography of Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Germany,” *The Historical Journal* 52:3 (2009): 776.

talk about in public.¹⁰⁹ But though Neubert insisted on being open about the role of sexuality in marriage, *Das Neue Ehebuch* was, in comparison with other sex-education literature in the GDR, quite typical in the technical, matter-of-fact manner it presented the reproductive act and its relation to a fulfilling married life.¹¹⁰

Despite dedicating over one hundred pages to the role of sex in marriage there was barely a paragraph in *Das Neue Ehebuch* going beyond the pure medical nature of reproduction. Still, Neubert maintained that sexuality was not only an integral part of maintaining a family, it was also a way to find true joy in a long-term relationship.¹¹¹ However, for Neubert, as well as for most experts writing about marriage and sexuality in the 1950, there was a built in problem to their scientific approach. While priding themselves on being open, and perhaps even more importantly, having a “natural” approach to the role of sexuality, counselors concurrently strove to maintain a certain amount of mystique concerning acts of intimacy. The ostensible reason for this appears to have been ideological. Neubert’s comments on the American Alfred Kinsey’s studies of sexual behavior illustrate this widespread attitude.¹¹² The main weakness, as Neubert saw it, was that Kinsey “only reports.” He did not use any norms and did not give any guidance in life.¹¹³ The mere fact that Kinsey spoke of sexuality in a way similar to Viennese salons in the times of Freud made the sexual experiences open for everyone to talk about, as if human circumstances were comparable to that of animals. According to

¹⁰⁹ Rudolf Neubert, *Das neue Ehebuch: Die Ehe als Aufgabe der Gegenwart und Zukunft* 21st Ed (Rudolstadt: Greifenverlag, 1976), 11.

¹¹⁰ For a comparison, see Bretschneider and Dierl, *Liebe und Ehe*.

¹¹¹ As with most of the sexual advice literature in the GDR, *Das neue Ehebuch* more resembles a medical handbook than a guide to a fulfilling sex life.

¹¹² The two Kinsey Reports were published in 1948 and 1953 respectively. Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell Baxter Pomeroy, and Clyde Eugene Martin, *Sexual Behavior In the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co., 1948), and Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior In the Human Female* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953).

¹¹³ Neubert, *Das neue Ehebuch*, 140.

Das Neue Ehebuch, such opinions were particularly common among intellectuals.¹¹⁴ And yet Neubert, along with most doctors and self-proclaimed experts writing on marriage and sexuality in the GDR, went to great lengths to do exactly what Kinsey had done. Most of the sexual advice offered in *Das Neue Ehebuch* consisted of mechanical, anatomic, and physiological explanations of how the human body operated. In the case of Kinsey, though, Neubert found such naturalistic approaches to be a sign of harmful bourgeois attitudes. How can we explain this seemingly obvious incongruity in Neubert's reasoning?

On the one hand most books argued that people need to read and talk openly about sexuality to improve their sex lives, which in turn was said to be an integral component of happy marriages. On the other hand, if sexuality is too exposed, overly analyzed, and unduly spoken of at each and every moment, it loses some of its potential as a way to experience intimacy. People need to lose themselves in the moment, but in order to do so they need to know exactly what it is they are doing. Authors of marriage advice books in East Germany prided themselves of representing a scientific point of view. And as scientists, they stuck to tangible examples, which by their nature tended for the most part to be rather mechanistic. The emotional side of sexuality, on the other hand, is not quite as manifest as reproduction or the ordering of a household. While this evidently posed a problem for scientifically minded marriage advisors, it also opened the door to more speculative assertions about meaning and values.

In most instances, marriage advisors approached emotional improvement indirectly. The majority of their books argued that the happiness associated with marriage was to be achieved through knowledge, material circumstances, and by scientific insights,

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 141.

and only occasionally by considering the sometimes irrational, and always non-material aspects of actually feeling something. Totalitarian or not, it was evident that the GDR aspired just as much as West Germany to be at the forefront of modernity and rational thinking.¹¹⁵ But if rationality is the standard for thinking about marital happiness, how, then, are advisors and medical experts to deal with the habitually irrational, yet according to many at the time indispensable element of human relationships, romantic love?

Healthy Love – A Medical Perspective

For many of the courts and GDR officials, health was often equated with productivity, which frequently led judges to see a partner's unwillingness to work as legal grounds for divorce.¹¹⁶ But for medical practitioners, a healthy marriage had a somewhat different meaning. Most doctors writing on marriage usually divided health into two separate, yet interrelated categories. On the one hand health simply meant physical and mental wellbeing of the partners in a relationship. On the other hand the same doctors pointed out that people needed to find true love in order to achieve a genuinely happy, and thus healthy marriage. This was also the topic of another East German bestseller, *Ein offenes Wort: Ein Buch über die Liebe*, by Hans-Joachim Hoffmann and Peter Klemm, first published in 1956.¹¹⁷

Like Rudolf Neubert and many others involved in giving marital advice in the GDR, Hoffmann and Klemm had a background in the medical profession. As the title of their book indicated, they promised to provide guidance for people seeking true love. Not

¹¹⁵ Kołakowski, *Modernity*, 10; Konrad Jarausch, and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), and Jürgen Kocka, "The GDR. A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship," in *Dictatorship as Experience. Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, Konrad Jarausch, ed., (Berghahn, 1999), 17-26.

¹¹⁶ Betts, *Within Walls*, 96.

¹¹⁷ Hans-Joachim Hoffmann and Peter G. Klemm, *Ein offenes Wort: Ein Buch über die Liebe* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1956).

in “myths, as was the case in the past, but in truth.” In contrast to many of their colleagues in the West, most East German doctors distanced themselves from religious notions of love. Accordingly, Hoffmann and Klemm characterized the “story of the myth of paradise, where woman is made out of man,” as pure fantasies and fairytales.¹¹⁸ Still, the authors maintained, there was something to be learned from these stories. Man and woman, parted by nature, strived to be whole. Or, as the title of their introduction had it, “1+1=1.” But in spite of such initial philosophical musings, Hoffmann and Klemm continued by following the trend set by their fellow marriage and sexual advisors. To explain the true nature of love, they felt it necessary to educate their mostly young readers about the physiology and mechanics of the human body.

Whether Rudolf Neubert had read *Ein offenes Wort* before drafting his own exploration of marital happiness cannot be established with complete certainty (he made no reference to it in *Das Neue Ehebuch*.) The fact still remains that the two books follow an almost identical structure, which in turn was mirrored in numerous other less prominent publications. After a passionate introduction about the importance of love for people’s well-being in general, and for marital happiness in particular, Hoffmann and Klemm made it clear that showing what love really looked like called for a “return to the basics.” This meant going back to the core of human nature and the teachings Carl Linnaeus, known for the modern biological naming scheme of binomial nomenclature. Hoffmann and Klemm’s approach was designed to invalidate myths of biblical teachings, as well as a way to organize their argument around the didactically useful image of

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 9.

human cells parting, only to grow into a single organism.¹¹⁹ In an almost identical line of argument as that in *Das Neue Ehebuch*, Hoffmann and Klemm contended that comprehending the meaning of love and happiness – that is, the emotional aspects of human relationships – was contingent on a thorough understanding of the rational “nature of man.”

However, questions of nuptial joy and the essential features of love in were almost impossible to discuss without somehow considering peoples emotions. Consequently, after a lengthy treatment of the physiological aspects of human life, Hoffmann and Klemm reached the issue of how to distinguish love from other emotions.¹²⁰ Their answer was quite simple: if it feels like love, it is love. The feeling of true love was, the authors argued, not your mind fooling you. On the contrary, it was your mind helping you to find a partner practically without you knowing it.¹²¹ This almost faith-based approach to emotions could be seen in other marriage advice as well. Rudolf Neubert, for example, had pointed to the importance of love for a happy marriage by also describing it in nearly religious terms, portraying the feeling as a body-soul-spirit experience.¹²² But despite this apparent veneration of romantic love, the majority of East German marriage advisors agreed that due to the risk of emotions playing tricks on people’s minds, love had to be controlled. Or as *Ein Offenes Wort* put it, “if you decide to be in a long term relationship, you may not only trust your emotions. You need to consult your rational mind [*Verstand*].”¹²³

¹¹⁹ This way of approaching issues of love and sexuality in the GDR seems to have been common practice both in marriage advice literature and sexual advice manuals (which in many cases were indistinguishable from one another).

¹²⁰ Hoffmann and Klemm, *Ein offenes Wort*, 159.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹²² Neubert, *Das neue Ehebuch*, 280.

¹²³ Hoffmann and Klemm, *Ein offenes Wort*, 160.

The importance of rational thinking for succeeding in married life was apparent almost everywhere in Socialist advice literature and counseling centers.¹²⁴ Consistent with this line of thinking, *Das Neue Ehebuch* noted that “true human love is not possible without rationality and knowledge about love itself. Just as a happy marriage is not possible without the knowledge about true happiness.”¹²⁵ The East German state claimed to be building a society in which its citizens would, eventually, experience love, happiness, and wellbeing. But as these examples show, strong emotional experiences on an individual level were met with a great deal of suspicion.

Part of this view of society can be read as a general attitude also found in most Western states at the time. However, those involved in discussing the politics of emotions in the GDR explicitly pointed to their reasoning as being inherently Socialist. This is also why marriage advisors felt the need to clearly define the meaning of rationality in opposition to its western counterpart. A marriage built on reason and rationality, *Ein Offenes Wort* argued, was what people should be striving for. But, the authors hastened to add, not as it was meant in bourgeois societies where “one says rationality and means money, one says love and means business, one says marriage and means profit.”¹²⁶ In other words, rationality in its specific Socialist guise was almost always defined against an ostensibly profligate Western capitalist version.

The road to true love, though, was not only a matter of knowledge. As we have seen, Hoffmann and Klemm contended that people need to *experience* love in order to gain knowledge about it. The crux was that if everyone has an unbroken chain of love

¹²⁴ LArch, B Rep. 008 Nr. 81 *Eheberatung* 1948-1950, and LArch, B Rep. 012 Nr. 177 *Eheberatungsstellen in Berlin* 1946-50.

¹²⁵ Hoffmann and Klemm, *Ein offenes Wort*, 160.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

affairs, they would never know if it really was true love they experienced. In Hoffmann and Klemm's view, people have to learn what real love looks like.¹²⁷ That is, they needed to be aware of its true structure, appearance, and tangible features, "not only what it *feels* like."¹²⁸ Obtaining such knowledge called for a sober and naturalistic approach.

At a first glance, Hoffmann and Klemm's description of what love "really is" comes across as dispassionate and well adjusted to the gender politics of the GDR, in which women were equal to men, at least in theory. Socialist love was powerfully contrasted with the inner workings of the "bourgeois marriage." In the latter, husband and wife were said to live together but not *with* each another, since in the underlying structure of bourgeois societies men had their mistresses just as women had their lovers. The only thing binding a couple together was the mutual bank account. Real love, or in some accounts "Socialist love," on the other hand, vouches for genuine feelings and mutual life experiences.¹²⁹ Moreover, in contrast to capitalist societies, physical appearances are not important for the Socialist take on true love. Instead, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly to some readers at the time, *Ein Offenes Wort* professed social status to be far more important than good looks.¹³⁰

However, social status should not be mistaken for East German references to a western capitalist "class system." Social status and social class were not analogous. According to Hoffmann and Klemm, the GDR by the mid 1950s no longer had classes with special privileges. Everyone had the same right to education, and consequently to

¹²⁷ For another expression of the tension between a romanticized love and the notion of "real love" in the East German marriage discourse, see *Neues Deutschland*, 3/13, 1953.

¹²⁸ Hoffmann and Klemm, *Ein offenes Wort*, 161. My emphasis.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹³⁰ The words used in the original are soziale Stellung, (Hoffmann and Klemm, 167). The importance of social status can also be seen in divorce courts where religious affiliation of the plaintiffs – always noted in pre-1949 cases, was replaced by work designation. See Betts, *Within Walls*, 95.

equal opportunities in society.¹³¹ Accordingly, social status needed to be understood as differences in skills, in particular those skills that applied to one's profession. In such a society partners could easily complement each other's abilities. This line of reasoning, similar to that of romantic love, opened for quasi-mystical thinking where advisors spoke of partners being meant for each other. It was also a slippery slope that, despite its call for equality, allowed for a gendered family structure in which women's "natural ability" of taking care of the household was complemented by men's skills in the workplace. But the same logic also allowed women to apply their skills *both* in the household *and* as workers, following official political guidelines. Such theoretical reasoning not only converged with the sentiments expressed by other marriage advisors and the practices of divorce courts, especially in the latter half of the 1950s.¹³² Some of these Socialist postulates also overlapped with a contemporary Christian understanding of marriage.

Christian Advice in a Secular State

In 1954, the same year as the new marriage law was debated and eventually went into effect, *Evangelische Verlagsanstalt* published *Das Gegenüber: Um Ehe und Liebe*. This was an evangelical marriage advice manual presenting the thoughts of East German Christian thinkers as well as biblical quotes and letters from Martin Luther to his wife Katharina von Bora.¹³³ Although small at its founding and always subject to the scrutiny of GDR censorship, the *Evangelische Verlagsanstalt* eventually grew to be the largest

¹³¹ Hoffmann and Klemm, *Ein offenes Wort*, 167.

¹³² Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 198-235, and Betts, *Within Walls*, 88-118.

¹³³ Magdalene Vedder and Hildegart Jaecks (Hg.), *Das Gegenüber: Um Liebe und Ehe* (Leipzig: Evangelischen Verlagsanstalt, 1954).

evangelical publisher in both East and West Germany.¹³⁴ Many Christian publications discussing love and marriage, including *Das Gegenüber* which had to be reprinted throughout the 1950s, were remarkably popular among East Germans.¹³⁵ This in itself would call for a closer examination of the message conveyed by Christian marriage advisors and other Christian spokespersons concerned with how the institution of marriage developed in the GDR. But the outspoken anti-Christian opinions in many officially sanctioned advice books, combined with the sometimes indistinguishable marriage ideals that Christians and SED representatives seemed to share, makes it even more interesting to consider the nature of Christian marriage advice at the time.

By caricaturing their Christian antagonists, doctors, psychologist, and party representatives had sought to show inherent flaws of irrational and emotional Christian attitudes toward marriage. One example, so clearly at odds with the ideas presented in *Das Gegenüber*, was Hans-Joachim Hoffmann and Peter Klemm's take on the story of Genesis in *Ein Offenes Wort*. In their account, Genesis was a "fairytale" conveying a "myth" that was not any different from other stories passed down through folklore and tradition. It might have been useful in communicating the idea that the relationship between men and women was larger than its separate parts, but without a scientific evaluation of this connection, Hoffmann and Klemm maintained, people could not learn anything from it.¹³⁶ This unwillingness, or inability, to understand such sincere religious belief, paired with a notion of Christianity as being a threat to the rational socialist state, most likely exacerbated the attempts to quench the voice of the churches in the GDR in

¹³⁴ History of the *Evangelische Verlagsanstalt*. http://www.eva-leipzig.de/shop_content.php?coID=17, accessed September 2, 2013.

¹³⁵ Jens Bulisch, *Evangelische Presse in der DDR: "Die Zeichen der Zeit" (1947-1990)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 62.

¹³⁶ Hoffmann and Klemm, *Ein offenes Wort*, 7-9.

the 1950s. It also seems like SED's hostility toward religion, but also the churches often strong dislike toward the state apparatus, led to more categorical denunciation of statements about marriage from both sides than would otherwise have been the case.

In the preface to *Das Gegenüber*, Magdalene Vedder, executive director of the *Evangelical Women's Support Organization* from 1945 to 1961, stressed the importance of God's message that men and women belonged together.¹³⁷ Indeed, they were created specifically to be with each other. This was also the central message *Das Gegenüber*. God wanted marriage to be the foundation of relationships between men and women, and since people need to follow his will, they also need to marry in order to be happy together. Liselotte Nold, an evangelical social worker and later acting chairman of the *Bayerischen Mütterdienst*, admitted that many found this hard to accept because people would rather that happiness came to them without having to do anything to earn it.¹³⁸ But Nold insisted that there was no other way than to actively say yes to marriage. This meant to say yes to one another, not because of good character traits – love, in Nold's reasoning, was not based on character – but because of the godly will that men and women belonged together.¹³⁹ Active affirmation of “God's commandment of marriage” also applied to matters of sexuality. Nold noted that “God has given us the true joy for each another in the heart, and this applies to us women as well.”¹⁴⁰

Instead of repressing female sexuality, as most of her West German colleagues did at this time, Nold encouraged sexual pleasures, at least as long as they took place in a

¹³⁷ For Vedder's activities during the Third Reich, see Rainer Bookhagen, *Die evangelische Kinderpflege und die Innere Mission in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 314.

¹³⁸ Beate Hofmann, *Liselotte Nold (1912-1978) in Frauen-Profil des Luthertums: Lebensgeschichten im 20. Jahrhundert*, Inge Mager, Hrsg. (Munich: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005).

¹³⁹ Vedder and Jaecks, *Das Gegenüber*, 9.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

marriage sanctioned by God. If it were not for the reference to God, this rather emancipatory attitude toward female sexuality would not have been altogether incompatible with SED's gender politics. Yet, there were a number of reasons why such similarities were no more than superficial. Much like the standard Christian view of the family in West Germany, Anna Teut, another contributor to *Das Gegenüber*, meant that a wife "needs to be her husband's helper." There was nothing wrong with this, she added. On the contrary, it was a "great mission and equal to saying yes to life and to help humanity."¹⁴¹ This reasoning rested on a belief built partly on the conservative religious philosophy of José Ortega y Gasset (a popular reference in these contexts) and partly on literal biblical interpretations of the relationship between men and women. The center of gravity of the female being, Teut argued, does not lay in action but in existence itself. A woman's place was not in politics, also not exclusively in social tasks, and not at all in productivity, but simply in *Da-Sein* – to "exist," to "just be there." According to Teut, a wife's essential activity was fulfilled through her husband.¹⁴² In other words, only marriage allowed women realize their destiny.

In *Ein Offenes Wort* Hoffmann and Klemm had pointed to the importance of sexuality for married couples, but in their eagerness to show the superiority of the rational aspects of socialist love, they actually sounded very much like their Christian antagonists. In Hoffmann and Klemm's view, the church has always fought against sex. Christians had directives completely prohibiting them from sexual activity, and for the rest of the people, Christians had invented the concept of sin.¹⁴³ But when discussing how much sex married people should have Hoffmann and Klemm were themselves highly

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 9–10.

¹⁴² Ibid., 12.

¹⁴³ Hoffmann and Klemm, , *Ein offenes Wort*, 199.

restrained. Their rule of thumb was “as often as necessary, and as infrequent as possible.”¹⁴⁴ To justify such sexual discipline, socialist love was contrasted to Western capitalist norms in which women were mere sex objects. If people thought of sexuality only in terms of intercourse, *Ein offenes Wort* insisted, it would “put us on the level of animals.”¹⁴⁵ Consequently, Communist marriage advisors and their Christian counterparts, despite their vastly different ideological starting points, both encouraged and repressed sexuality as a marital practice.

Apart from sexuality, perhaps the most contentious issue for Christian advisors was women’s role as workers. Just as in West Germany, the housewife ideal was not negotiable for most East German Christian spokespersons in the 1950s. However, the arguments presented to back up their stance were somewhat different from that of their western colleagues. Church organizations in the GDR maintained that having a job outside the home does not necessarily constitute more gender equality. To the contrary, it puts a double burden on women, who still do most of the domestic work, including cooking, grocery shopping, cleaning, and childcare.¹⁴⁶ There was, of course, also a religious side to the issue, which tied into the view of women as naturally passive beings. Liselotte Nold argued that a wife who works outside the household is not only doubly burdened in a physical and individual sense, but also torn between marriage and work in a more metaphysical meaning, and thus finds themselves “in a situation where belonging to the husband loses its primacy.”¹⁴⁷ In many ways, Nold’s conservative Christian model

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 204.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 173.

¹⁴⁶ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 203.

¹⁴⁷ Vedder and Jaecks, *Das Gegenüber*, 10.

was much closer to the reality of domestic gender roles in the GDR in the 1950s than was the message of equality between the sexes promoted by the SED.¹⁴⁸

The question of how important religion was to married life in East Germany just a little over a decade after the fall of Nazism is far from uncomplicated. One way to assess the impact of religion is to look at how Christian organizations were treated by the state. In the first years of the regime churches and other Christian organizations were left relatively free to act and publish without much oversight. Religion was seen by the SED to be fairly harmless and without much influence on social issues in the 1950s. This appears to be a fairly weak argument, though. As the successful publishing quotas of the *Evangelische Verlagsanstalt* indicate, Christian advice books sold in great numbers. Moreover, it would be wrong to assume that people turned away from old patterns of belief overnight. As Mary Fulbrook has argued, “religious practices and values were still very important as an alternative belief system and source of social and psychological support for large numbers of people. In some sense, religious communities were ‘resistant’ to communist infiltration.” This situation would change a decade later, but the contrast to the 1960s make the situation in the 1950s somewhat easier to evaluate. An illustrative example is the *Jugendweihe*, instituted as an alternative to the Christian confirmation ceremony and taken by only 17.7% in 1954-55. By the late 1960s, the corresponding number was 90%.¹⁴⁹

One thing that stands out with the East German Christian view of marital happiness was its optimistic outlook on married life. This was particularly true in

¹⁴⁸ See Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*.

¹⁴⁹ Martin Hewner, *Die Jugendweihe in der DDR und in den heutigen neuen Bundesländern* (München: GRIN Verlag, 2007), and Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 97.

comparison with Christians in the Federal Republic who, despite their prominent position in politics and in society at large, were constantly worried about the decline of Christian marriage values. The reason for this difference might be strength East German Christians gained from fighting against a well defined enemy – the Socialist regime – while Western churches mainly fought against “modernity” – a much less palpable adversary on which they at the same time were utterly dependent. As one contributor to *Das Gegenüber* put it, “people in the Christian community should talk less about the crisis of marriage and instead praise God for having given humans the gift of marriage.” To spread the Christian view of marriage, the commentator continued, would give courage to people who today flee into intoxication because of their fear of the future.¹⁵⁰ Thus, the East German Christian recipe for marital happiness was at the same time a direct indictment of the social order.

The Power of Tradition

Up to this point, my analysis of different views of marital happiness in the GDR has to a large degree operated in the world of wishes, hopes, predictions, and in some cases, pure illusions. Taken together they nonetheless reveal much about East German ideas of what it meant to be happily married. Or to be more precise, they unveil a world of thought in which the meaning of being happily married to a large degree rested on negative images, where the emphasis lay on what one ought *not* to do rather than what one *should* do to be happy.

Much of what can be inferred about people’s attitudes toward marriage in the 1950s point to a number of similarities with marriage patterns in the West, and at the

¹⁵⁰ Vedder and Jaecks, *Das Gegenüber*, 11.

same time to a silent rebuke of the advice offered by professional marriage experts. From the state's side, however, confident rhetoric of the "socialist family" and the ostensible superiority of "socialist love" indicated the SED's growing assertiveness. One example of this confidence can be seen in discussions of the new East German family law. Even before the formation of the GDR, the *Deutscher Volksrat* and other centers of political power were engaged in heated discussions about almost every aspect of married life down to the right for women to keep their family name.¹⁵¹ But by 1954, Minister of Justice Hilde Benjamin, who had also chaired numerous meetings of the *Deutscher Volksrat*, declared the postwar turmoil in the family to be over.¹⁵² Her argument was that since the situation of the family and the institution of marriage had by the mid 1950s reached extraordinary stability, the state could simply codify and support the situation with a new family law. The question is whether any reliable statistics can support such a claim.

An examination of marriage patterns in the 1950s seems to partly support Benjamin's assertions – if not about people's confidence in the socialist marriage, so at least when it came to the numbers. According to official GDR data, divorce rates almost halved from 49,860 in 1950 to 23,167 in 1958. Add to that the fact that both men and women married at an increasingly higher rate through the 1950s and that first time marriages occurred at an ever younger age.¹⁵³ This meant that between the beginning of

¹⁵¹ BArch, Berlin, DA/1/105 *Deutscher Volksrat* March, 1949.

¹⁵² Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 204.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 204. The average age of men went down from 27.3 in 1950 to 25 in 1960. The corresponding number for women was 23.8 and 22.9 respectively. See Lothar Mertens, *Wider die sozialistische Familiennorm - Ehescheidungen in der DDR 1950-1980* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 17.

the 1950s and the early 1960s, 150,000 to 200,000 marriages occurred per year.¹⁵⁴ Statistics also show that people seeking help for marital problems increased as advice centers became more popular.¹⁵⁵ With the exception of the number of marriages among people aged 20-24, which by 1964 was higher in the East, these figures were fairly similar compared to West Germany.¹⁵⁶ The only place where the GDR differed significantly from its western neighbor was in divorce rates, showing constantly higher numbers than the Federal Republic.¹⁵⁷ Yet, higher divorce rates do not necessarily have to mean people being less happy in their marriages. It could just as well indicate an attitude towards divorce that was less bound by social and religious stigma.

One thing we do know is that citizens of the GDR ascribed more importance to family and marriage in issues concerning character development and morality than they did to the role of collective work.¹⁵⁸ The conclusion must be that throughout the decade, marriage gave meaning to the lives of millions of East Germans, albeit not the same meaning the SED and the vast majority of East German marriage advisors had been advocating.¹⁵⁹ Instead, older traditions, ranging from Christian practices to habits anchored in more general understandings of romantic love, seem to have been the norm among most East Germans in the 1950s.

In a series of interviews conducted by Herbert Zerle and his team of researchers in 1959, East German citizens were asked about their opinion on work, marriage, and

¹⁵⁴ Helmut Schultze, "Vom Flüchtlingsstrom zur Massenflucht – die Bevölkerungsentwicklung" in *Im Trabi Durch die Zeit – 40 Jahre Leben in der DDR*, Egon Hölder, Hg. (Wiesbaden, Statistisches Bundesamt, 1992), 46.

¹⁵⁵ LArch Berlin, C Rep. 118 Nr. 769 *Eheberatungsstatistik 1950-51* and B Rep. 220 Nr. 1686 *Jahresbericht Eheberatungsstelle Reinickendorf 1950 and 1958-59*.

¹⁵⁶ Heineman, *What Difference*, 248.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁵⁹ Herbert Zerle, *Sozialistisch leben: Arbeitsmoral, Familienmoral, Erziehung* (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1964), 16.

morality. Apart from the fact that most people ranked family and marriage as more important than work for shaping morality, there were also a number of people worrying that the socialist state would deprive marriage of its Christian meaning. “Though I am not an orthodox Christian,” one person reported, “I regret that some important Christian concepts were rejected [by the SED.]” A certain amount of Christian morality would also be advantageous in a socialist society, the same person continued. “I miss the message about honoring ones father and mother and faithfulness in marriage,” he concluded.¹⁶⁰ Zerle criticized such views, arguing that family morality was communicated through socio-economic structures rather than Christian doctrines. But concerns like those expressed in the above example still indicate the importance many pre-socialist traditions had for the way people thought about marriage.

By the time the Berlin Wall went up in the summer of 1961, more than a decade had passed since the founding of the East German state. As Zerle’s results show, these years had not been enough to convince people of the advantages of finding happiness in a “socialist marriage.” Instead, during this time 3.5 million East Germans had fled to the West, whereas around 62,000 had moved in the opposite direction.¹⁶¹ Just as the semi-open border between 1949 and 1961 always had offered some kind of alternative life, albeit always problematic and one which could only come with great sacrifices, the building of the wall ended all such prospects. Marriage in the 1960s, then, would have to be imagined in social, cultural, and political space rather different from that of the 1950s.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 6-17.

¹⁶¹ Heineman, *What Difference*, 211, and Schultze, “Vom Flüchtlingsstrom zur Massenflucht,” 34.

CONCLUSION

A recurring theme in the wide variety of ideas, theories, and political concerns examined in this chapter has been worries about an imminent, if not already present “marriage crisis.” We have seen it in the East as well as in the West, in conservative Christian documents as well as in socialist writings. Because of its ubiquitous nature, it is tempting to interpret the assumed marriage crisis as a reaction to the shattering effects of the war and its often cited demographic impact. There is certainly some truth in such explanations. Particularly convincing are recent histories pointing to a general need to seek what people at the time perceived as a return to normalcy after the war.¹⁶² Nonetheless, the so-called *Frauenüberschuss* was demographically compensated for quite early in the 1950s and by 1955 the last POWs had returned to their homes in the new German states.¹⁶³ Moreover, most references to the marriage crisis had less to do with the past than worries about contemporary circumstances and about a rapidly changing society in the not too far distant future. As many examples from both the East and the West show, the enemy of marriage was not a chaotic past, but a frightening modern future. Finally, the idea of a marriage crisis needs to be put into a larger context. In essence, anxieties about the immanent end of the of marriage as a carrier of moral values can be found in western historical sources hundreds of years back and was by no means specific to the two postwar Germanies.¹⁶⁴ How, then, are we to understand why so many experts with such a varied ideological agenda, all felt the need to set right the institution of marriage in the 1950?

¹⁶² Niethammer, “‘Normalization’ in the West”.

¹⁶³ Heineman, *What Difference*, 210.

¹⁶⁴ Coontz, *Marriage, a History*.

It seems to me that part of the answer can be found in the very way experts sought to define marriage and marital happiness in the GDR and the Federal Republic, and in numerous other late modern countries in the first decade after the war. Sociologist Eva Illouz has suggested that Max Weber's notion of disenchantment could help us understand why modern societies have such ambivalent feelings toward romantic love.¹⁶⁵ While on the one hand modern science endeavors to explain how love works in our brains, popular culture keeps filling it with almost magical meaning. In a similar vein, East and West German marriage experts did all in their power to scientifically describe the workings of marriage, both as a social phenomenon and as a source to personal happiness. In doing so, they also began to strip marriage of any inherent meaning it might have had.¹⁶⁶ It is in this context we have to understand West German theologians expressing anger and fear over the increased use of social scientific language to get the Christian message of marriage across. In the same way, but in a significantly different intellectual environment, East German intellectual Rudolf Neubert strived to straddle the fence by first describing marriage as a pure function of socio-economic structures, only to immediately thereafter link it to human happiness by referring to its "unknowable mystique."¹⁶⁷

In both states we also see a great skepticism – not to be mistaken for lack of interest – among experts toward the role of emotions for stable and happy marriages. This was true regardless of which side of the border and what political and ideological agenda

¹⁶⁵ Eva Illouz, "Love and Its Discontents: Irony, Reason, Romance" in *The Hedgehog Review* 12.1 (Spring 2010). See also, Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation* (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2012), and Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 112ff.

¹⁶⁶ Kolakowski would argue, and I am inclined to agree with him, that marriage is a human practice that does not have an inherent meaning but needs to be given one in order to function as societal institution that holds families together.

¹⁶⁷ Rudolf Neubert, *Das neue Ehebuch*.

that was pushed at the time. Such attitudes can partly be explained by the sober language of the social sciences, which played a big role in determining of how “experts” talked about marriage. There are also immense difficulties involved in measuring people’s emotions, not to speak of controlling them or at least keeping them within the boundaries of rationality, which most advisors on both sides of the border saw as essential for a happy marriage. A further explanation for distrust of emotions, and a predisposition to elevate rationality to the only valid way of assessing a potential partner, might be found in the way people perceived of the recent past. Historians have shown that much of the socially conservative ideas in the 1950s were a reaction against Nazism and war rather than a continuation of a Third Reich morality, which is what the New Left argued in the late 1960s.¹⁶⁸ In a similar way, ideas of a happy marriage based on rationality and science, and not on an emotionally fueled National Socialist agenda could seem quite appealing.

Beginning in the 1950s, as indicated in this chapter, a process began that would not end until one of the two German states collapsed in 1989/90. In East and West Germany marriage was given a political and ideological meaning that would contribute to different understandings of the role of marriage in a happy life for the next forty years. Moreover, changes within the religious community in the West concerned with issues related to marriage made their Christian message less doctrinal. This was due to a felt need to reach out to a public increasingly inclined to ask for proof coming from the scientific community. Without taking this slow change into consideration, the drastic transformations in the late 1960s will be all the harder to comprehend. Finally, it needs to be emphasized that compared to both Nazi Germany and divided Germany in the late

¹⁶⁸ Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 8.

1960s and 1970s, virtually all ideals of nuptial happiness discussed in this chapter, including socialist family ideology, took place in a discourse, which always operated *within* the boundaries of marriage. East and West Germans soon began to accept the breaking of these confines, but we need to move into the 1960s before we see this happening.

CHAPTER TWO

The Slow Revolution 1962–1971

INTRODUCTION

“If you have had the privilege to visit a sixtieth or sixty-fifth birthday party of someone belonging to the protest movement of 1968,” wrote Götz Aly in a 2008 critical biography of his generation, “you will meet a happy group of people fully convinced of their own importance.”¹ The year 1968 has become synonymous with notions of social change and revolt. But it is not only the members the “generation of 1968” who claim that the late 1960s were one of the most important turning points in the history of West Germany. The last decade has seen numerous accounts, ranging from memoirs to scholarly articles pointing to social and cultural changes that were set in motion by a generation of young people seeking to revitalize and democratize the Federal Republic.² Historians of global history have begun asking if this also holds true for East Germany. Not, of course, with the argument that the GDR started a process of democratization in the 1960s, on the contrary, but rather a broader question whether East Germany also had its “moment of 1968.”³

¹ Götz Aly, *Unser Kampf: 1968 Ein Irritierter Blick Zurück* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2009), 7.

² See for example, Hans Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz: Germany's 1968 Generation and the Holocaust* (London: Hurst, 2010); Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2010); Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried, eds, *Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa 1968-1983* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010), and Anna von der Goltz, ed., *'Talkin' 'bout my Generation': Conflicts of Generation Building and Europe's 1968* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011).

³ To this point, see Timothy S. Brown, “‘1968’ East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History,” *American Historical Review*, 1 (2009): 69.

Central to this story are the roles of marriage, family, and sexuality in people's search for a happy and stable life in a time of change. A closer look at the debates surrounding these issues reveals a web of opinions, sometimes in opposition sometimes in agreement with one another. To be sure, in a comparison of how marriage was depicted in the early and in the late years of the 1960s – both in the GDR and in the Federal Republic – we see tremendous differences. Yet the reason for, and the nature of this change do not always overlap with the often self-congratulatory, or self-pitying narrative presented by those present at the time. The strong emphasis on the events of one particular year – 1968 – is one sign of the degree to which these events continue to be surrounded with mystification rather than historical insight. While there continues in some studies to be a fetishization of the year 1968, the most useful studies are those which place the events of the late 1960s in a longer-term perspective.⁴ The following will not deny the importance of “1968,” both as an idea and a moment in history. But the larger aim is also to bring to the surface and examine other, often mainstream, opinions that were equally important in shaping the dynamic view of marriage in the 1960s. And though the these years were certainly a time of change, this chapter will show that many of the conservative marriage values that had been established in both German states in the 1950s lived on relatively unharmed far into the following decade.

⁴ Among such, see Belinda Davis, Wilfried Mausbach, Martin Klimke and Carla MacDougall (eds), *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the US in the 1960s and 1970s* (New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2010); Norbert Frei, *1968: Jugendrevolte und globaler Protest* (Munich, DTV, 2008); Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America 1956–1976* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007). Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Acht und Sechzig: Eine Bilanz* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 2008); and Stephan Wolle, *Der Traum von der Revolte: Die DDR 1968*, (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag 2008).

WEST GERMANY

If the late 1960s was the culmination of a new generation's protest against their parents' "antiquated" and "Fascist" marriage and family traditions, the first half of the decade can largely be seen as a continuation of the 1950s. This was particularly true in the realm of politics. Indeed, the changes made to the marriage law in the 1960s were more conservative than progressive. This is not to say that there were no initiatives to more liberal legal reforms. There were. But due to the slow grinding of the legislative process, and the polarized marriage debate in the later years of the decade, a major overhaul to the marriage and family law did not happen until 1976. A third reason for this legal inertia may have been the conservative tilt in West German politics until the very end of the 1960s. Konrad Adenauer, representing the Christian Democrats, was reelected chancellor for a third time in 1961. He stayed on until 1963 when the *Spiegel Affair* forced him to resign.⁵ Ludwig Erhard followed Adenauer as chancellor. He kept Bruno Heck who had replaced the conservative Catholic Franz-Josef Wuermerling as Family Minister in 1962.

Wuermerling, who had lost much of his influence during his last years in office, nonetheless stuck to his agenda until the end. Speaking at a convention in Bamberg in 1961, Wuermerling declared that he intended to seek more "protection of marriage, family and innocent women and children who had been deserted by their men." By making it more difficult to divorce, he wanted to strengthen the marriage law, which he described as "still the same as during the Nazis."⁶ Accordingly, due to a CDU majority in

⁵ Adenauer's personal views on family and marriage were perhaps not more conservative than his family minister's, but to a growing number of West Germans they seemed to belong to a long forgotten historical era. For a closer look at religious influences on Adenauer's marriage ideals, see Charles Williams, *Adenauer: the Father of the New Germany* (London: Little Brown, 2000).

⁶ Franz-Josef Wuermerling, *Acht Jahre Familienpolitik – Acht Jahre Zentraler Familienrat* (München: Familienbund d. Dt. Katholiken, 1961), 14.

the legislature, such law was quickly passed.⁷ Keeping to his leitmotif from the 1950s, Wuermerling also made marriage, sexual restraints, and religion into weapons against the Communism threat to Christian values. “The family is the fundamental substance of life,” he contended, “and it is also the foundation of our inner power and resistance against the worldwide threat of Communism.”⁸ But in spite of Wuermerling’s and Heck’s strong Catholic faith and conservative political inclination, and the lack of progressive legal changes, marriage politics in the 1960s were more dynamic than the heads of the Family Ministry might lead us to believe.

In an interview published in 1968, CDU representative and Federal Minister of Justice Gustav Heinemann exhibited unusually liberal views toward marriage and divorce. Paying heed to opinions on both sides of the aisle, Heinemann revealed that he had put together a commission to oversee possible changes in the marriage law. Among other things he wanted to investigate the consequences of making it easier to divorce.⁹ In other words a law pointing in the exact opposite direction of the one proposed and brought into place by Wuermerling seven years earlier. On the question of what the precise task of the commission would be, Heinemann was quick to point out that all possible angles were looked into, even arguments opposing a more lenient divorce law. It was clear, though, that the Minister of Justice was under pressure from liberal reformers. He explained that religious influences on marriage law, as well as equal rights for men and women, were some of the most important questions the commission had to deal with. And though Heinemann asserted he did not want to influence the direction of the legal

⁷ Sabine Engelhardt, *Die missglückte Regelung des Rechts der fehlerhaften Ehe durch das Eheschließungsrechtsgesetz 1998* (PhD diss., Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2004), 14.

⁸ Wuermerling, *Acht Jahre Familienpolitik*, 3.

⁹ “Die Ehe soll kein kündbarer Vertrag werden,” *Brigitte*, 10/22, 1968.

proceedings, he expressed a firm conviction that the new marriage law would be more tolerant and permissive of people who wanted divorce. After all, if two people no longer wanted to stay married, “what is the purpose of keeping them together [by legal constraints]?”¹⁰

It appeared, then, as if during the course of the 1960s, the politics of marriage was in rapid change. From having been a mere reflection of the early Christian conservative agenda to a liberal program indicating a distinctive shift in the West German mentality toward the institution of marriage at the end of the decade. There is certainly some truth to this interpretation. A comparison of the way popular media depicted and reported on issues related to marriage in the initial and final years of the 1960s point to differences that cannot be ignored. In the early years of the 1960s, the institution of marriage was rarely, if ever, questioned as the “normal” way for people of the opposite sex to arrange their lives together. But the closer we get to the cultural revolts of the end of the decade, some commentators begun to express serious doubt in marriage as an organizing principle of human relationships. Echoing the East German critique of how marriage in West Germany reflected conservative, or fascist values, some people on the left begun to experiment with new forms of living. In communal arrangements “free love” was thought to work as an antidote to the reprehensible values of both Nazism and the Federal Republic of the 1950s, which for many of the New Left were one and the same.¹¹

But there was also another story of marriage in the 1960s – one not so easily explained with a radical break with the past initiated by the generation of 1968. Some of the more liberal tendencies seen in the marriage discourse of the 1960s had begun years

¹⁰ Ibid., 115.

¹¹ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

earlier, when Christian marriage advisors turned to the social sciences to explain the benefits of marriage and thereby diluting some of the more reactionary and doctrinal aspects of their message. Second, many of the changes advocated by the New Left, such as greater women's rights, were not reflected in their own lifestyles. Finally, we also need to take into consideration ordinary Germans' attitudes toward marriage. Statistical data show that, in contrast to what radical voices in the late 1960s preached, people continued to marry at more or less the same rates as they had ten years earlier. Moreover, a majority of these people were happy with their marriages, or at least so they claimed when asked by pollsters.¹² Historians who have emphasized the importance of the New Left are not wrong in arguing that they did have an impact on family politics in the 1960s. Still, the conservative 1950s did not end with Andenauer and Wuermerling leaving office. Tradition, coupled with emerging consumer cultures were far stronger forces affecting marriage ideals than were established politicians and politically radical youth groups. But before the student movement and the New Left gained attention toward the middle of the decade, the first years of the 1960s saw few breaks with the postwar order.

Gender Roles, Emotions, and the End of the "Long 1950s"

"There has never been a time in the history of our *Volk* that has seen so many divorces as the last ten years," theologian and marriage counselor Theodor Blieweiss wrote in 1960.¹³ Had he had the ability to see into the future, though, he would most likely have considered the 1950s as nothing but a prelude to a real crisis of marriage in the decade to come. But perhaps even more threatening to Blieweiss and other Christian conservatives in West Germany was the withering away of old taboos, of which divorce was only one

¹² Elisabeth Noelle and Erich Neumann [Hrsg.], *Jahrbuch der Öffentlichen Meinungen 1968-1973*.

¹³ Theodor Blieweiss, *Ehen die Zerbrachen: Bekenntnisse Geschiedener* (Munich: Verlag Herold, 1960), 9.

aspect. But the changes in how popular culture portrayed sexuality, gender issues, and marriage did not descend on West German society out of the blue in the last years of the decade. Rather, the 1960s were, as a recent German publication has it, *dynamische Zeiten*.¹⁴ In fact, for contemporary observers, the early years of the 1960s did not seem to change much at all in terms of patriarchal family patterns and predominantly conservative interpretation of gender roles. Judging by an increasing number of articles in women's magazines expressing frustrations with inequality between the sexes, the standards set up during the 1950s were still the norm.

One article from 1961 in the magazine *Brigitte* claimed that there needed to be an end to the double standard of what men and women were allowed to do before they got married.¹⁵ So what if women had a few flings before deciding to get engaged? It was still nothing compared to what most men indulged in, *Brigitte* argued. Women could vote, work outside the home and participate in a whole array of activities earlier judged as not fitting for them, the magazine continued, and at the same time they were not deemed capable of deciding even over their own spare time.¹⁶ But for all this criticism, even the most scathing observers of women's situation in the early 1960s conceded that the institution of marriage still brought great happiness to men and women alike. What women really wanted from a man, most of these commentators argued, was that he did not destroy that fragile image of the *grosse Liebe*. As long as he was careful to nurse this love, "we forgive him for all his other faults. That is just how inconsistent we women are." Thus, although voices were beginning to be raised in defense of women's right to

¹⁴ Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 2000).

¹⁵ "Sie hat einen schlechten Ruf," *Brigitte* 1/24, 1961. For another example, see 1961 "Could she take the first step?," *Brigitte* 4/30, 1961.

¹⁶ "Sie hat einen schlechten Ruf," *Brigitte*.

indulge premarital sex and freedom of romantic relationships with whomever they pleased, it was also clear that in the first years of the 1960s, marriage was considered the natural place to eventually end up for any “decent woman.”

Acknowledging the growing acceptance of women’s greater freedom to enter serious relationships that not necessarily had to lead to marriage, *Brigitte* invited sociologist Elisabeth Noelle-Neuman to discuss the matter. Born in the last years of the German Empire, Noelle-Neuman received a Ph.D. in political science from Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (today, Humboldt University of Berlin) in 1940. Throughout her studies and later career, she was interested in American politics and society, and as part of her doctoral training she visited University of Missouri from 1937 to 1938. After graduating from Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Noelle-Neuman worked for the Nazi newspaper *Das Reich* where she published anti-Semitic conspiracy theories about a Jewish syndicate running the American media. In 1947 she married the Christian Democratic politician Erich Peter Neumann, with whom she co-founded the public opinion research organization, the *Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research*.¹⁷ By the time *Brigitte* contacted her for an interview about the state of marriage in the Federal Republic, Noelle-Neuman had just accepted a professorship at Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, which, despite later accusations of Nazi collaboration, she would keep until 1983.¹⁸

Now that they had finally reach the level of equality they had so long been fighting for, *Brigitte* asked, could they really live up to the task? Was it not simply too

¹⁷ Hans Mathias Kepplinger, “In memoriam Elisabeth Noelle (19. Dezember 1916 – 25. März 2010),” *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, (62) 2010: 583-587.

¹⁸ For information about Noelle-Neumann’s Nazi ties, see John J. Mearsheimer, “Noelle-Neumann was a willing anti-Semite,” *Chicago Maroon*, 11/12, 1991, 17-18, and William H. Honan, “U.S. Professor's Criticism of German Scholar's Work Stirs Controversy,” *New York Times*, 8/27, 1997, A13.

much work for modern women to hold family together, including being in charge of the household, and at the same time have a job outside the home? Noelle-Neuman and her colleagues' at the conservative *Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research* meant that women were indeed "up to the task." According to their research, women's increasing willingness to work outside the home did not have a particularly negative influence on married life. Noelle-Neuman thus repudiated a correlation between working women and diminished marital happiness. In her words, the "whole thing is a myth." She appears to have been right. West German marriages were surely not without problems, but these problems seemed to have little to do with women's rights. In fact, Noelle-Neuman contended that contrary to conservative voices of the time, being a housewife was a much more likely source of unhappiness than being part of the active workforce.¹⁹

The views Noelle-Neuman expressed in *Brigitte* seem exceptionally progressive compared to the standards of the 1950, especially when seen in the light of her close ties to the CDU. Still, there were clear links between Noelle-Neuman's assertions and social conservatives who had a strong interest in the institution of marriage.²⁰ The common denominator was their anxiety about modern society. Noelle-Neuman argued that modern marriages deprived women of social interaction. At a time when German families to a larger degree than ever lived in suburbs, women were missing human contact, outside input, and basic dialogue. Not even modern kitchen supplies made things much easier. When "you have to take care of everything from morning to evening, including children, it is little consolation that you no longer have to bake your own bread," she concluded.²¹

¹⁹ "Ist die Ehe in Gefahr?," *Brigitte*, 10/13, 1964.

²⁰ Jörg Becker, *Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann. Demoskopie zwischen NS-Ideologie und Konservatismus* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013).

²¹ "Ist die Ehe in Gefahr?," *Brigitte*.

Noelle-Neuman's reasoning may seem to contradict some earlier conservative standards, but by the mid-1960s it was precisely such inconsistencies that shaped the marriage discourse in West German popular culture. The first half of the 1960s saw reporting in magazines such as *Brigitte*, *Constanze*, *Konkret*, arguing for greater acceptance of women who wanted to have more than one partner before settling down. At the same time, the same publications described marriage as the highest form of true love, and a life without it was considered morally inappropriate. Many counselors and other self-proclaimed marriage experts were alarmed by this development. Already in 1956, neurologist and psychiatrist Joachim Bodamer had written about the dangers of gender roles that were not fixed by solid ethical codes.²² Women engaged in work outside the home, Bodamer wrote, "became nervously aggressive, stressed, and excessively rational."²³ By the mid-1960s many thought that these ominous predictions had realized themselves through modern consumer society and women's growing demands for equal rights.

Noelle-Neuman pointed out that contrary to such fears of the masculinization women, working outside the home did nothing of the sort. Her research showed that over 50% of the married men in her studies thought their wives to be warmhearted and full of emotions, and 71% said their wives were domestic and loved family life.²⁴ This diagnosis of women as primarily emotional beings did not differ much from opinions held by the medical expertise in the 1950s. While emotions, and especially romantic love, were still considered with some skepticism by medical experts throughout the 1960s, Noelle-Neuman and a growing number of psychologists testified to how this distrust had slowly

²² Joachim Bodamer, *Der Mann von heute* (Basel: Schwabe, 1956).

²³ Quote from "ist die Ehe in Gefahr?," *Brigitte*, 10/13, 1964. The source is not mentioned in the article.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

begun to dissipate. This is not to say that men and women were considered to be on equal terms emotionally. Noelle-Neuman, for example, reported that partners are happiest when a wife could say about her husband that he can understand his spouse's feelings, is considerate, and a good listener.²⁵ In other words, husbands needed to play a passive and rational role in marriage whereas wives were expected to indulge in their natural emotional inclinations.

Modernity to the Rescue

As in the previous decade, love was a subject that gave rise to much ambivalence in the second half of the 1960s. On the one hand, it was the answer to the basic question why one should marry in the first place. As one expert put it, "it is quite obvious. People marry because they love each another."²⁶ On the other hand, love was said to meddle with people's rational decision-making leading to rash and disastrous adventures of eloping young couples. Keeping with the gendered understanding human emotions from the first half of the decade, women were always considered less capable of seeing through the fog of love than were their male partners. Thus, one the main concerns of marriage experts was how to square the circle of the advantages and the problems with romantic love.

In the late 1960s, many progressively minded commentators saw a solution to this "problem" in the very fabric of modernity. The answer, they asserted, was the tremendous power of the modern computer. Beginning in the second half of the 1960s, an increasing amount of "marriage institutes" began to advertise their services in virtually every magazine and paper offering personal ads. In *Brigitte*, such institutes even had a

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "How does one know if he is the right one?," *Brigitte*, 9/26, 1967.

designated column in which computer matching was offered as a superior alternative to blind dates and other forms of dating susceptible to flawed, emotionally based decisions. The partner selection, these ads guaranteed, was done with “scientific supervision” combining “individual consultation with modern data processing.”²⁷ In line with commercial selling techniques employed by an expanding West German consumer society, computers such as “Selectron Veryfair” promised “marriage or your money back.”²⁸

These almost too-good-to-be-true promises were based on the belief, or selling point, that modern computers could bypass the unreliability inherent in human decision making. Since the early 1950s, social scientists, Christian advisors, and a number of self-proclaimed marriage experts had struggled to find ways to combine rational and material elements with the equally important, but far less trustworthy emotional side of married life. Although the general opinion among experts had begun to change in the mid to late 1960s, most still held that emotions, and in particular romantic love, were detrimental when choosing a life partner. At the same time, everyone seemed to agree that love was a necessary and even required component in a happy marriage. The question was how to control ungovernable feelings of love and prevent the irrational and emotional side of people’s minds from picking the “wrong” person. For many, computer dating seemed like the perfect solution to this problem. As long as one provided enough data, machines such as Selectron Veryfair could make the a perfect decision based on hundreds of, or even thousands of pre-selected preferences. Moreover, it did so without being swayed by emotional irrationality.

²⁷ “Heiratsinstitute,” *Brigitte*, 3/12, 1968.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

During three consecutive months in early 1968, *Brigitte* followed Gerda Bödefeld, a 36 year old editor, in her endeavors to find a new partner through two leading computer dating agencies. For 1215 *Deutschmark*, a fairly high sum at the time, the dating agencies promised to employ “electronic brains and modern psychology to find a perfect match among thousands of marriage candidates.”²⁹ *Brigitte*’s readers could follow Bödefeld diligently filling out application forms describing her personality, looks, previous relationships, and numerous other details about her physical appearance and mental dispositions. But despite all these efforts, Bödefeld’s experience with computer dating proved disappointing. Only three of the almost forty men Bödefeld was put in touch with by the agencies ever wrote back. But instead of questioning the epistolary reticence of the men, or the efficacy of computer dating, Bödefeld came to the conclusion that “Ich bin schwer zu verheiraten.”³⁰ This self-deprecating comment was no coincidence.

The general viewpoint in advice books as well as marriage columns from the early 1950s through the 1960s was that if something did not go as planned, it was because women did something wrong. One out of many examples was *Brigitte*’s response to a distressed woman in a dreadful marriage. “[Your husband] avoids getting in touch with his emotional side to a degree that he does not even recognize it anymore,” the magazine wrote, continuing, “When you get the chance to talk to him you should not suffocate him with demands as you have done in the past, but try to approach him tenderly and with love.”³¹ Similarly, much of what Bödefeld reported from her computer dating experience pointed to repeated disappointments mostly resulting in self-blame and low self-esteem. In the end, though, she did “find happiness,” but not through computers,

²⁹ “Der Computer sucht mir einen Ehemann,” *Brigitte*, 2/27, 1968.

³⁰ “Ich bin Schwer zu verheiraten,” *Brigitte*, 3/12, 1968.

³¹ “Werden Frau D. und ihr Mann zueinander finden?,” *Brigitte*, 3/12, 1968.

but in a more traditional way.³² Still, Bödefeld was not entirely disappointed with her computer dating experience. At least, she asserted, it had taught her to be more skeptical of the ubiquitous offers of simple shortcuts to marital happiness.

The increasing popularity with computer dating also reveals a deeper truth about the relationship between marriage and happiness in the 1960s. This was the idea that marital happiness could be packaged as a commodity available for purchase to anyone who was ready to pay the right price. The consumer capitalist version of a happy marriage in the late 1960s was increasingly being equated with a perfect wedding.³³ In a 1968 wedding special, *Brigitte*'s readers could test themselves if they had the "talent for marital happiness" by choosing among ten wedding dress designs, get advice on how to buy the perfect set of crystal wine glasses for the "special day," and muse about "the most wonderful dress in a woman's life."³⁴ Other consumer products, such as pseudo scientific drugs, were also advertised with marital happiness as the selling point.³⁵ "Is it possible to be happier?" one ad from 1969 asked. It explain how many older marriages were the source of sorrow and dejection, but with one to two *Genusol* per day, "people felt more active, looked better, and gained a renewed taste for life," which inevitably would "work wonders" even in old marriages.³⁶

³² "Mein Glück kam nicht aus dem Computer," *Brigitte*, 3/26, 1968.

³³ Eva Illouz and Stephanie Coontz have written about both love and marriage in late capitalism, but are both vague in their periodization and in the actual places they refer to. Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy, Or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2005) and Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

³⁴ "Was bedeutet für Sie die Ehe?," *Brigitte*, 10/8, 1968; "Anzeige: gralglas," *Brigitte* 10/1, 1969, and "Wir wollen heiraten," *Brigitte-Sonderheft*, 1968.

³⁵ The importance of the dress (not only the wedding dress), was pointed out already in 1899 by Thorstein Veblen. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: an Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1902). See also, Chrys Ingraham, *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality In Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

³⁶ "Anzeige: Kan man glücklicher werden?," *Brigitte*, 5/1, 1969. The active substance in the advertised wonder pill was Procaine, a drug used in surgery as local anesthetic.

Conservative Radicals

The link between consumption and happiness was also one of the main points of criticism coming from the New Left in the second half of the 1960s. According to some of the more radical pundits on the left, the battle against consumerism was in fact a battle for the future of German democracy.³⁷ One of the more vociferous critics of modern consumer culture and its negative consequences for a happy life was Herbert Marcuse. Although his impact on the West German New Left has been somewhat revised of late, it is hard to avoid the New Left's numerous allusions to Marcuse during these years.³⁸ In *An Essay on Liberation*, published in 1969, Marcuse criticized exactly the tendencies to commercialize private life that we have seen in popular media's flirt with the budding wedding industry. This "consumer economy," Marcuse argued, created a "second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form."³⁹ To come to terms with consumerism's false sense of joy Marcuse called for a "new sensibility." This meant fighting back against a capitalist apparatus and mass media that "have adjusted the rational and emotional faculties to its market and its policies and steered them to defense of its dominion."⁴⁰ These and similar ideas translated into a criticism of marriage as a capitalist enterprise for individual rather than communal happiness. Add to this Engels' criticism of the capitalist family structure that East German marriage advisors had made

³⁷ Dirk A. Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 185. Konrad Jarauch has argued that it was not so much the politics of the New Left that changed things, but a general sense of bringing fun back into the game and move away from authoritarian sentiments. These sentiments could not even find their back after 1982. Konrad Jarauch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁸ John Abromeit writes about the myth making around Marcuse's and Adorno's impact on the student movement and the New Left. Yet, he concedes, it seems clear that although Marcuse was skeptical to the movement at times, his writings and theories, albeit simplified and muddled in wine soaked eyes of demonstration and muddy boots in the wake of them, did have an impact. John Abromeit, "The Limits of Praxis" in *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities In West Germany and the U.S. In the 1960s and 1970s*, Belinda J. Davis, ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

³⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

ample use of in the 1950s and the result was a damning verdict on marriage as a social and cultural phenomenon, at least in the eyes of many in the West German New Left.

Such theoretical underpinnings were critical for the New Left when outlining their ideas about marriage and family. But an equally important impetus for the New Left's hostility toward the institution of marriage in the recent past was the unresolved conflict they had with their parent's generation. Wrapped in the language of ideology and politics, the popular book *Repressive Familienpolitik* is a revealing example of how leftist theory was employed in the discrediting of contemporary family life.⁴¹ The main argument in *Repressive Familienpolitik* was that the moral foundation of family, sexuality, and marriage in the last two decades was just Nazism in disguise. To make matters worse, family politics in the Federal Republic had focused all its resources to support the strengthening of the nuclear family. Even policies that on the surface appeared benign, such as children's allowance, were ultimately authoritarian, since they reinforced the institution of marriage and monogamous family life.⁴² Family and Youth Minister Franz-Josef Wuermeling was held up as particularly harmful example of such practices.⁴³ Heavily influenced by Marxist ideology and American psychoanalytical trends, the authors of *Repressive Familienpolitik* praised scholars like Wilhelm Reich for giving "Marxist criticism of the capitalist society a psychological foundation," which ultimately helped to explain the harmful emotional and economic effects of "bourgeois marriages."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Dietrich Haensch et al. *Repressive Familienpolitik- Sexualdruckung als Mittel der Politik* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969). Reprinted in multiple editions into the mid 1970s.

⁴² The introduction and foreword to *Repressive Familienpolitik* is a virtual anti-family and anti marriage manifesto.

⁴³ Haensch, *Repressive Familienpolitik*, 74ff. As a criticism of the 1960s, the attacks on Wuermerling were somewhat misplaced since he retired in 1962 and had lost much of his influential powers long before that.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28 and 40.

Repressive Familienpolitik was only one of many publications criticizing the institution of marriage in West Germany. But there is one thing to publish strong opinions, and quite another to live by the standards set up in such tracts. However, efforts to explain the significance of the New Left in the decades that followed often confused theory with practice. Part of the reason for this was a general mythmaking that had its foundation in a collective wish to once and for all rid West Germany of its troubling past. This led intellectuals in the Federal Republic to suggest that it was only with the changes of 1968 that Germany became a western liberal democracy.⁴⁵ As Dirk Moses notes, the conventional wisdom was, and still is, that the New Left redeemed German honor and corrected the moral and political shortages of the first two postwar decades.⁴⁶ Many of these interpretations are written by “witness historians” who by focusing on 1968 alone sometimes underestimate the long-term changes and dynamics between the mid 1950s and mid 1970s.⁴⁷ As the sources make clear, though, the theories and practices in leftist circles were ill-matched at best, and in some cases evidently hypocritical.

In January 1967, as a way of turning theory into practice, Dieter Kunzelmann and some of his friends from the radical Socialist German Student Union (SDS) founded Kommune 1 (K1). Some of the central thoughts behind the communal life envisaged by the members of K1 were almost identical to those presented in *Repressive Familienpolitik*. The nuclear family was depicted as a repressive institution of capitalist society that was ultimately responsible for the success of Fascism. In the mind of

⁴⁵ Heiz Bude “The German Kriegskinder,” in *Generations In Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation In Germany, 1770-1968* Mark Roseman, ed. (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 293.

⁴⁶ Moses, *German Intellectuals*, 7.

⁴⁷ For a critical evaluation of this kind of research, see Maud Anne Bracke, “One-dimensional Conflict? Recent Scholarship on 1968 and the Limitations of the Generation Concept,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 47 (2012): 639.

Kunzelmann communal life was the only way to rectify a society where these problems were still present. But despite its ideology of group solidarity and a belief in gender equality, K1 soon found it difficult to combine theory with practice. When the left-leaning magazine *Konkret* visited K1 in August 1967, its reporter found a group of mostly young men with strict rules regulating interaction between the sexes.⁴⁸

In their uncompromising regulations of social life, the members of K1 considered private conversations between men and women equal to sexual intercourse. Sexuality and the evils of “bourgeois marriage” were also the themes the commune occupants were most willing to discuss with the *Konkret* reporter. Sex, most of the male participants seemed to think, was the antidote to virtually all the evils caused by capitalism and the institution of marriage. But after only a few months of K1’s existence most women had abandoned the commune, and by the summer of 1967 only the 26-year-old Gertrud Hemmer remained.⁴⁹ In practice, the male dominated world of the 1950s, in which women made their men happy by having dinner ready at the end of the work day had, in the more extreme leftist circles, been replaced by yet another male dominated world where the ideology of antifascism and sexual freedom left most female participants wanting.

There is no denying that Kunzelmann and his friends set a tone in the late 1960s that was highly evocative. It would be a mistake, though, to take this new radical way of speaking about marriage, sexuality, and family to indicate a similar change in the West German population at large. Too much focus on the “generation of 1968” fails to correctly assess the still strong cultural force of religion in West Germany of the 1960s.

⁴⁸ “Klaus Rainer Röhl über die Berliner Liebeskommune,” *Konkret*, August, 1967. It should also be noted that *Konkret* had clear leftist credentials and was also the magazine for which Ulrike Meinhof wrote.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Jochen Fischer and the Threats of Modernity

Throughout the 1950s, ministers such as Franz-Josef Wuermerling, Bruno Heck, as well as Konrad Adenauer emphasized the importance of marriage for a strong state but also as defense against the spread of Communism. As late as 1960, Wuermerling argued for a strong tie between family and state. Children who grow up in families where they got to know the meaning of authority structures, he contended, could easily grasp the significance of a firm state apparatus.⁵⁰ In a similar way, theologian Theodor Blieweis asserted, “only healthy marriages and families can form the foundation of a healthy people and a viable state.”⁵¹ Notwithstanding such harsh warnings, the wellbeing of the West German state was not the only, or even the main concern of Christian officials contemplating the future of marriage.

Anxieties about losing authority of interpretation in a variety of moral issues, which had seemed somewhat misguided if not entirely unjustified in the 1950s, began to appear as a much more real threat to all Christians in the 1960s. But whereas both Evangelicals and Catholics had argued that modern individualism and the focus on capitalist consumption were detrimental to traditional marriage patterns, Catholics had been less prone to change in order to appeal to the younger generations. When new marriage guidelines were finally made official as a result of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, it seemed to many to be too little, too late. Pointing to the differences between Catholic and Protestant churches, though, makes it easy to forget their common interest of reinforcing the Christian meaning of marriage. In fact, rather than being ecclesiastical antagonists organizations such as *Katolische Zentralinstitut für Ehe und Familienfragen*

⁵⁰ EZA Berlin, 99/697 (1960), *F-J Wuermerlin, Informationsruntschrift Nr. 34 from Feb, 1960.*

⁵¹ Blieweis, *Ehen die Zerbrachen*, 31.

and the *Konferenz für Evangelische Familienberatung* were cooperating on a number of issues.⁵² Their common interest was made clear in numerous letters between the *Katolische Zentralinstitut* and the evangelically oriented *Center for Marriage Counseling* discussing the “rapid change and social structure in today’s society” that had led to a loss of direction earlier given by tradition and old customs. The loss of these traditions left modern people “disconcerted and helpless,” which in turn caused irreparable damage to the institution of marriage and family life.⁵³

During the early 1960s, the *Center for Marriage Counseling* would become one of the most influential West German Christian organizations working with questions of marriage and family. The Center was led by Jochen Fischer, who in 1949 also had been part of the group that founded the *Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Jugend- und Eheberatung* (DAJEB). To come to terms with the decline of Christian marriage values, Fischer focused much of his energy on the education of the youth. Solid young marriages, he and his colleagues argued, was the foundation and bulwark against malign ideologies such as Communism, but also a way to combat the disease of consumer capitalism, both of which embodied the most threatening aspects of modernity. From the mid 1960s onward, the growing counterculture seemed to have given Christian marriage advisors such as Fischer a more concrete opponent against whom they could formulate their vindication of the “Christian marriage.”

A common target of criticism, but also of genuine concern to Fischer and his colleagues, was the “youth generation.” At the heart of the problem, Fischer explained, was the lack of stability that bourgeois traditions of earlier times had provided. In

⁵² EZA Berlin, 99/697 (1960), *F-J Wuermerlin, Informationsrundschrift Nr. 34 from Feb, 1960.*

⁵³ EZA 99/697, April 1963, KZfEF letter concerning “Begriffsbestimmung der Eheberatung.”

contrast to the past, he wrote, “young marriages of today [1963] have to find, or invent, their own direction. Unfortunately, the new generation of people ready to marry is not up for the task.”⁵⁴ Fischer argued that the youths themselves were only partly to blame for this development. The real culprit, though, were the modern trends of “social prestige, rogue consumerism [*Konsumterror*], conformism, and materialist competition.”⁵⁵ This critical stance towards individualism and consumerism would expand the further into the 1960s we get. Starting around the mid-1960s, it was also forcefully coupled with a condemnation of the way popular media represented sexuality.

Fischer described a state of emotional disturbance in modern marriages that was a direct consequence of a contemporary surge of premarital sexual activities. “This is not only a result of the calamitous commercialized sexualization of our society,” he wrote, “but also a product of our impoverished understanding of the Eros and the emotional deficit in our modern lives.”⁵⁶ While scrutinizing the moral decline among young people a few years later, Fischer was even bolder in his critique of social developments since the early 1950s. A direct threat to marital happiness, and indeed to marriage as we know it, Fischer declared in 1967, was the “new sexual morality.”⁵⁷ He traced this new moral code to mostly American sources. The fact that the ideas supposedly came from the frontier of modern consumerism was not Fischer’s greatest problem, though. His real aversion was directed towards people who tried to explain sexuality and the nature of love with pure hormonal changes in the body. This, Fischer argued, amounted to an error in which scientists used pure rationality to explain who we are and from where we get our

⁵⁴ Jochen Fischer, “Der Wachstumsvorgang der Ehe,” in *Ehe und Ehescheidung*, Erwin Wilkens ed. (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1963), 250.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁵⁷ Jochen Fischer, *Neue Moral unter die Lupe* genommen, (Wuppertal: Ausstaat Verlag, 1967), 6.

morality.⁵⁸ Offering an analogy he wrote that we did not expect a boat lost at sea to find its way back to port all by itself. It needed a compass, just like people lost and confused in modern society needed a compass.⁵⁹ Fischer's argument boiled down to the notion that the "new sexual morality," championed by "liberal humanism" robbed people of such a compass and instead provided a young generation of confused individuals with an infinite number of morally dubious choices. For Fischer and his colleagues, the introduction of the birth-control pill in 1960 was a particularly strong proof of moral deterioration, the harms of consumerism, and the potential bane of future marital happiness.

Celebrated by many West Germans as great step forward for female emancipation and sexual liberty, "the pill" was almost unanimously condemned by church leaders at its introduction. What is of greater interest here, though, is how West German Christians saw the pill not only as something preventing humans from interacting the way God had intended them to, but also as a symbol of modernity and the harm modern individualism did to Christian notions of happiness. For Fischer's and his colleagues, God's "commandment to procreate" was always a part of their argument against the use of contraception and the natural happiness children were supposed to bring to a young marriage. The pill became the very symbol of the deterioration of Christian morality in West German society.⁶⁰ In 1963, Fischer wrote that the danger of new methods of contraception "would cause unimaginable damage to the future of marriage."⁶¹

Explaining the reasoning behind this and similar statements he wrote that men and woman have vastly different bodily experiences, evidenced by the measurement of the

⁵⁸ Fischer, *Neue Moral*, 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁰ For one example out of many where contraception was presented as a danger to God's command to have children, see Jochen Fischer, *Die Lebensalter der Ehe* (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1965), 45-52.

⁶¹ Fischer, "Der Wachstumsvorgang," 252.

“orgasm curve.”⁶² This was of less importance, though, compared to the real difference between men and women, which was embodied in their very essence [*Wesen*]. The purpose of marriage was to accommodate these different natures of the sexes. Regrettably, the use of contraceptives altered the emotional experiences of men and women to a point where “marriage was acutely endangered.”⁶³ Marriage counseling and education of the youth was one of the few instruments left to set things right, argued Fischer.

To this purpose the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), in which Fischer had played a leading role since the early 1960s, met in February of 1967 to discuss “issues regarding the sexual revolution and marriage.”⁶⁴ The meeting was a joint session including representatives from both the GDR and the Federal Republic. Similar to Fischer and many other conservatives, the commission recognized a growing trend of sexual openness in West Germany. However, in contrast to Christian conservatives who spoke up in public against this perceived threat, the commission did not express great misgivings. Part of the reason was a recent survey, conducted by Elisabeth Noelle-Neuman’s institute in Allenbach, showing that young people were less inclined to premarital sex in 1963 than they were in 1949.

According to the minutes of the meeting, the commission found these numbers a reassuring signal that the Federal Republic was headed in the right direction.⁶⁵

Particularly encouraging in the process of restoration was that the “good old bourgeoisie”

⁶² Ibid., 253.

⁶³ Ibid., 253.

⁶⁴ EZA Berlin, 104/990, *Kommission für Fragen der Sexualetik*, 1967

⁶⁵ Ibid., Sektion II, 1967.

still maintained a “high morality.”⁶⁶ Regrettably, though, a strong moral poise was not enough to stave off the liberalizing of people’s sexual attitudes – practical measures were needed.⁶⁷ Already in 1963, the *Conference of Evangelical Marriage Counseling* had discussed such practical measures and reached the conclusion that parallel to keeping up the Christian marriage morality, the church had to reach out to young people *before* they got married. The newly established counseling clinics were seen as an excellent means with which to achieve this goal.⁶⁸ Another initiative discussed at the conference was educating the public through a more assertive publishing and promotion of advice books.⁶⁹ By the mid 1960s, however, it was becoming clear that it was not only an increasingly secularized public that posed a threat to Christian marriage values.

In addition to the dangers of the liberalized view of sexuality and marriage seen in the second half of the 1960s, Fischer wrote in his 1967 book *Neue Moral unter die Lupe genommen*, a certain breed of liberal Christianity had emerged.⁷⁰ Student papers and other publications, he continued, were advocating a “liberal Christianity” that wanted to liberate women’s sexuality and promote a commercial, individualized view of human life.⁷¹ Fischer argued that such standpoints were a clear misreading of God’s word at best and a mocking of the Christian message at worst. Accusations that the established Evangelical Churches (EKD) stood for totalitarian ideas could simply not be tolerated, he concluded. Just as the generation of 1968 argued that their parents had been responsible

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ EZA Berlin, 104/990 *Kurze Übersicht über die Entwicklung der kirchlich-diakonischen Ehe- und Familienberatung*, 17. September 1966. Also see Christiane Kuller, *Familienpolitik im föderativen Sozialstaat Die Formierung eines Politikfeldes in der Bundesrepublik 1949–1975* (Oldenbourg: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2004), 223-252.

⁶⁹ EZA Berlin, 104/990 *Kurze Übersicht*.

⁷⁰ Fischer, *Neue Moral*, 17ff.

⁷¹ Ibid., 17-18.

for Auschwitz, and were thus disqualified as serious interlocutors, Christian students accused the EKD of creating a moral dictatorship. Fischer found this outrageous. He argued that he and his fellow Christians in the EKD were involved in a necessary “resistance against the ruinations of human souls.” This fight, he wrote, had nothing to do with the political aims of the Nazis.⁷²

The obvious differences of opinion between liberal student Christians and the EKD resembles a microcosm of what was happening in West German society at large in the 1960s. Rigid Christian conservative marriage values were the EKD’s and other official church organizations’ way of defending a long held position of authority, which they thought was slowly slipping away from them. As we have seen in Fischer’s writings – which were a good example of how the EKD saw the world around them at this time – virtually everything young people thought and said about marriage and sexuality had been distorted by modern society. This also included young Christians who deviated from the norms set by Fischer and others in the Catholic Church and the EKD.⁷³ However, if we look at surveys from the late 1960s, the vast majority of West Germans still saw themselves as Christians.⁷⁴ They would most likely have been rather surprised to hear that just because they deviated from the EKD and the Catholic Church in their views on divorce and premarital sex, they were not real Christians.⁷⁵ It is telling that only 15% thought that going to church characterized a true Christian whereas the rest saw strength of character and similar traits as far more important in their self-identification as

⁷² Ibid., 28.

⁷³ In many cases the New Left and the Christian liberals Fischer talked about were one and the same. Many of the leading figures of the student movement, such as Rudi Dutschke, were practicing Christians. The only difference was that they chose to emphasize other issues before religious oppression.

⁷⁴ Werner Harenberg Hg. *Was glauben die Deutschen? Die Emnid-Umfrage* (Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1969).

⁷⁵ Ibid., 24 and 26.

Christians.⁷⁶

Common to almost all comments on marital happiness coming from official Church organizations, including the so-called liberal Christians in the student movement, was an insistence to work against a growing individualism in West German society. Marital happiness, Fischer insisted, could only be measured as an outcome of love relationships whose sum was greater than the parts taken together.⁷⁷ Still, he continued, it was a fundamental belief in God's will that was the most essential part of a happy marriage. Since, in Fischer's words, "a marriage is only a real marriage when it is a human sacrifice to God," his view of marital happiness transcended human earthly existence.⁷⁸ This idea was repeated in almost all Christian marriage advice books, with room for slight variations to cater to the tastes and specific agenda of the author.

It is difficult to discuss such expressions of Christian marital happiness alongside other, secular views of marriage. On the social level they have much in common, but ideologically, or better put, eschatologically, they talk past one another. Fischer's concerns with a new generation of West Germans in the 1960s can certainly be seen as part of a larger debate about marriage, family, and the future of West German society. But when discussing the meaning of marital happiness itself, there was a clear gap between the emotional understanding of happiness as it developed in the 1960s pop culture and the way it was understood by many of the church representatives. This made the dialogue between the two problematic and sometimes incomprehensible.

As long as the discussion was about emotional contentment coming from a loving relationship – regardless if it was in the form of communal living or a "traditional"

⁷⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁷⁷ Fischer, *Die Lebensalter*, 29.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 30.

nuclear family – the Churches and society at large could exchange intelligible ideas, although these ideas were often at odds with each other. But as soon as we move into the realm of religious belief, the connection was lost.⁷⁹ This is not to say that secular phenomena, especially the growing wedding industry, did not try to enchant marriage with a set of ideas and practices bordering modern thaumaturgy. The difference was that the magical nature ascribed to marriage by those who packaged and sold it in the form of white weddings was still linked to individual happiness in this world, and not in the afterlife.

Emotions by the Numbers

In their attempts to measure the mood of the citizens of the Federal Republic, the *Allensbach Institute* surveyed West Germans about issues ranging from preferences for political parties to how much laundry detergent a family used in an average week. Between 1963 and 1970, the *Institute* asked people whether they thought they lived “in happy times or if they had the feeling that we are going through a difficult period?”⁸⁰ This would seem to be an excellent source to tap into the emotional worlds of ordinary West Germans. However, statistical data is difficult to interpret and biased toward the way questions are phrased, as well as their wording. But while we cannot really explore the actual emotions of people in the past, we can still examine the way they accounted for their feelings and experiences. There is no reason to assume that people deliberately lied in an anonymous survey when asked how they felt about marriage, their family, and an array of other situations. If this is true, survey data from the 1960s provide a broader

⁷⁹ See Karl Horst Wrage, *Verantwortung in der Ehe: Intimgemeinschaft und Empfängnisregelung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1965), 11 and 15, for a good illustration of how earthly marriage ideals served a higher godly purpose in the mind of Christian marriage advisors.

⁸⁰ Elisabeth Noelle and Erich Neumann Hrsg., *Jahrbuch der Öffentlichen Meinungen 1968-1973* (Bonn: Verlag für Demoskopie, 1974), 125.

context for the ideas discussed up to this point. This does not suggest a direct correlation between any specific notion of marital happiness and the “general mood” of the population, though.

It is of course impossible to speculate about individual cases, but there seems to have been a parallel to the way West Germans perceived of their personal lives and their understanding of world politics. On the question whether people who married should be at ease when thinking about the future or if they should be afraid of immanent wars, West German attitudes changed dramatically between 1963 and 1973.⁸¹ In January 1963, 45% of the citizens of the Federal Republic reported feeling worried that a new war was around the corner. A decade later only 14% was of the same opinion. Having just lived through the Cuban Missile Crisis in the autumn of 1962 with the knowledge that hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops were ready in their barracks right across the German border, the 1963 numbers are not very surprising. Add to this the understanding that the only way for the West, that is, the United States, to “protect” West Germany from a Soviet land invasion was with nuclear weapons. The fear of war was quite understandable.⁸² In the same way, the more favorable outlook on a peaceful future in 1973 could be explained with détente in U.S. Soviet relations, as well as Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik* in the late 1960s, which was easing tensions with East Germany.⁸³ And since the 1973 poll was done in February, the OAPEC oil embargo still lay in the future. More interestingly, though, these fears did not seem to influence choices made when it came to marriage and family.

⁸¹ Ibid., 61.

⁸² Frank Biess, “‘Everybody has a Chance’: Nuclear Angst, Civil Defense, and the History of Emotions in Postwar West Germany,” *German History* 2009 (27): 215-243

⁸³ Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (London: J. Cape, 1993).

The inclination to seek happiness in marriage was relatively unaffected by the personal fears and anxieties about world affairs, even in cases where they had a direct impact on the safety of West Germans. Whereas the feeling of greater general safety and higher levels of happiness both increased in the 1960s, people's decision to marry had changed very little since 1950. In fact, the difference in marriages among the adult population between 1950 and 1970 was a mere 2.9%. Five years after the end of the war 63.2% of all adult West Germans reported being married. Some two decades later that number had risen to 66.1%.⁸⁴ The real difference was most likely greater, though, since many women were still legally married to men assumed to be in Soviet POW camps. Some of these men had perished in the war, and in many cases reunions after sometimes ten years of separation often led to divorce.⁸⁵ The adjustment for failed war marriages notwithstanding, people's fears or hopes for the future seemed to have had little or no impact on their decision to marry. People's habits, then, did not seem to overlap with conservative nightmare scenarios in which the institution of marriage was replaced by sexual promiscuity, communal life, and ungodly forms of family life. Nor did the survey data confirm the accusations made by the New Left that "traditional" marriages led to oppression and joylessness.

According to *Der Spiegel* people married in greater numbers than ever before and they were happier than even the numbers from the *Allbach Institute* showed.⁸⁶ In a survey from the *Industrieinstitut* 70% of all married West Germans said they were "happily

⁸⁴ Noelle and Neumann, *Jahrbuch 1968-1973*, 3.

⁸⁵ Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat In Postwar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁸⁶ "Ein Rest aus dem Paradies," *Der Spiegel*, 9/9, 1968.

married and lead a satisfying married life.”⁸⁷ But everyone was not happy. Psychologist Helmut Kentler worried that young people “shop for happiness” on an increasingly commercialized market. As proof he pointed to hundreds of thousands of teenagers who participated in “dating games” organized by for-profit interests such as “Rendezvous 67” and “Rendezvous 68.” Equally troubled was evangelical marriage advisor Dr. Helmut Harsch, who meant that all the hopes young people put in enormous white weddings was a “great romantic misunderstanding” of the reality of a life long commitment.

A main theme in this chapter has been various concerns with how a new generation of West Germans in the 1960s had begun to lose touch with “traditional forms” of marriage and family. Conservative voices called for a reeducation of the youth lest the Federal Republic would face a moral crisis. Another theme, closely related to the first, has been radical representatives from this new generation that a strong institution of marriage would lead to the quelling of a budding social revolution. It is easy to think of these worries as petty self-interest at best, and pure delusions at worst – especially in light of the statistics presented above. Yet we need to take the frustration and the feeling of loss of control seriously. Not because they necessarily reflected an absolute historical truth, but because they show the complex nature of how West Germans thought about marriage and happiness in a time that has, by later generations, in many ways been reduced to the year 1968.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

EAST GERMANY

In the collective memory of united Germany the Berlin Wall is still the quintessential representation of division, human tragedy, and the inhumanity of East German society. An abundance of stories with hurtful outcomes testify to the truth of such memories. Still, for all the Wall's success in keeping humans out, what the official remembrance culture does not so routinely recognize, was its impotence in preventing ideas from crossing over into the GDR. The remainder of this chapter explores the impact of Western ideas on the institution of marriage in the GDR – in particular the influence of West German consumerism. The following also examines ideas and practices related to marital happiness developed within the East German state. Sometimes derived from old traditions, sometimes as attempts to consolidate and stabilize a Socialist system that at this point had been under construction for over a decade, these new notions of a happy marriage often had little or no direct relation to events in the West. If the 1950s was a period of drastic change, felt in all spheres of East German society, the 1960s, in particular from the mid-decade on, was about fine-tuning the socialist system. At least this was what the political rhetoric would lead us to believe.

In the official history writing on the GDR, 1968 symbolized the year the state finally succeeded in reaching the ultimate goal of “real existing socialism.”⁸⁸ Looking at the 1960s from the viewpoint of the radicalized politics of identity, sexuality, family that seemed to spellbind a whole generation in West, historians have recently begun to ask if the GDR also had a “1968.”⁸⁹ The Prague Spring and other events playing out in the

⁸⁸ *Constitution of the German Democratic Republic, 1968*, <http://http-server.carleton.ca/~jevans/2509/1968.html>, accessed June 2, 2014.

⁸⁹ See for example Timothy S. Brown, “‘1968’ East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History,” *American Historical Review*, (1) 2009: 69.

Eastern Block would seem to indicate that the last years of the 1960s were tumultuous there well. But the sometimes all too special attention we pay to the revolutionary events in the late 1960s could make us blind to protracted processes of change. Marriage was an integral social institution that, needless to say, meant different things to different people. It was just as closely bound to old traditions during this period as it was with the latest expressions of Western modernity in the form of consumerism and advertisement. As we shall see, though, this by no means resulted in a wholesale adoption of Western ideals. Rather, the 1960s saw a specific East German form of these practices. In many respects they resembled those in the West, but at the same time they were redefined so they could be imbued with Socialist meaning.

Marriage Counseling and the Law

Explaining how marriage could played an integral part in keeping a state stable in a developed stage of Socialism, *Liebe und Ehe*, a marriage advice book from 1962, made clear that, “we can consider back and forth ... but we will always come to the conclusion that marriage is the best form for men and women to live together.”⁹⁰ This was an undeniable truth regardless if one looked at it form the point of view of health, morality, or childrearing, the author concluded. In much the same way paragraph two in the draft of the new family law of the GDR stated, “Marriage is a unification of man and woman, based on equality, mutual love and respect, which serves the common development of the

⁹⁰ Wolfgang Bretschneider and Wolfhilde Dierl, *Liebe und Ehe* (Berlin: Urania, 1962), 37.

spouses and the upbringing of children.”⁹¹ In addition, the law draft added, it also served the good of the state.⁹²

The people behind the draft made clear from the outset that it was a document written not only as guide to the Socialist marriage. It was also a repudiation of “Western ‘sociologists’” in the 1950s who had described a “hollowing out of all personal family bonds and a loss of functionality for marriage [as an institution].”⁹³ To further emphasize difference between Socialist and Capitalist standards, the preamble to the new law pointed to the tremendous importance marriage and family have for the building of a Socialist state. Of course, the West German *Basic Law* also had a clause in which it expressly vowed to protect the institution of family and marriage. The difference, though, was that the East German Family aCode also made clear that by receiving such protection, families also had to acknowledge their duty to the state.⁹⁴ Yes, the state would protect marriage and family, but at the same time, the reverse was true, since the “situation in family and marriage influences the shape of society.”⁹⁵

Another central issue for the lawmakers was gender equality. And while the West was again held up as a negative counterpart, the primary selling point was the progress and success of the GDR as a Socialist system. Offered as proof of this progress were allegedly random East German opinions on women’s role in marriage around the time East Germany was founded. “How can a women demand the same rights as a man,” said

⁹¹ Heinz Hensel, Hg., *Ehe und Familie in der DDR: Einführung zum Entwurf des Familiengesetzbuches der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik – Mit dem Text des Gesetzentwurfes* (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1965), 10.

⁹² For the legal aspects and development of family law in the GDR beyond the 1960s, see Anita Grandke, *Die Entwicklung des Familienrechts der DDR* (PhD diss., Humboldt University, Berlin, 2010).

⁹³ Hensel, *Ehe und Familie in der DDR*, 10.

⁹⁴ *Bonn Constitution: Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany* (Washington D.C.: U.S. State Department, 1949), 3 (Paragraph 6).

⁹⁵ Hensel, *Ehe und Familie in der DDR*, 11.

one person in 1949. “A woman is a woman and not a man (*Mannweib*).” Another survey participant suggested that “when a man completely supports a woman, she needs to understand that her tasks are in the kitchen and as child bearer.”⁹⁶ To show the progress of women’s role in marriage since the 1949 survey, the law draft offered its readers Walter Ulbricht’s speech from the fifteenth anniversary of the German Democratic Republic. In his address Ulbricht noted that equal rights for women were no longer only a fantasy but an East German reality.⁹⁷

Apart from protecting family and marriage, the law was also written to help people properly shape and frame their relationships with each another. Guidance to young people in their journeys toward happy and stable marriages was seen as particularly important. But since marriage and family were closely connected to “moral demands and ethical obligations,” the law alone was not considered enough to regulate and educate the new generations of East Germans coming of age in the 1960s. Thus the new marriage law draft was also presented as an appeal to the “good will, common sense, and feeling of responsibility of all East German citizens to voluntarily follow the advice outlined in the law.”⁹⁸ But the fear that people would not conform to the guidelines, or possibly the suspicion that some of the advice was not entirely persuasive, was enough for the state to also apply other means of marriage education. One way to do this was to continue the trend set in the 1950s in which divorce judges took a more active role than that of interpreter of the law.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 12. According to the law draft, these opinions were published in the 1949 booklet *Wollen die Frauen die Gleichberechtigung überhaupt selbst?*

⁹⁷ Hensel, *Ehe und Familie in der DDR*, 13.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 17.

Divorce court proceedings show an involvement in keeping marriages intact that went far beyond the supposed rational logic of legal proceedings. Paul Betts has noted how communal these processes had become by the 1960s. “Party organizations, trade unions, work collectives, and residential ‘housing communities’,” were all involved in trying to keep marriages together.⁹⁹ Having divorce judges acting like counselors might have been an effective way of keeping existing marriages together. It did little, though, to save young or inexperienced people from entering into a bad marriage. Consequently when the new Family Code was ratified in 1965 it also stipulated the expansion of marriage counseling. It required social organizations to cooperate with state organs in establishing “marriage and family counseling centers where experienced, informed citizens can offer advice and aid to people who are preparing for marriage or who turn to them in other family matters.”¹⁰⁰ Not only did this further increase the state’s involvement in previously private matters. It also codified the educational aspect of marriage through which primarily young people were to be taught how live according to “Socialist standards.”

Marriage counseling clinics were not new in the GDR. Still, if the growth in the number of clinics after 1966 can be taken as an indication of the impact of the 1965 Family Code, its influence was significant. From the year after the law went into effect up until 1977, the number of counseling centers grew from 100 to 242.¹⁰¹ But while such

⁹⁹ Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life In the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 101. Betts also shows that divorce courts in the second half of the 1960s were increasingly concerned with “patriarchal attitudes and male ‘egotism’.” Betts, *Within Walls*, 103. This goes to show that what the counseling protocols from *Stadtbezirk Friedrichsheim* described as problems of gender inequality in the home were part of a larger trend rather than local exceptions.

¹⁰⁰ *Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1966 Teil I* “Familiengesetzbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 20. Dezember 1965,” § 4, (2).

¹⁰¹ Bernhard Klose, *Ehescheidung und Ehescheidungsrecht in der DDR - ein ostdeutscher Sonderweg?* (München: Nomos-Verlag, 1996), 146-147.

numbers are hard to tie to direct cause and effect, protocols from newly opened counseling centers attest to the immediate consequences of the law, and in some cases even of the earlier law draft. In the Berlin district of Friedrichshain, the first counseling center was opened on August 10, 1965. Minutes from council meetings document both links between the draft of the Family Codes and the Friedrichshain clinic and the popularity of marriage counseling in the district.¹⁰²

Although not very successful in its first year, the number of visitors to the Friedrichshain clinic soon started to pick up. Part of the success can most likely be attributed to those in charge of the clinic. Beginning in the summer of 1966, people were able to make appointments by telephone for the first time, and earlier that year advertisements were placed in newspapers such as *Der Morgen*, *National-Zeitung*, and *Berliner Zeitung*.¹⁰³ In their marketing campaigns, the clinics described marriage counseling as a modern way of getting help as well as a guided path to happiness in life. These active efforts by the SED to educate East Germans were further expanded through “marriage academies.” Organized by the FDJ, DFD, and a number of local government branches, one such academy meeting in October 1966 was advertised as a “get-together with movies, discussions, and a lecture on friendship, love, and marriage.”¹⁰⁴ The target audience was young people, and the purpose of the meeting was not so much helping married couples in emotional or financial distress, as it was to educate a new generation

¹⁰² LArch Berlin, C Rep. 135 / 12 No 41. *Ehe- und Familienberatung im Stadtbezirk Friedrichshain 1965-1967*, 1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, Protokoll Jan. 27, 1966 of the *Ehe und Familienberatung*, and Resolution 67/66 from June 11, 1966.

¹⁰⁴ “... hat nie gereut?,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 10/21, 1966.

of East Germans in future Socialist marriage practices. This was to be an ongoing theme throughout the 1960s.¹⁰⁵

While it might seem as if such places as the Friedrichshain clinic and the various “marriage academies” were spontaneous attempts to get in line with new nationwide policies outlined in the Family Code, most of the development was directed from the top. In the late fall of 1965, the Ministry of Public Health called a meeting in the old Hanse town of Rostock. Participating were the *Working Committee for Marriage and Family* and the *Institute for Social Hygiene*. On order from the Ministry they embarked on outlining an implementation plan for the directives prescribed in the new marriage law. The meeting made clear that marriage and sexual counseling, led by doctors and psychologists, was “the most important constituents in [our general mission] of marriage education.” Making sure that counseling centers were built and properly staffed in all districts of the GDR was “the most urgent task at hand for our public health.”¹⁰⁶

As with all official discussions about marriage, women’s rights were high on the agenda in Rostock. But in contrast to the standard ideological justification for gender equality, the working committee pointed to more pragmatic and practical motives that were largely based on demographic concerns. All Socialist countries, the committee explained, gave women the same rights as men. This gave women the benefit of being “happy mothers as well as productive workers.”¹⁰⁷ In this way, the new law directly

¹⁰⁵ Dorothee Wierling has aptly called this the era of “didactic dictatorship (*Erziehungsdiktatur*).” See Dorothee Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Eins: der Jahrgang 1949 in der DDR: Versuch einer Kollektivbiographie*, (Berlin: Links Verlag, 2002).

¹⁰⁶ Karl-Heinz Mehlan Hrsg., *Tagungsbericht der 1. Rostocker Fortbildungstage über Probleme der Ehe- und Sexualberatung vom 22. bis 24. Oktober 1965 in Rostock-Warnemünde*, (Berlin, Verlag Volk und Gesundheit, 1966), 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

linked women's emotional wellbeing with the "will to have children."¹⁰⁸ The reasoning was that stable and happy marriages produced more progeny than unhappy marriages. Thus, the quest for the educators in the newly opened marriage counseling clinics was not only to improve married life in cases where things had gone awry. In addition, they needed to promote the idea that "family planning includes the responsibility to have children," and the "model family is one with 2 to 4 children."¹⁰⁹ Such instructions were particularly important in premarital counseling involving young people. As one conference participant expressed it,

Es entspricht daher unseren sozialistischen Erziehungsgrundsätzen und dem Prinzip der Prophylaxe im weitesten Sinne des Wortes, die voreheliche Beratung ganz konkret auf die Erziehung zu Bewusster Elternschaft auf der Basis ausreichender Kenntnisse über die Antikonzeption ausreichen.¹¹⁰

Private and Public Love

The new marriage law, together with the practices of divorce courts and the program for marriage counseling clinics, suggest ever increasing attempts by the state to control people's private lives. In the face of this development it would seem plausible to assume that East Germans increasingly retreated to the innermost sanctums of their homes to retain the little privacy they had left. While this may be true, a clear-cut division between private and public, or active rulers and passive ruled, fails to notice the intricacies of the interactions between private citizens and official and semi official institutions.¹¹¹ What is more, such conceptual dichotomy misses many of the older traditions and customs that

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 170.

¹¹¹ There has been some considerable debate about the nature of private and public in East Germany. See Thomas Lindenberger, *Herrschaft Und Eigen-sinn In Der Diktatur: Studien Zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte Der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag GmbH, 1999).

still dictated married life in numerous families.¹¹² If we are to take seriously the idea about a certain negotiation between private ideals and official policy, we need to look beyond the obvious cases of law and state managed marriage counseling where the SED attempted to impose its ideological agenda.

In 1963, marriage advisors Wolfgang Bretschneider and Wolfhilde Dierl wrote that “many people, even young people, are losing faith and the meaning of marriage. But that is not marriage’s fault”.¹¹³ To save the situation from a potential crisis, experts like Bretschneider and Dierl felt the need to educate East Germans and make them understand that in marriage, just as in the GDR in general, the emphasis on the “I” needed to be shifted to an emphasis on the “We.” Or put another way, the “happiness of your spouse [and others around you] increases your own happiness”.¹¹⁴ But for Bretschneider and Dierl, as for the SED in general, stable happy marriages served more than one purpose. On a basic level, happy citizens made for a happy society. More importantly, though, many experts on marriage and family argued that parents have a special responsibility to make sure their marriages were happy. Because if they did not, their children would to develop abnormal sex lives, which in turn would lead to “all kinds of drama, sorrow, squalor and social damage.”¹¹⁵

While this was not radically different from what advisors had said in the 1950s, the emergence of a new, and in the eyes of some officials, pristine and malleable generation of East Germans, heightened the importance for the state of guiding private individuals. Abiding by the custom to discuss matters of public interest in “dialogue”

¹¹² Though there was an apparent emphasis on young East Germans in the official marriage discourse of the 1960s, the generations born before 1949 still constituted the majority of the population.

¹¹³ Bretschneider and Dierl, *Liebe und Ehe*, 39.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

between citizens and lawmakers established in the previous decade, advice books and magazines were constantly asking for people's positions on new laws and decrees. Aided by a growing number of "marriage experts," magazines such as *Das Magazin* and *Für Dich*, catering to both older and younger generations, used letters from readers to gauge the opinions of "ordinary East Germans." Following this trend, *Für Dich* asked both its readers and Dr. Herta Kuhrig, the magazine's marriage expert of choice, if "happy marriages outside the realm of politics" existed anymore in East Germany.¹¹⁶

According to Dr. Kuhrig, most letters to the editors confirmed that by the mid-1960s the "old philistine adage 'my home is my castle'" already belonged to the past.¹¹⁷ People had begun to realize, Kuhrig continued, that the notion of the family as a place of privacy was no longer a viable idea. On the contrary, sharing happy experiences, as well as episodes of despondency, allowed people to learn from each another. In this way marital mistakes would soon be a memory of the past. In fact, Kuhrig attested, this was a political and social issue larger than marriage itself. To illustrate her point she told of encounters with older couples who had experienced how "imperialist politics" and war had a negative impact on their personal wellbeing. Such experiences, she continued, went to show how detrimental to marital happiness the individualistic pursuit of happiness in capitalist class societies was. In Socialist societies such as the GDR on the other hand, humanistic ideals and emancipatory principles allowed spouses to create stable family lives and achieve genuine marital happiness. To be sure, Kuhrig warns, privileges come with responsibilities. Citizens needed to accept marriage as part of the political realm.

¹¹⁶ "Glücklich verheiratet?," *Für Dich*, 42/1964.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

They also needed to actively participate in public life and share their private experiences with the rest of society.

Participation, Kuhrig argued, also means active intervention in other people's lives in cases where marriages were about to fall apart. In 1965, in the public discussion following the newly proposed family law, *Für Dich* again asked its readers if it was okay for a friend or a colleague to meddle in theirs or other people's marital problems.¹¹⁸ Many letters spoke of concerns about privacy and the importance of resolving these issues through people's own volition. As could be expected, the advice *Für Dich* and *Das Magazine* gave these letter writers were more or less in harmony with the Party program. *Für Dich* and its staff members concluded that as long as a certain degree of discretion could be vouched for, unhappily married couples could learn a lot from the intervention of happily married ones.¹¹⁹

If Kuhrig's approach seems to build on a notion of cooperation and reciprocity between society and individuals, other marriage experts were more candid about direct state intervention in people's lives. The widely read sexual educator Rolf Bormann, who had achieved fame among younger readers through his standing column in the popular magazine *Neues Leben*, was one of numerous keen advocates of such practices.¹²⁰ Turning to a new generation of East Germans in the mid-1960s, Bormann spoke of how crucial it was for young people to know what it meant to live in a Socialist state and how this privilege entailed special responsibilities. In return, though, citizens would be handsomely rewarded. Seeing how widespread Bormann's ideas were among party officials, it is worth quoting him at length.

¹¹⁸ "Vor der Ehe- von der Ehe-für die Ehe," *Für Dich*, 24/1965.

¹¹⁹ *Für Dich*, 27/1965.

¹²⁰ Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, 325, note 10.

The idea of man in Socialism, the essence of which determines both the Socialist morality and ethics, is indivisible from the development and consolidation of Socialist society. The genuinely humane and deeply moral standards, which find their expressions in Socialist ethics, are the very foundation of our actions. In this system, the relationship between men and women plays a very important role. However, a Socialist attitude towards the opposite sex does not happen spontaneously. It requires conscious, deliberate, systematic, and organized action in order to avoid detrimental effects from people's everyday environments.¹²¹

As with Kuhrig and most others championing a de-privatization of the personal sphere, Borrmann justified his standpoint with two interrelated arguments. First, being part of something larger than the mere individual allows for a superior morality, which in turn paves the ground for the emancipation of women. The second argument, linked to the defense of Socialist equality and moral eminence, was bound to comparisons with a degenerated West. Borrmann argued that whereas East German women are being more and more integrated in GDR society, women in the Federal Republic were used as commodities on the social marketplace. This, he continued, was an obvious observation considering the profits gained from prostitution and brothel taxes in West Germany.¹²² It should be noted, though, that despite constant comparisons with the West, the institution of marriage as a specific Socialist phenomenon did not require the same theoretical justification it did in the 1950s. After about a decade in power, the SED finally seemed to have convinced itself that it had cleansed marriage of the bourgeois practices associated with the traditional wedlock described in the sacred Marxist canon.

Accounts about the importance of incorporating marriage into larger political domains showed the SED's desire to expand their reach to even include people's private emotions. Or put another way, the representatives of the state sought to eradicate the distinction between private and public, not only by reaching into people's personal

¹²¹ Rolf Borrmann, *Jugend und Liebe: Die Beziehungen der Jugendlichen zum anderen Geschlecht* (Leipzig: Urania Verlag, 1966), 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 17f.

spheres, but by redefining the very meaning of private and public. Whereas there had been tendencies in this direction in the 1950s (especially in the economic sphere), intentions about the future of intimate relationships were never fully articulated. Instead the 1950s saw a much more vague ideological notion of a socialist “we,” which paid more attention to the personal dynamics of marriage (i.e. how to improve private life) than its specific political responsibilities in relation to the state.

Such increasing desire to politicize the private aspects of marriage, coupled with new family laws and investments in marriage counseling signaled a heightened confidence among leading SED functionaries in the 1960s. But there was still a host of marriage related issues toward which the party was highly ambivalent. One of the more difficult changes to marriage culture the SED had to face in the 1960s was a budding consumer society. Or perhaps more accurately, an intensified desire for marriage, and especially wedding related products advertised on an ever-grander scale.¹²³

Consuming an Idea

When comparing depictions of married life in East and West German popular magazines in the 1960s, one is struck by how much they resemble one another. In contrast to the 1950s, the “white wedding” was the almost ubiquitous image of a happy marriage. The 1950s also had its fair share of images portraying brides and grooms in their wedding outfits. But the image of a happy marriage in the first decade and a half after the war was just as often represented by snapshots of cozy homes where each room was gendered to create the ultimate experience for husbands (living room) and wives (kitchen). For

¹²³ Just as with SED’s promotion of the Socialist marriage and marriage related consumption in West Germany, rather than a physical commodity the product sold was a state of mind. See Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2012), 6.

younger couples, outdoor settings were somewhat more common. In particular images of couples walking hand in hand in distinctly bucolic environments resembling forests or parks.¹²⁴ Although such representations were not absent in depictions of marital happiness in the 1960s, they were increasingly being replaced by wedding motifs.

Older traditions were now repackaged in more consumer friendly ways where the white wedding symbolized the pinnacle of happiness between husband and wife – always with a strong emphasis on the wife. As the magazine *Für Dich* explained to its readers in 1963, “a wedding all in white is the dream of many girls.”¹²⁵ However, *Für Dich* went on to warn young couples not to focus too much on the giddy heights of a perfect wedding, since “life together does not only consists of holidays.”¹²⁶ Such cautionary advice was similar to what one could find in West German magazines such as *Brigitte* and *Constanze*. Yet, little seemed to be able to stop people from dreaming about the “happiest day in their lives.” Throughout the 1960s, consuming happiness through elaborate weddings ceremonies, but also by being able to purchase the furniture to decorate the perfect home, was a constant theme in East German popular culture. Such trends were, for obvious reasons, also highly problematic in a Socialist state stressing its dissimilarity with a capitalist West.

There were a number of ways for the SED to cope with the threat of Western influences, including consumerism and people’s desire to hold on to old and local traditions rather than adopting a Socialist view on marriage and family. In the latter case, not all “pasts” were equally problematic. Allusions to vague notions of medieval love, chivalry, and courtly manners were common. In some cases they performed the task of

¹²⁴ Same as above.

¹²⁵ “Weil wir uns lieben,” *Für Dich*, 32/1963.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

avoiding direct links with Western consumerism. In a 1964 article penned by a young fashion scholar, discussions of wedding dress designs – including fabric quality, what type of bouquet that went better with what dress, and jewelry design – was juxtaposed with a poem from the twelfth century celebrating romantic love.¹²⁷ Although never openly admitted, the connection between the noble love of a knight and his bride, and the ways a modern bride needed to dress for her own “knight” was obvious. Similar cases, in particular the use of medieval poetry, were common themes wherever wedding rituals were discussed.

Another, and much more typical way for the SED to disassociate East German marriages from the obvious impact of Western consumerism was to turn them into Socialist events with an added, distinctly East German nationalist flavor. Such efforts were evident not least in wedding ceremonies. Vividly depicted by Wolfgang Bretschneider and Wolfhilde Dierl in their book *Liebe und Ehe*, the East German wedding of 1963 seemed to have had all the trappings of a West German Christian Wedding, while at the same time being an invention of an entirely new tradition. Instead of a priest presiding over the ceremony, a registrar (*Standesbeamte*) joined the bride and groom together in “the name of our German Democratic Republic.” “Do not forget,” the registrar reminded the soon-to-be-married couple, “that the beauty of life and the happiness and health of your family rests on your mutual experience,” and on the “great community of our workers.” “You will be truly happy and proud,” he concluded, “when you succeed in connecting your own wishes and hopes with the rights and responsibilities of the citizens of our state of workers and farmers.”¹²⁸

¹²⁷ *Für Dich*, 17/1964.

¹²⁸ Bretschneider and Dierl, *Liebe und Ehe*, 173.

The similarity with Christian wedding ceremonies was clear enough. Upgraded to redefine the meaning of marriage, the state had replaced God as the guardian and provider of happiness, safety, and wellbeing. In fact, if we take the East German wedding ceremony on its words, the state had not only replaced God as the power that lawfully bound husband and wife to each another. By (re)defining morality and love, and substituting religion with a new belief system encompassing both nature and humanity, Socialism had indeed replaced Christianity. Religion had been superseded by Ideology. Or at least it aspired to do so. Marxist Socialism functioned as secular ethics on the one hand, and as eschatology on the other.¹²⁹ The former practice had a long history and began to take form in European intellectual circles already in the late 19th century.¹³⁰ As we have seen, morality and ethics were tremendously important themes in the “Socialist marriage.” But the idea of a Socialist eschatology was equally present, albeit not always as pronounced. The vague nature of Socialist eschatology had to do with the fact that the utopian future in Marxist orthodoxy was not very clearly defined. The establishment of Communism would, at least in theory, inevitably lead to personal happiness. Until then, however, “citizens were expected to defer individual pleasures and devote themselves to the massive task of building a ‘better Germany’.”¹³¹ Needless to say, such proclamations strongly echoed the Christian idea of salvation in return of sacrifice.

At the same time we see a quiet acceptance with the cultural and material consumption associated with marital happiness in the West. In some cases it was even

¹²⁹ Tony Judt and Timothy Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 81-84.

¹³⁰ As Timothy Snyder points out, Antonio Gramsci’s idea of hegemony is organized around the idea of party intellectuals replacing the church hierarchy and in doing so they institutionalize the social reproduction of ethics. Judt and Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century*, 82.

¹³¹ Josie McLellan, *Love In the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality In the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5.

encouraged in forms of loans to young married couples so they could start a new home. People under twenty-six were granted a 5,000 DM marriage credit by their first marriage. At the birth of their first child, a couple paid back less money, and after the third child, they owed nothing at all.¹³² Apart from the obvious encouragement to have more children, such measures can be interpreted as a welfare service provided in order to live up to minimum standards of a modern country. Yet the fetishizing of furniture design, kitchen appliances, and apartments in numerous articles, books, and other publications tell a different story. These commodities were not only part of a comfortable life for a family where new socialists were to be formed and educated. It was a place in which to be happy and, and if we are to believe advertisement and articles in the press, this happiness was intricately connected with the commodities themselves. The fact that most people did not have access to these products did not take away from the fantasies they evoked.¹³³ Parallel to such advertisement, news media kept reporting how West German capitalism led to criminality, high divorce rates, and gender inequality. Due to a popular skepticism toward the official media, though, these reports appear to have been largely ineffectual.¹³⁴

A close examination of marriage related advertisements reveals signs of, and even encouragement to attach specific values to certain commodities. As soon as the wedding ceremony was over, *Liebe und Ehe* explained, the party began. The party often took months, even years to plan, and included elaborate flowers, festive colors, and friends

¹³² Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 304.

¹³³ Anne Kaminsky, "True Advertising Means Promoting a Good Thing through a Good Form": Advertising in the German Democratic Republic," in *Selling Modernity: Advertising In Twentieth-century Germany*, Swett, Pamela E., S. Jonathan Wiesen, and Jonathan R Zatlín. Durham ed. (N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹³⁴ Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives In the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold , 2002), 61-62.

and family clad in their best attire. Bretschneider and Dierl heralded this moment as the acme of Socialist celebration and “an image of the ceaselessly active human being of our times pushing forward into the future.”¹³⁵ To an outside observer, though, the wedding party they described was, apart from the rhetoric, almost indistinguishable from a West German wedding. Moreover, the numerous references to medieval romantic love and other non-ideological traditions indicate that a utopian future of Socialist happiness was a difficult selling point unless it was associated with a history of real or imagined rituals.

For all its evocative imagery, Bretschneider and Dierl’s description of the perfect East German wedding was not representative for most parts of the country. A significant number of East Germans were married in small towns and villages with few resemblances to Berlin, with its relative closeness to the West and its function as natural “display window” of Socialist modernity. In the town of Neuruppin, some fifty miles northeast of the capital, ninety-eight people got married in 1964. Two of them were Charlotte and Dieter Beck whose marriage was covered by *Für Dich*, not because they were famous or particularly high ranking in the Party, but more because of their socialist virtue and almost exemplary life choices.¹³⁶ Having met at the FDJ-School in the village Bärenklau, Charlotte soon took her licensing examination to become an agriculturalist while Dieter went on to work as an engine fitter in the nearby nuclear power plant. Their wedding appeared to have included all the frills of a modern Berlin wedding, and after the happy couple had returned from their honeymoon in Prague, they were planning to

¹³⁵ Bretschneider and Dierl, *Liebe und Ehe*, 174.

¹³⁶ “Adam und Eva 64,” *Für Dich*, 18/1964.

move into their two-room apartment for which they had already bought all the furniture (to the envy of many people in town, the reporter added.)¹³⁷

However, a closer look at Charlotte and Dieter's wedding reveals a motley collection of old and new traditions. It was only when aligned with the model socialist lives of the newlyweds that these traditions could be compatible with the recipe for Socialist love advocated by contemporary advice manuals. In accordance with farmer traditions, *Für Dich* noted, the drink of choice was vodka. Older women were dressed in traditional headscarves and what appear to be knitted sweaters. Charlotte, on the other hand, sported high heels and a pearl necklace fit for any self-conscious bride in the West. Although *Für Dich* did not say so, it appears as if lingering old customs were excused only as long as they were compatible with, or did not interfere too visibly with newly established Socialist traditions. The same was true for the array of accessories borrowed from Western style consumer culture. As long as they did not obstruct the Socialist spirit too obviously they were not commented upon. And as time went by they did no longer seem so foreign.

Descriptions and images of East German wedding ceremonies such as the one between Charlotte and Dieter also reveal details about gendered nature of marital happiness in the 1960s. As in the West, the further into the postwar period we get, weddings became more and more associated with the happiness of the bride. In April of 1964, *Für Dich* published "five pages of wedding dresses," and in March 1969, a "Wedding special" followed. In the latter curious East Germans could read what it would be like to get married in a castle where a "real count had proposed to a dashing bride in a

¹³⁷ Ibid.

crimson rococo armchair,” (again, a relatively unproblematic past.)¹³⁸ In fact, every spring in the last five years of the 1960s, *Für Dich* and other magazines showered its readers with bride photos, fashion advice, and tips how to plan the perfect wedding. The reality, though, was that very few could afford, let alone find anywhere to buy such items.¹³⁹ Rather than physical commodities, the product sold was a state of mind or a dream.¹⁴⁰

Educating a New Generation

All evidence of leniency from the state’s side when it came to consumption and marital happiness notwithstanding, the 1960s also underwent a parallel development of increasing skepticism and harsh scrutiny of the institution of marriage. This did not only mean criticism of individualism and to some degree marriage related consumerism. It also meant a willingness to earnestly examine married life in detail and discuss the difficulties most couples encountered after lived together for a few years. But even in serious attempts to analyze the social and psychological sides of marriage, ideology was always present. East German author Jochen Weyer skillfully combined a moral narrative and criticism of flagrant consumerism with Party propaganda.¹⁴¹ In a 1964 photograph from the VEB (*Volkseigene Betrieb* [Publicly Owned]) power plant in Dresden a female apprentice and a male engineer were cooperating to solve a complicated task together. In

¹³⁸ “Alles für die Hochzeit,” *Für Dich*, 13/1969, and 17/1964.

¹³⁹ In many ways this could be compared to Weimar mass culture that also promised a better life and a different kind of reality. Weimar culture thrived because its dreams had the ability to sneak their way into public consciousness even when there was no commensurate reality. In both cases this reverie was designed and propagated as a distinctly modern way of life. See Konrad Jarausch, and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 291.

¹⁴⁰ Compare Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 6.

¹⁴¹ Weyer would later go on to write about youth culture in the GDR in Jochen Weyer, *Aus erster Hand - Jugend in der DDR - Vom Alltag junger Menschen im Sozialismus* (Berlin: Panorama DDR, 1974).

it, Weyer saw the true joy of work and community.¹⁴² But after having talked to some of the female workers at the plant, he sensed something was not quite right with that image. “We only work for the money,” one woman told him, “that is what all women do.”¹⁴³ It was nothing wrong with wanting to earn money to support family and children, Weyer assured his readers. After all, who did not want “to be happy and live a happy life?” The problem, though, he continued, was that so many thought personal happiness could come from individual achievements and be kept inside the four walls of the home. In the German Democratic Republic, Weyer insisted, personal happiness could only grow on the foundation of social (*gesellschaftlichen*) happiness. Fortunately, the older women at the plant understood this, he wrote. These women, through a deeper knowledge gained by life experience and reason, had grasped the importance of working together as a group. Lest these insights were lost on the younger women at the plant, measures needed to be taken to educate them about such social truths.¹⁴⁴

While Weyer did not specifically discuss the institution of marriage, his arguments were applied by those who did. Young people had become a particular problem for marriage educators to solve. On the one hand, they represented the first pristine generation coming of age not “tainted” by capitalism. On the other hand, they needed determined guidance to avoid the risk of Western influences.¹⁴⁵ A specific source of worrying was people who married at a very young age. This had been a concern in the 1950s too, but with new cohorts of teenagers growing up behind the wall, the “problem” of young marriages loomed ever larger on the horizon of East German marriage advisors.

¹⁴² “Glücklich sein – Was kostet das?,” *Für Dich*, 5/1966.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Compare with Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture In a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Helmut Müller, secretary of the central council of the FDJ, was concerned that young people “did not think things through” before deciding to marry. “Every young person dream of love and of their wedding day,” he continued, and in contrast to the West, “love marriages is the norm here [in the GDR].” All the same, for the institution of marriage to work properly, more people needed to understand what it really meant to live together, Müller argued. He wrote that the decisive condition of a good marriage was knowing of your partner’s personal character and his or her views of the world. “This way your future family will constitute a healthy, stable cell in our Socialist society.”¹⁴⁶

In the end, Müller asserted, it was not the age but the level of knowledge, insight, and life experience that determined to what degree a marriage would turn out well. These virtues were easier to acquire with age. Indeed, the advice of older people having lived in happy marriages were of enormous importance, which was why sharing one’s private life was crucial.¹⁴⁷ Still, it was through state directed marriage education and mass movements such as Müller’s own FDJ that young people were supposed to learn how to be happily married. Only then would they really contribute to the state, and at the same time constitute “healthy cell in our Socialist society.”¹⁴⁸

The Science of Socialist Love

On the one hand, marriage was made into a social problem especially focused on the youth, which was also how it was described in most popular magazines. On the other hand, marriage was idealized, packaged, and sold as the perfect way to happiness (often in the same magazines). But regardless of which way the debate was tilted, it was almost

¹⁴⁶ *Für Dich*, 5/1965.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

always accompanied by a discussion about love and love's role in the building of a Socialist state. East German marriage manuals and advice books of the 1950s had been highly skeptical of this emotion, which they described as giving rise to irrational, and unpredictable behavior. At the same time, virtually all marriage advisors viewed love as an integral component in any marriage if should have a fighting chance of being happy and lasting. Such mixed feelings about the role of love in the 1950s made for an abundance of theorizing of how to combine and control irrational emotions, and still embrace the feeling of naturally being drawn to a person of the opposite sex.¹⁴⁹ Moving into the mid 1960s, the skepticism of the previous decade had not gone away. But in addition to strictly ideological musings, love had also become the subject of psychoanalytical speculations.

With a growing number of young people coming of age in the 1960s, the Party's concern about youth sexuality and premarital sex intensified. In advice books and popular magazines, the connection between love as an uncontrollable emotion and irresponsible sexual behavior was widely discussed. As in the 1950s, love was described as both the noblest feeling one could have for another person and at the same time the most deceptive of emotions in situations where lack of rational reasoning led to morally questionable situations. Wolfgang Bretschneider and Wolfhilde Dierl explained to the readers of their book *Liebe und Ehe* that the feeling of love did by no means always "lead to the hoped for happiness." People needed to be aware that "love is not only a wonderful emotion, not only a spiritual expression, but it is also closely related to our sexual drives."¹⁵⁰ These drives, Bretschneider and Dierl continued, influenced peoples actions,

¹⁴⁹ In marriage advice books, homosexuality was discussed as an abnormality that needed to be eradicated.

¹⁵⁰ Bretschneider and Dierl, *Liebe und Ehe*, 9.

often against their own understanding and moral conceptions. What, then, could people do to make sure they were not swept away by the irrational side of love? As Bretschneider and Dierl explained, the only way to avoid “capitalist tendencies of commercial love” on the rise in the West was to adhere to Socialist morality. Although it might have not been the direct intention of the authors, this was politics disguised as the science of emotions, ultimately intended to eradicate the private sphere.

“Our society,” Bretschneider and Dierl wrote, “makes all possible efforts to support and help couples by showing them the meaning of love in the grander scheme of Socialist human coexistence.” In the GDR, they argued, love has been scientifically explained so that the “the veil has been lifted and the times of uncalled for shame and false moral consciousness now is a thing of the past.”¹⁵¹ Interpreted in the context of private and public, this amounted to abolishing individual notions of morality. This seems to come very close to an interpretation of East Germany in which the SED elite strived to achieve *durchherrschte Gesellschaft* where the state could map and control the life of each individual.¹⁵² However, the constant appeals to people’s cooperation in ideological, legal, and emotional matters speak to the fact that the party was far from having reached this goal and that they realized that this was the case. This is not to say that the private sphere of marriage and family was entirely left to be governed by the individuals who inhabited it. Instead of a top-down interpretation of power and control in the realm of marriage, the sources indicate a constant state of negotiation.

But no matter how much experts claimed they had explained and revealed the scientific reality of love and marriage, ideology always seemed to sneak back to provide

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵² Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society In East Germany Under Ulbricht 1945-71* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002), 288.

these concepts with a transcendental quality. The parallel to religious attempts to do the same in West Germany are obvious. In both cases, the Church and the SED made statements about love and marriage whose contradictory nature can only be explained by the inherent incompatibility of ideology and religion with scientific method. Not because one is more reliable than the other to provide us with truths about the human condition. The problem stems from the fact that religion and ideology claim to provide knowledge that goes *beyond* the material world. The mixing of scientific truths Socialist ideology in the GDR might best be understood as a political version of magical realism. Consequently, it was easy for Bretschneider and Dierl to first write how love had been scientifically explained, and thereafter proclaim that love was not only a “wonderful emotion,” but also a spiritual experience that transcended human understanding. The role of love in Socialist societies, they argued, was to bring happiness into peoples lives. This kind of love, though, was the spirit of society itself and could not be explained, only felt or experienced.

Youth, Sex, and Emotions

As can be expected of youth educators interested in young people’s marital habits, examining youth sexuality was high on the agenda. This often led to discussions of different aspects of men’s and women’s emotional character. Women, marriage experts argued, possessed a general feeling for the meaning of love in marriage. But the privilege of understanding the true nature of love also came with great responsibilities. “It is exactly the task of young women,” wrote Bretschneider and Dierl, “to educate and bring to young men the emotional [as opposed to sexual] side of love and make him into a

mature person with an equal understanding of marital love.”¹⁵³ In fact, women’s natural aptitude to appreciate the organic compound of love and marriage was so powerful that if a woman who “care more for free relationships without wanting to either marry or have children, one might suspect a psychiatric disorder [psychische Störung] in need of medical treatment.”¹⁵⁴

Here we also see a greater willingness than in the 1950s to accept the pure emotional side of love. Men’s rationality was still essential, but could, and indeed should be complemented by women’s capacity of mitigating men’s tendency to immature behavior. Women’s emotional skills also worked to reverse men’s ineptitude to access their feelings in marriage. Women were simply more advanced in her “temper and emotions,” whereas men all too often “confuse emotion with sentimentality and is much more keen on using his rational mind [Verstand].”¹⁵⁵ But despite the gifts of emotional instincts nature had given women, there was always the danger of letting one’s emotions get the upper hand, which could lead to rash and potentially harmful decisions when choosing a partner. The pervasive knowledge among marriage advisors was that young men were notoriously bad at making good decisions without the proper education. However, without the proper guidance, young women might also fall prey to deceitful desires, which was why they should sometime “apply their feelings of love to friendship and to help others, and use their sexual energy for cultural and athletic achievements.”¹⁵⁶

However, there was also another way women could make use of their excess energy and emotional intelligence. As the instructions in the new Family Code stated,

¹⁵³ Bretschneider and Dierl, *Liebe und Ehe*, 140.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 141-142.

women should an active part of the labor force. In fact, arguments to get women out in the workforce were not only prescribed by the law, but had been an integral aspect of GDR politics since the foundation of the state. As in the 1950s, though, there still existed an understanding of gender roles casting women in the their “natural” roles of childrearers and housekeepers. While job training should obviously be the number one priority, wrote Bretschneider and Dierl, “young women still had many opportunities to gain the knowledge they will need as housewives and mothers.”¹⁵⁷ In this way the Socialist science of love of the 1960s ended up corroborating both the ideological truths the SED had been busy codifying since 1949, as well as reinforcing the unequal burdens for men and women in family life that had been common practice in East Germany since the 1950s.¹⁵⁸

During the course of the 1960s, the SED initiated programs of education in order to avoid loosing the young, impressionable people, in the new generations of East Germans. Wolfhilde Dierl was a good example as any of how, by the end of the 1960s, marriage educators had nearly given up on fixing older marriages and spent all their effort to make sure young couples followed the guidelines of Socialist love. While still adhering to the ideological program of the SED, Dierl depicted happy marriages in a way that had become increasingly common by the end of the decade. In the popular mind, the wedding had become the apex of marital happiness. To be sure, Dierl also described couples out in the open enjoying sunny days in the workers paradise. Yet the images of the numerous smiling brides in advice books and popular magazines betrayed a growing significance of white weddings and consumer products in the imagination of East

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 142.

¹⁵⁸ For thorough research on the latter point, see Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*.

Germans. By the end of the 1960s we see far more bureaucracy, centralism, and ideological patronizing from the state. But while the regime had codified their position on marriage and endeavored to infiltrate people's private lives more than ever before, the 1960s were, as this chapter has shown, not a complete success for the SED in their ambitions of shaping people's ideals of what it meant to be happily married.

CONCLUSION

The fear of an impending “marriage crisis,” which had been the common theme in East and West Germany in the 1950s, had not so much disappeared as shifted focus in the 1960s. General concerns about the future of marriage had been increasingly geared toward a debate about the youth. And there was good reason to worry. Young people growing up in the two German states did not behave the way people in charge saw fit for their respective societies. This was perhaps most evident in West Germany where the New Left labeled all forms of marriage and family arrangement reminiscent of the 1950s as passé at best, and just as often as Fascist. The East German youth might not have been as outspokenly critical as their West German confederates, but the SED nonetheless regarded them as a potential threat. If the new generations of East Germans were not properly educated in the ways of Socialist marriage and family life, leading experts on marriage and family argued, they were bound to give in to influences from the West. The ways in which these “problems” or “potential problems” were dealt with in the FRG and the GDR also had a number of similarities, at least structurally.

Even though marriage counseling clinics had begun to operate early in both states, the 1960s saw an enormous increase in the number of clinics. In both countries these clinics relied on a conservative understanding of marriage. But whereas the clinics in the West derived most of their conservative ideals from a Christian interpretation of married life, the East German program of Socialist love originated in an atheist ideology presenting itself as the antithesis to western ideals. Yet both promoted visions of marital happiness that, stripped of its ideological and religious frills, was almost indistinguishable from each another. Thus, in a curious way Jochen Fischer, EKD

representative and head of the education center for marriage counselors in the Federal Republic, shared a number of core values with Wolfhilde Dierl, an East German party loyal dedicated to educate people in the preeminence of Socialist marriage morality. In light of such similarities one might ask whether ideology had replaced religion in the GDR. Or at least taken over some of the key functions religion had had for the institution of marriage in the past. There is much that speaks to such an interpretation, at least when considering those East Germans who were responsible for codifying the ideological doctrine of Socialist marriage. Yet the argument must not be pushed too far.

As popular magazines and other sources show, old marriage traditions were not simply replaced by new ones overnight. It is true that most East German wedding ceremonies by the end of the 1960s were steeped in party speak. Still, local traditions as well as pockets of religious communities throughout the GDR qualifies the notion that ideology had taken the place of religion. Moreover, as the counter culture of the New Left and student movement show, Christianity was not the only way to give meaning to marriage in West Germany, which is also corroborated by polling statistics. Finally, neither Socialist ideology nor Christian ideals were able to suppress new visions of marital happiness that were spreading through the growing culture of consumption. In its most conspicuous form, this vision of ultimate joy was the perfect wedding. The idea of the white wedding as the happiest day in life was not entirely new in the 1960s. It was in the second half of this decade, though, that a bride in a white wedding gown became an almost ubiquitous image of marital happiness on both sides of the Wall. To be sure, there was an enormous difference in how East and West Germans could realize these dreams.

Still, as Stefan Wolle has noted, the fact that most people in the GDR did not have access to these products did not take away from the fantasies they evoked.

As attempts to delimit the private sphere in the East and the vociferous protests by the New Left in the West indicate, the social fabric of the two German states had moved away from each other since 1949. The revolts of the New Left might be the most indicative case for how different the structures of these two societies had become. After the worker's revolt in 1953, neither the East German authorities nor their Soviet backers would have accepted such a cultural mutiny. Another more subtle, but not less interesting point is the radical difference between the East German version of Socialism and that of Dieter Kunzelmann and his colleagues in West German alternative circles. For where Kunzelmann argued for open relationships, the SED did all in their power to promote strong marriages. Where collective communities such as K1 wanted to abandon sexual conventions to once and for all defeat the "Fascist" ideal of the Nazi generation, East German marriage manuals strongly urged young people to abstain from premarital sex in the name of Socialist morality. The list could be made much longer. The point, however, is not to measure levels of affectation, but to illustrate just how pliable and socially, culturally, and economically contingent the idea of a happy life built on Socialism was in the 1960s.

CHAPTER THREE

Society and its Discontents 1972–1982

INTRODUCTION

From the 1970s through the 1980s, theories about the power, supremacy, and according to some, the weakness of the individual were widely debated.¹ Looking back at the first two postwar decades, such emphasis on the self seems to have materialized relatively unannounced. What had happened to the solidarity of the late 1960s, and what impact did the ostensibly growing importance of the individual in politics, media, and consumer culture have on marriage debates in the two Germanies?

In West Germany, we begin to see changing views in the relationship between individual and the groups with which he or she interacted.² Such tendencies were particularly assertive in theories coming from psychologists and psychotherapists, who had become increasingly active in the domain of marriage and relationship counseling. For them, as for large groups of disillusioned young West Germans, the self, as opposed to the power of the group and the collective, became the new starting point in the search for meaning in life. It was only after having taken care of one's personal needs that those of the spouse could be considered. Marriage, though still important and popular, had lost some of its previous magic. Although still a significant social institution, it was no longer, the obvious "glue" holding families together.

¹ This was a phenomenon transcending the East and West German national sphere and was just as prominent in the United States as it was in Europe. See Daniel T. Rogers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

² Dirk A. Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 23.

In East Germany, a debate about the place of individual priorities in society had been going on since the state was founded. The 1960s had been one long attempt by the SED to all but eradicate the private sphere, and in the process politicize sex, love, and marriage to a point where the personal was identical to the political. These efforts petered out during the 1970s. Although the SED's language of ideology did not change much, new generations of East Germans were becoming increasingly cynical about the regime. The debate about the role of the self in society and the responsibilities of the individual vis-à-vis his or her spouse continued into the 1970s, but it did so with a growing divergence between the way young East Germans on the one hand, and party backed experts on the other hand, defined the subject of discussion. The meaning of marriage was in flux.

It seems, then, as if the compulsion to primarily address individual interests in marriage in the East as well as in the West emanated from debates in the previous decades. This was also the case with the second concern the two Germanies had in common during this time. Talks about equal rights among the New Left in the Federal Republic and a state ideology of gender equality in the GDR had left large parts of both populations wanting. As a result, East and West Germans struggled to redefine the responsibilities, emotional preferences, and a variety of other characteristics they saw as bound to old-fashioned gender roles in the realm of love and marriage. Together with a reawakened fascination with the individual, this would result in widespread calls for a "new man" and a "new woman," who were better disposed to make each other happy.

WEST GERMANY

Looking back at the 1970s, contemporary German conservatives often recall a decade of decadence and moral collapse. A report from 2013 noted that the period was so dominated by “leftist intellectualism” that even minors were encouraged to have sex.³ At the same time, voices on the left wistfully remember an era of solidarity, sexual open-mindedness, and political promise. But irrespective of political allegiance these impressions of the recent past have one thing in common. They all suggest a popular understanding where the radical politics of the late 1960s continued seamlessly into the 1970s. In this view of the past, marriage is commonly portrayed as an institution in its death throes, hopelessly bound to traditions that the New Left, for better or for worse, had condemned to the ash heap of history.

When professional historians have assessed the 1970s, their judgments have been much less self-assured. Titles often come with a question mark. Did the 1970s represent the “end of confidence?” Was it a “period of disillusionment or promise?” Or did it indicate a time when West Germany began “the way to a new modernity?”⁴ According to these accounts, it was an age whipsawed by economic crisis and structural economic change. Yet the 1970s presents few decisive events on which historians can hinge a coherent narrative. For many excellent historical studies of marriage, there is also another reason why the decade is difficult to define as an era in its own right. Historians of family, gender, and sexuality with an interest in the institution of marriage often tend to

³ “Pädophilenfreundliche Artikel im ‘Pro Familia Magazin’,” *Die Zeit*, 10/8, 2013.

⁴ Thomas Raithel and Andreas Rödder, Andreas Wirsching eds., *Auf dem Weg in eine neue Moderne? Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2009); Konrad H. Jarausch ed., *Das Ende der Zuversicht? Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008); Hartmut Kaelble, *The 1970s in Europe: A Period of Disillusionment or Promise?* The 2009 Annual Lecture of the German Historical Institute London, (London: German Historical Inst., 2010).

use 1968 as their vantage point for understanding the years that followed. One explanation for the gravitation toward the late 1960s as a historical turning point is that most scholarly work discussing marriage after WWII see this period as a natural conclusion of postwar conservatism.⁵ They are surely correct in arguing that the 1970s was a time of growing feminism and weakening of the institution of marriage in left leaning circles, but precisely because of their particular viewpoint, these histories rarely examine mainstream conservatism and right-of-the-center attitudes where the belief in marriage as an organizing principle of (heterosexual) love was by no means dead. National polls, letters to popular magazines, and sociological research all testified to the fact that most West Germans still considered marriage as a natural locus of human happiness in the 1970s.

This chapter argues that rather than being dominated by ideas of solidarity and social unity, which had been the rallying cries for the New Left as well as for Christian conservatives, the institution of marriage saw changes in the 1970s indicating a great mistrust in collective solutions to human happiness. Society, which in the minds of the New Left in the late 1960s had been open to whoever wanted to change it, turned into the enemy of people's emotional wellbeing. Over the course of a decade, the ultimate responsibility for one's emotional health migrated from "the social" to the individual. While experts had strived to scientifically explain the inner workings of marriage and its influence on people's happiness for decades, they had never stopped believing in marriage as a power in its own right. By the end of the 1970s, though, neither social

⁵ See Elizabeth Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?: Women and Marital Status In Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) and Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality In Twentieth-century Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

institutions, nor the transcendental nature of marriage seemed enough to vouch for a happy life. Because of its important role in defining the meaning of marriage in the Federal Republic, and its strong reactions to the politics of the New Left, I will begin the examination of these changes by looking at transformations within the Christian community.

Conservative Continuities and the Legacy of the New Left

The unity of the New Left, which had been one of its defining characteristics in the closing years of the 1960s, soon begun to deteriorate into bickering factions. Growing disunity within the Left, however, had not changed its followers' radical debating style – if anything it had become even more provoking to people with a conservative outlook on marriage and family. Some theologians in the early 1970s were close to giving up when having to face of the pressures coming from the Left. Many admitted that they were not sure anymore how to justify Christian marriage norms. In addition, conservative theologians had to confront numerous social scientific studies that kept questioning earlier Christian certitudes. For some, though, mounting pressures to rethink Christian marriage only reinforced their belief in its validity. Catholics Klaus Reinhardt and Hubert Jedin argued along traditional lines, writing that marriage was and would always would always be a sacrament. As such it could not be subject to any adjustments due to changes in modern society.⁶ Reinhardt and Jedin did not even discuss the marriage guidelines agreed on and presented by the Second Vatican Council in 1965, which they perceived of as all too lenient. Instead they took their cues from the mid-sixteenth century Council of

⁶ Klaus Reinhardt and Hubert Jedin, *EHE - Sakrament in der Kirche des Herrn* (Berlin: Morus Verlag, 1971).

Trent.⁷ Needless to say, not all conservative theologians were as extreme in their views. Georg Siegmund, a professor of theology and philosophy at the seminar in Fulda, meant that although the last years had posed specific problems to the Christian idea of marriage, difficulties in the recent past could be turned around to an excellent opportunity to reeducate disillusioned West Germans. Of particular importance in Christian advisor's reeducation efforts, Siegmund argued, was to stifle the younger generation's obsession with sex.

For many conservatives, the radical politics of the late 1960s had left a bleeding scar throughout West German institutions. The implications were especially harmful in the educational system, where the new sexual education was responsible for a "situation where people have premarital sex like never before and divorce has become as normal as brushing one's teeth."⁸ Apart from the moral aspects, there was also a certain nationalist, as well as political quality to this claim. According to some Christian conservatives, the ideas threatening the institution of marriage in West Germany were not originally domestic products. The United States was held up as a specifically harmful liberal influence. In Social Democratic Sweden, though, traditional marriage values had broken down altogether, according to some critics. Borrowing from British author Roland Huntford, Georg Siegmund pointed to Sweden as a welfare dictatorship in which "true moral values" were destroyed in classrooms where sexual education had been on the syllabi since 1956. This is what happens when the state joined forces with the youth in a

⁷ Others arguing in a similar way were Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) who up until 1977 held various academic positions in West Germany. See for example Joseph Ratzinger, "Zur Theologie der Ehe," in *Theologie der Ehe*, Heinrich Greeven u. a. (Göttingen: Pustet, 1972), 81-115.

⁸ Georg Siegmund, *Warum heiraten?: Die Ehe heute Zweckgemeinschaft oder Lebensbindung* (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1974), 11.

generational conflict against their parents, he continued.⁹ The real predicament, though, Siegmund and his colleagues argued, were the new generations of West Germans who had lost their way. The reason for this decline in youth morality was partly due to foreign influences, but also to the fact that politicians and other potential role models did not take responsibility for the institution of marriage.

“To declare the holiness of marriage today is like preaching in the desert,” Siegmund noted and continued by lamenting the diminished public acceptance of the “eternal nature of marriage.”¹⁰ The hyperbole and doomsday scenarios drawn up by conservative Christians during this time were signs that they took the radical alternatives offered by the New Left very seriously. It also reflected a fear of the less radical but still disconcerting trends in popular culture to discuss the benefit of multiple partners and even considering divorce as a viable alternative to a broken marriage. Still, conservative theologians’ anxiety about the end of Christian marriage seemed somewhat misguided. According to numerous polls, most West Germans thought of themselves as Christians in the early 1970s.¹¹ And although the divorce rates were getting higher, especially compared with the 1950s, the number of people marrying had not reached anything close to “critically low levels.” In 1954, West Germany saw 8.7 marriages per 1000 citizens. In 1971, the corresponding number was 7, with regional differences ranging from 6.7 (Bavaria) to 7.8 (West Berlin).¹² These statistics notwithstanding, many conservative theologians felt threatened by what they saw as both a loss of influence in people’s

⁹ Siegmund, *Warum heiraten?*, 11. Siegmund seemed to have swallowed Huntford’s argument hook, line, and sinker. See Roland Huntford, *The New Totalitarians* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972).

¹⁰ Siegmund, *Warum Heiraten?*, 26.

¹¹ This has been documented in numerous surveys and demographic studies. See for example Renate Köcher, *Ehe und Familie- Einstellungen zu Ehe und Familie im Wandel der Zeit* (Stuttgart: Institut für Demoskopie, 1985).

¹² *Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Bonn: Statistisches Bundesamt, 1974), 55.

everyday life, but also an increased godlessness in society as a whole. In numerous disheartened predictions of the future, “the crisis of the Christian marriage” became a symbol for this feeling of privation. While this was similar to the fears of a “marriage crisis” of the 1950s, the “enemy” was much more pronounced in the 1970s. Whereas earlier, Christian conservatives had fought against a vaguely defined “modernity” and “modern love,” they had now found a concrete “proof” of social decline in the form of an increasing number of leftist splinter groups. The growing strength of feminism was another clear evidence to many Christian conservatives of how biblical marriage values were in decline.

As a way of reconquering lost ground, some conservative theologians took upon themselves to dispute various scientific explanations that portrayed marriage as an institution that had evolved from social and cultural practices. Only when human evolution is convincingly refuted can the meaning and the holiness of marriage be conclusively returned to the sacred realm, they argued. Could it really be, they asked, that human order had originated from animal disorder? Obviously “something” cannot come out of “nothing”. Yet such “indisputable facts had been muddled by dialectical sleights of hand.”¹³ One only needed to scrutinize these arguments in detail, Siegmund and his colleagues contended, and their speculative sophistry will be exposed to all sorts of inaccuracies. It was, after all, God’s will that man and woman should be joined in holy matrimony.¹⁴

In his endeavor to prove the evolution theory of marriage wrong, Siegmund also showed his disdain for Soviet style Socialism as well as the New Left, which in his mind

¹³ Siegmund, *Warum Heiraten?*, 47.

¹⁴ Judging by the statistics of West German’s religious affiliation, this was most likely a notion widely shared with the general population.

were two sides of the same coin. He lashed out against issues ranging from Karl Marx's "failed attempt" to "explain marriage and family in evolutionary terms" to the "obsession with sex" of his own times.¹⁵ He wrote that taken together all this led to a pursuit of "instant happiness" in sexual pleasures that only had the effect of leaving humanity in a saturnine state of mental impoverishment.¹⁶ People practicing "sex without love" were deprived of the marital sexual experience that was part of the "spiritual depth" of the Christian marriage. However, commercialized values in popular culture and the dehumanized sexuality of the New Left were the only two out of countless signs of moral decline. According to many conservatives, increasingly liberal attitudes toward recreational drugs also contributed to the plight of traditional marriage values.

While negative comments about drugs were evident attacks on the youth culture of the early 1970s, they also contained an element of racism. In particular they sought to discredit Turkish Gastarbeiter (immigrant workers) who had been coming to West Germany to seek employment since the late 1950s.¹⁷ Siegmund argued that the "false happiness" of hashish stimulus led to a growing number of people who did not properly understand the true happiness of life.¹⁸ Arabs, he wrote, were particularly prone to sexual selfishness after the use of hashish. In an indirect criticism of the growing Turkish population in West Germany, Siegmund declared that the specific Muslim quality of life

¹⁵ Siegmund, *Warum Heiraten?*, 48 and 55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁷ Siegmund's denunciation of Turkish immigrants must be seen in the light of a general heightened skepticism toward foreign workers among West Germans in the early 1970s. The reasons for this were complicated, yet the two factors that were frequently pointed to as problematic were the slowing down of the West German economy and the problem of integration. This led to an *Anwerbestopp* in November 1973 that made it significantly more difficult for Turkish citizens to seek employment in the Federal Republic. See Jochen Oltmer, *Das "Gastarbeiter"-System: Arbeitsmigration und ihre Folgen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Westeuropa* (Oldenbourg: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2012).

¹⁸ Siegmund was by no means alone in having this attitude toward foreigners. Even state led commissions could express similar, if not as blatantly racist, ideas. See *Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Sozialmedizinischen Dienste für Eheberatung, Familienplanung und Schwangerschaft für die Zeit vom 1.2.1976 – 31.12.1976* (1976), 7.

and its widespread use of hashish led Arab men to perform sexually in a very egotistical way.¹⁹ It was only when they moved abroad and initiated relationships with European or American women that they had an incentive to stop using hashish and begin to understand the reciprocity involved in true love. The “Arab man” could, then, be “truly happy.”²⁰ Thus, on one level European Christian civilization trumped both foreign cultures and harmful ideologies such as Marxism. But, argued Siegmund, if nothing was done about the moral and spiritual decay that had befallen West German society it would fall apart from within, with or without the help from Socialism and foreign influences.

Christian Pragmatists

Despite the growing discontent with consumerism and the politics of the New Left, the West German Christian community of the 1970s stood divided on the question of how to regain control over the institution of marriage. For while a significant number of conservative Christians reached for tradition and religious doctrine to recover their interpretative authority, the majority of Christian advisors had begun to adopt a much more liberal view of marriage. One reason for such liberalizing tendencies been around since the 1950s, and had to do with increasing influences of sociology and psychology on Christian thinking.²¹ The other reason needs to be sought in the specific context of the 1970s and can best be described as a reluctant acceptance of real and imagined changes in West German popular attitudes in the late 1960s. Franz Leist, theologian and professor of religious philosophy at the University of Munich was an ideal representative for both these developments. His 1973 book *Utopie Ehe zwischen Pornographie und Prüderie*,

¹⁹ Siegmund, *Warum Heiraten?*, 105.

²⁰ Siegmund borrowed this, and other ideas he had about Arab countries from Youssef el Marsy, *Die Tragödie der Frau im arabischen Orient*, (Munich: Rütten und Loenig, 1963).

²¹ See Chapter 1 and 2.

was an example of the West German fascination with sex and pornography in the 1970s. At the same time it was a Christian study of marriage that leaned heavily on the social sciences to convey its ideas.²²

Leist argued for a golden middle way between an overly sexualized society and stale religious moral regulation, both of which he thought were harmful to a harmonious marriage. Most of the reasons for why modern marriages had difficulties finding the levels of happiness they could potentially reach, he claimed, were found outside the realm of sexuality. He was not alone in his views. Just a few years earlier, psychiatrist and director of the *Catholic Institute for Marriage and Family* Günter Struck had made the same basic argument. Sex was important, but there were other issues that needed more immediate attention. This became even more evident when looking at the experience of “real people,” many of whom Struck had encountered during his years as marriage counselor.²³ In spite of his religious persuasion, he was critical to the strong influences Church representatives had over West German counseling clinics.²⁴ And in stark contrast to conservative theologians, Struck and his colleagues contended that Christian ethics did not necessarily begin with text and tradition, nor was it about formulating a unified credo. Instead, he contended, the key to persuasion lay “in the way we live our everyday lives.”²⁵ A growing theme, then, in liberal and left leaning theologians message was that teaching people about Christian marriage and family values was preferably done by example rather than through textual dogma.

²² Franz Leist, *Utopie Ehe zwischen Pornographie und Prüderie* (Tübingen: Katzmann Verlag, 1973).

²³ W. Beinert Hg., *Beiträge zur Theologie der Ehe* (Köln: Verlag Butzon & Bercker, 1971), 72.

²⁴ He was certainly right in this respect. For a representative example, see Lothar Loeffler Hg., *Einführung in die Eheberatung* (Grünewald: TVZ, 1971).

²⁵ Beinert, *Beiträge zur Theologie der Ehe*, 9.

Another liberal Christian, Hans-Jochim Thilo, argued that without Christianity the institution of marriage would be but a poor reflection of its real potential. But, he continued, it was equally important to consider “the realities of our times as well as scientific findings in the humanities.”²⁶ There was no coincidence that Thilo’s thinking was so similar to that of Leist. Thilo had been trying to find ways to combine theology and psychology since the 1950s.²⁷ As others who had followed this path, he also seemed to have been strongly affected by the marriage debate as it developed in the wake of the late 1960s. Two issues had made a particular impact on Thilo’s views. The first was a wide array of arguments from the New Left portraying marriage as an obsolete, even antimodern institution. The second had to do with growing inclinations in the new generation of West Germans to marry at a much younger age than in previous decades.²⁸ The former, Christian liberals contended, led to confusion and disillusionment about the proper starting point for a healthy and happy life. The latter, they lamented, led to early breakups and a devaluation of true love. On these issues liberal Christians shared the same concerns as their more conservative comrades. Yet their recipe for coming to terms with the contemporary devaluation of marriage diverged from conservative theologians on almost every conceivable aspect.

Whereas dogmatic conservatives had dedicated a good amount of time and energy to refute any evidence that marriage was a result of human evolution, most liberal Christians took the opposite approach. Instead of abiding by a static biblical

²⁶ Hans-Jochim Thilo, *Ehe Ohne Norm? Eine evangelische Ehe-Ethik in Theorie und Praxis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 5.

²⁷ For an analysis on Thilo’s work, see Ruth-Erika Kölsch, *Pastoralpsychologie als Suchbewegung und Erfüllung in Begegnung und Verantwortung. Hans-Joachim Thilo – Leben und Werk* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2001).

²⁸ Thilo, *Ehe Ohne Norm?*, 9.

interpretation of love and marriage they proposed “transformation of norms” over time.²⁹ For people to grasp the real meaning and importance of marriage, a firm understanding of its history was of the utmost importance.³⁰ Hans-Jochim Thilo meant that a historical approach to marital values also opened for a more nuanced discussion about happiness. Why, he asked, did theologians only treat happiness in marriage as an afterthought?³¹ Why not take to heart the insights from psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical theory showing that true happiness was not bound by the joy of the soul? Was it not obvious, he continued, that happiness also had a significant visceral component.³²

Another important issue for Thilo was the built in tensions and contradictions in human happiness Freud had unveiled in his writings. Here he was in agreement with others who had turned to psychology for answers to theological problems.³³ Only by combining the history of Christian thought with psychoanalytic thinking could one really understand why some theologians shied away from discussing marital happiness, Thilo wrote without further specifying his chain of reasoning.³⁴ But despite its pragmatism and relative openness, the liberal Christian community was, just as their conservative colleagues during this time, mainly concerned with saving the institution of marriage from a potential crisis. They never seriously discussed more far-reaching changes taking place in popular perceptions and social scientific approaches at the time. However,

²⁹ Thilo, *Ehe Ohne Norm?*, 79.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

³² *Ibid.*, 133.

³³ This was a general trend in the late 1970s that generated a number of books with titles such a *Jesus as Psychotherapist* and others. See Hanna Wolff, *Jesus als Psychotherapeut: Jesu Menschenbehandlung als Modell moderner Psychotherapie* (Stuttgart: RADIUS-Verlag, 1978).

³⁴ To be sure, the social scientist as truth teller beginning in the 1950s was by no means only a German phenomenon. See, Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 17.

parallel to Christian anxieties and hopes about the future of marriage a larger debate was going on about individual virtues on the one hand, and the social good on the other.

From the Smallest Cell to a Single Cell

In 1949 Jochen Fisher, one of the leading figures in the development of West German marriage counseling, wrote a letter to the Berlin bureau of public health. In it, he tried to persuade the authorities that stable marriages were essential for a prosperous future of the Federal Republic.³⁵ They needed little convincing.³⁶ Few representatives of the West German state would have disagreed with Fischer's notion that "we have to prioritize marriage and its central importance to all citizens since it is the key to understanding human existence [and society] at large."³⁷ From the state's point of view this attitude did not change much until well into the 1970 when a new divorce law made it easier for West Germans to separate. The new law can be read as a reflection of, or more likely a reaction to broader changes. In 1969, sociologist Franz-Xaver Kaufmann noted that it was almost impossible to speak of marriage as a constituent cell of society anymore. Marriage had turned into nothing but an "institutionalized private sphere," in which individuals had no direct link to society in general.³⁸ As we shall see, though, the question was not so much about the survival of marriage as an institution. Few argued for the complete abolishment of marriage and even fewer put such ideas into practice. The central issue, especially for a growing cadre of psychologists branding themselves as marriage experts, was what role marriage played in the individual person's comprehension of his or her place in society.

³⁵ LArch Berlin, B Rep. 012 Nr. 176 Eheberatung 1949-58. Letter from J. Fischer to the Magistrat der Stadt Berlin, Abtlg. Gesundheitswesen, July 1949.

³⁶ For the importance of marriage as "the smallest cell of society," see Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life In the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 88ff.

³⁷ LArch Berlin B Rep. 012 Nr. 176, Letter from J. Fischer to the Magistrat.

³⁸ Kaufmann is quoted in Loeffler, *Einführung in die Eheberatung*, 87.

Basing their reasoning on popularized versions of critical theory, many looked to an ever-expanding consumer society as the key for understanding modern marriage practices.

As unlikely partners as they may seem, Christian conservatives and supporters of the New Left both took a strong stand against West German consumerism. Despite coming from vastly different vantage points they argued that the increasing commercial nature of western life led to an unnatural individualistic pursuit of happiness that was particularly detrimental for human solidarity.³⁹ From a Left's perspective the basic idea was that modern society had rendered marriage obsolete and its current form could only lead to oppression. Increasing focus on consumerism, the argument continued, had made "marriage the death sentence of real love, since every gift [to your partner] has become a compulsory exercise. Couples, especially women, are cut off from social life, which leads to an *egotism à deux*."⁴⁰ The Christian perspective was almost identical, except for the important difference that marriage was still worth saving.⁴¹

Denunciations of consumer capitalism as the culprit destroying traditional marriage, which had been present since the 1950s, surfaced as one of the main themes in the marriage debates of the 1970s. But though the "perversion of consumerism" was a useful example of why marriages failed, for most psychologists the problem was larger still. In contrast to earlier decades, when the individual to a large degree had been held responsible for shattered and unhappy marriages, society was increasingly singled out as the culprit when young people struggled to establish stable families. In a popular book addressing these issues, psychologist Jürg Willi explained that young people who had

³⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay On Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), was a particular inspiration to the New Left's thinking on consumerism in contemporary West German culture.

⁴⁰ Loeffler, *Einführung in die Eheberatung*, 88.

⁴¹ See for example Otto Betz, *Ehe: Erfahrungen, Anfragen, Positionen* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1978) and Leist, *Utopie Ehe zwischen Pornographie und Prüderie*.

married after the late 1960s felt confused and anxious because of a variety of outside pressures. On the one hand, they were stifled by the rules of traditional marriage that would not let them live life to the fullest. On the other hand, the increasingly accepted attitudes of free sexuality and the “right to orgasm” set performance standards and expectations young people could not live up.⁴² “Partners have to mark off their boundaries, act more independently, and not let themselves be held back in their personal development,” Willi wrote. He also suggested that people practice “constructive conflict management,” which was essential for making unselfish decisions.⁴³ In other words, what Willi and many with him were saying was that although equality was a significant, the most important component of a good marriage was making sure each partner fulfilled his or her personal dreams and aspirations. To accomplish this goal, people needed to break the shackles of social repression, Willi concluded.

In much the same way, psychologist Josef Rattner noted that “our culture is sick.” The consequences of this illness could be seen in increasing psychological disturbances in West German marriages.⁴⁴ In order to open his marriage counseling to a broader public, Rattner published conversations between himself and people seeking his advice in group therapy sessions. The men and women who discussed their problems with Rattner dealt with issues similar to those of earlier decades. They included differences of opinion, poor sex life, and lack of communication. Rattner linked their problems to “bourgeois-Christian glorification of faithfulness ... which according to an ancient credo declares that marriage is sealed in heaven.” He also singled out negative pressures from

⁴² Jürg Willi, *Die Zweierbeziehung - Spannungsursachen, Störungsmuster, Klarungsprozesse, Lösungsmodelle* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1975), 7.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁴ Josef Rattner, *Miteinander leben lernen: Partnerschaft, Liebe, Sexualität und Ehe* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1974), 103.

contemporary culture that lead to “impotence and perversions,” as particularly harmful.⁴⁵ But despite such alleged cultural restraints, people were not encouraged to change the structural problems preventing them from being happy. Instead psychologists argued that psychotherapy, especially in larger groups, would “liberate depressive people from jealousy, envy, grudge, and resentment so they could live their own life and not always let the life of their partner interfere.”⁴⁶ Consequently, the collective solidarity of group therapy mainly served to boost the emotional wellbeing of the individual.

Taken together, the values and explanatory models employed by psychologists in the mid 1970s suggest a change in the basic premises of marital happiness from only half a decade earlier. The same holds true when taking into account trends in the Christian community. Whereas in the 1950s most conservatives who had been alarmed by the threat of modernity still believed they could change West German society, the majority of marriage advisors in the 1970s harbored no such illusions. If anyone was able to change anything, it was the individual changing his or her personal attitude toward other people. This sentiment was in many ways a consequence of the New Left’s failure to reform society in the radical ways it had set out to do. What we see, then, is a shift in focus from the collective to the individual. This was not an altogether consistent ideal. It demanded a balancing act of those compelled to live up to it. Filled with contradictions and uncertainties, the fixation on the individual also demanded an overhaul of old gender roles. In the 1970s traditional views of male and female were not hard to denigrate. It proved much more difficult, though, to agree on new norms for men and women in

⁴⁵ Ibid., 197 and 103.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 191.

married life, let alone what they were supposed to feel about themselves and about each another to be happy together.

The New Woman and the New Man

One of the more constant messages in the radical politics of the late 1960s had been the harmful effects of the nuclear family.⁴⁷ Once this outdated bourgeois construction was dismantled, many in the New Left had argued, life would be free, open, and based on gender equality.⁴⁸ But when it came to equal rights postulates, ideas and actions rarely overlapped. By the early 1970s many women felt sidelined by a male dominated movement, which itself began to fracture and pull in different directions. One of the results of these changes was a new feminist movement encouraging women's independence. In addition, it also demanded drastic changes in the male population.⁴⁹ Men, the general opinion went, needed to be more in tune with their emotions and the idea of romantic love. Assessing the mood at the time one sociologist meant that emotions were the only thing that mattered in marriage anymore.⁵⁰ Corroborating such analyses were surveys showing 69% of all men and 74% of all women thinking that "love and emotions" were the most significant issues to consider before getting married.⁵¹

At the same time, studies showed that the division of housework was by no means equal. When it came to childcare, which was one of the family burdens with the most

⁴⁷ For some of the more emblematic statements about marriage coming out of the New Left, see Reinhold Ruthe Hg., *Ist die Ehe überholt: Aspekte und Prognosen* (München, Claudius Verlag, 1970), 7.

⁴⁸ For the New Left's attitudes toward sexuality, see Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 141ff.

⁴⁹ Hilke Schlaeger argued already in the late 1970s that the second wave of West German feminism could quite clearly be dated to 1968. See Hilke Schlaeger, "The West German Women's Movement," *New German Critique*, 1978, 62. Having been part of that development herself, she certainly had a good reason to emphasize the importance of the late 1960s. Nonetheless, this notion has been argued in recent scholarship as well. See Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, 231.

⁵⁰ Loeffler, *Einführung in die Eheberatung*, 81.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

disproportionate gender division, women had to take the by far biggest responsibility.⁵² This gap between expectations and lived reality created a dissonance that the institution of marriage had not seen before in West Germany.⁵³ However, the high divorce rates that in part resulted from this development must not be taken as an indisputable sign of people losing faith in marriage as an organizing principle for human relationships. Marriage was not dead, as many followers of the New Left had hoped. Instead it had become a more complicated arrangement in which previous power relations had begun to come loose.

Evidently influenced by the psychological trends of the time, journalists Barbara and Manfred Grunert, along with numerous other popular marriage advisors, argued the need to understand one another as individuals in order to function as a couple. In a series of published dialogues taking place over a few years in the early 1970s, the Grunerts developed their ideas of gender roles in what they presented as a typical love relationship. The dialogues painted a portrait of a couple who, after many conflicts and subsequent reconciliations, slowly began to realize the underlying, psychological grounds for their partner's standpoints. The two finally discovered that the cause behind most of their fights were ideals planted in their subconscious in early childhood.⁵⁴ Ultimately, the protagonists agreed that reactionary upbringings, and perhaps even more defining, implicit Christian values still ruling the West German moral discourse, were responsible for their marital problems. Traditional ideas of love were "reactionary," since they forced individuals into a socially, idealistically, or religiously determined molds.⁵⁵ Like many in

⁵² A number of these studies were presented in the magazine *Brigitte*.

⁵³ This expectation was built on a belief in love as the force that could hold a marriage together forever as well as provide the incentive for equality in the private sphere.

⁵⁴ Barbara and Manfred Grunert, *Liebe ist Deine Liebe nicht: Psychogramm einer Ehe* (München, Verlag Kurt Desch, 1972), 226.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

the New Left had insisted a decade earlier, traditional love was totalitarian in its very nature. And still, the Grunerts could not give up entirely on the idea of love's inherent power – as long as it did not disrupt individual aspirations. Indeed, love was given transcendental powers and an agency of its own. Just as in earlier decades, the mystical notion of love constantly refilled marriage with meaning beyond the confines of scientific explanations.⁵⁶

Barbara and Manfred Grunert's marriage dialogues were examples of both the re-enchanting functions of love and the growing notion that repressive social institutions constituted a major impediment for functioning relationships. Yet they still represented a rather conventional attitude in terms of gender. For an increasing number of activists and scholars this was something that needed radical revision. Part of the reason for this increasing interest in gender was a reaction to the misogyny that had been spliced into the very structure of the radical Left.⁵⁷ Adding to this was also the so-called "crisis of New Left masculinity," which was caused by reactions to the spiraling RAF terrorism and other violent fringe phenomena.⁵⁸ In the wake of these developments people began to question previously held assumptions about the nature of the male mind. Before long, discussions of a "new man" had spread from more radical circles to the mainstream media.

When interviewed by *Brigitte* in 1975, Renate K, a thirty-five-year-old secretary in a midsized German town meant that the perfect man needed to be "smart, rational,"

⁵⁶ As I have shown in previous chapters this happened in all spheres of society, including consumer culture, religion, and the social sciences.

⁵⁷ Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, 231.

⁵⁸ For a discussion about the problem of masculinity and terrorism, see Gabrielle Huster, "Die Veränderung der Femme Fatale und ihrer Schwerstern: Nachdenken über das Frauenbild des Nationalsozialismus," in *Inszenierung der Macht: Ästhetische Faszination im Faschismus*, ed. Klaus Behnken and Frank Wagner (Berlin: NGBK, 1987), 145f.

and, she added, “have good taste.”⁵⁹ Complementing Renate’s list, another woman added age as an important factor (he needed to be older), and the ability to take the initiative. Besides, it did not hurt if he had a good income. In fact, most women asked about how they pictured the “perfect man” agreed on these points.⁶⁰ In other words, a list of traits associated with masculinity that could easily have been from the 1950s. But when asked what men could do better, the answers suddenly looked very different. “I am afraid of men getting lost in their professional life and forget how to love,” was one reaction. Another pointed out the inherent contradiction of their dream men saying that on the one hand “we want men who are ambitious about their careers. But at the same time it is this kind of man who does not have time to care for his wife and show her that he loves her. This is the true dilemma”.⁶¹ Most of all they wanted men to be more emotionally affectionate, or as one woman put it, “men are simply not willing to show their feelings.” Others agreed. “It is almost impossible to meet a man with emotional [capabilities]. And we are certainly looking for him.”⁶² The incoherent, and confusingly contradictory partner ideals that in the previous two decades had mainly been applied to women were now also beginning to be part of the repertoire expected from the “new man.” Some sociologists speculated that the high expectations people had on romantic love as a ticket to life-long happiness was not necessarily an exclusively good development. Higher expectations, they argued, also created conflict.⁶³

The new ideals did indeed create conflict. And most of the resistance came from men feeling their position, and perhaps even their identity, being threatened. However,

⁵⁹ “Die Männer sollen zärtlicher sein,” *Brigitte*, 2/28, 1975.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Hannelore D. in “Die Männer sollen zärtlicher sein,” *Brigitte*, 2/28, 1975.

⁶² Renate W. in “Die Männer sollen zärtlicher sein,” *Brigitte*, 2/28, 1975.

⁶³ Loeffler, *Einführung in die Eheberatung*, 81.

recent work in the history of emotions has argued convincingly that men did not wait until the 1970s to debate their emotionality. Andrea Meissner, for example, shows through the example of Catholic men in the interwar period that “the question of certain feelings and their alleged appropriate expression was of critical importance at the beginning of the twentieth century as well.”⁶⁴ Still, this is a body of research focusing almost exclusively on religious communities.⁶⁵ Practices among Catholic men after WWI cannot so easily be transposed to society at large. The virtual explosion of letters and interviews in the popular media discussing men’s emotions (and their reactions to the shift in women’s priorities) suggests that a distinct change happened in the 1970s. It is true that we cannot say how these changes played out in private life. Nonetheless we see an emerging frustration and annoyance among West German men who felt they were losing control and power. This reaction might seem understandable in the light of the contradicting ideals of the “new man.” But whereas men were expected to be more emotional and access “their feminine side,” no equivalent move into the traditional male sphere was available for the “new woman.”

To be sure, with respect to divorce, women had certainly gained ground in the 1970s. The new divorce law, as well as a growing number of women active on the job market, allowed women to leave their husbands to higher degrees than ever before.⁶⁶ Women’s magazines now openly discussed the benefits of being able to take the initiative when it came to deciding the future of a bad marriage. As one recently divorced woman

⁶⁴ Pascal Eitler, Bettina Hitzer, Monique Scheerin, “Feeling and Faith – Religious Emotions in German History,” *German History* (32) 2014: 348.

⁶⁵ See for example Andrea Meissner, “Against ‘Sentimental’ Piety: The Search for a New Culture of Emotions in Interwar German Catholicism,” *German History* (32) 2014: 393–413.

⁶⁶ Parallels can be seen in the GDR, but in the 1960s. Partly due to women being financially independent earlier there.

wrote, “I am not giving up my independence again.”⁶⁷ On the following page, though, a (male) psychologist expressed doubts about the benefits of being a single or divorced woman.⁶⁸ Moreover, as in previous decades, much of the blame for why men did not live up to their new standards was put on women. Disheartened letter writers told of husbands casting aspersions on their new independent lifestyle, and wives were derided for no longer having neither the time nor desire to cook dinner or clean the home.

When Ute and Rolf J sought professional help for their marital problems they recalled the early days of their relationship. Ute painted a picture of mutual emotional understanding, if not always of equal division of the housekeeping. In an attempt to reconcile their current differences she begged her husband to look back to a past when “we were one heart and one soul.” Rolf, incapable of accepting a greater responsibility in the household, retorted that “you only want to dominate me.”⁶⁹ While creating more equality was beneficial in the long-term, pressures to comply with transforming gender roles just as often led to conflict, misunderstandings, and confusion in the short run.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ “Die geschiedene Frau,” *Brigitte* 4/15, 1975.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Brigitte*, 3/14, 1975,

⁷⁰ While I have mainly focused on gender ideals in marriage counseling and popular media, discussions between conservative and liberal theologians of marriage were equally replete with contradicting gender models and mixed messages. For comparison, see Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, *Die Frau, in Familie, Kirche und Gesellschaft: Eine Studie zum gemeinsamen Leben von Frau und Mann* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1979) and Jochen Fischer, *Ein Verwirrender Kompromiss: Auseinandersetzung mit der EKD Denkschrift zur Sexualethik* (Wuppertal: Aussaat Verlag, 1971).

EAST GERMANY

If the 1960s had been a time of intense ideological propagandizing, the following decade was one of pragmatism. This did not mean that the GDR lacked either ideologically based policies nor that it had a leadership who to a large degree followed their own ideological doctrine. The language of East German Socialism still permeated the official discussion about love and marriage found in law drafts, popular magazines, and marriage counseling clinics. At the same time, though, the efforts to politicize and entirely control the private sphere, including married life, that had been going on in the 1960s had to a large extent been abandoned or drastically reduced in intensity. Some scholars have even talked about the 1970s as a period of “normalization” in the GDR.⁷¹ Did this mean that East Germans had broken free from a repressive state apparatus trying to control their private lives? Not quite. But if we look beyond the language of “Socialist love” and “Socialist marriage,” that still held sway in the official marriage discourse, a few things become apparent.

First, counseling clinics and advisors, still wrapped up in the language of ideology, were becoming much more pragmatic in their view of marriage and the advice they gave couples. They increasingly based their activities on previous experiences of what had seemed to work in the past, as well as on contemporary social scientific research. Second, a growing number of young East Germans, skeptical of the ideological façade covering up the reality of a slowly decaying society, had begun to redefine the very meaning of marriage. For many of the younger generations, marriage was no longer special in the way it was officially defined. It was certainly desirable, but did not occupy

⁷¹ Mary Fulbrook, *Power and Society In the GDR, 1961-1979: the 'normalisation of Rule'?* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

the same sanctified place in people's minds it had in previous decades. This can be seen in contrast to the West where people also sought alternative forms of partnership, but where marriage was still considered by many to be the ultimate form of life-long commitment. Similar to the West, though, love and marriage in the GDR was being framed by a larger discussion about the importance of self-realization and individual freedom for a happy and fulfilling life.

Marriage between Individual and Society

Made available to the public already in 1957, Rudolf Neubert's *Das Neue Ehebuch* had by the 1970s become one of the most popular East German marriage advice books ever.⁷² Though minor changes had been made over the years, the twenty-first edition, published in 1976, was by and large the same as the original version. Yet subtle revisions and additions indicated a shift in attitudes on a number of core values. While marriage in the past had primarily been an economic union with the potential of personal fulfillment, it had lately moved toward an emphasis on the latter, Neubert added in the new 1976 edition. That is, the "personal characteristics, talents, and [future] prospects are becoming ever more important."⁷³ The institution of marriage was about to "make a huge leap forward." Marriage had an enormous potential for personal and social improvement, Neubert wrote, yet he was still not unequivocally happy about this development. Great social changes, he warned, also brought insecurity and anxiety, which in turn led to unfaithfulness and divorce. Luckily, he continued, there was a potential solution to the problem. While people could certainly grow apart, couples should not give up too soon

⁷² It was not only popular in the GDR. Between 1963 and 1972, it had been translated into Slovak, Czech, Russian, Bulgarian, Latvian, and Lithuanian. Rudolf Neubert, *Das neue Ehebuch: Die Ehe als Aufgabe der Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Rudolstadt: Greifenverlag, 1976),

⁷³ Neubert, *Das Neue Ehebuch*, 223.

and immediately search for a new partner. Instead Neubert argued, they needed to take advantage of the numerous state run marriage counseling clinics. They could also benefit from a variety of family friendly policies, and well-authored advice books. If people did not let the state help them, however, East Germany society might soon be at a crossroads.

Neubert's laments about an imminent marriage crisis might not seem different from similar concerns in the 1950s. But though the issue at hand was the same the underlying premise for the debate had changed. First, in contrast to the 1950s, the 1970s signaled a loss of confidence in people's ability to live in stable, socialist, and happy marriage the way Neubert and others had advocated. To be sure, similar concerns had been raised in earlier decades, in particular with reference to new generations of East Germans coming of age. Compared to the 1970s, though, those debates had been more optimistic about the states ability to reform young people's marriage ideals. Second, there was the issue about the individual citizen's place in East German society. If the previous two decades had been filled with discussions describing the private sphere as part of the society at large, the 1970s was a time when the debate became de-politicized. Or, in the words of some scholars, "normalized".⁷⁴ This meant that much of the theory and ideological justification that had gone into official arguments of why society, including marriage, needed to be politicized through and through were no longer as common, nor did they seem as urgent as they had done only ten years earlier.

Not everything had changed, though. Similar to previous decades constant references were made to the image of marriage as the smallest building block, or smallest cell of society. But in contrast to early years the 1970s saw a softer approach in the way

⁷⁴ Mary Fulbrook, *Power and Society In the GDR, 1961-1979: the 'normalisation of Rule'?* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

experts and officials framed this issue. Although individualism was still considered contrary to Socialist ideology, some advice books had begun pointing to the benefits of marriage as a source of personal happiness. To avoid confusion, such assertions were often accompanied by a comparison to Western style individualism. This was done by simply describing capitalism as a force detaching people from life's real values. In addition, to emphasize the important role of Socialist ideology in East Germans' chances to fulfill their dreams, some advisors also pointed to the arbitrary nature of Western "happiness philosophy."

Using the example of philosopher Karl Robert Eduard von Hartmann, one advice book argued that at the heart of bourgeois individualism was the idea that people did not have to work for their happiness. It was determined by fate or luck alone, which detached it from time and space as if it existed independent of social interactions. In the GDR on the other hand, the same book noted, people had to come together and actively work toward their happiness.⁷⁵ Apart from the questionable use of Hartmann, a Prussian philosopher who died in 1906, the point was clear. "The intimate sphere and society are no longer mutually exclusive entities, but are instead complementary in nature and make up the foundation of the socialist family," marriage expert Rolf Borrmann wrote and concluded: "One person's happiness is an integral part of someone else's happiness, and this personal joy cannot be separated from the society in which it is made possible."⁷⁶

While this might not sound different from some of the politically saturated advice books published in the 1960s, it was made without any major justifications or overly

⁷⁵ K.-H. Mehlan, "Worin bestehen die Ziele und Aspekte moderner Familienplanung?" in Wolfgang Polte, *Unsere Ehe* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1973), 22.

⁷⁶ Rolf Borrmann, "Welche Aufgaben haben Ehe und Familie in unserer Gesellschaft?" in Wolfgang Polte, *Unsere Ehe* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1973), 17.

complicated theoretical explanations. Instead Borrmann stated his conclusions as simple facts of life; a mere description of East German reality. Borrmann's assertions summed up the majority view fairly well, but there were also exception to the official SED narrative of anti-individualism.

Having pushed for equal rights for men and women since 1949, it would have been almost unthinkable for state backed advisors to talk about marriage and family without stressing the importance gender equality. This also made it impossible not to underline the individual rights of women in the context of marriage. "We insist on the individualism of spouses, especially that of women," Robert Schulz declared in his book *Unsere Ehe*, quickly adding, "individual interests should be taken too far."⁷⁷ After all, "Socialist dictum states that all human beings, in all times, have been, and always will be, social beings." The rationale behind Schulz's reasoning was that though individuals made up a family, it was the family (held together by a strong institution of marriage), and not individuals that made up society. That is, marriage and family functioned as a mediator between society and individual. This was why, he explained, individual desires and preferences were subordinated the interests and needs of society.⁷⁸

Asked in an interview whether East German society provided people with benefits befitting the sacrifices they have to make, 39-year-old teacher Olga K. replied that she did not think that was the case.⁷⁹ After some thought she admitted, "I have actually never thought much about the details but the fact is, I can live here without any real anxiety for

⁷⁷ Robert Schulz, "Individualität und Gemeinsamkeit – ein Widerspruch?" in Wolfgang Polte, *Unsere Ehe* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1973), 124.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁷⁹ Barbara Bronnen, *Liebe, Ehe und Sexualität in der DDR* (München: Piper Verlag, 1975), 15.

the future, and I never have to be afraid to lose my job.”⁸⁰ Fritz, her 51-year old husband, added that living in an orderly [*geordnet*] society had its benefits. But despite a feeling of security and being free from worries about the future, Olga and her husband meant that society sometimes asked too much of them. Because of constant pressures to contribute to party activities and care for the social good of your neighbors, Fritz said, “one has the feeling that with the passing of the years, you have too little time for your partner and family.” His wife concluded that she did not think there was anything “negative about this feeling to want to withdraw [into the private].” Unfortunately, she said, social pressures sometimes made it impossible to maintain a normal private life.

Olga and Fritz’s story reminds us that it was not only Stasi spies and Informal collaborators (IM) in one’s immediate circle of friends who made it difficult keep up a real sense of privacy. There were also more vague, but equally powerful pressures contributing to a feeling of being torn between private and public. And still, many East Germans were pleased – albeit not as deliriously happy as the propaganda would have it – with the services the state provided in order to make family life easier. These included children’s allowance, free childcare, state loans to young newlyweds, and a number of other benefits, many of which were specifically geared toward some of the main themes in family politics such as female emancipation.⁸¹ Obviously not all, or even the majority of these services were new in the 1970s. As some recent scholarship suggests, amenities such as childcare and other flagship programs had become part of people’s regular lives, and as such they were increasingly taken for granted. That is, the “normalization” of East Germany in the 1970s did not only mean phasing out of some of the more excessive

⁸⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁸¹ For a list of policies specifically created to make life easier for working mothers, see Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998), 294.

ideological rhetoric. It was also a general assumption that, for good or for bad, many family related issues were by the mid 1970s taken for granted, something which again Olga's attitude testified to ("I have actually never thought about [what society gives back to me]").

Liebe, Ehe und Sexualität in der DDR, the book in which the interview with Olga and her husband was published along with eight other "informal conversations," was a result of Barbara Bronnen and Franz Henny's extensive travels in the GDR. The authors had set out to find out what "socialist everyday life looks like" and "how much a socialist state value the institution of marriage."⁸² Bronnen and Henny, two West Germans of the "generation of 1968" with degrees in psychology and pedagogy were, according to their own account, simply curious about "love, marriage, and sexuality behind the Wall." The fact that they were from the West might have helped to lessen the suspicion many East Germans would have felt if GDR officials, or any East German for that matter, had interviewed them about their private lives. Bronnen and Henny's questions were also good indicators of their own assumptions about the individual's role in marriage and society in East Germany. In the interview with Olga and Franz, for instance, the self-styled West German ethnographers did not seem satisfied to hear that Olga and Franz had not given the issue about private and public much serious thought. To find out more the authors pressed on, asking if Olga and Franz nonetheless could "see a contradiction between social programs and individual possibilities." In a comparative perspective, this question echoes more of West German marriage psychologists' fixation with liberating the individual from societies bonds, than a nuanced understanding of East German

⁸² Bronnen, *Liebe, Ehe und Sexualität*, 7.

premises.⁸³ Other responses to Bronnen and Henny's questions further stressed the contrasting perspectives of society's role in people's pursuit of happiness.

"Of course we see our private [marital] problems in the framework of larger social problems," Franz answered when asked about the benefit of social programs. He insisted that there was always a link between "the subjective and the social aspects of marriage," which needed to be understood as an ongoing, uneasy, and often contradictory relationship between public and private interests. His wife refrained from seeing every question in the light of larger social issues. She added that while Franz might be right, she still did not take her rage out on the entire system every time she was really angry.⁸⁴ Society and the state were natural parts of married life for Franz and Olga, yet neither one of them envisioned a future where the institution of marriage would eventually dissolve entirely and become part of political order. In the end, Olga argued, marriage had a number of positive sides, in particular when it came to childrearing. After all, she said, "marriage had been the source of so many wonderful things for thousands of years." If some aspects of private life were profoundly intertwined and restricted by the state, this last statement again distanced the marriage, love, and family life from the political regime.

Bronnen and Henny experienced many of their interviewees' attitudes as heavily influenced by socialist propaganda. There seem to be little doubt that ideological indoctrination swayed people's worldview. On the other hand, to claim that Olga and Franz, and others with similar attitudes, were brainwashed by party propaganda would be a mistake. Negotiations between state ideology and the traditions and integrity of

⁸³ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 18.

individual citizens have to be seriously considered. Moreover, analogous patterns from West German examples do not seem to raise similar questions among historians.

Consider, for instance, an interview with West Germans in which most of them agree with common popular and political views of marriage and family. Few, if any, scholars would interpret this in terms of indoctrination. To be sure, the authoritarian structure of the GDR must never be forgotten in such comparisons. East Germans were often severely restricted and never had the same variety of choices and options as did people in the West. This, however, did not make them completely void of agency. Moreover, skepticism, or outright cynicism toward official publications had become widespread among young East Germans in the 1970s. Ironically, those who only had the experience of GDR society to relate to were the ones who became the greatest cynics in the face of state propaganda.

The dynamics of ideas and social attitudes were also clear to marriage experts at the time, though they did not frame it as a process of tacit negotiations. After all, despite personal preferences regarding specific questions, their ultimate objective was to find ways of implementing the ideological program of the SED. To do so, they needed to reduce the influence of pre-Socialist traditions and, if possible, eradicate youth cynicism. By and large counselors and advisors argued that the main problem was a flawed historical understanding of the present situation. People did not appreciate enough the enormous changes that had taken place in only a few decades, they contended. The second, and corresponding problem was the very speed with which social economic change had been realized. The latter had been so effective that people had not had time to change old traditions and patterns of behavior. Consequently, numerous marriage experts

pointed to a disparity between the economic and social reality of East German society and the way East Germans understood and interpreted this reality. People were, they meant, held back by a veil of obsolete cultural attitudes hindering them from living in the present. A present, which, as official statements had declared since the late 1960s, was that of real existing socialism.

A Real Marriage Crisis?

In the endeavors to build a society providing all the necessary amenities to lead fulfilling, stable, and happy lives, continuing high divorce rates were considered a serious threat to the very foundation of society. On that account, it was somewhat surprising that in the 1970s, East German divorce courts became increasingly lenient and open to divorce and separations.⁸⁵ On the one hand, they reasoned, people should be able to divorce in the case they no longer got along together. On the other hand, ideology and law saw stable and long lasting marriages as a requirement for a strong state. This logical dilemma did not pass unnoticed. “Every use of coercion to keep fragile marriages together is unthinkable in a socialist society,” one expert declared. “But,” he continued, “since the family is the smallest, and therefore the most important cell of the socialist state, [our] society is undeniably interested in stable marriages.”⁸⁶ By the mid 1970s, however, there was little interest in using force and oppression to cut the Gordian knot. The solution was the relative financial and social benefits the Socialist state could offer its conjugal partners, not the force it could exercise to keep them together.

⁸⁵ Betts, *Within Walls*, 108f.

⁸⁶ Peter G. Hesse et. al. Hg., *Sexuologie: Geschlecht, Mensch, Gesellschaft, Band III* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1976), 46.

“The answer to problems related to divorce is the uncompromising enforcement and agreement on women’s equal rights, the continuing lifting of the general level of education, and housing construction,” one commentator wrote.⁸⁷ These measures indicated aspirations to implement programs granting people more freedom and individual choices. However, the desire to control people’s private life was still present. “Separate bedrooms,” the same advisor wrote, “could be just as beneficial [in preventing divorce] as occasional celebrations of the marriage, since it makes clear the worth of the other partner. A clever woman does not complain about being neglected. Instead, she strives to be a lifelong friend and discussion partner.”⁸⁸ Though the last sentence in this quote from 1976 seems to clash with the idea of female emancipation, it was not just a sign of male chauvinism lingering under the surface of ostensible equal rights slogans.

Put into the context of individual rights and collective responsibilities, one of the more problematic issues for East German marriage experts was to square the circle of female emancipation. On the one hand emancipation led to a desired increase in individual freedom for women, but on the other hand, such individual freedom competed with the emphasis on the collective. In the end, the prestige invested in female emancipation would prevail. As Donna Harsh and others have noted, women’s rights were always at the top of the agenda of the SED.⁸⁹ Moreover, there was also a more general downtrend in the party’s enforcement of the indivisible nature of private and public that had been the hallmark of the 1960s. The tension remained, though. While acknowledging the fact that there actually was a private sphere in which the state should

⁸⁷ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁹ Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 7.

not intervene if possible, intervention in family life was nonetheless justified on the pretext of adverse effects on labor capacities and the dignity of women.⁹⁰ Ironically, more independent and integrated women turned out to spell disaster for the already negative divorce rates.

In August 1973 the *Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik* presented the East German divorce statistics over the previous five years. It was depressing reading for even the most jaded state official. In absolute numbers, divorces in the GDR had gone from 28,721 in 1968 to 38,500 in 1973.⁹¹ What is more, divorces initiated by women were steadily rising during this time. Whereas in 1968, wives initiated 18,100 divorces, in 1973 the number had risen to 25,200. The corresponding numbers for men were 10819 and 12300, respectively.⁹² Instead of sweeping such gloomy statistics under the rug, a 1978 judicial report made an effort turn them around to something positive.⁹³ The GDR, the report said, was a more open society than its western neighbor. As the divorce statistics showed, argued the report, East German citizens were free to make their own choices. High divorce rates were not necessarily negative if one considered them as a sign of growing social status for women who, thanks to their economic self-sufficiency, also had acquired greater personal independence.⁹⁴ This could be read as on the one hand a continuation of a long tradition to compare East German social progress with the West in order to prove the superiority of the Socialist system, and on the other hand a sign of increasing resignation about the superiority of the collective. That is, resignation in the

⁹⁰ Betts, *Within Walls*, 113.

⁹¹ BArch, Berlin, DE/2/30836 - *Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik – Ehescheidungsstatistik*.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ LArch Berlin, C Rep 368/311, *Stadtbezirkgericht, Der Vorstand, Kollegium der Rechtsanwälte in Berlin* “Studien zu den Ursachen der Ehescheidung”, 13 June 1978,

⁹⁴ Ibid.

face of growing social problems that seemed more difficult than ever to confront in the face of a stagnant economy and a population that had become increasingly cynical about the superiority of the system.

Apart from greater economic independence as a result of being integrated in the salaried workforce, there were other telltale signs why women initiated divorces to a higher degree than men. Statistics from a variety of sources makes it possible to compile a list of the most common reasons why people sought to dissolve their marriages. Alcoholism and adultery topped most lists.⁹⁵ A closer look at the statistics show a clear differences in male and female behavior within the family. In a 1970 summary of answers gathered from 2500 Berlin residents, adultery committed by the husband was more than twice as common as than for women.⁹⁶ The same was true for alcohol consumption where men were even more overrepresented. These numbers changed little over the decade.⁹⁷ After alcoholism and adultery, divorce lawyers and local counseling centers seemed to agree that sexual problems, or as some dubbed it “disharmony in intimate relations,” was the third most common reason for relationship difficulties.

In their 1978 analysis of East German divorce patterns, the *Kollegium der Rechtsanwälte* noted the distinctly individualistic aspects of the problem. After having praised the changes the institution of marriage had undergone in the GDR – including an almost complete secularization – and reiterated the by now tokenistic ideological homage to “Socialist marriage,” the *Kollegium* turned to the actual situation at hand. They expressed frustration with the difficulties of getting to the core of the problem, by which

⁹⁵ For a breakdown of answers from a wide variety of East German cities on the question of what the most common reason for divorce was, see BArch Berlin, SAPMO DY/64/53, *Kollegium der Rechtsanwälte – Untersuchung über die Ursachen von Ehescheidungen*, March 7, 1978.

⁹⁶ 1015 cases of male adultery as opposed to 478 of female adultery.

⁹⁷ Compare with BArch Berlin, SAPMO DY/64/53 (1978)

they meant the people's private lives. The chairman of the *Kollegium* pointed out that citizens of the GDR who lived as man and wife all too often strived for material wealth and affluence. Spouses, he continued, "almost never get to have a sensible (*vernünftig*) conversation with one another nowadays." Moreover, the chairman insisted, people did not seem to understand the moral significance of marriage. Their aspirations to personal advantages was a clear sign of a growing egotism that to a large degree could be explained by an expanding media influence and addiction to television (*Fernsehsucht*).⁹⁸ In other words, despite the GDR being a state of "actual existing socialism," capitalist influences were still a force that needed to be taken seriously. And though the *Kollegium* admitted that a dire shortage of apartments for newlyweds was a great problem, they held the view that individual citizens rather than state policies had to be held responsible for increasing divorce rates.

In fact, most popular publications maintained that with all the advantages given married couples in the GDR, it was their duty to be happily married. Echoing the 1960s debate about everyone's responsibility to contribute to the well being of the socialist state – sometimes presented as a duty, sometimes evoked as a quasi religious sacrifice for the greater good – the popular magazine *Für Dich* suggested that happiness had to be understood as a system of reciprocity.⁹⁹ Referencing the childcare reforms presented by the 5th Plenum of the SED, the magazine argued that the state had made it easier than ever for young people to create a family. The East German state had once again improved society in a way that demanded responsible, long lasting marriages. As *Für Dich* put it, "we can only congratulate future spouses: this is indeed a solid foundation for the

⁹⁸ BArch Berlin, SAPMO DY/64/53 - *Antwort von Vorsitzender Seidel, Cottbus, Berliner Str. 158, 1978.*

⁹⁹ "Glück ist Nehmen und Geben," *Für Dich*, 23/1972.

happiness of their families.”¹⁰⁰ In many ways this was the polar opposite of the attitude in the West. In the FRG, psychologists did not miss any opportunity to identify society as the root to the problem and the individual’s ability to transcend the social and cultural constraints under which they lived. Similarly to West Germany, though, many East Germans sought professional help to resolve their conflicts.¹⁰¹

Counseling Pragmatists

Having been one of the cornerstones in the SED’s attempts to strengthen the institution of marriage, counseling clinics were well established in the GDR by the 1970s. So was their mission to promote and reinforce “socialist morality” in East German marriages. Slowly, though, the ideological underpinnings of the state sponsored counseling had begun to be exchanged for more pragmatic problem solving. The same trend could be seen in divorce courts, where there was a clear drop in moral language and little emphasis on the virtues of socialism in long-term partnerships.¹⁰² Whether this was a result of political apathy, or if it was an evolving process based on public demand for to-the-point counseling, or both, is hard to determine. From the statistics found in the records of counseling centers it is clear that marriage counseling grew increasingly popular in the 1970s. Two things in particular stood out in the statistics, and they were corroborated by personal accounts from counselors. First, more women than men came for help at the centers, and second, far more young people sought professional help than did older couples.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ BArch Berlin, DC/4/531 – *Zur Entwicklung junger Ehen zwischen dem ersten und siebenten Ehejahr* – “Ratgeber”.

¹⁰² Betts, *Within Walls*, 109.

¹⁰³ BArch Berlin, DC/4/531, “Ratgeber,” and LArch Berlin, C Rep. 135-02-02 Nr. 1130, 21/7 1977 *Protokoll, Stadtbezirksamt*.

Apart from a more pragmatic approach to divorce, counselors also changed the way they dealt with sexual issues in the 1970s. Some scholars have pointed to increasingly open attitudes toward sexuality as a sign of greater personal freedom in the GDR after the 1960s. Others have noted the enormous interest in female sexuality coming from a wide variety of “experts,” as well as a heightened tolerance of nudity and encouragements to treat nudity and sexuality as “naturally” as possible in the home.¹⁰⁴ We can also see a willingness among authors of marriage advice books to emphasize sexuality as a specifically important component for achieving stability and harmony in long-term partnerships.¹⁰⁵ In light of these changes, it appeared a natural step to merge sexual and marriage counseling clinics into one entity. In the summer of 1977, the Berlin district of Friedrichshain decided to do exactly that. Why, the head of the center asked, should we keep sexual and marriage counseling separate when so many relationship problems seem to come from sexual differences?¹⁰⁶ The popularity of these services left clinics in a situation where they had difficulties keeping up with public demand for professional help.

Between the mid 1960s and mid 1970s counseling clinics had seen a steady rise in visitors. A government study spanning the years 1976 to 1983 showed that although family members remained the most common place to seek advice, marriage counseling centers were more popular resource than were close friends – at least during the first year of marriage.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, local papers frequently advertised the benefits of

¹⁰⁴ Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, Josie McLellan, *Love In the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality In the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁵ For one out of many examples, see Wolfgang Polte, *Unsere Ehe* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1973), 380.

¹⁰⁶ LArch Berlin, C Rep. 135-02-02 Nr. 1130, 21/7 1977 Protokoll, Stadtbezirksamt.

¹⁰⁷ BArch Berlin, DC/4/531, “Ratgeber”.

professional help, which added to people's awareness.¹⁰⁸ The increasing pressure on counseling centers led to appeals for more resources, both in forms of financial backing and more competent counselors.¹⁰⁹ In 1977 one doctor at a Berlin clinic wrote, "because of the number of visitors this year, we have reached the limit of our capacities."¹¹⁰ Only by the very end of the decade did the reports signal a clear improvement.¹¹¹ In a statement from the previously mentioned Friedrichshain clinic, representatives now described a situation in which "things are looking good."¹¹² Most of the initial problems had been taken care of. "Since March 1979 we have large rooms at Frankfurter Allee 40 [a major Berlin thoroughfare] with access to advanced technical equipment and a well educated staff," the yearly report stated.¹¹³ Particularly striking about these progress statements at the end of the 1970s – apart from the state's willingness to pour large resources into worn down clinics – was an apparent absence of ideology and pressures to advocate "Socialist morality" as the foundation for married life.

While Socialism was certainly mentioned at various points, the technocratic language of marriage counseling in the 1970s thoroughly different from the political and ideological discourse saturating the profession only ten to fifteen years earlier. One clinic summed up its focal points for the upcoming decade with the following list: An in-depth specialization of our staff; a scientific foundation for our counseling and therapy; and gathering of data for more efficient psychotherapy. All this was required because "our citizens' need highly specialized counseling, supervision, and treatment [of marriage and

¹⁰⁸ See *Berliner Zeitung*, 1/7, 1978; 1/8, 1978; 4/11, 1979; and 4/29, 1979.

¹⁰⁹ LArch Berlin, C rep. 135-02-02 Nr. 1144, Öffentliche Ratsitzung am 15 Dez. 1977.

¹¹⁰ LArch Berlin, C rep. 135-02-02 Nr. 1144, Note by Dr. Wilder.

¹¹¹ Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft. Zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR, 1945-1989*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992.

¹¹² LArch Berlin, C Rep. 135-02-02 Nr. 1246 Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratssitzungen 1980 - Bericht 20.10.1980.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

sexually related problems],” and according to the clinic this need was constantly growing.¹¹⁴ And still, all these efforts by the state to create the most beneficial circumstances for families to feel secure did not stifle the rate people kept filing for divorce.¹¹⁵ By centering the attention on divorce and methods to keep marriages together, the SED and its cadre of marriage still maintained a traditional marriage ideal. This was a view of marriage settled in the 1950s with a foundational principle to last for life. It was also people’s violation of this ideal, through divorce and separation, that led the state to do all in its power to keep marriages intact. In light of such values, in combination with increasing divorce rates, it was not surprising that state officials and marriage experts continued to talk about a marriage crisis. What East German marriage experts often overlooked, or only mentioned in passing, was the fact that people in the Democratic Republic kept marrying in substantial numbers throughout the 1970s. But there were also signs that East Germans more often than earlier opted for civil unions or just casual cohabitation. To many East Germans marriage was by no means dead or out of fashion. Rather, it had become one out of a number of accepted ways of partnership.

Toward a New Definition of Marriage

The reasons why young people continued to get married in fairly high numbers in the 1970s is far more complicated and diverse than a direct correlation between social programs and a greater willingness to marry would suggest. These reasons why young people continued to marry in fairly high numbers in the 1970s included old and overlapping generational traditions, influences from western as well as domestic advertisements for elaborate wedding ceremonies, and less tangible personal preferences.

¹¹⁴ LArch Berlin, C rep. 135-02-02 Nr. 1144, Öffentliche Ratsitzung am 15 Dez. 1977.

¹¹⁵ The divorce rates did not decline but kept on rising in the 1980s.

Interviews with East Germans indicate that some social programs also had at least a partial impact – beyond purely practical implications – on people’s decisions to marry.

What the statistics do not show, though, was that marriage was beginning to be redefined in the minds of many East Germans. While the theoretical basis for social programs and state policies was that of traditional, or Socialist marriage ideals, new generations of East Germans were increasingly seeing marriage as less marked by such strict boundaries and limits. Many young East Germans were satisfied with not marrying at all, while those who did marry – which was still a substantial number – took the commitment far less serious than the older generations had done. This growing gap between official and public understanding of marriage did not only create misunderstandings and misguided policies, it also brought considerable difficulties to couples who waited to get married or refrained from it altogether.

Elli, a thirty-six year old divorced mother of two, who in the mid 1970s was interviewed by West German sociologists Barbara Bronnen and Franz Henny, earned an income of 1400 Mark per month. Leading a relatively comfortable life, she could afford a 100 square meter ($\approx 1080 \text{ ft}^2$) apartment in a large, unspecified East German city where she lived with her six and nine year old children. “The problem with the single motherhood,” she argued, “is that once a woman has proven capable of holding down a job and at the same time being a mother, she is too proud to let a marriage take that away from her.”¹¹⁶ This did not mean that life for single women in the GDR was in any way easy. For example, when asked about the childcare provided by the state, Elli explained that it was far from as ideal as advertised. Elli’s case still shows is that some of the

¹¹⁶ Barbara Bronnen and Franz Henny, *Liebe, Ehe, Sexualität in Der DDR: Interviews Und Dokumente* (München: Piper Verlag, 1975), 22.

programs put in place to strengthen the institution of marriage also facilitating single life. The fact that most of these programs were not restricted by people's marital status also suggests that being divorced was less and less seen as a social stigma, even in the case of single motherhood.¹¹⁷

For Ruth W. and Holger S., the conscious decision not to marry had given rise to a number of practical problems, especially in their search for a common place to live. After some futile attempts to apply for apartments, Ruth's mother, who worked as a maintenance supervisor, managed to get them a garret in the building she was employed. Holger assured that despite their plight, it was actually not much easier to find a home as a married couple. Even then "it could take five years to get an apartment, and new places cost 200 Mark a month to rent. Apartments are something you get if you have good connections," Holger lamented, adding, "one hand washes the other. You simply need to know someone at the housing office."¹¹⁸ The lack of housing was well known among party officials and one of the few things the SED admitted to be, if not a failure of the system, so at least a problem needing attention in the near future.¹¹⁹ In addition to the general difficulties to find a common home, there was also a widespread opprobrium of unmarried couple living together.

Ruth and Holger said they constantly heard about young people living together without being married. In practice, though, this was much easier said than done, at least in their experience.¹²⁰ Ruth conceded that other tenants in the house did not like the fact of

¹¹⁷ Betts, *Within Walls*, 110. Also, a 1974 study carried out by the ZiJ showed that 93% of the young works asked what they thought about single mothers meant that it was not something that needed to be seen as particularly harmful. See Barch Berlin, DC/4/2060, *Junge Partner* 1.2.8. "Einstellung zur ledigen Mütter".

¹¹⁸ Barbara Bronnen, *Liebe, Ehe und Sexualität*, 32-33.

¹¹⁹ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 304.

¹²⁰ Barbara Bronnen, *Liebe, Ehe und Sexualität*, 32.

her and Holger living together as a couple without being married. “We hear snide remarks behind our backs, even from young people in the house,” she explained.¹²¹ Such were not the problems of Kalle and Eva who lived together in an apartment Eva had kept after her recent divorce. Their issues were of a far more practical nature. No one really cared about the moral of it all, Eva said, but if she and Kalle were to live together officially, he needed to register as a resident in the house, get an approval from the police showing that he may stay in the apartment as guest tenant for a year, and a other bureaucratic measurers. It was simply easier to keep the current arrangements.¹²² These kinds of complications led many young couples to see marriage as a way to a materially better life.

Veronika and Volker V. was one such couple. They were both twenty-five years old in 1975 and came from a self-described bourgeois background with university educated parents. In the beginning of their relationship, Volker had slept over at Veronika’s, since she had her own room and her parents were not morally opposed to that kind of arrangement. The couple decided to get married early in their relationship. Mostly because they did not wanted to deal with other people’s dissenting opinions. “That way, the whole problem goes away,” Veronika said. “When you marry, your parents have to accept everything and their attitudes change. In this way, marriage is a form of protection from your parents, and it lets you be your own,” she added.¹²³ But there were also other, material advantages that came with marriage. In contrast to Holger and Ruth, who both meant that contacts and bribes were they only way get ahead, Veronika maintained that the key to a good home was marriage itself. “Not to get married at all is not an option

¹²¹ Ibid., 33.

¹²² Ibid., 39.

¹²³ Ibid., 54.

here [in the GDR], you will simply not get an apartment [without being married].” In this respect Volker had been naïve at first, he said. “But once you become part of the system [through marriage] it all looks different: you get an apartment, stipends are higher, and young people get a credit of 5000 Mark.”¹²⁴ If there are so many advantages with marriage, the interviewer asked, why do people divorce at such a high rate in the GDR?

Echoing some of the more popular marriage advice books of the time, Veronika and Volker explained the high divorce rates as a result of changing attitudes and not as a consequence of poor living standards and widespread domestic problems. As Volker put it, “in contrast to other countries, it is uncomplicated to get divorced here: all it takes is for the partners to agree on going separate ways.”¹²⁵ To a certain extent, Volker was right. Recent scholarship on divorce in East Germany in the 1970s has pointed to an accelerated official acceptance of divorce during this period.¹²⁶ Moreover, many advice books and publications written by persons close to the party turned the high divorce rates into a Cold War propaganda weapon.¹²⁷ High divorce rates, they wrote, was a sign of Socialist liberty rather than social decline and bad living standards. People divorced because they were free to choose the kind of life they wanted, the argument went. This was a less aggressive style of Cold War propaganda than in earlier decades. The fact that many of the social programs in the 1970s were financed by loans from the West Germany may have contributed to this less confrontational posture.¹²⁸ It was clear, though, that by

¹²⁴ Ibid., 55.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 55.

¹²⁶ Betts, *Within Walls*, 108.

¹²⁷ See, Anita Grandke and Klaus-Peter Orth, “Rechtssoziologische Untersuchungen zur Stabilität von Ehen in der DDR”, *Staat und Recht*, 21/1 (1972): 50.

¹²⁸ See Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent*, for details on loans to social programs etc.

the end of the decade the state had not only lost some of its power over part of the private sphere. It had also lost control of the way people defined what it meant to be married.

Marriage and new Gender Roles

In the 1970s questions of women's equality was brought into the realm of sexuality in a way that had not been seen before.¹²⁹ Sex, which had been fairly taboo other than as an act of reproduction, began to be more accepted. Advice books and popular magazines begun discussing sex not only as an important part of peoples lives in general, but also as a way to a happier marriage.¹³⁰ This development also allowed for more open discussions about emotional expressions. Whereas love had earlier been viewed with suspicion because of its irrational nature, it was now seen as something positive, and in many ways even essential to fully working marriages. The question for the SED was how to tap into this previously unexploited resource of potential control. How, marriage experts and party representatives asked, could one best understand and learn about people's opinion of sex, love, and long term relationships and use this information to keep the institution of marriage from falling into complete decay?¹³¹

In November 1969, letters discussing the prospect of studying these issues begun to circulate in government ministries.¹³² The question was considered urgent and a study was set to take place already in the fall of 1970.¹³³ While a small part covering divorce courts and young people's criminal behavior was indeed carried out at that time, it took

¹²⁹ McLellan, *Love In the Time of Communism*, 174ff.

¹³⁰ See Wolfgang Polte, *Unsere Ehe* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1973).

¹³¹ This is not only clear in government reports that were still comparing marriage to the "smallest building block" of society (a somewhat ossified and diluted concept by the 1970s), but perhaps more so in the great concerns about staggering divorce rates.

¹³² BArch Berlin, DY/64/34 – Letters exchanged between Dr. Wolff and Minister Kaulfersch, November 18, 1969 to January 26, 1970.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, Letter from Dr. Wolff, January 26, 1970.

until April 1974 before the extensive study *Junge Partner* was finally completed. By then 1968 workers, 773 university students, and 991 students in their last year of *Gymnasium* (high school) had, by filling out anonymous questionnaires, answered queries covering everything from ideal life partners to intimate sexual issues.¹³⁴

The task to see the project through had been given to the *Central Institute for Youth research* in Leipzig (ZiJ). In the introduction to *Junge Partner* they explained the enormous importance of educating the youth. The “advancement of harmonious and Socialist families”, guaranteed the “upbringing of happy children,” who, in turn, were the mainspring in any solid Socialist society.¹³⁵ If the language of the report was a way of paying lip service to Socialist traditions, the aim of the study was to bring the state’s understanding of contemporary youth culture up to date. As the ZiJ put it, “we want to give a picture of how the youth today understand the moral aspects of marriage and their ideas for what is shaping one’s life (*Lebensgestaltung*).”¹³⁶ The young people in question consisted of 16-25 year-olds from across the country, including Cottbus, Greifswald, Teltow, and Karl Marx Stadt.

Junge Partner, divided participants into groups of those considered more politically reliable and those deemed less likely to follow the official party line. The selection was based on education, family background, current type of employment, and in some cases gender. As it turned out, though, people considered ideologically superior did not always abide by the (admittedly fluid) ideas behind Socialist morality and Socialist marriage. While women, for example, seemed to differentiate between sex and friendship more than men did, the ZiJ researchers found it remarkable that a great number of women

¹³⁴ BArch Berlin, DC/4/2060 ZiJ Untersuchung *Junge Partner & Lebensgestaltung Junger Ehen* (1974).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

nonetheless had sex without being in love with their partner. Still, these rather frequent deviations from the ideological norm were not met with outright moral condemnation as they had been in earlier decades. As might be expected, the ZiJ also found positive ideological signs, but more often than not they seemed to be grasping at straws. Time and again, the authors of *Junge Partner* wrote that they “could not see that any political ideal type [practice] a certain kind of [sexual] relationship.” Still, they insisted, at least “those who are of the positive ideological type tend to discuss political problems with their partner more often than others, and they are also more active in the FDJ.”¹³⁷

In the end, the researchers conceded that despite the apparent lack of Socialist morality, the results of the analysis were positive. Their assessment, which would have been almost impossible a decade earlier, fits well with how divorce courts at the same time put less emphasis on ideology and the ways in which marriage counseling clinics increasingly focused on pragmatic problem solving rather than political inculcation. In this fashion, the 1970s saw ideological standard models of marriage being emphasized less frequently by experts and party officials across the board. And though the political aspects of marriage did not go away completely, romantic love – viewed as the positive “glue” keeping marriages stable and happy – begun to slowly appear in places where the key concept earlier had been spelled Socialist morality. Indeed, the notion of romantic love was considered of such great import that the ZiJ felt the need to discuss it in depth.

Admitting that it was almost impossible to establish the scientific boundaries of such a complex emotion as love, the authors of *Junge Partner* settled on a somewhat vague interpretation based mainly on subjective experiences. Its most important qualities included a special understanding of the partner (always of the opposite sex) and a feeling

¹³⁷ BArch Berlin, DC/4/2060 *Junge Partner*, 2.2.1. “Vorhandensein von Beziehungen”.

of reciprocity.¹³⁸ But the most interesting aspect of ZiJ's evaluation was not so much the seemingly sensible decision to focus on the subjectivity of love, nor the perhaps less realistic notion that these feelings needed to be reciprocated to be "real love." Instead, what was striking in a historical perspective was the generally positive evaluation of love and the tacit agreement with the respondents that love should always be the primary reason to get married, regardless of potential economic risks and social difficulties that may come in the future. For almost two decades experts had been highly skeptical of the emotional aspects of marriage. The common understanding in the 1950s and early 1960s had been that although love was surely good in theory, people needed to be extremely careful with emotional impulses as soon as it came to making decisions about future partners. This was particularly true for women, who, it was said, were more prone to irrational decision-making. In contrast to these earlier assumptions, *Junge Partner* concluded that it "doubtlessly" boded well for the institution of marriage that 99% of the respondents reported they had met the love of their lives, and that their love would last forever.¹³⁹ The somewhat naïve optimism aside – in particular in light of the ever growing divorce rates in the 1970s – this signaled a clear change in the official attitude toward romantic love. A similar development was also taking place in popular media.

Although popular magazines had never disowned the idea of love quite as much as experts and party representatives, it was clear that emotions in marriage were considered more important in the 1970s than had earlier been the case. "It is all about love," *Für Dich* declared in 1970, referring to the "organization of happiness" in "a good

¹³⁸ BArch Berlin, DC/4/2060 *Junge Partner*, "Kapitel 3: Einstellungen zur Liebe".

¹³⁹ BArch Berlin, DC/4/2060 *Junge Partner*, 3.3. "Zuversicht der richtigen Partnerfindung".

marriage.”¹⁴⁰ This was a reaction to a story published a few weeks earlier about how women needed to find a way out of an “emotional impasse.” The signature Renate H. wrote about how her husband had left her for another, younger woman, but then came back to ask for forgiveness. He finally moved back in with the family. But though things may looked normal to outside observers, she had lost that one thing that held her marriage together and for which she had married in the first place: love. She was even ready to give her husband an honest second chance, but how was she going to do this when the love between them was not there anymore, she asked.¹⁴¹ Her problems, she wrote, were of a private nature and the solution could only be found in the emotional ties between her and her husband.

As Renate H’s letter, as well as the ZiJ study indicated, gender inequalities in the private sphere were still common in the 1970s. In a 1974 interview one couple asserted that when it came to the household, the GDR was still a *Männergesellschaft*, a world dominated by men. In fact, they continued, “this is true for the rest of our society as well ... one need only to look at the *Politbüro*”.¹⁴² Whereas cases of actual gender inequality had surfaced in public debates throughout the existence of the GDR, they had almost always revolved around practical issues and the ubiquitous question of women in the workforce. But just as West Germans on the other side of the border had begun to see the development of a “new kind of man” around this time, East Germans embarked on a discussion about the importance of men’s emotions; both in terms of male identity and as an important aspect of gender equality in marriage. Advice books, weekly magazines, and even government reports began to take an interest in the role love and other emotions

¹⁴⁰ “Ganz unter uns gesagt,” *Für Dich*, 09/1970.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Barbara Bronnen, *Liebe, Ehe und Sexualität*, 13.

played for men's inner life. This had been an almost completely neglected subject in previous decades.

Kurt L. Rhön, one of many male readers of *Für Dich* wrote that there was a lack of public acceptance of men's display of emotions. "Why is it that young men can't cry?," Rhön asked. "Tears come from a variety of different reasons. Is it not the case that we all feel the need to cry when faced with pain, or with anger and worry over things we feel incapable to overcome?" To substantiate his argument Rhön continued, "Children, boys and girls alike, are not ashamed to show their tears when they are sad, or to open their hearts when they love someone." The problem, he concluded, was that "these qualities are gradually denied the young man as he gets older and learns how to 'keep his composure.'¹⁴³

In essence, Rhön's letter was an indictment of social conventions. It questioned gendered emotional practices that had been in place since the early years of the GDR. And though Rhön presented his thoughts in the context of childrearing, his ideas was also part of a larger discussion of the upbringing of young men in a "new era." Recent studies of the private sphere have emphasized women's increasing dissatisfaction with love, sexuality, and domestic life in general in the 1970s.¹⁴⁴ This is an important and correct assessment of the period, which is further backed by East German publications beginning to appear in the late 1960s.¹⁴⁵ But though this process gave rise to new notions of

¹⁴³ "Haben Jungen Gefühl?," *Für Dich*, 7/1971.

¹⁴⁴ See for example, Betts, *Within Walls*, p. 110.

¹⁴⁵ Examples of books expressing women's dissatisfaction with both emotional needs and practical sides of domestic life include Christa, Wolf, *Nachdenken Über Christa T.* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1968); Brigitte Reimann, *Franziska Linkerhand: Roman.* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1974); and Maxie Wander, *Guten Morgen, Du Schöne: Protokolle Nach Tonband* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977).

masculinity – both implicitly and openly, as in the examples above – the East German version of the “new man” has rarely been subject of historical investigation.

It should be stressed that the forces leading to a reevaluation of men’s sensibilities, emotional needs, and responsibilities in marriage appear to differ from those leading to the concurrent West German concept of the “new man”. The GDR did not experience the radical politics of the late 1960s, nor did it have a strong feminist movement, both of which were important for West German developments.¹⁴⁶ Instead, East Germany saw a relatively depoliticized public dialogue about sexuality in the 1970s, which in turn created a backdrop for discussions of a wide variety of intimate issues concerning both men and women. Thus, Siegfried Schnabel explained in one of the most read books ever in East Germany how equal rights in the home was the foundation of any true love relationship.¹⁴⁷ The gender equality per se was not new, but how it had moved from being a social concern to something considered equally important, and indeed necessary for the private sphere. Equal rights were suddenly defined as sexual rights and the right to emotional wellbeing. Using statistical data, Schnabl showed what he considered a deplorable low number of orgasms among East German women.¹⁴⁸ Making sure to also represent the male side of the population, he added statistics illustrating the

¹⁴⁶ New research suggests that the social, cultural and even political upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the West left their mark on Eastern Europe too. In particular, work on the Eastern European ‘1968’ and its aftermath has suggested that activists were well informed about events in the West. Peter Apor and James Mark, “Mobilising Generation: the Idea of 1968 in Hungary,” in *Talkin’ ‘bout my Generation: Conflicts of Generation Building and Europe’s ‘1968’*, ed. Anna von der Goltz, (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011), 97–115. See also, Josie McLellan, “Glad to be Gay Behind the Wall: Gay and Lesbian Activism in 1970s East Germany,” *History Workshop Journal*, 74 (2012): 105.

¹⁴⁷ Siegfried Schnabl, *Mann und Frau Intim* (Berlin: VEB Verlag Volk und Gesundheit, 1978), 55.

¹⁴⁸ While some have argued that this was a sign of a society open to sexual questions, at least in comparison with the West, Josie McLellan insists that it tended to conceal the fact that East German writers on sex were anything but permissive. McLellan, *Love In the Time of Communism*, 85.

extent of erectile dysfunction.¹⁴⁹ Schnabl's general answer of how to come to terms with these problems was, as might be expected, greater equality in the private sphere. To be sure, he explained, society needed to offer the right conditions for such equality to succeed. But in contrast to earlier advice manuals, society – apart from being the obvious context in which married life played out – did not take up any considerable part of Schnabl's theories. This is not to say that sexual relations between men and women were more equal in practice. Some have even gone so far as to argue that like a West German man in his position, East German men were “free to sleep around, remarry without consequences.” While such practices are hard to measure, we can still see how the discussion among marriage advisors was increasingly concerned with sexual equality.¹⁵⁰

A more specific answer to problems in the intimate sphere, which Schnabl and many others in the 1970s saw as the number one key to marital happiness, was to change men's attitudes of female sexuality.¹⁵¹ To start with, they needed to be more knowledgeable of female needs. Paraphrasing Honoré de Balzac, Schnabl wrote, “no man should get married before he has studied the female anatomy.”¹⁵² If East German society were to reach the levels of marital happiness for which it was equipped, he argued, men needed to take greater interest in, and responsibility of, both female sexuality and women's emotional needs. While such statements still assumed women to be naturally more emotional than men, it was nonetheless a step in the direction of also embracing male emotionality. In this vein, *Mittag des Lebens*, an advice book in the literary genre,

¹⁴⁹ Schnabl, *Mann und Frau Intim*, 15.

¹⁵⁰ McLellan, *Love In the Time of Communism*, 74–5.

¹⁵¹ The ZiJ study *Junge Partner* and statistics from marriage counseling bureaus did not confirm this conviction. Issues with sexual satisfaction and equality in the intimate sphere were indeed high on the lists of why people got divorced, but these numbers never came close to problems with alcoholism and infidelity – both of which men were accountable for to a much higher degree than their wives. See BArch Berlin, DC/4/2060 ZiJ Untersuchung *Junge Partner & Lebensgestaltung Junger Ehen* (1974).

¹⁵² Schnabl, *Mann und Frau Intim*, 80.

could tell a story about a young man having problems expressing his feelings in front of his father. But after witnessing his father embrace another man who had lost his wife, and seeing the two men shed tears together, the young man understood that “a father is not only a father,” he “can also feel sorrow and distress.”¹⁵³ This is not to say that men’s feelings were all of a sudden out in the open. A sign of the somewhat hesitant and gradual process of accepting men’s feelings could be gleaned from the ending of the story about the young man and his father. On their way back home from where they had experienced the emotionally charged moment, the father told his son, “it is not really necessary to talk about this to anyone else, ok?”¹⁵⁴

Emancipation of women in public life, along with the idea of greater emotional responsibility, caused many men to feel threatened. In one counseling session a frustrated husband told about his wife who had moved to Berlin to study at the university. In Berlin she had found another man who was more understanding and easier to talk to than the husband. Faced with divorce, the husband explained why he felt the situation to be so deeply unfair. “What is it that she wants?” he asked the therapist. “I help her out with everything, I am fully for equal rights, I even allowed her to go study in Berlin. And this is what I get for having acted like a modern man?”¹⁵⁵ In another, story published in *Für Dich*, a woman had spent much time and energy on her education to take the step up from vendor to schoolteacher. Her studies had opened up a new world of ideas to her, which she was eager to discuss with her husband. He, however, remained cold and reserved.¹⁵⁶ In their letters to the magazine, readers seemed in full agreement: the husband needed to

¹⁵³ Walter Bauer, “Die Tränen eines Mannes,” in Fanny Herklotz Hg., *Mittag des Lebens: Erzählungen um Liebe und Ehe* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1974), 146.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ “Der Mustergatte,” *Für Dich*, 17/1973.

¹⁵⁶ “Hör mir doch mal zu!,” *Für Dich*, 29/1972.

rethink his ways and learn how to speak with his wife. Among the responses could be found a letter from Hanna and Gehard Seifert, a couple from the city of Reichenbach. In one of the more revealing expressions of the new zeitgeist, the Seifert's wrote that "the new woman (*neue Leitbild der Frau*) needs to be complemented by a new man in order to once and for all get rid of old ideas and customs."¹⁵⁷ The question whether men and women could live up to these new ideals would be central to the marriage debates in the last decade of the German Democratic Republic.

¹⁵⁷ "Neues Männerleitbild vonnöten?" *Für Dich*, 29/1972.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the 1970s both German states dealt with questions that were the result of developments in the 1960s. West Germany saw a previously united New Left dissolve into fractions and groups with diverging interests. At the same time conservative voices called for an undoing of the set of values and attitudes ushered in by the radical politics of the late 1960s. Looking back at the 1970s today, many people on the Left maintain that the cultural conflicts of these years eventually resulted in more liberal and democratic values.¹⁵⁸ Conservatives, however, point to the detrimental effects of the counter-culture.¹⁵⁹ As this chapters has shown, though, neither the Left nor the Right came out as winners of the culture wars, at least not in the broad discussions about love, marriage, and family. The debates about the virtues of marriage, which in many ways was a microcosm of a larger discussion about modernity and its effects on people's lives, resulted in a loss of belief in society as a guarantor for a safe and stable life. Society had become a burden for the individual to overcome rather than a domain one could change for the better, either through the means of radical politics or the reestablishment of conservative Christian values.

East Germany had to deal with the aftermath of a different kind of 1960s. After a massive effort to politicize and essentially disband the private sphere, including marriage, the 1970s was a time of partial ideological inertia. This did not mean freedom from intrusion by the state. What we see, though, are new generations of East Germans carrying the discussion about the individual's role in society into the 1970s by

¹⁵⁸ Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Hg., *1968: Die Revolte* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2007), and Paul Hockenos, *Joschka Fischer and the Making of the Berlin Republic: an Alternative History of Postwar Germany*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

¹⁵⁹ See for example "Pädophilenfreundliche Artikel im 'Pro Familia Magazin'," *Die Zeit*, 10/8, 2013.

emphasizing the importance of self-realization for a fulfilling life. State-backed marriage advisors found it imperative to reach out and educate these young citizens before they fell prey to “bourgeois individualism,” that would lead them away from the path toward “Socialist love.” But in order to reach out to cynical, young East Germans, advisors had to rid their arguments of the ideological dogmatism of the previous decade. Individualism and concerns about the youth were not the only points on which the East and West Germans converged in their concerns about love and marriage in the 1970s.

In spite of East German calls for gender equality and the New Left’s promises to abandon old family structures, neither state really lived up to such assurances of equal rights. Traditional gender roles still dominated family life in the 1980s. To resolve this persisting problem, experts in both German states discussed the hidden possibilities of emotions. In East Germany the emphasis was mostly on romantic love, which had never been a negative notion per se, but always considered problematic because of its ostensible irrational aspects and close ties to bourgeois consumer culture. In the 1970s this did not only change to the point where romantic love became an integral part of Socialist morality. Many advisors also insisted that dynamic families demanded greater emotional responsibility from men. Husbands needed to understand the emotional world of their wives, which, they argued, was closely related to women’s sexual needs.

The conviction that men had to access a previously untapped emotional resource was also prevalent in the West. The “new man” had to be better at understanding his partner’s feelings, but also more emotional in general. Women, on the other hand, were told to dial down the irrational side of their emotional impulses in order to make clear and sensible decisions. Not least when it came to choosing a suitable husband. In both

German states the new partner ideals were often as confusing and contradictory as they had been in the past, which created anxiety, and for some men a feeling that they were losing their positions of power and authority. The fascination with emotions would not go away as we move into the 1980s, but the ideal of the “new man” would be challenged. So would the negative assessment of men’s and women’s possibilities to break through social restraints to form their own lives.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Marketplace of Love 1983–1989

INTRODUCTION

The 1980s has garnered a lot of attention in recent German historiography. The main reason for this attentiveness to the period can be spelled “1989” and German unification.¹ Of the many studies published about the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of East Germany, and the subsequent process of merging what some have called “one nation in two states,” the politics and social decline of the GDR has been especially interesting to historians.² The same holds true for the growing religious activity in East Germany, which, with a few exceptions, have been almost exclusively examined because of its role in the fall of the regime.³ While this historical interest in the 1980s stands in stark contrast to the relatively small number of studies about the preceding decade, the sheer volume of publications could be somewhat misleading. A closer look at the East and West German historiography of the 1980s reveals a dearth in works dealing with social and cultural history connecting with the developments of earlier decades. In these histories the 1970s and 1980s have tended to be treated either as the “aftermath of 1968,”

¹ For an exhaustive list of publications on these events, see M. E. Sarotte, *The Collapse: the Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2014) and M. E. Sarotte, *1989: the Struggle to Create Post-cold War Europe*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

² Christoph Kleßmann, *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation. Deutsche Geschichte 1955–1970* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

³ See Sarotte, *The Collapse*, 30ff, for a discussion of this trend. It should also be said that there a large body of research on religion in both East and West Germany in the 1980s, but as with most German religious history it is confined to either theological issues or other questions mostly related to religious studies. My point here is that there have been relatively few studies dealing with religion (mainstream or otherwise) outside the context of 1989 in cultural, political, and social histories of the Federal Republic and the GDR.

or the turn to more conservative values.⁴ Similar trends can be seen in works on marriage, family and sexuality.⁵ An excellent exception is Josie McLellan who, in her history of sexuality in the GDR, has paid close attention to developments in the last decade before the end of the Cold War.⁶ As her research shows, it would be a mistake to treat the 1980s as a mere lead-up to the end of East and West Germany as sovereign states.

In order to understand the changing meaning of marriage in the 1980s, we need to take long-term perspectives by interrelating memories, experiences and expectations. For example, the growing focus on self-realization in the East and West German marriage discourse during these years cannot be understood without reaching back to the increasing individualism in the 1970s. In the following we will see how dreams of realizing career goals and other ambitions contained in the term *Selbstverwirklichung* became an integral part of public discussions of marriage in both German states. At the same time, West Germans also expressed desires to move on past the self-centered 1970s, which many thought had been a mere egotistical pursuit of sexual desires. The result was the *neue Treue* (new faithfulness). This chapter explores how these ideals – on the one hand a growing individualism, and on the other hand a renewed faith in marriage as a dual enterprise – was negotiated.

⁴ Peter Hoeres, “Von der ‘Tendenzwende’ zur ‘geistig-moralischen Wende’: Konstruktion und Kritik konservativer Signaturen in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 61 (2013): 93–119; Philipp Gassert, Tim Geiger and Hermann Wentker (eds), *Zweiter Kalter Krieg und Friedensbewegung: Der NATO-Doppelbeschluss in deutsch-deutscher und internationaler Perspektive* (Munich, Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011).

⁵ Elizabeth Heineman and Dagmar Herzog do this but from different perspectives. Elizabeth Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?: Women and Marital Status In Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), and Herzog, Dagmar, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality In Twentieth-century Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁶ Josie McLellan, *Love In the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality In the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). McLellan also discusses the 1980s in Josie McLellan, “Glad to be Gay Behind the Wall: Gay and Lesbian Activism in 1970s East Germany,” *History Workshop Journal*, 74 (2012): 105.

The 1980s was also the decade when the reevaluation of marriage among young East Germans reached a point where it was still seen as desirable, to be sure, but not more important than any other form of relationship. Such a change of the meaning of marriage never happened in the West. As we shall see, though, the skepticism as to whether emotions were sufficient to ground a solid foundation of a happy marriage, which had been the opinion in the early postwar years, had almost vanished among experts and legislators in the Federal Republic and the GDR alike.⁷ What caused this sudden interest in intimate emotions, such as feelings of love and deep affection for one's partner? And how does the renewed fascination for emotions in married life relate to a desire for self-realization, on the one hand, and the *neue Treue*, on the other hand? While attempting to explore these questions, this chapter also endeavors find out if the 1980s indeed represented a turning point in German history, or whether we can connect some of the changes to developments in the preceding decades.

⁷ For a study that points to similar changes among the remaining fractions of the New Left in West Germany, see Joachim C. Häberlen and Jake P. Smith, "Struggling for Feelings: The Politics of Emotions in the Radical New Left in West Germany, c.1968–84," *Contemporary European History* 23 (2014): 615 – 637.

WEST GERMANY

By the late 1970s, many of the social and cultural debates that seemed so urgent only half a decade earlier had begun to turn tepid. However, the trends toward more individualistic definitions of marital happiness, which had partly been a result of these debates, continued to spread in the Federal Republic. Instead of an institution of shared experiences, some West Germans began to see marriage as a mere vehicle of personal fulfillment. This sustained focus on the self was also compatible with broader tendencies in the mid to late 1980s of defining personal success. While not entirely new, concepts such as “the [marriage] market,” and “investing in the future,” with a reference to a potential partner, became increasingly commonplace in the West German marriage discourse. There were several benefits to this way of thinking. “The market,” as one historian has noted, seemed to have no history — it had become “natural,” the lens through which people viewed the world — and it even seemed to promise the ability to skip time.⁸ What had begun as reaction to the upheavals of the New Left in the late 1960s had transformed into an enterprise driven more by market oriented thinking than by the social and cultural issues that had been at the center of the marriage debate some ten years earlier. Some have gone so far as to argue that West Germany went through structural upheavals of such revolutionary quality during this time that their effects, in all social spheres, are still with us today.⁹

Woven into this increasingly self-centered marriage discourse was an increasing conviction that advanced technology could help people find a perfect partner. This was

⁸ Daniel T. Rogers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 221ff.

⁹ Dietmar Süß, “En Route to a Post-Industrial Society? Western German Contemporary History Writing on the 1970s and 1980s,” *Contemporary European History* 18 (2009): 522.

nothing new. In the 1960s computer powered dating agencies offered their services to those who could afford them. But though “computer dating” had been widely advertised in the late 1960s and early 1970s, professional marriage counselors had remained skeptical of such practices. This changed in the mid-1980s when computers, camcorders, and other electronic equipment became more commonplace in people’s everyday life. The magazine *Brigitte* began organizing mixers for its readers called “computer events,” in which an ostensibly failsafe computer selection of partners vouched for success. According to the magazine, their previous meetings had brought together an astonishing one hundred sixty thousand people in a perfect marketplace of love.¹⁰ For those less inclined to partake in giant social functions, there was the option of video dating. Either through direct links provided by dating agencies, or prerecorded videotapes sent in the mail, people could experience “their first rendezvous on a personal TV-screen.”¹¹ Not only individualism, but also the mixing of technology and personal life had, by the late 1980s, become mainstream.

In many ways, then, the 1980s can be considered a distinct break with the past. It was a period in which some of the trends that had begun in the 1970s, such as an increased focus on self-realization, spread and intensified to a degree warranting the notion of a new era. This sense of change appears even more justified when examining the political scene. After having lost power to the Social Democrats (SPD) in 1969, the Christian Democrats (CDU) regained their leading position after a vote of no confidence

¹⁰ “Brigitte-Aktion Treffpunkt – Lernen Sie nette Leute kennen!,” *Brigitte*, 4/2, 1980.

¹¹ “Das erste Rendezvous findet auf dem Bildschirm statt,” *Brigitte*, 12/28, 1983.

in 1982, followed by a resounding victory in the federal elections of 1983.¹² In many recent accounts of this time, then, the early 1980s not only marked a return to conservative politics. It also meant the end of the first Social-Liberal Era Germany had experienced since the end of WWII. Others have pointed to continuities in economic patterns and the enhanced scientific approach to social questions, which in some ways refutes the notion of drastic change.¹³ Few, however, explore the fact that many West Germans at the time felt the late 1970s and early 1980s to be distinctly different from earlier postwar years. That is, the spiritual-moral turnaround (*geistig-moralische Wende*), as some historians have called the early 1980s, is not only a matter of historical hindsight.¹⁴ The ways in which conservatives in general, and Christian conservatives in particular, imagined the recent past worked as a powerful influence on the discussion of family and marriage during this time.

Marriage, Christianity, and a New Past

Why, *Brigitte* asked in 1986, had everyone all of a sudden begun to romanticize the 1960s? The answer, wrote the magazine, was that “da war schon was los!” but also that the 1960s was an end of an era.¹⁵ The author of the article lamented the end of a time

¹² The CDU/CSU won 48.8%, and with the FDP, who had won 7.0% of the votes, they had a strong majority in the Bundestag. In comparison, the SPD got 38.2% of the votes, which was their worst result since 1961.

¹³ Depending on their own involvement, political sympathies, but also on the topic of investigation, historians are divided about the benefits of the Social-Liberal politics of the late 1960s and the 1970s. See Martin H. Geyer, ed., *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945*, Vol. 6: 1974–1982 (Baden-Baden: Nomos-Verlag, 2008); Andreas Wirsching, *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Abschied vom Provisorium: Geschichte der Bundesrepublik 1982–1989/09* (Munich: DVA, 2006); Konrad Jarausch, ed., *Das Ende der Zuversicht? Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2008); Thomas Hertfelder and Andreas Rödder, eds., *Modell Deutschland. Erfolgsgeschichte oder Illusion?* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2007); Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, and Lutz Raphael, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2008).

¹⁴ Hoeres, “Von der ‘Tendenzwende’, 93–119, and Gassert, *Zweiter Kalter Krieg*.

¹⁵ “Warum schwärmen alle von den 60er Jahren?,” *Brigitte*, 4/2, 1986. The German phrasing was “Die 60er Jahre: Da ging was zu Ende.”

when everyone had been “flower children,” “sexual revolutionaries,” and “happy anarchists.” This positive experience culminated in 1968, but faded away only a few years later the article concluded. It might not be surprising that someone who had been at the center of the New Left would look back at the 1960s with nostalgia. What is striking is the sheer number of accounts in the 1980s relating to the first two postwar decades as if they, once and for all, had been consigned to the history books. That is, there seemed to have been a feeling that a new era had begun. Whereas marriage experts, equal rights activists, and most other people concerned with the fate of marriage in West Germany up to this point had been relating to the time after 1945 as a continuum in which they played a distinct role, there was all of a sudden a growing sense of a “before” and an “after.” This was evidenced not least in numerous confident balance sheets, contrasting the post-1945 past in ways, which, instead of giving a sense of continuity, invoked the strangeness of the past.

A telling example of this shift could be seen in 1981, when *Brigitte* proudly reported about transformations women had undergone over the previous thirty years. To underline the progress, pictures showing two women in their twenties walking down the street. One was from 1951 and the other from 1981. Below the picture of the two women was printed the headline “This is what we have accomplished.”¹⁶ As if the visual disparity between the two pictures were not enough to convince readers, the caption explained that not only did statistics of women’s position in society prove great strides forward, progress was also obvious in the way they dressed. Instead of being “prim and stiff[mannered],” women were now “sporty and casual,” wearing pants and sweaters

¹⁶ “Das haben wir gut hingekriegt,” *Brigitte*, 8/12, 1981. This is by no means the only piece in which the 1980s is contrasted against the postwar past and described as a new era. Another example is “Nie wieder Krieg!,” *Brigitte* 1/23, 1985.

instead of ankle length dresses. Together with numbers pointing to the increase of employed and well educated women in West Germany, the accompanying image made it clear that the postwar decades had turned into a foreign landscape.¹⁷

This positive depiction of what the feminist movement had accomplished had clear links to the goals of the New Left of the late 1960s. It was also an obvious continuation of the individualist inclinations of the 1970s, which had signaled a path to human happiness beginning with introspection. Yet the values invoked in the early 1980s were an indication that the time of social pessimism was beginning to give way to more optimistic sentiments. While this did not necessarily mean an across-the-board abandonment of old ideals, the public discussion about love, sex, and marriage that had been so contentious in the 1970s nonetheless seemed to soften, although not fade away altogether. Many of the previous disagreements were still present, but they were more subtle and presented in a less confrontational manner. The reason for this might be found in a turn to more conservative values in general, but also in the CDU's reorientation toward social issues. The latter also provided the party with a semantic lever, since the Social Democrats could no longer claim that the CDU constantly tried to delegitimize social-liberal reforms.

In mainstream popular culture, the discussion of marriage took the form of values vacillating between individual freedom and feminist traditions on the one hand, and a desire to display marriage as a strong and stabilizing social institution on the other. In

¹⁷ Historians such as Tony Judt and others have argued that the 1970s was a time when the "postwar" period ended. See Tony Judt, *Postwar: a History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), and Hartmut Kaelble, *The 1970s in Europe: A Period of Disillusionment or Promise?* (London: German Historical Institute, 2010), 37ff. This seems to be true for a variety of issues, in particular when considered from an economic point of view. Yet, the shift in perception of the past among people at the time, did not seem to happen until the late 1970s and, as I show here, in the early to mid 1980s.

1985, West German readers of *Brigitte* were told, “for five years now, we have been talking about the ‘neue Treue [new faithfulness]’.”¹⁸ German women were fed up with the era of open relationships and free sexuality, the magazine informed. Relying on international authorities of the feminist movement such as Susan Brownmiller and Germaine Greer, *Brigitte* was convinced that the turn away from the frivolous sexual behavior of the 1970s was real, despite statistics pointing the other direction. Psychoanalyst and author of *Utopie der Treue*, Marina Gambaroff, as well as actress Erika Pluhar backed this opinion. Pluhar had even published a series of diaries where she wrote that while sex was a necessary part of a good relationship, it was by no means enough, since couples also needed strong emotional ties to each other to be truly happy.¹⁹

Seemingly anxious not to sound too conservative, *Brigitte* maintained that this did not mean a return to the 1950s.²⁰ It was a return to love, faithfulness, and endearment. What was gone, though, was “a time when men and women believed that sex alone made people happy,” – a clear reference to the 1970s.²¹ According to *Brigitte*’s interpretation of the new feminist consensus, people could finally break loose from the idea that reaching an orgasm had to be the foundation of marital success and emotional well-being.²² Even in popular music, some suggested, mendacious kitsch had been replaced by real-life

¹⁸ “Zweisamkeit auf Zeit – Die neue Treue,” *Brigitte*, 8/17, 1985.

¹⁹ Marina Gambaroff, *Utopie der Treue* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1984), and Erika Pluhar, *Aus Tagebüchern* (Stuttgart, Deutscher Bücherbund, 1981).

²⁰ *Brigitte* did not explicitly write the 1950s but with the decoupling of the first postwar decades with the “new era” of the 1980s, this was more than implied.

²¹ “Zweisamkeit auf Zeit – Die neue Treue,” *Brigitte*, 8/17, 1985.

²² This had been an idea preached by psychoanalysts such as Wilhelm Reich, whose writings had been a particularly important source of inspiration for the New Left in the 1970s. Of particular importance for the New Left was Wilhelm Reich, *Die Sexualität im Kulturkampf. Zur sozialistischen Umstrukturierung des Menschen* (Kopenhagen: Verlag für Sexualpolitik, 1936).

representations of love.²³ In other words, the “new times” and new marriage values of the 1980s were not only a result of Helmut Kohl’s Christian Democratic “geistig-moralische Wende.” Many of those supporting the “neue Treue” were, as these examples clearly show, feminists self-identifying as New Left radicals fed up with the hypocrisy and overly sexualized marriage discourse of the 1970s. At the same time, we also see the creation of a myth where the 1970s was depicted as more liberal than it actually was.²⁴ Thus, the spiritual-moral turnaround of the 1980s was both a continuation of the Christian conservative “counter movement” of the 1970s, and a feminist call to come to terms with the core values of the radical Left.

Supporters of conservative marriage ideals in the 1970s had, in addition to a small number of key publications, largely relied on the force of tradition to get their message across. In the late 1980s, conservative publications were increasing. They promised to save marriage from growing secularism, an overly sexualized society, and the fact the people just did not seem to take the sacred vows of married life as seriously as they had once done.²⁵ Far from all of these books, however, could be said to represent a simple return to the values of the 1950s. One example was Hans Kramer, who in 1982 argued that to effectively deal with the problem of marriage among the younger generations, Christians were doing themselves a disfavor when evoking “an ostensible idyllic past of

²³ In *Brigitte* journalist Fee Zschocke compared the 1955 hit *Steig' in das Traumboot der Liebe* with Herbert Grönemeyer's *Total egal*, which she described as a “decidedly realistic confession of love.” Zschocke was the author of a number of books in the 1980s, including *Er oder ich – Männergeschichten* (Berlin: Verlag Berlin/Jossa). She was also the author behind the *Brigitte* article “Zweisamkeit auf Zeit – Die neue Treue”.

²⁴ While the 1970s in many ways has to be seen as a time when a more liberal view of sexuality and open relationships was introduced, it was also a decade in which the moral conservatism of the Adenauer era by no means had disappeared. For some, the late 1960s even proved a revival of marriage values built on the mainstream Christian conservatism of the 1950s.

²⁵ Some titles were very clear about this message. One example was Hans Erich Troje, *Gestohlene Liebe - Zum Problem der Rettung der Ehe* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Fromman Verlag, 1988).

previous generations.”²⁶ There never was a “heile Welt [ideal world]” of married life where people lived according to a Christian family blueprint. And still, “men of the Church” maintained that Europe’s cultural heritage, built on the “bedrock of ascetic marriage ideals,” was being squandered. These “men of the Church,” Kramer continued, wanted to hold on to, or even restore an ideal world of the past that never existed.²⁷

For Hans Kramer, the question at this point was to figure out “what, in the message of Christ, will let us find a new [way forward].” What, he asked, led to “real happiness?”²⁸ The answers, at least the ones offered in *Ehe war und wird anders*, must have been rather disappointing for readers searching for a new road to “real happiness.” In fourteen points, Kramer offered little, if anything new other than broad generalizations and circular arguments. Point one in Kramer’s manifesto explained that married life demanded of modern Christians to think critically of themselves, of the world around them, and of other people. Not in a negative way, but analytically, using the “logics of the Christian faith.” This would help them feel piety for both God and other humans. Therefore, the next point declared, Christians should make sure to take to heart the best about love and marriage from both Church and secular society.²⁹ These, and similar generalizations makes it difficult to pinpoint exactly what Kramer considered to be new in his “modern take on the Christian marriage.” His imprecision and nonspecific terminology was echoed in numerous other Christian marriage manuals.³⁰ Even *The Evangelical Church in Germany’s* (EKD) official decree on marriage published by a member organization in 1981 followed the same pattern. “The Christian marriage,” it

²⁶ Hans Kramer, *Ehe war und wird anders* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1982) – Back cover.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

³⁰ For a representative example, see Marina Gambaroff, *Utopie der Treue*.

read, “is open for change.” “This is why we ask young people in particular to contribute to the renewal of the institution of marriage in our contemporary society,” the EKD concluded.³¹

As in earlier periods the Christian community was also home to numerous liberal theologians and other official spokespersons. In 1983, protestant minister Helga Frisch’s published an alternative vision of Christian partnership. Much like her conservative fellow believers it was an attempt to deal with the “marriage crisis of the 1970s.”³² But Frisch, who had studied theology during the formative years of the mid-1960s, had a rather different idea than her colleagues of how to come to terms with the ever-rising divorce rates and general skepticism about the institution of marriage. Perhaps the New Left had been right, she argued. Maybe the institution of marriage itself was the problem. Or at least the way marriage was conceived of in Christian, as well as in secular legal doctrine. The idea of lifelong partnership between a man and a woman was not wrong. But instead of the straightjacket imposed by traditional values, Frisch envisioned a form of “Christian relationship” in which new possibilities, not conceivable in a “traditional marriage,” were allowed to develop freely.

According to Frisch, Catholic and Evangelical marriage counselors did a great service to the public by bringing the Christian message to couples in need. Unfortunately conservative pundits did not understand that they ultimately provided the wrong solution to the problem, she continued.³³ Frisch insisted that Church leaders had to see beyond the structures of traditional marriage in order to find a solution to the problems at hand. In a

³¹ *Protocol from the German Bishop’s Conference in the Fall of 1981* (Hannover: Kirchenkanzlei der EKD und Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Bonn, 1981).

³² Helga Frisch, *Ehe?: Eine Pastorin plädiert für neue Formen der Partnerschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1983).

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

similar way to many of those in the student movement who had been critical of any kind of authority, she wrote that no “legal statutes are required when two people truly love and trust each other, because human emotions should never be regulated by the law.”³⁴ In fact, Fischer continued, emotions alone should be the deciding factor in a relationship. This was a continuation of a tradition of antiauthoritarian ideas of love coming from within the Christian community that had started in the late 1960s.

Young, Independent, and Happy

Stepping back for a moment, it might be worth once more to consider the concerns state representatives as well as professional marriage advisors such as Helga Fischer, Hans Kramer, and numerous others had expressed for over thirty years. Regardless of their political and religious affiliation, the vast majority of these experts had warned about an impending marriage crisis since the early years of the 1950s. As in earlier decades, statistics from the mid 1980s show that such anxieties emanated from insecurities, real or imagined threats to cultural and political dominance, and a variety of other issues. Statistics and poll data from the mid 1980s show that just as in previous decades sentiment among ordinary Germans and the viewpoint of the experts rarely overlapped. For example, despite worries about the deterioration of family life since the end of the war, people holding the view that family is important for a happy life had changed very little over the years. Those in favor of this notion made up 78% of the population in 1953, compared to a 73% in 1979.³⁵ There were, however, opinion shifts that might not seem

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Renate Köcher, *Ehe und Familie- Einstellungen zu Ehe und Familie im Wandel der Zeit* (Stuttgart: Institut für Demoskopie, 1985), 5.

significant at a first glance, but put in the right context indicate small but revealing shifts in the popular mind.

Asked about the most significant component in a *meaningful* life, the popularity of personal happiness had gone up from 48% to 57% between 1974 and 1985, whereas the answer “that my family is provided for” (which was the most popular choice) had plunged from 67% to 59% during the same timespan.³⁶ Seen in a longer perspective these numbers were not so strange. Recent historical research, as well as contemporary sources, point to the 1970s as the decade of growing individualism.³⁷ The influence of the New Left’s credo of social inclusiveness on West German popular culture gave the impression of a society embracing solidarity and communal spirit. However, in the wake of the many splinter groups, failed experiments, and confusion caused by the clash of so many new ideals, many in the New Left soon felt disillusioned and deceived. For a significant number of people, this development in the early 1970s led to the conclusion that the individual, rather than the community or society at large, had to be the starting point for a meaningful life. This turned out to be a rather pessimistic view of what the self was capable of, and many psychologists and other marriage advisors had a gloomy outlook on happiness in long-term relationships. Statistics from the *Institut für Demoskopie* give further credence to this interpretation. It also point to increasingly self-centered notions of individualism. Between the mid 1970s and mid 1980s, people seeing the purpose of life to be to “just enjoy themselves” increased drastically from 27% to 45%.

Congruent with these numbers, the idea of self-realization was a central theme in almost every marriage advice column and self-help book published in the 1980s. The

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁷ For an overview, see Kaelble, *The 1970s in Europe*.

tendency to zero in on people's need to realize their dreams and ambitions was in part a consequence of the feminist movement's demand for more influence among women in a society that was still decidedly unequal. This was especially true when it came to the household and other family related issues. There were also a growing number of calls for greater acceptance of male self-realization. In some cases, the two ideals were at odds with each other, while in others, they were easier to reconcile. This had implications for the institution of marriage as well as the ways men and women perceived of marital happiness and family life.

Having children had for most observers been the obvious cornerstone in a happy marriage. It had also, almost by default, been considered a female concern. This was true regardless of the ideological or religious standpoint.³⁸ In the early 1980s, such attitudes began to change. "The question of why we are constantly having fewer children [in West Germany] has until recently been discussed as an exclusively female issue," *Brigitte* wrote in 1980, referring to feminist's call for greater female self-realization. What people did not seem to understand, *Brigitte* continued, was that "there are also many men who do not want to add children to the family."³⁹ The rationale behind the decision of not having children varied greatly in the diverse group of men *Brigitte* had interviewed when investigating the topic. Some expressed fear of having to care for and be responsible for a human life. Some meant that it would be unfair to put children into an already overpopulated world. Others, such as 32-year-old schoolteacher Volker Schang, said modern society was simply a too hostile environment for children to grow up in.⁴⁰ But if

³⁸ This debate could take the form of feminists arguing for more freedom and equality as well as conservatives wanting to keep the "traditional role of women as childrearsers" intact.

³⁹ "Kinder – nein danke!," *Brigitte*, 4/2, 1980.

⁴⁰ "Haben Männer Angst vor der Verantwortung?," *Brigitte*, 4/2, 1980.

these men differed in their initial justification for why they did not want to bring children into their marriages or, for some, future marriages, almost all of them agreed that an important underlying factor was that no children meant more time to realize one's dreams. In other words, a childless marriage freed up more time for the spouses' *Selbstverwirklichung*. Or as one interviewee explained his standpoint, it "would not only be a financial burden for us if my wife had to quit her job. It would also be impossible for me to take time off my job, which would be needed in order to be a good father." It is also worth noting that most of the men *Brigitte* interviewed were relatively young and early in their careers.

The question of marriage as an impediment on one's career and self-realization appeared to be partly determined by age. For example, only 14% of all men and women over the age of 55 thought marriage or long-term relationships were no longer viable options. The numbers were only slightly higher for people 35 to 55.⁴¹ It was among the younger generation, born after 1960, that the new attitudes were most apparent. This was particularly true for young men, of whom 40% had no interest in either marriage or long-term relations. The corresponding number for women under 25 was 35%.⁴² To say that this was only a result of increasing individualism would be wrong. Since the 1950s, divorce rates had been going up all the while the number of marriages had been going down. Secularization and numerous other factors also played a role in these changes.

It is noteworthy, through, that at a time of renewed belief in faithfulness (the *neue Treue*) and a strengthening of both religion and conservative ideals in the West German public sphere, the institution of marriage was losing ground. This gave rise to yet another

⁴¹ 19% for men and 17% for women.

⁴² Sample-Institut study presented in "Heiraten? Das liegt mir total fern," *Brigitte*, 11/28, 1984.

wave of worried pronouncements about a looming marriage crisis. Convinced that modernity in its late twentieth century form had devalued the status of love and marriage in favor of an ever growing individualism, some looked to the future with unease. One worried journalist investigating young people's professional advancement conjured up a scenario where the communal student quarters from the 1970s would end up as nursing homes for perpetual singles.⁴³ However, for the young men and women who author Matthias Horx had dubbed NEGOS (*nette Egoisten* or "nice egotists"), the value system prevalent in the flat-sharing communities of the old student movement belonged to the past.

A prime example of the NEGOS lifestyle was 26-year-old Patrik. With both a law degree and credentials as a journalist, Patrik preferred mineral water to beer, since "alcohol makes you stupid and lazy." and when asked about his opinion of potential future partners, he was pessimistic without being despondent. "I am completely indifferent to women who fall in love with me," he declared. "Or put another way," he continued to clarify, "the women I really want, I cannot get." In the end work was more important than loving relationships for Patrik. His last date, he confessed, felt neglected because he was working on a magazine article while they were out together. The story he was working on was exciting, he explained, the date less so.⁴⁴ Was this the result of an increasingly advanced consumer culture and brutal individualism? Some thought it was.

In 1983, reflecting on "women in the Individualization Process," sociologist Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim noted the dangers of completely eradicating material and

⁴³ "Keine Zeit für die Liebe," *Brigitte*, 1/13. 1988.

⁴⁴ "Keine Zeit für die Liebe," *Brigitte*, 1/13. 1988. Interview with "Patrik." Also see interview with "Daniel" in the article and Matthias Horx, *Die wilden Achtziger. Eine Zeitgeist- Reise durch die Bundesrepublik* (München: Hanser-Verlag, 1987).

social inequalities between men and women for the benefit of a *bien pensant* image of ever advancing “progress.”⁴⁵ To be sure, she wrote, women had certainly seen enormous improvements in their life situations over the last twenty years, but this had also led to new problems. As women were increasingly released from direct ties to the family they underwent an “individualization boost,” going from “ascribed” to “acquired” roles. This opened for a vast array of new chances for women. But at the same time, the individualization process brought on new uncertainties, conflicts, and pressures. For while women had surely acquired more freedom and mobility of late, they were still faced with the bulk of the household responsibilities as well as competition with men on a job market that was defined by male standards.⁴⁶ Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim was right in pointing to the lingering unwillingness among many men to contribute to “traditional female activities,” both inside and outside the home. Still, her analysis reflected more the self-help psychology of the 1970s (precarious individuals in a hostile society) than it did the positive individualism of the 1980s. But more importantly, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim’s chosen vantage point reveals a distinct generational disagreement about the question about marriage, love, and individualism in the 1980s. Because it was not only young men who made active decisions to put love and marriage to the side while focusing on career and other forms of *Selbstverwirklichung*.

Sabrina, a Munich art director of 27, described herself as “mostly brains,” and she was “completely fine with that.”⁴⁷ When not on the road for work she spent long hours in the office. On the weekends she liked to go disco dancing. Like most men in the same

⁴⁵ Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences* (London: SAGE, 2002), 54.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

⁴⁷ “Keine Zeit für die Liebe,” *Brigitte*, 1/13, 1988. Interview with “Sabrina.”

situation, Sabine was of the opinion that a person's limited energy resources needed to be spent wisely and on things that had a high chance of paying off. "Emotions cannot be assessed in advanced, and are therefore useless," she explained. Another woman, Meike, who was in the early stages of her career, emphasized the importance of emancipation for her life choices. She aspired to realize her full potentials, and did not want to be just another "assistant" on a male dominated job market.⁴⁸ "An emancipated relationship sounds like a very good idea," Meike commented, only to add that if she were ever to settle down her partner had to be a stay at home husband who was there at her beck and call. Just "to balance out" historical injustices, she put it. She also made clear that for the time being she was not likely to enter a long-term relationship. "Passion and constant creativity is something I need for myself and my work," she concluded.

Sabrina and Meike were not representative of an entire generation of women coming of age in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Still, their views on love and marriage were part of a larger trend toward realizing one's full potential by tending primarily to the needs of the self. Sabine and Meike chose to do so at the expense of a stable relationship. Women who did not want to go quite that far in the quest for self-realization still had to deal with the matter of, "how free are you in your love[life]?", which was a question magazines such as *Brigitte* and *Constanze* asked their readers over and over again.⁴⁹ Included in this set of issues was women's right their own sexuality. Psychologist Oskar Holzberg emphasized the importance of emotional involvement to deal with the pressures women faced in a competitive modern society. For Holzberg, emotions were not a barrier to be overcome in order be free and independent. On the

⁴⁸ Ibid., Interview with "Meike."

⁴⁹ "Wie frei sind Sie in der Liebe?," *Brigitte*, 3/21, 1984.

contrary, he wrote, “you will only find happiness in sexual fulfillment as long as you emerge yourself fully in your emotions.”⁵⁰ A personal computer might be useful for calculating the perfect sexual position, he added, but real satisfaction could only be experienced in moments of spontaneity. In a move that seemed to be based on Holzberg’s conviction that contemporary notions of love and sexuality were too technical, he attempted to re-enchant the nature of intimate human interaction. “The way we experience sensuousness,” he wrote, “also has to do with our larger world view. Do we only believe in facts and what is rationally intelligible, or do we also believe in the inexplicable, the mystical?” For Herzog, then, not only emotional intuition but also a healthy skepticism of rational modernity were indispensable features on the way to self-realization.

As one might expect, contrasting views on love, marriage, and sexuality led to doubt and uncertainty. A study by the polling institute GFM-Getas showed a widespread opinion that the desire to marry (or stay married) often clashed with social pressures to first and foremost care about oneself, which was more often than not interpreted as pursuing a successful professional life.⁵¹ Reporting on the polling data, *Brigitte* summed up the situation for young women as almost impossible to cope with. On the one hand “all young women want to have a job, but far too many give up on [this dream] so they can have children.” On the other hand, the magazine continued, “almost all young women want children, but many give up on this idea to stick with their professional career.”⁵² *Brigitte’s* appraisal of love and marriage for young people in the late 1980s resembled

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ GFM-Getas study of 636 couples between 18 and 33 years old commissioned by *Brigitte* in 1988. See *Brigitte*, 10/5, 1988, 134.

⁵² Ibid.

that of Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim in the early years of the decade. The contemporary urge to fulfill one's dreams was, on the surface of it, a positive development in the long road to female emancipation and a more equal form of marriage, their argument went. But at the same time, these new ideals created a web of desires, needs, and pressures that were almost impossible for a new generation of young women to untangle, and poll data seemed to corroborate this conclusion.

The political discourse, never known for either coherence or linear logic, reflected this trend of juxtaposing, and often conflating conflicting ideas of love and marriage. Having stood for "traditional family values" and a strong protection of the family under the law since the 1950s, the CDU, after its ascent to power in 1982, changed little in this respect. Marriage, in the official party program was still the designated framework for love, sexuality, and emotional fulfillment. However, pressures to change their approach to fit a younger constituency led to a 1985 campaign adopting the slogan "The new Partnership – Women in work, family and home." The goal was to "eradicate the inequality between men and women by the end of the century."⁵³ The CDU contrasted their program with the inhumane measures in the GDR to achieve equality by force. At the same time they vowed to broaden government involvement in people's marriage experience by dealing with "new social issues." To make matters even more confusing, the divorce law from 1977, enacted during Social Democratic political leadership, stated, "Partner sollen vielmehr über die Gestaltung ihrer Ehe selbst entscheiden," an idea that probably most Christian Democrats would have agreed with.⁵⁴ Thus, the politics of marriage in the latter half of the 1980s, emphasizing individual freedom but also more

⁵³ Gisela Helwig, *Frau und Familie, Bundesrepublik Deutschland-DDR* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1987), 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

government guidance, appeared just as inconsequential as the marriage discourse in popular media.

You Have to Feel It

In a 1979 critique of West German consumerism and growing emotional inauthenticity, Dorothee Sölle argued that young couples had to abandon their cynical worldview.⁵⁵ Writing from a liberal Christian perspective, Sölle meant that happiness could only emerge from true reciprocity. However, organic human interaction unimpeded by outside forces had been lost in a consumer society where everything was for sale and the driving forces were egotistical pleasures. According to Sölle, each “true affirmation [of each other] is an answer, a response. This response is our very experience of happiness. Happiness means relating to, not merely speaking to someone.”⁵⁶ This certainly sounded a lot like conservative Christian denunciations of consumerism in the early postwar years. Sölle also resembled these earlier Christian commentaries in her call for increasing reciprocity between people, especially between men and women in married life. On one crucial point, however, set Sölle aside from her colleagues in the past. She was much more willing to let people explore each other’s emotional worlds without the intervention of professional guidance.

In an another pessimistic view of the Federal Republic, editor and writer Dieter Wellershoff wrote of a young man who, after countless visits to the psychoanalyst still experienced his life as meaningless, empty, and shallow.⁵⁷ And though Wellershoff

⁵⁵ Dorothee Sölle, “Thou Shalt Have No Other Jeans before Me,” in *Observations On “the Spiritual Situation of the Age”*: Contemporary German Perspectives Jürgen Habermas (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984).

⁵⁶ Sölle, “Thou Shalt Have,” 167.

⁵⁷ Dieter Wellershoff, “Germany – A state of Flux,” in *Observations On “the Spiritual Situation of the Age”*: Contemporary German Perspectives Jürgen Habermas (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984).

meant that the times in which he now wrote were better than the recent past, developments in contemporary West German society were headed toward a complete emotional dearth.⁵⁸ The young boy in Wellershoff's story was let down by society, but also by his parents. "Having no time for their children – although plenty for their jobs, competition, and their self-fulfillment – they assuage their feelings of guilt by spoiling [their children] with gifts."⁵⁹ According to Wellershoff, married life as a whole could only convey a mere surrogate of people's true needs. Not because marriage *per se* was a bad idea, but because in a too rationally driven consumer society *everything* was a mere surrogate, packaged and sold as if that was all people needed. In this society, "where the only remaining choice [for young people] is between depression and adulthood," many still managed to find their way, but they did so by often overcompensating and striving even harder toward "what society has deemed desirable."⁶⁰

According to those who along with Sölle and Wellershoff were skeptical of what they deemed to be a self-centered culture, there were still things to be done in order to reverse the current order. The first step was for me to open up emotionally to get closer to the core of love, some of them argued. Women, while still invited to be emotionally open, were encouraged to apply a higher degree of rational thinking than they, according to these social critics, had traditionally been known to. None of this were entirely new. Ambivalent notions of a "new man" had been flouted already ten years earlier, and the perceived "problem" with women's excessively emotional nature had been a topic of discussion for centuries.⁶¹ Despite the age-old assumption that women always knew the

⁵⁸ Wellershoff had himself been an active participant in the activities of the New Left.

⁵⁹ Wellershoff, "Germany – A state of Flux," 364.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ For discussions about the "new man" of the 1970s, see Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, 240ff.

meaning of love better than men, *Brigitte* announced in 1982 that love was something women had just recently rediscovered.⁶² The magazine even went so far as to declare the “old” meaning of love dead and buried. “Only the word is the same. Love itself has changed,” one article proclaimed.⁶³ It turned out, though, that the new meaning of love was only new in relation to how “modern women” related to it.

Such insecurities about how to relate to women’s emotions continued throughout the 1980s. Interestingly enough the various viewpoints in this debate did not seem to be particularly determined by political or ideological proclivities. In 1984, in one of *Brigitte*’s perennial self-assessment questioners, readers were asked (as they had been for almost four decades) if they had the aptitude for true happiness. In the section evaluating test takers ability to connect emotionally with their partners, psychologist Oskar Holzberg reiterated much of what we have already seen. Emotional intelligence was essential for those who wanted true happiness. More importantly, though, the real trick was to learn how to relate to other people’s emotions, and here, according to Holzberg, women already had a natural advantage. The problem for women was to control these feelings and not get carried away on an emotional rollercoaster. Quite unsurprisingly considering his professional training, Holzberg explained that one way to do this was to reach back to childhood memories. There, buried deep in the subconscious, one could find an explanation to some of the stronger and uncontrollable feelings that lead to both personal and relational problems.⁶⁴ These ideas about women needing to control their emotions looked eerily familiar to something that had been going on for centuries. It should be

⁶² “Liebe – Frauen haben sie neu entdeckt,” *Brigitte*, 9/8, 1982.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ “Fragebogen: Haben Sie Talent zum Glückhsein,” *Brigitte*, 2/22, 1984. This was hardly something new, yet it was presented as an up-to-date way of dealing with emotional stress caused by modernity.

pointed out, though, that in the 1980s, they were not always cast in the language of “a problem” that “needed to be resolved,” which earlier had been the standard message. And though many of the statements were not particularly flattering to women, plenty of them came from feminists with an explicitly stated goal to liberate and empower women, both as individuals and spouses.

It might seem somewhat counterintuitive, then, that the ability to get in touch with one’s emotional side – which in the case of women had to be curbed – was seen as a great strength for men.⁶⁵ Psychologist Ursula Lebert found it astounding that in the early 1980s, West German men had all of a sudden found the true meaning of love.⁶⁶ Referring to some of the bestselling love manuals at the time, Lebert argued, tongue-in-cheek, that if the themes of these books – “temple of love,” “Ocean currents of happiness,” and “schlummernder Sinnlichkeit” – reflected reality, West German men had been swept off their feet by an “emotional tidal wave.”⁶⁷ It is hard to determine whether these publications actually demonstrated a behavioral change, but it was clear that the “emotional man” was becoming a good “marketing strategy” for men in search of a potential spouse. A new vocabulary was also seeping into the terse and cryptic canon of personal ad prose.⁶⁸ In a revealing example from 1988, one man was looking for a future spouse who had the “Brigitte look,” which according to the eligible bachelor meant “young, very thin, naturally good looking, and charming.” At the same time, he described himself as being a “very tender and affectionate man,” and not someone who would be so

⁶⁵ Some examples of this trend include the best seller by psychologist Peter Lauster, *Die Liebe. Psychologie eines Phänomens* (Düsseldorf: Econ Verlag, 1980), which has sold over one million copies. Other examples were Michael Cöllen, *Lass uns für die Liebe kämpfen; der neue Weg aus der Partnerkrise: Gestalttherapie für Paare* (München: Kösel Verlag, 1984), and Tilmann Moser, *Stufen der Nähe: Ein Lehrstück für Liebende* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984).

⁶⁶ “Männer: Nun baden sie in Gefühlen,” *Brigitte*, 10/15, 1986.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ In many cases this led to slightly counterintuitive proposals.

superficial as to care about looks.⁶⁹ Throughout the 1980s women's magazines, marriage manuals, and advice books on sex and love, also perpetuated the "emotional man" as a new ideal, and sometimes even the ultimate solution to marital bliss.

As always with emotional experiences in the past, the question of how far cultural expressions were reflected in people's behavior and subjective emotional realities is almost impossible to answer. There are many reasons to approach suggestions of far reaching changes in "emotional communities" with suspicion, or at least with great caution.⁷⁰ While the contemporary marriage discourse was replete with emotional superlatives, there is also a good deal of evidence pointing to the persistent force of tradition and a continuation of older gender roles. Nonetheless, the fact that such fascination with emotions emerged at this time is a significant observation. However, Ursula Lebert, who had expressed excitement about men being more interested in love and displays of affection, had some misgivings. All of a sudden, she wrote, we learn that men also have a profound emotional inclination that might be even more sensitive than women's "natural emotional abilities."⁷¹ Lambert was skeptical about the sincerity of the new "emotional man" and his alleged sensitivity. Others voiced their concerns about a disconnect between the recently discovered feminine side of West Germany's male population and their persistent inability to carry out "traditional female activities" in the household.

⁶⁹ *Brigitte*, 6/15, 1988.

⁷⁰ I deliberately use the term "emotional community" here without defining it in theoretically. In this context it simply refers to a social group (specifically young-to-middle-aged men seeking a spouse). See William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions" in *Passions in Context* I (1/2010): 1–32, for an extensive discussion about usage, methodology, and theoretical implications of the term.

⁷¹ "Der schmerzhafteste Abschied vom Chauvi," *Brigitte*, 10/12, 1985.

In support of Lambert's suspicions there was an ongoing debate in which men's willingness to relinquish some of their old privileges was being questioned. Moreover, though the "emotional man" was the prevailing ideal for a great number of women at the time, competing standards abounded. Some of them came in the form of men who were entirely focused on their careers. Others were more concerned with physical attributes. "Manliness galore, set against an endless horizon," was how *Der Spiegel* described the popular image of the ideal man of the 1980s.⁷² "Large muscles, well trained *pectoralis major* under a tight shirt," the magazine continued. "Almost as if Leni Riefenstahl had been behind the camera."⁷³ And though *Brigitte* announced that 1985 marked the "painful goodbye to the *Chauvi* [male chauvinist]," sociologist Helge Pross expressed doubts about how well such statements matched up with reality.⁷⁴ While men had supposedly "learned to be more like women," that is, "softer," "more social," and with the "ability to show his emotions," they still had not learned how to carry out the simplest household chores, argued Ursula Lebert.⁷⁵ In a study by Sigrid Metz-Göckel and Ursula Müller at the University of Dortmund many of the men who were generally positive toward a more equal society and equality in marriage at the same time admitted that they "can no longer stand the word 'emancipation'."⁷⁶ It is not surprising, then, that while many women lamented the fact that things were still not quite the way they should be, men were anxious about losing their old privileges. Such concerns notwithstanding, the majority of

⁷² Journalist Marion Schreiber who wrote these words had been investigating the notion of the "new man" for years. Although she was not entirely convinced about the sincerity of the "new man" she showed that even CDU politician Heiner Geißler announced himself a patron saint of the "Anti Macho Movement" when he took up the fight against the patriarchy in the Bundestag. See "Frisch gebadet," *Der Spiegel* 5/29, 1989.

⁷³ "Frisch gebadet," *Der Spiegel* 5/29, 1989.

⁷⁴ "Der schmerzhafteste Abschied vom Chauvi," *Brigitte*, 10/12, 1985.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ See Sigrid Metz-Göckel and Ursula Müller, *Der Mann. Die BRIGITTE-Studie* (Weinheim: Beltz Verlag, 1986).

the participants in the marriage debate were convinced that more emotions were generally good for relationships.

The question remained, however, what kind of relationships were best suited to accommodate people's emotional needs *and* the growing demands for self-realization. Marriage was still widely accepted as the standard, but there were also those who meant that modern society demanded new models of partnership. There were plenty of examples of this standpoint although they never gained the same traction as the ideal of the "neue Treue." Helga Frisch, a female priest who had been outspoken against traditional marriage practices, argued her case on both on a legal and a moral grounds. Love, she wrote, was a wonderful human potential that in the past had been used in an inappropriate way to legitimize bourgeois marriage rituals as well as religious doctrine. Such traditions distorted the fact that "emotions cannot be regulated by law," regardless of its wordily or heavenly legitimacy, argued Frisch.⁷⁷ Human relationships should be based on the feelings partners have for each other, not a legal or moral framework regulating people's behaviors, Frisch maintained. It was people's happiness that needed to constitute the compass in partnership between men and women, she concluded.⁷⁸ As in earlier decades it is a difficult task to assess the general effect such competing forms of relationships had on people's life choices. Marriage and divorce rates were certainly rough indicators of new life styles, but they say little about how spouses and partners felt about each other while married or the circumstances that led them to part ways.

⁷⁷ Frisch, *Ehe?*, 9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 11. Note that, as with virtually all the sources at the time, these relationships were heterosexual. The norm was still that of a man and a woman, even in circles arguing for partnerships outside the traditional framework of marriage.

In 1985 the *Institut für Demoskopie* set out to map the thoughts about “marriage and family in [a time of] change” in the state of Baden-Württemberg.⁷⁹ The *Institut*, as well as university based research groups, had been conducting similar studies for decades in order to better understand the dynamics of the German family. As could be expected the focal points of these polls had shifted according to the social climate. The table of contents of the *Institut’s* 1985 report suggested a far greater interest in people’s emotional attachments in married life than had been the case earlier. In fact, the first point of inquiry was how the family could function as an “emotional home.”⁸⁰ One of the most important findings was that most Baden-Württembergers, 76%, saw family and marriage as something positive and even as essential for a “successful and happy life.”⁸¹ Moreover, the vast majority of the participants were of the opinion that strong family values were “not only important for personal happiness, but for [a healthy] condition of society as a whole.”⁸² Did this mean that high divorce rates and alternative forms of partnership had not had such a great impact on the minds of West Germans after all?

It needs to be stressed that Baden-Württemberg, Helmut Kohl’s home state and a CDU stronghold, did not represent the entire Federal Republic.⁸³ Moreover, the *Institut für Demoskopie* was a conservative opinion-polling institute given the task of researching opinions about marriage on behalf of Barbara Schäfer, who served as CDU’s Family Minister in Baden-Württemberg. Indeed, because of the positive attitudes of marriage the *Institut* reported, Schäfer immediately declared the study to be an excellent basis for

⁷⁹ Köcher, *Ehe und Familie*.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 10. The section specifically dealt with “Emotionale Beheimatung als zentrale Funktion der Familie.”

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, ii.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ With the exception of the first two years of its existence, Baden-Württemberg’s local government had been ruled by the CDU for a total of fifty-five years before the lost power to the SPD and the Greens in 2011.

CDU's family politics in the state.⁸⁴ However, despite such obvious biases the Baden-Württemberg study mirrored larger trends in popular media and advice literature written by "marriage experts" from a broad political and ideological spectrum. Emotions, in particular romantic love, were becoming one of the main interests to anyone concerned with marriage and family issues in the mid 1980s. This is not to say that these phenomena were a necessary result of the general turn to conservative politics. As we have seen, the reawakened belief in "true love" and a turn to the "neue Treue" was by no means an exclusively conservative enterprise. These ideals were backed by a variety of groups including radical feminists, leftist psychologists, and many others who did not affiliate with either conservatism, Christianity, or the politics of the CDU.

⁸⁴ Köcher, *Ehe und Familie*, ii. Schäfer wrote the preface to the printed edition since the Family Ministry of Baden-Württemberg published the study.

EAST GERMANY

The 1980s has gained a lot of attention from historians of late. The main reason for this is the search for explanations to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent end of the GDR as sovereign state. In these accounts religion has made a return to mainstream German history. Just as in West Germany, the GDR saw increasing religious activity in the 1980s.⁸⁵ Most historians examining the end of East Germany has seen this as a sign of growing protest against the regime.⁸⁶ However, since the focus has been on dissident movements and mass protests in 1989, few have looked beyond the use of Church facilities as a way of getting around state censorship and stage large scale demonstrations. Still, the question remains whether people's growing interest in religion also contributed to a return of Christian values among those who associated with the Churches. And if so, how did this influence East Germans' view of marriage?

As could be expected, the regime did not incorporate any of the reawakened Christian elements in their marriage and family politics. As in in the 1970s, though, SED-backed counselors and other advisors continued to follow a less ideological path. Their approach was pragmatic rather than dictated by Socialist theory.⁸⁷ Like in West Germany there was also a growing fascination with emotions, not least among marriage experts. Here we also see the conclusion of one of the larger arguments in this study. What in the early days of the Democratic Republic had been considered one of the problematic aspects of marriage, had, by the 1980s come to be seen as the main guiding light for

⁸⁵ See for example David Doellinger, "Constructing Peace in the GDR: Conscientious Objection and Compromise among Christians, 1962-1989," in *Christianity and Modernity In Eastern Europe*. Ed. Bruce R Berglund and Brian Porter (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010).

⁸⁶ Sarotte, *The Collapse*, 30ff.

⁸⁷ See for example C Rep. Berlin, 135-02-02 Nr. 1246 *Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratssitzungen 1980*, Bericht 20.10.1980.

finding marital happiness. Indeed, the notion of romantic love and other emotional aspects of married life would be incorporated into the very meaning of “Socialist morality.” Issues of love and emotional wellbeing were also integrated into the perpetual question of gender equality. SED’s dilemma of how to argue coherently for a state in which the community was more important than its constituents, and at the same time promote an image of strong, individualistic women was by no means gone. As it turned out, the role of the individual in marriage and in Socialist society proved to be one of the debates in the history of East Germany that lasted from the foundation of the state in 1949 to its collapse forty years later.

Socialist Individualism

Looking back at three decades of marriage and sex counseling in the GDR, physician Peter Brauer wrote that people’s personal interests always had been the guiding light in East German counseling philosophy.⁸⁸ His book, *Entwicklung der Ehe- und Sexualberatung in der DDR aus Historischer Sicht*, made clear that this did not mean a promotion of Western style individualism. Brauer noted that there were constant mediations between individual concerns and society at large.⁸⁹ This was hardly a controversial statement. Whereas the focus of East German marriage counseling had always been on the improvement of GDR society, the importance of the individual had never been entirely neglected. However, due to a slowly de-politicized approaches to social issues combined with increasing cynicism among the general population, a shift in

⁸⁸ Peter Brauer, *Entwicklung der Ehe- und Sexualberatung in der DDR aus Historischer Sicht* (MD Diss., Akademie für Ärztliche Fortbildung, Berlin, 1980), 165.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

attitudes had taken place over the course of the 1970s.⁹⁰ Brauer's book reflected many of these changes. In "the contemporary phase of East German marriage counseling," he explained, the *main* concern was the well-being of individuals and families.⁹¹ While Brauer did certainly not neglect society and state, these were no longer listed as issues of immediate relevance to state employed counselors.

Maxie Wander, the author of *Guten Morgen, du Schöne – Protokolle nach Tonband*, took this argument even further, writing that the right to fulfillment of one's own potential had to be seen as self-evident. To illustrate her point, Wander, who in the late 1950s had moved to the GDR from Austria because of her political convictions, published a number of interviews with East German women about their everyday lives. By the early 1980s her book turned into a best seller.⁹² Wander's stated intention was to unveil issues the official media rarely or ever spoke about, such as people's private lives and personal experiences. In *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* and other similar publications in the 1980s, many people expressed the view that self-realization, or *Selbstverwirklichung*, was one of the most important aspects of a happy life. In Wander's words, "Selbstverwirklichung has now become the obvious aspiration for all women [in the GDR]."⁹³ She was not entirely happy with recent developments, though. To achieve the kind of freedom and independence women deserved, she wrote, they had to break the barriers of tradition that held them back from being fully self-sufficient. Still, as Wander's own focus on *Selbstverwirklichung* showed, freedom and personal

⁹⁰ Mary Fulbrook, *Power and Society In the GDR, 1961-1979: the 'normalisation of Rule'?* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

⁹¹ Brauer, *Entwicklung der Ehe*, 168.

⁹² For the fame of Wander, see "Leben wär' eine prima Alternative – Maxie Wanders Tagebuchaufzeichnungen und Briefe," *Die Zeit*, 10/10, 1980.

⁹³ Maxie Wander, *Guten Morgen, Du Schöne: Protokolle Nach Tonband* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977), 7.

independence were becoming increasingly common buzzwords in discussions of love, marriage, and family. This was not only a question of feminism, which according to some historians did not have a particularly strong standing in the GDR in the first place.⁹⁴

Independence and self-realization were equally present in men's views of married life.

In 1985, 24-year-old Ralf remembered how he in his late teens was torn between the allure of individual freedom on the one hand, and the comfort of the FDJ community on the other.⁹⁵ After marrying his wife Kerstin, with whom he now had a son, Ralf became much more inclined to see his previous excitement about the harmony and like-mindedness of the FDJ as a sham. He was not alone in expressing such thoughts. A longing for more personal freedom and self-realization could of course be conceived of as a natural endeavor in a repressive society such as the GDR. However, we still need to explain why there was a distinct shift in attitudes in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Moreover, seeing how "traditional" gender roles in the household lingered on into the 1980s, despite efforts by the state to eradicate them, men did not have the same incentive as women did to liberate themselves in their marriages. Part of the explanation might be found in the redefinition of marriage among East Germans during this time.

In the minds of younger people, the concepts of marriage and self-determination did not seem to invoke the same reactions they had in the ideological debates of the 1960s. The reasons for this change must be sought in a softening of the regime's push for "Socialist morality." Another decisive factor was an increasing indifference among East Germans with the regime's ideological agenda. Taken together, these changes in public

⁹⁴ Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1.

⁹⁵ A telling entry in Ralf's diary from this period read: "You wear your individualism like a protective coat that looks good from an outside perspective. But exactly this, which you think is your strength, is in fact your weakness." Christine Müller, *Männerprotokolle* (Berlin: Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1988), 135.

attitudes, coupled with a wakened reinforcement of socialist dogma from the part of the state, might begin to explain why marriage and individualism seemed to be two sides of the same coin in the last two decades of the GDR. Moreover, if marriage did not work out, divorce was always a viable option.

Rosi, a 32-year-old married woman and one of Maxi Wander's interviewees, expressed an increasingly common opinion among East Germans. Marriage, she said, had many advantages but it was not sacred or had to last for a lifetime. It was wonderful if people wanted to get married but most East Germans did not take the institution very seriously anymore, Rosi explained.⁹⁶ Divorce rates and attitudes such as that of Dosi testified to the fact that the stigma of legal separation was not much of an issue anymore in the 1980s. At the same time, though, the appeal of marriage had not gone away, nor had the commercialized and commodified ideals in which marriage was packaged and sold as a sure path to a happy life. Moreover, less traditional view did not entirely replace older notions where marriage was still thought of as a life long commitment. The blending of concepts such as individual freedom and persisting portrayals of marriage as a social ideal were signs that the regime had lost some of its authority of interpretation, but it also created confusion among young East Germans.

Jörg, a 22-year-old-worker, was a good example of such confusion. Jörg had a positive outlook on family life, as one might expect from a young man about to get married. "Marriage is simply something beautiful, something old, something binding people together for the rest of their lives," Jörg said four weeks before the wedding with

⁹⁶ Wander, *Guten Morgen*, 9.

his fiancée Cordula.⁹⁷ Apart from these general clichés, though, he was not sure if he could think of any other good reasons to marry. “I have decided to be together with Cordula for the rest of my life,” he explained, adding that in a larger perspective the institution of marriage might not be of great importance.⁹⁸ In fact, he admitted, “I’m not really sure why I am getting married. I only know that I want to do it.” It was nice to do something his friends approved of and supported, he clarified. After having thought about it for a few more minutes, Jörg confessed that there were in fact other things much more important than marriage. First and foremost he was concerned with his own emotional wellbeing. Work was a significant part of this, but good friends were perhaps even more important. “To only have a marriage and no friends, that would simply not work,” he concluded.

The Return of Christ?

Parallel to the weakening of traditional family values among young East Germans, a number of self-help books focused on marriage with an unmistakable Christian vantage point were being published. Many of the authors of these books expressed worries about the ways in which younger citizens seemed to be devaluing the moral code of marriage. Priest and counselor Helmut Fritzsche was particularly concerned with the weakening of the Bible’s message of life long commitment between husband and wife.⁹⁹ Biblical tradition and family values were evidently important to Fritzsche, but there was also a certain kind of pragmatism in to his reasoning.

⁹⁷ Christine Lambrecht, *Männerbekanntschaften- Freimütige Protokolle* (Leipzig: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1986), 47.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹⁹ Helmut Fritzsche, *Freiheit und Verantwortung in Liebe und Ehe - Zur Theorie der Partnerbeziehungen* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 258.

Fritzsche shared his practical views of social issues and Biblical teachings with numerous other members of the clergy who in 1983 were busy outlining a program for the future of Christian marriage in the GDR.¹⁰⁰ The group assigned the task of writing the new program asserted that in the recent past a new and more equal form of partnership had gained ground. A direct consequence of this development, they argued, was that men and women had acquired more individual freedom and independence than had been the case only a few generations back. Christians in the GDR certainly needed to defend the biblical tradition, but they also had to be aware of how important it was to adapt to the advancements of modernity, the new program stated.¹⁰¹ Fritzsche and his colleagues were open to the needs of the younger generations, as long as some of the more important Christian traditions were kept intact. Rather than focusing on the most hard-to-live-up-to biblical principles, they emphasized everyday problems with a special attention to young partners' psychological and emotional needs. How, in a self-proclaimed atheist state, could such books pass the censors desk?

Compared to most other activities in the GDR, from beekeeping to youth organizations, the churches were relatively free from state control.¹⁰² Certainly, the SED did everything it could to circumscribe Church freedom by infiltrating religious structures and creating a State Secretariat for Church Affairs, but this only worked to a limited degree.¹⁰³ The role of the churches, and the degree to which they were allowed to operate without state intervention has also been of growing interest to historians in recent years.

¹⁰⁰ For a reference to the seminars, lectures, and meetings leading up to this plan, see Fritzsche, *Freiheit und Verantwortung*, 11.

¹⁰¹ Fritzsche, *Freiheit und Verantwortung*, 11.

¹⁰² Wendy Tyndale, *Protestants In Communist East Germany: In the Storm of the World*. Burlington, (VT: Ashgate, 2010), xvii-xviii.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, xvii.

The most common focus in this body of research is the involvement of Christian groups in the events leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall.¹⁰⁴ Less has been written about the influence of Christian thought on everyday life in the 1980s, let alone in the realm of love and marriage.¹⁰⁵ In the last ten years of the GDR, though, religiously inspired marriage books and references to Christian themes when discussing love and marriage in private life was becoming increasingly common.¹⁰⁶

Despite a shared worry among Christians and the SED about the weakening of the institution of marriage, counseling centers did not incorporate any kind of religious perspective in their practice.¹⁰⁷ However, some of them had become much less inclined to condemn these values as entirely irreconcilable with party doctrine. For example, in a popular advice book from 1956, physicians Hans-Joachim Hoffmann and Peter Klemm had written about biblical notions of love as “myth” and “fairytales” that science and Socialist ideology had to debunk.¹⁰⁸ Now, some thirty-two years later, Professor Barbara Bertram and her colleagues at the *Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung* in Leipzig took a rather different stance. In their book *Adam und Eva heute*, the same stories Klemm and Hoffmann had seen as harmful myths were presented as inspirational parables. Of course, modern science had disproven all biblical tales as historically inaccurate, Bertram assured

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 91ff. However, Leipzig was a special case. Some church leaders were against praying for and advocating for the émigrés and against the regime. See Sarotte, *The Collapse*, 30ff.

¹⁰⁵ Two notable studies have made a point of going beyond official doctrine to try to explore the everyday Christian life in the GDR. Tyndale, *Protestants In Communist East Germany* and Bernd Schaefer, *The East German State and the Catholic Church: 1945–1989* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ We do know that protestant families used their faith as a reason not to vote and other actions of opposition against the regime as early as the 1960s. See Hester Vaizey, *Born in the GDR. Living in the Shadow of the Wall* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 93-94. But whether this was a sign of a strengthening Christian faith, or if it simply was a manifestation of civil disobedience in a state that had cultivated a clear anti-religious agenda, is not easy to say.

¹⁰⁷ See Larch Berlin, C Rep. 150-02-02 Nr. 241 Berlin-Marzahn Ratsitzungen vom 7.3.1985, C Rep. 150-02-02 Nr. 241 Berlin-Marzahn Ratsitzungen vom 7.3.1985.

¹⁰⁸ Hans-Joachim Hoffmann and Peter G. Klemm, *Ein offenes Wort: Ein Buch über die Liebe* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1956), 9.

her readers. But, she continued, they were still wonderful legends from which people could learn about the psychological nature of men and women and how to live together in harmony. Not in a Christian marriage per se, but in an emotionally stable Socialist family using the examples of Adam and Eve as romantic inspiration.¹⁰⁹

Betrams's focus on psychology and emotions had become common in the early 1980s. Catholic authors Melitta and Hans Donat spent a large portion of their book *Lebendige Ehe Als Gabe und Aufgabe* to discuss how the communication of feelings was essential for a happy marriage.¹¹⁰ The Donats' point of departure was that the institution of marriage was in trouble.¹¹¹ This was a question of values of morality, the book argued, and Christian virtues were essential to getting on the road to recovery. Young people were in particular danger of moral decline, even those who did get married. According to the Donats, the mindset of teenagers and young adults was simply not in line with real values of family life. Young East Germans no longer married because they believed it could bring happiness through love and affection, but because of material desires. Instead of emotional fulfillment, they were only looking for a fast track to a subsidized apartment or a low interest loan, the Donats wrote. This reasoning was not much different from that of Christians in the West, who already in the 1950s had begun worrying that modern consumerism was making people less inclined to follow the path of Christ.¹¹²

Much of what Melitta and Hans Donat saw as essential for improving the weakening institution of marriage was already part of official East German family

¹⁰⁹ Barbara Bertram et. al., *Adam und Eva heute* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1988), 11-12.

¹¹⁰ Melitta Donat and Hans Donat, *Lebendige Ehe- Ehe als Gabe und Aufgabe* (Leipzig: St. Benno Verlag, 1985).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹² The trend to criticize modern consumerism really took off in the mid 1960s when Christian spokespeople and radical leftists both agonized over the evils of capitalism, albeit for rather different reasons.

politics. Their emphasis on equality in the household, women's right to work, and similar issues had been the official party line for decades. Other elements of the Donats proposed cure for the looming marriage crisis were more challenging to party doctrine. While stressing the importance of communication and equality, the Donats also underlined how significant an individual identity and independence was for a successful marriage.¹¹³ This jumbling of individualism and community idealism in *Lebendige Ehe Als Gabe und Aufgabe* resulted in an odd cross-breed of Catholicism and state sanctioned ideology. One of the reasons *Lebendige Ehe*, along with most other Catholic advice books, was relatively quiet in its social criticism was most likely the precarious situation for Catholic organizations in the GDR.¹¹⁴ *Lebendige Ehe* did nonetheless criticize social conditions, but it did so by implication rather than through direct accusations. One example of this was the Donats' discussion of gender equality. Knowing how important women's right were for the ideological identity of the SED, they asked why most men still acted as if childrearing, cooking, cleaning, and other related tasks were part of a natural female domain. Instead of following social norms in which household chores were considered a female duty, men should share the burden of everyday life by acting on congenial emotional impulses.¹¹⁵

The examples of Helmut Fritzsche and Melitta and Hans Donat point to a shared set of interests between Christian advisors and the SED in the 1980s.¹¹⁶ These included a

¹¹³ Donat, *Lebendige Ehe*, 21.

¹¹⁴ The reason why *Lebendige Ehe* and other Catholic advice books were much less outspokenly Christian (especially in comparison with West Germany) was most likely the isolated situation for the Catholic Church in the GDR. Indeed, for much of the existence of the GDR, the catholic clergy were forbidden by the Cardinal Archbishop of Berlin to criticize the state *or* to praise it. Only in the 1980s did this change. See Schaefer, *The East German State and the Catholic Church*.

¹¹⁵ Donat, *Lebendige Ehe*, 203-207.

¹¹⁶ Another example of this overlap was Georg Teichtweier, *Was Gott verbunden hat... - Glück in Liebe und Ehe* (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1988).

strengthening of family values and protection of the institution of marriage. It also involved a push for bigger families. And at the same time Church and state were clearly at odds with each other. Apart from the hostility to religion built into official state ideology, there were also specific points of disagreement such as the right to privacy and individual fulfillment, free from state interference. Consequently, Christian marriage advice books had to perform a balancing act to pass the censor's muster. Helmut Fritzsche's book, for example, which was primarily written with an already actively Christian reader in mind, was fairly audacious in contradicting official party doctrine. Yet it did so with the usual concessions hailing the preeminence of "our socialist state."¹¹⁷ Catholic advice books were even more careful not to be too agitating due to the less stable conditions of the Catholic Church.

Personal Experiences

A growing output of religiously inspired advice books seem to indicate a heightened general interest in Christian family values among East Germans. Rather than expressions of rekindled faith, though, most historians have explained this upswing of religious activity in the 1980s in terms of deliberate protest against the regime.¹¹⁸ Such assessments appear justified – especially in cases where Churches acted as safe havens for dissidents and other activities leading up to the fall of the Wall. Another reason for why Churches and some religious leaders have been tied to the events in 1989 could be that this has been the focus of interest among historians as well as other social scientists

¹¹⁷ Wendy Tyndale notes in *Protestants In Communist East Germany* that in the 1980s, protestant theologians published works dealing with questions about where Protestants fit in a Marxist-Leninist society. Fritzsche must certainly be counted to those partaking in this critical debate. Yet it is almost impossible to know how sincere he is in his remarks about Communist ideology.

¹¹⁸ See Sarotte, *The Collapse*, 30ff.

exploring this time period. Does this mean we simply have not looked close enough to find a greater interest in Christianity among East Germans, not only as a way of protest, but also as an alternative guide to love and marriage?

The fact that people rarely expressed their thoughts on these issues in writing makes it difficult to investigate the subject historically. Still, there is not a complete lack of sources for those interested in exploring this topic. Interviews published in the various *Protokolle* over the 1980s are good indicators of the ways in which East Germans dealt both with new interpretation of what it meant to be married and how their religious, or atheist, viewpoints influenced these thoughts, if at all. Statistically unrepresentative and often formed by the interviewers private agendas, these books nonetheless help us balance the accounts about religion and marriage published by Christian organizations and state sponsored marriage advisors.¹¹⁹

Gabrielle Eckart, a West German author following the example of Maxie Wander, published over twenty interviews with people from all walks of life. Her 1984 *Protokolle* included gardeners, plant managers, retirees, and variety of other professionals who all had agreed to talk candidly about their lives. Wolfgang, a 47-year-old agronomist remembered how during his years at university, his professor had told him that because of his religious conviction he was not worth anything as a human being. The Professor made Wolfgang's life difficult throughout his studies in the early 1960s.¹²⁰ Describing the situation of a Christian in the mid-1980s, Imke, 17, painted a slightly different picture. "Today," she noted, "going to Church had become a *Modefrage*," a fad.

According to Imke, the churchgoing trend was a direct result of people being fed up with

¹¹⁹ McLellan, *Love in the time of Communism*, 16-21.

¹²⁰ Gabriele Eckart, *So sehe ich die Sache- Protokolle aus der DDR* (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1984), 53.

stale and strict programs in the FDJ. In church, young people were allowed to discuss things from a more critical perspective and address interesting questions, Imke claimed. This was not encouraged in the FDJ, where questioning of the party doctrine was “*streng verboten*.” Imke drew on personal experience. During her time as secretary of the FDJ she secretly attended meetings in her local Church.¹²¹ But despite her religious proclivities, Imke’s outlook on marriage had few of the characteristics Christian marriage advise books were prescribing. Nor did it entirely match the resurgence of quasi-religious values such as the “*neue Treue*” in the West.

“My future husband,” she explained, “should be extremely good-looking and have a distinct masculine composure.”¹²² She admitted that being so concerned with looks was probably stupid, but she was not ashamed of it. “Somehow I just value appearances.” Imke’s view of married life was in many ways an East German version of how many women in their late teens and early twenties in West Germany saw their future. What was most important to Imke, apart from good looks and reasonably high intelligence, was that her future husband “need to let me keep my independence.” If he wanted to, he would of course also retain the freedom of being alone, or pursue his personal interests. But only as long as she was free to realize *her* dreams. As for an appropriate age to get married, Imke would not even consider a husband before she had turned twenty-five. And though family life was not something she was adverse to, she still did not want too many children. “There are so many things I want to do,” Imke explained, and for marriage to be part of that it had to be compatible with her vision of independence.

¹²¹ Ibid., 58.

¹²² Eckart, *So sehe ich die Sache*, 60.

Imke's story was not unique. Young people all over the GDR celebrated a general trend pointing to individualism and self-realization as the main goal in life. At the same time, many East Germans also took advantage of the protective patronage offered by some Churches. This also meant that spaces previously reserved for religious practices had taken on a particular secular meaning.¹²³ Not only did they function as a proxy for a malfunctioning or nonexistent civil society. Some of them even welcomed discussions that could be seen as going against Christian values. But though younger East Germans hailed this development as a way to finally express themselves freely, it was not always seen as positive among older people in the Christian community. Ilse, born in 1928 and a representative of a local Horticulture cooperative lamented how contemporary discussions of the human condition were too superficial and far too materialistic. "We do not take enough interest in the soul anymore," she explained.¹²⁴ According to Ilse, the ideal place to talk through such issues was the family. But only a lucky few had a life partner with whom they could connect on an emotional level. In earlier days when communication in the family proved difficult, listening and worrying about people's souls was the job of the priest, Ilse noted. "[T]hat kind of involvement is missing today," she added.

As Christian advice manuals attest to, Ilse was not entirely right about the Churches' lack of concern for either people's souls or their families. Taken together, though, Ilse's and other more or less religious East Germans' accounts pointed to a disconnect between their view of marriage and that of Church representatives and

¹²³ This was not, as some popular accounts would have it, a general trend. Some churches did indeed invite people for a broad dialogue about contemporary issues. Others, however, were much less inclined to host meetings they deemed as secular and hostile to the regime. See Sarotte, *The Collapse*, 30ff.

¹²⁴ Eckart, *So sehe ich die Sache*, 134.

advisors. In fact, the growing popularity of Christian organizations and an increase in Church attendance in the 1980s seemed to have had very little impact on how the religious part of the population viewed marriage. Christian East Germans appeared to have reevaluated marriage in less sacred terms as much as those not identifying as religious. This is the conclusion one has to draw from the evidence presented in hundreds of interviews in the last fifteen years or so before the GDR collapsed.

It should also be noted that religious activities were not always based on a developed belief system. This meant that not all East Germans who chose a Church wedding in lieu of a state ceremony, for example, did so for religious reasons. Karla, a 25 year-old member of a *Brigade* work group explained how spending Christmas and Easter in her parents' house had a special place in her heart. On Christmas Eve the whole family went to Church and when they came back home they exchanged Christmas gifts. "I am not religious," Karla assured the interviewer, "I don't even pay Church taxes, but how could one celebrate such events without going to Church?" This sentiment could certainly also be applied to a variety of marriage traditions previously associated with the Christian faith, but which for younger East Germans did not hold any particular religious meaning.

The Power of Love Revisited

In 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but before the unification of the two German states, psychiatrist Hans Joachim Maaz wrote, "the average citizen of the GDR has always shown a façade of respectability, discipline, and order."¹²⁵ Because of this outward appearance of proper manners, East Germans were perceived of as friendly but for the most part circumspect in their interaction with others, Maaz argued. Over the

¹²⁵ Hans-Joachim Maaz, *Der Gefühlsstau - Ein Psychogramm der DDR* (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1990), 11-12.

years, he continued, this double-faced nature of life had made falsehood a part of East German' everyday lives. Professional psychiatrists, such as himself, knew how this unnatural suppression of emotions had led to the creation of a new, particularity East German kind of identity. It felt genuine, but in reality it was only a way to rationalize the experience of "real existing Socialism."¹²⁶ Maaz's description of repressed emotions was almost the polar opposite of an ostensible West German eagerness to talk about their feelings in in the 1980s. If he was right, West Germans' fascination with emotions during this time seemed to have had no parallel in the GDR.

For Rolf Borrmann, though, Maaz's description of an East German "emotional congestion" must have seemed somewhat misguided. Borrmann, who had been publishing books on marriage and sexuality since the mid-1960s, wrote frequently about emotions. In his view, they were both important and plentiful in East German families. The problem was that human feelings were precarious and easily hurt. For this reason, Borrmann argued, people needed to cultivate the specific Socialist values that held East German families together.¹²⁷ Together with Hans-Joachim Schille, Borrmann contended that the Socialist system enabled individuals to live a fulfilling life, allowing for both marital happiness and a dynamic development of individual feelings. Borrmann and Schille's readers were surely familiar with "Socialist morality" and the "socialist marriage." These old tropes in the official East German marriage discourse had ben around since the 1950s. Their meaning, though, had begun to change in the late 1970s. Marxist dogma had given way to more psychologically inclined analyses. While old

¹²⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹²⁷ Rolf Borrmann and Hans-Joachim Schille, *Vorbereitung der Jugend auf Liebe, Ehe und Familie – Theoretische Probleme, Empirische Daten, Pädagogische Konsequenzen* (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1980.), 7 and 23.

terminologies were kept more or less intact, they were no longer bound to their original meaning. This is why Borrmann and Schille could so easily transition from long established party-speak to a discussion of the far-reaching importance of emotions without getting entangled in complicated and often contradictory ideological deliberations.

There were obvious advantages of basing East German family life on “Socialist morality,” wrote Borrmann and Schille. Most importantly it eradicated capitalist power hierarchies of oppressing husbands and subjugated wives.¹²⁸ For citizens of the GDR, who by now understood that marriage was about love and happiness, they continued, the problem of oppression was no longer an issue. The focus had shifted from gender inequality to the management of emotional problems. In essence, Socialist society had made human beings increasingly refined in their sensibilities. It only had one disadvantage. People had become more sensitive to emotional harm. At least this was how Borrmann and Schille described the situation in the early 1980s. East German marriage advisors had of course always considered the impact emotions had on married life, albeit with varying degrees of confidence in how much spouses could change without the help of some kind of state intervention. In Borrmann and Schille’s account, though, the Socialist system had reached a point where it was more a matter of fine-tuning people’s emotional sensibilities than creating new and intrusive social institutions. As a result of this reasoning they stressed the importance of “psychological aspects of marriage dynamics.”¹²⁹

¹²⁸ This, as we have seen, was a gross oversimplification of family life in the GDR. Although gender roles in marriage were generally more equal in East Germany than they were in the West in the 1970s and early 1980s, they were far from “eradicated.”

¹²⁹ Borrmann and Schille, *Vorbereitung der Jugend*, 23.

Published in 1980, Borrmann and Schille's book pointed to a renewed interest in the emotional aspects of marriage. A number of widely popular advice books published throughout the 1980s testify to this development. *Mit dir leben, Liebe und Sexualität bis 30*, and a variety of other titles did not only single out love and happiness as the main reasons to get married. They also, following the example of Borrmann and Schille, emphasized the foundational Socialist values of understanding the emotional sides of married life. Even dispassionate legal prose began to echo the language of emotions. Explaining the ins and outs of family law, Renate Bähnisch of the Ministry of Justice wrote of marriage as the most important form of human relationship in which a deep emotional bond could be formed. This, she concluded, would lead to lasting love, respect, and trust between spouses.¹³⁰

Such talk about integrating the intensely private aspects of emotions with the politicized “public good” in part resembled the debate about private and public from the 1960s. Then the goal had been to eliminate the private aspects of family life. In the 1980s, however, the SED had begun to scale back on its ideological war on individualism and privacy.¹³¹ Arnold Pinther, the author of *Mit dir leben*, was a good example of this subtle shift in priorities. Pinther did not hesitate to overtly praising the East German system, which had contributed to “12500 new marriage bonds being forged every year.”¹³² He also made a point of the fact that all of these marriages were conferred at the civil registry office and not in a Church. In short, the system provided the best institutions

¹³⁰ Renate Bähnisch, *Ehe und Familie - Gesetzliche Bestimmungen* (Berlin: Ministerium der Justiz, 1988), 11.

¹³¹ This did not mean a reduction in the activities of the STASI. It only indicates a less outspoken policy to socialize the private sphere, which had been so common in the 1960s.

¹³² Arnold Pinther, *Mit dir leben - Kleine Eheschule für junge Verheiratete und solche, die es werden möchten* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1984), 7.

yet seen for East German citizens to succeed in married life. But since love – a decidedly personal experience – was the single most important factor when it came to finding the right partner, individuals also needed to take emotional responsibility. “Mutual feelings of love is the first consideration when choosing a partner nowadays,” Pinther stated.¹³³ Far from being a romantic, though, he went on to warn his readers of the fragile nature of human emotions. Marriage was hard work. Spouses needed to allow each other to develop personal tastes and individual interests without curtailing the mutual support for each other. The GDR had built the ideal social framework for people to succeed in this endeavor, Pinther argued, but it was up to each individual to take proper emotional responsibility.

At the *Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung* (ZiJ) in Leipzig emotions were taken just as seriously as in books aimed to educate the public. To be sure, ZiJ marriage studies of the 1980s were, as they had been in the past, mainly focused on housing questions, financial incentives for young partners to stay together, and, being one of the highest priorities, how to persuade people to have more children.¹³⁴ But in contrast to earlier decades, studies from the 1980s took greater pains to appraise what role emotions played in functioning long-term relationships. In essence, these reports stated that Socialist morality had made people aware of the real values of marriage. Consequently, East Germans were no longer held back by “social status and other influences from bourgeois

¹³³ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁴ Lack of population growth caused constant anxiety in the GDR party apparatus. When, in 1981, a report stated that 90% of young married couples had children within four years of the wedding, it was greeted as great news and a feather in the hat for incentive programs dedicated to encourage people to have more children. See BArch DC/4/515 – *ZiJ Zwischenbericht: Hauptergebnisse der Intervallstudie: Zur Entwicklung der Lebensgestaltung junger Ehen*, 1981.

class morality.¹³⁵ Citizens were now motivated only by deep emotional considerations, the ZiJ concluded. Love was not only the guiding light when looking for a suitable partner. According to the reports it was also the single most important factor holding marriages together in the long run.¹³⁶ In many respects the ZiJ was right. At least if statistics, based on large sets anonymous polling data, could be said to reflected people's emotional reality. The majority of the couples participating in studies throughout the 1980s held that love was indeed the driving force in their relationships. However, a closer look at the numbers shows that the facts on the ground did not always match up with ZiJ's optimistic prognoses. A 1981 study, for example, found that almost a fifth of the participants had married for other reasons than love, and follow-up surveys showed similar results.¹³⁷

For the participants in these studies, the most common motivations for getting married, apart from being in love, had to do with improved living standards. Like many of the interviewees in the *Protokolle*, 19 percent of young spouses in 1981 mentioned pragmatic reasons for getting married. These included moving out from their parents' home, access to better living quarters, and eligibility for favorable loans granted to young newlyweds.¹³⁸ Others explained that an unexpected pregnancy had made them reevaluate their future, realizing that marriage came with many benefits, and perhaps most importantly a safer future for the child. However, dividing people's motivations for getting married into distinct categories – as did most counselors and the studies from

¹³⁵ BArch Berlin, DC/4/515, *ZiJ Zwischenbericht: Hauptergebnisse der Intervallstudie: Zur Entwicklung der Lebensgestaltung junger Ehen*, 1981.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid. For similar results, see BArch DC/4/516 – *Forschungsbericht – Zur Herausbildung sozialistischer Partnerbeziehungen un Jungen Ehen*, December 1982.

¹³⁸ BArch Berlin, DC/4/515, *ZiJ Zwischenbericht*.

institutions such as the ZiJ – often creates an artificial view of human decision making. It not only disregards multiple and overlapping motivating forces. It also ignores the ways in which people reevaluate decisions made in the past.

For example, while almost one fifth presented other reasons than love for getting married, over 60 percent of those who *did* say love was the motivating factor revealed that by the fourth year of marriage material security ranked higher than emotional rapport. One might assume that the researchers at the ZiJ would have considered the possibility that rational decision making was sometimes based on emotional instinct.¹³⁹ After all, this was exactly what their colleagues in the 1950s had argued when warning about the dangers of letting love guide people in such important commitments marriage. But instead the researchers in the 1980s did what they could to explain away the importance of non-emotional factors. “Material possessions,” the ZiJ announced, “cannot count as a primary factor for happiness.”¹⁴⁰

For some historians, such remarks show the widening gap between the official and public definitions of marriage during this time.¹⁴¹ ZiJ’s studies, together with *Protokolle* interviews, corroborate this interpretation. It is important, though, to remember that many state supported marriage advisors tried to find a middle way between official doctrine and the lived reality of East German citizens. There are also other reasons to be wary of blanket statements about state attitudes toward marriage in this period. While some officials seemed utterly heedless of how most East Germans

¹³⁹ Basically all recent social psychological research confirms that this is the case. See for example Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth In Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006) and Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

¹⁴⁰ BArch Berlin DC/4/515 – ZiJ *Zwischenbericht: Hauptergebnisse der Intervallstudie: Zur Entwicklung der Lebensgestaltung junger Ehen*, 1981.

¹⁴¹ McLellan, *Love in the time of Communism*, 53ff.

preferred to live their lives, others appeared to be keeping up a rapidly withering façade. That is, they were fully aware of changing attitudes among young East Germans, but decided not to act on this information.

In 1987, the ZiJ made a list pitting traditional marriage against new forms of partnerships that were becoming increasingly common among young people.¹⁴² Marriage, the researchers wrote, had the obvious advantage of producing more children. They continued: “if you really love each other, you should marry,” “Marriage gives you an official record of your relationship,” “Marriage provides security and safety,” and “People who do not marry leave the backdoor open.” This last argument was also mentioned as one of the advantages of alternative forms of partnership. “In domestic partnerships, one is not tied down for life,” the appraisal read, followed by “Domestic partnership is a good way to test the ground for a future marriage,” and, “Domestic partnerships lowers the high divorce rates.”¹⁴³ To the end of the regime, the SED had a clear preference for “traditional marriage.” Still, the fact that domestic partnerships were being examined with less prejudice than in earlier decades shows that institutes such as the ZiJ were not completely oblivious to the priorities of young East Germans.

¹⁴² BArch Berlin DC/4/526 – *Junge Frauen in der Ehe und in der Lebensgemeinschaft – eine verglichene Untersuchung*, 1987, 6.

¹⁴³ BArch Berlin DC/4/526, Amt für Jugendfragen.

CONCLUSION

The major themes influencing the ways in which East and West Germans discussed marriage in the last decade of the Cold War were strikingly similar. Religion, a growing individualism, and emotional wellbeing were all looming large on the minds of marriage experts and ordinary Germans alike. The 1980s was also a time when popular understandings in the GDR and the Federal Republic of what marriage meant for a happy life drifted further apart than ever before. How do we explain these developments? In West Germany it seems as if the 1980s offered a way out of older debates entrenched in ideological and religious understandings of marriage, love, and sexuality. The solution can best be described as “more of everything.” That is, conflicts were not “resolved” in a traditional sense, but the venues on which they could be articulated grew large enough for everyone to participate and feel appreciated. Instead of a constant conflict, as in the late 1960s and early 1970s, or a relatively broad social consensus, as in the “long 1950s,” ideas in the 1980s did not clash as violently as they had before. Historian Daniel Rogers has suggested that the notion of “the market” gave disparate notions of morality, politics, and even family life, a framework that allowed them to coexist without tearing apart the social fabric.¹⁴⁴ During the 1980s, West German consumer culture expanded, and the focus on “the self” was stronger than ever. At the same time references to people’s emotional needs and the importance of a deeper emotional understanding between lovers, spouses, and even short term partners, were suddenly seen everywhere. This development went hand in hand with a growing wedding industry that benefitted by linking marriage and emotional fulfillment together and package them for sale on an ever expanding market.

¹⁴⁴ See Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 221ff.

The above process was aided by an emerging view that the 1980s constituted a break with the postwar period. The issues of the past were by no means gone. The constituent elements in the public discussion about marriage stayed more or less intact. Yet many of these themes that had been carrying the burden of historical memory, were now interpreted as either positive, or at least as a part of a new beginning. The importance of the individual and the strife for self-realization was perhaps the most pronounced of these ideas. Society was no longer considered such a heavy weight on either individual Germans or on the institution of marriage. Historians and others have shown how the 1980s also witnessed a renewed push toward commemoration of the past and a renewed interest in the Holocaust. Evidently Germans were still preoccupied with the past. But it was in many ways a new past. The conflicts of the 1960s and early 1970s appeared to be history rather than part of the present. Meanwhile, traditions cultivated over generations remained an important element in West Germans' understanding of married life. And while these traditions were mixed with modern aspirations for self-realization and late capitalist consumer culture, the idea of marriage as a life-long commitment that held a sacred or magical meaning was never abandoned.

This relatively traditional and conservative view of marriage was shared with the ruling regime across the border, although the ideological justifications for strong family values certainly differed. To be sure, East German counselors had become more pragmatic in their practice since the 1970s and authors of advice books incorporated both ideas of individualism and semi-mystical notions of the power of romantic love in their notion of a happy marriage. These important changes notwithstanding, the idea of marriage as the main moral and ideological glue holding families together persisted in

most official accounts. Did the same hold true for the majority of East Germans? It is difficult to generalize the attitudes of a whole population, but there can be no doubt that at least younger East Germans had a different understanding of marriage in the last two decades of the GDR.

After the 1960s, new generations in the GDR could no longer experience religious marriage ceremonies unless they belonged to a few pockets of Christian communities. Moreover, ideology, which was supposed to replace religion and which the regime made such an effort to force on their citizens in the 1960s, was by the 1970s considered with great skepticism by most. Young people in particular seemed to have developed an outright cynical attitude to any belief system purporting to explain or whitewash a society that by this point was in rapid decline. It seems plausible, then, that this is why East Germans never took Christian family values to heart when religion made a modest comeback in the 1980s. Even when Church leaders who invited people to open discussions tried to emphasize the importance of Christian morality, most East Germans seemed impervious to their proselytizing. Marriage had become one out of many kinds of relationships, albeit still a rather attractive one. Old traditions lived on, but they did not manage to rekindle the magic in the institution of marriage that persisted in the West. People married in fairly high numbers, but they did so for a variety of reasons, many of which were highly pragmatic, such as the access to better living quarters and subsidized state loans. In short, marriage had lost much of its previous mystical power. Whether this had an impact on post unification relationships between former East and West Germans difficult to determine. Many other aspects contributed to the sometimes problematic

integration process in the new Federal Republic.¹⁴⁵ We do know, however, that marriages between former East and West Germans ended in divorce to a higher degree than others in the first fifteen years of united Germany. It seems reasonable to argue that the different popular understanding of and marriage did indeed influence German relationships after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

¹⁴⁵ Vaizey, *Born in the GDR*.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation started as a study of marriage in East and West Germany. I was interested in what the two German states could tell us about the institution of marriage and about the pursuit of happiness. Postwar Germany seemed to present a specifically interesting and rewarding place to investigate these questions comparatively. First, it offers an opportunity to explore how Germans dealt with love and marriage as a source of happiness in a time fraught with memories of recent mass death, murder, and national defeat in the wake of WWII. Second, the East and the West embarked on two different paths of rebuilding society, often justified by ideological convictions. Many of those who planned these new societies saw marriage as fundamentally important to a happy life and a stable state, but they did so from radically different perspectives. Finally, both Germanys had to deal with new generations questioning recently established truths, which created debates about the institution of marriage.

As I was getting further into the writing, the direction the study was moving began to change. From having focused on what postwar Germany can tell us about marriage, it became a study of what the institution of marriage can tell us about the nature of the two German states. This change of direction is also reflected in the conclusions, which emphasize the inability of state run programs and expert advisors to change people's attitudes toward marriage. We should be aware, then, that the results come out of two, sometimes competing, narratives, which is perhaps most evident in the role emotions play in this study. At times, the history of emotions is employed as a method to explore people's attitudes toward marriage. In other cases, the history of emotions illuminates differences and similarities between the two German states. While the results

are still valid, it is important to point out that they are a consequence of the tension between the two driving narratives in this study.

* * *

When East and West Germany were founded in 1949, Germans did not reinvent the institution of marriage. As with a number of other traditions transcending national borders, historical breaking points, and religious and ideological fault lines, marriage retained more or less the same place in people's lives it had had before they found themselves inhabiting new political and social landscapes. At the same time self-proclaimed experts, church representatives, and government officials fought for power, influence, and the right to interpret the meaning of marriage. This dissertation has told the story of how these elite groups endeavored to make people adopt their specific view of married life – from the choice of partner to the desired number of children one should have. Considering how different the two German states were, and how much power some of these groups held when formulating policies and creating government sponsored programs, it would not be entirely implausible to suggest that their efforts to eventually change people's view of marriage were successful. I hope, however, that the preceding chapters have led us to a different conclusion. While they indeed made a mark on the way people perceived of married life between 1949 and 1989, governments and strong interest organizations mostly worked against local traditions, challenged views from new generations, and were ambivalent in the face of desires awoken by an expanding consumer culture. This holds true for the GDR as well as for the Federal Republic, yet the ways these societies framed the public discussion of marriage was to a great extent dependent of their ideological and religious perspectives.

Their political differences notwithstanding framers of the East and West German constitutions agreed at least on one point. Marriage needed to be protected by the law. As with most states, the GDR and the Federal Republic wanted to control the institution, which inevitably led to rather conservative interpretations of marriage. In West Germany, such views mostly came from politicians with strong ties to the Church, such as Franz-Josef Wuermeling. In East Germany, they were backed by an older generation of politically progressive but socially conservative leaders. Throughout the forty years under investigation, politicians on both sides of the border held more or less secure positions from which to formulate policies and laws to safeguard a strong institution of marriage. While this might not seem particularly surprising, the fact that they felt a constant threat coming from outside forces is all the more interesting. Despite their strong standing, and in some cases altogether dominant social positions, the groups and individuals constantly feared an impending marriage crisis.

As I hope to have shown, the fear that marriage was in constant danger of losing its importance continued until the end of our period. This suggests that in spite of persistent efforts to change the meaning of marriage and control people's family lives through legislation and other measures, dominant voices in the marriage debate in both German states felt they had very limited influence. In reality, laws regulating divorce, subsidized loans to newlyweds, and other state sponsored programs had a great impact on people's lives. But no matter how important these measures were to change the practical sides of marriage, they were mostly reactionary and reflected underlying cultural and social changes that they could not control.

I hope to have demonstrated that there were stronger powers involved in the transformation of marriage than ideology and religion, often operating on a level that extended across national boundaries and contrasting ideological regimes. An increasing influence from commercial interests, such as a growing wedding industry, had an immense impact on what a happy marriage meant in the popular mind. Another development transcending the German-German border was a move toward an increasingly individualized and self-centered idea of marital happiness. This was in many ways influenced by commercial interest marketing marital happiness as a way of self-realization. But it was also a result of even larger social and economic changes through which market forces – both in reality and in people’s imaginations – guided people’s behavior.

When examining and historicizing these broad changes we see that they took rather different forms depending on which side of the German border we look. They were justified, contested, and explained by such contrasting concepts as Socialist morality, the Christian marriage, communal living, and many others. Still, these were not just impotent reactions. They were part of a reciprocal process contributing to form the overlapping local and national narratives about the good marriage we have followed in this study. In a similar way citizens of the two German states were not only passive consumers of goods and ideas linked to a happy marriage. Traditions, felt and imagined needs, and dreams about the future all shaped the emerging wedding and marriage industry.

While it may seem obvious to point out that love and affection were crucial to how experts as well as ordinary Germans imagined a fulfilling life, the role of emotions in the public discussion about marriage changed a great deal over the forty years under

investigation. In the 1950s and 1960s we hear many skeptical voices about the danger of choosing a partner based only on one's feelings. In the past two decades of this study, however, emotions became increasingly accepted, and eventually expected as the foundation for a fulfilling marriage. This development was ultimately a question of how to resolve the dilemma of combining romantic love with rational decision making. We can see examples of this throughout our period. In East Germany advisors found ways to ideologically merge these two concepts into the notion of "Socialist marriage." In the West, for instance, many saw "computer dating" as the ultimate solution. All possible parameters, including information about emotional and material needs, were fed to a program, which then found a perfect match by combining the information with that of people of the opposite sex. This way emotions were allowed to play a role in finding the perfect partner, while at the same time being conveniently eliminated from the decision making process.

The focus on rationality and the pessimism toward strong emotions in the 1950s can be accounted for by an ongoing scientific enterprise to explain the human condition. Yet the more social scientists exposed their biological or evolutionary significance, or their function, the more people found ways to re-enchant the meaning of love and marriage. And although divorce rates kept on rising by the end of our period, marriage remained the preferred form of partnership, at least in West Germany. In the GDRs new generations of East Germans began to see marriage as just one among many kinds of partnerships. Nevertheless, the expectation that marriage was as an institution where one might find happiness for life was still present. Still, as I hope the preceding chapters have shown, young people in the GDR were also less susceptible to a return of Christian

values in the 1980s, and the magical powers the commercialization of marriage had brought with it. This was most likely a result of their mistrust of ideology and of any general systems of thought explaining the world around them. However, the different views of marriage among young East and West Germans notwithstanding, they soon had to adjust to new realities after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Thus, exploring whether these differences continued to be articulated in the new Federal Republic is fundamental to understanding the development of marriage in the decades following German unification.

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