

**RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND FAMILY PLANNING**

# **YOUTH SEXUALITY IN THE INTERNET AGE**

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE SOCIAL AND  
SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

## **STUDY**

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Publisher: Bundeszentrale  
für gesundheitliche Aufklärung

## **RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND FAMILY PLANNING**

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# **Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age**

**A qualitative study of the social and  
sexual relationships of young people**

**by Silja Matthiesen**

**with contributions from André Aude, Jasmin Mainka,  
Urszula Martyniuk, Gunter Schmidt and Anja Wermann**

**Funded and commissioned by the Bundeszentrale für  
gesundheitliche Aufklärung (BZgA),  
Cologne 2013**

Bibliographic information from the Deutsche Bibliothek:

the Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available online at <http://dnb.ddb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-942816-48-9

The contributions to the expert series Forschung und Praxis der Sexualaufklärung und Familienplanung (Research and Practice in Sexuality Education and Family Planning) represent the opinion of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the client. The expert series is designed as a discussion forum.

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**Executive editor:**

Angelika Heßling

**Editing, concept and design:**

Kühn Medienkonzept & Design GmbH, Hennef

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# Preface

The new media are a firm component of the everyday life of young people and young adults. They use them as a communication platform, as a source of information and also as a place to get advice. Sexual media contents such as images, chats and films are available online, making them quite easily accessible. However, the extent to which this really influences the sexual socialization of young women and men has been the subject of very little empirical research.

The representative survey on youth sexuality by the Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung (BZgA) has been delivering firm quantitative data about the attitudes and behaviours of young people and young adults in the matter of sexuality education, sexuality and contraception. However, there are insufficient data about how this group currently organizes their sexuality and relationships, their values and ideals, and the role the internet and the new media play. In light of this, the BZgA commissioned the research project 'Sexual and Social Relationships of Young People and Young Adults'. The qualitative interview study was conducted from July 2009 to December 2011. 160 young women and men between the ages of 16 and 19 from Hamburg and Leipzig and attending a Gymnasium (high school) or Berufsschule (vocational training college) at this time were surveyed. As part of the study, an investigation was carried out into how young people and young adults currently live in a relationship or as single people. One central question was always the influence of the internet and what young women and men do there, as well as in chat rooms and on social networking sites. A further aspect of the study focused on how the free access to internet pornography is coped with.

The results presented here show how flirts and relationships are approached in the virtual world and how meetings in real life take their course. The results about how young people handle sexualized or pornographic content confirm that they are very competent in their assessment of the media world of images and the extent to which these correspond to reality.



The study results illustrate that young people and young adults have gained an additional, new sphere for sexual experiences in the internet. This presents a particular challenge to parents and teachers because – according to the BZgA's 2010 Youth Sexuality Study – these are still the most important reference people with regard to sexuality. Parents and teachers need media education so that they can be adequately 'there' for young people and young adults during their sexual development.

The present study provides important clues about the development and optimization of sex-education concepts and information services with regard to sexuality education. Among other things, the BZgA maintains a youth-friendly online medium, [www.loveline.de](http://www.loveline.de), which accompanies young people growing up in the internet age.

Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung  
Köln 2013

# Introduction

*Gunter Schmidt and Silja Matthiesen*

Youth sexuality has changed a great deal since the second half of the twentieth century. This is largely because of the liberalization that has taken place in Western society. The results presented here are to be seen against this background. They supplement the studies that the Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung (BZgA) has repeatedly conducted since 1994, which focus on quantitative data about sexuality and contraceptive behaviour. In contrast to those studies, this publication presents its results as a qualitative interview study, which contains 'softer' and more in-depth findings about ideals, relationships, experiences, fears and conflicts.

Silja Matthiesen and her team are primarily interested in three aspects of young people's sex lives:

- the social organization of sexuality and relationships;
- the experiences young people have with the internet and their effects on their sexual socialization;
- how young people deal with pornographic material on the internet.

To round off the picture, further topics such as sexual orientation, the young people's perception of their own bodies, and migrant background are also looked at; they embed the young people's experiences into a wider social context. While they are to be seen as an important supplement, this study does not claim to address them exhaustively.

Many debates about youth sexuality that were based on impressions and prejudice can now be placed on a solid foundation. This examination shows that careful empirical investigation can have an educational and socially calming effect in the recurring social panics about young people's sexual experiences and habits.

## 1.1 Background: post-emancipation youth sexuality

*Gunter Schmidt*

1

Sexual liberalization is a long-drawn-out process in Western societies. Its roots lie in the Enlightenment, with its call to leave behind self-incurred immaturity, and in the Romantic period, with its emphasis on subjectivity, feelings and passions. The process of emancipation had early highlights: in the German empire in the late nineteenth century for example, when the sexually other, particularly homosexuals, were given a voice and the significance of sexuality on people's lives and personalities was discovered by psychoanalysts and experts from other fields<sup>1</sup> another early peak occurred in the 1920s when, after the collapse of the old political order, new freedoms were tested and traditional gender images were shattered.<sup>2</sup> The Nazis split the sexual field: they were permissive towards non-marital sexual relations, as long as they were heterosexual, while at the same time brutally persecuting sexual minorities. They propagated a deeply patriarchal perception of women and the family. Abortions were fiercely punished on the one hand, or carried out compulsorily on the other. Their reproductive policies were racist.<sup>3</sup> There have been periods of standstill or indeed reaction in more recent times too. There was, for example, the sexual and gender-political reaction of the Adenauer era, which received active support from the churches.<sup>4</sup> However, this final attempt to hold up developments in the 1950s only accelerated the progress of liberalization when the contradiction between the official morality of church and state on the one hand and the sexual reality and moral values of young adults on the other had taken on grotesque aspects and was no longer tenable. The late 1960s witnessed a sexual revolution. This dramatically accelerated the process of emancipation. A few years later came the feminist revolution, which turned the understanding of the genders upside down and largely abolished sexist double standards.

### The decline of the significance of marriage

The core of sexual liberalization is easy to name. By the 1970s, marriage had finally lost its monopoly on legitimizing sexuality and relationships, meaning that marital and non-marital sexuality and relationships were put on the same level. This process has many manifestations:<sup>5</sup> married and unmarried adults no longer differ in their sexual rights and hardly differ in their sexual activity; non-marital relationships and family structures – living together out of wedlock, raising children out of wedlock, same-sex relationships with and without children – have become more common and, over time, more socially acceptable. Relationships became more mobile, monogamy became serial. Gay and lesbian sexuality escaped the ghetto of the forbidden and the abnormal, becoming a 'healthy' variant of human sexuality. In

<sup>1</sup> Oosterhuis (2000)

<sup>2</sup> Herzog (2011)

<sup>3</sup> Herzog (2005)

<sup>4</sup> Schmidt (2000a)

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the overview in, for example, Schmidt (2004a)

this country, youth sexuality became the norm and was largely accepted by society (even though we adults succumb to moral panics from time to time about the apparently high pregnancy rates of girls or the alleged pornography addiction of boys).<sup>6</sup> The sexual liberalization went hand-in-hand with an impressive dismantling of double standards that discriminated against women as well as with a convergence of the genders with regard to sexual options, rights and behaviours.<sup>7</sup> The emancipation process and its consequences can be illustrated using youth sexuality as a good example.

### Neither taboo nor laissez-faire

Of the women born before 1950, fewer than 20 % had sexual intercourse before the age of 19. After the liberalization, this figure was more than 60 %. That is a dramatic change. It occurred relatively abruptly among the women born between 1950 and 1954, in other words those who were 18 years old in around 1970. The trends among the boys are similar to those of the girls, but less pronounced. The girls have ‘overtaken’ the boys. They start having sex earlier now. The traditional pattern of gender differences – boys start earlier – has been turned upside down. I have already cited the reason for this above: sexual emancipation goes hand-in-hand with a dismantling of double standards and with a convergence of the genders regarding sexual options and rights.

The data cited were collected from German university students<sup>8</sup> But the same trends can be seen at both the higher and lower level among young people with different educational levels and young people from different countries with a liberal (Scandinavia) or restrictive sexual tradition (southern Europe).<sup>9</sup> Sexual liberalization and the gender equalization are global events in Western industrialized societies.

The change in young people’s sexual behaviour took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the height of the sexual revolution. Since that time, not much has happened with regard to the age at which young people have sexual intercourse for the first time. The common lament that young people are starting earlier and earlier is one of the many fantasies nurtured by adults with regard to youth sexuality. This is demonstrated by the repeat surveys conducted by the BZgA between 1994 and 2009, with young people born between 1977 and 1995.<sup>10</sup> The subjects of the youth sex revolution, the ‘revolutionaries’, are now between 55 and 60 years old, the parents are the rebels, not their adolescent daughters or sons. In Germany today, around a quarter of 15-year-old and around two thirds of 17-year-old girls have already slept with a member of the opposite sex. Among the boys of the same age the corresponding figures are five to ten percentage points lower.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Matthiesen et. al. (2009) as well as chapter 4

<sup>7</sup> Kontula, Haavio-Mannila (1995)

<sup>8</sup> Schmidt (2004b)

<sup>9</sup> Bozon, Kontula (1998)

<sup>10</sup> BZgA (2010a)

When parental and social prohibitions disappear, young people have to take responsibility for their own sexual behaviour. Does that work? Overall, quite well. The responsibility young people accept can be seen particularly clearly in their contraceptive behaviour. Young people's contraceptive behaviour has massively improved over the past 40 years. Of the women who are 16 and 17 today, around 88 % used 'safe' (Pill, condom, Pill and condom) contraception the first time they had intercourse, and more than 95 % did so the most recent time.<sup>11</sup> Adults behave no better.

Unwanted pregnancies are a risk of youth sexuality. In line with the good contraceptive behaviour, annual pregnancy rates of 15–17-year-old women in 2011 were low in Germany compared to other countries, with seven pregnancies per 1,000 women.<sup>12</sup> The widespread stereotype that teenage pregnancies are constantly on the increase is simply false, another adult fantasy. What is interesting is that in countries with restrictive attitudes towards youth sexuality (e.g. USA), teen pregnancies are much more common than in countries with liberal attitudes (Germany or Scandinavia). Conservative sexual attitudes go hand-in-hand with teenage pregnancies and problematic contraceptive behaviour.<sup>13</sup> In addition, all youth studies show that young people structure their sexuality into steady relationships; as in other population groups, more than 90 % of their sexual activity takes place within a steady relationship.<sup>14</sup>

### The democratization of sexual morals

Sexual liberalization has not led, as is often thought, to a moral laissez-faire attitude or to chaos. Instead, it has produced an order that is in some regards stricter than the old rules. The result of these changes is known as 'negotiation ethics' or 'consensus ethics'.<sup>15</sup> The old sexual mores of the churches and the state was a morality of sexual acts; it qualified certain sexual activity, such as premarital or extra-marital sex, masturbation, homosexuality, oral sex, sex with contraception or whatever as bad in principle, largely independent of its context. By contrast, negotiation ethics do not judge sexual acts as such, but the manner in which they occur, in other words the interaction. It has clear liberal traits. Whether heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual, marital or non-marital, with love or without, oral or anal, tender or rough, respectable or inventive, sadistic or masochistic – none of that is of any interest morally. What is of interest is that it is negotiated and agreed. Even abstinence can come into its own again, dressed up as 'new chastity', but this time as a voluntary and optional

<sup>11</sup> BZgA (2010a)

<sup>12</sup> Matthiesen et. al. (2009)

<sup>13</sup> Matthiesen et. al. (2009)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. for example Schmidt (1993) and chapter 2.1

<sup>15</sup> Schmidt (1996)

attitude. Among young people consensus ethics can be seen in many negotiation processes, such as in conversations about contraception or about the differing sexual desires of the sexual partners.<sup>16</sup>

It is not external authorities such as the state or the churches who determine what is right or wrong. It is the people directly involved. That makes negotiation ethics democratic. It is a grassroots ethical stance, a morality from the bottom up, and that implies a radical change with regard to who determines what is right or wrong. This is no longer done by institutions such as the churches or the state. Morality has been de-institutionalized. Although the institutions, the Roman Catholic church for example, still voice clear moral codes, they are spectacularly irrelevant for the actions of the vast majority of people, including religious people, at least in the Western industrialized nations. Young Roman Catholics have sexual intercourse for the first time just as early as young Protestants or those without a religion. Fortunately they also use contraception as well as the others.<sup>17</sup> If young Catholic women under the age of 18 experience an unwanted pregnancy, they are just as likely to opt for a termination as women who are protestant or without a religious denomination.

The central ideal of morality from below is sexual self-determination. Our senses have been sharpened to this as a result of the feminist debate, which frequently addressed sexual violence, sexual assault and sexual violations in the 1980s, shortly after the sexual revolution. It was no longer premarital sex that was sinful; instead it was, as Andreas Zielcke has put it, 'deprivation of sexual liberty'.<sup>18</sup> It was no longer sexual intercourse with contraception that was immoral, but rather unprotected sex with a drowsy partner against the agreement to 'only do it with condoms'. Consent ethics have greatly heightened our sensitivity to sexual assaults and violations, in a way that the old morality of the churches never could. Polemically expressed, that morality called everything 'fornication' that was premarital, extramarital, same-sex, with contraception, or paedosexual. This is a reason why the historic cases of abuse in the churches are only being talked about now and generally only by those outside.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Matthiesen et. al. (2009) as well as chapter 2.1

<sup>17</sup> Matthiesen et. al. (2009)

<sup>18</sup> Zielcke (2011)

## From urge to resource

With sexual liberalization, sexual experience changed as well. For the pre-liberal boy, who masturbated despite it being forbidden fifty years ago, it was a disturbing experience, a mixture of arousal, fear, guilt, rebellion against and triumph over prohibitions, and it was exactly this mixture that produced the intensity of his experience and his orgasm. For a boy of today, who is allowed everything, masturbation is a pastime that has to compete with other pastimes, an option for his body that he can take advantage of in a pleasurable and relaxing manner. ‘Play another round on the computer or get myself off’ could be the question he faces. He no longer experiences his sexuality as an urge, as a force that could achieve power over him at any time, as a wild animal, caged inside him, always ready to break free. For him, sexuality is a resource he can make use of: to experience arousal, to rid himself of loneliness or boredom, to express his masculinity or use it to delve into his imagination, as well as for many other things.

**The urge model.** In the nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth, sexual urges were the leading metaphor for the understanding of sexuality. According to this model, sexual tensions keep building up, as if a kettle filled with water were standing on the fire and had to blow off steam from time to time to prevent the kettle from buckling (the neurotic symptom) or exploding (sexual impulse actions or a breakthrough of sexual urges). Sigmund Freud gave this kettle or psychohydraulic model its most nuanced form, thereby probably giving quite a precise description of the experiences and feelings of people, especially men, around 1900. Psychoanalysis did not see sexual urges as a socially determined manifestation of the age, instead seeing them as something ahistorical and essential. However, the scientific model of sexual urges and people’s experiences of these urges were the product of a specific social situation that was shaped by the sexual prohibitions of the pre-liberal society, a morality of abstinence, the lack of sexual outlets, and the strict regulation of sexual gratification. In such a social situation, sexuality becomes an urge, a force, that can overcome us like an impulse at any time, it could in principle be anti-social or destructive, but also full of subversive potency, heavenly enticing and hellishly dangerous.

**The resource model.** In the 1970s, in other words against the background of sexual liberalization, sociologists and psychoanalysts developed theories about sexuality that made do without the concept of ‘urge’.<sup>19</sup> Over time, a concept of sexuality developed that I call the resource model.<sup>20</sup> Today we no longer understand and experience sexuality as an urge that works like a kettle on a fire, but as a resource, as a (biologically founded) way of searching for arousal, pleasure, experience and relationship. We are no longer moved so much anymore by the question of how we can get rid of sexual pressure and tension to find peace; instead we want to know about all the different things we can do with our sexuality. ‘It overcomes me’ describes the experience of sexual desire in the

<sup>19</sup> Gagnon, Simon (1973); Stoller (1979)

<sup>20</sup> Schmidt (2012b)

model of sexual urges, whereas ‘I seek out the desire and make something of it’ expresses the attitude in the resource model. The goal is not salvation from torturous pent-up urges, instead we want to play with arousal and desire. As this study shows, it is not an abundance of impulses (pent-up urges), but a paucity of impulses (boredom) that motivates the boys of today to surf the porn worlds until they find something to turn them on enough to masturbate – or not, as the case may be.

## 1.2 The study: contents and structure

*Silja Matthiesen*

‘They watch porn when they’re 12, have sex when they’re 13 and get pregnant at 14’<sup>21</sup> – so said the magazine of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2009. This is just one example for the scandalization of youth sexuality that is currently so widespread in the media: using buzzword expressions like ‘the porn generation’ or ‘the sexualization of our youth’, fears are stoked and images of young people’s sexual impoverishment are generated. However, existing empirical youth studies say something very different: the data of the Statistisches Bundesamt (German Federal Office of Statistics) for example, show that teenage pregnancy rates have been falling for the past ten years and that they are low in comparison with other countries.<sup>22</sup> The representative youth studies the BZgA has been publishing since the 1980s document a continuous improvement in contraceptive behaviour.<sup>23</sup> Neither the BZgA’s longitudinal studies nor any other empirical investigations in Germany in any way indicate ‘sexual depravity’.<sup>24</sup> The age at which young people have sex for the first time has only changed slightly in the past decade and the responsible management of sexuality, indicated by the care young people take in using contraception, has increased over the past ten years.<sup>25</sup> Pregnancy rates, contraceptive behaviour and the age when young people first have sexual intercourse are important and useful indicators, but also rough ones, for the sexual behaviour of young people.

<sup>21</sup> *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* (2009)

<sup>22</sup> Matthiesen et. al. (2009)

<sup>23</sup> BZgA (2006; 2010a)

<sup>24</sup> Schetsche, Schmidt (2010)

<sup>25</sup> BZgA (2006; 2010a)



### 1.2.1 Goals and research questions

With regard to the effects of the new media, there are in Germany many worries, some of them excessive, but little actual empirical research to date. It is undoubtedly true that the conditions that shape the internet age also influence the sexual socialization of boys and girls. It is equally undoubtedly true that this poses a massive challenge for all the people and institutions whose job it is to accompany young people as they develop into sexual beings in this day and age. The goal of this study is to obtain well-founded empirical data about how young people currently organize sexuality and relationships and what values and ideals drive them. At the heart of the study is the topic of 'youth sexuality and the internet', in other words the question of how easy, constant access to sexually explicit images, chats and films on the internet is currently changing the conditions young people's sexual socialization.

It is one of the study's particular concerns to address the subject matter of young people, the internet and pornography, a theme much discussed by the public. What do we know about how young people associate what they see in pornographic images with their own sexuality? Up until a few years ago, we had very little empirical data about this. The lack of data contributes to classifying pornography exclusively as a risk factor in sexual development.

Questions about the possible opportunities presented by pornography consumption have received little attention to date, as has the role of young women who only appear marginally or – in the feminist thought tradition – as victims of men's pornography consumption. Youth protection debates and sex-education discourse often talk about 'young people' when in fact they mean 'boys'. Questions debated there, such as 'are young people becoming addicted to pornography?' or 'is violent pornographic sexuality becoming a kind of norm for young people?' can be examined with some justification by looking at particular groups of boys.<sup>26</sup> Questions like this for girls border on the absurd. If we look at young women in isolation, it becomes clear that their occupation with pornography is linked to questions about female gender identity, of 'doing gender' and their ambivalent positioning as a sexual subject.

<sup>26</sup> Hill (2011a; 2011b)

### 1.2.2 Data and methodology

The research project ‘Sexuelle und soziale Beziehungen von 17- und 18-jährigen Frauen und Männern’ (‘The sexual and social relationships of 17 and 18-year-old women and men’) was conducted by the Institut für Sexualforschung und Forensische Psychiatrie at the Universitätsklinikum Hamburg-Eppendorf. It ran from June 2009 to December 2011 and was sponsored by the BZgA. In the autumn of 2009, we used guided interviews to survey 160 young people living in cities.

The guide was created taking into account the state of research and checked with the help of conversations with experts. It was also trialled in a pre-test. It contained five sections:

- personal background;
- the current steady relationship and the sex in the relationship, or the single life and sex as a single person;
- the use of the internet for flirting, finding a partner and for socio-sexual chats;
- experiences with and dealing with pornography;
- sexual development and sexual experiences to date.<sup>27</sup>

The young people’s experiences with sexual boundary transgressions, molestation and sexual violence were not systematically included in the interviews. The guide was already very extensive and was not to be overloaded. The student interviewers and the respondents were not to be overwhelmed either.<sup>28</sup>

The surveyed individuals were male and female in approximately equal numbers. They were attending vocational college or high school at the time, and were living in Hamburg or Leipzig (cf. table 1). They were contacted through their school. The survey was authorized by the Hamburg and Leipzig education authorities respectively. The principals and teachers at the participating schools were generally interested in the study, as well as being very helpful and forthcoming.

<sup>27</sup> The interview guide can be obtained from the author.

<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless some respondents reported negative, stressful experiences, which are addressed in various chapters: online harassment (cf. chapter 3.3.2), young men’s experiences with shocking and repugnant pornography (cf. chapter 4.2), as well as young female migrants’ experience with violence (cf. chapter 6.2).

Table 1: **Data acquisition** (by gender, type of school and city)

	High school		Vocational college	
	<i>female</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>male</i>
Hamburg	20	16	19	25
Leipzig	21	20	20	19
Total	41	36	39	44

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

The students were informed about the goals of the study in school and were made aware that participation was voluntary. The young people were very willing to participate, which is why not all those willing could actually be interviewed at many schools. This reflects a high level of interest in the subject of sexuality on the part of the students, and the participation conditions were evidently attractive: they were paid 30 euros to compensate them for their efforts. In addition it was possible to conduct some of the interviews in the schools during school hours. There was also the option to conduct the interviews in the premises of the Hamburg Institute or, at the request of the participants, over the phone.

The approach, as described, for obtaining the sample and conducting the survey was agreed with Hamburg's data protection officer. The names of those interviewed have been altered for data protection reasons.

The interviews took between around half an hour to three hours, depending on what experiences with relationships and sexuality were present and how communicative the young people were. 149 interviews were conducted face-to-face, eleven over the phone. They did not differ in duration. The interviews were conducted by colleagues involved in the project as well as by students from the Universities of Hamburg and Leipzig (in Leipzig under the guidance of Dr Uta Starke) who were trained by us. Women interviewed girls, men interviewed boys. The conversations were recorded and then transcribed anonymously. The evaluation of the extensive, transcribed material is oriented to the method of qualitative content analysis and was partially done with the help of the software tool MaxQDA.

Table 2: **The sample** (case numbers)

		Girls (n = 80)	Boys (n = 80)	Total (n = 160)
<b>Age</b>				
	16	5	4	9
	17	38	36	74
	18	29	29	58
	19	8	11	19
<b>Level of education</b>				
	academic high	41	36	77
	middle*	9	17	26
	basic secondary*	30	27	57
<b>Migration</b>				
	Migration background**	23	18	41
<b>Sexual experiences</b>				
	Has masturbated	34	77	111
	Has had sexual intercourse	59	60	119
	Currently in a steady relationship	41	36	77

\* The participants in these categories were at vocational college at the time of the interview.

\*\* At least one parent with a foreign nationality, or born outside Germany.

Source: BZgA, database 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age' 2011

The 160 young people surveyed are to be understood as a self-selection sample distributed by location, gender and education. Table 2 describes the sample with regard to sociodemographic and sexual-demographic characteristics. The goal of the sampling, as is customary in qualitative studies, is to capture the greatest possible heterogeneity of experiences. That was relatively successful as a result of accessing the participants through the different types of school. Of course there is the limitation that young people not attending any school were not reached. Among the respondents in Hamburg there were a large number of young people with a migration background (42%). With regard to previous sexual experiences, the respondents are no different from those in the BZgA's representative youth survey.<sup>29</sup>

**29** BZgA (2010a)

No young people with a homosexual or bisexual orientation participated in the survey, even though we expressly invited them to do so when we introduced the project.

The results presented in the following chapters hold for the mainstream of heterosexual young people living in cities. They are not in themselves applicable to all young people. It seems likely that in certain groups – such as among young people who live in particularly educationally and socially disadvantaged circumstances – also have other attitudes and experiences. We cannot rule out that young people from precarious social and family circumstances are less able to have a critical, reflective and self-confident way of dealing with sexuality than the young people surveyed here.

With regard to young people's sex lives, our study is interested in the following questions.

- How is their sexuality organized? How are the relationships organized? How does being single go together with sexuality? All of this is addressed against the background of everyday lives almost unthinkable without internet access.
- What experiences do young people have online? How do these affect their sexual socialization? How do they use the internet for their sexual socialization?
- How do young people deal with pornographic material on the internet?
- What other facets of young people's sex lives appear in the qualitative interviews (sexual orientation, perception of the body, removing pubic hair, masturbation)? How do young people with a migrant background experience their sexuality?



# 2

## *Youth sexuality today*

**2.1** *Living as a couple: relationships*  
*Silja Matthiesen, Jasmin Mainka and*  
*Urszula Martyniuk*

**2.2** *Currently unattached: single life and  
sex as a single*  
*Urszula Martyniuk*

# Youth sexuality today

*Silja Matthiesen, Jasmin Mainka, Urszula Martyniuk*

In this chapter we want to use our extensive qualitative material to address in more depth the following questions.

- How do young people organize sexuality and relationships today?
- What values, expectations and concepts do young people have with regard to sexual relationships?

We distinguish between experiences in a steady relationship and life as a single. We examine how young couples live together, how unattached young people experience sexuality, and the importance that sex and dealing with it have for the individual.

We have investigated these questions once before while looking at a special sample group – women who had unwanted pregnancies and opted for a termination. We were able to show that even for these women the dominant pattern of their sexual behaviour was by no means chaotic, let alone ‘depraved’.<sup>30</sup> The data here expand the questions to the mainstream of young people and supplement them with the male perspective.

<sup>30</sup> Matthiesen, Schmidt (2009)



## 2.1 Life as a couple: being in a relationship

*Silja Matthiesen, Jasmin Mainka, Urszula Martyniuk*

In what follows we shall evaluate in one place the statements made by young women and by young men. This has a simple reason: many traditional gender differences in the heterosexual behaviour of young people have disappeared or even become reversed in recent decades.<sup>31</sup> Petersen and Hyde, in their large-scale meta-analysis of gender differences reach the same conclusion about adults: 'Most gender differences in sexual attitudes and behaviours were small. Exceptions were masturbation incidence, pornography use, casual sex, and attitudes toward casual sex, which all yielded medium effect sizes in which male participants reported more sexual behaviour or permissive attitudes than female participants.'<sup>32</sup> This means that there is now virtually no difference between the genders with regard to their sexual experiences with a partner – clear differences can only be found with regard to solo sexual experiences (pornography use and masturbation, cf. chapters 4 and 5.4) as well as among young people with a migrant background (cf. chapter 6).

### 2.1.1 Definitions and relationship cohesion

Of our 160 respondents, half were in a steady relationship during the time of the survey. More than 90 % had already been in a steady relationship, young women and young men only exhibiting minor differences with regard to their relationship experience to date. The current steady relationship had been going on for an average of 13 months.<sup>33</sup> For 80 % of the young people currently in a relationship, it was not their first one, meaning they had already had at least one other partner, which also means they had experienced at least one break-up. Steady relationships tend to be sexual relationships. In the current steady relationships, 80 % had already had sexual intercourse with their partner. Around three quarters had had sexual intercourse in the past four weeks. The average frequency of intercourse for the sexually active group was eight per month.<sup>34</sup> Those who were in a steady relationship but were not (yet) sleeping together said they were too young or the relationship was too fresh. Another possibility was that one or both partners had a migrant background associated with a less liberal attitude to premarital sexuality.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Bozon, Kontula (1998); Schmidt (1993); Schmidt (2004b); Schmidt et. al. (2006); Matthiesen et. al. (2009), p. 13 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Petersen, Hyde (2011), p. 21 (original English)

<sup>33</sup> The average was ten months; 25 % of the current relationships had lasted one to three months; 36 % longer than a year, the longest relationship at the time of the survey had been going on for 42 months.

<sup>34</sup> To compare: only 13 % of the non-attached respondents had had sex in the past four weeks; the average sexual intercourse frequency of single people in the past four weeks was 0.4 times (cf. chapter 2.2).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. chapter 6 about concerns regarding virginity and the acceptance of premarital sex.

How do young people define a steady relationship? 17-year-old Phillip gave a typical answer: *'[I understand] a steady relationship to be something where you're really together, that you just love this one person, that there are no others, that you can trust each other completely and that you're faithful to each other.'* They want a clear avowal to each other, love, fidelity and trust. Sexuality is not necessarily part of it – especially the first relationships can be steady without sexual intercourse occurring. The duration also plays a role. Retrospectively, the relationships were more likely to be judged as having been steady, the longer they lasted.

### **What relationship biographies are there?**

The 160 respondents reported 447 steady relationships that they had had to date or that were still on-going. This count was based purely on the subjective personal definition of the respondents – they determined what a steady relationship was/is for them. For the following depiction of the respondents' experience to date, we have added two criteria for standardization purposes:

- We only count relationships that (have) lasted three months or longer.
- We start the relationship biography on the 13th birthday.  
All the relationships that started and ended before that were left out; all the relationships that started earlier and lasted for at least three months after the 13th birthday were included.<sup>36</sup>

Because of the subsequent determination of a minimum age of 13 and a minimum duration of three months, 144 of the 447 steady relationships were instead classed as 'short-term relationships' (relationships that lasted between one day and three months), while 51 were classed as 'early relationships' (relationships that began and ended before the 13th birthday). The 'short-term' relationships, even though they have a different quality, reveal something important in the lives of young people, namely the extent to which they seek out a partner.

The 160 respondents had had a total of 252 steady relationships that lasted for three months or more. They lasted for between three months and three and a half years. Between their 13th birthday and their interview, the young women surveyed had spent an average of a third of their time, the men a little less – a quarter of their time – in a steady relationship, in one to two relationships (average 1.6). 15 % had not yet had a relationship that had lasted three months or more.

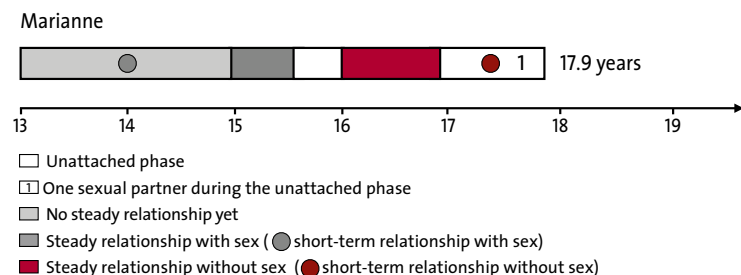
**36** This definition is based on the young people's assessments. Although many mention relationships that took place before their 13th birthday, in most cases they were not classed as 'proper' or 'steady' relationships. Instead they were called 'kindergarten relationships' or 'kid stuff' or 'playground stuff' in retrospect.

These averages cover very different individual patterns, which we want to describe in their development in the following section as relationship biographies.

Our definition of relationship biography is the sequence of relationships and unattached periods in the time between the respondents' 13th birthdays and the time of the interview. Relationship biographies varied with regard to the duration and number of relationships and single periods as well as their special progression; they reveal individual patterns for every respondent.

Figure 1 is an example of a relationship biography and describes the associated story.

Figure 1: Relationship biography - an example



BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

**Story behind the relationship biography** (fig. 1). Marianne (17) has had two steady relationships lasting three months or more to date. She also had two short-term relationships. The first steady relationship started when she was 15 and lasted for half a year. She did not have sex with her partner during this relationship. After being unattached for half a year and having no sex during this period, she had her second steady relationship. This relationship lasted for a year. She was sexually active with him, and faithful. Marianne has been unattached for almost a year now. During this second unattached phase she had a short-term relationship (with sex) and a one-night stand.

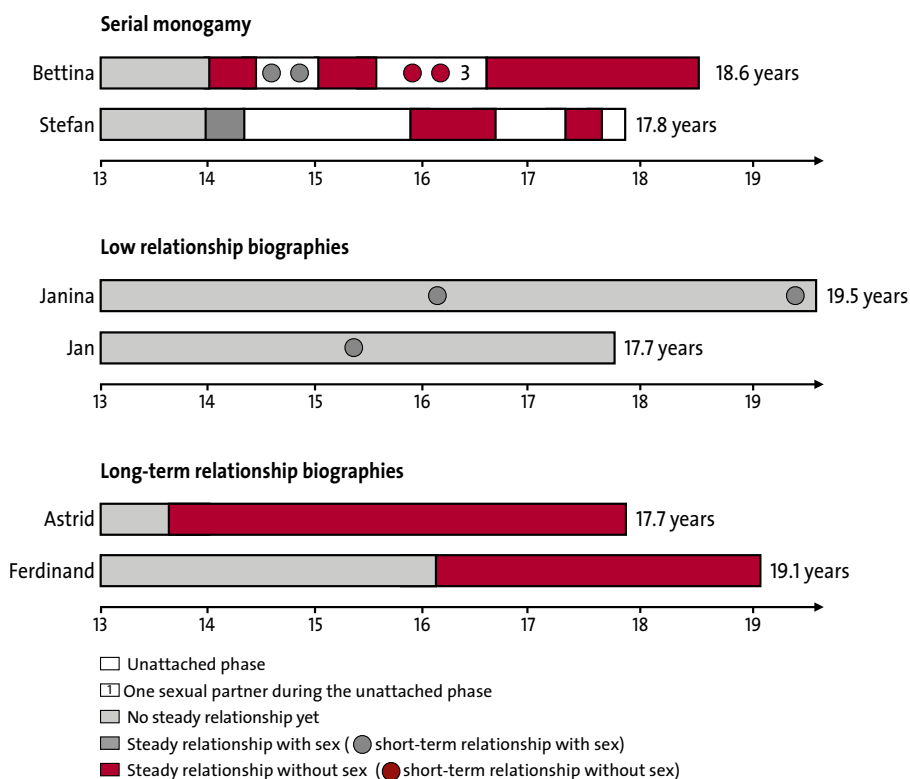
There are three main patterns among the 160 respondents (cf. fig. 2).

- The most common type, which applies to around a third of the respondents, is the serially monogamous biography. These women and men had had at least two steady relationships to date, in which they had been/were sexually active (with intercourse) and faithful. What is typical of this pattern is not just their considerable relationship experience, but also their openness towards sex outside of steady relationships: in this survey group almost all of the respondents had had more sexual partners than relationship partners, meaning they had had short-term sexual encounters with others before, after and in between the steady relationships. In this group all the respondents are, by definition, sexually active.

- The second-most common type, which also includes roughly a third of the respondents, is the low-relationship biography. These young people had only had a few or no steady relationships; they had little relationship experience. This category includes all the biographies where the respondents had spent half a year or less in steady relationships to date. Two thirds of the respondents with this type of biography were not yet sexually active.
- Around a fifth of the respondents had a long-term relationship biography, meaning they had had at least one steady relationship (with or without intercourse), which lasted for two years or longer, or which had lasted for at least a year and a half if it was still ongoing. What is striking is that there are twice as many women as men in this group, and almost all of them were sexually active.

Around 80 % of the biographies fit into these three patterns.

Figure 2: Relationship biographies of heterosexual young people



Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

The longitudinal view of young people with relationship experience compared with the cross-sectional view has the advantage that it makes the diversity of different developments clear. There is a broad range: around a third had different experiences with changing partners as well as relationships following the serial monogamy pattern; a further third were still very reserved and had very little experience to date, while a fifth already had long-lasting, established relationships and a further fifth did not fit into any pattern. The following section evaluates the experiences of the 78 young people who were in a steady relationship at the time of the survey (the situation of the unattached respondents is described in chapter 2.2).

## How are relationships started and maintained?

Heterosexual young people tend to fall in love with people in their close social surroundings. They were most likely to have met via a mutual friend (33 %) or through school (23 %). In third place were relationships that came about online (17 %). This emphasizes the significance of the internet for looking for a partner. But we also know that internet contacts are often with people from the extended circle of acquaintances (cf. chapter 3). Other important meeting places are sports clubs and parties. Only a fraction of the respondents met the current partner on the street or in the train. Two small case studies clarify how the process of getting together usually takes place:

**Corinna, 17**, goes to a high school in Leipzig. Ten months ago she met her boyfriend at the party of a mutual friend. At the party they *'didn't really talk much,'* except that he said *'get home safely'*. At home she then wrote to him *'online, whether he got home safely and it all developed from there'*. They then *'kept writing back and forth,'* until they met for the first time; after they had *'met three, four, five times'* they officially became a couple. *'He wrote to me that he had fallen in love with me. At first I wasn't so sure, but then I developed feelings too and then he asked to be in a relationship with me.'*

**Benjamin, 18**, goes to a vocational college in Hamburg and has been with his partner Christin for a year and ten months. They met through mutual friends. *'We went ice skating in winter (...) and that's where we met.'* But what happened afterwards was a bit *'long-winded'*, because he was in a steady relationship when he met Christin. *'Sparks only flew the third time we met'*. Benjamin described the moment it was clear they were a couple as follows: *'It was funny because neither of us really knew because we were still quite shy. But it was clear to both of us the first time we kissed.'*

Peter Fuchs wrote in his 1999 book ‘Liebe, Sex und solche Sachen’ (‘Love, Sex and Things Like That’) that the modern ideal of love, in contrast to match-made or arranged marriages, has two requirements for love to develop: the chance character of the encounter and the myth of its lightning nature. Love ‘hits people like a thunderclap’<sup>37</sup> Our respondents refer to this romantic ideal, they too use expressions like ‘sparks’, ‘struck’ and ‘love at first sight’; but they were pragmatic about the reasons for entering a relationship. The vast majority communicated this moment explicitly, be it in a face-to-face conversation or in a text message. Usually it was not the case that one party had to take the risk of asking: ‘Do you want to go out with me?’ Instead, the mutual uncertainty of whether to be in a relationship or not was discussed together in conversation.

*Ralf, 17: ‘We basically said it’s our day because we hit it off right away. We realized we had a lot in common and we had feelings for each other. That’s why we said we’re together’.*

*Timo, 17: ‘I was at her place on Saturday evening and then it cropped up in conversation and we said to each other we’d give it a go.’*

*Natalie, 18: ‘We met again afterwards and always had nice conversations and chats on MSN [chat software] and by text. Then we met up on our own and we kissed and we went to the cinema. He paid. He took me home. Then we met again and we asked if we wanted to try and get together. And we’ve been together since then. We talked about it properly.’*

*Bea, 17: ‘We met again the following day and the conversation was, were we an item or not. And he said: ‘yes’ (laughs), we could imagine that. That’s when it was official.’*

In an age in which sexual experiences outside of steady relationships are accepted among young people (although they are not very widespread, cf. chapter 2.2), sex is not a reliable marker of relationships. Consequently, none of the young people said that the first time they had sex with someone was also the start of their relationship with that person. A fifth cite the first kiss: ‘we kissed for the first time in the cinema,’ remembers Rüdiger (17); ‘we kissed and then it was all clear to me,’ says Artur (17); ‘we went swimming in the lake together, just the two of us, and then we had our first kiss and that was the sign,’ says Katha (18), while 18-year-old Akay is more precise, ‘it’s always the first kiss on the mouth’. The first kiss or a special gift often symbolize the moment a relationship is started. Petra tells her story, which is typical in many respects:

<sup>37</sup> Fuchs (1999), S. 61

**Petra, 18:** *'We were at his house, watching television. He said, 'Turn the light off'. So I turned the light off. He put a necklace around my neck, it's this heart necklace [respondent indicates the necklace she's wearing]. I said, 'Oh, cute.' A boy had never given me anything like it before. Then he said, 'Can I have a kiss for that?' So then we kissed and we both knew then that we were together.'*

We get an impression here that the relationships of young people are romantic, or better, that they are shaped by the ideal of romantic love. At the same time they are often close once they are official: the partner soon becomes the most important person in every respect.

**Frequent contact.** All those in steady relationships keep in touch with their partner via mobile phones and the internet. Often they send text messages, speak on the phone, chat and send emails several times a day. Having a partner means keeping that person constantly updated and being constantly updated too. This does not require a special cause; the first message is often the 'good morning text message'. The points of contact extend over the course of the day through occasional messages until the 'good night text message'.

**Katha, 18:** *'We write each other that we love each other, what we're still doing that day or where we're meeting, if we're meeting.'*

**Katja, 17:** *'What are you doing right now? How are you? Did you sleep well? And cute things like I love you, I miss you, kisses, hearts.'*

**Benjamin, 18:** *'It's usually by text, about meeting up in the evening or about what you've just been doing, if you've had an exam. (...) Then you write that it went well and are we seeing each other tonight or not.'*

**Alexander, 19:** *'When we were in the exam period and we were in our beds, studying, we sent each other nice texts, such as 'Sleep tight, sweet dreams'. (...) It feels good to do that.'*

Couples virtually never go one or even more days without hearing from each other. Just the idea of it makes them feel anxious. 'It would be strange if he didn't get in touch one day,' says Michi (17); if he forgets his mobile and a day goes by without a message, Melanie (17) thinks that is 'terrible' and Dominik (19) says 'something is missing in the evening' if he does not speak on the phone with his girlfriend. This constant contact gives young couples security. Whenever there is something to report or there is a problem, the other is always reachable. There are four different types of getting in touch via the internet that can be distinguished:

- updating, sharing information about everyday issues
- organizing get-togethers
- showing affection
- long conversations, but these are not done by text message.

Staying in touch all the time is a way of nurturing the relationship. This generation of young people are the first to do it in this form.

### 2.1.2 Everyday life in a relationship

Natalie (18) has had a new boyfriend for the past two and a half weeks. She says about her meetings with him: *'We mostly lie on the bed, watch television or we chat. Or we do something with his family, we eat together. Otherwise we go out and meet with friends sometimes.'* As early as the 1990s sexuality research stated that youth sexuality had become a 'family affair'.<sup>38</sup> That is to say, many parents know about the relationships and sexual experiences of their children. Young people's sexuality has become a subject of communication and confrontation in the family. This trend has continued and intensified among the young people we surveyed: almost all the parents know about the relationships of their adolescent children. They tend to know their partners well and largely express positive attitudes about the relationship. They sometimes go on holiday together and often the relationship is closely interwoven with everyday family life. The respondents were most likely to say that their most recent evening together was spent watching television together in the bedroom. They tend to eat together, relax together, cuddle and also spend the night at each other's homes.

*Marina, 17: 'I still had work to do for school so I was sitting at my desk doing school work. He lay on the bed and did something for school too. Then it was quite late and we just went to bed and watched a bit of television.'*

*Fritz, 17: 'We were both working for school because we had two exams the next day and then we went to bed and cuddled and it was too late already so we fell asleep cuddling.'*

83 % of young people in a steady relationship have the option to spend the night with their partner in their own home or their partner's home, because the parents accept or tacitly tolerate the sexual relationships of their children. The remaining 17 % can be divided into three groups:

<sup>38</sup> Schmidt (1993), S. 30



- those where the parents are against it in principle (usually migrants);
- those where it has not happened yet because the relationship has not been going for very long;
- those where it is logistically difficult.

Staying the night with the partner is handled differently by parents: some allow it from the start of the first relationship, while others set certain time periods or age limits.

**Heiko, 18:** *'What are they going to say? We're old enough.'*

**Maren, 17:** *'At first I always had to plead with them that I could sleep there because my mum was concerned. 'What do you do there?' Now it's become established so I don't have to ask anymore.'*

**Marianne, 17:** *'They don't really give me any rules. My mother just said that it would be nice if she could meet him first, instead of me bringing him home at half past two in the morning and then he spends the night. She wanted a: 'Hello, I'm Max. I'm spending the night here tonight.' (laughs) or something like that.'*

By incorporating the relationship so closely into their families, young people are relieved of the burden of secrecy regarding their sex lives. At the same time, two aspects that used to be important in earlier generations are fading into the background somewhat: the role of sexuality in the development of autonomy, and in 'leaving the nest'. This is a big change, but one which does not hold for everyone: young people with a migrant background for example do not get the same kind of understanding and support from their parents regarding their sexual wishes.<sup>39</sup>

New problems are created by embedding adolescent relationships into the family. Young people are primarily occupied with the question of how they can safeguard their privacy. They often have the choice of whether they go to his place or to hers and they opt for the alternative where they are more undisturbed. Important aspects include: Who already has his/her own place? Which parental home has more room? Where can they be unmolested by siblings? Where are the parents out more? Which room has thicker walls? Who has the big, comfortable bed? Ferdinand gave a particularly impressive account of the weighing-up process, which is necessary for the mutual respect of the privacy of both the children and the parents.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. chapter 6; BZgA (2010a), p. 25

**Ferdinand, 19:** *'When I'm home alone, then [we sleep] at mine. The problem is that we both still live at home. We have to time it so that there's no one in my house or at hers. The thing is, her mother only has a part-time job because she has a little sister. And the little sister's around so we really have to time it well, which is a bit annoying because that takes away the spontaneity. But we get that back elsewhere. (...) I have friends who I know always have loud sex while the parents are in the kitchen (laughs). I don't need that. I couldn't do that either (both laugh). It's my privacy and I don't have to include my mother in that (smiles). It's none of her business. Just like her privacy is none of my business.'*

The close interplay of family life and the current relationship usually works smoothly. The relationship and the family co-exist peacefully, everyone's privacy is respected and the partner is integrated into the family in many ways. The couples can express their sexuality in their parental home. Young people have – like no previous generation – the opportunity to experience a shared everyday life with their partner in their family.

### **What keeps couples together?**

Young people most commonly respond to this question with 'intimacy': 'mutual trust', 'a huge amount of openness and honesty', 'no secrets from each other', 'mutual understanding'. In second place they cite 'exchange' as the umbrella term for similar views, hobbies, interests and other shared aspects such as 'the same sense of humour', which contributes to 'being able to laugh well and have fun together' (Felix, 18). Support plays an important role; for Michi (17) that means 'that we stand by each other and are there for each other'. Love is mentioned almost as much: 'because we love each other and that bonds us' (Dominik, 19).<sup>40</sup> Some young couples also feel connected through their shared history: 'we've known each other for so long' or 'we've experienced a lot together'. Interestingly, sex does not contribute much to the partner bond in the eyes of the respondents. Only two girls and one boy cited physical intimacy in their response, and sex was listed just once explicitly. This is also how often the desire to 'not be alone' is given for the continuation of a relationship.

The respondents' statements were often much more elaborate and expressive than the categories were able to capture. Here are some quotes to illustrate this point:

**Nadine, 18:** *'I would say it's because we are the way we are. I think that keeps us together.'* (in a steady relationship for two months)

<sup>40</sup> There are two possible reasons why love is mentioned strikingly rarely: firstly, the question about cohesion was preceded by a question about their feelings for their partner and love was mentioned there. Secondly, it seems likely that young people are wary of using the big word love in their often (still) short relationships.

**Artur, 17:** *'We can trust each other and we can tell each other everything. We have no secrets from each other and the partner has to be really tolerant.'* (in a steady relationship for six months)

**Lukas, 18:** *'Even just the way we met isn't something you get every day anymore, that alone makes it special.'* (in a steady relationship for seven months)

**Dschamal, 18:** *'She's interested in what I think is fun.'* (in a steady relationship for 30 months)

**Sabine, 18:** *'I think it's because we love each other and need each other. I need him a lot. I talk to him about everything.'* (in a steady relationship for 36 months)

Young people have, as can be heard here, high standards. They want lasting relationships as long as they feel supported and feel the relationship is satisfying and alive. As soon as the desired qualities are lacking, there are arguments, which question the relationship and possibly put and end to it.

Our respondents didn't like using the word 'argument'. They preferred to say things like 'disagreements', 'friction', 'a difference of opinion' and 'minor strops'. In response to the question whether they had already had a major argument in the relationship, most were like Michael (17): *'No, not yet, just some small things.'* More than a fifth of the respondents said they had never been in an argument with the current partner. There are two possible reasons for that: either the relationship has only existed for a short time and there was no opportunity yet to express a difference of opinion, or – the optimistic view – *'everything's going great'* (Natalie, 18). The two most important causes of arguments are behaviours of the partner that are bothersome and cannot be tolerated, and jealousy.

**Bothersome behaviours.** Half of the respondents said that a reason for an argument was that they or their partner had behaved in a way that was unacceptable to the other. From cigarette/alcohol consumption to insufficient attention, different interests, the behaviour towards a third party and a forgotten telephone call – many things can trigger a conflict. 18-year-old Sophie does not like her boyfriend's alcohol consumption: *'He likes to drink a bit much sometimes (laughs). That's always a point of friction, where I say, I don't like that.'* Fabian's (17) girlfriend does not like it that he smokes: *'She says I shouldn't smoke. She doesn't like it, she doesn't want it. It makes her sad.'* Forbidding alcohol and cigarettes is an interesting example of the raised demands young people have of their partner. This can be interpreted as a sign of the desired seriousness of the relationship or as a struggle to bear and tolerate the partner's differences.

**Jealousy.** A third of the young people surveyed cited jealousy as an emotional hotspot. Depending on the extent, the jealousy argument can take on various proportions: from ‘minor teasing’ to big fights that question the relationship. 17-year-old Hans explains how quickly jealousy can erupt: ‘I only have to look at another girl or say ‘hello’ and she gets mad. If I say, ‘leave it’, she just gets more and more worked up.’ The partner’s behaviour online can also trigger a suspicion of infidelity: ‘I learned that he’d written to another girl [online]. I was really worried. Alarm bells went off and then we had a big fight.’ (Katja, 17). 17-year-old Jennifer describes how bothersome it can be to deal with jealousy: ‘He’s always quite jealous and that really annoys me. That’s always the thing we fight about.’

### Relationship matrix: love and fidelity or control and jealousy?

In 1990 fidelity already had a high standing in the relationships of German young people. 95 % of the girls and 89 % of the boys said that you should promise fidelity to each other and stay faithful to each other.<sup>41</sup> Little has changed here over the past twenty years: ‘[Fidelity] is everything for both of us,’ says Marina (17); ‘it’s just the pillar of a relationship,’ explains Artur (17), while Felix (18) expresses a widespread assessment: ‘It wouldn’t work without being faithful. That’s very, very, very important.’ For the vast majority, fidelity defines a relationship, it is a basic rule, and proof of the special nature of the romantic relationship. In the eyes of the young people, sexual fidelity has a lot to do with trust and honesty. Infidelity is a grave breach of trust and an act of deception. It questions the relationship, because it threatens their most important pillars, mutual trust and intimacy: ‘If we were to cheat on each other, the other person couldn’t bear it because we’d feel deceived,’ says Greta (17). ‘It’s a breach of trust, [it] would hurt me a lot,’ says Artur (17). The demand for fidelity is less about asserting possessive rights than about protecting the trust that is seen as central. Since young people are more in agreement about fidelity than they are about almost any other aspect of their relationships, two examples will suffice here:

**Claudia, 17:** ‘We talked about the reasons for fidelity once. Fidelity is the most important thing. He would immediately break up with me if I cheated on him and I would do the same.’

**Alexander, 19:** ‘Fidelity is very important. We talked about what reasons there would be for breaking up. To see where enough’s enough. It’s not that I would be thinking I could get away with that, she’d stay with me if I do that. It was just so we knew how strict she is about the whole thing. We said that if she chats or even kisses someone else, it’s over. Infidelity destroys the trust that we’ve built. We talked openly about that.’

Almost three quarters of the respondents in steady relationships had talked to their partners about fidelity. In these conversations they ‘agreed to basic rules’, often

<sup>41</sup> Schmidt (1993), S. 40

they 'set up guidelines' so that it was clear to both of them 'where our limits are'. The consequences of breaking these rules also tend to be clearly fixed: 'If I were to cheat, he'd break up with me. I know that. He told me that' (Sophie, 18). The actual or suspected sanctions in the event of infidelity are strict and clear. Three quarters of all those in a steady relationship demand fidelity in their relationships and would probably end the relationship; around a quarter could imagine giving the partner a second chance. A quarter don't explicitly state the expectation of fidelity, but it is no less clear to them: 'Of course we expect fidelity, even though we don't go around pointing it out to each other' (Timo, 17).

We wanted to know where exactly infidelity starts for young people. The boundary is not very tangible and varies greatly. The answers to the question of what the partner is allowed to do with others ranged from 'nothing at all', 'nothing, just talking', 'no flirting with others', 'looking's fine but touching isn't', 'dancing, but that's it' and 'they're not allowed to get intimate or kiss'. It is clear to all of them that infidelity starts way before sexual intercourse. Some think the partner can already be unfaithful to them in their mind, for others the line to infidelity could be intense eye contact (Silvia), a proper flirt (Fritz), a dance with someone else (Marianne), a one-on-one meeting with someone (Petra) or kissing (Benjamin, Friedel).<sup>42</sup>

**Silvia, 17:** 'Really intense flirting with eye contact and smiling. If something like that happens, I'd wonder if he had lost the plot.'

**Fritz, 17:** 'A little bit of flirting's alright but as soon as it's proper flirting or kissing, that's infidelity for me.'

**Marianne, 17:** 'If my boyfriend were to kiss someone else, that would be infidelity. But I would already get angry if he were to dance closely with someone else or if he were to touch her in places, like grabbing her bum. I wouldn't say he had cheated on me if he did that, but it would be a reason for an argument.'

**Petra, 18:** 'If he were to meet up with a girl on his own (...) so that they're laughing together and having fun together, that would be cheating to me.'

**Benjamin, 18:** 'Cheating starts for both of us if you touch another person. It depends. If it were proper kissing and touching in a certain way, then we both were agreed that that would be cheating.'

<sup>42</sup> 'He or she kisses someone else'. According to the BRAVO Dr. Sommer study, this is the main reason why young people become jealous. Cf. BRAVO (2009)

**Friedel, 17:** *'I can hug my female friends. I don't think it's a problem to give them a kiss on the cheek. But as soon as there's more, like a long kiss with tongues, that would be too much. Or if there's groping, I don't think that's great either.'*

Even though most of the respondents classed kissing someone else as a breach of fidelity and it was definitely undesired, it is still problematic to draw the line exactly here. Because, as 19-year-old Dominik said, it depends *'when you're kissing, how you're kissing, who you're kissing and why you're kissing.'* Not all kisses are equal and the assessment depends on what feelings and significance lie behind them. As soon as something violates the intimacy between the partners, indicating a breach of trust, it is seen as infidelity.

It is a similar situation with cheating online. There too the assessment depends on how, with whom and why a partner is chatting: *'It depends on how you flirt. If you flirt a little bit like, hey, you look cute today, that's okay. But if it's really bad flirting, like, hey, I want to have you with me tonight, I want to feel you close to me – that wouldn't be acceptable,'* explains Markus (19). 18-year-old Gabi gave a good definition of infidelity. She lets her girlfriend do everything *'except what she does with me'*. It is a breach against the special status of the relationship, against the feeling of uniqueness and exclusivity of this love that marks the line to infidelity.

**Test of fidelity.** How can anyone know whether a partner is faithful? One option would be to have faith in this relationship of trust, another would be to check. Young people frequently prefer the first option, but there are exceptions. 18-year-old Petra is in a relationship where she says *'a few things happened online'*. That's why she has agreed mutual checks with her boyfriend: *'He has my password, I have his password, that's necessary.'* Only few try to check up on their partner by secretly looking at their mobiles, emails, messenger accounts or contacts. But interestingly the majority opt for other security measures: the couples inform each other when they are spending time with whom, contacts to the opposite sex are limited (Fatma, Markus), one-on-one meetings are avoided (Rebecca, Friedel) and alcohol consumption, a potential risk factor, is reduced (Nadine, Falk). To make sure the relationship runs smoothly, the partners do not do anything the other does not accept.

**Fatma, 18:** *'It's really important to me, if he has female friends, that they know me and that they know we're together and that I love him and that he loves me. As soon as I feel I'm moving into the background, or the line isn't clear, I get angry and I won't accept that.'*

**Rebecca, 16:** *'At the weekend, I wanted to go to the cinema with a good [male] friend of mine. But he didn't let me. He said I wasn't allowed. I asked him why not. He's allowed to do the same. He said he didn't want*

*that because he was worried about what I'd do with that boy because he doesn't know him. So I said it was okay, I'd take a few girls and he could take a few boys and then we'd go. And he said, as long as we weren't alone together. Then I was allowed to go.'*

**Friedel, 17:** *'A [female] friend wanted to sleep [at mine] at the weekend. That had been agreed for a long time. But I chose to cancel because she's broken up with her boyfriend now. I get the feeling she wants a bit more from me. I don't want that to escalate. That's why I left it.'*

**Nadine, 18:** *'If you've had something to drink, you lose your inhibitions. That's the case for me so I think it could be the case with him too. That's why we agreed that when we're going to parties in the beginning, in our first year, we always go together. We agreed that and we also agreed we'd talk about it straight away if we didn't like something.'*

**Falk, 17:** *'If she tells me she's with a group of girlfriends and she wants to have a drink, then I don't have a problem with that. But if she's with a big group of friends where there are guys too, then... guys don't care if a girl has a boyfriend. They would keep giving her drinks and do something. That's why I said I didn't want that. I don't want her to drink a lot if there are boys around. The same's true for me of course.'*

**Markus, 19:** *'Contact with your exes, better not. I was told I mustn't, even though I think that's a pity. But you can't alter that, you don't want to hurt your partner. (...) If that bothers her, then I have to rein that in.'*

Jealousy is an issue in many relationships: 61 of 78 of those in a relationship had at least one period of jealousy in the current relationship. Jealousy generally comes about if a partner feels neglected or as if he/she is getting too little attention or if he/she is scared of being ditched. Young people are most jealous of ex-partners and friends of the opposite sex. A typical reaction would be to confront the partner with the feelings and to demand that he/she partner explains the situation.

In the current relationships, five of 78 respondents (one girl, four boys) have cheated. Two girls know about their partner's infidelity. In most cases these were instances of kissing someone else. In four cases alcohol contributed significantly to the incident, in one case *'it was just a holiday flirt'*, in another case it was seeing an ex-girlfriend again where *'there were feelings'* and then there was the partner of Akay (18), who wants to preserve her virginity, who cheated on her with a prostitute. 17-year-old Katja is one of the ones who have found out about their cheating partner. She describes how she coped with the difficult situation: *'We took a break from our relationship, to get some space to think where we're at and how we can move forward. After that we*



*agreed and he regretted it.*’ Interestingly that was not the end of the story for Katja, she got her own back: *‘I got my revenge. I told him I’d had something with another guy, which wasn’t true. A friend of mine helped me. I saved her number under a boy’s name and she kept texting me. I showed him and then he was quite jealous.’* The vast majority of the respondents who were in a relationship had not cheated in their current relationship and most of them could not even imagine it.<sup>43</sup> Even though conflicts about jealousy plague many of the relationships, the probability of being cheated on is quite small in the (still) short relationships: the vast majority want sex with their partner the most.

### 2.1.3 Significance of sex

Youth surveys show that the sexuality of young heterosexual men and women largely plays out in relationships that they themselves define as *‘steady’*.<sup>44</sup> A simple number illustrates the extent to which this is true: of all the instances of sexual intercourse our respondents had had in the last four weeks, 91 % (men) and 99 % (women) had been in steady relationships.

Different amounts of time pass between the moment the couple are properly together and the first time they have sex together. A few (10 %) already had sex before they got together. For most of them (40 %) it happened in the first month, while a quarter waited two to three months and a further quarter waited longer – up to two years – giving this experience at a special time as a gift, such as for the partner’s birthday. If the young people have sex within four weeks of meeting, they class this as being *‘relatively quickly, ‘quite early’* and *‘not long’*; some even said the short period of time was *‘somewhat unpleasant’*.

From four months and more the assessment changes, then they have *‘taken their time’*, *‘waited until she was on the Pill’*, it slowly got *‘dicey’* and some started complaining: *‘it took forever with her’* (Kurt, 17, waited eight months). Some girls, like Lin (18) set a date: *‘I specifically said that I would only [sleep with him] after a year, on our one-year anniversary, when I was certain he would stay with me.’* Or they are self-confident, like Franzl (17): *‘They’d have to wait at least three months to sleep with me, I have to know they’re serious about me.’*

This broad spectrum shows that most young people are capable of finding their own individual pace. It also becomes very clear how much the young people care about finding their own right time for the first time they sleep with a new partner. *‘If I think I want to sleep with him now, then that’s the time when I’ll do it,’* emphasized

<sup>43</sup> According to the BRAVO Dr. Sommer study, 22 % of the boys and 13 % of the girls who had already had sexual intercourse could imagine sleeping with someone else despite having a steady partner. Cf. BRAVO (2009)

<sup>44</sup> Cf. BZgA (2010a); Dannenbeck, Stich (2005); Matthiesen, Schmidt (2009); Schmidt (1993); Wendt (2009)



17-year-old Marianne. The reason why most of them waited quite a while is because for more than half of them (36 out of 62) the first time in the current relationship was also the first time ever.<sup>45</sup>

**Frequency of intercourse.** Once young people start sleeping with each other in a steady relationship, the frequency is relatively high. The average is two or three times per week. The boys' estimates are a bit higher than those of the girls. Sabine (18) is one of those who sleeps with her boyfriend particularly often: *'In the past four weeks we've done it every day (laughs). (...) I think it's right, I think it's just [right] – it works.'* Here too the young people have a lot of tolerance for the different frequencies, as these examples demonstrate:

**Franzi, 17:** *'In the last four weeks? Three times. [That's] exactly right. I don't need it all the time. We've had a couple of months where we haven't slept together at all. That was a phase where the desire just wasn't there. You're busy with school and family. You're exhausted in the evening. He said that sometimes but not as often as I did. But I think it's fine the way it is.'*

**Benjamin, 18:** *'In the last four weeks?' (laughs) Not that often, maybe four times. I'm not counting. It depends when we see each other. We haven't seen each other all week. You always think it's not enough, but really it's just right. If you have it too much, it gets boring, so I think it's right. Although I think that if we were to see each other every time, we'd do it more.'*

**Salomea, 17:** *'Sometimes we do it twice a week, sometimes four times, so [8 to 16 times] a month. I don't do anything I don't like. That's why I only do it when I'm in the mood. I don't say, 'Yes, fine, let's do it'. I tell him, 'No, I don't want to'. That's why the level we're doing it now is right for me.'*

**Markus, 19:** *'[In the past four weeks?] I don't know, twenty or thirty times? Probably more like twenty times. It depends on the situation. It's not like I say I have to have sex now. But if it happens and you want it, then I won't say no. I don't have a number where I say that's how much sex I need per week.'*

**45** Matthiesen and Schmidt found in a sample of pregnant girls under the age of 18 that there was a shorter average period between meeting and the 'first time', which is probably because these pregnant girls were probably already sexually active in earlier relationships. Cf. Matthiesen, Schmidt (2009)

**Importance for the partnership.** Sexuality is an important area for testing and strengthening a relationship. *'We need sex, it's part of love,'* says Sabine (18), describing one of the many aspects sexuality contributes to a relationship.

*'[Sexuality] doesn't play a dominant role. There are more important things. But it plays quite a good role in our relationship,'* responds Mario (18), when asked about the importance of sexuality in his current relationship. Both of the partial statements in these quotes are typical: on the one hand the importance is restricted, most commonly expressed by saying sexuality is *'important, but not the most important thing'*; on the other hand the positive, bonding aspects of shared sexuality are recognized and emphasized. Dieter (18) combines both of these angles very clearly. He says: *'I'm more interested in my girlfriend as a person but it would be wrong to say that [sex] is a negligible aspect. I really enjoy having sex with her, so it plays an important role.'* The typical ideal narrative both boys and girls tell, reduced to their most important statements, is: *'Sex is part of a relationship, sexuality marks the special nature of this relationship, but relationships are more than sex, they're about the other person and about the bond.'* Such concepts about sex and relationships are evidently widespread, we have already found them among adults of different age groups, among university students and pregnant teenage girls.<sup>46</sup> The same is true here:

**Peggy, 17:** *'A big one, but not too big (laughs). I think sex shouldn't be overrated. It's part of it and it's important, but it's not just about sex in a relationship, there's much more to it than that.'* (frequency of sexual intercourse in the past four weeks: 9)

**Kleo, 17:** *'It's part of every relationship and it's not the most important thing. I think talking is much more important but it completes the whole thing.'* (frequency of sexual intercourse in the past four weeks: 8)

**Katha, 18:** *'Sexuality is something like a bonus, something extra that makes a relationship a bit more exciting. But sex isn't the foundation of a relationship for me. It's just a nice extra.'* (frequency of sexual intercourse in the past four weeks: 3 – 4)

**Kurt, 17:** *'Sex is secondary for me. The main thing is that you have each other. Sex comes at the end. It's not the main thing for us. It would be terrible if it were all about sex.'* (frequency of sexual intercourse in the past four weeks: 8)

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Schmidt et al. (2006); Dekker, Matthiesen (2000); Matthiesen, Schmidt (2009)

**Björn, 19:** *'It's secondary. The woman you're having sex with has to be compatible with you and if you're compatible, then the other area will take care of itself.'* (frequency of sexual intercourse in the past four weeks: 15–20)

**Markus, 19:** *'It's not unimportant. I'm not saying it's the most important thing. But it's somewhere in the middle. It would be a five on a scale from one to ten.'* (frequency of sexual intercourse in the past four weeks: 20)

Sex is given a broad breadth of significance. It creates 'closeness' and 'good feelings', it is bonding and expresses 'intimacy' and 'love', it is the most important 'proof of love' there is. However, many qualities are listed that are more important or at least as important as sex: trust, support, togetherness, doing things together, good conversation, being on 'the same wavelength' and having fun together, spending time together and feeling happy in each other's company. Almost all the young people are agreed that it would be a sad state of affairs for a relationship if it were only about sex. Most of them are therefore also of the opinion that a relationship could withstand several months without sex. Only two of the respondents said a relationship without sex would be out of the question:

**Nadine, 18:** *'If there were no sex, the relationship wouldn't work. You wouldn't be happy. I wouldn't be happy. I need sex.'*

**Alexander, 19:** *'[My girlfriend] said, 'Sex is something in a relationship that you need.'. Without sex it's not a relationship, it's a sandpit relationship.'*

In the responses about the question regarding the significance of sex, we did not find any gender differences. As a result it is not surprising that most of the young people believed their partner had a similar opinion about sex to them. The men surveyed were unanimously of the opinion that their girlfriend *'saw it like that too'*. Among the women there was a small group who perceived a gender difference. Six women believed their boyfriend was more interested in sex. Fatma (18) says her boyfriend has *'a very strong sexual need'*, Petra, Peggy, Lin and Marina believe that sex is *'a bit more important'* to their boyfriends than to them, but they do not feel their boyfriends *'overrate'* it; Ayse (18) feels that it is more difficult for her boyfriend to wait for sex until marriage than it is for her.

## Are there different sexual desires?

Most young people initially refer to consensus, only a small minority point to discrepancies between male and female sexual desires. Gender differences are perceived more clearly when it comes to taking the sexual initiative. The young people responded either with 'both to the same extent' or 'the boy more often'. Here are a few typical responses from boys and girls to the question: 'Who initiates?'

**Dieter, 18:** *'Me (laughs).'*

**Manfred, 17:** *'I think I do. She's a bit reserved (...). She wants it too but she's not one to take the initiative, even if she wanted to.'*

**Falk, 17:** *'It's often the case that the boy wants it, but it also happens that I'm not in the mood when she is.'*

**Rüdiger, 17:** *'I think it comes from both sides. We massage each other or I give her massages. Depending on how she is with that, I can tell whether she's in the mood or not and whether I'm in the mood or not.'*

**Artur, 17:** *'It always depends on the situation, mostly it's always me. Sometimes it just happens in the situation without anyone saying 'How about it?' That happens too.'*

**Salomea, 17:** *'It's usually him (laughs). Yes. I don't as often but I do sometimes.'*

**Nadine, 18:** *'It depends what mood you're in. If I'm in the mood, the pants come off and things get going. Or he initiates when he's in the mood. It really depends. Sometimes me, sometimes him.'*

**Nele, 18:** *'It varies. Sometimes he initiates for three weeks in a row, then I do. The one who's in the mood starts.'*

**Petra, 18:** *'He always does.'*

**Claudia, 17:** *'It depends on who's in what mood and what the situation's like, but I'd say he initiates more.'*

**Katha, 18:** *'I'd say we can both sense when we're in the mood and then we just start or we leave it.'*

Our data allow us to make an interesting comparison of the appraisals, namely with regard to the questions who normally initiates ('he does') and who actually took the initiative the last time they had sex. We find that on this occasion 'both' took the initiative or the women somewhat more often – perception and reality diverge here. We can only speculate about the reasons: maybe the times when the women took the initiative stand out more in their minds because they are rarer, or the statement 'men want it more' is shaped much more strongly by male and female stereotypes than by the young people's actual experiences.

**The norm of reciprocity.** The notion that sex is to be mutual, where both want it and both get satisfied, is taken for granted by the young people. It seems inconceivable and fundamentally wrong to them that one of them would go along with it 'for the sake of the other'. This norm of mutuality does not of course rule out differing sexual desires in the relationship. But it requires a special way of dealing with it that is characterized by mutual respect and an absence of violence, because as Volker (18) says: *'If your partner isn't in the mood, you can't force her.'* Indeed, almost all the couples know the situation that she is not in the mood. The question of whether it had happened that he had not been in the mood at times does get the odd positive answer, but more in the sense of an exception proving the rule. The girls express how they feel and what they say when they sexually reject their partners. The boys by contrast tell very varied stories about how they cope with rebuffs:

**Markus, 19:** *'At first I'm a bit sulky but after I've thought about it, I think: 'If she's not in the mood, then she's not in the mood and that's fine.' I can't be angry with her. I didn't force her into it.'*

**Falk, 17:** *'If you're really in the mood because you haven't done it in three days and your girlfriend's not in the mood, you do think about how much you'd like it. I do sometimes ask her, 'Great, why don't you want to?'' because it does get to me. She tells me she's not in the mood. But then I accept it and don't try to change her mind. I'm not like that.'*

**Rüdiger, 17:** *'She tells me she's not in the mood and she sticks with that. I'm disappointed of course because I know how rarely we get the opportunity. On the other hand I wouldn't like it if she were to do it just for me and didn't enjoy it herself.'*

**Ralf, 17:** *'I'm definitely not angry. We just won't do it.'*

**Heiko, 18:** *'She tells me no and I have to accept that. That's normal. How else am I going to react? I can wait (laughs).'*

**Felix, 18:** *'Sure. In that case I don't try to get to sleep with her anyway; I just have to do without. But that's okay.'*

In summary, if the girlfriend is not in the mood, it is always accepted. The boys' chosen options are somewhere between gentle attempts to coax their girlfriends and waiting for a better opportunity. The negative emotions of feeling hurt and disappointed and feeling rejected do not last long. Only one boy and one girl said that they were constantly in the unfortunate role of constantly taking the initiative and constantly being rejected.

The girls also do not make a big deal out of the situation where they are not in the mood and reject their partner. They typically reject the desire for sex without a justification being necessary. A simple 'I'm not in the mood' suffices:

**Salomea, 17:** *'I don't go along with it when I'm not in the mood. I don't say 'Okay fine, let's do it.'" I say 'No, I don't want to.'*

**Marie, 18:** *'I say it. Sometimes he accepts it, other times he's not thrilled about it, but if I'm tired or exhausted... It doesn't cause an argument. He accepts it. He complains a little, but that's it.'*

**Fatma, 18:** *'No, if I'm not in the mood, I tell him and then I don't want to do it. If I'm on my period, I won't have sex. I think that's disgusting. He respects that and he has no choice. I can say what I want, although I think he wants it a bit more than me. I'm not like that. I like doing it, but only when I'm in the mood.'*

**Marina, 17:** *'He always hints and wants to start and then I tell him: 'I don't want to. I don't want to because we've done it enough.' It's every day. I think it's something special and you shouldn't have it every day. He's quite accepting. He doesn't force me into anything.'*

**Maria, 17:** *'It's not bad, it's not like he complains. He accepts it and then it's fine.'*

We find that the young women have a distinct ability to express the times when they do not feel like sex and handle them confidently. Even the occasional moaning of the partner does not lead to a reversal of the internalized principle of not doing anything they do not want to do. The situations illustrated here in detail, where one partner is not in the mood, should not give the false impression that most of the young people were unhappy with the sex in their relationship. They are very happy: *'I'm very satisfied with my sex life,'* says Nele (18); *'[during sex] everything is great between us,'* explains Nadine (18) and Kurt (19) is particularly enthusiastic, saying: *'the best sex of all in his circle of friends.'*

**Improving mutual sex.** How the sex a couple has experienced together is assessed also depends on how much time passed between the start of the relationship and the first time they had sex together. For more than half (36 out of 62) of our respondents who are in steady relationships and sexually active, the first sex with the current partner was the first time ever for at least one of the two. This fact is a reminder that the majority of our respondents are relatively inexperienced sexually. As a result, the dominant narrative that describes the changes to the shared sexuality during the relationship tends to be one of continuous improvement.

Young people do not tend to have high requirements for the first time with a new partner. Because the expectations are low, most retrospectively judge the first time with the new partner to be positive, with provisos such as 'it was a bit short', 'a bit tense', 'painful' or 'not very exciting'. The greater evaluation criterion is mutual consideration. That is why expected problems, like a bit of pain, insecurity, inhibitions and a bit of embarrassment are easily forgiven. The first time is seen as starting signal that is followed by mutual experimentation and the development of a shared sexuality.

**Kleo, 17:** *'I'd say the first time wasn't quite as good as the times afterwards because it was unfamiliar. It was the very first time for me and it wasn't bad or anything like that. It just got better afterwards.'*

**Alexander, 19:** *'It was very cautious but nice. We got a bit of a feel for each other. We didn't know yet what the other person likes, so we started slowly and then I could see whether she wanted it a bit stronger. I saw what was good. It was very nice, very long and very affectionate.'*

**Peggy, 17:** *'Everything went quite quickly. It wasn't that... It was still nice because it was the first time with him. But if I compare it with what I have with him now, it wasn't that great.'*

**Falk, 17:** *'It's always said that the first time isn't the best, especially not for the girl because it hurts her. As a boy, you have to be respectful of that so that she still likes it even though it hurts. That's why I thought the first time wasn't that great, but it was okay.'*

80 % of the young women and men who are having sexual intercourse in their relationship say that the sex has become significantly better since the first time. Only a few said it had stayed the same and only one young man said the sex had got worse, which was because of a drop in quantity rather than lacking quality. So what improves?

**Michael, 17:** *'You try out more things because you've been together for longer and you trust your partner more.'*

**Nadine, 18:** *'We didn't say what we liked in the beginning. We didn't know what the other person was into. That's why he said he could hurt me and that's why he was going slow. Until he found out that I don't like all soft and gentle like that.'*

**Greta, 17:** *'We had problems in the beginning because he was scared of not meeting my expectations (...). Then I explained to him what my favourite positions are and where I like being touched and that has made it better. (...) It's become longer too, not so short anymore.'*

**Ferdinand, 19:** *[The sex has] definitely changed (...). You have to get into it first (smiles). I had to learn it all first. (...) You're not just mindlessly screwing, there's passion. (...) That develops over time because you get rid of your embarrassment. You realize you can talk openly with her about it (...). That gets me in the mood for giving her pleasure.'*

**Nele, 18:** *'At the time [it was] quiet and we didn't know exactly what we wanted or what the other wanted. But now we talk about it too, about what we like and what the other person likes. Then we can accommodate those wishes. It has got better and more intimate because we know what the other person wants.'*

**Lukas, 18:** *'When the subject came up, she really couldn't talk about it. When I talked with her on the phone about it, even about contraception – she wasn't brought up in a home where it's discussed so openly. It was quite difficult to get anything out of her because I didn't want to drag it out of her one word at a time. But that got a lot better over time and now we're really open with each other. When you're open with each other you can talk about what you like and what you don't like. That makes it much better. The first time isn't necessarily a hit.'*



**Dismantling anxiety.** Initial inhibitions and fears go away over time; trust, relaxation and the sharing of sexual desires and preferences allow the young people to meet each other's needs better. Almost all the young women and men are satisfied with the sex they are currently having in their relationship. Kurt (17) is particularly enthusiastic: *'We have almost the same preferences when it comes to sex. (...) I don't know if anyone in the world is having sex that's as hot as mine.'*

There was just one young woman who said sex was bothersome: *'I'm more the kind of person who thinks sex is gross. (...) In the moment when I'm having sex with Steffen, it's nice. But in general and afterwards, I feel gross'* (Mira, 18, currently pregnant). Most of the young people in steady relationships said sex was 'nice', 'wonderful', 'really hot', 'great' and 'lovely'. But what does good sex mean for 16–19-year-olds? Their list is long and could have come straight from a modern sex manual for young people: 'varied, not over the top, not too cautious, 'affectionate', 'easy-going and pleasant', 'relaxed', 'without pressure', 'loving', 'passionate', 'open', 'intimate', 'not too short', 'when you love the other person'. According to the young people, these things can only happen when they trust their sexual partner and they can meet each other's sexual desires. If they have not reached this state, some start to experiment and try out new practices.

If young people are asked what they would like to try out with their partner, two thirds say 'nothing'. Some have already tried out a lot and they cannot think of anything new at the moment; others are not that far yet and still want to 'get used to normal sex' and yet others are 'perfectly satisfied'. The other third cite sexual practices that are considered advanced among young people and are often only explored after having had a sexual relationship with a partner for quite a while. They say they want to try sexy undies, sex toys, pornography and – most commonly cited – new positions and sex in unusual locations. Usually such desires are expressed without problems or simply implemented. Nadine (18) says for example: *'Last time I put on sexy undies because I thought he'd like it. I wanted to add some excitement again and he thought it was great.'*

What is noticeable is that the framework for sexual experiments is quite narrow. The rejection of 'disgusting' and 'perverted' practices is massive. The question: 'What do you do together sexually?' was designed to give them a way to talk about non-penetrative practices by way of such an open question. As it turned out, most were merely confused by this question. They thought it was getting at particularly unusual sexual practices that they tended to reject, either while giggling or while being outraged. Greta (17) said: *'Nothing sick like bondage or tying each other up (giggles). Normal things. We have sex, we have oral sex, nothing special or unusual.'* Dieter (18) was also confused: *'Sex?! I mean (laughs), could you be more specific? Oral. No anal. Definitely not.'* Many list the different varieties of sex that they have with their partner.

*Kurt, 17: 'We both prefer it to be affectionate. We're not like some who like this hardcore bondage and all those things. That's just really gross and we don't want that.'*

*Silvia, 17: 'Not all kinds of things. We definitely don't do S&M. Not at all. Just normal things, normal with foreplay.'*

*Gabi, 18: 'What do we do with each other sexually? We sleep together.'*

*Hans, 17: 'Of course we sleep together. We try out some things. But we haven't done things like having a threesome. We don't want that either.'*

Sex is considered good by young people when it is fun and their sexuality is not tainted by fears, worries and inhibitions. This is not a utopian ideal for them. In many cases, this is their reality – overall they are satisfied and do what they want.

### **Digression: is the female orgasm a sign of quality for sex with a partner?**

As we have seen, young people think that the central principle of sexual action is that both are in the mood and both get satisfied. As a result of this expectation, both partners' orgasms are given an important role, because they are a recognized sign that the reciprocal feeling of arousal and satisfaction has actually taken place. As Sven Lewandowski convincingly writes in his article about the social function of the orgasm(-paradigm), the orgasm is now a central reference parameter for successful sexuality, thereby structuring what is considered 'proper sexuality'.<sup>47</sup> At the same time we know that young women rarely have an orgasm when having sex with a partner and even more rarely through vaginal intercourse without additional manual and/or oral stimulation.<sup>48</sup> For young couples this means that the confirmation through the female orgasm, that the sex was good and everyone has done everything correctly, is often absent.

Of our 34 sexually active women in steady relationships, 14 had an orgasm the last time they had sex with their partner, two have never had an orgasm, and all are familiar with the situation of not having an orgasm when having sex with their partner. The experience that women do not have orgasms as often as men is something the girls discuss. They know from conversations with girlfriends that 'it's very variable' for women, they are informed 'that [it] is just normal that women don't come every time they have sex' and they have read that 'it is a bit more difficult for women than for men'. The gender difference with regard to the frequency of orgasm can be associated with difficulties in two respects: on the one hand for the girls, if they don't feel satisfied or they feel 'neglected'; on the other hand for the boys, if

<sup>47</sup> Lewandowski (2001), S. 209; Lewandowski (2004)

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Matthiesen, Hauch (2004); Lloyd (2005); Wallen, Lloyd (2011)

they are 'insecure' and believe they are 'not good enough'. What is noticeable is that the young women only rarely make an issue of the different frequency of orgasm. Most of them do not feel that having an orgasm is a requirement for good sex. Sex can be good without an orgasm. Here are some typical answers to the questions about how young women experience it and how young couples deal with her not having an orgasm:

**Fatma, 18:** *'It doesn't make me frustrated because I know that if I wanted it, he would carry on. I can help myself too. I don't put myself last – it's not the case that I have the need for it and don't do anything about it. But my orgasm isn't paramount when I'm having sex. I don't feel that sex is only good if I've had an orgasm. So I cope with it quite well.'* (in a steady relationship for ten months)

**Bea, 17:** *'I feel a bit silly right afterwards. If we're doing it and he comes too soon, then I feel a bit narky for a short while because it annoys me, but I'm not angry with him. I just feel a bit silly (laughs).'* (in a steady relationship for six months)

**Nele, 18:** *'It's a nice feeling to have sex, but when you have an orgasm, it's a better feeling. It doesn't have to happen every time of course. It happens when it happens, but it's important and it does make it better. (...) It's nice for a woman even without one. It's different for a man. They have to have an orgasm to reach this climax. But it's different for women. We can have good sex without having had an orgasm.'* (in a steady relationship for twelve months)

**Nadine, 18:** *'I don't have vaginal orgasms, just clitoral ones. I've never had a different kind (laughs). So I don't really need that. I'm satisfied even when I don't have one. If he's a nice man, he'll use his hands and I don't have to (laughs). But I don't need it. (...) I told him that nobody before him ever managed to give me an orgasm. And he said he'd manage it. And he has. Everything's great.'* (in a steady relationship for two months)

**Peggy, 17:** *'It's not so bad. It's not that I absolutely have to have it. I like the feeling that he's as close to me as possible'* (in a steady relationship for four months)

**Marina, 17:** *'It doesn't really bother me that I don't have an orgasm when having sex. I think that's fine. If it were to happen, that would be nice, but I don't need it because he gives me an orgasm in a different way. He either uses his hand or he goes down on me.'* (in a steady relationship for 18 months with a short break)

**Maren, 17:** *'I don't think it's bad because it just wasn't meant to be and then the next time could be all the better. I'm not so strict (laughs).'* (in a steady relationship for 24 months)

**Sabine, 18:** *'It's not great (laughs). But he tries to give me an orgasm in some other way. Of course you can't always have an orgasm, but he tries. He wants me to come and have fun.'* (in a steady relationship for 36 months)

The vast majority of the young women do not think it is bad if they do not have an orgasm every time. The line to worry is crossed when the woman never has an orgasm during sex. Salomea (17), for whom this is the case, asks herself whether she is *'somehow strange'* and Nele (18) clearly says: *'if I had never got one, things would have gone wrong'*. Only two women fundamentally criticize the sex they have with their partners. They openly and self-confidently complain about the quality of their shared sexuality: their boyfriends were finished too quickly, would pay too little attention to them and would neglect oral practices. Greta and Sissi are particularly frustrated because they have already addressed the subject and clearly expressed their wishes and yet nothing has changed:

**Greta, 17:** *'[I feel] neglected because he comes more quickly than me and to be honest, I've never had an internal orgasm, just an external one. He knows that, I've told him that and we've talked about it. That's not because of him that I don't have internal orgasms and I've told him that too. But he doesn't say: 'Well, you've not had that many orgasms, so I'm going to go down on you until you come too.' That's not the case (...). He's ultimately quite selfish and thinks of himself and I've told him that.'*

**Sissi, 18:** *'I don't know why, but he doesn't go down on me. He used to, but he hasn't done it since we've got back together. It's normal that a woman doesn't come during sex. Especially if you have sex rarely. In my case, if I have sex more often, then my libido is different and I have more orgasms. But if I only have sex every three weeks and for not very long, then he's surprised that I don't come. I try to explain to him that women come differently, not just during sex, which he knows. He's educated about that, after all. I really regret that I only rarely have an orgasm with him. He knows that but it doesn't interest him (laughs).'*

The girls experience is that the absence of an orgasm is worse for the boys (unfortunately we did not systematically ask the boys about their perception).

**Michi, 17:** *'For me not at all. I think it would be bad for my boyfriend because then he'd think it was really bad.'*

**Salomea, 17:** *'It's not a problem for me, but it is for him because then he thinks he's not good enough.'*

**Nele, 18:** *'I think that boys, if they sleep with girls and [the girl] doesn't have an orgasm and she says she didn't have one, then that makes them insecure.'*

**Katja, 17:** *'I don't think he has a huge problem with it. Maybe a bit because it hurts his pride. But it's not because of him.'*

**Peggy, 17:** *'He's always really disappointed, he's not thrilled. He asks me whether I had one and I tell him 'No', to which he says, 'Great.' You can tell he's disappointed, definitely. He does think about it.'*

**Andrea, 17:** *'For the person who had the orgasm, it's a bit shattering that the partner didn't have one but we can talk about it now.'*

We can say that the orgasm really does play an important role for validating sexual performance – for the boys the partner's orgasm is crucial; for the girls it is enough if they at least have an orgasm from time to time during sex with a partner.

### 2.1.4 Dealing with contraception

Of the 78 young women and men currently in steady relationships, 61 commented on the contraception in their current relationship.<sup>49</sup> Four aspects were of interest regarding how the sexually active in a steady relationship dealt with contraception:

- the current contraceptive method;
- the communication with the partner about it;
- the subjective feeling of reliability;
- the conflict potential about the subject in the relationship.

<sup>49</sup> Eight boys and eight girls have not yet had sexual intercourse in their relationship; one girl is in a same-sex partnership. We also asked the couple who were not (yet) sexually active what they were planning to do about contraception. These responses were not evaluated here.

The young people from an urban background who were in a steady relationship had a very diligent contraceptive behaviour. A quarter used the Pill and condoms, more than 60 % used the Pill or another hormonal contraceptive, and the percentage of those not using contraception or using unsafe methods was low at 3 %.

In order to be able to assess our data better, we have compared it in table 3, with a representative sample of sexually active 14–17-year-olds<sup>50</sup> The 16–19-year-olds we surveyed largely used hormonal contraceptives (87 %); 97 % used ‘reliable methods’ (the contraceptive pill and other hormonal methods and/or condoms) in the current relationship. Compared with the younger age group, two facts of note are the increased significance of the Pill and the lower percentage of condom users. The reason for this is probably that we are only looking at young people in a steady relationship, who, as we will show, tend to move from condoms to the Pill over the course of a relationship.

Table 3: Contraception used for the most recent sexual intercourse (in %)

	16 – 19-YEAR-OLDS IN A STEADY RELATIONSHIP* (n = 61)	Population 14 – 17-year-olds **
<b>Contraception, differentiated</b>		
none	-	2
unreliable	3	1
condoms	8	26
diaphragm	2	-
contraceptive pill	57	37
other hormonal	5	-
Pill and condoms	25	31
<b>Contraception</b>		
none/unreliable	3	3
reliable	97	97

\* only sexually active women and men, both genders taken together

\*\* sexually active young people without a migrant background (BZgA 2010a: 164ff.)

Source: BZgA, data set ‘Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age’, 2011

50 BZgA (2010a), S. 164

As already described in other studies,<sup>51</sup> there is a typical developmental pattern regarding contraception in adolescent heterosexual relationships: in the beginning they use condoms (exclusively or in conjunction with hormonal contraception), after a while they switch to the Pill. 18-year-old Benjamin describes this shift: *'She's on the Pill. We used to do it with condoms but then we stopped using them.'* There are several reasons why couples rarely stick with condoms during the course of a relationship: young people complain that condoms were too unreliable long-term, they reduced the spontaneity during sex and they impaired sensation. Both young men and young women mention this latter point. The cost factor is a secondary issue for them, only two young people say that using condoms was quite expensive.

**Falk, 17:** *'Condoms break quite quickly, they tear quickly or they can have a hole.'*

**Hans, 17:** *'I felt a lot less than I did without condoms.'*

**Katja, 17:** *'It just feels more natural without. It's a bit annoying to always have to put it on first.'*

**Salomea, 17:** *'Early on we had sex with condoms. I personally don't really like that.'*

Matthiesen writes that young people *'take it for granted to wear condoms the first time they have sex with a new partner (...). They accept this as a necessary evil as long as they are not that familiar with their partner and they have not built a relationship of trust.'*<sup>52</sup>

**From condoms to the Pill.** Certain conditions need to be met before they switch from condoms to the exclusive use of hormonal contraception. In first place they cite trust and the health of the partner. This trust can have different foundations: the couple assure each other that they had not had any unprotected sex before, or they both have themselves tested for HIV and/or other STIs. This trust can also be created because they have known each other for long enough and each assumes that the other is healthy. At the same time they hope for the future health of their partner, in other words their fidelity. The last condition is the trust in the hormonal contraceptive method, i.e. in a feeling of security that the partner will take the Pill reliably and responsibly. The time when condoms are abandoned depends on many different factors and varies greatly.

<sup>51</sup> Matthiesen (2007); Matthiesen et al. (2009)

<sup>52</sup> Matthiesen et al. (2009), S. 94

**Nadine, 18:** *'[We use] the Pill. We both had ourselves tested in the beginning. We started out using condoms. Then we didn't want to use condoms anymore and had ourselves tested. We were both clean and since we both trust each other... When he says he's going to do sports, I know he's telling the truth, instead of messing around with another girl. That's why we only use the Pill.'* (in a steady relationship for two months)

**Franzi, 17:** *'In the beginning it was important to me that we used condoms. I didn't know him that well. But then he said he hadn't been with anyone else before. In the beginning he had always boasted, especially in front of the boys, because they already had. It was unpleasant for him so he said he'd already had a couple of girls. But later, when we were together for a bit, he told me he had something to tell me. He said he'd never been with a girl before. But I still preferred condoms in the beginning. (...) Especially in the beginning because you don't know what kind of guy you're dealing with (laughs).'* (in a steady relationship for 42 months)

**Lukas, 18:** *'We don't use condoms anymore because she now knows – I mean, she's always known how to take the Pill. But she always pays close attention to it. She's very responsible. I ask her – it's just the case that girls have to take the Pill. It always sounds a bit dumb if a boy says: 'The girl's seeing to it' but I trust her with that. I mean, she's 16 (laughs) and she always says 'Whatever happens, no children!'* (in a steady relationship for seven months)

**Manfred, 17:** *'She really wanted to wait until she was on the Pill because she said condoms weren't entirely safe. I have a different opinion, but it doesn't matter. I think that condoms are enough. She wanted to wait, or her parents wanted her to wait, until she was on the Pill. (...) In the beginning we used the Pill and condoms. I told her I thought it was silly to use them both together. Now we just use the Pill.'* (in a steady relationship for ten months)

Of course there are exceptions to the standard progression from condoms to the Pill described above. Although young people consider it 'normal' to forgo condoms after a certain time in a steady relationship, for the reasons described above, some couples develop other strategies: five young women and men are currently using condoms exclusively as their form of contraception in their relationship. The Pill did not agree with Bettina (18) so she stopped taking it; Susi (17) is scared of going to the gynaecologist and therefore prefers contraception she can just buy; for Claudia (17) it is *'just obvious'* that condoms are used; Markus (19) is still waiting for his girlfriend to get the Pill prescribed and Karim (18) does not care much about the subject of contraception and *'usually'* uses a condom.



A few couples operate the belt-and-braces principle. This is particularly significant for young people who have not had any, or much, previous contraceptive experience. Hormonal contraceptives, unlike condoms, act invisibly and it takes some time to trust the effect. Just how much the message that twice the contraception provides twice the protection has established itself among young people is demonstrated by Fatma's quote, who believes she has to justify herself that she is 'only' using the Pill.

**Fatma, 18:** *'I have to confess, I don't use condoms. I don't use them with new sexual partners either. So far the boys were ones where I thought about it and they weren't the kind to have a different girl every night. That's why I didn't see a reason for doing this. I take the Pill and it agrees with me so I've always got contraception.'* (in a steady relationship for ten months)

Even if the couple exclusively uses hormonal contraception, they often have condoms around 'just in case'. If she forgot to take the Pill or took it too late, they use condoms in addition to the Pill. Patrick (19) uses condoms to bridge problems with the Pill that occur quite frequently with his girlfriend: *'If she forgot to take the Pill again, then we have to wait for a while and if it happens, then we [use a condom].'*

Condoms play a subordinate role for sex in relationships in the long term, but they are a requirement for sex outside of steady relationships. As we have already seen, young people rarely cheat, or have sex when they are unattached (cf. chapter 2.2). But if young people do have sex outside of a steady relationship, then they almost always use condoms. This has three reasons: condoms provide protection against disease and unwanted pregnancies, they are visible, and can be used spontaneously. Cornel (19) explains: *'I'm definitely a fan of condoms for one-night-stands. I can't afford at my age, and in my current situation, to have a baby.'* Of the 25 young people who report having used contraception outside of steady relationships, only three had sex without a condom (twice with the Pill, once with the morning-after Pill).

### Shared responsibility for contraception?

The choice of contraceptive is usually discussed together and does not create much conflict. If young people are asked whether they talk to their partners about contraception, they respond with 'yes, of course', 'definitely' and 'naturally'. The conversations usually take place before they have sex for the first time. The exception are those who say it is 'obvious' that they would use condoms for the first time. It is quite balanced as to who raises the issue of contraception. The first issue they address is whether the girl is already on the Pill. A change in contraception is almost always discussed in advance too. Some examples illustrate how naturally and confidently young people address contraceptive issues in their relationships:

**Lukas, 18:** *'It was all agreed in advance (...). She said she also thought it would be better without [condoms].'*

**Michael, 17:** *'We spoke quite openly about it and she was happy [using the Pill and condoms].'*

**Franzi, 17:** *'He was there when I got the Pill. We talk very openly about everything.'*

**Bea, 17:** *'Before we slept together, we talked about what contraception we would use. Then I said that I was on the Pill and then the subject has been dealt with for us.'*

The change from condoms to the Pill is pushed for by the young men in some cases. They gently coax their girlfriends to go on the Pill so that they can stop using the condoms they find bothersome. Some young women hesitate and in the rare cases where this leads to conflicts, they are resolved according to the woman's wishes. That does not create any serious confrontation in any of the couples.

**Markus, 19:** *'I don't want to force her into it, but I want to convince that she should take the [Pill]. She said it was too early...'*

**Peggy, 17:** *'He wanted that I take the Pill and I wanted to do it too because just using condoms feels a bit unsafe.'*

Since young women are more likely to be scared of an unwanted pregnancy (we will discuss this further below), it happens that they want to be safer than their partner, meaning, they want to use the double protection of the Pill and condoms. In this case the decision is made on the basis of what the person with the greatest concerns wants. Those who want more reliability almost always assert themselves and it is almost always the women who want more reliability.

If young people are asked who is responsible for contraception in their relationship, the most common response is 'we both are'. In practice however, condoms are the men's responsibility, they carry it in their wallets; the Pill is more a woman's responsibility, because she has to have it prescribed and she has to take it regularly. It therefore seems likely that when couples shift from condoms to the Pill, there is also a shift of responsibility. Despite this division of labour, contraception among young people is rarely a man's job or a woman's job. Many young men are well informed about how the Pill works and help their partner to remember the rules of taking it; some young women always carry condoms.

**Salomea, 17:** *'We talked about me taking the Pill and that we'd both make sure that I definitely took it.'*

**Ferdinand, 19:** *'[I] tell her: 'You have to take [the Pill], it's important.' (...) It has to happen in a certain window.'*

**Dieter, 18:** *'I think the Pearl index is so low, it's at 0.1 so that's safe enough for me.'*

The demand for shared responsibility regarding contraception is a central concern in sex education work.<sup>53</sup> At least among 16 – 19-year-olds in steady relationships the responsibility is either shared in actual fact or seen to be shared. None of the young people complained that they had to see to the contraceptive issue on their own. It goes so far that young women answer the question about what contraception they use with: *'We use condoms'* (Susi, 17). This expresses that contraception is an issue that is to be dealt with in the relationship. The 'we' comes from open communication, shared decision-making and the feeling of shared responsibility.

### How do young people deal with contraceptive failure?

Where contraception takes place, problems occur. The spectrum of contraceptive problems reported by the young people is manageable. They tend to be usage problems of condoms and/or the Pill: the typical problem with condoms is that they slip off or tear, the typical problem with the Pill is that it was taken too late or not at all, or the Pill lost its efficacy as a result of vomiting, diarrhoea or taking other medication. Some young people report tricks they use to avoid problems with the Pill. 18-year-old Nadine always puts her Pill in her toothbrush beaker and the girlfriend of 19-year-old Ferdinand uses the reminder function on her mobile phone to regularly remind her to take the Pill. But despite the general feeling of responsibility, not all problems can be avoided. Here are some typical examples:

**Nadine, 18:** *'Once, I had (...) taken antibiotics. I slept with him with a condom and it tore.'*

**Martina, 17:** *'Although I had taken the Pill, I had forgotten it the previous day and taken it later. But we had sex without a condom just at that time.'*

**Maren, 17:** *'We had one situation where we were having a party in the bungalow at my grandparents' place. We had sex with a condom because I wasn't on the Pill yet and then the condom stayed in me when he pulled out.'*

**Olli, 18:** *'She didn't have a Pill anymore, she had run out, for whatever reason, I don't know. So we used a condom and it broke. I was a bit scared of becoming a father. We went to the out-of-hours pharmacy and got the 'morning-after-pill'.'*

<sup>53</sup> Schmidt, Sielert (2008)

*Caroline, 17: 'I took the Pill regularly but I had been sick for three months previously. I had diarrhoea and was vomiting. And so the Pill doesn't work properly anymore. Even though I knew that, it wasn't really on my mind. It was more in the back of my head. If I'd thought of it, I'd have used condoms.'*

Only few young people (5 women, 4 men) had sexual intercourse in their current relationship without using contraception because they were caught up in the heat of the moment. In most of these cases the sexual intercourse was ended before the man ejaculated.

We know that two thirds of the women under the age of 18 who became pregnant unintentionally did so when they had sex with 'reliable' contraceptives.<sup>54</sup> We can deduce from this that usage problems with the Pill and condoms are widespread. Contraception is an area of sexuality where experience has to be collected and a certain routine needs to be acquired in order to minimize contraceptive errors. Young people do not have much experience in this area simply because of their age.

**Fear of pregnancy.** Almost all young people are scared of getting pregnant/getting a girl pregnant at this time. 13 boys and 23 girls were already worried in their current relationship that a pregnancy had occurred – the situations almost always ended in relief.<sup>55</sup> 18-year-old Nadine found clear words for her attitude to parenthood, an attitude shared by many young people. For her it would be *'the biggest nightmare to get pregnant now, because I'd ruin my whole life with that.'* Sissi (18) has the following to say about unintended pregnancies: *'That's a big horror scenario for me. That mustn't happen to me.'* The boys do not feel any differently: *'It was terrible for me,'* remembers Björn (19), recounting a situation where his girlfriend did a pregnancy test.

Regardless of all the agreement in attitude among men and women, it is striking that far more young women have already been scared that they might be pregnant (cf. on internet use chapter 3.1.2). We have a gender-specific division of labour here – worrying is a woman's job. The young men often take on the passive, waiting and comforting role. The following quotes illustrate how detached young men can sometimes be in the face of their girlfriends' concerns (Manfred, Franz) and how much they can sometimes be affected by them (Alexander, Felix):

<sup>54</sup> Matthiesen et al. (2009), pp. 69 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Four of the 160 young people reported a pregnancy. One young woman, 18, is currently pregnant and in a steady relationship with the father of the child. She says that the child was intended. A young man (currently single) became a father at 16; the child who was one at the time of the survey lives away with its mother. She had told him she was on the Pill, but he said: *'That wasn't the case.'* One young woman had a miscarriage at 15 and one young man said that an ex-girlfriend, who had died of cancer, had been pregnant.

**Manfred, 17:** 'I don't generally have that worry. Only she has that. (...) I don't think that there's an imminent danger. And I think if she uses contraception, she can't get pregnant.'

**Franz, 18:** 'She wrote me that she hadn't got her period and that she was a few days late. I said: 'It's only stress, it'll be fine.' But I did think about it a bit.'

**Alexander, 19:** 'It was quite early in our relationship. I was worried because she hadn't got her period. (...) She'd had her tonsils taken out and because of the injection she'd had some hormonal changes, so she didn't have her period for a month. I was scared because that was a completely new situation for me. But that sorted itself out after the second month and she said: 'That can happen quite often after surgery.' Then that was that.'

**Felix, 18:** 'She was always really scared that one of the condoms could have a hole in it. She said that with her previous boyfriend a condom had ripped and that her girlfriends had told her that these things were constantly ripping. My experience was completely different. My experience was that they rip if you use them incorrectly, but otherwise they're safe. I've never had a ripped condom. But she was scared and always checked afterwards to make sure there wasn't a hole. She was always scared, it was towards the end, no towards the beginning, when she had just stopped taking [the Pill] and her period hadn't found its rhythm yet and it didn't come. She was really scared and thought she was pregnant. Of course after a couple of days... it was just the hormonal changes. But in that moment we both worried. Then we did the pregnancy test and it wasn't anything.'

**Reasons for worry.** There are many reasons why young people think there might be an unintended pregnancy. Either the fear is triggered by a contraceptive problem, the period comes later than expected or the trust in the contraceptive method used is not solid. Young women do not have much routine in dealing with their body's fertility. Periods are often irregular, the changes to how the body feels during the cycle are unfamiliar and are easily misinterpreted. Physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea, bloating and a ravenous appetite can be interpreted as signs of pregnancy, even though 'safe' contraception was used:

**Bettina, 18:** 'My period was quite late, it came five days late and I had started to panic but it was a false alarm.'

**Andrea, 17:** *'I used the Pill, no condoms, and he pulled out early, but I was still scared that I was pregnant because I felt nauseous. But it turned out to be stress because of school.'*

**Nina, 18:** *'It was frustrating. After my first time my belly got fatter and I thought shit (...), I come home late from school and then I only eat in the evenings and then it's a hot meal too. So of course your tummy gets bloated. (...) I wanted to do a test but I had an appointment with my gynaecologist a few days later and he said I had nothing to worry about (laughs).'*

**Peggy, 17:** *'I wasn't taking the Pill yet and what happened was, he wasn't wearing a condom yet, but was already lying on top of me (...). And then I was scared because people say you can get pregnant from pre-ejaculate. I got really scared and so I did a pregnancy test, but everything was fine.'*

The relative unfamiliarity with the potential fertility of the own body, a cycle that is often still irregular and an uncertain relationship to how the body feels lead to widespread fear and sometimes panic about unintended pregnancies. This mainly affects young women. This fear is not always justified, often it is based on lacking experience and a distrust of 'invisible' hormonal contraceptive methods.

### 2.1.5 Views of steady relationships

Most of the young people (80% of the girls and 90% of the boys) are happy or very happy with their steady relationship the way it currently is. Depending on their current mood, the responses to the question about their relationship satisfaction range from enthusiasm ('yes, extremely!'; 'yes, very!'; 'very happy, if it were to stay like this, I'd be quite happy') and quiet confidence ('yes, I'm satisfied'; 'yes, of course'). The most common qualification is that the couples do not see each other often enough or privately enough as they would like because they have 'too much work on through school', because they live too far from each other or, in rare cases, because of parental prohibitions.

Looking at the future, almost all those in steady relationships assume that they will still be with their current partner in a year's time (cf. table 4). Asked about it, they typically answered with 'yes'. Other typical responses were: *'If everything stays the way it is now, then yes'* (Salomea, 17); *'Yes, I hope so. I hope so.'* (Marie, 18); *'I hope so (laughs).'* (Heinz, 17).

Table 4: **Durability of steady relationships during the teenage years\***  
(only respondents who are currently in a steady relationship, in %)

	Still together in a year	Still together in five years
Yes	73	31
Don't know but I hope so	15	48
Not sure because of time in a foreign country, training, university	11	12
No	1	9

\*Answers to the question: 'Do you think you'll still be together in a year's time?' And in five years' time?'

Data for women and men taken together, no gender differences

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

One exception to these optimistic prospects is couples where a separation could already be foreseen right now because of external reasons, or was already being discussed: one partner is planning to go travelling for a year or to move away long-term for further education or job training. Two young people do not want to be with their current partner anymore. Their relationships are close to ending and do not have a future.

The young people were much more sceptical about whether they would still be with their current partner in five years' time (cf. table 4). Five years is a long time for young people and they do not feel they can plan that far ahead. Here are some examples:

**Rebecca, 16:** *'You never know what will be in the future.'*

**Marianne, 17:** *'Five years is a long time.'*

**Cora, 18:** *'I don't know. A whole lot will happen, but I hope so.'*

**Manfred, 17:** *'Five years is... I can't say right now.'*

**Timo, 17:** *'I can't say that yet, we haven't thought about that.'*

**Lukas, 18:** *'We've talked openly with each other. We can't just assume we'll be together in four years' time. So much can happen.'*

The young people give three arguments for their scepticism that their current relationship will last another five years. The most common is the priority of training, education and career plans. Two longer quotes are given to illustrate this:

**Bettina, 18:** 'I'll probably be gone in a year. We've talked about it. He wants to do a FSJ [Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr – Voluntary Social Year]. Will we stay together anyway? (...) After this year [I] want to study and so does he. It depends on where. It depends on whether we happen to have the same interests at the same university.'

**Felix, 18:** 'I would never study somewhere different or something different just so that I can move to the same town as her. And the same is true the other way around (...). Our education comes first at the moment.'

The professional plans for the future take precedence over their private wants for almost all of the young people right now. Many can foresee a geographical separation in the future. Continuing a partnership as a long-distance relationship over a longer period of time is considered an unattractive, unrealistic option. The girls and boys demonstrate a solid sense of pragmatism and a high level of career orientation.

The second argument they often cite is the fragility of relationships that they have seen. Half of those who are currently in a steady relationship have experienced parental separation (through divorce, separation or the death of a parent), for 80 % the current relationship is not the first steady one, so that they have already experienced at least one break-up. In addition, relationships during the teenage years are, as we have seen, run on emotion so that their stability is fundamentally at risk. The young people experience this too and express it by saying: 'something could always happen'. For that reason it is important not to get pinned down too much to avoid disappointment.

**Silvia, 17:** 'The big love, getting married and all that... I don't know. Either it'll happen or it won't. I don't want to think about that. I don't want to say I'll still be with him in a year and then end up breaking up with him in two weeks' time. I don't know. Something could always happen.'

**Benjamin, 18:** 'I don't really want to make firm plans (...) because it could end as quickly as it started for whatever reason.'

Because the young people are aware of the instability of steady relationships during adolescence, there is a widespread normative concept of youth as a time of trying out different relationships and having changing partners. Many young people implicitly or explicitly refer to the serial nature of relationships.

**Marie, 18:** 'You're in this phase, when you're between 16 and 18, 20, where you try a lot of things (...). I couldn't live my whole life that way, then I would be missing something. I would also want to try someone, something new.'



**Nele, 18:** *'I'm still young and I don't want to get tied down. We've been together for a year and I'm happy with him, but I can't see a future with him because I'm young and these things don't last anyway and I'm going to have many more partners.'*

**Falk, 17:** *'We're still so young, we haven't had that much experience, that's why it's difficult to stay together for so long. For most people our age, a relationship fails after six months or a year. (...) It's too early to think about marriage. We're still young. We have our whole lives ahead of us.'*

Many young people feel that those who do not have different experiences with different partners are missing an important biographical phase. Associated with this is the idea that a lot will still change in their own character; their plans and their requirements of a partner and a steady relationship are flexible: *'Five years,'* says 17-year-old Salomea, *'you change a lot in that time. Especially at our age.'* The life phase between adolescence and young adulthood is seen as a time for having different experiences, while the consolidation and long-term choice in favour of a steady relationship is only desired from the mid to late twenties in association with marriage and planning for children.

### What should the future look like?

The young people were also asked what they imagined their lives to be like in ten years' time. In contrast to the questions about the one-year and five-year prospects, the responses here had a greater utopian dimension. They were no longer asked about a realistic assessment. Instead, we wanted to know what they wanted their lives to look like, if everything went the way they wanted it to.

Before we address what they said, we need to comment on how the young people reacted to this question: one group liked giving information and did so in detail. For these young couples conversations about the shared future are evidently an appreciated relationship ritual. The future is planned and they think about the names of their children. Sometimes they even negotiate about the colour of the furniture and the type of car they will drive. The other group of young people clearly dislike being asked to imagine their own lives in ten years' time. The attitude here is that they did not want to make the wrong plans for the future, they preferred to 'let it happen'. They plan the next holiday together or, as Rüdiger puts it: *'the future is only planned out for the next half year'*. The invitation to talk about a ten-year timespan created unease and was also rejected by some of the respondents.

**Career.** When thinking about the future, women and men both expressed a priority for their career. The most important wish for their own lives in ten years' time was: I want to have finished my training, be established in my job, earn my own money and *'be living my life with both feet on the ground'* (Katja, 17). Almost all the men and women saw themselves as working in ten years' time. The young people are fol-

lowing the three-phase model of the female work biography (working, family phase, working) that held for pre-unification West Germany. Children only come later, after they have become established in their jobs. The young people's wishes for the future are impressive in how much they are focused on security and stability. Securing their livelihood is the most important life goal, or as Salomea (17) puts it, *'a secure position, where there's no uncertainty'*. This is expressed by both sexes, but the young men primarily define security as financial security. It is about *'always having a bit more left over than necessary'*, explains Benjamin (18). That is considered to be the most important requirement for parenthood: *'First a job so that there is the financial basis for children'* (Hans, 17). This raises the second important point that the young people mention in their plans for the future: children.

**Children.** Children are part of the life plans of all the young women and men, but the dominant attitude is: *'having children one day, not now'* (Nele, 18). As already became clear in the chapter about contraceptive failures and fears about pregnancy (cf. chapter 2.1.4), our respondents fear a pregnancy right now. They are not expressing an attitude that is against children in general. They are merely against becoming parents too early as teenagers. The young people's reasons for delaying parenthood are that they want to be responsible parents. Sociologist Norbert Schneider says this opinion is based on the general principle that *'children should only be brought into this world if you can look after them well'*.<sup>56</sup> In the minds of the respondents, this also means having a job, somewhere to live, independent material security and a reliable relationship, i.e. joint parenthood and therefore resources the young people do not generally have yet: they are still in school or in training (or not even that), they are not established in a job, they are not financially independent of their parents and their relationships have not been long enough or experienced enough to suffice for starting a family or, in more modern terms, for embarking on the *'parental project'*.<sup>57</sup>

The family wishes described all follow the model of the *'standard nuclear family'*. With an impressive conformity and without fear of clichés, they describe the *'standard dream'* (Ralf, 17).

**Marianne, 17:** *'I'd like to have at least one child by the time I'm 27. I'd like to be in a happy relationship or married already, I'd like to have finished my degree and be working. My husband would also work (...) and we'd be living together in our own place. But I don't think I'd be able to afford that at 27 (laughs). And yes, normal life.'*

**Karim, 17:** *'I want to have money and all that: a flat, a house, a car, money and after that I want a wife and children, so that I've got something to offer them.'*

<sup>56</sup> Schneider (2002), S. 16 ff.

<sup>57</sup> Boltanski (2007)

**Michi, 17:** *'I would like to have a good job that I can live off, but that's still fun so that I'm not in a bad mood at work. And then maybe a child or two. A car, a house or a flat. And a good relationship with my parents still.'*

**Artur, 17:** *'In ten years, I'd like to have finished my degree and have found a good job in a company where I can earn good money so that I can look after my family, which I might already have by then.'*

What's striking is that for the young people, getting married is much less a part of the important goals of the future than having children. This does not include the young people with a migrant background, for whom marriage legitimizes the relationship and is a very important prerequisite for sexuality with a partner and parenthood (cf. chapter 6). For the others getting married is *'definitely not an issue right now'* (Alexander, 19) and is explicitly rejected by some. *'I'm not the church type who wants to get married, I think all that's a bit gooey,'* says Heiko (18), summarizing the attitude of very many young men. If marriage is considered, then only after children have been born.

Many young people are very pragmatic about a relationship biography that is (initially) of a serial nature. They believe this is fitting for their teenage years and the life phase of young adulthood. It is only from the mid to late-twenties that they hope this trial period will turn into something more long-lasting and it is during this period that they also intend to start a family. The occupational wishes for the future are impressive in that security and stability are important. The most important goal for both the women and the men is to become established in a job and the associated financial security of an independent life.

### 2.1.6 Conclusion

For most of the young people we surveyed, sex is part of a loving relationship and vice versa, they consider a relationship to be 'steady' when they are sleeping with their partner. The relationships are close, person-centred and romantic, they are seen as positive by the parents, supported by them and mostly smoothly integrated into the everyday family life. Sex and loving relationships validate each other. This means that 16–19-year-olds sleep with each other at the latest two to three months into the start of the relationship, to show that, or check whether, it is a 'real' relationship. The relationships are strongly shaped by the ideals of love and fidelity. Confrontations and dealing with the subject of jealousy and securing sexual exclusivity have an important function to authenticate the relationship. Communicating via the new media is a natural part of this function. The young people tend to be actually monogamous, even though this is often serial monogamy in short relationships.

They want lasting relationships, but only for as long as they feel supported by the relationship. They must experience it as satisfying and alive. The majority of the young people we surveyed had already had more than one steady relationship. They are aware that serial relationships are now more the rule rather than the exception for young people and adults. Their doubts about the continuance of their relationships beyond a year come from pragmatic considerations about their age, their development, the necessary occupational mobility and the instability of modern relationships. The serial nature of relationships is not lamented as failure, instead it is used as an opportunity to have different experiences with different partners.

Young people largely use safe contraception in their steady relationships. They understand contraception as a shared task. Contraception is talked about and the responsibility is shared. Both sexes feel that the Pill is the contraceptive method that has the least impact on the sexuality in the relationship. That is why many couples switch from using condoms to using the Pill or another contraceptive method after a certain amount of time. All these things are good conditions for successful contraception and they can be seen as successes of the comprehensive, target group-specific sexuality education and prevention work that has been done. Nevertheless almost all the young people also had experiences with usage problems and contraceptive failures. With regard to contraception they are not experienced enough and still have to learn strategies to avoid incorrect use. But even if actual contraceptive failures or the fear of an unintended pregnancy make young couples panic, this does not lead to a lasting impairment of their shared sexuality.

Most young people are happy with the sexuality in their relationship. With the increasing length of the relationship, they experience a significant improvement to the sexuality they have with their partner. Young women demand the same sexual rights and options as men – this applies both to the right to not always be in the mood, as well as to the right of sexual satisfaction (with or without orgasm). And almost always they experience that their demand for equality and mutuality is respected in the relationship. The sexuality in the relationship is organized in an egalitarian and consent-based manner.

## 2.2 Currently single: life and sex for the unattached

*Urszula Martyniuk*

No ties, flexible, sexually open, but also selfish, pleasure-oriented and incapable of having a relationship – these are all clichés about single people that are often repeated in the media. With the increase in one-person households<sup>58</sup> there is a growing worry that the single life could establish itself as a new lifestyle, especially in the younger generation. As a result, the questions about the single life are often discussed in conjunction with falling marriage rates,<sup>59</sup> the increasing probability of divorce,<sup>60</sup> the falling birth rates<sup>61</sup> and the fear that love and family will decrease in value. Since Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim identified the single person, flexibly adapted to the requirements of the labour market, as the ‘success model’ of a completely individualized society<sup>62</sup> in the early 1990s, such headlines stubbornly stick around, even though the academic community has been providing opposing findings for years now: single people are neither particularly sexually active nor do they reject relationships.<sup>63</sup> The relationship biography study in Hamburg has shown, for example, that adult sexuality is generally arranged in steady relationships (regardless of age and generation membership) and single people tend to be sexually under-supplied, measured by the frequency of sexual intercourse in the past four weeks.<sup>64</sup> In addition single people feel ambivalent about their single life. They long for closeness, comfort, support and exchange in a relationship.<sup>65</sup>

How does a person become single? Either a person has never had a relationship or a break-up has occurred. Studies show that the number of steady relationships in a person’s life is increasing. Relationships are also becoming shorter and more serial in nature. As a result, relationship biographies are increasingly characterized by a back-and-forth of relationship periods and single periods.<sup>66</sup> Being single from time to time between two relationships is therefore a widespread consequence of the serial relationship pattern – only very rarely is it a chosen lifestyle. This only applies to young people only in a very limited fashion as they are right at the start of their relationship life. In this chapter we want to describe how young people deal with not having a current steady partner.

<sup>58</sup> Statistische Ämter des Bundes (2011), p. 28

<sup>59</sup> The number of married couples in Germany has fallen by 5 % since 1996. Cf. Rübenach, Weinmann (2008), p. 129

<sup>60</sup> The number of divorces rose from 170,000 in 1995 to 192,148 in 2008. Cf. Statistisches Bundesamt (2010), p. 6

<sup>61</sup> The number of newborns has dropped by 18 % in Germany since 1991. The prognoses say that the number of births will drop by a further 15 % by 2030. Cf. Statistische Ämter des Bundes (2011), p. 10

<sup>62</sup> Beck, Beck-Gernsheim (1990), p. 15 ff.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Schmidt (1999); Kaufmann (2002); Schmidt et al. (2006)

<sup>64</sup> Schmidt et al. (2006), p. 74

<sup>65</sup> Schmidt et al. (2006), p. 73

<sup>66</sup> Schmidt et al. (2006)

### 2.2.1 Ambivalences about being unattached

Of the 160 respondents, around half (38 girls and 44 boys) were not in a steady relationship during the time of the interviews. In our study, the term ‘single’ refers to a woman or a man who is currently not in a steady relationship.<sup>67</sup> These young people, who are often living with their parents, have either no experience with relationships and/or sexuality or they are single, in the above sense, after having had a relationship previously. The largest group had been single for half a year or less during the time of the survey. 15 % had never been in a steady relationship (table 5).

Table 5: Duration of the current ‘single’ period (16–19-year-olds, in %)

	Girls (n = 38)	Boys (n = 44)	Total (n = 82)
<b>Duration of the single period</b>			
Never in a steady relationship	16	14	15
6 months or less	37	27	32
7 to 12 months	18	23	21
13 to 24 months	11	25	18
2 years or more	18	11	15

Source: BZgA, data set ‘Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age’, 2011

If we look at the time between the respondents’ 13th birthday and the time of the interview, then we find that the young women (n = 80) spent a third of this time in steady relationships, while the same was true for a quarter of the young men’s time (n = 80). We can already conclude here that for young people, being single is the norm, while times of being in a steady relationship is more the exception.

Even though all the stories of the respondents have their own individual character and the reports about the single life vary greatly, there are three types of young single people:

- (1) single by tradition
- (2) low-contact single people
- (3) serial single people.

<sup>67</sup> In the question about what constituted a steady relationship, we followed the subjective definitions of the respondents. Cf. chapter 2.1 for more in-depth information. Note by translator: the English word ‘single’ is used in German, as it is here. Whether it is used in quite the same way in English is open to question. However, for the sake of simplicity, and given the author’s definition here, the word has been retained.

## (1) SINGLE BY TRADITION

In the small group of people single by tradition, we find young women with a migrant background (five women in Hamburg) who live in families that place great value on religious rules and norms. Virginity until marriage, limited contact to young men and maintaining the family honour are important for these girls. We want to introduce 18-year-old Gönül as the typical representative of this group:

**Gönül, 18**, attends a vocational college in Hamburg. She is training as a home and family carer. Both of her parents are from Turkey. The family belong to the Islamic religious community. Religion is very important to Gönül. She prays and regularly goes to her mosque. She has voluntarily worn a headscarf since year 5 in school, which even alienated her parents: *'It was my own decision.'* When asked about what was particularly important in life, she said: *'My future is important to me. I think a lot about when I get married, then I would like to work and not sit around at home.'* Gönül currently has a crush on a 20-year-old acquaintance she has known since childhood and who she recently met again at a wedding. They rarely see each other. Instead they speak on the phone and chat a lot online. In her opinion it is too early to assess how this relationship will develop further. Gönül has never had a steady relationship. *'I'm 18 now. If I were to have a steady boyfriend, I'd expect it to lead to marriage. It should be serious with me, not just fun.'* She has not had any sexual experiences because in her opinion *'it's [not] possible without love'*. She wants to wait to have her first sexual experiences on her wedding night.

## (2) LOW-CONTACT SINGLES

Another small group is that of the low-contact single people. These young people struggle to make and maintain social connections, especially with members of the opposite sex. Shyness, fear of opening up, the inability to express oneself, a low sense of self-worth and lack of opportunities to meet potential partners are all factors that lead to these respondents having difficulty entering relationships. This group only contained young men (six, largely from Leipzig), who have, or are working towards, qualifications from non-academic secondary schools. The story of 17-year-old Hannes will illustrate some of the special features of this type of single person:

**Hannes, 17**, lives in Leipzig and is training as a metal worker. When asked about his hobbies, he says: *'I like sitting in front of my computer. That's it, really.'* He has never been in love and has never had a steady relationship. What he does not like about being single is *'that I'm alone a lot. (...) [I miss] that I could do something with someone, (...) go out or go for a walk.'* Hannes is worried about his future: *'that [I'll] go without ever having had a girlfriend if I carry on this way.'* He deals with his sadness by spending a lot of time *'in front of the computer to*

*forget about it.*' Then he likes playing online games. Hannes would like to find a girlfriend. He does not express any specific wishes about such a steady relationship: *'what people generally imagine'*. He has not actively tried to find a partner so far. For Hannes sexuality means *'contact, physical contact'*, but he has never experienced it himself. Sexuality has an 'average' value in his life. In his opinion he cannot find a girlfriend because of his weight. But he is also not doing anything to change that: *'I'm too lazy to do anything. That's my problem.'*

### (3) SERIAL SINGLES

By far the largest group (33 girls and 38 boys) are serially single<sup>68</sup> and are between relationships. They have had one or more relationships are searching for or waiting for the next. The single people between relationships are the most heterogeneous group of all the single people. They have experiences from one or more past relationships. Some are enjoying their single lives and the associated freedom. Others are longing for a new relationship. 17-year-old Lotte tells a typical story of the serial single life.

*Lotte, 17, is currently in love with a boy who she met while on holiday on the Baltic. She is in touch with him online. Her relationship biography can be summarized as follows: 'The longest [relationship] was a year and a half. But I've been in one that just lasted a month and a half. I've had three relationships that I would call steady.'* A few months ago Lotte finished her last relationship because she felt *'that it was more friendship than love'*. The decision seems to have been the right one: *'At first, after the break-up, I thought it was great (laughs).'* She has enjoyed her single life, especially the new freedoms: *'Looking at boys and flirting in night clubs, or just spending time with my girlfriends (...). And then came a moment when it stopped a bit and I felt I would prefer to have a boyfriend who could hug me.'*

**Experience of being single.** *'Being single is uncomplicated. At least less complicated than being in a relationship,'* reports 17-year-old Daniel from personal experience. In this section we want to examine in what way it is easier to be single. We are particularly interested in the following aspects: how do young people experience their singledom? Do they enjoy their freedoms or do they suffer from being alone? Are they worried if they do not find a partner and do they feel under pressure to find one?

When systematically approaching the question about how young people experience singledom, the most striking feature is that they largely feel ambivalent about it, regardless of the duration of the current single period.<sup>69</sup> The very happy and unhap-

<sup>68</sup> Schmidt et al. (2000)

<sup>69</sup> Schmidt et al. find that single adults also feel ambivalent about living alone. Cf. Schmidt et. al. (2006), p. 73



py single people are clearly in the minority. Interestingly there are more unhappy young men in our sample than young women: 40 % of the girls as against just 10 % of the boys described their single life as exclusively positive (table 6).

Table 6: Rating the experience of being single (16–19-year-olds, in %)

	Girls (n = 36)	Boys (n = 43)	Total (n = 79)
<b>Experience of being single</b>			
Wholly negative	3	14	9
Wholly positive	39	9	23
Ambivalent	58	77	68
Significance	.004		

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

Among the most important and most commonly cited advantages of being single is the freedom – in the words of the young people: *'You can do what you want'* (Angi, 17). Other positive aspects they give of being single are independence, personal responsibility, more time for friends as well as for oneself, but also saving money.<sup>70</sup> Despite these perks, single people long for togetherness, intimacy, closeness and a 'physical relationship'. They sometimes feel lonely and want to 'be hugged' and 'be loved and cherished', on bad days they miss the support of a relationship.<sup>71</sup> 18-year-old Leon misses 'the feeling of close intimacy, of sex (laughs), I miss everything that makes a relationship a relationship'. The desire for autonomy on the one hand and the need for a bond on the other is the source of the single person's ambivalence.

*Tina, 19: 'When you see couples together you think that it would be nice. At Christmas it would be nice to have a partner. But sometimes you think it's good because you don't have the stress, especially when I hear others going on about how their boyfriend was jealous and all that. Then I think (grins) that I'm lucky.'*

*Marcel, 19: 'I have no responsibilities, I don't have to justify myself to anyone and I don't have any trust issues with a girl. I don't have to worry about what she's doing, I don't have any obligations and that makes me more open. Of course it would be nice to have a girl from time to time*

**70** In the ElitePartner-Trendmonitor we find very similar results. Around 78 % of the adult single people said that one of the biggest advantages of their life was that they were 'free and independent' and 41 % said they had 'more time for friends and hobbies'. Cf. ElitePartner (2009)

**71** According to the ElitePartner-Trendmonitor, the things single people miss the most are 'being hugged' (94 %), 'sex and intimacy' (91 %), 'sharing everyday life with someone' (80 %) and 'falling asleep next to someone' (78 %). Cf. ElitePartner (2008)

*who I could watch a film with or go out for a meal or go to the cinema in the evening or the weekend or even go away with for the weekend, so I don't get things like that.'*

**Violetta, 18:** *'[I like it] that I just don't have this obligation to always get in touch, to keep thinking about it. I'm just free in my head. (...) [I miss] the closeness of another person, when someone hugs me and comforts me, that's a nice feeling, so sometimes I feel alone, but I think I can replace that with friends.'*

**Stefan, 17:** *'What I miss the most is falling asleep with someone in my arms. I really like that. You don't get that when you're single. [As a single person] you don't have any times, it doesn't matter who you're doing what with. You don't have to check whether you're talking too much to a girl or anything like that. It's pleasant. That's the biggest advantage for me – this freedom.'*

**Ambivalence.** Interestingly, the ambivalence about being single lasts regardless of the amount of time the young people have spent being single. In most cases the young people are aware of the upsides and downsides of their situation. Even those who really miss a steady relationship point out the freedoms that come with being single. The only thing that changes over time is the emotional focus. Those young people who have just become single are often still thinking about their last relationships and the separation (Phil). Depending on whether they were the one breaking off the relationship or the one who was ditched, the emotional state can be very different: for some the dominant emotion is sadness, for others it is relief (Eva, Deena). At some point they accept their partnerless state and start looking for a new partner (Jan, Violetta). If the single period lasts for an overly long time, the longing for closeness often becomes very strong, or the person in question loses hope in a fulfilling relationship (Sara, Marcel). Those single people who have not had any relationship experience, but who have wanted a relationship for quite some time are in a similar emotional situation (Daniel, Antje).

**Phil, 19:** *'There are still some feelings there so when I think back at that time, I think about wanting to give it another go.'*

**Eva, 18:** *'The first two or three days it was tough, no text messages: 'I love you', no call, that was unfamiliar.'*

**Deena, 17:** *'I think [being single] feels very good, I have to say.'*

**Jan, 17:** *'I'm basically in the phase where I'm waiting for someone to cross my path. I don't have a problem being single at the moment.'*

**Violetta, 18:** *'I'm fine on my own but I know that in the long run, in a year or two, I'd feel a bit lonely.'*

**Sara, 17:** *'Right now I'm a bit tired of [being single]. I'm searching for something new.'*

**Marcel, 19:** *'I've accepted it. When you've been single for three years, at this age, it's difficult to just get into a relationship.'*

**Daniel, 17:** *'I'm trying to enjoy [the single life] even though, to be honest, I'd like a proper relationship because I've never really had one where I've really loved someone.'*

**Antje, 18:** *'I don't know anything else. I don't know being tied to someone. That's why it's normal life for me and it's great. I can imagine it being different too but it's okay.'*

Most of the single people have little doubt that they will find a new partner in time. A combination of carefreeness and openness, as described by 17-year-old Moritz, is typical: *'It'll happen. I just think that it'll happen again at some point. I live my life without worrying that I won't find a girlfriend anymore.'* Some young people are pensive about their partnerless state. They think about why they are not finding the 'right one' and why nobody is falling in love with them. These single people cannot help thinking about questions like 'why [am] I single?', '[am] I unattractive?', 'what am I doing wrong?', 'am I spending time in the wrong circles?' and how come 'that I don't want those who want me and vice versa?'.

If at all, single people experience internal pressure rather than pressure from the outside. Janina (19) says: *'the only pressure comes from me'*. Most of the anxious ones would agree with this statement. Nevertheless some of the young people are put under pressure by their milieu.

**Igor, 18:** *'I'm in an environment where lots of people say things like: 'you're a man, you should have a girlfriend'. I often get discriminated against. The people don't want to do that, but that's how it feels to you. (...) I feel under pressure. I don't like it when I'm with friends or family members who start talking about it. My brother is in a steady relationship right now and then they say things like: 'your brother has one – why don't you?'.'*

*Gülhanim, 18: ‘One of my friends thinks that I’m missing something in life because I don’t have a relationship and have never had sex. She says: ‘you’ve got no experience, you’ll be really naïve (...) and helpless in these matters.’ Others don’t think it’s a problem. It depends. That one friend is very focused on love so it’s very important to her that everyone has a relationship and if you don’t have one there’s something wrong with you and you’re not cool.’*

Fortunately, the stories quoted here by Igor and Gülhanim are exceptions. Young single people are rarely seen as ‘losers’ and that constitutes a major distinction between them and singles of older generations.<sup>72</sup> The milieu and the young people are aware that they are at the start of their relationship career and will probably soon switch to being in a relationship (again).

**Do they have partner requirements?**

The Shell Youth Survey has made the same finding for several years now, namely that friendship and family are the most important values in young people’s lives.<sup>73</sup> That is why it is not surprising that around half of our single respondents explicitly desire a relationship. Around a third do not want to change their partnerless state and a fifth are undecided (cf. table 7).

Table 7: **Desire for a steady relationship** (16–19-year-olds, in %)

	Girls (n = 38)	Boys (n = 44)	Total (n = 82)
<b>Desire for a steady relationship</b>			
No	26	32	29
Yes	50	52	51
Undecided	24	16	20

Source: BZgA, data set ‘Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age’, 2011

The desire for a steady relationship is very widespread and the corresponding ideas about ‘the right one’ are expressed quite concretely by many young people. The ideal partner should be as follows: ‘kind, fun, a bit more self-confident than me’, ‘honest’, ‘faithful’, ‘open, a bit crazy but not too much’, ‘on my wavelength’, ‘reliable, kind, helpful, not so arrogant’, ‘intelligent... at least relatively’, ‘out-going’, ‘like a macho, masculine, so I know he’ll protect me’, ‘a similar character to mine’, someone ‘I can talk to about everything’, ‘should make spontaneous arrangements from ‘let’s go do something’ to ‘let’s go into the corn field’, ‘an open person, not too boring and who enjoys life’ or,

**72** Hradil (2003)  
**73** Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel (2010)

put a bit differently ‘someone who blows me away’. Specific characteristics are listed in first place, followed by appearance. The corresponding statements range from ‘*appearance doesn’t really matter much to me, unless he looks really terrible*’ (Sandy, 17) to very detailed requirements, which were, however, given more often by the boys we surveyed.<sup>74</sup> One example: ‘*She shouldn’t be taller than 170 [cm] and should be slender, not too slim, nice long hair, definitely blue eyes*’ (Martin, 18). The list of expectations seems to be endless; fulfilling all of them is near impossible.

In light of this, it is not surprising that the single respondents in our survey explained their single status by saying they had too high requirements of a potential partner. Reasons like ‘haven’t found the right one yet’, ‘unlucky, always only ever find the wrong ones’ or ‘there’s no chemistry’ are cited most often to explain their single status. ‘*If you have a thousand expectations about what someone should be like, it’s difficult to meet them,*’ muses 17-year-old Renate, adding that she stands in her own way when it comes to a relationship. Almost 36% of the 18–29-year-olds in the ElitePartner-Singlestudie of 2012 said that they did not have a partner because their standards were too high, while 32% did not want to give up their independence.<sup>75</sup> Our single respondents reluctantly believed that they did not have a partner because they were too shy: ‘I don’t have the confidence to go up to people’; others think they are ‘not interesting’ or ‘annoying’ or unattractive: ‘because I’m a bit chubby’, others complain that they do not have much time for social contacts because of school: ‘studying all the time’. The criterion ‘time’ was also important for the group of respondents who were single by choice (almost 30% of our respondents): they either wanted peace and quiet for school or for themselves, to ‘be on my own for a bit’, ‘to think about everything’, to process the last relationship and to rest after the perceived stress of the previous relationship.

**Looking for partners.** Surprisingly, the young single respondents made virtually no effort to actively seek out their ideal partner. Most of our respondents have done little to date in order to find a suitable partner. They were more likely to follow the motto: ‘*I’m just letting it happen*’ (Lutz, Lea). Some had very precise ideas about how a meeting should unfold (Lara). Some single people try to increase their chances of a romantic encounter by going out more often and being open to new acquaintances (Christin), while others are doubtful whether this kind of search could be successful (Olli).

*Lea, 18: ‘I don’t go out hoping that I’m going to find my prince (smiles). That’s not what I do. If he comes along, he comes along.’*

*Lutz, 17: ‘I’m letting it happen and if the right one comes along, then definitely, but not desperately.’*

<sup>74</sup> The results of the Brigitte study reveal that 41% of adult men and 21% of women say that looks and attractiveness are the most important thing in a partner. Cf. Brigitte (2009)

<sup>75</sup> ElitePartner (2010)

**Lara, 16:** *'Ever since I've liked boys, I've had this dream: in school, you're walking alongside each other and bump into each other and then you have the first eye contact and then afterwards, maybe in the canteen, he plucks up the courage to talk to me, maybe by bumping into me on purpose, 'Oh, I'm sorry' and we get chatting that way.'*

**Christin, 18:** *'If I meet someone, a friend of a friend or at a concert and he talks to me or I talk to him, there could be chemistry, but maybe there won't be. I'm not specifically looking.'*

**Olli, 18:** *'I regularly go to parties. We go all over the neighbourhood to all the clubs. I don't meet the right kind there. They're all just party girls.'*

Only around a fifth of the young single people (four girls and twelve boys) said they had actively tried to look for a partner or they are intending to do so. Those who have decided *'to do something to meet someone'* (Igor, 18) give several options: going out more often, not being so shy, openly talking to attractive women (Leon, Stefan), having an intensive *'look around'* (Miriam), including online, or to create a profile on an online dating site (Horst):

**Igor, 18:** *'I really want to do something about it. My resolution for the coming year is to find someone. I want to go to more places where you meet people. Nightclubs, events. I want to try and be less shy.'*

**Leon, 18:** *'I had started searching. Everywhere, really. I spontaneously chatted to women, but my problem is that I always chat to women who look young but who turn out to be almost 30.'*

**Stefan, 17:** *'I was lying in bed yesterday and was thinking about her and was thinking: 'What can I do? How can I get to her?' because we don't have anything to do with each other, except in school. And that's when I had the idea and (...) then I got up again and wrote her the letter (laughs) and I gave it to her today.'*

**Miriam, 17:** *'I'm online. Then I had a look around and I go out with my friend. I look around when I'm out too. I do look around to see if something could come of it.'*

**Horst, 17:** *'I've signed up with an online dating site but I'm looking more for friendships there. Including to women (...). I don't have the direct goal of looking around online for a partner.'*

The statements indicate that the young people believe in a romantic ideal that includes meeting the right one by chance. They imply that there is ‘love at first sight’ and that the contact should be made discreetly. These notions resemble the scenarios in teenage soap operas, or, even more symbolic and deeply rooted, the ideal of the fairytale prince.<sup>76</sup> *‘If the right one comes along, yes. Otherwise I’m fine without,’* says 17-year-old Caroline. This attitude of either finding an ideal partner or not going for it does not make the search for a partner any easier. In addition there seems to be the widespread notion that it looks bad if you need to do something actively to meet someone. For 18-year-old Violetta the desire for a relationship is not enough to justify actively searching for a partner. *‘That comes on its own, by chance, that’s really lovely, it’s not that you look for someone and have to find him and are desperate to meet him to start a relationship so that you’re not alone.’*

## 2.2.2 Sex in the ‘single’ phase

Before we address the sex lives of the unattached respondents in this section, it is a good idea to take a brief look at the experiences with sexuality and/or relationships this group has had. The results can be portrayed well in a simple diagram (cf. figure 3).

Figure 3: Relationship and sexual intercourse experience among the 16–19-year-old single respondents (n = 82)

		Relationship experience	
		Yes	No
Sexual intercourse experience	No	9 boys 11 girls	6 boys 6 girls
	Yes	29 boys 21 girls	0

Source: BZgA, data set ‘Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age’, 2011

The biggest group (n = 50) have already had experience with sexual intercourse and have had at least one steady relationship already. The second-largest group (n = 20) has already had a steady relationship, but no sex. A small group (n = 12) has had neither sex nor a relationship, and nobody has had sexual intercourse but no steady relationship yet. Hedonistically motivated sex without a relationship appears to be extremely rare among young people, which is not quite the impression one gets from the public debate about ‘the oversexed youth of today’.

<sup>76</sup> Kaufmann (2002), p. 88

Of the 50 sexually experienced single respondents, around half had not had a sexual encounter during the current single phase, neither women nor men. The other half generally had had one to two sexual partners during this time (cf. table 8).

**Table 8: Number of sexual partners during the current single period (16–19-year-olds, only single respondents who have already had sex; n = 49\*)**

		Girls (n = 21)	Boys (n = 28)	Total (n = 49*)
<b>Number of sexual partners</b>				
	None	14	12	26
	1 to 2	5	10	15
	3 to 4	1	4	5
	5 or more	1	2	3

\*this information was not obtained from one of the participants

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

When looking at the frequency of sexual intercourse among the sexually experienced single people, it turns out that the vast majority have not had sex in the past four weeks (cf. table 9). That means the sex lives of single young people is on the bleak side, at least when it comes to the quantity of sex.

**Table 9: Frequency of sexual intercourse in the past four weeks (16–19-year-olds, only single respondents who have already had sex)**

		Girls (n = 21)	Boys (n = 29)	Total (n = 50)
<b>Quantity of sexual intercourse (past four weeks)</b>				
	None	19	20	39
	1 to 2 times	2	5	7
	3 to 5 times	0	4	4
	More than 5 times	0	0	0

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011



We can see that being single largely means being without sex. Being single is not characterized by a large number of changing partners or large amount of sexual activity. Most young people do not have a tendency to be promiscuous and there are absolutely no indicators suggesting sexual depravity. On the contrary: single people spend most of their time being abstinent while they are waiting for ‘the right one’. These few figures also suggest that young women and men value romantic and interpersonal relationships, and that sexuality outside of steady relationships plays more of a subordinate role for them. Nevertheless, sex is still part of the lives of single people. How does sex outside of steady relationships come about? Who are the partners? How do they feel about the sexual encounter afterwards and how is it different from sex in relationships? These are the questions we want to address in the following sections.

### What sexual encounters occur during the single period?

The single respondents who were sexually active during their single phase (7 girls and 17 boys) reported 70 sexual partners that they had been with during the current single phase. In the interviews, 54 of these sexual encounters were described in more detail, so that it was possible to understand the different settings in which a sexual encounter occurred (cf. table 10).

**Table 10: Frequency of the different forms of single sex during the current single period**  
(54 sexual encounters among the sexually active single respondents)

	Girls (n = 13)	Boys (n = 41)	Total (n = 54)
<b>Frequency of the different forms of ‘single’ sex</b>			
one-night-stand	7	30	37
affair	4	2	6
‘friends with benefits’	1	4	5
sex with the ex	1	5	6

Source: BZgA, data set ‘Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age’, 2011

By far the most common type of single sex is the one-night-stand. It is rare for young people to have an affair or arrange sex with a good friend or ex partner. Phil (19) describes the typical one-night-stand: *‘You go out, you meet someone, you go home with them, you have sex, you go home and that was it.’* A one-night-stand does

not have to be associated with a trip to a nightclub. Even 'would-be DVD evenings' and spontaneous meetings can end in a sexual encounter. The possible scenarios are very diverse and some of the stories are quite adventurous and not always in the positive sense.

An affair, on the other hand, is an *'interim thing (...), something between a relationship and nothing'* (Jenny, 19). Only a few young people mention 'sex with the ex', and the 'friends with benefits' scenario is also uncommon. These are friendships that lead to sexual encounters from time to time. The following quotes will illustrate the breadth of single sex:

**Lutz, 17:** *'That was a girl who I met at a party. (...) We met at her place, her parents weren't home, I brought something to drink and then we made out and it just happened.'*

**Mehdi, 18:** *'I met her via SchülerVZ [a social networking site for school students]. We were together for one, no, two weeks. It just happened after two weeks. (...) I'd say [the initiative came] more from me. 40 % from her and 60 % from me.'*

**Sara, 17:** *'Well, he [the ex-boyfriend] got in touch with me online and wanted us to meet again to watch a DVD, but we never really got around to watching the DVD.'*

**Moritz, 17:** *'There was a female friend of mine who I still know today. It was a funny story. We were sitting together as friends and then she asked: 'Do you feel like sex?' Just like that. So as a man, of course I said 'yes'. It was as friends but we still had sex.'*

Depending on context, the sexual partners can be divided into three groups: strangers, acquaintances/friends, and ex-partners. Interestingly the single respondents had sex with friends just as often as sex with strangers they meet at parties or other social gatherings. 18-year-old Christin and 19-year-old Marcel are among the rare exceptions who had lots of sexual encounters with many partners during their single period. Their description illustrates in what constellations single people could have sex.

**Christin, 18:** *'They were all from my circle of friends. Once with my ex-boyfriend, then the new guy who I was with for around a month and then with two others who were friends of mine.'*

**Marcel, 19:** *'Some of them were girls from my school, in my year, where it just developed. We met up and then [it] escalated in some situations. Sometimes this resulted in longer affairs, where we had sex 20, 30 times. Sometimes it was just once or twice. Some girls I met that evening, other girls were friends of good friends.'*

At the time of the interview almost all the respondents were no longer in touch with the partners they had these sexual encounters with. One-off sexual encounters did not develop into lasting friendships or even relationships; no 'friends with benefits' scenario ever developed into a relationship. This finding suggests that this kind of sex is about the sex 'itself'. They are not trying to use sexual contacts to develop a romantic relationship.

### **Sexual encounters: is sex with love better?**

The single respondents said they preferred relationship sex over non-committal sex. Most of the single respondents who were familiar with sex outside of a relationship felt that sexuality in a relationship was more intense, enjoyable and more emotional:

**Jenny, 19:** *'I think it's better in a relationship because I can enjoy it more. It's more intense than if you're doing it with just anyone, to put it crudely. You know the other person, it's nicer if you have this mutual trust in a relationship.'*

**Moritz, 17:** *'Sex with people you don't know is very, very superficial and is just about fun. With a girlfriend, it's very emotional and that makes sex more tender (...) kissing, everything that doesn't happen during a one-night-stand in my opinion.'*

These two quotes already indicate that uncommitted sex is sometimes seen as lacking in quality: according to the young people surveyed, sex between singles tends to be average, sometimes good; rarely is it seen as a disaster.<sup>77</sup> Good single sex is described with the following words: *'it was fun'*, *'it was good, nice'*, *'somehow good because it's something nice'*, *'the whole thing was fun'*. But nobody talked about very good single sex.

The average sex is described as 'not that great', 'odd', 'didn't need to be', it was 'lacking love' and 'you have a strange feeling doing it'. The experiences with the sex that was perceived as bad were described as 'rather unpleasant', 'alienating', 'quite gross', 'not really it' or simply 'shit'. Then they want to 'forget [what happened] as quickly as possible'. 19-year-old Heidi judges a one-night-stand in comparison to her previous

<sup>77</sup> In 25 sex stories by our sexually active single respondents who have had sexual intercourse there were statements about the quality of single sex. During the evaluation process, a rating was used to divide them into three categories: 'good', 'average' and 'bad'.

sexual experiences as average: *'It wasn't bad, I had fun, but it wasn't great either. It wasn't good compared to what I had before.'* But even if this sort of sex was not particularly satisfying, it can still be seen as an important experience. Heidi, for example, thinks her sexual adventure was enriching: *'It was an experience. I don't think experiences are bad because you can always learn from experiences.'*

For the vast majority of the single respondents, one-off sexual encounters are out of the question. They say, as 17-year-old Caroline says, that *'it's just not possible without love and trust'*, justifying this attitude with: *'because it's something that I want to do with someone who means something to me'* (Daniel, 17). Some do not rule out a possible change in their attitude with increasing age and life experience: *'Maybe when I'm older, but I can't imagine sex without love'* (Maya, 17).

Sex does not play a big role in the lives of most of the young single people, not least because in their eyes, sexuality should take place within a relationship:

**Angi, 17:** *'For me, sex isn't a big thing right now. I can't imagine having sex at the moment because I don't have a boyfriend and I have to really trust a boy first before I can think about sex.'*

**Ibrahim, 17:** *'Sex is important. And it's important in a relationship. I don't think that you could be without it completely, because it's an act of lovemaking because you trust each other and you come closer than you would be with just the relationship. It's a good feeling for both partners.'*

### 2.2.3 Conclusion

Being single is a normal state in the lives of most young people. Most of our single respondents have already had at least one relationship and are in a transitional period to the next relationship. They often feel ambivalent about this break. On the one hand they enjoy the freedoms of being unattached, on the other they long for the closeness and intimacy of a relationship. This ambivalence is reflected in their desire for a partner. They would only give up their independence for 'the right one'. The single respondents are hopeful as they wait for a suitable partner who will fulfil their (often) high expectations. Some use the opportunities the internet has to offer. Around a third of all our single respondents had at least one non-committal sexual encounter during their single

phase. Interestingly, this has nothing to do with the search for 'the right one', instead it happens spontaneously and is often sexually motivated. Generally speaking, 'single' sex is average to good, it creates moments in which the young people can experience the feeling of togetherness again. Sexuality is important to young single people, but it is not the most important thing. They desire sexuality in a relationship but love and friendship count for more than the pure physical contact. The young single people are neither particularly hedonistic nor depraved. On the contrary: they dream of princes and princesses and wait full of hope for a fulfilling relationship (not least, a sexually fulfilling relationship).



# 3

## *Young People's Sexual Experiences Online*

### **3.1** *Media routine: internet use by 16–19-year-olds*

*Urszula Martyniuk*

### **3.2** *You and me: looking for a partner online*

*Urszula Martyniuk*

### **3.3** *Fun or distress? – Sexual actions and the internet*

*Urszula Martyniuk*

# Young people's sexual experiences online

## 3

*Urszula Martyniuk*

The new media are a firm part of young people's everyday lives: almost every German young person (97 %) has access to his/her own mobile phone, 84 % have an MP3 player, 79 % own their own computer or laptop and more than half of the young people (58 %) have a television. One in two (51 %) have a digital camera as well as a games console (50 %).<sup>78</sup> Young women and men constantly move between phone calls, text messages, online communities, chats, music, programmes, digital images, games etc. and they even do it all at once. At the same time they lead a normal exciting teenage life with all the ups and downs, emotions, hormonal chaos, search for identity, first loves and sexual experiences. It seems obvious that these new media have found their way into this adolescent world, the only question is how. In this section we want to explore the role of the internet on the socialization of young people in all aspects that are important for sexuality.

The internet makes many new encounters possible via online communication and active participation in forums, chats and online communities.<sup>79</sup> The vast majority of young people in the internet generation<sup>80</sup> use the internet quite naturally as a sexual exploratory sphere. Even though the current debate is dominated by concerns about the possible effects of internet pornography, it is chatting in flirting, dating and meeting sites that probably plays a much bigger role for young people's sex and relationship lives. They share experiences online, meet new people, try themselves at flirting, arrange meetings in the real world and try out which sexual encounters they find pleasant and which ones not. The following section presents and discusses young people's positive and negative experiences with chats, flirts and looking for a partner online.

<sup>78</sup> Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (2010)

<sup>79</sup> Döring (2003)

<sup>80</sup> Palfrey, Gasser (2008)



### 3.1 The media norm: internet use by 16–19-year-olds

Urszula Martyniuk

The internet is among the social spaces in which young people regularly spend time. 96 % of all our respondents had internet access at home,<sup>81</sup> 76 % of them in their own rooms. They are completely (64 %) or partly (27 %) undisturbed there. Only a few (8 %) young people report that they do not have the ability to surf the web undisturbed. Most young people spend up to three hours online every day; girls tend to spend less time in front of the computer than boys (cf. table 11).<sup>82</sup>

Table 11: Internet access in hours per day (16–19-year-olds, in %)

	Girls (n = 78)	Boys (n = 79)	Total (n = 157*)
Internet use, per day			
none	5	0	3
up to 1 hr.	55	28	41
2–3 hrs.	30	51	40
4–5 hrs.	9	15	12
more than 5 hrs.	1	6	4
Significance	.001		

\* in three interviews there was no data about the internet use per day

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

It is harder to answer the question 'How much time do you spend online per day?' than it would first appear. This has to do with two special features of internet use: (1) the varying intensity of use and (2) the leisure time capacity that is dependent on the young people's schedules. Some archetypal responses reveal the heterogeneity of young people's internet use:

*Timo, 17: 'Actively? No idea, maybe one and a half to two hours, I'd say. That's when I'm really sitting in front of the computer doing something.'*

**81** The figures match the results of the JIM study. It determines that 98 % of households that have young people living in them have internet access. The BZgA study and the Shell-Jugendstudie have similar findings. Cf. Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (2010); BZgA study (2010a); Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel (2010)

**82** In the JIM study the boys say they use the internet more than the girls say they do – the boys say they spend 144 minutes online per day, the girls say it is around 131. Cf. Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (2010)

**Angi, 17:** *'I have it on all day. I'm doing something all day, like MSN [chat software], you can be online there. I'm only in front of the computer in the evenings or every now and then. I check it for ten minutes, then I go away again, then I do something different, like looking after my brother. I come and go, I just use it more in the evenings.'*

**Klaus, 18:** *'I broke the record one holiday when I spent 16 hours [per day online].'*

These few quotes already show us that young people distinguish between active and passive internet use, meaning between phases where they are doing something specific online and periods during which they remain online but aren't actively using the computer. This 'on the side use' largely applies to the messenger services, which have associated apps for mobile phones that the young women and men use. In addition, internet use depends on how much time they have. Many have the chance to spend more time online at the weekends or during the holidays. But for some it is exactly the other way around: that is when they are busy doing other things, so they stay offline for longer.

The JIM study has found that daily internet use goes up with young people's age, from 91 minutes among 12–13-year-olds, to 172 minutes for 18–19-year-olds.<sup>83</sup> Interestingly a third of our respondents (26 girls and 26 boys) feel there is an opposite trend: in their estimation, at the time of the survey (i.e. among 16–19-year-olds) the phase of the most intense internet use lies some years back. They often report that they spent more time online between 13 and 16. It was at this time that most of them got their first own computer, which they used for intensive online gaming, online flirting and access to online communities, as the following examples illustrate.

**Carsten, 15:** *'When I got my computer, I was in front of it every day. Nobody could get me away from it. (Laughs) 25 hours per day was the minimum.'*

**Björn, 19:** *'There were times, three years ago or so, when there was nothing else. I got home from school, chucked my bag in the corner, switched on the computer, stuck a pizza in the oven and sat in front of the computer until I went to bed. The next day I just did my time in school before I could get back to the computer.'*

**Dilek, 17:** *'It was worse with the internet because I had more time and I was a bit addicted. I was at my computer and online, chatting, 24 hours per day, even though I knew I'd never meet them.'*

**83** Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (2010)

*Irem, 19: '15-16 was my phase, but not at all after that. I was completely addicted, and had to message the MSN people [people who use the MSN chat software].'*

### 3.1.1 Young people's activities online

It is important to get a picture of how heterogeneous and diverse young people's internet use is, and how much it is embedded into the social network and the family sphere, before we can focus on its use in a sexual context (cf. chapter 3.1.2). If young people are asked about all the things they do online, we get a broad spectrum of very different activities:

- they use the internet as a source of information, particularly for their homework; they get information about questions that interest them, such as sexuality;
- the internet is naturally used as a communication tool, and here they primarily cite online communities<sup>84</sup> and messenger services;
- in addition young people use the internet for entertainment purposes, such as listening to music or the radio, watching films and playing computer games;
- not least the internet plays a considerable role with regard to their sexual socialization: many have experiences with flirting and pornography here (cf. chapter 4).

The following examples give an idea how online activities are intertwined with school and everyday life:

*Fritz, 17: 'Bild [a tabloid newspaper] is my homepage. I read about the sports news and general news. Then I check SchülerVZ [social networking site for school students], wetter.de [weather], my school website and the Sparkasse [bank].'*

*Bernd, 17: 'I read about what's new, especially with computer issues and what's going on in the world. I don't read newspapers and I don't want television, I'm just online.'*

*Felix, 18: 'I have a blog. I don't blog privately, I blog with a climate activist group. It's more political and less about entertainment.'*

*Lotte, 17: 'I use Google a lot for school, I do that every day. I like YouTube and check out new music or I download music. I chat and I send emails.'*

<sup>84</sup> Röll (2010)

The vast majority of our respondents (89%) have at least one profile on a social networking site. Messenger services are similarly popular (81 %) and this is in line with the nationwide trend for young people.<sup>85</sup>

**Role of parents.** Most young people are, then, regularly online, without having to leave their rooms. They are mostly undisturbed. The majority of taught themselves how to work with a computer.<sup>86</sup> In light of this, we are interested in the role of the parents with regard to their children's media socialization and media-competence development. What do parents know about what their children are doing online? Do they have an influence on that? Do they regulate online times or certain contents via bans, rules or conversations?

The most common scenario of parent-child communication about the internet is illustrated by a quote by 19-year-old Alexander: *'They taught me that I shouldn't reveal my name and address publicly because of advertising and data protection. And they said to be careful online, but they don't really ask what I do.'* 56 % of our respondents reported that their parents had never spoken to them about the internet. This fact is interpreted differently by the young people: some believe that their parents are not interested in it or are not computer-savvy, others think that their parents' lack of involvement is a good sign of the trusting relationship. 44 % of the young women and men say they had spoken to their parents or other adults about their internet use and in these cases the parents usually took the initiative. However, the dialogues were often limited to a superficial exchange, such as: *'What are you doing there?'*, *'No idea, playing.'*, *'Okay, fine.'* (Lutz, 17). A few demonstrative examples illustrate how young people evaluate their parents with regard to computer use.

*Igor, 18: 'They don't really know so much about it and it's not really interesting to them because they think that if I have a problem, then I'll come to them.'*

*Mandy, 18: Well, she [the mother] trusts me completely. She knows that I won't visit sites where I could get into trouble. We have a proper mother-daughter relationship.'*

*Gülhanım, 18: 'My mother's quite nosy and she likes to come and ask about what I'm doing in front of the computer all day. I don't like it when my parents look at what I'm doing so I close all the windows because it annoys me that they don't respect my privacy.'*

*Timo, 17: 'My parents are quite aware of what I'm doing because I quite like talking about it.'*

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (2010); ARD/ZDF-Onlinestudie (2010)

<sup>86</sup> Treumann et al. (2007), p. 107

Some parents, when they talk to their children about internet use, give them a number of tips and bans. 34% of the respondents got clear rules from their parents, which ranged from *'I was only allowed to use the computer for four hours per week'* (Steve, 17) to statements such as the one by 17-year-old Tanja: *'My parents said: 'don't put anything online, no information about yourself, no pictures, blah blah, it can all be used against you and it will be used against you.' They're really paranoid about it.'* If parents issue rules, they are mostly about time limits or potentially dangerous situations like 'meeting with someone from a chat room', 'downloading things', 'shopping online' and 'pornographic sites'. Terms like 'data protection' and 'viruses' are also used.<sup>87</sup> They rarely explain what the rule is meant to protect them from, for example: 'because these [websites] contain viruses', 'because the [shooting games] get people addicted very quickly' or 'because that could cost money or could be illegal'. The rules sometimes remain *'unspoken'*, they are not clearly stated and the young people can only surmise their parents' intentions.

Two thirds of the respondents were not given any kind of limitations by their parents and report about their independence, like 18-year-old Jakob: *'no, there were no rules, pure freedom'*. If the parents or guardians do not issue rules, the reason is often based on the desire that the young women and men *'learn on their own to be responsible'*. The rules/freedoms are demonstrated in the following statements.

**Caroline, 17:** *'The big issue is meeting someone or exchanging addresses or telephone numbers or anything like that. That's their biggest concern, that I could meet someone and then I'd be gone.'*

**Horst, 17:** *'My mother casually said I shouldn't get into trouble. But did she really set up clear rules? No, not really.'*

**Grit, 17:** *'It was something unspoken, that I know I shouldn't click on unknown things and get viruses that could be harmful, but there were no direct rules about what I mustn't look at.'*

**Heinz, 17:** *'I'm allowed to for as long as I like. I have to decide for myself. They always say: you have to learn to take responsibility and I am responsible in this area.'*

**87** In the study by Pew Internet & American Life Project 68% of the parents said they had given their children rules about internet contents and 55% about the amount of time their children could spend online. Macgill (2007)

Some young people do not agree with their parents rules. They want to be treated like adults and enjoy more freedoms. Tanja (17) who was quoted above said about her parents' rules: *'I'm old enough to decide what I do with the internet and what not. I can judge the consequences.'*

It becomes clear from the young people's statements that they are often left alone during their internet use. One reason for this could be the parents' own meagre internet skills. Some parents/guardians feel overwhelmed or are not aware of the online risks. To improve the family conversation about the internet, parents should become competent conversational partners.

**Internet security.** Young people think a lot about security online. Although the media often portray it otherwise, they are media-aware and competent. Generally speaking they are aware of the potential dangers of the internet and know to what extent it is possible to protect themselves. 96% of the respondents in our survey said that they think about personal protection when they are online. For example, they only make their profiles in online communities available to friends, but do not give their personal details such as their surname, address and telephone number,<sup>88</sup> they only use usernames and regularly change their passwords. They avoid dubious websites and they only chat to people they know.

*Timo, 17: 'Apart from my name and my date of birth, which are correct, the rest is made up. I say I'm in class 5b and work at the bakery, so I've made it a bit of fun, rather than revealing any data.'*

*Katha, 18: 'I don't give my address or my surname. I give a nickname and then I only let my friends see my profile, not those who don't know me.'*

*Hans, 17: 'I change my passwords quite a bit because I've heard that they cracked a password. That happened to a friend of mine.'*

*Antje, 18: 'I googled myself and I put in my name and that came up with my photo from my facebook page. So I changed it so that nobody could see it anymore and now it doesn't come up on Google anymore either. That's important to me.'*

*Paul, 16: 'I just stay away from pages where I'm very uncertain or that I've heard bad things about.'*

**88** We also found similar protective measures in the study by Pew Internet & American Life Project, in which 66% of the young people aged 12 to 17 reported that their profiles were at least partially blocked, 71% did not have surnames and 98% did not give their mobile phone numbers in their profile. Cf. Pew Internet & American Life Project (2007)

Only 4% of the young people surveyed told us that they hardly paid any attention to their safety online. They had not yet thought about it, and were not scared that ‘something would happen’ or, as 18-year-old Petra put it: *‘I don’t really protect [myself]. I don’t have any secrets.’* For some, like 18-year-old Ronny, it has to do with honesty: *‘I write down everything. I’m an honest person who prefers to put everything down.’*

The diverse prevention strategies that young people know about cannot always protect them from unpleasant situations online. Sometimes they still have unwanted encounters or offers. In these situations the internet has various coping strategies, the easiest one being: *‘just going offline for a while’* (Kurt, 17).

**Björn, 19:** *‘There was the odd case where I thought: hmm, something’s not right and then I just left again.’*

**Tamara, 19:** *‘I don’t need to protect myself because if someone tries something, I either just click away or I get at him... I don’t know, I always think of something.’*

**Falk, 17:** *‘Like when I was stalked by this girl, I just stopped responding to her conversations, I just ignored her. I would delete her or something.’*

**Miriam, 17:** *‘If someone writes something, then I just put him on the ignore list. (...) I have someone who’ll throw him out. There are CMs and if I tell him that I’m being harassed, I can raise the alarm. I can write what the problem is and I can write harassment and my reasons and then I send that off.’*

Most young people seem to be aware of the tools they can use to protect themselves online and they are not powerless in threatening situations either. They act within their capabilities (cf. chapter 3.3.2 re sexual harassment online).

### 3.1.2 Sexuality education online

In Nicola Döring's 2008 survey of sexuality and the internet, she distinguished between six usages pertaining to sexuality: pornography, sex shops, sex work, sexuality education, sexual contacts and sexual subcultures.<sup>89</sup>

Three of these are particularly relevant for young people:

- the search for information about sexuality and sex education
- flirting, chatting, dating, seeking partners and sexual contacts (cf. chapter 3.2.1)
- consuming pornography (cf. chapter 4).

The use of sex shops and sex work, as well as the participation in sexual subcultures only played a really marginal role or no role at all among our respondents. We start the following depiction of the young people's sexual experiences online with the aspect of sexuality education – a subject that is of surprisingly little relevance to young people – before we then move on to the broad field of online flirting, online dates and sexual contacts in and through the internet, as well as young people's pornography consumption.

If we bring to mind how much young people take internet use for granted and how regularly they use it, it is surprising that they only rarely use the internet as a source of information about sexual questions.<sup>90</sup> Only 43 % of our respondents had already searched the web at least once for information about sexuality (24 % several times). (Interestingly, respondents from the academic high school had done so more often than those from a vocational college, and there was no difference between men and women).<sup>91</sup> Most young people evidently feel well informed and do not feel they need more information.<sup>92</sup> If they have questions, they prefer to turn to friends, parents and teachers.<sup>93</sup> Some young people even feel a certain weariness in light of the omnipresent wealth of information about sexual subjects:

*Dschamal, 18: 'If you see a page, you'll click on it, but we've learned too much in school to really get proper information from those sites. We get too much sex education from TV and everywhere. There's no need to go online specifically to research something.'*

<sup>89</sup> Döring (2008)

<sup>90</sup> The BZgA study finds clear gender differences with regard to the preferred media for obtaining information. Boys prefer the internet to get information about sexuality, while girls prefer youth magazines and sex-education brochures. Cf. BZgA-Studie (2010a)

<sup>91</sup> 154 of our respondents answered the question: 'Do you get information about sexuality online?'

<sup>92</sup> In the study by Choudhry, Wallace and Brown done with English teenagers, 89 % of the respondents said that they knew everything about sexuality and relationships that there was to know. Cf. Choudhry, Wallace, Brown (2010)

<sup>93</sup> The data from the BRAVO Dr. Sommer study confirm this. Cf. BRAVO (2009)



**Tina, 19:** 'Informed? Hmm, not really, no. I wrote about it with a few friends and through school. My mother always tells me a lot of things (laughs).'

**Jan, 17:** 'I got information [about sexuality] from info materials that I got given and at check-ups and at school. I don't think I have a gap in my knowledge there.'

Young people believe they know a lot, maybe even too much about sexuality. But are they really well informed and do they know the right things? Clearly, the need for concrete information goes up as soon as they have their first experiences with sex and relationships. It happens more at that time that young people seek out information about sexuality online. In first place (33%) they try to find out about different sexual practices (positions, oral and anal sex) and to understand new, unfamiliar terms (e.g. fetish, 'blow job', cybersex). They are almost as likely (27%) to address contraceptive issues. Girls are particularly interested here. Around a fifth, of which a significantly greater number are men, seek out information about HIV, AIDS and STIs. They often research the symptoms of pregnancy in an emergency. In addition they are interested in sex toys, sexuality in general (e.g. sexual development, menstruation, 'ten things every woman wants in bed'), they satisfy their curiosity about the opposite sex and they read reports about other people's 'first time'.

**Tanja, 17:** 'Contraceptives, the Pill, vaginal ring, other options and which ones are reliable and which ones aren't. What positions are good for women (laughs) and other tips to give your boyfriend a good time (laughs).'

**Heiko, 18:** 'For example, when I was 13, I didn't know what a blow job was. I typed it in online and (laughs)... there were thousands of hits right away (laughs).'

**Max, 17:** 'There was one time when I really sought out information online and that was about AIDS and HIV because everyone was talking about it but nobody really described what it was and then I did a talk on it and I got top marks for that in school.'

**Deena, 17:** 'The only thing I [looked up] was when I thought I was pregnant. I researched all the symptoms and checked whether it was possible, but nothing else really.'

**Greta, 17:** 'He had – I don't know how you call it – a tear in his foreskin. It was extremely painful and we couldn't sleep together anymore. It was embarrassing enough for him and he didn't know what it was and because I was concerned because he was ill, too, I read up on what it could be.'

**Katha, 18:** *'At the start of my relationship I did that but not anymore. I read comments about the first time and what it can be like because all girls are scared of the first time. And about contraception and things like that.'*

Most of those looking for information were unreservedly satisfied with what they found. Only a few (10%) did not find a satisfactory answer to their question.<sup>94</sup> The quality of the information from the internet is given a very critical assessment.

**Timo, 17:** *'The information was more or less reputable so I could read through that well and get something out of it. It wasn't bad at all.'*

**Sophie, 18:** *'[The information I found] wasn't great. I went to gofeminin, a forum. Everyone says something different. There's no agreement. It's better to see your gynaecologist.'*

**Phil, 19:** *'The problem is that there are so many contradictions online. Some pages say one thing, others say other things. You don't know what to believe anymore. As a result it's difficult to be confident in what you find online.'*

The young people are not happy with just anything they find. They do specific searches for reputable websites. They also complain about the high level of contradictory information and prefer to turn to reliable sources of information such as parents and doctors in their search.

### 3.1.3 Conclusion

Young people's everyday lives are shaped by the digital media. They affect all areas of life and are taken for granted. Access to the internet is often available at home, it is embedded in the family context and it is regulated in very different ways. With regard to sex education and prevention work, parents should get more involved in their children's media world. It would be a good idea for them to take an active interest in the medium themselves itself, in the experiences their children have online and to have first-hand knowledge of the concerns arising from internet use. At the same time they must remember to respect the young people's privacy. Parents should aim for an objective treatment and avoid passing on widespread clichés.

Even though the educational scope is often not visible to parents when it comes to the internet, the young people interviewed were very media-competent and had a confident, natural attitude in dealing with what the internet had to offer. Young people mostly keep an eye on personal security and data protection.

<sup>94</sup> The statements about satisfaction with the search result made by 42 respondents were divided into three categories using a rating: 'satisfied', 'somewhat satisfied', 'dissatisfied'.

The internet is not greatly used as a source of information about sexual matters by the young women and men because they feel sufficiently educated. They prefer to turn to friends and parents about sexual questions as they trust them more than the information from the internet, which they find overwhelming and sometimes contradictory.

## 3.2 You and me: looking for a partner online

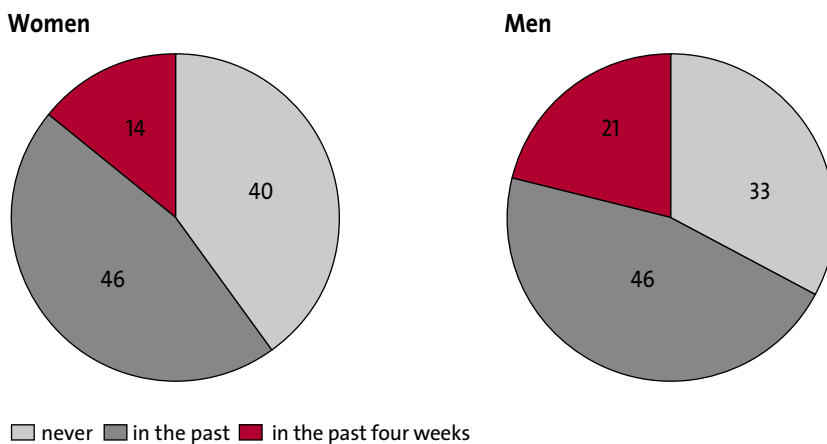
*Urszula Martyniuk*

Young people nurture many social contacts via the internet and social networks. As a result, things happen there that also happen when looking for a partner in the real world. The following section will look at how young people flirt, connect with new people and then meet face to face in the internet age.

### 3.2.1 Meeting people online

Online flirts are common among German young people: 64% of our respondents have had experience with internet flirts, with the young men flirting just as much as the young women (cf. figure 4).<sup>95</sup>

Figure 4: Experiences with online flirting by gender (rating, in %)<sup>96</sup>



Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

<sup>95</sup> In the study by Cooper, 47% of the 18–24-year-old men and 40% of the women of the same age said that they flirted online. Cf. Cooper et al (2003)

<sup>96</sup> We do not find any significant differences between the genders with regard to the frequency of online flirt experiences and no differences with regard to place of residence (Hamburg or Leipzig) or education.

So while the majority of young people have already had experiences with online flirting (usually earlier), the occurrence of this in the past four weeks was significantly lower: only 14 % of the girls and 21 % of the boys had flirted online, often several times.<sup>97</sup> The low figures for current online flirting could be because half of our respondents are currently in a steady relationship (this belief is supported by the fact that 89 % of those who are currently flirting online are single in the sense outlined above).

When asked what exactly online flirting was – where does a conversation between friends end and a flirt began – we used the subjective definitions of the respondents. However, they themselves were often unsure about where the line between a neutral chat and an online flirt was. Many did not really like the term ‘flirting’ and tried to find their own words: *‘It wasn’t a proper flirt, it was just a pleasant conversation.’* (Yasmin, 17), *‘giving compliments, having a nice conversation’* (Dominik, 19), *‘being nice to each other’* (Sandy, 17) and having *‘conversations on a pleasant level’* (Lukas, 18). 18-year-old Felix addressed this unclear boundary: *‘What does flirting mean? I think it’s a tricky line.’* In light of these fluid boundaries, one special feature of the online flirt becomes apparent: flirting does not always happen in an intentional and planned or structural framework (as it would in a specific ‘flirt chat’). Often the transition is indiscernible and the flirt is part of a broader communication with friends or strangers. There are very different settings for online flirts that are associated with different expectations, significances and experiences. Young people usually have their first experiences by flirting just for fun.

**Flirting for fun.** 16-year-old Bettina gave a good description of what flirting for fun involved: *‘I signed up with Flirtfieber, a flirt site. But that was a long time ago. My friends and I all did it together. It wasn’t serious. It was a bit of fun.’* The age between 12 and 14 was a phase during which many of them intensively dealt with the medium. Flirting at ‘Knuddels’, ‘Spin’ and ‘Singles-Leipzig’ were among the popularly tested options of the internet and were often checked out together with friends. This first foray into the world of sexual encounters online was not primarily about sexual arousal. The central motivation was curiosity and fun.

<sup>97</sup> Of the respondents who flirted online in the last four weeks, 50 % logged in once or twice, 18 % three to five times, 11 % six to ten times and 21 % more than ten times.

**Mandy, 18:** *'It wasn't really a flirt. It was more a bit of fun. It was just things like 'I love you' and I don't know what. What little children do. I was ten, I was still with my head in the clouds.'*

**Jenny, 19:** *'When we were 14, I did this chat thing with a friend. It was more fun than serious and I don't want to do it anymore now.'*

**Stefan, 17:** *'It's fun. Flirting via chat, because you sit there waiting for the response wondering what she'll write. It's fun and not really serious.'*

**Manfred, 17:** *'Yes (laughs), when I was 13 or 14. I was briefly in such idiot rooms like Knuddels and other awful chat rooms. But I stopped again very quickly, because I really didn't think much of it.'*

Björn (19) addresses a further motive for flirting for fun: to share one's experiences with the peer group. *'[I flirted at the time] because everyone was doing it, because many were doing it,'* he says, remembering, along with 17-year-old Kleo, the collective experience of the flirting phase: *'It was a phase. Everyone in school was signed up with Knuddels.'* Another experience that is often had with peers is to be someone else in chats to confuse others and have them on 'for fun'.

**Max, 17:** *'We set up an account with [Knuddels] because we were bored. So we said, 'cute blonde, 16', and asked them if he wanted our number. He wanted to call her on our number, male voice and all that, and that's how we took them all for a ride.'*

**Maren, 17:** *'Since we always only ever did it as a big group of girls, we saw it as a bit of fun. We tried to take other people for a ride and write it a bit differently to how it was. Either we presented ourselves to be really dreadful or really amazing.'*

Young people use the internet as a low-threshold entrance into the world of erotic encounters. They use it as a platform to practise and to have first experiences with the rules of flirting, they learn to position themselves and others on the partner market and they test their own attractiveness and self-presentation. Kurt (17) described his times using the 'Knuddels' website as *the early beginnings of flirting*, which becomes less attractive as soon as young people think the chances of an actual encounter and of finding a steady relationship are higher. As the American journalist Tracy Clark-Flory writes, the internet is now naturally part of 'the way in which children find their way in our sexual culture, long before they actually have sex. In the past it meant (...) that a girl would try on her mother's bra. For me it meant (...) chatting with people, some

of whom turned out to be perverts.’<sup>98</sup> In actual fact, young people flock to the virtual world because it promises sexual experiences with low costs and risks, without investments and without unpleasant consequences.

### Is the counterpart real?

‘Anyone can write anything’ – was the statement with which 18-year-old Franz opened the discussion about honesty when flirting online. For young people it is an important and controversial subject whether others and they themselves ought to be honest online. As a result, young people are almost always aware they cannot believe everything they read. Unknown chat partners are viewed with a certain amount of vigilance, and many are occupied with the question of whether the person they are talking to is being honest. 66% of those who have flirted online said that they had always been honest during their online communication, 24% said sometimes and 10% said they deliberately had not made any true statements.<sup>99</sup> Young women are just as honest, or otherwise, as young men.<sup>100</sup> Why do young people stay honest when they flirt online? The reasons most commonly given are moral ones ‘it’s wrong to lie’ or pragmatic ones ‘it’s not worth it because it’ll all come out if you meet up in person’. For what reason do they give incorrect information? There are three possibilities:

- safety;
- to give a better impression;
- to have fun taking others for a ride.

The question of whether honesty is a successful strategy depends on the goal of the flirt: if it is about meeting up as soon as possible, it makes little sense to claim things that make them look like liars (Falk). If there is no intention to ever meet up, it ‘doesn’t matter’ as Nele puts it.

**Falk, 17:** *‘The thing is, why should I lie? I don’t benefit from that. If I want to meet her, then it’ll all come out and things look bad for me. It’ll come out that I’m a liar and then she’ll leave. How’s that good for me? It isn’t.’*

**Nele, 18:** *‘First I said that I lived somewhere completely different. And then I exaggerated about my body: I’m really slim and have really big breasts. You say things like that. You don’t know the person you’re talk-*

<sup>98</sup> Clark-Flory (2009), p. 1

<sup>99</sup> The answers were divided into three categories in the evaluation, using a rating: ‘honest’, ‘partially honest’ and ‘not honest’.

<sup>100</sup> Interestingly the results of Whitty’s study regarding dishonesty online differ from our findings. According to Whitty, men lie more than women and low-frequency chatters lie more than regular chatters. Cf. Whitty (2002)

*ing to and I'm not planning on meeting him, that's why it doesn't matter. I can lie (grins).'*

Since they do not know who they are talking to or how the flirt will develop, the question about believability is a constant companion to many online conversations. Young people remain vigilant and are on their guard if something seems off. *'You don't know who you're talking to. It could be you're talking to who he says he is, but he could be someone else,'* says 17-year-old Lotte. The respondents reported different authentication strategies.<sup>101</sup> They become suspicious if they find something 'strange', if the information does not match up or if the information sounds dubious or over the top (Fritz). They use tests to check believability, by asking more questions and by confronting people with contradictions (Marion), by checking attempts to deceive them (Lotte) or by doing the 'cam test' (Mehdi).

**Fritz, 17:** *'Some things that I just can't imagine or that just sound over the top make me think that she's going a bit too far.'*

**Marion, 17:** *'If it doesn't take long. If he responds quickly. Then you can tell that he's already thinking about what he wants to say. I write to him and put it in different words. I don't mention it directly at first but after some time I get direct and then it comes out that he was caught (laughs).'*

**Lotte, 17:** *'He said for example that he was going to Prague for New Year and we texted each other and I should have seen it on my bill because it's expensive to write to Prague. I saw that he can't have been in the Czech Republic. So I stopped talking to him entirely because that was too risky for me (laughs).'*

**Mehdi, 18:** *'If the girl's ugly and she puts up a pretty picture, after chatting to her for a while, I say: 'send me pictures, put your camera on.' If they don't do that, then you know something's up.'*

Interestingly, the worries and fantasies about what the online counterpart is like if not the way he or she describes vary, depending on gender. Most young women, as a result of the media and parental warnings, have the nightmare vision that their chat partner is not an attractive young man but *'old, fat, small and 33 years old'* (Mandy, 18). The character of the paedophile sexual predator who searches for potential victims online is known to many, even though only one respondent said she had already been systematically deceived and exploited by a chat partner. The boys' dominant worry is that their chat partner could 'turn out to be a man'. Since six of the boys spontaneously reported that they themselves had pretended to be a girl at least once, their worries may not be unfounded. From the perspective of the boys it seems quite likely they may be deceived in this way. The believability of the

**101** Dekker (2003), p. 293

chat partner is therefore continually questioned. Different authentication tests are used to ensure that the counterpart really is the person he or she says.

**One contact opportunity among many.** The internet is as normal a part of young people's everyday lives as school is. There too they meet peers, familiar ones and new ones, and there too they have good opportunities to meet someone.<sup>102</sup> Daniel, a 17-year-old high-school student from Hamburg reveals where he meets girls: *'In all kinds of places: at school, at parties, out and about, on the street, when I'm doing things with friends and online too.'* The internet is a new option that can be taken into consideration when searching for a partner. Caroline (17) reports what she has already done to meet someone: *'Going out with friends to see what's out there on the market (laughs). Or looking at pictures online, but I haven't searched intensively yet.'* Interestingly she met her ex-boyfriend online, *'even though he lives in the same town and just a street away'.*

New acquaintanceships can form online completely unexpectedly and by chance. This is particularly common where social contacts play a central role, such as online communities, online games and internet forums. A few typical stories:

**Daniel, 17:** *'If I see someone who was on my page and they look vaguely familiar, then I usually write to them and sometimes I really knew them, sometimes not and that's how you meet new people.'*

**Phillip, 17:** *'She just wrote to me because we have our birthday on the same day. [In] SchülerVZ [a networking site for school students] funnily enough (...) and we got chatting and we got on really well so we decided we had to meet up and that's what we did.'*

**Tanja, 17:** *'Starting with SchülerVZ. I was in a group and the discussion started (...) and then the guy sent me a personal message and then we wrote back and forth a bit. Then I asked him if he had MSN or ICQ [chat software] and then we messaged there and we started flirting too.'*

**Heidi, 19:** *'I met someone online quite by chance. I didn't deliberately start chatting to him. Instead (...) I had just written something under his picture because I liked it, the picture. I had no ulterior motive.'*

**102** Parks, Floyd (1996)



Building incidental relationships with others online is characteristic of young people. They do not think much of the concrete search for new social contacts, they hardly use online dating sites. That is also confirmed by the ARD/ZDF online study, according to which only 7% of 14–19-year-olds use meeting or dating sites online at least once a week.<sup>103</sup> The young people think they are ‘still too young for that’, ‘not that desperate’, they do not think they ‘need to resort to that’, ‘maybe when I’m 40’ and the online dating sites are ‘ridiculous’ and ‘fishy’, they prefer other ways to meet people.

Meeting sites are unpopular and are classed as uncool. The statements quoted here are based implicitly or explicitly on the widespread assumption that adolescence is associated with a lot of offers and a high degree of attractiveness on the partner market, while older people need to resort to a targeted and active search for a partner. Very traditional gender images are also cited, when girls do not want to search and instead prefer to be ‘found’. Generally speaking, people who look for someone online are downgraded, the young people believe they are ‘lazy’, they lack motivation ‘to just get up off their backside’ or they have weak characters. They totally reject any services that they would have to pay for.

**Online communities.** There are also websites that young people like spending time on, just to see ‘what’s on the market’. They can look at potential flirt and relationship partners from a safe distance in online communities, they can choose them using their own selection criteria, and if in doubt, they can quickly click away again – a special feature of approaching others online, which Geser and Bühler refer to as a ‘facilitated exit option’.<sup>104</sup> *‘Since you can say in what town you’re looking for a girl and in what age group, you get countless profiles. You can check out what they look like or who they’re friends with. You can build a network like that,’* says 17-year-old Devran, who is one of the 89% of our respondents who have their own online profile. *‘Usually I just check profiles to see how old he is, where he’s from, what he likes doing, whether he has children or I look at the pictures,’* Caroline (17) confides in us. The more attractive and interesting a profile is, the greater the chances of receiving messages. Profiles without pictures or without original descriptions tend to be rejected.<sup>105</sup> 18-year-old Olli explained what caught his eye and why he wrote to a girl: *‘She was quite pretty, no I don’t mean quite pretty, she was very pretty. I liked her profile.’*

As we have already seen, young people’s many online activities are very closely embedded in their everyday lives. The new online acquaintances are not just tested in the real world; the reverse also happens. Real contacts are solidified and deepened online. 18-year-old Bettina for example met her (now ex-)boyfriend at a party and then deepened the contact

<sup>103</sup> ARD/ZDF-Onlinestudie (2010)

<sup>104</sup> Geser, Bühler (2006)

<sup>105</sup> In a recent study of online flirting by Whitty, conducted in 2008, 90% of the respondents reported that they primarily looked at appearance in a potential male or female partner, 85% at similar interests and 73% on socio-economic status. Interestingly, the body plays a big role in flirting. Women in particular tend to strongly emphasize their physical attractiveness while chatting. Cf. Whitty (2004; 2008)

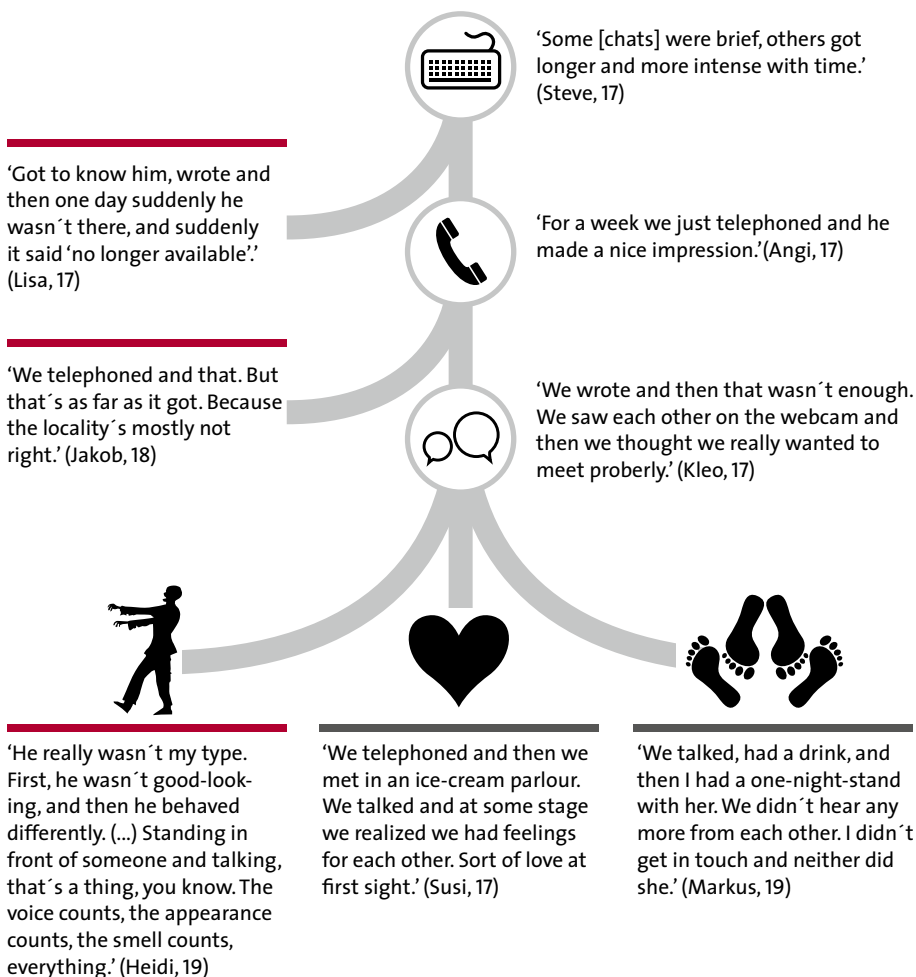
online: *'I thought it was great that he wanted my messenger address and then I wrote back and forth with him.'* When asked whether they had already met up with someone in real life whom they had met online, our respondents often answered like 18-year-old Mario: *'It was always the other way around. We met in real life and then saw each other again online. [It happens] that you add someone on MSN [chat software] or you write to someone on SchülerVZ: 'What's up? We did this and that, do you remember?'* While it used to be the case that phone numbers were exchanged after a good party, contacts today are initially deepened online: instead of phone numbers, they exchange messenger addresses, look for each other at 'SchülerVZ' and 'facebook', check out each other's profiles and chat.

We can see here that the frequent comparison of the real world and the virtual world does not really apply to the reality experienced by the young people. Reality and internet are not seen as two separate worlds by young women and men. They are perceived as one.

### **Do online contacts pass the test on other levels?**

Let us now turn to a scenario that plays a central role in the debate about the possible risks of looking for a partner online: a young person meets a stranger online, starts flirting and then wants to meet this person 'for real'. The typical meeting online takes place in three stages: chatting, talking on the phone and then the first meeting. Each step has two possible outcomes: either the contact is deepened or the contact is abandoned (cf. figure 5).

Figure 5: Performance tests



Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

Generally speaking the contents of a chat are superficial. The participants exchange basic information such as age, school, hobbies and try to get to know each other better and get the other person to be interested in them. Most of our respondents described the procedure as the 'typical flirt programme', in which the same things are always asked. *'You always say the standard things. What you're doing with your life and what school you go to. It's the everyday things. You can also upload pictures on SchülerVZ. You can see the person. That means you don't have to describe yourself,'* reports Bernd (17), who has a lot of experience with flirting. Lea (18) on the other hand hardly ever flirts online but she knows the typical beginning, because she often receives messages: *'Hi, how are you, what are you doing? Where do you live? How old are you? Do you have a boyfriend? All the standard things.'* Here are two more examples that illustrate the process:

**Horst, 17:** [About his most recent flirtatious chat] *'First we talked about general things and then we talked about certain things in more detail and then I paid her some compliments, all this sweet talk.'*

**Marion, 17:** *'What I like, how old I am, definitely, how tall I am, what I look like and could I send a picture. Then I always get one back (laughs). Quite generally: friends, hobbies and things like that.'*

Sometimes chatting is just about having a pleasant conversation, without the intention of meeting. Then the young people do not ask each other so many questions and just enjoy the conversations. When chatting, the potential partners are screened using individual criteria. Those who do not fit the ideal profile are ignored or deleted.

If the beginning went well, and there is further interest in the chat partner and a relationship of trust is built, then the conversations become more intense. A lot of young people in our study have the impression that people become open and personal more quickly online. And indeed, the standard reply to the question: 'What was the most intimate thing you talked about [during the last chat]?' was: 'about sex'. It is a broad subject. Sexual experiences to date could be a subject matter (often 'Are you still a virgin?'), as can be relationship experiences, physical details and preferences. All of this helps them assess whether they could be right for each other. On the other hand it deepens the contact.

**Horst, 17:** *'It was funny. There was a questionnaire on this website, and the most intimate question was whether you shave your pubic hair. That was the most intimate part of the questionnaire and the most intimate thing we wrote to each other.'*

**Caroline, 17:** *'About past relationships, what was his longest relationship, what was my longest relationship, how many girlfriends he had had, how many sexual partners he had had. If someone's already slept with 20 women, then you don't know if you're just another notch on the bedpost.'*

**Rüdiger, 17:** *'I asked her whether she was still a virgin and she said she wasn't. I was really shocked. It was a big thing if someone wasn't a virgin anymore and I thought it was extremely exciting.'*

By revealing intimate details, the relationship is strengthened and deepened. If trust has been created, the next step is taken and the friendship is deepened offline.

The second practical test is talking on the phone: *'I think talking on the phone will come. That's the second level. That'll happen before a meeting. We're texting and I think the next thing will be to talk on the phone,'* is how 17-year-old Lotte describes the stages of meeting. Talking on the phone has the major advantage that this medium allows the young people to do a 'no fake test'. It gives a more comprehensive impression of the person, about their voice, their way of talking and expressing themselves. Caroline (17) wants to talk on the phone with her chat partner to *'exchange voices'*. Irem (19) cares about additional information: *'the way [he] talks. It let me get a good idea of what his movements are like.'* Sometimes it stays with talking on the phone because the distances are too great and a meeting is impossible, sometimes the voice or the way of talking does not fit and the contact is abandoned and sometimes, if everything goes well, a meeting follows.

### 3.2.2 Meeting up with online contacts

After chatting and talking on the phone for hours, the desire to meet the person the young people have invested so much time in goes up. Kleo (17) met her chat partner *'because writing wasn't enough for us anymore. We knew we really liked the other person and we wanted to meet in person.'* Caroline (17) is succinct: *'[I] just wanted to know who he was.'* On the one hand they feel they already know the other person very well. On the other hand they are meeting with a stranger. This contradiction is what makes this situation special and means that the first meeting is usually 'a surprising moment'. 36% of our respondents have met up with someone they met online at least once (cf. table 12). In the EU Kids Online study 4% of the 11–12-year-olds, 9% of the 13–14-year-olds and 15% of the 15–16-year-olds had met at least one (un)known online contact.<sup>106</sup> In the JIM study the figures were 11% of 12–13-year-olds, but as many as 27% of the 16–17-year-olds and 39% of the 18–19-year-olds.<sup>107</sup> The rising trend makes it likely that with increasing age young people are more likely to move online acquaintances into the offline reality.

<sup>106</sup> EU Kids Online (2010), p. 91

<sup>107</sup> Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (2010), p. 51

Table 12: **Online contacts met offline** (16–19-year-olds, in %)

		Girls (n = 79*)	Boys (n = 80)	Total (n = 159*)
Online contacts met offline				
	Never	61	68	64
	Once	25	11	18
	Several times	14	21	18

\* one participant (f.) was not asked this question

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

Around two thirds of our respondents have never met up with a stranger from the internet. This includes both those who do not flirt online as well as a group that do not, on principle, want to move online contacts into the real world. They prefer to stay online and maintain the ability to click away. Girls were more likely to talk spontaneously about their concerns regarding meeting up with a stranger. Unfortunately we cannot give any data about the gender differences here, but it stands out that most of the fears were generated by the media, parents and teachers:

***Dana, 18:** 'A teacher told me not to go out with a boy from the internet because you don't know what the boy is like. I don't meet up with boys I chat with.'*

***Nele, 18:** 'You see all kinds of things on television and you read a lot too about how the people are crazy and all only want one thing and they're all screwing. Maybe some aren't quite right in the head. As a girl I think that's really dangerous to meet up alone with a stranger.'*

***Karim, 17:** 'My father says it's dangerous. It could be just anybody who wants to meet up with you and has plans for you. It could be a pervert, who used a picture of a pretty 17-year-old girl, pretending that that's him. You never know.'*

However, Karim has met up several times with girls who he initially met online. But he took care of his safety by always going to the meeting accompanied by his male friends.

Just like the online relationship deepens in increments, the first meeting is also prepared in small steps and the back door is left open for as long as possible. It is not uncommon for the young people to show up at the agreed meeting place but for them not to reveal themselves. This is a strategy particularly favoured by girls and is used when they do not like their chat partner. Birgit gives a typical example of such a scenario:

**Birgit, 19:** *'My best friend and I said, okay, we're doing it now. We agreed a meeting. We arrived a bit early and we hid to take a look first. We wanted to know what he looked like. Then he came with his friend and they were both really ugly (laughs). We thought, shit, we can't do this! (laughs) And we ran away quickly. Then he kept getting in touch with me (speaks with altered voice): 'Why didn't you show up?' I blocked all that really quickly (inhales).'*

The time it takes for the first meeting to take place varies. Some meet the next day, others need more time to build up some trust.<sup>108</sup> In addition to waiting a little, other strategies to improve safety are also employed: the most common one is for a friend to accompany them to the meeting (Karim) or to only meet up with friends of friends (Marianne). A public place is often chosen as the meeting place (Silvia) and (more rarely) the parents are involved in the protective measures (Caroline):

**Karim, 17:** *'If I do it [meeting with an online contact], then I make sure that when the girl comes, I have one or two friends with me. The main thing is, I'm not alone.'*

**Marianne, 17:** *'He asked me if I wanted to meet up with him and I said yes. But only because I knew that a friend of mine knew him.'*

**Silvia, 17:** *'I was at the main train station at the flower shop and there are people (...) And then [we were] everywhere where there were people and you could get away.'*

**Caroline, 17:** *'He had a manner that was quite open and friendly and I could tell that when we were writing and talking on the phone. I asked if I could put him on the loudspeaker briefly and then she [the mother] listened for a few minutes. And then she said: 'Okay, as long as it's here in M. and I know where you are and you don't go anywhere else, it's okay.'"*

That means the young people are aware that a meeting comes with certain risks. They respond by deliberately setting up corresponding safety features.

**New quality of communication.** At the same time the first meeting promises a new quality of communication. They can check their beliefs about the acquaintance and if things go well, they can develop the friendship. However, it is not just the other person who is being judged. They themselves are being checked out and they have to worry that they could be judged unfavourably. The young people worry about being disappointed, but also about being disappointing:

<sup>108</sup> Whitty, Gavin (2001)

**Greta, 17:** *'[We were] uncertain because we didn't know how the other person would respond to the other's appearance. But we quickly relaxed and were quickly talking normally to each other, we weren't tense or anything.'*

**Falk, 17:** *'It was a strange feeling because you were scared that when she saw you she would think differently of you than when she was writing to you online.'*

**Olli, 18:** *'It was an uncomfortable feeling in the beginning: does she really look the way she did in her picture or will she just have used someone else's picture. But that didn't happen.'*

**Marianne, 17:** *'Of course you're nervous because you don't know what to expect. You only know the other person from the internet. That's why you get butterflies in your tummy and you're nervous and you're hoping you won't be disappointed.'*

Nervousness, hope and curiosity are all part of the first meeting, which is also the most important test. The first moment and the greeting are the most difficult thing, they say. The young people report being flooded by feelings, positive or negative. Fabian describes very clearly the successful beginning to a first meeting:

**Fabian, 17:** *'I only saw her once on the webcam. I knew what her face looked like. And when I saw her from a distance, I was happy with what I saw. She had these brown eyes that were really bright. And then she hugged me straight away. I was briefly speechless. And she didn't really know what to say either. Apparently she liked me right away too. At least she said so. I was thrilled. After that we had to go and sit in a café (laughs) and let the first moment sink in a bit.'*

Fabian describes an experience that many others report too: when confronted with the other person, they are lost for words. 17-year-old Rüdiger confirms this: *'When you've built contacts online, it's difficult to find something to talk about in real life.'* Even though there is a certain level of trust, it can happen that real conversations are not as easy going and straightforward as they were in the chat. Many of our respondents remember initial difficulties, but they almost always went away after a few minutes. They often meet up in a familiar, public place and when the initial inhibitions are gone, they fall into conversation. The scenarios of the first meeting are very different: they go for walks or sit in cafés or they spend hours walking through town or (more rarely) go to one person's home – the most important thing is to have the opportunity to talk in peace and quiet. Here are a few typical examples of such 'blind dates':



**Lars, 18:** *'We went to her house, her parents were on holiday. She cooked for me, which I thought was great. Cool. But I couldn't eat what she'd made because she couldn't cook. (...) We made out a bit but we didn't have sex that first day.'*

**Sara, 17:** *'We went to the cinema for our first meeting, we cuddled a bit but not much more.'*

**Ralf, 17:** *'We greeted each other and walked through the P.C. and chatted about hobbies and things like that. We repeated a bit what we'd already talked about online. We asked about preferences and how school was going, general things. It was nice. I had the proverbial butterflies in my stomach.'*

**Phillip, 17:** *'We walked through town all day. From the first moment to the last we chatted with each other. It was really great. I was fascinated to see that it works, that we could chat non-stop for the eight, nine hours that we were together.'*

**Miriam, 17:** *'It was freezing cold and he gave me his jacket so I was wearing that. And when he got home he told me his whole room smelled of my perfume.'*

Miriam's example points at two new aspects, namely the romance of the encounter and the holistic nature of the sensory experience, which the internet does not offer, most notably smell. Ralf mentioned the *'butterflies in the stomach'* which are associated with falling in love and which reflect the intensity of the emotions. Romance, emotional highs and adventure characterize most of the first meetings.

### What comes from the first meeting?

Our respondents reported three options of what could happen after the first date:

- (1) the most common one: the contact is abandoned;
- (2) in some cases a steady relationship develops;
- (3) rarely, a one-night-stand occurs.

## (1) CONTACT ABANDONED

Even if photographs had been exchanged, the real appearance of someone often does not match their online presentation – it is an experience labelled ‘offline shock’. Unfortunately this phenomenon is hard to quantify from our data, but it appears to be quite a common scenario. We want to present three examples of first meetings where the expectations were not met in more detail:

*Heidi, 19: ‘He wasn’t my type at all. He wasn’t good looking and he also behaved differently. You’re always different because writing is one thing, while being face-to-face and talking is another. The voice matters, the appearance, the smell, everything.’*

*Bernd, 17: ‘It wasn’t cool because I didn’t know the person well. I don’t know what she’s like and what she does and so the whole thing was quite pointless. I didn’t really like her when we met.’*

*Karim, 17: ‘I met up with her and didn’t think she was that good looking. You obviously can’t say: ‘You look crap, I’m leaving now.’ That’s bad manners and so I didn’t do that. I chilled out with her for half an hour, an hour. Then I pretended I was getting a phone call and said I had to go home because something was up.’*

If the two people do not like each other, there is no second meeting. 17-year-old Grit continued writing to her chat partner after their first actual meeting, *‘but a lot less than before and then it fizzled out.’* Sometimes there is a mutual decision that the contact should be abandoned. This was the case for 17-year-old Katja: *‘We met up and then wrote to each other that we weren’t right for each other and then we stopped talking.’*

## (2) STEADY RELATIONSHIP

It is not uncommon among young people that couples meet online: 17% of our respondents had met at least one steady partner online (cf. table 13). This particular form of getting to know one another does not seem to have negative effects on the future of the relationship. Although the start takes place online, everything else is reminiscent of familiar stories.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Döring (2009)

Table 13: Boyfriends/girlfriends met online (16–19-year-olds, in %)

		Girls (n = 80)	Boys (n = 80)	Total (n = 160)
Boyfriends / girlfriends met online				
	Never	81	85	83
	Once	14	14	14
	Several times	5	1	3

Source: BZgA, data set ‘Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age’, 2011

Around a fifth of our respondents have already met a partner online, but most of them have only had that experience once. That could be because of the young people’s age and their relatively brief relationship careers to date, but also because around half of the young people interviewed are currently in a relationship.<sup>110</sup> 17-year-old Silvia recounts: ‘I met my first boyfriend at [Knuddels] and my second one too.’ She is one of the 3 % who have started more than one relationship online.

There are two stories we want to describe in particular detail: those of Ayse, who met her current partner online, and Benjamin, who experienced a story without a happy end.

**Ayse, 18,** goes to a high school in Hamburg. Both of the relationships she has had so far started online. The MSN address of her current partner, with whom she has been in a relationship for more than two years, was given to her by friends. She thought he was ‘cute’ and they started writing to each other, albeit tentatively in the beginning: ‘but I went offline again very quickly (laughs) because I was scared of talking to him.’ She still remembers the early days of the relationship: ‘[It was] during the summer holidays and we had nothing to do and the weather was bad too (laughs) and we were in front of the computer and chatted the whole time and it developed like that.’ They chatted every day and ‘the conversations became very familiar’. She had the impression ‘as if I were talking to my best friend and apparently it was the same for him. We got so close’ online that it was not enough for them. They started talking on the phone and then they met up ‘and then it got closer’ (giggles in embarrassment).

**110** 14 of the 78 current relationships that our respondents reported formed with the help of the internet.

**Benjamin, 18**, attends a vocational college in Hamburg. He met his ex-girlfriend two years ago while chatting. *'I bluntly wrote: 'Who wants to meet me?' One girl wrote to me. She was 'nice, polite, kind' and 'seemed to be quite cute'. That same day they spoke on the phone 'until the early hours of the morning'. It turned out that she lived in Berlin. One week later Benjamin went there for a weekend. He was very nervous about the first meeting: 'It was strange, you feel like you've known each other for a few months because we spent so much time talking on the phone, but it was strange because I didn't know her and that was unpleasant.'* He thought the girl was *'quite forward (...) because she wanted to kiss that first day,'* she was also in the mood for sex, which did not happen and that is something Benjamin is now glad about: *'You just give your first time away.'* After three and a half months of back and forth, Benjamin broke up with her: *'It was always back and forth and it basically ended because there was too much arguing.'*

Apart from romantic relationships, online contacts can sometimes turn into friendships after the first meeting. That does not happen very frequently because often the young people meet up hoping to find true love. If there is no chance of love, this alternative can be considered, but young people only rarely try to actively expand their circle of friends online.

**(3) CASUAL SEX**

Only 6% of our respondents (two girls and eight boys) reported that they had casual sex or a one-night-stand with someone they met online.<sup>111</sup>

Table 14: **Met a sexual partner online** (16–19-year-olds, in %)\*

		Girls (n = 79*)	Boys (n = 80)	Total (n = 159*)
Met a sexual partner online				
	Never	97	90	94
	Once	3	5	3
	More than once	0	5	3

\* One girl was not asked this question

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

**111** In the study by Daneback 33% of the 18–24-year-old women and 34% of the men of the same age reported that they had had a sexual encounter with someone they met online at least once. Cf. Daneback, Mansson, Ross (2007)

The small gender difference, which could suggest that boys seek out sexual contacts online more often than girls, is not statistically significant. Regardless of the frequencies, the stories of the boys and girls differ with regard to content: while some boys say very clearly that they searched actively online for a sexual partner (Karim), girls are more likely to say that they got into an intimate situation by chance (Cora). There are also boys who had an unplanned sexual encounter with an online contact (Dominik):

**Karim, 17:** *'I met with them, we did something together and after that we continued writing on MSN [chat software], things like: 'let's do it again soon, let's go to the cinema, blah, blah,' we'd meet up two or three times and after the fourth time I had sex with them. [And after that] we stayed in touch. We didn't meet up as often anymore, but we did from time to time, just to hang out.'*

**Cora, 18:** *'I met him through a friend. We wrote to each other but it didn't turn out to be that great. We met up several times and he came to my place a bit and that's when we had our first time. And after that he never got back in touch.'*

**Dominik, 19:** *'We wanted to go to sleep and lay down in bed and then I had a hand on my stomach. Yes. And that's when it started. (...) At first I thought, 'Shit', because the thing is, I don't really sleep with girls who I'm not going out with.'*

The different experiences and reports become even more clear with these two very different cases. There is Caroline on the one hand, who had her first time with a boy she met online and who really regrets it, and then there is Lars who uses the opportunities of the internet to meet new sexual partners and really enjoys it.

**Caroline, 17,** attends a vocational college in Leipzig. When she was 14, she was *'very unhappy'* because she *'didn't have a boyfriend and everyone else had one'*. As a result she chose to go for *'the next guy available'*. She started a correspondence with a 23-year-old man online and she met him for the first time just after she turned 15. She had *'a good feeling'* after the first meeting because he was how she thought he would be. The young man spent the night at her house, which her parents knew about. Caroline introduced him with a *'completely different name, different age, different job, so that my parents wouldn't get the wrong idea'*. She had her first sexual intercourse in the night after their first meeting. Unfortunately it did not go the way she thought it would. In her opinion the first time is *'a special thing'* and should *'happen out of love and not just whenever because you've been drinking'*. She regrets it and thinks she should wait longer and thought *'[she] didn't know much about the person even*

*though they had spent so long writing to each other.'*

**Lars, 18**, attends a vocational college in Hamburg. He broke up with his girlfriend two weeks ago. What he likes about being single is the new sexual freedom, which he describes as follows: *'[I can] have sex with whoever I please (laughs).'* He thinks it is normal that he and his ex-girlfriend have had sex with other people since their breakup. He finds new sexual partners online. Either girls write to him or he writes to potential partners on SchülerVZ: *'I usually write to them on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday: 'Hey, let's meet up on Friday, there's a party on Saturday, do you want to come? You can crash at my place if you can't take the train home, or a friend will drive you. But they tend to say they'll sleep at mine (grins).'* That suffices to meet up and often it is enough for a one-night-stand. It does not result in sexual activities every time: *'But most of the time they say in advance that they'll stay at my place.'* Lars has had four different sexual partners in the two weeks since breaking up with his girlfriend. He is *'enjoying the single life for now'*. He cannot currently imagine getting into a new relationship, he does not *'want to have a steady girlfriend. It's just for sex.'*

### 3.2.3 Conclusion

The internet gives young people a new sphere for experiences, which is also used for sexual encounters. The most common are online flirting, which is initially used to experiment and later to find a partner.

It would seem that for the young people in our study, the boundaries between the real and the virtual world are permeable in both directions. The internet is seen as part of the real world, or rather, it is real. This expansion of reality gives them new options when looking for a partner, but they are used in familiar ways. The first contact can develop online or in a real meeting and then be pursued online. They determine via many means of communication whether they suit each other and this is tested again and again. The litmus test of online relationships is the face-to-face meeting. Around a third of the young people surveyed have met at least one online contact in the flesh. Most of these acquaintanceships are ended after the first meeting. If a steady relationship does develop, then it does not matter anymore that the first contact took place online. It is rare for such a meeting to result in casual sex, a one-night-stand, and the experiences with those are very different.

The young people surveyed are largely very aware of the potential dangers of meeting a stranger they met online. Of course there are some exceptions here too, but generally speaking young women and men use different safety measures that build on each other, which safeguard them against disappointment and embarrassment as well as against possible assault, misunderstanding and sexual violence.

### 3.3 Fun or distress? – Sexual actions and the internet

*Urszula Martyniuk*

In addition to looking for a partner, the young people also use the internet for sexual activities. We now wish to investigate to what extent young people use the media options to create a sexual image of themselves and to what extent they explore cyber sex. The interviews also focused on asking about the potential dangers they encounter, meaning the different forms of online harassment.

#### 3.3.1 Dealing with naked images and cyber sex

While chatting, the young people sometimes use a webcam or they exchange private photographs (including some very revealing ones of their own bodies). Sexting (texting nude images via mobile phone or online) has generated a lot of media interest. The public focus is mainly on the dangers of sexting and the violation of rights. On the one hand the worry is that the revealing images are published against the wishes of the person depicted, with resulting unpleasant consequences for the author; on the other hand the boundary to pornography, and in the case of minors to child pornography, is considered dangerously narrow.<sup>112</sup> In the study by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy in 2009, 20% of the 13–19-year-olds and 33% of the 20–26-year-olds had sent nude images by mobile phone or the internet or posted them online.<sup>113</sup> In the survey by EU Kids Online the figures were merely 3% of the 11–16-year-olds,<sup>114</sup> in the survey by Knowledge Networks it was 10% of the 14–24-year-olds<sup>115</sup> and in the study by Ferguson, with female students averaging 21 years of age, it was 20%.<sup>116</sup> There is a rising trend, which is presumably associated with increasing age and growing sexual activity. In our study 6% (four girls and six boys) have already posted naked pictures of themselves online or sent them via the internet. We did not find any significant differences with regard to gender, place or residence or education.

<sup>112</sup> Döring (2012)

<sup>113</sup> The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2009)

<sup>114</sup> EU Kids Online (2010)

<sup>115</sup> Knowledge Networks (2009)

<sup>116</sup> Ferguson (2011)

The most common types of images sent were naked pictures or pictures in underwear, topless pictures or pictures of genitals. The recipients tend to be boyfriends and girlfriends, but naked pictures are also sent to unknown flirt partners online. Sometimes this is part of a shared sexuality with someone (Steven), and can help maintain the sexual contact in long-distance relationships. The naked pictures can be used as a present (Ayse) or they are a sought-after object of exchange when flirting online (Sara, Martin).<sup>117</sup>

**Steven, 18:** *'I sent naked pictures to my ex, Susanna. She then sent me some back. Then I sent some back to her when we couldn't see each other for a while (...). I could see her breasts or her bum. And on my pictures you could see my penis.'*

**Sara, 17:** *'I [sent pictures of myself in underwear] to boys who I met online, who I flirted with. I also got pictures back. It was an exchange. (...) I couldn't imagine doing that now. It would be far too intimate for an internet relationship now.'*

**Ayse, 18:** *'Yes, I've sent pictures before. That was during a period when I wanted to take a step back. He was sulking of course, so I sent him some pictures to placate him and then it was fine again.'*

**Martin, 18:** *'A topless one. I can put the [pictures] up on my [profile], but then I can take them down straight away again of course. If I get asked what my body's like, I can show them and then I take it down again.'*

**Caution with nude photos.** The young people are generally careful with dealing with naked images. They have individual strategies to determine risk. Martin only uploads his pictures for a short period of time and then takes them down again, while Steven does not make it a one-sided affair. He gets pictures back from his girlfriend. Reciprocity, the 'golden rule or safe sexting'<sup>118</sup>, is considered the most important rule. But eight young men reported having received naked images without having sent any themselves.

Young people know many good reasons why they should not send naked pictures of themselves via mobile phone or the internet. 92% of our respondents have not done it yet: they could be scared of being exposed if fellow students find the picture online (Timo, Chris). They do not want the pictures to 'fall into the wrong hands' and they do not want to lose control of the pictures (Deena). There is the danger that a future employer will find the picture and reject an application (Phil). Such pictures could

<sup>117</sup> 66% of the 13–19-year-old girls and 60% of the boys of the same age who have sent naked pictures did so for fun or as part of a flirt, 52% of the girls sent the pictures as 'sex gifts' to their boyfriends, 44% of the young women and men did it in exchange, 12% of the girls felt coerced into it. Cf. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2009), p. 4

<sup>118</sup> Döring (2012), S. 21



attract the wrong kind of attention (Dana), violate the intimacy between two people (Birgit), or cause conflicts in a relationship (Marion).<sup>119</sup>

**Timo, 17:** 'People could come across it and say: 'Hey, I saw you naked online today, haha' and then you're out of favour with them.'

**Chris, 19:** 'Things like that [naked pictures] just spread very quickly and I think it would be against my morals. Maybe not at this age, but if it had happened two or three years ago, then I would have changed schools, etc. because children and teenagers like to be bullies. For that reason alone I'd think eight to 20 times about it.'

**Deena, 17:** 'I would always be worried that these pictures and videos would show up again elsewhere. They could be used. I would be worried about that. Or they could fall into the wrong hands.'

**Phil, 19:** 'If you apply somewhere and the nice employer googles you, and then he sees a naked picture of you. I don't think that would go down very well.'

**Dana, 18:** 'Why should I upload a naked picture of myself? That makes no sense. That means I want attention from boys who only want one thing from me. I wouldn't do that.'

**Birgit, 19:** 'I don't see the point of uploading naked pictures of myself. It's nobody's business but mine and the person I'd like to show myself naked to.'

**Marion, 17:** 'If I had a boyfriend, he'd be very angry with me and I'd ask him permission first anyway whether he liked it or not. But no, the risk is just too great.'

Some of the young people surveyed just thought it was 'not a good idea' or 'unnecessary' to upload naked pictures of themselves. Some went further and said this kind of behaviour was 'embarrassing', 'strange' or 'crazy'. Others would not do it because they feel it is 'too risky' or 'much too dangerous'. Some think this kind of behaviour is 'completely indiscreet' because the naked pictures are 'too private' or 'too intimate'. They also think less highly of others who upload such pictures. That is probably the idea behind statements such as 'slutty', 'disgusting' or '[then] I might was well get

**119** 83 % of the 13–19-year-olds would not send naked images of themselves because they could later regret it, 77 % would be scared of embarrassment and humiliation, 74 % believe it would harm their reputation, 68 % do not want to disappoint their families, and in both cases 63 % do not want to be labelled as 'slutty' or worry that it could harm their relationship, 53 % worry about their family's good reputation and 51 % do not want a future employer to find the pictures. Cf. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2009), p. 14

undressed for a porn film straight away'. In summary it can be said that the majority of the young people have not uploaded or sent naked pictures of themselves because they are aware of the associated risks. That does not mean, however, that young women and men do not take naked pictures of themselves. Some have naked pictures of themselves on their own mobile phones, on their hard drives for 'very personal use', while others have printed versions 'hanging in the bedroom'. Some have given them away 'on a CD' or 'by mail', deliberately not online.

**Online sex chat.** Cybersex (chatting with the explicit purpose of sexual arousal) is not common among young people. 13 % of our respondents (seven girls and twelve boys) had already tried it once or more than once. To compare: in the study conducted by Danebeck, Cooper and Mansson with Swedish young people aged 18 to 24, 38 % of the men and 34 % of the women had participated in cybersex at least once before.<sup>120</sup> Most young people who have experienced cybersex surprisingly do not use sex chat sites. Instead it is most likely to happen during conventional chatting (e.g. Knuddels), in online communities (e.g. SchülerVZ) and during online games (e.g. World of Warcraft). 19-year-old Heidi gives a typical scenario and explains the terms: *'I was in a chat and the questions that came up were: do you want CS, TS or real? That is: do you want cybersex, telephone sex or do you want to meet up?'* The chat partner is often a stranger, they meet by chance and write to each other, after that there is no more contact. Online sex can also be practised by people who are in a relationship with each other.

Interestingly, sexual arousal is not cited by any of the respondents as the reason for an online sex chat, and nobody reported having masturbated while chatting. The main motivation is curiosity and fun, in most cases they leave it at having tried it once. To illustrate the phenomenon more clearly, the following is a description given by young women and men.

**Heidi, 19:** *'First the boys want to get some stats from you. I lied sometimes. I said I was ten centimetres taller and had bigger breasts, because I was only twelve, I didn't have much. Then I just wrote back: 'How would you like it?' because it's all in the mind anyway. And then you write something like 'I'm just taking my clothes off' and then you say 'you're lying in bed and I hop in with you' or something like that and then you take turns.'*

**Cornel, 19:** *'I had [online sex] with a [girl in my class]. It was quite intensive with her. (...) It was no real satisfaction for me. I didn't get off on it. The motivation for me was to give her the satisfaction. It was more about that.'* 'Did she masturbate while chatting with you?' *'Yes, she did. She thought it was exciting. (...)'* 'And how long did that go on for?' *'It varied. The longest may have been half an hour. (...) She had a webcam on. That was the reward for me.'*

<sup>120</sup> Danebeck, Cooper, Mansson (2005)

**Cindy, 17:** *'Someone wrote to me, for fun. (...) It started like this: 'I'm just taking off my T-shirt.' And I wrote back for fun: 'Me too.' Then the trousers (laughs). All the clothes came off. We wrote to each other via Knuddels. Then I had to start laughing. 'It wasn't serious for you?' 'No.' 'And for him?' 'I asked him: 'are you taking this seriously?' and he said 'well...', he took it seriously. So I said, 'Shit, I wasn't taking it seriously.' (laughs)'*

**Falk, 17:** *'There are girls on Knuddels who always try to chat with you and ask you if you're in the mood for role play. I did that for fun and we wrote some stuff. I remember that we were sitting there and then she started writing: 'I'm taking your trousers off and giving you a hand-job and you're kissing me gently.' We were sitting there and burst out laughing. I don't think it's arousing. I think it's fun.'*

Eight boys and one girl reported about a striptease in front of the webcam as one form of cybersex that they had tried. Interestingly the boys only played a passive role, meaning they just watched their partner strip, without taking off their clothes themselves.

In comparison to the other young people, Heidi has quite a lot of experience with cybersex. After some time the 'appeal went away because it's nothing tangible' and because she thinks it is 'pitiful'. This summary voices the opinion of the majority of the young people who are not interested in online sex chats and who reject them as 'perverse', 'not normal', 'stupid', 'abstract' or 'or not my level'. 17-year-old Maya is wholly against cybersex. The internet is *'not the right place to express sexual needs or to find something to get gratification'*. Kurt, also 17, does not even want to give any attention to the subject and definitely does not want to be counted in the group who pursue cybersex: *'I don't want to have anything to do with this kind of sex, because that's for people who don't have a real life or who're really ugly, who spend the whole day sitting in front of the computer, masturbating.'* The worry often spread in the sex education/scientific debate that the people most likely to use the internet's sexual offerings are the ones who have difficulty organizing a sex life or finding a sexual partner in 'real' life, has been adopted by the young people. Nevertheless our results suggest something else: sex online does not tend to have a compensatory character. Instead it is used by those young people who are sexually open and who are already experienced, in addition to their 'real life' activities.

Young people with no interest in online sex chats are also often confronted with the offer. Direct questions such as 'Do you want CS?' are very widespread and are rejected in the vast majority of cases as annoying. But even the creeping transition from a flirtatious chat to a sexual one with sentences like: 'I'm taking my pants off' is considered 'silly', 'stupid' or 'annoying', especially among unknown chat partners. Pleasingly, the medium offers the simple option of ending unwanted situations quickly. The chat is ended, the chat partner is blocked.

**Tom, 18:** *'When she wrote things like: 'I'm taking my pants off', I thought it was silly and wasn't in the mood for that. That's why I just went offline.'*

**Lara, 16:** *'They want CS – computer sex – all the time and so I just blocked them. I left. It's annoying. They don't know you and then they write something like that and I think that's stupid.'*

**Sven, 17:** *'When I get a message saying, 'Feel like cybersex?'; I always say, 'Leave it, I'm going to go'. It's too much for me. I don't want that, to be honest, it's not for me. It's a virtual thing. If I want to have sex or when I'm having sex, then I want to have it for real and not in my imagination. That's not for me.'*

For most young people, cybersex is one of the sexual options of the internet that they could try out but don't have to. The motivation for those who do let themselves in for such experiments is curiosity, not sexual desire. It should be kept in mind that only a few young women and men find this type of sexuality appealing.

### 3.3.2 Online harassment

Negative sexual experiences online are just as commonplace as positive ones. 23 respondents (19 girls and four boys) reported at least one situation where internet use was associated with harassment – which corresponds to around 15%.<sup>121</sup> Depending on the definition, the number of internet users who have experienced harassment varies: in the study conducted by Ybarra and Mitchell, it was 34% of the 10–15-year-olds,<sup>122</sup> in the study by Wolak, Mitchell and Finkelhor it was 9% of the 10–17-year-olds.<sup>123</sup> It is known that women are affected more often by online harassment than men: *[You] have to be careful, but not really as a boy, women have more problems,*' says Jakob (18). The high percentage of students attending vocational college (19 out of 23) reporting negative experiences is striking. The 23 respondents mentioned a total of 31 incidents: 28 stories were about situations in which they themselves were harassed, the other three were about situations where they harassed others.

What can happen during online harassment? Our respondents' stories portray a wide and extremely heterogeneous spectrum of unpleasant experiences online. To get a better overview, we have structured the 31 stories into four categories (cf. table 15).

**121** In our interviews, the subject was addressed in two places, once in the question: 'have you ever done anything online that you would never do again?' and 'have you ever seen or experienced anything sexual online that you didn't like or that stressed you?'

**122** Ybarra, Mitchell (2008)

**123** Wolak, Mitchell, Finkelhor (2007a)

Table 15: Forms of online harassment (31 stories)

Type of harassment	Was harassed		Did the harassing	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
(1) Asking for sexual services	6			
(2) Aggressive behaviour online				
Created a profile / page	1	1		1
Insulted on a profile page			1	
Spreading telephone numbers				1
Made a film	1			
(3) Unwanted efforts to make contact	1	3		
(4) Webcam exhibitionism	14	1		

Source: BZgA, data set ‘Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age’, 2011

(1) ENQUIRIES ABOUT SEXUAL SERVICES

Six girls reported situations in which they were openly asked for sexual services.<sup>124</sup> Chat partners urged them to sexual activities online, such as performing a striptease via a webcam or S&M practices – or they tried to persuade them to meet in person, which was associated with an offer of prostitution.

*Dana, 18: ‘There are some boys who come along and I have a normal chat with them (...) and then they say: ‘Take your clothes off. Could you imagine giving me head?’*

*Cindy, 17: ‘There [on Knuddels] someone just wrote to me (...) and it was about sex: ‘Have you done it before and do you want to meet up with me and have sex and make some money?’ and I just said no.’*

*Heidi, 19: ‘He started calling me ‘my goddess’ and I just thought it was strange, but it was also funny, which is why I carried on writing with him. He then became really scary. He wanted me to make a plan about how often he would be allowed to wank. (...) I put an end to that relatively quickly, I just stopped writing and didn’t go back to that chat. And then he called here [at home] and that was creepy. I had never given him anything of mine. He never knew my real name, he never knew where I lived and I had never given him my number. (...) And I was quite scared for a while because if he managed to find my number, then he could find my address but nothing happened.’*

<sup>124</sup> In Ybarra and Mitchell’s study, 11 % of the 10–15-year-olds said that they were asked online to do something sexual. Cf. Ybarra, Mitchell (2008)

17-year-old Lisa confided a story in us that is a one-off in our study. An allegedly 17-year-old boy with whom she and a friend flirted a lot online asked her to send him naked pictures in exchange for money or small gifts. The story did not come to the desired, romantic end:

*Lisa, 17, attends a vocational college in Leipzig. When she was 14, she and a friend took naked pictures of themselves and sent them to a man online. 'We thought he was 17, he was really cute in the picture. But then it turned out he was 40.' Lisa does not know why they did that. She spontaneously added: 'Because he always told us, 'oh, you're so cute!' and 'I'd have you both if I could!' He was allegedly 17 and I was happy because he was really great. At first I thought he didn't like my body or something like that.' She reports that the man sent them mobile phone cards, money and sometimes cigarettes. She remembers what was visible on the pictures: 'Well, only around the top, definitely not around the bottom. But around the top. I didn't have very much yet! (laughs) But he wanted to have it! One day the police came to her home 'and then I was really scared and I cried straight away.' Lisa learned later that the man had been convicted: 'He's in prison now and that's good! (laughs)'. In her words he was 'The second-biggest kiddie-fiddler in the world'. She very much regrets what she did and swears: 'I'm never going to do that again.'*

## **(2) AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR ONLINE**

This is about harassing and hassling others via the new communication means. Aggressive behaviour online can take many different forms: someone can use your picture without permission; telephone numbers can be passed on without asking, a fake account could be created under a fake name or someone could be publicly bad-mouthed.<sup>125</sup> Interestingly, two people (Cindy and Max) also talked about how they had used the internet to cause someone else harm. The example of Cindy, who was harassed herself, illustrates how quickly someone can slip into the role of harasser. The story of Mira, who has no internet access, shows that it is not just internet users who expose themselves to the danger of online harassment.

*Falk, 17: 'Someone copied my profile on Netlog and wrote rubbish about me. He pretended to be me and then he copied pictures from my site and added them to his. That went too far for me. When someone violates your privacy, it just goes too far.'*

**125** 15% of the 12–19-year-olds said in the JIM study that they have already had something incorrect or insulting spread about them online. Cf. Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (2010)

**Angi, 17:** 'A page was made about me on Netlog once, but not just about me, but about many girls. I was supposed to be one of the prostitutes of Hamburg. There were 100 pictures of girls. But they were people who have nothing to do and just stole other people's profiles. (...) I thought it was more funny than anything, but I also got a fright. Imagine my mother would see something like that online.'

**Cindy, 17:** 'I insulted someone. I wrote something on his wall at SchülerVZ. I wrote something that wasn't even true and that really hurt that person and I'm never going to do that again.' What exactly did you write? 'That she's only interested in sex and that she gets off with everyone. Everyone could read that and then there was a big fuss. I had had a rubbish day and somehow I was angry with her.'

**Max, 17:** 'It is just like revealing your telephone number publicly. Someone did that once too. Then, because I was bored and was online and thought she was with everyone anyway, I wrote on Knuddels: 'Here, I've got the number of a really cute girl,' but it was the number of a guy friend of mine. He learned his lesson and immediately had that card blocked and got himself a new one.'

**Mira, 18:** 'My window goes right on to the street and when I got changed in the evening, there were slats missing from my blinds. And so you could look in and it's hard to get changed in the dark. So someone made a video and that went all around school. (...) And they put it online too.'

In addition to their own experiences, young people are aware of other, very much worse stories.<sup>126</sup> Six students from a high school in Hamburg told us of a case that shook their school. The individual accounts differed somewhat in the details, but the core of it is as follows. A few boys created a girl's profile and wrote to a fellow student. They flirted with him until they had won his trust and then they asked him to send 'the girl' some naked pictures or videos of himself. This material, on which the boy in question could be seen masturbating, was spread all over the school and the internet. The public exposure and humiliation caused serious social and psychological harm and the boy changed schools. We wanted to document this specific case from the perspective of two survey participants:

**Yasmin, 17:** 'He was bullied by everyone, I think he ended up in psychiatric treatment as a result. He was made fun of online by a few boys from my school who didn't like him and who created a girl's profile on some website. And they chatted with him for so long and got his trust that he sent them

<sup>126</sup> Almost one in four young people report that someone in their circle of friends had already been harassed online. Cf. Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (2010)



*naked pictures and videos. (...) And then they published it online and the whole school saw it. It was sent on and it was written on blackboards where people could go and see it. (...) The teachers didn't do anything, they knew about it, but they were only vaguely aware of it, but they didn't investigate further, until he left the school.' 'Is it known who did that?' 'Yes, I definitely know and everyone at school knows, except for the teachers. I think the teachers wouldn't have done anything, even if they knew.'*

**Tim, 18:** *'I didn't want to see that. I knew what was going to happen because my whole year group was all jolly and even put up the link on the walls. Which really wasn't very nice. The guy changed schools and was laughed at everywhere. (...) He masturbated [in the video]. Yes, and strangely he put a sock over it and everyone really laughed about that.'*

This specific case is special in the sense that none of our respondents had anything to do with the story directly. It happened to others and the young people reported it in order to reveal their awareness for risks.

### **(3) UNWANTED CONTACT ATTEMPTS**

Four of our respondents told us stories in which others repeatedly tried to get in touch with them with the help of electronic communication devices (such as the internet or mobile phone), even though they did not want that:

**Daniel, 17:** *'She broke up with me. I was pleased about that. Then she started regretting it and gave loads of her friends my ID, my MSN [chat software] address. They then started asking me lots of questions about why I didn't want to get back together with her.'*

**Cindy, 17:** *'He calls me every evening. He calls when I'm sleeping, at one or at eleven because he wants to tell me something, but I don't want that, I want him to leave me alone. I always end the call because that's really annoying.'*

**Matze, 17:** *'I had a girlfriend and she's still stalking me. She calls me thousands of times at home. I wanted to switch numbers because of her. She's sick! After two years she still calls. That's definitely stalking. I've always got my phone switched off. It's sick.'*

Online harassment allows the perpetrators to be far away from their victims geographically and (with advanced IT knowledge) hide their identity. The diverse opportunities of the new media are not infrequently used by acquaintances to move confrontations and conflicts to the media world.<sup>127</sup> Arguments and competition among friends, strong

**127** In 43 % of the cases of online harassment among young people, the victims knew the perpetrators. Cf. Wolak et al. (2007a)



emotions and crazy love are all part of finding one's identity during the teenage years, but they can also lead to imprudent (online) actions with far-reaching consequences.

#### **(4) WEBCAM EXHIBITIONISM**

The commonest form of sexual harassment online by far is webcam exhibitionism: 14 women and one man reported a kind of camera exhibitionism, i.e. a situation where their chat partner showed them their genitals without them wanting this to happen. The interviews did not explicitly ask about this situation. These figures here are based on spontaneous mentions and are therefore conservative estimates.

*Miriam, 17: 'After a few hours he asked me if I had MSN [chat software]. I said, 'yes'. 'Do you also have a webcam?' (...) And I then deliberately wrote, 'No'. And he wrote: 'But I do. Do you want to see me?' And then I wrote to him: 'Yes' because I thought he meant his face and what he really looked like. So I clicked on it and then I saw his, um, you know? And not his face and I stopped that right away again and then I ignored him and deleted him.'*

*Caroline, 17: 'Someone wrote to me quite normally and said: 'Do you feel like chatting on webcam?' And I opened it up and he showed me his cock on camera. After that I clicked away and was totally shaken.'*

The reactions of young women to these unwanted images are almost always the same – the chat is ended immediately and the chat partner blocked. The situation triggers different feelings: from disgust to fear and anger to amusement.

*Rebecca, 16: 'It was just disgusting, so we left the room.'*

*Lea, 18: 'It didn't distress me but I was shocked.'*

*Cindy, 17: 'A bit offended because I really don't like seeing that.'*

*Jessica, 17: 'I felt exploited. As if he only wanted to sleep with me and nothing more.'*

*Silvia, 17: 'My mother pressed charges against a guy because of that.'*

*Bettina, 18: 'We were chatting to him and we really had to laugh. It really wasn't serious.'*

At first glance the internet resembles the sexual experiences girls have elsewhere: studies show that sexual harassment of girls is widespread.<sup>128</sup> At second glance it becomes clear however that things can be quite different online, and that the anonymity negates or even reverses the power balance between the sexes:

**Dominik, 19:** *'I met a girl, we briefly chatted. Then she immediately asked for my MSN [chat software]. I gave her my address. And then she turned the webcam on and showed me her fanny. And that shocked me because unfortunately I had my webcam on too and it was aiming right at my face and I didn't know what was going to happen (laughs). Something like that's out of the question.'*

**Tom, 18:** *'The five of us claimed to be a girl called Hanna, 16. This guy asked if we wanted to watch him masturbate on webcam. He started doing his thing and when he was done, we wrote to him: 'Thanks you've just amused my male friends a great deal.' Then you saw his hand go in front of the webcam and the user went offline and we found that really funny.'*

Sexual encounters online are characterized by certain special features, the young people have to learn to deal with betrayal and lies. Young people have to learn to be cautious and that online it is never entirely certain what the identity of their chat partners are and what motives they are pursuing.

Different forms of online harassment are associated with different types of harm. Some pose a threat to safety and physical inviolability, while others target the destruction of social recognition or people's 'good reputation', while yet others result in financial losses or the loss of privacy. Most of our affected individuals have experienced situations that have resulted in minor or moderate consequences, harm or negative effects. Sexual harassment online confronts young people with different unpleasant situations. In the vast majority of cases the young people can end them right away, experiencing more irritation and outrage than fear and a threat. Ultimately, young people practise here too, how they can best control what sexual experiences they would like to have and which ones not.

<sup>128</sup> The numbers about the frequency of such incidences vary: in the recently published representative youth study by the BZgA, 13 % of the girls (19 % of the female migrants) report sexual harassment. In an older study on youth sexuality, Lange finds that more than half of the girls surveyed and around a fifth of the boys had had experience with sexual harassment and violence. Cf. BZgA (2010a); Lange (1998), p. 33

### 3.3.3 Conclusion

Our interviews show that exclusively sexual contacts online or via the internet are rare among young people. The vast majority do not post or send any naked pictures because they are aware of the associated risks. Like respondents in other surveys, many of them said it was stupid, dangerous, embarrassing and discomfiting.<sup>129</sup> Only 6% of our respondents use sexting. Our findings regarding their motivation seem to corroborate earlier findings: the pictures are used as sexual gifts for the partner or as an object of exchange while flirting. Cyber sex, sexual interaction in the narrower sense, is part of the sexual opportunities of the internet that young people feel they can try out but do not have to. In our study, 13% of the respondents had already experienced online sex. Unfortunately there are not enough studies about young people and cyber sex. In comparison to the prevalence data among adults, the figures are low among our respondents. The motivation for those who did engage in such experiments is curiosity, not sexual desire. It should be mentioned that only a few young women and men find this form of sexuality appealing, they also describe it quite soberly. Young people are also confronted with unpleasant situations online, when their chat partner behaves aggressively, openly asks them for sexual favours, urges them to engage in sexual activities or exposes himself/herself online. 15% of the women and men surveyed were harassed online in this way. That corresponds to the results from other studies. Young people are very competent at dealing with media and they know how they can protect themselves from and in these situations.

<sup>129</sup> Knowledge Networks (2009)



# 4

## *What do young people do with pornography?*

### **4.1** *What do girls do with pornography?*

*Silja Matthiesen*

### **4.2** *What do boys do with pornography?*

*Gunter Schmidt*

# What do young people do with pornography?

## 4

*Silja Matthiesen and Gunter Schmidt*

In the past 50 years, empirical sexological research into pornography focused almost entirely on studying its impact, regardless of its sexual-political context. The studies can be put into three groups.

- Studies critical of censorship emphasize gender equality and are keen on optimistic effects. They were conducted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, i.e. during the time of the sexual revolution.<sup>130</sup>
- The studies critical of men focus on the increase in aggression and misogyny as a result of pornography. They were published in the early 1980s at the height of feminist sexual criticism.<sup>131</sup>
- The most recent youth studies have a critical take on the impact of the media. They were published in the past five to ten years. This time has been characterized by easy access to, and the frequent use of, pornographic material online. At the same time the public are engaged in an agitated debate about it.<sup>132</sup>

The alarmist nature of the public debate and the high media interest have contributed little to an objective and differentiated confrontation. However, it is probably thanks to them that a lot of empirical studies have been sponsored in the past few years. By now we have quantitative and qualitative studies as well as internationally comparable data. New links have developed: the subject of young people and pornography lies on the boundary of sexology, media research and gender studies. The subject matter touches on questions

**130** Cf. e.g. Sigusch, Schmidt (1970); a summary of the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography (1970)

**131** A critical overview of these socio-psychological experimental studies can be found in Lautmann (1988). In parallel to these studies the feminist anti-pornography campaign, initiated by Andrea Dworkin, developed, at first in the United States, then later also in Germany. Cf. Dworkin (1979); MacKinnon (1988) as well as the Emma-PorNo Campaign (1987)

**132** So far the public debate about the negative effects of pornography has not really been based on academic results, but rather on works of popular science. Cf. e.g. Wüllenweber (2007); Schirmacher (2008); Siggelkow, Büscher (2008); Gernert (2010)

of ethics,<sup>133</sup> sexuality education,<sup>134</sup> media competency teaching,<sup>135</sup> youth protection<sup>136</sup> and the gender-specific sexual socialization.<sup>137</sup>

The youth studies very often follow the principle of the 1980s studies in that they are critical of pornography and pessimistic about its effects. They ask about the influence of pornographic consumption on the image of women, sexual satisfaction and sexualization<sup>138</sup> as well as the inclination to be sexually aggressive.<sup>139</sup> A different option is that they assess pornography consumption to be ‘online victimization’ (when it is encountered unintentionally while surfing the web) or ‘risky behaviour’ (when its consumption is intended) right from the outset.<sup>140</sup>

Regardless of their social and political context, the empirical pornography studies from the three periods mentioned above are primarily interested in the effects that the consumption of explicitly sexual material actually has. They want to know: what does pornography do to people? This question is justified and the attempt to answer it is useful and theoretically significant; but as Feona Attwood writes in her essay entitled ‘What do people do with porn?’<sup>141</sup>, it is also one-sided and insufficient. For that reason Attwood demands a change to, or at least an addition to, the traditional perspective. We are taking up Attwood’s suggestion and ask how young people use pornography, and what for, what competencies they develop in doing so, what significances they attribute to it and how they evaluate it. In a deliberate decision to turn away from the focus on effects and go instead with a question from action theory: ‘What do young people do with pornography?’ – how do they deal with it on their own, as a couple, in the peer group and in their family and how does pornographic consumption embed itself into the social, sexual and gender-related development during adolescence.

As far as we know, the only upcoming studies to pursue this intention of seeing young people as actors with regard to pornography and to let them voice their opinions are those by Grimm, Rhein and Müller<sup>142</sup> and the Swedish study by Lofgren-Martenson and Manson<sup>143 144</sup>.

**133** Döring (2011a)

**134** Weller (2010)

**135** Döring (2011b)

**136** Hajok (2011)

**137** Klein (2010); Zillich (2011)

**138** Cf. e.g. Peter, Valkenburg (2007; 2008; 2009a; 2009b)

**139** Cf. e.g. Krahé (2011)

**140** Cf. e.g. Wolak, Mitchell, Finkelhor (2007b). An overview of these studies can be found in Grimm, Rhein, Müller (2010), a critical discussion of the study results in Hill (2011a).

**141** Attwood (2005)

**142** Grimm, Rhein, Müller (2010)

**143** Lofgren-Martenson, Manson (2010)

**144** Grimm, Rhein, Müller interviewed 35 13–19-year-olds (ten of them girls) as part of focus groups; the Swedish study by Lofgren-Martenson and Manson is based on interviews and focus groups with 73 14–20-year-olds (half of them girls). Cf. Grimm, Rhein, Müller (2010); Lofgren-Martenson, Manson (2010)

## 4.1 What do girls do with pornography?<sup>145</sup>

*Silja Matthiesen*

Studies that are interested in the potential harmful effects of pornography rarely take a differentiated look at both genders. If we look at the consequences of increased aggression and violent inclinations, women often slip from view unnoticed. This is particularly clear in the feminist debate of the 1980s, where women do not exist as competent and critical consumers of pornography – they were merely victims. In the current public debate, girls receive no or only little attention; their interests, their experiences and their way of dealing with pornography disappear behind those of the boys. To avoid that and to highlight the heterogeneity of young women's experiences, viewpoints and ways of using pornography, we have decided to evaluate and present the data of the young women and men separately (for the evaluation of the boys' data, see section 4.2 below).

### 4.1.1 Young women have a low affinity for pornography

How much experience do adolescent girls have with pornography today? As simple as this question may sound, it is difficult to answer. There are now many studies about young people's pornography use, both internationally and for Germany, both with large quantitative samples and with small qualitative samples. However, the results are often not comparable because the scope of the questions, the age groups examined and the underlying definition of pornography all vary greatly.<sup>146</sup>

In our interviews, the subject of pornography is only raised in the final third. It takes up a lot of space: the interview transcripts of the 80 young women on the subject of 'pornography' consist of 222 pages (97,705 words). We did not set a definition of pornography. Instead we followed the definitions of our respondents. With this approach, we allow for the fact that definitions of pornography (as of sexuality) are heterogeneous, context-dependent, socially contested and also infused with moral judgements. Our respondents used the everyday definition of pornography, which – as Döring describes – also includes softcore material.<sup>147</sup> That means we are working with a very wide, 'soft' understanding of pornography. As a result, we tend to have higher figures for the prevalence of pornography consumption compared to studies working with a hardcore definition of pornography. For all the heterogeneity, the usage data available to date reveal three clear tendencies:

<sup>145</sup> A slightly different version of this text was published in advance. Cf. Matthiesen, Martyniuk, Dekker (2011)

<sup>146</sup> For an overview of the international prevalence data of recent years, cf. Braun-Courville, Rojas (2009); Kolbein (2007); Mossige, Ainsaar, Svedin (2007); Narring (2002); Nussbaum (2009); Sørensen, Kjørholt (2007); Lofgren-Martenson, Manson (2010); Wallmayr, Welin (2006); Wolak, Mitchell, Finkelhor (2007b); for Germany, cf. BRAVO (2009); Stephan, Winkler (2010); Weber, Daschmann (2010); Zillich (2011)

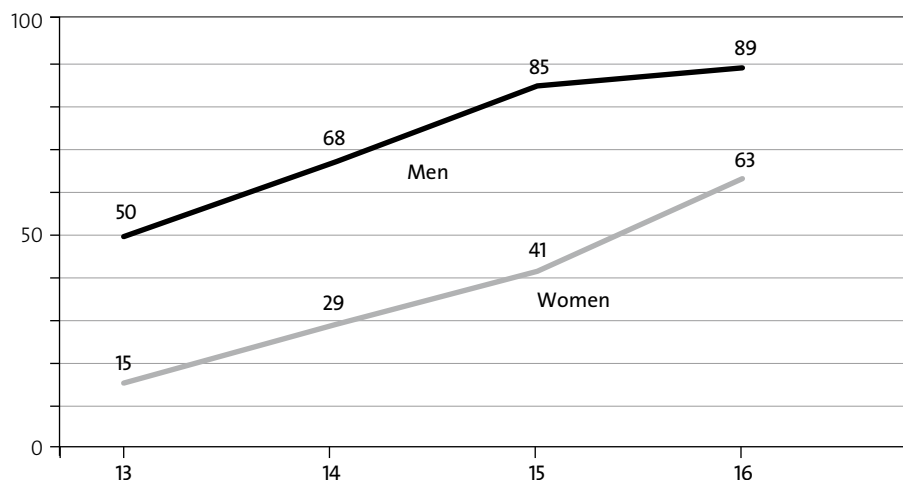
<sup>147</sup> Cf. Starke (2010); a comprehensive and sophisticated discussion of the most important attempts at definitions can be found in Döring (2011a)



- Pornography, in its diverse forms, is now a very natural part of young people's sexual environment;
- Girls use pornography significantly less than boys;
- Boys tend to specifically search for pornography, girls usually come across it by chance, incidentally or unintentionally.

These tendencies are confirmed by our data.

**Figure 6: Age at first contact with pornography**  
(by gender, in %, cumulative\*)



\*the figures show what percentage of men/women have had contact with pornography at least once at a certain age

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

In addition, our study allows us to examine the extent of boys' and girls' pornography experiences in a differentiated manner because we have determined three parameters: the age at first contact, the frequency in the past four weeks and, using a rating, the extent of their overall pornography experience to date. We have found that boys start consuming pornography earlier than girls (cf. figure 6) and at the time of the survey they were using pornography much more frequently (cf. table 16).

The gender differences are particularly striking when one compares the extent of total pornography experience (cf. table 16): only 8% of the young women but some 80% of the young men have more than just sporadic experience of pornography; not a single young woman, but one third of the men, had watched pornography very intensively in the past month or at an earlier date.

Table 16: Pornography consumption (in %, by gender)

	Girls (n = 80)	Boys (n = 80)
<b>Pornography consumption in the past four weeks</b>		
None	92	46
1 to 3 times	8	23
4 to 7 times	0	10
More than 8 times	0	21
Average	0.1	4.3
<b>Rating of the intensity of pornography use</b>		
None or sporadic	92	20
Low*	8	23
Moderate**	0	25
High***	0	33

\* More than sporadic and less than twice a month, currently or during an earlier period

\*\* Twice a month and less than twice a week, currently or during an earlier period

\*\*\* Twice a week or more, currently or during an earlier period

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

We can say that young women have very much less interest in pornography than their male peers.<sup>148</sup> This is not to disguise the fact that most of the 16–19-year-old women surveyed, namely 76 % of them (compared to 92 % of the boys), had already seen pornographic films, or at least excerpts.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>148</sup> We currently do not know anything about changing pornographic consumption and interest over time. It would be interesting to find out whether women with increasing age and sexual experience develop a greater interest in pornography. There seems to be a reverse development among boys/men (cf. chapter 4.2).

<sup>149</sup> The highly developed gender differences presented here are limited to the frequency of use of pornographic material. Earlier studies with an experimental setting revealed surprisingly small gender differences. One possible reason is that the questions, methodology and context have a very strong influence on the extent of the gender differences. Cf. Sigusch, Schmidt (1970); Schmidt (1975)

## When and with whom do young women watch pornography?

There are four different scenarios or setting in which girls watch pornography:

- (1) solo setting (alone, 35 % have done this at least once);
- (2) homosocial setting (with girlfriends, 33 %);
- (3) heterosocial setting (with peers of both sexes, 23 %);
- (4) couple setting (with their boyfriend, 23 %).

Depending on the setting, the motives for consumption, the choice of film and the felt experience of the film all differ: *'If it is a really realistic film and my boyfriend's there, then you do get into the mood. But if it's some hardcore porn and I'm watching that with girlfriends, then it produces more of a feeling of amusement,'* says Anka (17). It is obvious, and yet it is often completely ignored, that the effects of pornography cannot be described without an overall picture. Many factors contribute: the contents consumed, the situations and the contexts as well as how the pornographic encounter is embedded in the young people's biography, social setting and relationship.<sup>150</sup>

### (1) SOLO SETTING

Girls are most likely to watch pornography on their own when they are zapping through the television channels late at night or if they come across it by chance while surfing online and 'get stuck' for a few minutes. Salomea (17) describes the everyday nature of these encounters: *'There are these nice films that are shown on television in the evenings on regular channels. You might watch that and see a scene. [...] It's not planned.'* They usually change channels again quite quickly. The girls do not feel burdened by such involuntary exposure, but they are often repelled by the images they see and are therefore irritated by them. Unintended exposure to pornography is typically brief and banal, it does not leave grave effects. One 17-year-old girl summarizes her pornography experience to date thus: *'None of it affected me negatively, I watched that porn film once and I didn't think it was that great and otherwise there were no effects'* (Kleo, 17). Another female respondent emphasized the unimportance of pornography in girls' worlds, by laughingly answering as follows the question of whether she would like to see a pornographic film sometime: *'Cosmetic stuff is more important to me than a porn film'* (Eva, 18). If watched alone, girls almost never functionalize pornography for masturbation, not even if they are experienced in that, and there is one simple reason: for most young women pornographic movies are not arousing.

<sup>150</sup> Lautmann (1988), p. 57

## (2) HOMOSOCIAL SETTING

Watching pornography together with other girls usually takes place in an atmosphere of joking around, which lives on breaking taboos and doing something prohibited and embarrassing. The situation is primarily 'exciting', there is a lot of laughing and giggling. 'It was quite amusing [...] and incredibly absurd,' remembers 19-year-old Birgit, regarding her first encounter with softcore pornography on commercial television. For Jenny too the first pornographic film was more laughable than erotic: 'It was funny. The typical giggling about what was going on.' The motivation for a girls' porn night, apart from curiosity and fun, is also a diffuse feeling that minimal knowledge of pornography is now part of growing up. As Birgit (19) laconically stated, it is a bit uncool not to have any idea at all what happens in pornographic films: 'We told ourselves we had to watch one at least once.' Here are two more typical examples of girls' pornographic consumption:

*Fatma, 18: 'With girlfriends [...] There were four or five of us and we did that too but we thought it was funny and exciting.'*

*Sissi, 18: '[...] always secretly, must have been in year six, seven or eight, whenever her brother [her female friend's brother] wasn't around. We screamed and looked away and did the typical 'Oh God, what are they doing?''*

In the homo-social situation the depicted sexuality is discussed and commented on by the girls. The main point is to make fun of the aspects of the sexual events that appear absurd or bizarre and to exchange sexual know-how in an innocuous manner. All the giggling and screaming serves the purpose of getting rid of uncertainty. Watching pornography together gives the girls lots of occasion to communicate, which allow them to confront certain sexual practices and to distance themselves from them.<sup>151</sup>

## (3) HETEROSOCIAL SETTING

Sometimes watching pornography is one of the shared activities of a group of friends consisting of boys and girls. Most of the hetero-social situations (at parties, during movie nights) occur at the initiative of individual boys, the girls participate or tolerate it silently. The typical role distribution when watching pornography in a group looks like this, from a girl's perspective: 'At some point the guys had the idea to watch a porn movie. I just thought: do what you want' (Gülhanım, 18). The two following examples show just how normal pornography now is in young people's entertainment options:

<sup>151</sup> Klein (2010), p. 180 ff.

**Jenny, 19:** *'There was a time when we cooked together and then we watched television in the evenings and then there was nothing else on but porn, so we watched porn.'*

**Sandra, 16:** *'When we were visiting friends, they agreed it. At first I thought it was funny (laughs). We went there for fun and laughed. And then he switched on the porn film [...] We were all laughing, it was all more for fun, I think.'*

In the hetero-social group situations, similarly to the homo-social situations, it is about the 'fun factor', about the shared amusement over particularly bizarre, grotesque, absurd sexual displays, and at the same time the young people want to distance themselves from those. They learn together about the remote corners of the expansive world of sexuality and at the same time they reassure each other – by shared disgust or shared laughter – of its normalcy.

#### **(4) COUPLE SETTING**

Young women are not very likely to watch pornography together with their boyfriend: 18 out of 80 (23 %) of the respondents have done this before – either in their current relationship or in an earlier one, but for hardly any of them is it an important, regular component of their couple's sexuality. The situation usually arises at the suggestion of the male partner or it happens unintentionally, if the couple happen to come across a pornographic movie while watching late-night television or online. Just one woman (Nele) reports that she hires and watches pornography with her boyfriend around once a month. Here are some typical examples of the couple setting:

**Maria, 17:** *'We were browsing online [...] on a website where we could download music. There was this advert and we accidentally clicked on it. It popped up and played. We watched what they were doing but it wasn't great for me.'*

**Bea, 17:** *'At that moment [while watching pornography together with her boyfriend] I felt a bit uncomfortable because it was a bit embarrassing (laughs). I think we watched it online. It's a while ago, must be at least two or three months ago.'*

**Sophie, 18:** *'I watched a porn film once, with my boyfriend. That was once but it was switched off again very quickly. DVD. It was his personal collection. It was nice, but the desire for each other was greater than watching the porn film.'*

**Nele, 18,** a student at a vocational college in Hamburg, watches pornographic DVDs with her boyfriend around once a month. They hire them from a movie store. The initiative comes from him, *'The suggestion wouldn't come from [me]'*. But Nele thinks it is *'really interesting'* to watch

pornography. It starts with renting them at the movie store, where she thinks it is 'funny' to observe the people and to speculate with her boyfriend in the 'sex department' about the potential sexual preferences of the clientele. The couple always rent 'a gross one and a normal one'. Nele is very interested in pornographic films: she thinks about the production conditions, watches how positions are changed and makes fun of 'disgusting' or 'perverse' pornographic films together with her boyfriend. The pornographic material is not arousing for her, but it is for her boyfriend. However, this difference is not experienced as a problem by the couple: *'He can watch it and it can turn him on, that's not a problem for me. That's the point of the whole thing [...]. It doesn't bother us that he gets aroused and I don't.'*

Unlike Nele, most girls report that the different reactions by the genders to the pornographic material had an adverse effect on the couple: he is aroused, she is tired and annoyed. 17-year-old Lisa describes one such situation, that was rather draining for her: *'I don't know why, but I slept. I turned away. But he got aroused and that's not really that great.'* Most of the young couples are neither aroused by watching pornography together, nor do they plan frequent repeats. A 17-year-old summarizes the attitude of many young people: *'We prefer to do it ourselves than to watch others doing it'* (Marina, 17).

In summary it can be said that young women tend to avoid the world of pornography or they ignore it, and as a result, they do not know much about it. Their encounters with pornography remain isolated and superficial. Since they do not actively seek out pornography, they are mostly familiar with the soft pornography on late-night television, the 'disgusting porn films' of the internet, which are watched by way of a dare and are shared among friends, and the other mainstream pornographic clips they find online. Much of their pornographic experience is unplanned or unintended, but the presence and availability of pornography are so great these days that the reactions to unwanted encounters are quite relaxed: they pause to watch them briefly or they change channels/close the page.

### **What are young women's attitudes to pornography?**

When asked what they think of pornography, most young women express a liberal attitude. Those who like porn should watch it, as long as nobody comes to any harm: *'Those who need it should watch it, and those who find it disgusting can simply leave it'* (Katha, 17). Most young women today would agree with this surprisingly unideological and pragmatic stance. For them the subject of pornography is not a big feminist issue, it is not seen as a social or even a gender-political subject, but rather as a matter of personal preference.

We found three types of attitude among the women surveyed:

- (1) negative (25 %);
- (2) liberal, but uninterested (50 %);
- (3) liberal, open and curious (25 %).

Some examples will illustrate the spectrum of attitudes, from massive hostility to a positive assessment:

**Nina, 18:** *'[I think porn] is shit. How you can watch something like that, I don't know. What can I say? If they think it's fun, they should do what they want. But I think it's disgusting to watch someone having sex.'*

**Christin, 18:** *'I think they're stupid and dull. They're really boring and not erotic at all. They're not my thing.'*

**Sandy, 17:** *'I feel somewhat negative about them. I don't want to have anything to do with them because I don't like them.'*

**Tanja, 17:** *'They're definitely not for me. I think that most girls don't think them as great as men do. But I think it's okay when boys watch them. That's their thing. It's also okay if girls watch them or if girls watch them with their boyfriends.'*

**Dilek, 17:** *'Yes, they're normal. I'm not so interested in them (giggles). But I also don't think it's bad to watch them.'*

**Tamara, 19:** *'No, definitely no porn films. They're absolutely not for me.'*

**Melanie, 17:** *'Those who want to watch that kind of thing can, I wouldn't judge anyone for it, but it's just not my world.'*

**Sissi, 18:** *'[I] think especially this Youporn culture where people can upload homemade porn, that's okay. If people have fun doing it and if other people have fun watching it, then they should do that.'*

**Katja, 17:** *'I think they're alright in general. I think it's something completely normal if you watch something like that to get new inspiration and new ideas for what you can do in bed.'*

*Sara, 17: 'I'm not really against porn. Especially in relationships where things aren't going so well in bed anymore. They could be helpful if you use them to get ideas.'*

### **(1) NEGATIVE ATTITUDE**

All of the three groups contain their own heterogeneous viewpoints. The rejection of pornography is given very different justifications, for example. A lot of girls in the negative group are critical about the production conditions of pornography. Those who assume that women are used as actors against their will strongly criticize it as a form of prostitution and sexual violence. Others justify their rejection of pornography on a more emotional basis, they think porn is 'idiotic' and they think that *'they're almost only watched by people who're totally desperate'* (Susi, 17). In many cases these occasionally harsh judgements are based on very little experience with pornography. 18-year-old Akay holds an extreme position in the negative attitude type:

*Akay, 18*, is Turkish and goes to a high school in Hamburg. She has already seen 'loads' of pornographic films but has *'never watched them voluntarily'*. She is strongly critical of the fact that everyone online, including children, has unimpeded access to pornography online through just some random clicks. She thinks pornography *'isn't really healthy'* and it is also *'dangerous'* and *'totally unrealistic'*. Pornography disgusts her, but she can well imagine that pornography is *'arousing'* for men and she also knows of the relevant comments made by classmates. She and her female friends think pornography is *'not that arousing or hot or cool or anything like that, just disgusting'* and they voice their hostility by making fun of pornography and of *'porn-chic'*: *'When others dress revealingly [...], we say: oh, our porn star has arrived'*. Akay discusses at length that the production conditions of pornography are repulsive and that pornographic consumption supports and funds the porn industry. She is one of the very few who deviate from the liberal stance, speaking out for a legal ban on pornography. She is convinced that it can be *'harmful'* for pubescent boys and girls to develop the wrong ideas about sexuality through pornography.



## (2) LIBERAL BUT UNINTERESTED

The largest group is made up of liberal, but uninterested girls. They mainly voice their utter bewilderment towards pornography. They do not think they are 'bad', they think they are 'normal', it is just that they do not do anything for them. Here too the opinion is often based on little experience. These girls exhibit a liberal-pragmatic attitude, which is based on the principles of informed consent.<sup>152</sup> *'Everyone can do what they want and as long as it doesn't harm anyone, they can watch porn too if they want,'* says 17-year-old Deena. The young women in this group cite the right to sexual self-determination, which in their opinion includes the consumption and production of pornography if desired. Although pornographic consumption and production is something done by 'others', they think that *'[if] they want to do that and it's their life, then they should. Why get involved in that?'* (Dilek, 17). Peggy is one example of this attitude type:

*Peggy, 17, attends a high school in Leipzig. She has only seen one pornographic film to date, during a 'girls' night' when she was in year 7. The girls came across a pornographic film by chance on late-night television, which they then made fun of together. She openly talks to her friends about the subject and thinks that none of them currently watch pornography. She also assumes, however, that 'many boys watch porn'. She asked her boyfriend about it and says he said he was not 'so keen' on them anymore but used to watch them 'quite a bit'. Peggy was initially irritated by that, but then concluded '[that he] can do that if he wants to, if he needs it'. She is 'not really' jealous and she does not experience her boyfriend's greater interest in pornography as a form of infidelity. She expresses her personal view: '[I think it is] quite pointless to watch some people having sex, [it] just doesn't interest [me]'. She has a clear opinion about the relationship between porn sex and her own sexual experiences: 'In real life it's a lot nicer because you have feelings for the other person.' In porn films, she complains, it is just 'in and out', there are no feelings and the people in them are just actors. Since pornography is not arousing to Peggy, it has remained with this one-off experience.*

<sup>152</sup> Schmidt (1996)

### (3) LIBERAL, OPEN AND CURIOUS

The most diverse positions and experiences are to be found in the group of open and interested women. Some complain about the misogyny and absurdity of the available pornographic films, explicitly asking for a different kind of pornography. Others have made their own amateur sex clips with their boyfriend or enjoy watching a porn film to get 'ideas' for their sex lives with their partners. We want to present Heidi's opinion as an example of this kind of attitude:

*Heidi, 19, attends a high school in Hamburg. She watched her first porn film when she was 14. At first she was not really interested in pornography. The things she sometimes saw by chance on television were 'boring' to her. The most recent video she has seen – 'two girls one cup' – is one she watched because all her friends did so and 'everyone was talking about it'. Apart from this experience, her contact with pornography is marginal, but she has watched one on her own, 'just to see what it was like'. Most pornography does not appeal to her, in her eyes they are just 'banal stories' that she 'just think[s] are incredibly stupid,' so that she does not want to see them and 'cannot take them seriously'. There was one pornographic film that Heidi did find arousing. This film stood out because it was less 'misogynistic' or as she says: 'It wasn't just a pure guys' porn film'. She thought the depiction of the orgasm was arousing: 'the only thing I think is arousing is when there's an orgasm because [...] that turns me on. There wasn't really anything else arousing in these other three porn films I saw.' Heidi is open to pornography but she is disappointed by what is available. She misses good stories that she 'could identify more with'.*

Young women's attitudes to pornography are influenced by very different factors, including the pornography they have seen so far, the general values, their sexual experiences to date, their age, their circle of friends and their cultural and religious background. In our data we found a connection between their attitude and their sexual experiences to date (cf. table 17). It is hardly surprising that with increasing sexual experience there is also a more liberal attitude to pornography: the girls who have not had sexual intercourse and who have not masturbated are the ones most likely to reject pornography.

Table 17: Attitudes to pornography and sexual experiences to date  
(women, in %)

	Total	Sexual intercourse experience		Masturbation experience*	
		No (n = 21)	Yes (n = 59)	No (n = 43)	Yes (n = 33)
Group (1): Negative	25	43	19	37	12
Group (2): liberal, but disinterested	51	48	52	49	49
Group (3): curious, open	24	10	29	14	40
Significance		.045		.010	

\* No data for four female respondents

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

It remains an open question why many young women are not interested in pornography. A key to understanding this is that the pornography they have seen so far has not been sexually arousing to most of them. When asked whether pornographic movies aroused them, the most common response was: 'Not one little bit!' That also explains why almost all young women, even if they masturbate, think it is absurd to use pornography to this end. But upon closer inspection, the situation here too is less clear than it initially appears. 13 out of 80 female respondents reported that watching pornography could be arousing to them. Here are some examples:

**Katja, 17:** 'Sometimes [it's arousing]. But if it's something disgusting, then of course not (laughs), then it's disgusting, but sometimes it's arousing.'

**Sandra, 18:** 'It always depends. There is nice porn and perverted porn. [...]'  
Is pornography arousing to you?' 'Yes (laughs). Yes.'

**Anka, 17:** '[When watching pornography together] I am more in the mood for my partner and he for me.'

**Greta, 17:** 'Of course [porn] arouses me. It's a turn-on. There is porn with less attractive actors and then it doesn't arouse me of course.'

**Marianne, 17:** 'Porn is arousing to me if it's with a man and a woman. Two women or two men don't arouse me at all. If it's normal sex.'

Girls who are aroused by pornography do not always experience this arousal as unequivocally positive. Sometimes the arousal is associated with irritation, as in Lisa's (17) case: *'[There have] been days when it's aroused me. But then I quickly switched away again.'* The ambivalence addressed here could be associated with two aspects: arousal through pornography can neither be easily reconciled with the traditional female gender role (female sexuality primarily associated with romance and emotional loving relationships) nor with a feminist understanding (which states that pornography is to be rejected as misogynistic).<sup>153</sup> In light of this, the percentage of girls who admit that they are sometimes aroused by pornography is quite high, at 15%. In addition we should bear in mind that – as we have seen – around a quarter of the girls are open to pornography. Therefore we can at least reject the hypothesis that pornographic consumption is a male sphere of activity by nature. The interesting questions that follow are how the girls themselves perceive this gender difference, how they classify and explain it, how it shapes their understanding of the genders and how they deal with it when it becomes a concrete issue in their relationship.

#### 4.1.2 The 'gender gap' of pornography use

With the exception of masturbation, we do not find a gender difference this massive in any other area of young people's sexual behaviour as pornography. While the gender differences are murkier with masturbation because it is not talked about, they are clearer with pornography. The different interest of boys and girls in it is openly communicated and also demonstrated in the peer group. Boys and girls present themselves as different sexual beings very clearly here. The offensive position is held by the boys in this process. They make no attempt to hide their interest in pornography. After they were on the sociosexual defensive for the past 30 years (girls start sex and relationships somewhat earlier<sup>154</sup>), they now demonstrate competence with hardcore knowledge.

What impacts does this process have on how the genders deal with each other and on how girls perceive the males of the species?

In the eyes of most young women, pornography, like 'shooting games', is 'for boys'. Girls know that boys and men like pornography and they have the realistic perception that they find it arousing and use it for masturbation. The glaring difference between the genders with regard to the assessment and use of pornography is accepted by most girls as nothing worth getting worked up about. It is often interpreted as part of gender-specific sexual needs, as the following examples show:

<sup>153</sup> Cf. for adult women Hofstadler, Körbitz (1996)

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Schmidt (1993); Schmidt (2004b); BZgA (2006; 2010a)

**Renate, 17:** 'Boys are like that, I knew that, they 'need' that. To gratify themselves of whatever.'

**Marion, 17:** 'Every boy watches porn. I don't think it's stupid, it's not disgusting, but it's a bit strange.'

**Julia, 17:** 'It a typical boys' thing. You have this concept in your head that most boys do it, but I think there are probably girls who watch it too.'

**Eva, 18:** 'That's just the way it is. Men watch porn. [...] Maybe because they aren't in a relationship or want to wait.'

**Karin, 16:** 'He's a boy and many boys watch it, I wouldn't say he can't do it, and I couldn't anyway because he's a boy (laughs).'

Some of the girls' interpretations, such as 'boys need it more' and 'the sperm has to get out', contain a traditional drive model or a biological understanding of male sexuality. Other statements relativize the one-sided gender explanation by stating: 'There are girls too, a girlfriend of mine for example' (Franzi, 17). Many girls shrug their shoulders and accept that there must be different needs, interests and dispositions here. They do not think further about it. They do not think it is bad if boys watch porn.

The liberal attitude towards pornography exhibited by most of the young women also refers to the pornographic consumption of their own boyfriends. They are remarkably self-confident about the subject. They do not have a disproportionate fear of the 'competition' of pornography and feel little jealousy. The liberal attitude described by Michi is the most widespread: she evaluates pornographic consumption as a legitimate need of her boyfriend, as a private matter that is none of her business and that does not bother her. Some (Katha) are a bit irritated, but they concede that their partner can do what he wants when they are not there. Only few do not like the thought of their boyfriend regularly watching pornography, and they tell him that too (Nina).

**Michi, 17:** 'He tells me [that he watches porn] and I can live with that.' 'Do you think it's normal?' 'Yes, I hear it from other boys too. They all do it.' 'Does that make you jealous?' 'Not really because they're any old girls.'

**Katha, 17:** 'When we met, we told each other about ourselves and that was part of it. I know it and accept it. [...] I don't think it's great because we have a good and nice sex life and he doesn't need it, but if that's the way it is, then I can't change it.'

*Nina, 18: 'I talked to him about it and [he] said he doesn't watch porn. Jealous... on the one hand, yes. Because he'd be looking at other people, so I would think it's not working well between us. But he doesn't do it.'*

Several young women describe a development in their attitude to their boyfriend's pornographic consumption (Fatma). Even though they were irritated at first, they change their attitude after they have spoken to female friends and/or their partner about it. On the one hand they manage to classify it as 'something for boys', on the other hand they can differentiate between their sexuality as a couple and the sexual desires that continue as 'private', even when the sexuality as a couple is fulfilling and successful:

*Fatma, 18: 'He definitely watches it sometimes. It's what boys do. They can't imagine it so well in their heads when they're masturbating. They need to see it. We've talked about it and he 'confessed' it, he says it quite openly. At first I thought [ironically]: 'Oh great!', but in the end I think it's just one of those things. They watch that and listen to that to get aroused. At first I thought: 'he's paying attention to the women and it's important to him that they're beautiful and they have bigger breasts than me and that's why they're great.' But he managed to allay my fears and ultimately it's his private affair. If he wants that, he can do it.'*

Girls draw a very clear line between pornographic consumption and infidelity. Even those who react with jealousy towards their partner's pornographic consumption feel that he cannot cheat on them by watching pornography because *'He's just watching, he's not touching them'* (Maria, 17). Like masturbation, the boyfriend's pornographic consumption is not generally judged as infidelity – and this in a generation where kissing someone else can cause serious eruptions in a relationship.<sup>155</sup>

**Interpretation of the gender gap.** How can the gender differences regarding the assessment and interest in pornography that we discovered be interpreted? Grimm, Rhein and Müller use the metaphor of the 'slut' as the central explanatory model of boys' and girls' different pornographic consumption<sup>156</sup> In this study, the authors assume that: 'When talking about pornography and pornographic consumption, a traditional backward-looking gender role model emerges from both the boys [...] and the girls.'<sup>157</sup> The preponderance of such a traditional double standard and non-egalitarian conception of young people contradicts the studies into young people's sexual behaviour.<sup>158</sup> The quotes from the focus groups that Grimm, Rhein and Müller present come mainly from young people whose parents have come from cultures with traditional gender roles (such as Islamic ones). This was not

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Matthiesen, Schmidt (2009)

<sup>156</sup> Grimm, Rhein, Müller (2010)

<sup>157</sup> Grimm, Rhein, Müller (2010), S. 258

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Schmidt (2004b); Matthiesen, Schmidt (2009); BZgA (2010a)

considered by the authors. Nor did they consider what conflicts a meeting between young people from families with traditional gender understandings and liberal gender understandings in the peer group can cause.

In our interviews 15 of the 80 girls interviewed use the term 'slut' at least once, i.e. a minority of the respondents (19%). This confirms that this is not a central category of young women's 'sexual stories'<sup>159</sup> Girls who have sex with lots of men early on or who have sex before marriage or post naked pictures of themselves online are called 'sluts' in a minority of these interviews; at least they are in danger of being categorized as such. Other respondents in this group use the term without embracing it: they say for example that women in pornographic films are depicted as 'sluts'. One woman reports that she was called that by a man who sexually assaulted her. If the respondents reject the word, the interviews in which the word crops up are infused with the fear they have of the labelling violence of such ascription. The term 'slut' is largely used by women whose parents (or parent) have come from a culture with a traditional understanding of genders.<sup>160</sup> Around half of them talk about 'sluts' in their interviews. Among the women without a migrant background and those where the parents come from EU countries, the figure is just 10% ( $p = .01$ ).

In the boys' interviews, the term 'slut' is virtually non-existent: only three of the 80 respondents use this term. One boy used it to refer to a woman who is sexually offensive with men. Another reported that he and his friends had called a chat partner on a commercial sex chat a 'horny slut'. The third one said that his girlfriend sometimes calls women she is jealous of 'sluts'.

To summarize: most girls are surprisingly sophisticated about the gender differences regarding pornography consumption. The differences between boys and girls' sexual interests are communicated but also respected. It is rare that the boys' greater interest in pornography is given a 'derogatory' assessment. There is also little evidence of a double standard, where boys' interest in pornography is seen as legitimate while it is socially sanctioned for girls. When this attitude did crop up, then only among respondents with a migrant background supporting traditional gender concepts. Instead, most young women express a remarkably relaxed attitude and a large amount of tolerance towards men's interest in pornography. This tolerance also refers to their boyfriend's interest, as long as the boyfriend's sexual interests remain 'virtual', meaning as long as they concern women 'online' or 'on television'.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Plummer (1995)

<sup>160</sup> Our sample includes 18 women with a cultural background that has traditional gender views. The parents (one parent) have come to Germany from Turkey (12 respondents), from the Middle East (1), from eastern Europe (non-EU; 1), from Africa (2) and from South America (2).

### 4.1.3 The connexion between sexuality and pornographic content

The worry among sexuality educators and in the educational media about young people's pornographic consumption is often associated with the concern that young people will believe the sexuality depicted in pornography is 'real'. Furthermore, they will then go on to transfer these practices into their own lives, by adopting sexual practices or enacting scenarios typical of pornography in an uncritical manner. Generally speaking, the 'perceived reality' of pornographic films depends on several factors:

- what is being watched;
- personal sexual experiences; they can be used to compare what is seen and put it into context;
- the pornographic competence<sup>161</sup> of the viewer;
- the outcome of negotiations with the partner about whether certain pornographic contents are tried out.

The women we surveyed assume that in pornography as in feature films, the protagonist are actors and actresses, and that the sexuality portrayed is (very largely) produced for the needs of the male audience. Jenny (19) summarizes this: *'Porn is a movie made so that people watch it and find it arousing.'* The respondents are almost unanimously of the opinion that *'it's all acted anyway'* (Salomea, 17). *'You can see quite quickly that it doesn't really have anything to do with reality,'* judges the sexually inexperienced 19-year-old Janina. For the vast majority of girls it is clear that pornography depicts sex without love, sex without relationships, sex without feelings. They know that this is a very specific form of sexuality. Nina (18) puts it like this: *'In real life sex is different, because it's with love. In porn, it's work.'*

Of the 56 girls who commented on the subject of 'realism in porn', 50 classed pornography as unrealistic. They describe the sex depicted as 'too outlandish', 'too wild', 'too hard' and 'too loud', they are irritated by the 'constant unrealistic moaning', the 'excessive' and sometimes 'violent' depictions. They strongly criticize and reject stories that rob themselves of credibility by containing absurd activities and implausible situations:

**Ayşe, 18:** *'That a man walks into a bar and suddenly the woman's lying on the bar and everyone else around them is pretending nothing is happening, and I think that's unrealistic.'*

**Dilek, 17:** *'They just start, nobody gives a damn. Sex, just in and out.'*

<sup>161</sup> Döring (2011b)



**Yasmin, 17:** *'I don't think it's realistic when two people are having anal sex outside a disco.'*

**Michaela, 17:** *'I think porn is really strange. If I compare it to my [sex], it's very different, a completely different world.'*

**Akay, 18:** *'[There's] no such thing as foreplay. They just sit down somewhere and the whole thing goes on for two minutes and then everyone's happy. I don't think it's like that in real life. It doesn't strike me as realistic.'*

In addition to the effusive acting and the absurd plot, the third and most important feature that makes sex in pornography different from what young people experience is the absence of intimacy and love. Measured by their experienced reality, the girls miss the feelings, the whole emotional dimension of sexuality. The motivation for pornographic sex is 'work and money', whereas the young women describe their own sexuality in very different terms. For them, as Greta (17) puts it, sex is 'arousal, sensuality and love'.

**Gülhanım, 18:** *'[With sex] it's usually the case that you're in the mood at that moment and you [do] what you really feel like, whereas in porn films, I could imagine that that's not the case. They're not thinking: "yes, I want to have sex now," they're thinking "I want to be paid so I'll do this now." I don't think it's ever as intimate in a porn movie as it is in a relationship.'*

**Marianne, 17:** *'I think that porn films are without any inhibitions or timidity. When you sleep with your partner, then you have love and passion, which isn't shown in many porn films, because that's all about "in, out, thanks.'*

**Peggy, 17:** *'Porn films don't show emotions. It's all just in, out, and finished. In real life it's nicer, because you feel something for the other person.'*

Just six of our female informants conceded that pornographic sex could be realistic; they say 'it depends' and are presumably thinking more of the sexual practices than of the context of pornographic films:

**Dana, 18:** *'Everybody has sex differently. I think some people will do [it] just like in porn films, others don't.'*

**Tamara, 19:** *'I think overall it's the same as what we do too.'*

**Caroline, 17:** *'It depends on how far you can go with your partner.'*

Nicola Döring justifiably remarks that pornography, maybe with the exception of amateur pornography, should be classed as a fictional genre. The ‘unrealistic depictions’ are less a deficit of the genre than a characteristic.<sup>162</sup> Young people can maintain a considered detachment from pornographic images and see them as something beyond their reality. This insight is helpful in order to defuse the general suspicion that young people will take over the script of pornographic movies one-to-one. Only now can we turn to the question of the extent to which young people use pornographic depictions specifically to get information about sexual practices.

### Does porn provide sex education?

Around half of the young women we surveyed concede that pornography can have an informative effect: you can see ‘how it’s done’ and ‘what’s out there’ and it answers the important question of ‘what it all looks like’. Jennifer (17) describes that it had been helpful for her first time to have an idea of ‘*how to start*’. 17-year-old Astrid goes so far as to say that pornographic films have a sex-education function. ‘*I don’t think it’s terrible, because it’s a form of sex-ed.*’ Girls have further arguments for watching a pornographic film: If they watch it first, they are not as uncertain beforehand, it could ‘relax’ them, they can get ‘ideas’ and ‘suggestions’ and can learn about ‘how it all takes place’. With regard to the sex-education potential, age and previous sexual experience also play a role. Some girls are of the opinion that it cannot harm sexually inexperienced women to watch a pornographic film to get information.

*Marion, 17: ‘I think yes, at a young age. At this age you know a lot about sex, but if I had been younger, I would have watched a porn film to see how it’s all done.’*

*Salomea, 17: ‘I can imagine that when a girl has her first time and she hasn’t been confronted with it before, then she’ll be overwhelmed and insecure. [...] Maybe a girl who watches that beforehand will be a bit more relaxed.’*

*Nele, 18: ‘You can see that you don’t have to get up every time and say, ‘Come on, sweetie, change position’. Instead you can see that it just happens. You can see that. It’s not that you’re deliberately copying it.’*

Generally speaking, many girls confirm the thought that in their current life phase they are interested in ‘becoming more experienced’ sexually, to ‘try out things’ and to ‘learn’. Their own experiences are the most important to them. In this context, pornography is used to mark out their personal position and to determine their own boundaries. As 17-year-old Silvia describes, they think: ‘*Would I do this? Would I not?*’

<sup>162</sup> Döring (2011b)

The sexual practices of young couples are marked by a certain amount of uncertainty, not least because of the absence of comparison options. They do not know *'what other couples do in bed'* (Nadine, 18) and pornography serves an age-related curiosity for the young people. Everything they see is automatically filtered, because our respondents know very well that *'pornography is not the reality, but you can lift certain aspects'* (Tanja, 17).

Others are sceptical of the sex-education value of pornography. 17-year-old Katja gives a sarcastic response to the question whether she has ever learned anything when watching pornography: *'Maybe how to fake an orgasm, but no more than that (laughs).'* In addition, some young people voice concerns about getting ideas and suggestions from pornography. The girls are particularly worried that their partner could get the wrong ideas or develop unrealistic expectations (Deena, Marie). Another objection was that pornographic sex was unattractive and that the images only served to feed insecurities (Renate, Christin). Dilek expresses fundamental scepticism about whether set formulae of sexual sequences are helpful. She is convinced that detailed parameters and images in the head make the sexual situation not easier but more complicated. Eva is also in favour of *'not wanting to do everything perfectly'*. Using pornographic consumption to fake more competence and sexual experience than is present is silly and gets in the way of open communication between partners:

**Deena, 17:** *'If a boy watches a porn film for the first time but hasn't had sex himself yet, then it's a bit dangerous. He could think that that's what it's really like. He'll have very high expectations and will think it's all really easy and effortless.'*

**Marie, 18:** *'I think more men watch pornography than women and maybe men change their expectations of what they want from women, to want the same things they see in porn.'*

**Renate, 17:** *'I asked myself whether sex always looks like it's depicted in porn films. Because sometimes it's really unattractive and disgusting the way it's shown there. [...] That maybe made me a bit insecure. Can it be nice?'*

**Christin, 18:** *'It's all so dull and acted. I don't think you need that. If you want to try something out, then try it out and don't do it just because you've seen it somewhere.'*

**Dilek, 17:** *'If you had got information, then you would have it in your mind that it has to be a certain way and then it would be chaotic because your boyfriend will do it differently and then everything gets into a muddle. I prefer to take it as it comes.'*

**Eva, 18:** *'I'm not the kind of woman who wants to do everything perfectly. I watch porn, let's see how they do it. I would tell him honestly and openly [...]: 'I don't know how to do that.' Then he knows what to expect.'*

The young women surveyed showed a wide variety of attitudes and a high level of reflection when assessing pornography. They are quite able to distinguish between pornographic fantasies, images and stories on the one hand and their 'real' sexuality with their partner on the other. They have developed strategies to use the pornographic worlds in a way that is useful to them, to leave them again or to pay no attention to them in the first place.

### **Increasing arousal or increasing pressure?**

The views about whether it is a good idea to try out the things seen in pornography vary. 17-year-old Miriam, who saw her first pornographic film six weeks ago, is fascinated by the sexual practices she was unfamiliar with: *'My jaw just dropped when I saw all the things you could do.'* Some women toy with the idea of trying things out, others have already done it. They are the most likely, with varying success, to try out new positions with their partner:

**Tanja, 18:** *'Positions, things like that. You should just give it a go in your relationship [...]. Positions are quite interesting (laughs). You can learn from that.'*

**Kati, 18:** *'It happened when I was 16. I tried spooning, which we hadn't done before. I saw it and tried it with my boyfriend and thought it was great.'*

**Astrid, 17:** *'A strange position [it wasn't fun] (laughs). You can try things, that's the only way you can find out whether you like it or not.'*

**Katja, 17:** *'It was cool, it was something new. But sometimes it was strange and obscure and twisted and pointless, really.'*

**Marianne, 17:** *'The positions weren't the way I had imagined. I thought they would be better than they turned out to be. But I was pleasantly surprised with some of them.'*

**Sara, 17:** *'If you see certain positions in porn films, then you can try them out in real life or you can get ideas for sex games.'*

The increased presence of pornography will probably change youth sexuality insofar as it will make them more willing to experiment in a steady relationship. Positions and non-coital practices are likely to be tried out sooner. Oral practices in particular are massively portrayed in pornography and are perceived by young people as a component of the general repertoire:

*Lisa, 17: 'In the past I didn't know that blowjobs and things like that were part of it. I thought only some people did that. Then I learned that almost everyone does it (laughs). And then I looked at how to do it (laughs). Then I tried it. It was nice (laughs). [Without pornography] I don't think I would have done it because I would have been scared of doing something wrong.'*

Apart from being motivated to try out new positions or practices (within the mainstream context), most women tend to keep pornographic sex and their own sex lives separate. That is very much linked to them having to negotiate trying out things seen in pornography with their partner. From the perspective of one girl who is toying with the idea of implementing something she has seen, the first question is that of successful implementation: because *'online it always looks so cool, and when you do it yourself, you think: 'it looked better online'.*' (Marion, 17). She has to pluck up the courage to talk to her partner about her sexual desires. Miriam (17) describes very clearly that she would like to *'try things out'* in principle, but that she does not know whether she has *'the courage for it'*. It is very important to young women that *'it gets talked about'*. If, for example, their partner expressed his interest in certain practices while watching pornography together, then *'we could talk about whether we would do it or not'* (Melanie, 17). The girls leave little doubt, it cannot be done without a mutual discussion about it. The young women have no problem rejecting their partner's wishes. Silvia (17) describes one such rejection: *'If my boyfriend comes to me and wants doggy style and things like that, then I tell him: 'Hey, not like that, thanks' (giggles). I don't need that.'* The desire for certain accessories or sexual *'performances'* is also clearly rejected. None of the women reported that they had felt forced or pushed by their partner to *'re-enact'* certain pornographic contents or to take on the role of a porn actress. We also find nothing to suggest that girls, in line with the traditional roles of the sexes, feel a one-sided duty to take care of their partner's sexual satisfaction. What they do feel (jointly) responsible for is maintaining a lively and varied sexuality in their relationships.

#### 4.1.4 Conclusion

At first glance, the interviews are notable for the low level of most young women's interest in pornography. Many girls prefer to avoid the confrontation with pornography at this age. They look at pornography quite shyly. We have found several causes for this.

- Seen from an interactionist perspective of 'doing gender', it appears that girls' lack of interest in pornography stabilizes and supports the female gender identity, while exactly the opposite is true for boys: their active interest in pornography serves to support and affirm the developing male heterosexual gender identity (cf. chapter 4.2).
- In addition the pornography available is tailored to and produced for the male audience. Since girls are not very familiar with the rapidly changing pornographic films available online, it is not easy for them to find forms of pornographic films or images that could potentially be attractive or arousing to them.
- A public admission of a pro-pornography position exposes girls in certain social groups to the risk of social devaluation. However, the intra-psychological and interpersonal conflicts associated with an interest in pornography are much more serious because not only traditional feminine ideals of women's focus on emotions and relationships but also feminist ideals are challenged and questioned.

There are therefore many good reasons that get in the way of young women taking an active interest in pornography. For that reason, the variety of ways in which they deal with it only becomes clear on second glance and can only be discerned within a very intimate conversational situation, such as prevailed during the qualitative interviews. The young women can express their interest and arousal that they too experience when exposed to pornography. Our results document a far greater heterogeneity of young women's opinions and experiences about pornography than other studies. Over the course of a lifetime, we can assume that the percentage of women who are interested in pornography and who consume it as arousing increases with increasing sexual experience.

## 4.2 What do boys do with pornography?<sup>163</sup>

Gunter Schmidt

In this chapter we will evaluate the pornography-consumption data of the 80 surveyed boys. The stories the young men told us about their relationship with pornography have been documented on 485 anonymized transcript pages containing almost 200,000 words. The following section presents and analyses these stories, arranged by subject and contents. The young people will have their say in detail.

Young men, like young women, assume that interest in pornography is ‘for boys’. There is no other area of sexual behaviour where the difference between the genders is as stark as it is with the use of pornographic material. Not even 10% of the girls, but 80% of the boys have more than sporadic experience with pornography; none of the women surveyed, but one third of the boys, use or used pornography particularly often, namely twice a week or more, over an extended period (cf. table 18).

Table 18: **Intensity of pornography consumption** (in %, by gender)

	Boys (n = 80)	Girls (n = 80)
<b>Rating of the intensity of pornography use</b>		
None or sporadic	20	92
low*	23	8
moderate**	25	0
high***	33	0

\* More than sporadic and less than twice a month, currently or during a previous period in time

\*\* Twice a month and less than twice a week, currently or during a previous period in time

\*\*\* Twice a week or more, currently or during an earlier period

Source: BZgA, data set ‘Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age’, 2011

Young men often access pornographic material online. They exclusively consume pornography that is streamed for free. During the interviews, the respondents mentioned 33 websites. By far the most popular site is ‘Youporn’, which was named by 42 of the 80 respondents. Boys’ pornography use affects all classes, but is particularly pronounced in the middle class. 47% of the academic high-school students, but only 21% of the vocational-college students in our sample reported particularly high pornography use ( $p = .02$ ).<sup>164</sup>

<sup>163</sup> A slightly different version of this text was published in advance. Cf. Schmidt, Matthiesen (2011)

<sup>164</sup> In light of this data and applied to young people, the statement by sexologist Jakob Pastötter that pornography was becoming the ‘prevailing culture of the underclass’ is shown to be pure (middle class) speculation. Cf. Wüllenweber (2007)

### 4.2.1 Being selective about pornography

The dichotomy of the pornographic world is a striking characteristic of the stories that the young people recounted about their experiences with pornography. They distinguish – as other studies confirm as well<sup>165</sup> – between two groups of pornographic material, namely the ‘normal’ and the grotesque, bizarre, ‘disgusting’. The former are used far more often, alone and often in connexion with masturbation. They are generally assessed positively or as acceptable. Almost all of the boys have already seen pornography in the latter group, but with quite a low frequency, and if they watch it, then mainly with peers (together with boys of the same age or through sharing internet links among peers) or when they come across it by chance (the young people come across such pages by accident). Consuming extreme pornography is not a sexual or erotic event. They are sometimes seen as spectacular entertainment and as a joke, but usually as a weird, and occasionally as a disturbing experience.

Young men describe very clearly and very uniformly what kind of pornography they prefer. Pornographic streams or films suitable for arousal and masturbation should depict ‘normal’ sex between a man and a woman, they should be ‘natural’ and ‘real’. Varying and unusual sexual positions are desired, as is oral sex, but heterosexual anal sex is already beyond the level of the acceptable. Sex in pornographic movies is to be similar to the sex that they have themselves or that they imagine, maybe a little more accomplished, refined and bold. The preferences that determine what pornography they choose are generally conventional and heterocentric, as the following statements confirm:

**Paul, 17:** *‘Normal situations, not things like group sex, but where two people, a man and a woman, come together.’* (high-school student, a lot of pornographic experience)

**Fabian, 17:** *‘The way I would like to do it. Amateur films, where it’s just like in real life. Normal videos, where nothing spectacular happens. It’s just like when you’re having normal sex with your girlfriend.’* (high-school student, a lot of pornographic experience)

**Peter, 16:** *‘I only tend to watch things that I can understand and that are natural. Just sex with heterosexuals. They should definitely be adults. Pornography needs a story. I need to be able to follow what they’re doing, it shouldn’t be too extreme.’* (vocational-college student, a lot of pornographic experience)

<sup>165</sup> E.g. Altstötter-Gleich (2006); Grimm, Rhein, Müller (2010)



**Mehdi, 18:** *'They show what real sex is. Amateur films, when the video is shaky. Man – woman or man – two women, yes even two women.'* (vocational-college student, small amount of pornographic experience)

Medhi's quote contains two subjects that are not in line with a narrowly defined convention: sex with two women and sex between two women. The latter is particularly appealing to lots of young men. One in four mentions spontaneously (without being asked about it first) that he thinks such films are arousing and good. This is because boys have a dilemma when watching pornography: they actually want heterosexual sex but often feel somehow disturbed by the man, they push him into a side role, he becomes a vague character or is pushed out entirely.

### **Digression: how are male actors perceived?**

When young men are asked about the actors or when they raise this subject on their own, most of them only talk about the women, the men are not even mentioned. *'The main thing is you get a really attractive woman,'* says Sebastian (17), *'The woman is important and only the woman,'* decides Michael (17). Women are to be pretty, attractive, sexy and erotic. Everything has to be 'just right'. From time to time, specific attributes are mentioned (a pretty face, 'big tits and a proper arse', blondes, Latinas). Franz (18) watched one film several times because *'the woman was incredible, she was the bomb, she really was'*. If young people mention the male actors, they express minimum standards (they must not look disgusting, must not be too fat, 'no limp guys', 'nobody wants to see a hairy arse') or they confirm that they are insignificant or bothersome: *'I never pay attention to the men, I prefer not to look at them,'* says Dschamal (18), *'The men are irrelevant in porn, it's all about the woman,'* says Ferdinand (19). And of course these adult, sexually accomplished, inexhaustibly potent men in the porn films are also sinister to the adolescent boys: *'If the men in porn films really can have sex for an hour and a half without coming, it's... But I know that they usually take Viagra and things like that, so it's not so intimidating'* (Marcel, 19).

The young men's efforts to blank out the man in a heterosexual porn film are also illustrated by their comments about threesomes and foursomes, which are only okay if the scenario involves one man and several women. Mehdi mentions it quite casually in the quote above, Björn (19) expresses it more clearly: *'A threesome with two men is getting a bit gay, it's better if there's an extra woman.'* A naked, sexually performing man is always a homosexual offering and a homosexual threat for the viewer. This is a further reason for the irritated lack of interest that many boys have for the male actors in pornographic films. This becomes particularly clear in the rejection of male-male pornography. Almost one boy in four spontaneously, i.e. without being asked about it, expresses his dislike of 'gay porn'. The vehemence of their hostility varies:

**Igor, 18:** *'I don't like it when there are gay guys. That's a bit repulsive to me. I don't mind it that there are people like that, but I don't want to see it.'* (vocational-college student, low pornographic experience)

**Lars, 18:** *'A gay porn film. That was the worst thing I've ever seen. I was zapping through videos and thought, 'What?' In that scene there was fucking up the arse. I zapped away straight away. And then it was all over. I was emotionally destroyed after having seen that. Honestly, it was terrible. I felt sick that evening. I couldn't eat anything. I was completely devastated. I don't know why, but now, in retrospect, I can laugh about it.'* (vocational-college student, low pornographic experience)

The dislike for male-male pornographic films corresponds to the popularity of female-female films. Björn (19) put it this way: *'What I really don't like are gay guys in porn films, that's disgusting. It's quite the opposite with lesbians'*. The respondents were more likely to talk about sex between two women rather than 'lesbian sex', such as Tom (18): *'Very erotic for me are porn films with two women. I like that a lot.'* In contrast to 'lesbians', 'two women' in a pornographic film remain obtainable for men and that may influence their choice of words. In any case, pornographic films that only contain women no longer contain the male rivals. In addition they are often tenderer than the male-female pornographic films, and these films can teach a lot about cunnilingus. By the way, the widely available films in which a woman masturbates do not receive much attention from the young people. They evidently do not wish to be exposed to the sexual desire and arousal of a woman that she has produced herself.

### **What pornography is rejected?**

Around three quarters of the young men surveyed have already seen pornography that was not arousing to them, but bizarre, repulsive or frightening. These films are, as already mentioned, mainly consumed in the homosocial context, i.e. among male friends: the boys share links for such pornography or they watch it together with other friends. Occasionally they come across such clips by chance, when they are surfing pornographic websites alone, but that tends to be the exception. Since these films are not suitable for arousal and masturbation, the frequency with which the boys seek them out is very low. The sexual contents of these pornographic films is unusual, paraphilic or violent, as the following list reveals: sexualized urolangia and coprophilia (one in three have seen this); sadomasochism, bondage (one in four); anal or vaginal insertions with objects, fisting (one in five); men or women having sex with animals (one in six); violence, rape, 'gang bang' (one in eight), fetishes (one in ten), monster sex (animations, one in 20).

The numbers in the categories ‘urolangia and coprophilia’, ‘anal and vaginal insertions’ and ‘sex with animals’ indicate neither that the young people are particularly interested in these subjects, nor do they suggest that there are a large number of films with this subject matter online. They merely reflect the fact that particularly spectacular and unusual films (or their links) are often shared among young people. The emotional reactions to these different contents are relatively uniform: they are generally considered as ‘totally not arousing’ and are rejected by all of them, occasionally in quite a relaxed way (‘not my thing’, ‘I don’t like it’), but usually with a strong reaction (‘disgusting’, ‘revolting’, ‘off-putting’, ‘absolutely repugnant’, ‘massively gross’, ‘nasty’, ‘perverse’, ‘sick’, ‘appalling’, ‘eww, no’ etc.). The following interview excerpts reveal the spectrum of young people’s experiences with pornography beyond the mainstream, as well as their reactions to it.

**Sebastian, 17:** *‘I remember something that was quite gross. One guy and one woman had just had oral sex, she gave him a blow job and then he put his penis quite deep down her throat. That was quite intense (laughs sheepishly). I thought it was gross because she almost suffocated, it was intense, it was almost brutal. I can’t imagine it being fun for her. I think it’s quite disrespectful.’* (high-school student, moderate pornography experience)

**Tom, 18:** *‘I felt sick. It was called Cup Chicks. There were two women who vomited over each other and pooped in a glass and rubbed it over each other. It was really revolting. I was unfortunately just eating chocolate pudding. I had to throw it away because I couldn’t deal with that anymore.’* (high-school student, high pornography experience)

**Kurt, 17:** *‘This was with these foot fetishists. They’ve always got slaves and then there’s this dominatrix, who seems to think it’s really hot when her slave kisses her latex boots and things like that. That’s terrible. If you see how many people have already watched it, it’s frightening.’* (vocational-college student, low pornography experience)

**Hans, 17:** *‘I don’t know whether you can still call it pornography, but a horse slept with a woman, I don’t know if you can still call it ‘slept with’. It took her from behind and that was totally gross and really perverse. First I had to laugh. There’s a lot of rubbish on the internet and people let others do all kinds of things to them. I don’t know if it was fake.’* (high-school student, high pornography experience)

Boys with high and moderate pornography experience are significantly more likely to have seen gross pornography than boys with low or sporadic pornography experience (83 % compared to 56 %,  $p = .01$ , cf. table 18). This is no surprise: they spend more time in the pornographic regions of the net, thereby increasing their chances of coming across something unusual. This does not mean that they have a greater affinity to this type of pornography than the 'low users', because there is no difference between the two groups with regard to extreme pornography. Both groups see extreme films incredibly rarely and generally only by chance or when initiated by others. They do not consider them arousing and they clearly reject them. The result goes against the popular theory that pornographic consumption stimulates the search for ever harder, 'more perverted' clips.

The homosocial context, which is where young people usually watch paraphilic and violent pornography, makes this consumption a trip to the fairground of sexual insanities – their powerful rejection is an affirmation of their distance to the 'perverted' and of their own normality. Hardly any of them feel lastingly troubled by these experiences. *'I would have forgotten about it, had you not asked about it,'* says Lennart (17); *'It grosses you out and then it's gone again,'* says Fabius (17). Chris (19) tries to explain why this is the case: *'I don't want to say that I had to think about it for long, because the internet is a quick way of consuming something. You click and it's gone and forgotten about. I had forgotten about it quite quickly again, but then I remembered again how disgusting and gross it was.'*

Child pornography is not available online via the websites the young people use. They only know about it from hearsay and from public debate. Around one in ten mentioned this subject in the interview of their own accord. In addition to vehement rejection, which we described above in connection to other paraphilic pornography, young people react with moral condemnation and the demand for severe sanctions when it comes to child pornography, as the following statement reveals:

**Falk, 17:** *'I haven't seen any porn in which children have been raped, but you read about it in the news, and when it says a child was raped, I think, how can anyone be such an asshole to do something like that? How is it the children's fault that they didn't manage to get a woman? It may sound tough, but that would be a reason for me to reintroduce the death penalty in Germany. It's true. I think raping a child is the worst thing you can do. Little children can't defend themselves. It's brutal. And when you hear that they kill them afterwards, what then?'* (vocational-college student, low pornography experience)

Psychoanalyst Robert J. Stoller once said that while pornography was produced for the purpose of sexual arousal, not every product aroused every viewer, therefore there was such a thing as non-pornographic pornography.<sup>166</sup> Pornography that depicts paraphilic or violent sexuality is non-pornographic in this sense for young people. Some respondents explicitly express this thought; one of them being Hans in the interview excerpt above.

#### 4.2.2 Consuming pornography alone at home

There are different forms of pornographic consumption. What young men do with pornography, why they view pornography and what they expect or experience when they see it, depends on the setting in which they consume pornography. As was the case among the young women, we distinguish between four such settings.

- The solo-setting – pornographic clips are consumed alone – by far the most common category among the boys. 91 % of the respondents have done this before; during more than 80 % of all pornographic encounters (e.g. during the past four weeks) the boys are alone. The gender differences are particularly pronounced with regard to this setting.
- In the homosocial setting – together with other boys – 56 % of the respondents have already watched pornography.
- Just 10 % remember consuming pornography in the heterosocial setting, such as at parties with peers.
- 24 % have consumed pornography in the couple setting together with their steady girlfriend.

With regard to frequency, the three forms of consuming pornography in the company of others remain occasional events. In the following section we will take a closer look at solitary pornography consumption.

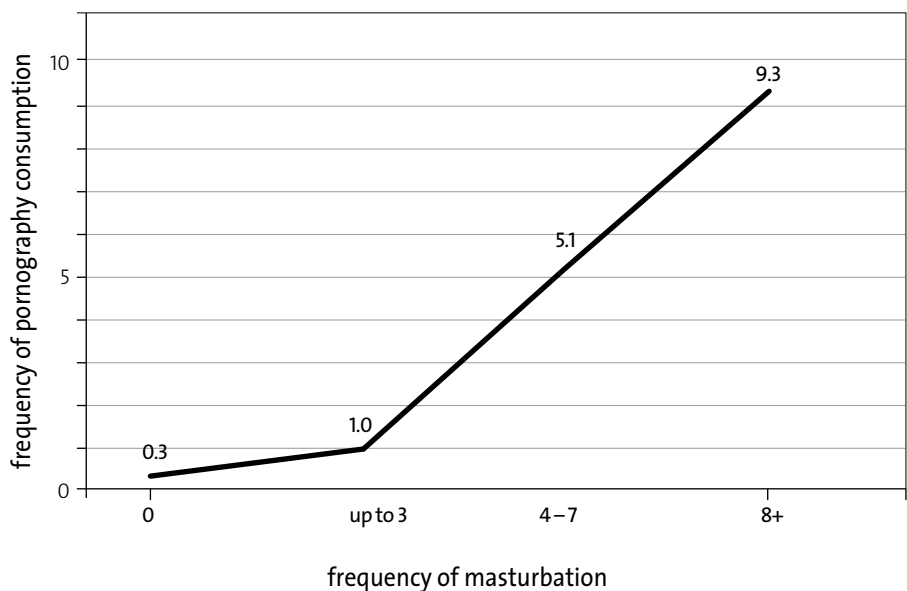
Figure 7 shows a close statistical correlation between the frequency of pornographic consumption and the frequency of masturbation.<sup>167</sup> And indeed, pornographic consumption in the solo-setting and masturbation go hand-in-hand very often. *‘It’s a strong link,’* says Chris (19): around three quarters of the respondents have already masturbated while watching pornography; 70 % of the young people who consumed pornography on their own in the past four weeks masturbated during the most recent

<sup>166</sup> ‘Pornography is that depiction manufactured with the intent to produce erotic excitement. Pornography is pornographic when it does excite. Not all pornography, then, is pornographic to all’, Stoller (2009), p. 11

<sup>167</sup> The correlation (Spearman rank correlation) between these two characteristics is  $r = 0.66$  ( $p < .001$ ) in our sample.

occurrence, 30% did not. That means masturbation is the norm in the solo-setting, while ‘abstinent’ viewing – viewing for fun, because the films are not arousing enough or because they want to learn something about positions – is the exception.

Figure 7: Frequency of pornography consumption and masturbation in the past four weeks (boys, averages)



Source: BZgA, data set ‘Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age’, 2011

Masturbation without pornography is more common than pornography without masturbation. The spectrum in which both are combined ranges from ‘never’ to ‘every time’. The many crossovers between these poles are reflected in the responses to the question: ‘How often do you use pornography to masturbate?’:

**Friedrich, 18:** ‘Never.’ (vocational-college student, masturbation frequency in the past four weeks: 16)

**Alexander, 19:** ‘Rarely. I’ve used porn, but rarely.’ (high-school student, masturbation frequency in the past four weeks: 2)

**Paul, 17:** ‘It depends on my mood. I don’t usually need it, it’s enough to go to bed and get started. But if I do need something visual, then I’ll watch a clip.’ (high-school student, masturbation frequency in the past four weeks: 4)

**Jan, 17:** *'How often in percentage terms? Around half the time, I'd say.'* (high-school student, masturbation frequency in the past four weeks: 14)

**Tobias, 19:** *'Well, when it does happen, then I usually use something, because you need a stimulus for that and then I use that.'* (vocational-college student, masturbation frequency in the past four weeks: 6)

**Marcel, 18:** *'Every time. It's not possible without. If I do it, then with porn.'* (vocational-college student, masturbation frequency in the past four weeks: 3)

Internet pornography has almost fully replaced the masturbation aids that were used in the past, such as nude and semi-nude pictures and pinups, which boys found in newspapers, magazines, art books, fashion catalogues or books. In a study from the 1970s, young people stated they used the following products as aids to masturbation: 'Quick, Neue Revue, Twen, Jasmin, Softgirls, Sexfront, Beate Uhse books, Bravo, Neckermann catalogue, Pardon, Spontan, Konkret, Henry Miller, Playboy, Moravia, Kolle'.<sup>168</sup> Today, just like then, many prefer to use their imagination when masturbating rather than get ideas or help elsewhere.<sup>169</sup>

**Does internet pornography shape the imagination?** First off, the boys emphasize the independence of their imagination. They do not imagine porn stars but girls and women from their surroundings, their circle of friends, their classmates, women they have seen in the street, in a nightclub and very often their current or former girlfriends. The fantasies involving their girlfriends are memories of sexual experiences or they develop the sexual experiences with them further:

**Heiko, 18:** *'When I was in hospital with a broken leg, the nurse wasn't bad looking and then I have fantasies.'*

**Sebastian, 17:** *'When Megan spent the night at mine, we had sex, I think about that sometimes. And of course I imagine sleeping with someone who I know a little bit.'*

**Dieter, 18:** *'I fantasize about my girlfriend. If I want to have an arousing image, then I imagine my girlfriend. Just memories and realistic ideas from how I experience us when we're having sex.'*

<sup>168</sup> Amendt (1974), p. 69

<sup>169</sup> It would seem that the easy availability of pornography has merely changed what young people use as aids to masturbation, rather than the amount they masturbate: 19 and 20-year-old university students whom we surveyed in 1996 and the 16–19-year-old high-school students in this study had both masturbated on average around nine times in the past four weeks. Cf. Schmidt (2000b)

**Rüdiger, 17:** *'Sometimes I dream of things my girlfriend and I could do. Positions we haven't tried yet, or I dreamed that she came during sex because she can't come during sex, I don't know why, and that's a shame. That's something I've fantasized about.'*

It is not just with regard to the female protagonists that pornography and the boys' fantasies differ. The respondents also highlight clear differences in contents. Two differences are cited most often.

- In the fantasy they are an actor, not a passive viewer – or as Leon (18) puts it: *'In my own fantasies, I'm the one who likes having women.'*
- The fantasies are more romantic and emotional, therefore less fetishistic than pornography, as Andreas (17) says: *'In the porn films it's their job what they're doing, in my fantasies it's much more intense, with love and much more emotional.'*

Nevertheless the majority of the respondents admit that the films do affect their fantasies at least to some extent, *'only a fractional amount'* (Bernd, 17): because *'[porn] expands your horizons a bit'* (Peter, 16); *'You can copy in your head the position or whatever else the professional is doing'* (Mehdi, 18); *'You run a scene through your head that you think is hot, you remember it and that comes to mind, like having sex with your girlfriend in the shower'* (Olli, 18). There are few suggestions that the pornographic examples 'capture' the young people's sexual fantasies; but the young people often use the examples to flesh out their fantasies, as long as they fit into their sexual pattern or script.<sup>170</sup>

There is a common concern (especially among the non-scientific public) that young people's pornography consumption could lead to an addiction-like escalation, to a move towards ever harder, more brutal and perverse contents and to a higher and higher frequency of pornography use. In our non-clinical and rather small sample, there are no such tendencies among the young people. We have already described this above for the contents/preferred subject matters of pornography. With regard to frequency of use, there is a reverse tendency in our sample: of the 64 young men who have had more than sporadic experience with pornography (rating 2 to 4, cf. table 18), more than a third say that they are already over the hill as far as their interest in pornography is concerned. That means they used to watch more pornography than they do now. The reasons for this are varied.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Schmidt (2009); Stulhofer, Schmidt, Lanripet (2009)



- They consumed pornography more often and masturbated more often before they had a girlfriend – this reason is cited by far the most often.
- Since they acquired sexual experiences, they use their memories to fantasize
- They have lost interest and have ‘grown out of it’.
- In difficult times (now overcome), such as after a separation, they had to ‘let off steam’ and ‘symbolically cheat’.
- They are not bored so often as they used to be.

These reasons rarely lead to them giving up pornography entirely, but their consumption becomes far less and becomes secondary. The changes are most obvious in Chris, who has given up pornography and masturbation. He is the only one of the respondents who spoke about addiction and who was scared of losing control of his pornography consumption. Christ told the following story:

**Chris, 19:** *‘I haven’t watched pornography for a good year now. There was a time when I was in danger of becoming addicted. I started to think it was disgusting, because I thought it was hurtful to women. [...] During the time when I watched pornography, I constantly masturbated. That’s the reason why I don’t watch pornography anymore. It was always a strong link. When I watched porn, masturbating was automatic. It was part of it and it’s one reason why I don’t watch porn anymore, because then I don’t masturbate anymore either.’ ‘Don’t you masturbate at all anymore?’ ‘No, not at all anymore.’ ‘What does not at all anymore mean?’ ‘The last time maybe four months ago. [...] I just don’t feel the urge anymore. I don’t know why. Of course that automatically means that I get, what’s it called, wet dreams. But that’s not a problem for me. I can joke about it now. But it takes a lot of discipline and it gives me a lot more time, I have to say. In the past I spent a lot of time during the week doing that. In bad weeks I’d even say ten hours.’ ‘With watching porn or masturbating?’ ‘With both. And that’s lost time.’ ‘How many times a day did you masturbate?’ ‘That was three times a day and over the week, that’s three times seven, which is a lot, 21 times. I lost an hour or more and that’s not necessary.’ ‘You haven’t had the urge to do that in the past few months?’ ‘No (smirks).’ ‘How come?’ ‘I don’t know. But it’s deliberate too. That means that when I come home I don’t just sit down in front of the computer and have a wank. Instead I talk on the phone and meet up with friends or do something else, the main thing is I don’t do that. It’s just something that was important to me to get control of.’*

The three respondents with the highest pornography consumption in our study said that they had watched pornography every day over the past four weeks. Their accounts show that they do not think this is particularly dramatic; they do not have fears of succumbing to pornography. Moritz (17) has been unattached for five months; when he had a girlfriend and was having sex, he only watched pornography once a week, *'When you've got a girlfriend, it's not so important'*. Matze (17) is also single and he too has had girlfriends and sex. Almost every evening before going to sleep he watches a film on a television channel. If the film is very arousing, he masturbates, otherwise he goes to sleep. Patrick (19) has had a girlfriend for 18 months, but they only rarely sleep together (twice a month), because she does not have a high libido. When he is surfing the web or checking emails, he often visits porn sites. When he finds one that is arousing, he masturbates, otherwise he does not. For all three 'high users', their masturbation frequency is clearly below the frequency of their pornographic consumption. If the urge is not that strong or they are not in the mood, they can simply switch off the computer.

**Why do boys watch pornography on their own?** In their study about young people's pornographic consumption, Grimm, Rhein and Müller postulate that boys experience strong sexual urges, that they are 'gagging for it' and that their sexual tension leads them to consume pornography, with the goal of releasing this tension.<sup>171</sup> This is a purely urge-driven understanding of (male) sexuality.<sup>172</sup> In our study, 43 of the 80 respondents talked about why they consumed pornography the last time they did so. For the others, the event was too far back or they did not comment on the matter. Only five of them mentioned sexual tension or arousal, such as Marcel and Klaus:

*Marcel, 18: 'If I'm in the mood for sex and I can't have any, then I watch porn.'*

*Klaus, 18: 'To put it plainly, if I have a massive hard-on and it doesn't go away in half an hour, then I have to do something.'*

A much more common reason the young men give when talking about why they consume pornography is not so much sexual urges but boredom and the desire to dispel their boredom (18 out of 43 respondents). The sexual stimuli are sought out in order to enjoy arousal and masturbation. The young people are not driven by their urges, instead they seek out arousal. They use pornography to take advantage of the resource of sexuality to pass the time and experience something exciting and arousing, as the following examples make clear:

<sup>171</sup> Grimm, Rhein, Müller (2010)

<sup>172</sup> Schmidt (2012b)

**Timo, 17:** *'I was bored sitting at home and didn't have anything to do, so I thought: 'What can I do?' I doesn't matter. [...] I was home alone and was bored.'*

**Peter, 16:** *'Out of boredom. [...] It was out of boredom again. I've been out the past few nights and in the evenings I sat at home and thought, 'what now?' [...] I just clicked around out of boredom, I didn't really watch for a long time.'*

**Michael, 17:** *'Boredom. Between school and sports, when I don't have anything to do. [...] I had nothing to do. When you're busy, it doesn't occur to you.'*

Being in the mood for watching it, for arousal and masturbation is the most commonly cited reason after boredom for pornography consumption (10 out of 43). The 'being in the mood' that the boys are referring to may be similar to what was once called a 'drive' or 'urge', but it is important that the young people do not use these words. 'Being in the mood' has positive connotations. It is not something that drives them like an outside power, something they might not even want.

**Dschamal, 18:** *'I was in the mood, it was spontaneous.'*

**Christian, 18:** *'I was in the mood to masturbate. There are these films on porn sites to make masturbating a bit easier.'*

Other reasons that are given (one or two mentions each) are: friends sent a link and they watch it; watching pornography for informative value (*'to refresh what I know'*), to relax and to release non-sexual tension (*'to relax after a stressful day or when I'm angry, just to calm down'*).

### **Digression: what do the parents know?**

The pornographic worlds of young people and their parents (insofar as they have them) are strictly separated from each other; neither side knows about the other's activities. There are only a few exception to this rule: Klaus and Jakob (both 18) have already secretly helped themselves to their parents DVDs. Benjamin (18) has been given pornography by his father, which he then watched them hesitantly and with little enthusiasm (*'I didn't like the one, and then I put on the other one and I disliked it just as much'*). Heiko's (18) father *'borrowed some porn from me'*. Countless young people only consume pornography if nobody is home, others lock their bedroom doors and turn down the volume on the computer or DVD player. The boundaries within families are well established and intact in this area. Young people rarely report parental bans and restrictions. Only Andrej (17, cultural background that has traditional views on the sexes) says that his parents told him he was not allowed to watch pornography and that he was obeying them. A few mention quasi-

moral parental bans, couched in technological justifications, such as that they should avoid pornography to avoid their computer getting 'infected' with viruses.

A good half of the boys with more than sporadic pornography experience (ratings 2 to 4, cf. table 18) are convinced or believe that their parents know nothing about their pornographic consumption. A quarter believe the parents assume that they watch pornography, even though they had never spoken about it, because it is 'normal' for boys. Tom (18) who lives with his mother said, for example that *'We have never actively spoken about it. She can imagine it. I'm a normal teenager. That's why (laughs).'* Another quarter say that the parents know and that they are relaxed about their son's pornographic consumption (such as Klaus and Fabian). Nobody reports sanctions.

**Klaus, 18:** *'It's something natural for [my parents]. They know that I've been unattached for two years now, but they don't make a fuss about it.'*

**Fabian, 17:** *'I assume that [my parents] have been aware of it before, and I don't really have a problem with it. It's just part of it these days. The internet is accessible to everyone. Maybe thirty, forty or ten years ago it was still considered a sin. Today everybody's doing it. It starts with ten-year-olds.'* 'What if your parents were to catch you watching porn?' *'Oh, that happened three weeks or so ago. It was hilarious. My father (laughs) sat down next to me and wanted to watch it too. I switched it off instead and it was fine. He just told me to watch out that I didn't get on to paid sites. I told him I would be careful.'*

Few young people would react as confidently, calmly and objectively as Fabian if their parents were to catch them in the act. Most say that it would be embarrassing, unpleasant and awkward for them and their parents if their parents were to know about their pornography consumption or catch them watching it (Kevin, Peter). The reason for this is not some moral embarrassment, but the violation of their privacy. Few fear sanctions, reprimands, conversations or lecturing interventions (Rüdiger). Most expect their parents to be relaxed and casual, as Fabian describes, or that they will not care and accept it without comment (Olli). Here are some responses to the question: 'Do your parents know that you watch porn?':

**Kevin, 17:** *'I hope not. It would be really embarrassing for me and it would be a bit embarrassing for them. I haven't met many who say they've told their parents (laughs).'*

**Peter, 16:** *'They don't directly know. But I think they can imagine it. [If they were to catch me] it would be very unpleasant and very embarrassing. But if it happens, it happens and then there's nothing you can do about it anymore. And it's nothing unnatural.'*

**Rüdiger, 17:** ‘Do your parents know that you watch that?’ ‘No.’ ‘And what do you think would happen, if they caught you?’ ‘I don’t think they’d be that thrilled. They’d be horrified at first, because I don’t think they can imagine me doing something like that. But on the other hand my parents are very intelligent people who definitely wouldn’t threaten me with consequences. They’d talk to me about it, why I was doing it and what I thought about it. But there wouldn’t be grave consequences.’

**Olli, 18:** ‘I don’t know. I haven’t talked to them about it. [My mother] has caught me having sex, I don’t know what she would do if she came in while I was masturbating. I think she would go out again; I don’t think she would watch.’

Most young men assume that their parents are much more tolerant and relaxed about the subject of young people and pornography than is the case in the media and among educators.<sup>173</sup> At the same time parents and young people make sure that both sides’ buffer zones are respected, the family’s boundaries regarding sexual matters and the young people’s privacy are respected.

### 4.2.3 Consuming pornography with others

After the in-depth analysis of the solo-setting, this section will look at the various forms of communal pornographic consumption, namely:

- (1) the homosocial setting;
- (2) the heterosocial setting;
- (3) the couple setting.

Each setting stands for specific significances and functions of pornography.<sup>174</sup>

#### (1) HOMOSOCIAL SETTING

More than half of the boys surveyed have already watched pornography together with other boys, especially online, but also on mobile phones and on DVDs. They are in groups of two, and more often in groups of three to six peers. They meet up to watch pornography, to overcome their boredom while together or to fill the breaks of their internet parties in this way. The homosocial setting is particularly common for the ‘first time’ and the ‘craziest porn experience’: more boys watch their first pornographic film together with other boys than on their own, therefore their pornographic experience usually begins in a boys’ group. A very large number

<sup>173</sup> Archetypal for this are Siggelkow, Büscher (2008); for criticism see Lautmann (2010); Weller (2010)

<sup>174</sup> Attwood (2005)

of boys have seen non-mainstream, grotesque or 'gross pornography' with other boys or on the recommendation of their peers.

Watching pornography alone or with other boys are two very different events, the function and affect are wholly different. When watching pornography alone, the main point is increasing and enjoying arousal as well as masturbation. When watching pornography with peers, it is about demonstrating a cool attitude and competence with regard to sex, including shocking sex. Sexual arousal is avoided, it is considered uncool (if it is noticed), the young people laugh it off and talk themselves out of it. The predominant affects are having fun, enjoying making fun of what they see and making jokes. Watching pornography together '*is more about the fun factor than the arousing aspect*,' says Moritz (17). Here are some examples of reactions in the homosocial setting:

**Christian, 18:** *'We've watched it with friends, just for fun and to make fun of it. That it's so pointless.'*

**Horst, 17:** *'I thought it was funny. But that's it. My friend and I killed ourselves laughing. We were total heroes, I'd say (laughs).'*

**Dschamal, 18:** *'One friend turned something on for fun once. I wasn't turned on because my friend was there, so that's not an arousing situation. I just watched. It would only arouse me if I were on my own, but not with my mate right next to me. I don't like it when there are other people there.'*

What is even more common than consuming pornography together, is boys of the same age communicating about pornography. In the peer group, friends send it via mobile phones and the internet as streams, they share links to pornographic films and suggest relevant websites and they borrow DVDs together. They supply each other and inform each other about the material available. The tips about pornography that is particularly 'worth watching' rarely applies to films that would be most suitable to support masturbation; instead they refer to the grotesque, severe and revolting pornography. The boys share opinions and experiences about pornography. The boys are more likely to talk openly about pornography to their male friends than to their steady girlfriend.

In individual cases peer communication also affects private material. Two of the 80 boys surveyed said that their friends had shown them erotic pictures or films of their girlfriend without the latter knowing about it. In one case the young woman had stripped for her boyfriend, in the other case the boyfriend secretly filmed them having sex. Even though it was tough for both of the protagonists to distance themselves from their friends' behaviour, their unease about this kind of intimate betrayal is obvious. Their knowledge is particularly stressful when the boy knows

the girl whose images have been revealed. The following paragraphs document the two cases:

**Peter, 16:** *'Wow, now I'm wondering whether to talk about it here or not because it's quite... Fine. It's like this. A female friend of mine got undressed on camera at a mate's house. I know about it, but she doesn't know that I know. That was difficult for me.'* 'Is it still difficult for you?' 'Right now? Yes, because I can't tell her because that would be bad for my mate.' 'Okay, that means he showed you the pictures too, right?' 'Yes, I know everything, I saw everything. Some other people know about it too, but they know about it from him. I don't know how many people. Around ten, fifteen.' 'They all saw these images?' 'Maybe fewer have actually seen the images, maybe five people.' 'How long ago was this?' 'Not long. Three weeks.'

**Daniel, 17:** *'A mate showed us his homemade [video].'* 'What was on it?' 'Everything.' 'What was your friend doing?' 'He was sleeping with his girlfriend. He recorded it.' 'Did she know about that?' 'No, and fortunately she didn't find out.' 'Does she know about it now?' '[...] I hope not. Only his best friends know about it.' 'What do you think about it?' 'It's his business.' 'Would you do it too?' 'Maybe, I don't know.'

## **(2) HETEROSOCIAL SETTING:**

Only six of the boys say that they have already watched pornography in a mixed-gender group, such as at a party, or while 'hanging out' together at home or at school (on mobile phones and laptops). The girls react with boredom and rejection. Sometimes (in the classroom or in the school yard) the girls do not show up at the scene or they withdraw quickly, even though school is a heterosocial setting.

**Chris, 19:** 'Have you ever watched pornography with others?' *'I watched not a porn film but an erotic film with several male and female friends. The girls thought it was gross and revolting. The guys didn't care. They were probably used to harder stuff.'* 'Why did the girls think it was revolting?' 'Because, and this is my general belief, society doesn't expect women to watch pornography. But I'm sure that they watch pornography too, just not as much as men.'

The heterosocial setting plays a much smaller role than the homosocial setting. The young people see themselves as strangers while viewing pornography together, separating themselves from their companions. When they do watch pornography together, they react very differently. All this demonstrates to what extent pornographic consumption and interest is gender-based.



### (3) COUPLE SETTING

Girlfriends and boyfriends also tend to avoid each other when it comes to pornography: only a few talk about whether and what experiences they have had with pornography. Most of them avoid watching pornography together, including those boys who are very experienced and active in their pornographic consumption.

Only one in four respondents has already watched pornographic films together with a steady girlfriend. Most of them have only done this once or a few times. Watching pornography together is not an established practice in any of the couples. With one exception, the young men experienced in watching pornography as a couple also watch it alone and during masturbation. Only Ronny (18) feels watching pornography is only worthwhile in company: *'Yes, I've watched porn but only with my girlfriend. I don't do that on my own.'* Of those who have not yet seen pornography with their girlfriend, most of them do not want to do so in the future either (Alexander); a minority expresses cautious interest in watching it as a couple (Manfred):

**Alexander, 19:** *'Do you have the desire or does she [that you watch pornography together]?' 'Not at all. I always think porn is a replacement for this love that you have for someone or that you can live it. That's what I think. And since I can have the situation live, I don't need an erotic movie.'* (high-school student, steady relationship for eight months)

**Manfred, 17:** *'Do you plan to do that with her [watching a porn film]?' 'Yes, why not? I wouldn't say no.' 'Have you talked about watching pornography together?' 'No, not yet (laughs). No, not yet. I could raise it (laughs).'* (high-school student, steady relationship for two and a half years)

Young women who watch pornography with their boyfriends unanimously emphasize that their boyfriends were more interested, and more aroused, than they were. The young men do not notice such gender differences to the same extent. According to their reports the initiative sometimes comes from the boys and sometimes from the girls. The atmosphere when watching pornography together is described as casual, amused and teasing. Only one respondent reported an oppressive, embarrassing atmosphere, which was still arousing for both parties. Around one in two respondents with experience in viewing pornography with a partner say that they went on to have sex with their girlfriend. Some couples use shared pornographic consumption to watch and try something new (Sven, Ferdinand).

**Sven, 18:** *'It was together with my ex-girlfriend. We watched it together.' 'Whose idea was it?' 'I'd say it was mine because at 16 she's still a bit inexperienced. She said she had wanted to try something new, but she didn't come up with anything specific. I said to her we could watch a porn film if she wanted to. She agreed and then we watched a porn film and after that we looked at specific scenes again, some of which I really liked and some*



of which she really liked, regarding positions. We watched them again and also tried them out occasionally.' (vocational-college student, currently single, reporting on his last relationship)

**Ferdinand, 19:** *'She [his girlfriend] watched it and said 'you have to come and see this, it's very funny!' It was great to get ideas. If you don't have any ideas about what you can do, then you spend a couple of hours watching pornography online and you get an idea of what to do next. [...] I thought it was fun.'* *'Did you have sex afterwards?'* *'Yes (laughs).'* *'And did you do something different from normal?'* *'I think so. We probably tried something. I can't say what though.'* (high-school student, steady relationship for two years)

**Kurt, 17:** *'We watched a porn film for fun on Youporn, this website, and it was really funny because it was all unrealistic and fake. We really laughed about it, it was brilliant. We were both watching it for fun for breakfast.'* (vocational-college student, steady relationship for two years)

**Markus 19:** *'A couple of weeks ago we watched a porn film for the first time. I thought it was a bit strange. If you watch porn as a boy, that's normal, but it's quite different watching it with your girlfriend. It was a bit strange [...]. I think it was arousing for her. It was arousing for me too, it's not that it wasn't. But I think she was a bit more aroused than me. She was more in the mood for sex as a result. She was clearly more in the mood for sex.'* *'Did you have sex afterwards or during?'* *'Afterwards.'* *'Did you do anything different during sex then?'* *'No, like always.'* (vocational-college student, steady relationship for two months)

4

We have already mentioned that adolescent couples only rarely talk about whether, how often and what pornographic films they use when they are alone. In general, that remains a secret, as do their masturbation habits. The few young people who open up to their girlfriends are more likely to be confronted with irritation (*'She was definitely a bit annoyed'*, Ibrahim, 17), but sometimes also with indulgence (*'She thought it was understandable'*, Moritz, 17). If we ask the boys whether their girlfriend watches pornography on her own, the typical response is: *'I don't know. We don't talk about it. But I find it hard to imagine'* (Dschalal, 18). Most of the young men would not consider it an act of infidelity if their girlfriend watched pornography and believe that they would react casually, Christian for example (18): *'No, I wouldn't be jealous. I watch it too. As long as she's not with another guy and they start something, it's okay.'* One reason for this relaxed attitude is probably because they know how uninterested girls of their age are in pornography. Only Franz (18) exhibited an openly hostile as well as a hypocritical attitude towards watching pornography (alone). If a girlfriend – which rarely happens – is open about her pornographic consumption and does not make a secret about her interest in it, then her partners react with insecurity and irritation (Kurt, 17).

**Franz, 18:** ‘Do you know if Franzl has ever watched pornography on her own?’ *‘Yes, I know that. She hasn’t done it; but if she were to do it, I wouldn’t like it.’* ‘Why not?’ *‘Because obviously she has me, she doesn’t need to watch something like that.’* ‘Why are you allowed to?’ *‘Because I’m the boy. I’m the boy.’* ‘Didn’t you previously say you were in favour of equality?’ *‘Yes, but not in the... no, it’s common sense. What woman watches pornography on her own? She doesn’t do that. I’ve asked her.’* (vocational-college student, steady relationship for two years)

**Kurt, 17:** ‘Do you know if Maria watches pornography?’ *‘Yes, she always watches lesbian porn. From time to time because she thinks it’s arousing. It’s not that she’s a lesbian or bi, but she thinks it’s, I don’t know, she always thinks it funny when she sees her kind drooling over each other and kissing each other (laughs).’* ‘How do you feel about Maria watching lesbian pornography?’ *‘On the one hand I think it’s confusing. On the other hand it’s quite funny, when she tells me about what she’s watched. She does it for fun, to annoy me with it.’* ‘Does that make you jealous?’ *‘No, not really, but I think it’s confusing that she watches stuff like that.’* (vocational-college student, steady relationship for two years)

Most of the adolescent couples avoid watching pornography together, the ones who do have experience with that tend to be the ones who have already been together for quite a while. The young men who have experience in watching pornography as a couple say (unlike the young women) that this practice is surprisingly gender-egalitarian with regard to interest and stimulation.

#### **4.2.4 The influence of pornography consumption on sexual practices and the perception of women**

The selective way in which pornography is dealt with suggests that even frequent consumption of pornography has hardly any influence on the pattern of sexual desire. We will now investigate whether and how pornographic consumption influences the young men’s sexual practices in their opinion. Of the 64 boys who have more than sporadic pornographic experience (rating 2 to 4, cf. table 18), a clear majority say that the pornographic films can give them practical ideas and that they try them out in their sex lives. These ideas refer exclusively to mainstream sexual practices, especially to sexual positions for intercourse (cf. Dieter, 18), more rarely to stimulative practices (affection, oral sex, e.g. Rüdiger, 17, Andreas, 17). The boundaries of this eagerness to experiment are marked already by anal sex (which only one respondent said he could envisage, namely Kevin, 18). The notion that a ‘threesome’ could be appealing is one a few boys have got from pornographic consumption, but so far they have kept their interest in their imagination. Some boys who are still without sexual intercourse experience hope

they will be a little better prepared for their ‘first time’ by watching pornography (e.g. Dschamal, 18). There is agreement that sexual competencies are acquired by real experiences and that pornography is a tool of limited use in this area (e.g. Timo, 17). The following responses to the question: ‘Are there things about sex that you learned from watching pornography?’ may illustrate our findings.

**Dieter, 18:** *‘Yes, positions. It’s not directly that you’re copying something, but it makes you think ‘I could try that’. I could try something with my girlfriend, like doggy style or something like that. I just start feeling like I’d like to try that.’ ‘Did you try it?’ ‘Exactly.’*

**Rüdiger, 17:** *‘Things about what I’m allowed to do, like I’m allowed to kiss a woman’s nipples or her neck, in fact that’s very desired. Or about how oral sex on each other works.’*

**Andreas, 17:** *‘Mainly how a man orally pleasures a woman. If you don’t watch things like that and don’t talk to anyone about it, then you don’t know how to do it. You watch that and think you could give that a go. You do that and when you see that your girlfriend likes it, it’s nice.’*

**Kevin, 18:** *‘Yes, anal sex for example. Really early on I didn’t know about that at all.’ ‘Did you try anal sex?’ ‘Yes, with my previous girlfriend, with Susanna.’ ‘And how was it for you?’ ‘It was something new. It was like... you’re a bit nervous because you’re trying something new. I think normal sex is better, but it makes a change.’*

**Dschamal, 18:** *‘I think you copy certain positions and methods. When I have my first time, I’ll definitely know how far I can go. I think it won’t be bad. It’ll be a little crutch for me.’*

**Timo, 17:** *‘Not really. It’s more about learning by doing, than ‘watch it and know what to do’. Of course you see what it looks like and that solidifies it in your head and expands your horizons of what’s possible. But I’ve never implemented something or thought, ‘Hey, that looked cool in the porn film, let’s try that’.*

In summary: pornography consumption can expand the interactive sexual scripts that lie more at the surface and that have been acquired post-puberty<sup>175</sup> but it cannot really influence the psychological scripts that are rooted early in an individual’s life and which determine the blueprint of individual sexual desire.<sup>176</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Simon, Gagnon (1986)

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Schmidt (2011) for the theoretical justification

Of the 57 boys<sup>177</sup> who were asked about ‘How, in your experiences, are women and men portrayed in pornography?’, most of them (60%) clearly point out a hierarchical relationship between the genders. The men are in the leadership position in the pornographic films, they are dominant, ‘above the woman’, higher, they say what happens, they are merciless machos, conquerors, in the power position, misogynistic, they submit women, they are the bosses, ‘shaggers, who take women harshly’ etc. In pornographic films, women are sex objects, objects of arousal and desire, they are humiliated, made to be submissive, they are degraded, they become tools for men, despised, ‘like a piece of meat’, dominated, used, debased, ‘fuck pieces’, ‘fucked like mad’, slutty etc.

Almost all the boys who describe such a relationship morally reject it, they accept it at all only because that is what it is like in pornography. Most of them consider it typical of pornography, meaning they think that real sexuality between men and women is more egalitarian because men and women have become emancipated from the old clichés. Some, however, emphasize that such interactions could be real, if only in certain groups or in special circumstances. The following interview excerpts reveal the breadth of the role-critical comments:

**Andreas, 17:** *‘I think that the women are always presented as somewhat inferior people and the man is always the dominant figure. That’s a big porn cliché. Basically you have a stud and he takes them harshly and that’s what happens. It always comes across as if the woman is just an object, I think.’*  
‘Do you think that portrayal is realistic?’ *‘No, I don’t think so. In real life, when you’re having sex with someone, then you pay attention to each other and you do what the other person wants.’*

**Sebastian, 17:** *‘It’s one of the reasons why I don’t like pornography. The woman is dominated. That’s how it feels to me. It looks like she’s just being used. It disgusts me sometimes. It’s really outrageous sometimes.’* ‘Is it realistic?’ *‘I think sometimes, but not always, you can’t generalize like that.’*

**177** 16 respondents with sporadic or low pornographic experience (ratings 1 and 2, cf. table 18) made no statements about this area and the same is true for seven boys with moderate and high pornographic consumption.

**Dieter, 18:** *'I think that women are degraded far too often. That's one reason why I don't consume much of this medium, because I can't deal with the role of the woman. Don't get me wrong, I'm not some great feminist, but I still think that this platform isn't meant for degrading someone's dignity. I don't think it's right what's done to women, that they're just seen as objects of desire. Every second porn title, if you browse through them are things like 'fucked hard', 'brutally fucked' or whatever it's called, 'fucked in the mouth', where I just think my girlfriend gives me a blowjob. It's a big difference.'* 'Do you think the depiction of women and men in pornography is realistic?' 'No.'

**Kurt, 17:** *'The men are always portrayed as huge animals with massive penises. They sometimes have real whoppers. You think they want to beat you up with it, but the women are always these primitive creatures who're just fucked hard and who're also beaten. The man is always the grand guy and the woman is under the man and always has to do what he wants. I don't think that's okay, I don't like that hierarchy.'* 'Do you think it's realistic, what's shown in pornography or is it unrealistic?' 'Well, I'm sure it is realistic because in some households or in my circle of friends it happens like that.'

4

It is interesting that the frequency of the critical perception of the gender relationship in pornography is not correlated with the intensity of pornographic experience: the opinions of boys with sporadic and low pornographic experience on the one hand and with moderate or high pornographic experience on the other hand do not differ. That means two things: (in our sample) high consumption does not reduce the gender-critical perspective of pornography; and this perspective is also critical when the boys have only seen few or no pornographic films. This suggests that the young people's assessment is shaped more by the discourse about pornography than by their own experiences and observations. This also explains why blatant gender messages that are not addressed in the discourse about pornography are also virtually not discussed by the young people, such as the ferocity of the woman's desire in pornography, which the man has to service with a lot of sexual competence, discipline, effort and stamina. If we only cite the relationship of suppression and reduce the woman in this way, then we deny the potency of women in pornography. This makes sense because this potency can be disturbing to (young) men. Only very few young people hint at such fears. Peter (16) for example responds to the question about whether his girlfriend should be like the women in pornography with *'No, I hope not. Not so horny all the time.'*

## Is sex in pornography realistic?

With regard to the gender relationship, young men across the board say that pornography is not close to their own reality. That is also true for the sexuality shown in pornography. Even though they recognize their sexuality or their fantasies in certain practices and positions shown in pornography, young people see fundamental differences between sex in pornography and the sexuality that they themselves practise and desire. The central differences that are cited are emotional and romantic aspects:<sup>178</sup> pornography is about 'pure sex without emotion', the female and male partners have no relationship to each other. In the sexuality they themselves practice or desire, it is intimate and emotional, stroking and foreplay are important, they have more time, respect and trust for each other and 'it's all much nicer with love'. Some point out the staged aspect of pornography ('plumber wants to repair the tap, has sex with the housewife'), some the artificial nature ('They change positions every five seconds'), the effusive aspect ('I've never experienced a woman squeak like that') and the public nature ('We do it for us, not because thousands of people are watching us'). Some boys emphasize that a one-night-stand, a sexual practice that does not play a central role among young people, resembles sex in pornography the most. Overall, young people's statements about the differences between sex in pornography and their own sexual experiences do not vary much so that two examples will suffice as illustration:

*Timo, 17: 'Do you feel that sex with your girlfriend is like sex in pornography?' 'Not at all. It's totally different. Everything's much slower and pleasanter, it's more atmospheric and not just constant screwing. It's not in, out and done, it's about having fun and taking time for it.'* 'Are there any similarities?' 'Of course there are similarities. It's about the same thing, but the implementation is very, very different. We take a lot of time beforehand. The whole thing with the before and the after and all of it can last two hours, that's quite normal and that's different in pornography. The average film lasts seven minutes, wham, bam and done.' (high-school student)

*Tim, 17: 'In a relationship, love and all that is part of it. The [porn stars] just do it for money. I don't think they think about that.'* 'The sex itself, how is it different to what you experience with a partner?' 'It's definitely different because there are feelings that don't play a part in pornography.' (vocational-college student)

<sup>178</sup> Cf. also Lofgren-Martenson, Mansson (2010)

Both with regard to the gender relationship and with regard to the nature and quality of the sexuality the young people make a clear distinction between pornography and the real sexual world. Their sexual reality is not like the sexuality depicted in pornography and they do not want it to become like that either. Dominik (19) summarizes this attitude: *'You should be able to distinguish between the virtual world and the real world. The people who can't do that should get rid of their computer again. For me there's a virtual world and a real world. And I keep them apart. When I'm online, I'm online.'*

#### 4.2.5 Conclusion

Boys generally consume pornography online these days. The world of pornography is clearly divided into two for them. They make a distinction between 'normal' and 'arousing' footage on the one hand and 'perverse' pornography and pornography that is a 'turn off'. They use the pornography in the former group far more often, especially alone and often in connection with masturbation. They only use the latter in the homosocial context for ribald amusement and sometimes macho-like behaviour. Boys sometimes watch pornography with their girlfriends for mutual stimulation and in search of increased variety to their sex lives. Overall, young men's treatment of pornography is selective. They have preferences that tend to be conventional and heterocentric. Pornographic consumption has an influence on their willingness to try new sexual positions and oral sex either in real life or in their fantasies. A critical opinion about the role of men and women in conventional pornography is very widespread among the young men, including among those with high pornographic consumption. Internet pornography replaces conventional masturbation aids (that is probably its biggest effect) without increasing masturbation frequency. Young people make a clear distinction between their real sexual world and the virtual one. They do not want to replace the one with the other. They critically separate themselves from the image of women portrayed in pornography and do not consider themselves in danger of internalising it. Their treatment of pornography is more relaxed than the public debate about it.







# 5

## *Facets of young people's sexual behaviour*

### **5.1** *In love with whom? – Sexual orientation*

*Anja Wermann and Silja Matthiesen*

### **5.2** *Mirror, mirror on the wall... - young people's experience of their own bodies and body modifications*

*Anja Wermann and Silja Matthiesen*

### **5.3** *Nice hair, but not there – pubic hair removal*

*Jasmin Mainka and Silja Matthiesen*

### **5.4** *How does my body feel? – Masturbation*

*André Aude and Silja Matthiesen*

# Facets of young people's sexual behaviour

*Anja Wermann, Jasmin Mainka, Silja Matthiesen,  
André Aude*

In addition to the aspects examined in detail, the qualitative interviews also provide a wealth of further information that allows the results to be better embedded. It shows different facets of youth sexuality in the internet age and thereby supplements the picture. The strength of the connection between sexuality and internet use varies.

- First we will look at sexual orientation. Almost all of the respondents said they were heterosexual, nevertheless they also report same-sex experiences.
- How they experience their own body and body modifications are a central aspect for young people, who have noticed big changes to their bodies during puberty. Questions about presentation and personal wellbeing occupy them.
- Closely linked to this topic is the question of pubic hair removal, something most of the young people interviewed have a clear opinion about.
- Masturbation stands out as the fourth focal point. There are statements about it in all of the 160 interviews.

These issues were only addressed on the side in these interviews, meaning they were not asked about systematically or extensively. For that reason we do not claim to have dealt with these subjects comprehensively.

## 5.1 In love with whom? – Sexual orientation

*Anja Wermann and Silja Matthiesen*

Our sample is made up almost exclusively of heterosexual young people: except for two girls, who class themselves as bisexual, all the 158 other young people call themselves heterosexual. Nevertheless, in this chapter we want to look at the few non-heterosexual experiences our respondents mention. We asked all the young people whether they tended to fall in love with men or women or both and whether they had already had a same-sex experience.

According to extreme estimates, the average for the whole of Germany is that 5% of the total adult population and up to 10% of city dwellers are homosexual.<sup>179</sup> These figures are sometimes applied to young people in the literature,<sup>180</sup> but there is no empirical data about the percentage of non-heterosexual young people in Germany. The major sex surveys conducted in the United States, France and England in the early 1990s find very much lower numbers among adults: a homosexual or bisexual identity was cited by 2.8 % of the men and 1.4 % of the women in the United States; the prevalence of same-sex experiences among men last year was 2.7 % (USA), 1.1 % (France) and 1.1 % (Great Britain), and thus higher than among women (1.3 % USA, 0.3 % France, 0.4 % Great Britain), but still very much lower than the estimates above would have us believe.<sup>181</sup> Current representative figures for young people in the United States can be found in the National survey of Sexual Health and Behavior (NSSHB): of 820 14–17-year-olds, 3.3 % of the boys and 0.2 % of the girls say they are homosexual or bisexual.<sup>182</sup>

In our sample the percentage of homosexual or bisexual young people is even lower than is to be expected from these figures. What are the causes of the very low percentage of non-heterosexual participants? We would like to present three explanations for discussion.

- It is likely that the estimates of how much homosexuality there is among young people are too high because the majority of them biographically have not reached their first sexual experiences yet, or they are before their ‘coming out’. It could well be that a certain percentage of those who will consider themselves not heterosexual as adults do not know that yet between the ages of 16 and 19.<sup>183</sup> This assumption also rejects the notion of monosexuality,<sup>184</sup> believing instead that

<sup>179</sup> Braun, Martin (2000), p. 15; Decker and von Stritzky conducted a three-generation study in which they found that 6% of the men they surveyed defined themselves as homosexual or bisexual. This figure was significantly lower among women. Cf. Decker, von Stritzky (2004)

<sup>180</sup> Schmauch (2010), p. 300

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Johnson et al. (1994); Laumann et al. (1994); Spira, Bajos, ACSF Group (1994)

<sup>182</sup> Herbenick et al. (2010), p. 258

<sup>183</sup> Watzlawick, Heine (2009), p. 101

<sup>184</sup> Schmidt (2004a), p. 138 ff.

sexual orientation can change over a lifetime. In addition studies suggest that the phase of sexual experimentation among same-sex young people occurs late compared with heterosexual young people.<sup>185</sup>

- A second explanation would be that homosexual and bisexual young people did not participate in the survey because they felt too insecure to express their sexual orientation to others, even in an anonymous interview.
- We cannot rule out that non-heterosexual young people systematically refused to participate in the research project because they felt the study was not for them, despite us explicitly inviting everyone to participate, regardless of their sexual orientation, their current relationship status and regardless of whether they have already had sexual experiences or not.<sup>186</sup>

### 5.1.1 The respondents' sexual orientation

The reactions of the 158 heterosexual young people to the question about loving someone of the same gender were very varied. They range from extremely brief statements about being heterosexual to in-depth and thought-through positions about homosexuality. However, the short, single syllable responses are in the clear majority. The most common responses were neutral, short ones without value judgements, often expressing their own heterosexuality in just one word. In some of the responses the heterosexual orientation is emphasized further and the suggested possibility of a homosexual orientation firmly rejected.

*Ralf, 17: 'Yes, I'm only into women. (...) 1000 percent.'*

*Gönül, 18: 'No, men of course!'*

Other respondents evidently felt they had to do more than just express their own heterosexual orientation, but also voice their tolerance of non-heterosexual people.

*Heidi, 19: 'I'm definitely heterosexual. I don't have a problem with lesbians or with bisexuality.'*

*Leon, 18: 'Definitely women. (...) I don't mind gay people, but I couldn't imagine doing anything with a gay guy.'*

<sup>185</sup> Schmauch (2010), p. 29

<sup>186</sup> Dannenbeck and Stich reported on a similar effect: among the 60 young people and young adults they surveyed, there were no homosexual participants; three young women said their orientation was bisexual. Cf. Dannenbeck, Stich (2005), p. 21

A few of the respondents can imagine falling in love with a person of the same gender one day, although they have not done so yet:

**Katja, 17:** *'Yes, I could imagine it. There's nothing suggesting I couldn't in principle.'*

**Daniel, 17:** *'It could happen but at the moment it's really not my thing. I'm going to stick with women.'*

Others categorically reject this notion:

**Angi, 17:** *'Oh my God. No. Never.'*

Only four of the respondents gave in-depth and thought-through answers. They express a confrontation with the hypothetical possibility of falling in love with a person of the same sex. The considerations include experiences male and female friends have had as well as the social climate. Here are two examples:

**Felix, 18:** *'No, that's never happened. To be honest, I can't imagine it either. I would say I've dealt with the subject quite intensively. (...) Two of my friends are homosexual. For that reason I really confronted the subject. A friend of mine (...) will often get into controversial discussions with you because he thinks that everyone fancies men and women and it's just all on a sliding scale. For a long time he tried to convince me that that's true for me too, but I haven't felt it to be honest and I approached the subject with an open mind.'*

**Janina, 19:** *'It hasn't happened to me yet, but I have to admit, I'm quite curious about the sexual aspect. Why not? I could imagine that it happens. But to say I'd be a lesbian or bisexual is a bit difficult right now, being gay is more respected. I could imagine it being very difficult, but if it happens, it happens and if not, then not.'*

Eight girls (six from Hamburg and two from Leipzig) express a certain openness and curiosity towards same-sex experiences, without that defining their sexual orientation. Here are some examples of that too:

**Tanja, 17:** *'I don't know about falling in love. To be honest, I don't know about properly falling in love. But I could imagine getting involved with a woman, let's put it like that.'*

*Heidi, 19: 'I have no interest in sleeping with a woman but it could happen. It's not that I find women unattractive. I think women are very attractive (...).'*

*Caroline, 17: 'I wouldn't be averse to it, but it's not the case that I'm into women either.'*

The only one of the boys who says that he does not *'know whether that will change but it's heterosexual at the moment'* is 17-year-old David, revealing a certain openness regarding the homosexual orientation. A similar difference between the genders was found in a study about 'gender-specific differences regarding the flexibility of sexual orientation'.<sup>187</sup> According to this study, heterosexual women change their sexual orientation and are more flexible with it than heterosexual men in the dimensions of 'sexual fantasies' and 'romantic attraction'. In the 2009 BRAVO Dr. Sommer study 10% of the female respondents reported same-sex fantasies, while only 2% of the boys did so.<sup>188</sup> One reason for this could be the increasing disappearance of temporary homosexuality in heterosexual boys, which has been observed for some decades now:

Between the 1970s and 1990s the number of 18-year-old male high-school students who had already had a sexual experience with another boy dropped from 20% to 5%.<sup>189</sup> Schmidt believes the cause of this is the omnipresent categorization of sexual orientation into 'homosexual/heterosexual' so that same-sex experiences among boys quickly get labelled as 'gay', a label most would prefer to avoid.

### 5.1.2 Same-sex experiences among heterosexual young people

Even though the majority of the young people surveyed class themselves as heterosexual, some do report same-sex experiences, ranging from timid kisses to mutual genital stimulation.

Girls are more open and willing to experiment. They report same-sex experiences more often than the boys surveyed. 24 girls, meaning more than a quarter of our female respondents, have already kissed another girl at least once. The motives and occasions for these kisses among female friends vary greatly. The most common reasons are curiosity, being in the mood to try it out and *'practising kissing'*. Often the girls kiss *'just because'*, because they are drunk or because they were asked to while playing *'truth or dare'* or *'spin the bottle'*. In a few cases the girls want to annoy or turn on boys who are present:

*Fatma, 19: 'We were five best girlfriends and we had a sleepover at one of*

<sup>187</sup> Kinnish et al. (2004)

<sup>188</sup> BRAVO (2009)

<sup>189</sup> Schmidt (2004a), p. 141 ff.

our places on Friday and when you're that age [12 to 13] then you practise that or try it out.'

**Yasmin, 17:** 'Usually when we've been partying. We've had a bit of a drink, or at break, when we've had nothing to do and it just happened like that.'

**Tanja, 17:** 'I'm sure I've kissed my girlfriends thousands of times while tipsy. (...) We just annoy the boys but it doesn't mean anything.'

**Heidi, 19:** 'With one girlfriend (...) but that was always just to turn on the guys who were around us.'

Most of the kisses between girls did not arise from sexual desire. Therefore they were not perceived or categorized as sexually arousing. For most of them it is clear that 'Kissing (...) is nice and okay, but that's it,' as 17-year-old Silvia put it.

Very few women can conceive of going beyond kissing with another woman. Four of the respondents have already done this with a good friend. Here too there were varying motives: curiosity and the desire to try it out with a woman, as well as the desire for sex and a strong physical attraction between two women. The inhibitions are overcome with alcohol and the situation has remained a one-off for all of the four women. We want to document all the four same-sex situations here:

**Jennifer, 17:** 'Just to try it out [with my best friend]. We were alone [and] we were drinking. We kissed and then stroked each other more and that was it.'

**Sabine, 18:** 'We really wanted to know what it's like with a woman. We talked about it and then we did it, at her house. First we kissed, then we took our clothes off and then we brought each other off with our hands. (...) A woman is much more tender than a man but I still don't think it's that great.'

**Sissi, 18:** 'I went a bit further once (...) when I was 16 (...). It was once and when I was drunk with a good friend. It was strange. It has always been the case that we like each other physically. We laughed about it once and never talked about it again.'

**Caroline, 17:** 'It happened on my 16th birthday. We were a bit drunk and she was in the mood for sex and then we did it for each other. (...) It was a friend of mine and I've known her for quite a while. [It was] nice. (...) I think [I'd do it again] if I were drunk. (...) Because I had some inhibitions.'

Three female vocational-college students report that they have participated in a threesome (one man, two women). The striking fact about these three stories is that none of the young women really enjoyed it. Instead, the sexual act with another girl was more for the benefit of the boy/man who was present:

**Sandra, 16:** *'One girlfriend and someone else (...) At first it was strange but after a while it was fine. When I was alone with my friend (...) we laughed about it (...) because it was funny.'*

**Nele, 18:** *'I was drunk so it wasn't terrible, but when things got going and my boyfriend started getting it on with my best friend, I didn't think it was funny anymore. I didn't say anything because I suggested it with her (...) but I didn't think it was great. (...) I think it would have been better with a girl we didn't know (...). You can avoid each other afterwards (...) but we had to have a proper chat about it afterwards (...) Not every boy will experience that, with one half-black girl and a blonde girl so it was very exciting for him.'*

**Nadine, 18,** experienced a threesome with a girlfriend and an unknown man who they had met just before. Upon his suggestion they went *'into the woods, which was crap too (...) and then we had a threesome.'* She had talked with her friend beforehand and they agreed that *'you have to have experiences, otherwise you won't know if it's fun for you or not'*. Nadine found out that she *'could never be a lesbian because I thought it was almost gross (...) touching her.'* For the man it was *'great (...), one girl giving him a blowjob and the other doing something else. Of course he thought it was great.'*

All three of the girls appear to have focused more on putting on a show for the man in these sexual situations, than on their own sexual desire. It is clear they had a strong desire to offer their boyfriend or sexual partner something special. When asked whether they took over images from pornography here, Sandra answers with rejection, *'it would have happened without pornography too.'* Interestingly, none of the young women we surveyed who had a sexual experience with a woman questioned their heterosexual orientation. On the contrary: the same-sex experiences categorize youth as a life phase where experimentation is important for learning what they like and dislike sexually. *'You have to get experience,'* as 18-year-old Nadine summarizes laconically.

Only six male respondents reported same-sex experiences. Tom (18) immediately emphasized that it was nothing but a fun *'kiss on the mouth'*, which was common in his group of friends and he did not view it as a sexual experience. All of the experiences described occurred a while back. The social context is spin the bottle, practising kissing and experimenting:



**Philip, 19:** *'It was when I was 13 with my best friend at the time. (...) That's when I knew I was heterosexual and was interested in women.'*

**Daniel, 17:** *'I've kissed a boy before but that's it. (...) It was my best friend during spin the bottle. (...) We had all drunk something already so it was quite funny.'*

**Markus, 19:** *'It was sometime in year 5, 6, 7. I had a friend we experimented with each other with touching each other for example. (...) But I learned that it was nothing for me.'*

**David, 17:** *'Does that include French kissing? Because a male friend of mine taught me that. (...) We only did that once. We even did it in front of girls (...) and then we did that with the girls too.'*

Just one boy reports an involuntary same-sex situation. Felix was approached by a drunken bisexual friend who said: *'I want to give you a blowjob'* and then he *'touched me but that was enough for me'*. Felix resisted and addressed his friend about it openly a few days later: *'[I told him] my opinion very clearly. He really apologized for it.'* In contrast to the girls, none of the boys said they had become sexually active with another boy because of desire or arousal. Whether this is true or whether they are too embarrassed to experience their homosexual experience as arousing and to admit it remains open.

Generally speaking the acceptance of homosexuality among the young people surveyed is high. Deprecatory remarks are only voiced by a few boys and they mainly focus on rejecting the depiction of homosexual practices in pornography. 14 of the 80 boys surveyed report they have already seen 'gay porn' and none of them liked it. Their reactions ranged from boredom to disgust and rejection:

**Christian, 18:** *'Gay porn doesn't turn me on.'*

**Patrick, 19:** *'I clicked on it by accident but I switched it off again quickly. (...) The idea that I could do something like that – no.'*

**Igor, 18:** *'I don't like it when there are gay guys. It's a bit revolting for me. I don't mind there being people like that but I don't want to see that.'*

The rejection of depictions of same-sex sexuality and the shared disgust about it should be taken up by teachers, because it continues the prejudice against non-heterosexual people.<sup>190</sup> The findings of one study by Simon suggest that it is largely young people with a Turkish migrant background and young people

<sup>190</sup> Döring (2011b)

from the former Soviet Union who express anti-homosexual sentiments.<sup>191</sup> We cannot support that finding in our study. The evaluation of our results shows that the young men who are hostile towards homosexuality or gay depictions in pornography are vocational-college students who had previously attended a non-academic secondary school. Around 20 years ago, Michael Bochow found a connexion between homophobia and social class.<sup>192</sup> Maybe this link still exists.

### 5.1.3 Conclusion

We assume that the number of homosexual young people in the 16–19 age group is relatively small. Presumably these young people tend to feel excluded from a survey that addresses subjects such as love and relationships, but that appears to imply heterosexuality as normative. That would explain that no gay boy and no lesbian girl participated in our survey. As a result, many important questions have to remain unanswered: presumably non-heterosexual young people use the internet differently, maybe they even watch different pornography.<sup>193</sup>

In his study ‘Sexualität in Zeiten des Internet’ (‘Sexuality in the Internet Age’) Andreas Hill suggested that ‘it is easier for communities and subcultures of people with shared sexual interests to develop online than offline, especially for sexual minorities (e.g. gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and intersex people, sado-masochists, fetishists), especially in remote, rural regions, and that the internet gives them an easier coming out, serving as a means for self-acceptance, emancipation and empowerment.’<sup>194</sup> Whether and to what extent this applies to young people in Germany is unknown. More research into these matters would be desirable.<sup>195</sup>

## 5.2 Mirror, mirror on the wall... - young people’s experience of their own bodies and body modifications

*Anja Wermann and Silja Matthiesen*

A slim, well looked after and fit body is ‘the new currency of social recognition’.<sup>196</sup> The body receives increased attention during adolescence – the young people themselves as well as others around them watch their bodies because that is where the most evident changes of this life phase take place: physical proportions, size and weight all change, hair grows where there had not been any, boys experience their

<sup>191</sup> Simon (2008)

<sup>192</sup> Braun, Martin (2000), p. 71 f.

<sup>193</sup> Döring (2011b)

<sup>194</sup> Hill (2011b), p. 477

<sup>195</sup> In their comparative study, Dekker and Schäfer found that the way they obtained their sample group had a big influence on their research results re (male) homosexuality. For further research in youth sexuality, the sample should be selected at random and be big enough to allow empirically based statements about the influence of migration and social class. Cf. Dekker, Schäfer (1999), p. 355 ff.

<sup>196</sup> Schmincke (2011), p. 152

first ejaculation, girls their first period.<sup>197</sup> The body that had previously been child-like turns into an ‘intrusively altered body’.<sup>198</sup> In puberty, when young people care about their effect on who they are with and the opposite sex – in other words, make efforts to conform to the current beauty ideal – the body develops a life of its own that is hard to control. One of the crucial developmental tasks of adolescence is, as Helmut Fend puts it, to ‘learn to inhabit one’s body’.<sup>199</sup>

Presumably this task is a bigger challenge for young people today than it was for young people of earlier generations, because never before have young people been confronted with such a wealth of images of bodies in the media, portraying ‘what a perfect body ought to look like’.<sup>200</sup> This is reflected in the results of international and national studies, which contain some worrying responses to questions about the respondents’ satisfaction with their own body and appearance. Young people’s dissatisfaction with their body is relatively high.<sup>201</sup> Girls are more critical of their bodies than boys, but boys are also increasingly affected by insecurities and dissatisfaction.<sup>202</sup>

For Germany, the BRAVO-DR.-Sommer-Studie 2009, which surveyed 1,228 young people aged between 11 and 17, found the following results: even though more than two thirds of the boys and more than half of the girls said they felt happy in their own skin, the girls of all age groups were more critical of their appearance than they were as recently as 2006 and the level of satisfaction dropped with increasing age. Boys also thought their weight was less ideal than they had said three years earlier.<sup>203</sup>

The BZgA Youth Sexuality study surveyed 2,810 young people with German citizenship and 732 young people of non-German citizenship aged between 14 and 17.<sup>204</sup> The results show that girls have the same feelings about their bodies regardless of their citizenship: they are worried about not being able to keep up with the (overly) slim beauty ideal. Around a quarter of the girls think they are too fat, very few think they are too thin. Nevertheless around half of the girls say they are happy in their own body. This does not mean that the other half are completely dissatisfied with it. Instead, the girls’ relationship to their body is ambivalent. For boys on the other hand, the focus is on physical fitness. Around seven out of ten boys feel happy in their body, and boys are also significantly less concerned about their weight. Although some of them think they are too fat or too thin, the maximum values here

**197** Göppel (2011), p. 23

**198** King (2011), p. 83

**199** Fend (2005), p. 222

**200** Göppel (2011), p. 37

**201** Presnell, Bearman, Stice (2004)

**202** Cf. re. the girls Barker, Galambos (2003); Knauss, Paxton, Alsaker (2007, 2008); McKinley (2006); cf. re the boys Cohane, Pope (2000)

**203** BRAVO (2009)

**204** BZgA (2010a)

are 10%. A clear trend towards an ideal of reducing their weight, as the girls describe, cannot be seen among the boys.

In our study, the young people's satisfaction with their own body matters to the extent that it influences their sexuality and relationships. A good, self-confident attitude towards their bodies is often seen as a requirement for successful sexuality. If the young people think of themselves as and feel attractive, it has an impact on their relationship or their search for a partner.

In this context, one question that is currently asked a lot is whether and to what extent the bodies and physical norms in pornographic material have an impact on young people's body image. As we know, all young people today are familiar with pornographic depictions (see chapter 4). What impact do these experiences have on the young people?

In the final third of the interview we asked the participants various questions about their body and their feelings about their body.<sup>205</sup> All of the respondents answered these questions, so that the following evaluation is based on statements by 160 young people. The girls' responses are somewhat more in-depth, but the gender difference with regard to answer length is not that great. Hardly any of the young people are embarrassed to answer questions about their body. In comparison to talking about sexuality, which was new and unfamiliar to some of the respondents, the body is not a taboo subject, because young people discuss it often and extensively.

### **5.2.1 Young people's perception of their own body**

Very concretely, with regard to how young people perceive their own body, we are interested in questions such as the following.

- (1) Have young people integrated the comprehensive physical changes to their body well by the end of puberty and are they 'at home' in their male or female body?
- (2) Are they comfortable when they are naked with a partner? Do they feel inhibitions and embarrassment in connexion with their body while having sex, and if yes, how do they deal with that?

#### **(1) BODY SATISFACTION**

We have used a rating to categorize the young people's satisfaction with their body and appearance into 'satisfied' (young people who have no complaints about their body), 'dissatisfied' (young people who are completely unhappy with their body) and 'so so' (young people who like certain things about their appearance but not others). In our study we found that boys are more likely to be satisfied than girls.

<sup>205</sup> The questions were: 'How do you feel about your body? Are you happy with your appearance? What are you happy with, what are you unhappy with? Do you think you're attractive? Do you feel good when you're naked? Is there anything about your body you'd like to change? Do you have piercings or tattoos?'

Unlike in the aforementioned BRAVO and BZgA studies, only around a third of our young people said they were fully satisfied with their body and appearance:<sup>206</sup>

**Felix, 18:** *'I'm totally satisfied. I've already had strong physical changes and fluctuations and have always been satisfied.'*

**Natalie, 18:** *'I really like my tummy. I'm very satisfied.'*

The majority of the interviewees have an ambivalent relationship with their body and appearance.

**Lea, 18:** *'Normal. I don't think any woman is totally satisfied with her body.'*

**Paul, 17:** *'I feel very happy, but I don't like the way I look now. I've gained weight.'*

Only a few are completely dissatisfied:

**Sabine, 18:** *'Unhappy. I think I'm too fat.'*

Even though the boys are, on average, somewhat more satisfied than the girls, they are not entirely free from struggling with their weight. The girls primarily want to lose weight, while the boys want to lose weight and gain muscle.

Three of the 80 women interviewed think they are too thin and as a result they feel 'totally unfeminine'.

**Violetta, 18:** *'[I've] always been embarrassed about my body.'*

It took her a long time to get undressed in front of her ex-boyfriend.<sup>207</sup> This already illustrates that when heterosexual girls worry about their weight, their primary concern is being attractive and looking feminine to the opposite sex. Boys on the other hand want to become more muscular, regardless of whether they want to gain or lose weight. They do not just want to please the opposite sex, they also do it because they think it is healthy and useful.

**Chris, 19:** *'Because it's more about health than attractiveness to me.'*

**Daniel, 17:** *'(Because it) can be (...) useful if friends end up in a fight.'*

<sup>206</sup> BRAVO (2009); BZgA (2010a)

<sup>207</sup> Knauss, Paxton and Alsaker found in their study, which examined 1,610 Swiss young people between the ages of 14 and 16, that the girls were more reticent about their bodies than the boys were. Cf. Knauss, Paxton, Alsaker (2008)

What do young people use for orientation if they want to know if they are too thin or too fat or how muscular a boy ought to be? Studies show that conversations in the peer group are the most important reference frame; and these conversations contain appreciation and criticism. In addition they compare themselves with their peers and images in the media, and during that process the girls seem to internalize the ideals portrayed there more strongly.<sup>208</sup> The young women surveyed in our study put this fact into words:

**Birgit, 19:** *'(...) especially when I go to the swimming pool with my really slim friend, I think, 'Damn it (starts giggling), where's my towel?'*

**Lea, 18:** *'(...) if you look at celebrities, you get an inferiority complex.'*

The finding presented above, that girls are quicker at internalizing beauty ideals in the media, does not permit a reverse conclusion for the boys. The omnipresent images on television and in magazines and action figures in particular (such as the ever more muscular G.I. Joe) also have an impact on the boys. If we want to list the factors that make boys strive for muscles and an ideal weight, then the media come into play more and more often, as the growing number of relevant studies confirms.<sup>209</sup> Pressure from their direct environment, such as from friends and family, is not to be underestimated. But the young men in our study did not comment on that. 19-year-old Cornel mentions another factor: *'As a man (...) you (look) when you see someone who (...) is muscular.'* Young men therefore also use 'real' persons as a reference frame. The following case story describes a typical male attitude to their own body:

**Friedrich, 17,** from Leipzig has finished school and is now training in vehicle mechatronics. He has a short and clear response to the question of whether he is happy with his appearance: *'Definitely!'* The only thing he is unhappy about are *'my feet because they always smell a lot when I take my shoes off'*. When asked if he thought he was attractive, he answered, *'hm, so so'* and explained that he would find himself more attractive if he were *'not so thin'* and *'a bit more muscular'* because *'this way I look too skinny'*. He does not, however, care whether other people approve of his weight or appearance.

## **(2) NAKED IN FRONT OF A PARTNER**

Another question we were interested in was whether the young people feel relaxed and uninhibited when they are naked with a partner. This cannot be taken for granted for young people or adults. Young people between the ages of 16 and 19 are coming to the end of their adolescent physical changes. In a time in which the body is not seen as something given by nature that cannot be changed, but as a malleable part of

<sup>208</sup> Harper, Tiggemann (2008); Jones, Vigfusdottir, Lee (2004); Schutz, Paxton, Wertheim (2002)

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Smolak, Stein (2006); Ricciardelli et al. (2006)

our identity, subject to a 'shaping imperative',<sup>210</sup> there is a significant risk associated with presenting the naked body. Rejection or criticism can be very hurtful, therefore it is not surprising that some young people say they are 'scared of being laughed at' and consider it a matter of 'trust' as well as of the reliability of the 'bond' to have sex with the light on. The spectrum ranges from coy and vulnerable (Phil, Sophie, Benni) to a complete lack of inhibitions and a high level of confidence (Lars, Tanja, Kleo):

**Phil, 19:** *'I just need an extreme bond and a lot of trust to someone to show myself naked in front of them. (...) [In my last relationship] the sex was usually under the duvet and in the dark, at night.'*

**Sophie, 18:** *'Let me put it this way, my boyfriend knows what I look like naked but I think (...) it's nicer when it's dark because it stimulates your senses more (...) and I'm not into naturism, I don't have a need to get my clothes off.'*

**Benni, 18:** *'At first it was a strange feeling, but later it was alright. (...) I was scared she would find something about me repulsive or that she would laugh at me or something like that.'*

**Lars, 18:** *'It doesn't stress me. I don't have a problem with it. I don't have a problem being naked in front of girls I've had sex with.'*

**Tanja, 18:** *'At home at my boyfriend's house it's totally normal.'*

**Kleo, 18:** *'I'm not embarrassed to be naked in front of my boyfriend, or if I have a fling when I'm single.'*

Like Knauss et al., we too have found a difference between the sexes with regard to their physical self-confidence. This can be seen by the fact that boys are somewhat more likely than girls to say that they feel comfortable being naked in front of their partner.<sup>211</sup> For many young people, whether or not they feel comfortable naked also depends on affirmation by the partner:

**Leon, 18:** *'It depends whether I've got someone who likes it.'*

**Michi, 17:** *'Right in front of him is a bit... I want to hide problem areas, but I mean, he's already seen me naked anyway and he says he thinks I'm pretty so why bother hiding from him?'*

18-year-old Ayse does not want to show herself fully naked in front of her boyfriend.

<sup>210</sup> Borkenhagen, Brähler (2010), p. 8

<sup>211</sup> Knauss et. al. (2008)

She *'always feel[s] so exposed'*, adding: *'it [is] nice with underwear'*. Tanja (18) claims about herself that she suffers from *'body dysmorphic disorder'*:

**Tanja, 18:** *'At first [I thought] it was terrible because I felt disgusted by myself and couldn't understand how he could sleep with me (...). But what's nice now is that I've learned to accept myself during the act.'*

For some young people, positive comments from the partner about their body are a boost, but we do not find a significant link between their satisfaction with their body and their experiences with relationships and sex to date.

### 5.2.2 The influence of media images

In the interview section about pornography, we asked the young people whether they compare their body to the bodies of porn stars. Do they react with insecurity in light of the specially selected and often surgically altered pornographic bodies? Do they measure their own bodies by these standards? Do bodies in pornography, like the bodies of top models<sup>212</sup>, shape or alter the desires they have about their own body?

The girls' reactions are diverse, but fundamentally they unanimously reject this notion. Their responses range from *'I only compare myself to people who I see in real life, but not on television or the internet'* (Greta, 17) to the statement that these women were *'the kind I don't want to identify with'* (Sissi, 18).

Regardless of the extent of their pornographic experience to date, every young woman has an idea of what the female porn stars look like. It is the stereotypical image of the *'sexy woman'*.

**Akay, 18:** *'The women always have really fake breasts, pumped up, the lips, the breasts, flat tummy, slim legs. This idea of the 90/60/90 proportions, a typically sexy woman.'*

**Janina, 19:** *'Really dolled up, (...), ugly face but a huge cleavage.'*

They highlight the artificial nature of female bodies in pornography, saying that they do not seem real and do not have anything to do with their world.

**Bettina, 18:** *'They look like dolls (...) as if they were sex dolls for screwing.'*

Most of the girls distance themselves from these images, which they experience as stereotypical. At the same time this is the basis that they use to relate their own bodies. By pointing out that the female porn stars have had surgery, they emphasize the separation between *'real'* and *'visual'*.

<sup>212</sup> Hoffmann (2011)



This distancing does not mean, however, that there is no comparison taking place whatsoever. With regard to the details, some still compared themselves and drew different conclusions.

**Ayse, 18:** *'(...) I thought I was prettier. I didn't like all the surgically enhanced chests. And they have tons of make-up on, I don't know.'*

**Sara, 17:** *'In contrast to these women [I am] much fatter (...) and not necessarily sexually attractive.'*

**Sophie, 17:** *'I'm not the slimmest and there are some where I think, 'wow, they've got great bodies'. But I tell my boyfriend too: 'wow, look, she's got great breasts' or something like that. We talk about it openly.'*

Although the girls do not consider female porn stars suitable people to identify themselves with, they do use them to assess their own body.

Most boys answer the question of whether they compare their own body to the bodies of male porn stars with a simple 'no' (Artur, 17). Others compare themselves, but relativize the result by distancing themselves in a similar manner to the girls.

**Bernd, 17:** *'No, they're adults, I'm not.'*

**Hans, 17:** *'I always look at the level [they have] stooped to, to put such films online.'*

Some take the male porn stars' well developed muscles as a motivation to do sports. One area that cannot be altered by sport, however, is the size of the penis. Three boys had something to say about the matter:

**Moritz, 17:** *'(...) sometimes (...) I wonder about the guy's hard-on. (...) I know from quite a reliable source that they always look for people with big penises for porn films. And (...) you shouldn't use that as your benchmark.'*

**Dieter, 18:** *'I'm well enough equipped so it's fine.'*

**Christian, 18:** *'I'm happy. It's not like it's really small or anything like that.'*

In summary it can be said that the respondents do not let the bodies in pornography make them insecure. They largely reject these bodies as being undesirable and unnatural.

## How to present an attractive body?

Closely linked to their satisfaction with their body and appearance is the young people's assessment of their own attractiveness. The question 'Do you think you're attractive?' was answered with 'yes' by 49% of the boys, three times more than the girls (15%). Only a few young people called themselves unattractive (boys 9%, girls 6%). Many were unable to answer the question clearly one way or another:

**Eva, 18:** *'I don't know (...). I'm not the kind of person to say 'I'm pretty'. It's a matter of taste.'*

**Melanie, 17:** *'I think I'm average.'*

**Ferdinand, 19:** *'I haven't given it any thought.'*

**Mandy, 18:** *'You should ask my boyfriend that question.'*

**Volker, 18:** *'I think your partner should find you attractive, instead of you finding yourself attractive.'*

**Mario, 18:** *'Pfff, no, I don't think you say that about yourself.'*

**Lisa, 17:** *'If I were to say 'yes!' it would sound really arrogant and if I were to say 'no!' then... I'd say 'so so'.'*

The girls are particularly likely to describe their feelings about their own attractiveness as fluctuating, not very reliable and 'dependent on how I'm feeling on the day'. How they are feeling on the day depends on whether they have styled themselves, whether they have chosen the right clothes, what feedback they are receiving from others and on even very minor fluctuations in weight:

**Marie, 18:** *'If I'm wearing nice clothes or I'm getting compliments (...) then I feel more attractive.'*

**Renate, 17:** *'If I style myself and dress up then I can be attractive too.'*

**Salomea, 17:** *'If I weigh a kilo less than normal, then I see myself quite differently.'*

**Tanja, 17:** *'It always depends on what my scales tell me in the morning, whether I'm going to wear close-fitting clothes or something baggier. Whether I try to emphasize my body or try to hide it.'*

How the boys feel on the day has nothing or little to do with whether they have styled themselves or whether they receive compliments:

**Martin, 18:** *'Sometimes I like looking at myself and sometimes I think "it does matter". It depends on my mood or whether I've just got up or whether I've been drinking.'*

**Phil, 19:** *'It depends. I can look in the mirror and think "shit, what do you look like today?" or I can think "it's good today".'*

**Patrick, 19:** *'Sometimes yes, sometimes no, it depends.'*

There is a significant difference between the sexes here: girls are less likely to feel attractive without having done something for it. The British psychoanalyst Susie Orbach commented that: *'young women (...) don't know that their bodies are powerfully attractive just as they are. They feel they must work hard to get their bodies to be sexually alluring.'*<sup>213</sup> This predominant trend is avoided by some girls. They manage to escape the pressure of the Western world to be overly slim by using their cultural background as a resource:

**Fatma, 18,** a high-school student from Hamburg with a Turkish migrant background, describes herself as *'open (...), very ambitious, but also very critical of myself'*. Despite criticizing herself, she says the following about her feelings about her body: *'[I'm] out of the phase of complaining about myself.'* Up until then she was particularly bothered *'that I don't have such a large chest'*. Overall she thinks she has *'ve..ery womanly curves'*: *'[together] with a good friend of mine I'm the only one who has this hourglass figure (...), this really small waist'*. She found it difficult, however, to accept the changes of her body as it was becoming a woman: *'in puberty, when it's not standard in Germany and the models don't look like that'*. When asked whether she compared herself to the women in porn films, she answered: *'not at all, but what I did sometimes do was [compare myself to] an underwear model'* or even more to with *'pop stars and actresses'*. In comparison to Turkey she thinks the pressure of having to be thin in Germany is much greater because: *'those who have round hips (...) can have lots of children and that's just the epitome of a woman (...). If a woman has a big bum, it's nice and it's seen as feminine and that's a bit different here [in Germany].'*

<sup>213</sup> Orbach (2010), p. 145

As we have already seen, around three quarters of the girls surveyed and two thirds of the boys surveyed see a difference – not usually a bothersome one – between their own body and their physical ideal. There are various responses to this:

(1) Either the young people choose to work on their bodies and strive for physical modification through styling, diets, fitness, body art, sports, surgical interventions etc.

(2) Or they react in a casual, resigned manner. Despite a potentially critical confrontation or distance to the ideal.

### **(1) BODY MODIFICATION**

If the young people choose to change something about their bodies, the dominant option for young men is doing sports. Young women on the other hand choose a much larger number of different options, and often several of them concurrently. Only one boy (Moritz, 17) reports being on a diet:

*Moritz, 17: 'I've completely changed what I eat. I eat no more than four slices of crisp bread with boiled ham in the morning. The best choice for lunch would be a turkey breast filet. And in the evening I eat another four slices of crisp bread.'*

*Daniel, 17: 'I started working out regularly with a [male] friend of mine about a month ago. We do boxing, kickboxing, lifting weights, press-ups, pull-ups etc.'*

*Artur, 17: 'I've lost weight nicely through endurance training (...), 20 kg within two or three months (...). It went quite quickly.'*

Dieting is the young women's buzzword when it comes to losing weight or maintaining their weight. Their behaviour ranges from deliberately regulating what they eat: 'I [don't] just [eat] anything I want in a day' (Salomea, 17), to the problematic eating behaviour some women report:

*Janina, 19: 'If I've really binged and would like to run to the toilet, I think, "No, it's best not to do that", even though I've done that from time to time. (...) And if it happens several times a month, then I think, "No, I'm not going to do that again". And then it's fine for a few months.'*

*Gönül, 18: '(...) I fainted because I hadn't eaten anything or had eaten so little even though it wasn't necessary for me to do that (...). I was quite sick and after that I said, "No, I won't do it." It's not good and I'm not fat and so I left it.'*

*Tanja, 17: 'Well... it all started when I was 12. First I started suffering from depression and I started self-harming. When I was 13 I also got an eating disorder.'*

A further significant aspect of physical modification for girls is styling. Getting done up for the young women largely means 'hair, make-up and the right clothes' (Eva, 18). Styling and the option of 'possible cosmetic surgery' are clearly 'girls' subjects' in our study because neither of the two are mentioned by the boys. Some of the young women could imagine using cosmetic surgery to alter their bodies. They mention breast enlargements or lifts, liposuction and 'nose jobs'. They also mention laser treatments for permanent hair removal, because 'I'm really annoyed by my hair, I have to (...) shave every second day' (Eva, 18). By the way, hardly any of the young people mention pubic hair removal in connection with attractiveness or as something they do to improve their looks. Instead they consider it part of their personal hygiene (cf. V.3).

## **(2) OPTING OUT OF BODY MODIFICATION**

If the young people choose the other option of no physical modifications, they are relaxed about the perceived differences to the body they consider to be ideal.

*Lars, 18: 'I'm not the slimmest guy, but it's more about how you can love me. How do you say it? There's more of me to love.'*

*Igor, 18: 'My attitude is that I want to achieve something with the way I am. I don't want to make a special effort just to stand a better chance.'*

*Klaus, 18: 'I could go to the gym a bit (...) but gaming is more my thing.'*

*Ayse, 18: 'I'm not perfect, everybody has flaws, but that's not bad. Every flaw can also be an advantage.'*

*Marianne, 17: 'I've got a few curves and that's okay. If someone doesn't like me, then unlucky for him, but my friends and my boyfriend like this about me so I'm very happy.'*

*Gülhanım, 18: 'There's the odd bit here or there that could be improved, but it's not really necessary and I would never have surgery or anything like that done.'*

### 5.2.3 Conclusion

The young people we surveyed confront one of the central developmental tasks of adolescence – they have to ‘cope with the physical changes of puberty and reach a positive relationship to their body’.<sup>214</sup> In our study only a very small percentage of young people report serious problems with this process: two of the respondents mentioned eating disorders, self-harming behaviour and serious inhibitions about being naked in front of a partner. A diffuse dissatisfaction with their own body was much more widespread. Two thirds of our respondents say they are not satisfied with their body and their looks. Various studies confirm that this dissatisfaction, if it continues, can have negative consequences for the person affected, such as the development of eating disorders or depression.<sup>215</sup> Barker and Galambos found (at least for girls) that acceptance by the mother or father had a protective function against physical dissatisfaction.<sup>216</sup> The results of the BZgA study also show that girls and boys (with and without a migrant background) are more positive about their body the more they feel taken seriously in the home.<sup>217</sup> Our data show that temporary difficulties with their bodies only rarely lead to negative or inhibiting effects on young people’s sexual experiences.

In addition our interviews suggest that the influence of body images in pornographic material is overestimated. Young people, and girls in particular, reject pornographic bodies. Female porn stars are not role models for young women. A career as a porn actress is not a model for success. They have an easier time distancing themselves from these body images than they do keeping a critical distance to other examples in the media (models, Hollywood actresses).

It is striking that young people are often confronted with the double message: ‘Be yourself, but pay attention to this diet and these make-up tips!’.<sup>218</sup> Boys also hear this message, albeit with slightly different contents. The current formula for them is: ‘stay as you are, but be slim, sporty and build muscle’. These gender-specific demands have a big impact on young people’s self-perception and behaviour. They only rarely muster resistance and it is only in isolated cases that young women manage to go against the Western physical ideal of extreme slimness, by pointing to the beauty ideals of other cultures for example.

**214** Göppel (2011), p. 37

**215** Cf. Cooley, Torey (2001); Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2006); Smolak (2004)

**216** Barker, Galambos (2003)

**217** BZgA (2010a)

**218** Schmincke (2011), p. 149

### 5.3 Nice hair, but not there – pubic hair removal

*Jasmin Mainka und Silja Matthiesen*

‘American Apparel shocks with pubic hair’ and ‘provocative pubic hair campaign’ are just two of the media reactions to an advertising campaign by a US fashion brand (February 2011), depicting a model with see-through underwear, through which dark pubic hair can be seen. It was not the revealing nature of the campaign that was provocative, but the fact that the model had pubic hair. The norm of hairlessness has gone so far that hair on women’s bodies causes outrage, disgust and rejection.<sup>219</sup> However, pubic hair removal is neither an exclusively Western phenomenon, nor a modern one. It is practised in Islamic cultural circles for religious reasons and in Europe pubic-hair removal has been practised from time to time by various population groups.<sup>220</sup>

Removing body hair on men has also established itself in recent years through the expansion of many beauty treatments for the male body.<sup>221</sup> In a study with 118 male students, Boroughs, Cafri and Thompson found that 64 % of the participants removed hair below the neck in some way.<sup>222</sup> One study with 678 adult women, conducted by Toerien et al. the same year, had the following result: 99 % of the women shaved their armpits, 94 % shaved their legs and 86 % their pubic area.<sup>223</sup>

The norm of hair removal has turned the genital area into a new area of bodily design. Elmar Brähler speaks about a new creative imperative, as was already presented in connection with body modifications: ‘For the first time a generally valid genital aesthetic has developed that is binding for large groups of society. A region of the body that had hitherto been a private one, namely the genital area, now underlies a creative imperative.’<sup>224</sup> This is observed with scepticism from the feminist perspective. While some merely criticize the ‘tamed body’ of the shaven woman, the political scientist Regula Stämpfli does not believe that ‘children’s fannies on adult women’ is merely a ‘casual aesthetic action’, it is the ‘dominant political philosophy implemented on their own bodies’.<sup>225</sup> Lifestyle magazines and advertisements proclaim female and male hairlessness, and that probably has a particularly large effect on young media consumers.<sup>226</sup>

Presenting their bodies plays a special role for young people. Using fashion, styling and hair styles, they assert and symbolize their membership to their peer group and to youth-specific subcultures. This is an essential part of detaching from their family

**219** Tiggemann, Lewis (2004)

**220** Borkenhagen, Brähler (2010); Brähler (2008, 2009)

**221** Penz (2010)

**222** Boroughs, Cafri, Thompson (2005)

**223** Toerien et. al. (2005)

**224** Borkenhagen, Brähler (2010), p. 8

**225** Stämpfli (2008)

**226** Pompper (2010)

and looking for their own identity (cf. chapter 5.2). Looking after and shaping the naked body by removing hair and styling the genital area are embedded into two subject areas: on the one hand they refer to questions about hygiene, on the other they are part of the process of recognizing the body as a sexual body, of highlighting it as such and embracing it as such as well.

### 5.3.1 Attitudes to pubic hair removal and implementation thereof

Of our respondents, 94 % of the young women and 81 % of the young men remove some or all of their pubic hair. In the BRAVO-Dr.-Sommer-Studie 65 % of the girls and 41 % of the boys aged between 11 and 17 said they shaved their pubic hair.<sup>227</sup> The reason why our percentage is higher in our sample is probably because our respondents are quite a bit older.

For most young people, pubic-hair removal is an unquestioned normality and part of their daily physical maintenance. What is hardly surprising at first glance is that more girls than boys shave – both hygiene and beauty standards traditionally focus more on women in our culture. In addition to the clear difference between the genders, there are connections to factors of sexual development: young people without sexual intercourse experience and young people who are not currently in steady relationships shave less often than those who have already had sexual intercourse or who are in a steady relationship. The experience with pornography does not have an impact on the occurrence of pubic-hair removal in our data set. Young people distance themselves from the doll-like pornographic bodies and do not see them as role models or ideals (cf. chapter 4.2 and 5.2.2). Education, location, religious denomination and migrant background have no impact on the occurrence of pubic-hair removal. It is done by young people in all educational and social classes.

Young people's attitude to pubic hair removal varies strongly: while some go so far as rejecting sex with an unshaved partner, others think the subject of pubic hair removal is immaterial and do not personally shave. Both of these extreme positions are fairly uncommon. The majority of the young people feel positively about pubic-hair removal, but voice a liberal attitude about it: it is *'up to everyone themselves'* how to deal with the issue.

Those who see pubic-hair removal as a must for everyone shave their pubic area regularly and thoroughly and they expect the same from others. Young people who do not shave themselves are seen as unkempt and sex with them is often rejected. One example of such an attitude comes from 18-year-old Mehdi.

<sup>227</sup> BRAVO (2009)



**Mehdi, 18**, is a Muslim. He has middle-school qualifications and says he has slept with 15 women, although he is unattached at the moment. Mehdi shaves *'the whole body'* and trims the hair on his legs with a machine, explaining that southerners like him had very strong hair growth there. He shaves under his arms and his pubic area *'with Gillette'* and as for his chest hair, he said: *'[there] is (...) this product by Nivea – it's a cream. You apply it and when you shower, it's gone.'* In response to the question where he thought women should shave, he said: *'I don't want to see any hair on a woman from here (indicates to his neck) down.'* He states he is grossed out by women who do not shave and he rejects sex with unshaven women.

Some young people are overwhelmingly enthusiastic about pubic-hair removal. They think it is great to shave, they think they and others are better looking and tidier and they see no disadvantages to this new trend. Marianne (17) for example is *'very glad it exists'* and Dieter (18) says: *'Great. Perfect. I'm into it.'* Many young people think pubic-hair removal is *'totally normal'*, they do not question the need for pubic-hair removal, they accept it just as they accept other personal hygiene activities. When asked whether they shaved, they answered with: *'Of course'* or *'That's totally normal'*. Many who shave explain that it was necessary for adequate personal hygiene, but that other people could deal with it the way they saw fit. Peggy (17) says for example that *'It's more hygienic and also nicer looking' but 'each to their own'*.

Pubic-hair removal is rarely seen as an expectation placed on them by the outside world. Chris (19) says for example: *'I think you go along with society'*. Many of those who were uncertain at first shave not least because of their fear that their peers will be hostile towards them. *'You must smell more than others'* or *'What kind of a bush do you have?'* are sentences the young people occasionally bring up themselves. Deena (17) describes in detail how she confronted the subject of pubic-hair removal:

**Deena, 17**, did not find it easy to find her own opinion about pubic-hair removal. It was a difficult topic for her because she was not sure how her boyfriend felt: *'Does he expect that and is that part of it?'* She finally decided merely to shave off the pubic hair at the sides. When she read about hair removal via *'waxing'* she considered using it on her pubic area. However, she heard *'that it's meant to be incredibly painful'* and *'withdrew from that idea again'*. She discovered that almost all of her female friends shave their pubic area and has *'the feeling that almost all girls are a little uncertain about this subject'*. There is *'pressure from the outside'* and those who do not shave are quickly considered *'really disgusting and unsexy'*. When it comes to shaving, she

thinks that *'everyone has to decide for themselves'*. Now Deena shaves her pubic area, legs and under arms *'out of habit'* because *'if you do it, you can't go wrong.'*

In the group of those who think pubic-hair removal is unnecessary, the young men are clearly in the majority. They give the subject very little significance and have a pragmatic attitude about shaving their pubic area. Either they do not shave, like Hannes (17), who thinks he is *'clearly too lazy'* for pubic-hair removal, or they trim their pubic hair a little to avoid it *'taking on such proportions'*.

**Kurt, 17**, is a vocational-college student and has been with his girlfriend for two years. He thinks *'it's alright that she's shaven,'* but also thinks that women can be *'unshaven'*. He only expresses disgust when women *'have a massive bush'*. Even though all of his friends shave their pubic area, he only shaves under his arms because *'people have hair everywhere'*. He merely trims his pubic hair somewhat. When men shave their pubic hair, it always feels *'a little bit gay'* to him. He thinks it is *'very unmanly when men are completely bald in their pubic area'*. If his girlfriend were to have a problem with his shaving habits, he would *'find a solution'* but he *'wouldn't necessarily shave'*.

It is not just the removal of pubic hair that is of importance to the young people, hair on other body parts is shaved, trimmed, epilated and waxed. When asked *'Where do you shave?'*, 17-year-old Salomea said *'everywhere, where it's normal'* as if it were a matter of course. But what is *'normal'* for young people? What is normal for girls and what for boys?

Most young women are in favour of men shaving their pubic area, because here young people say *'the same standards for everyone'*. In the opinion of the young women, the boys should also shave their armpits as well as any hair on their backs. Girls disagree when it comes to chest and tummy hair: some think this hair is manly, others think it is unkempt. Almost none of the young women surveyed thought men should shave their legs.

**Fatma, 18**: *'Men don't have to get rid of everything. I don't like it when men have a hairless chest, I don't think that's really manly. But I also don't like it if they have hair everywhere, like on their back and really thick – that's gross. I think healthy, male hair, but not too much.'*

The attitude and practice among young men are in line with the young women's attitude. They think it looks better and is more hygienic if they remove or trim their pubic hair and under-arm hair. There is also agreement when it comes to back hair. It has to go. Chest and tummy hair polarize the young men just like the young women. The young men virtually never shave their legs, since this is considered

‘gay’ or unmanly. Nevertheless there are young men in our sample, especially from Mediterranean countries, who at least trim their leg hair, because they feel their leg hair is too much. ‘Normal’ for young men at the time of the interviews meant that they remove hair under their arms, on their back and in their pubic area, what they do with their chest hair varies and their legs remain unshaven.

The ‘norm’ is much simpler and clearly defined for young women. Both young men and young women think that girls should shave their under arms, legs and pubic area. Some also shave their lower arms, but that is the exception. There is much more agreement among the young people what young women should shave and as a result there is less variation in their shaving behaviour.

Young men and women are also agreed that pubic-hair removal is more necessary for women than for men. There are several reasons for this. Young people think pubic hair is more bothersome during oral sex performed on women than oral sex performed on men. They also say that it is ‘totally disgusting’ for bodily fluids such as urine or blood to get trapped in the hair. Therefore they believe that shaving their pubic hair is twice as important during their period. A further reason for the special relevance of hair removal for women is that hairlessness emphasizes their femininity. Violetta (18) thinks it is more important that women shave because *‘for men it’s normal that they have more hair’*.

5

### 5.3.2 Reasons for pubic hair removal

We have determined three different triggers why young people start shaving their public hair:

**Pubic hair removal since the start of hair growth.** 13 % of the respondents have been shaving since the start of their hair growth. Most of them have therefore never seen themselves with fully developed pubic hair. Some young people have quite distorted views about what they would look like with full pubic hair. Eva (18) for example claims that if she had not started shaving at fourteen, she would have to *‘wear three pairs of trousers so you couldn’t see it,’* while Heidi (19) thinks it is *‘provocative’* to come across a woman on the beach whose bikini is *‘bursting at the seams’*.

*Carsten, 16: ‘When the first hairs grew, they came straight off again.’*

*Tamara, 19: ‘Since they started growing (...), as soon as I knew that I would be getting more, I got rid of them.’*

**Pubic hair removal since the start of a steady relationship.** Those who have been shaving since the start of a relationship give different reasons for doing so. Some want to shave only in relationships because they would not be seen naked by anyone outside of relationships and they would therefore have no other reason to. Others say that it was not until their partner came along that they had the idea to shave. They never paid any attention to the appearance of their pubic area before the start of their relationship. Again others say that their partner shaved and they therefore assumed certain expectations on the part of their partner. In some cases the partner explicitly drew attention to him or her preferring a shaven pubic area.

*Olli, 18: 'My first girlfriend, who I was with for two years, told me to shave otherwise there would be no sex.'*

*Peter, 17: 'In my case she shaved so I started shaving too. Maybe it's more pleasant for her (laughs).'*

*Nele, 18: 'At first he didn't shave. He had a full bush. But after a couple of days I told him, "Shave it off because I think it's unhygienic and gross."*

When it comes to shaving, adolescent sexual partners have a desire for mutuality. If one of them shaves, the other follows suit. This sometimes happens out of a sense of duty, sometimes out of solidarity and it is often expected from the partner.

**Triggered by friends or relatives.** Only a few young people say that they started shaving their pubic area because they were copying friends or relatives. Although some remember that they started shaving when it became a topic of discussion in their group of friends and more and more friends started shaving, but it seems that the young people are less aware of this aspect than they are of the two previous triggers.

*Hans, 17: 'I saw it on others, so I thought I should do that too.'*

*Michaela, 17: 'I knew it from my mother, and my cousin who is older than me and then I started doing it too because I didn't like it either.'*

*Marie, 18: 'Lots of girls in my class were doing it and that pulled me along a bit.'*

The effort young people put into shaving their pubic hair is often exaggerated. Since it is routine for the majority of them, it goes quite quickly. Some shave every day, others shave at irregular intervals and only when they have time and are in the mood. Dschamal (18) says for example that he *'sometimes shave[s] regularly, sometimes [he's] too lazy,'* while Dana (18) shaves *'once a fortnight'.*

For most young people, it is not about how thoroughly or accurately they shave; what matters is that they shave at all.

**Chris, 19:** *'I shave every three months because I just feel better doing it.'*

**Dilek, 17:** *'Everywhere so it's smooth (...), when I'm in the shower, quite regularly.'*

The question about how young people shave their pubic area, meaning what 'style' they prefer, is answered very differently. From narrow strips to patterns such as stars or hearts to shaving their pubic hair off completely – everything was cited. There are some very clear preferences here too. Some think patterns are 'silly', while others say it is 'too childlike' without any hair. Yet others do not care at all how their partner shaves. Their clear principle is, the main thing is he/she does.

**Sissi, 18:** *'I always shaved off everything completely but now I've got into the habit of having a strip because I think it's more feminine to have some hair.'*

**Patrick, 19:** *'I haven't shaved it all off either. I've left a strip in the middle because otherwise you look like you're twelve. That's not necessary either.'*

The widespread nature and great acceptance of pubic hair removal suggests that the young people believe there are good reasons for engaging in this habit. Almost all of the respondents had at least one answer in store. Hygiene was cited most frequently. Those who are not shaved are quickly considered 'gross' and 'unkempt'. Many emphasize that smell develops stronger and more quickly with pubic hair than without. Some interviews suggest that it would be a personal and social disaster to be considered unkempt or smelling unpleasantly because of an unshaven body. *'You have to watch out because it can ruin your life. If a boy were to see that he would gossip about you,'* says 18-year-old Dana. A shaven pubic area is considered 'lower maintenance', which, as mentioned above, is particularly important to the young women during their menstrual period. Appearance is another frequently cited reason, particularly among the young women. They report how bad it would be, for example, if pubic hair could be seen coming out of their bikini bottoms. Kevin (18) was one of the few men citing appearance as the reason for pubic hair removal, saying *'then your penis stands out a bit more'*. Some young people say their genital area feels better shaved. Many do not specify this reason any further and just say it is 'more pleasant' or they say they 'feel better' when they are shaved. *'I think that for me personally it's more pleasant. Not having hair everywhere (...). I personally think it's more comfortable,'* Renate (17). Among girls and boys alike there is a widespread notion that public hair 'pricks' or 'twinges'. A further widespread concept is that sex is better without pubic hair. Tina (19) thinks that *'just the idea of pleasuring someone down there with your mouth and*

then you've got all this hair' is revolting. To what extent the horror visions cited in this context ('pubic hair between the teeth') are related to a certain unfamiliarity with, and distance to, oral sexual practices is another matter. One young man and one young woman cite their religion, Islam, as the reason why they shave. In Islam, pubic hair removal is considered hygienic and is performed regularly as part of ritual cleansing.

**Gönül, 18:** *'In our prayer you have to wash before the prayer and if that's not clean, then it doesn't count. When you're praying, it doesn't count, when it's (...) so long (grins).'*

The 'good reasons' for pubic hair removal compiled here are not to cover up the fact that shaving has a very strong normative dimension. Although only a few young people explicitly say that they shave to 'fit in' and avoid negative attention, many have integrated pubic-hair removal into their sex lives and repertoire of personal hygiene. They think as little about this process as about regularly brushing their teeth, and think of it as just as unproblematic. It seems to them, as Renate (17) puts it, normal: *'It's basic. You just do it. There's no written law, it's just often the case. [You went] along with it and now I feel good like this.'*

The reasons against pubic hair removal are much less varied. Only a few young women and men feel pubic hair removal is bothersome. Some think so because they have particularly strong hair growth, the others because they have very sensitive skin and shaving gives them a rash and causes itching.

**Friedrich, 17:** *'Are you shaved?' 'Hm, no, because that cuts up my skin (laughs).'*

**Eva, 18:** *'The hair infuriates me. I have to shave every second day because it bothers me to have hair. But that's the same for everyone. That's why I considered laser hair removal. (...) It bothers me and it's a waste of time doing it every day.'*

### 5.3.3 Conclusion

Pubic hair removal has become a standard of physical hygiene for young people of both sexes. Almost everyone does it and only very few of them critically question it. Many assume that their partner will expect it and they say they personally think it is more hygienic, more attractive and more practical. Almost none of the respondents rejected pubic hair removal on the grounds that they thought an unshaved pubic area was more attractive. However, all attitudes are represented, from disinterest to enthusiasm, and they are not connected to their education or locality.

There are some difficulties for young people that come with this new norm of hair removal. In the already confusing time of adolescence there is a further area of uncertainty: what should happen to their pubic hair? Should chest hair be removed? Will my new partner think me sexy if I have not shaved under my arms in two weeks? Young men in particular struggle to find a personal balance between too little hair and too much hair, meaning between looking ‘unmanly’ or ‘gay’ or looking ‘unkempt’ and ‘gross’. For young women the norm is much more clearly defined and the line to too little hair is almost impossible to cross. The young people in our sample are in no way interested in infantilizing their pubic area, but we also did not find any evidence of ‘empowerment’ as a result of making the genitals visible<sup>228</sup>. Instead, those who shave seem to want to say: *‘I look after myself, I know what to do, I’m normal.’*

<sup>228</sup> Borkenhagen, Brähler (2010)

## 5.4 How does my body feel? – masturbation

*André Aude and Silja Matthiesen*

Masturbation plays an important role in the sexual socialization of boys and girls. While masturbating, they can explore, feel and discover their bodies; young people have the chance to find out on their own what genital touch is pleasant for them, what leads to orgasm and what does not. However, such an appreciative view cannot yet be taken for granted in all cultures, religions and social milieus – it is a late modern and, historically seen, relatively recent view of masturbation. The subject has a disreputable history: there is virtually no other sexual practice of young people that has been persecuted, banned and pathologized to such an extent.<sup>229</sup> The fear of the consequences of masturbation is, as sexologist Gunter Schmidt rightly says, the ‘source of all moral panics about youth sexuality’.<sup>230</sup> Starting with the anti-masturbation campaigns of the late eighteenth century, during which educators and doctors warned about moral, emotional and physical decay, the denigration and tabooing of masturbation lasted until well into the twentieth century.<sup>231</sup>

These days the concept of ‘dangerous masturbation’ seems to have largely disappeared from the minds of young people. Feelings of guilt, moral concerns and a bad conscience are also cited much more rarely in empirical surveys.<sup>232</sup> However, despite this widespread normalization of masturbation, the long history of negative connotations can still be felt, in interpretations such as ‘substitute satisfaction’ or insults such as ‘wanker’. For this reason it is no surprise that masturbation is a very private and intimate part of young people’s lives. Talking about masturbation is a particularly unusual experience for both the respondents and the interviewers. Nevertheless the interviewers were able to get information about masturbation in all of the 160 interviews. None of the respondents asked the interviewer to skip the subject. The boys in particular tended to answer all of the questions openly and without inhibitions. Some even raised the subject on their own (usually in response to questions about their pornographic consumption).

Among the girls on the other hand only one of them raised the subject of masturbation on her own. Around half of them responded in a reserved manner, few girls openly gave information without feeling shy about it, which may be because the percentage of girls with experience of with masturbation is much lower than that of boys. We asked the young people directly about their masturbation experience (e.g. age when they did it for the first time), about their masturbation frequency in the past four weeks and what aids they use to stimulate themselves.

<sup>229</sup> Schetsche (1993); Schetsche, Schmidt (1996)

<sup>230</sup> Schmidt (2009), p. 27

<sup>231</sup> Böhm (2008), p. 311 ff.

<sup>232</sup> BZgA (2003), p. 79 ff.; Schmidt (2004a), p. 115



### 5.4.1 Dealing with masturbation and attitudes towards it

Almost all of the boys surveyed have masturbation experience (97 %), while the same is only true for 43 % of the girls (cf. table 19). Boys start masturbating younger than girls and generally do it more often. That makes masturbation behaviour (alongside pornography consumption) one of the few areas of young people's sexual behaviour where massive gender differences continue to exist. These gender differences in young people's masturbation behaviour have been known about for many years and are confirmed by various quantitative surveys.<sup>233</sup> The figures are quite similar among young people in France and the United States as well.<sup>234</sup>

Table 19: **Masturbation experiences** (boys and girls)

	Experi- ence (in %)	Age 13 (in %)**	Age 14 (in %)**	Age 15 (in %)**	Age 16 (in %)**	Masturbated in prev. 4 wks (in %)	Frequency in prev. 4 wks (M)***
Girls	43	18	21	37	46	20	0.5
Boys	97	65	88	96	97	71	6.8
Significance*	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

\* using chi-square for percentages; t-test for medians

\*\* First masturbation at 13 (14, 15, 16) years old or younger

\*\*\* Averages for the whole group; the figures for those with masturbation experience are 1.0 and 7.2 (.000)

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

The gender difference is highlighted even more clearly in the masturbation frequency than in its occurrence: while the boys surveyed masturbated an average of around seven times in the past four weeks, the girls did so less than once (cf. table 19). If occurrence and frequency of masturbation are compared with the occurrence and frequency of sex with a partner, it can be seen that for boys, masturbation is almost always the first sexual activity: most boys (93 %) gain experience with masturbation before they have a sexual experience with a partner. Secondly, it is not infrequently the only sexual activity for several years (for all those who have not yet had sex with a partner, 25 % of all boys in our sample), and thirdly it is the most frequent sexual activity.<sup>235</sup> If we just look at the number of orgasms and ignore their significance, boys' sexual activity in the age span from 16 to 19 very largely takes the form of masturbation.

<sup>233</sup> Cf. BZgA (2010a); BRAVO (2009); Schmidt (1993)

<sup>234</sup> For France cf. Bajos, Bozon, Beltzer (2008), p. 275, for USA cf. Fortenberry et al. (2010), pp. 309 ff. The fact that women masturbate more rarely than men and start masturbating significantly later has been, since the Kinsey reports, confirmed by national and international surveys and has been a surprisingly stubborn difference between the genders. Cf. Kinsey (1948; 1953); Matthiesen, Hauch (2004)

<sup>235</sup> The average masturbation frequency of boys was 7.2 in the past four weeks (group of boys with masturbation experience), compared to an average sexual intercourse frequency of 5.6 times in the past four weeks (group of boys with sexual intercourse experience).

The situation is very different for girls: only around a quarter of the girls we surveyed said their first sexual experience was masturbation. Fewer than half of them had ever masturbated at the time of the survey. 45% of the young women have their first sexual experience with a partner and are, if you will, sexually initiated by a man, before they have made their own experiences with physical desire, arousal and orgasm.

Whether boy or girl: the young people talk openly among their friends and with their partner about masturbation, but they do it alone and when they are undisturbed – often in their own room and when their parents are not home or when they are sleeping. Since most boys masturbate during or after watching pornography, they are often in front of a screen and/or in their own bed. The subject of masturbation is almost never discussed with the parents. The inhibitions between the generations are still very strong here. Girls tend to discuss the subject the way Lara (16) portrays: *‘with my girlfriends (...), not with my mother’*. The fear of being ‘caught’ by the parents often leads to the suppression or delay of their own desire, especially if masturbation is frowned upon or banned in the home for religious reasons, as Gülhanım (18) reports: *‘If my parents are home, it’s unpleasant because someone could walk in on me. I don’t like that. That’s why I really don’t do it a lot.’*

For almost all of the boys masturbation is a commonplace, natural and usually uncomplicated affair, which is part of the growing up process and that is how they see it too. As a result, their attitude to masturbation is relaxed, as the following case study illustrates:

**Dschamal, 18**, a Muslim with German citizenship, lives with three of his four siblings and his father. He has been with his girlfriend Asija for more than three years now. They attend a high school in Hamburg together. For religious reasons they both want to abstain from sex before marriage. However, Dschamal does not want to go without pornography. When asked whether he masturbated while watching pornography, he answered: *‘yes, of course (...), almost every time.’* It is important to him that he is undisturbed at the time: *‘either at night of when nobody’s at home’*. Dschamal was 14 when he masturbated for the first time and that is also when he had his first orgasm. In the past four weeks Dschamal masturbated around *‘twelve times’*, and he had an orgasm every time. Despite his religious affiliation, Dschamal is relaxed and confident about the subject of masturbation.

Around one third of the girls see masturbation as something positive and natural. The girls with masturbation experience describe it as *‘exciting’* and *‘interesting’*. The motivation to give it a go is often curiosity. *‘I was curious. Girlfriends had done it and told me about it (...) so I was curious and gave it a go.’* One case study will illustrate the relaxed attitude of many young women:

**Heidi, 19**, lives with her mother in Hamburg and attends a high school. Masturbation is something ‘natural’ for Heidi. She remembers being aware of her own pleasure as a child in the bath: *‘I knew that I liked it and that started when I was six or so.’* She realized this behaviour was sexual *‘quite early on, when I was 12 or 13.’* When asked if she has an orgasm when she masturbates now, Heidi said: *‘Yes, I think so. A different one to the one during sex.’* She describes masturbation as a part of her sexuality that is not particularly important but natural and unproblematic. *‘It isn’t important to me but I know that I have the option and sometimes it overcomes me. I’m not the kind of person who feels I have to suppress it, I’m allowed to do that and I’m not embarrassed about it. It just happens. It’s natural. I don’t think it’s bad, I’m not shy to touch myself.’*

For other girls masturbation is neither commonplace nor natural. A sizable number (especially girls not experienced with masturbation) reject the practice for themselves or at least do not exhibit any kind of interest in it, even if they have a generally positive attitude towards it. There are many different reasons for this: some report that they simply do not feel the desire. Others say the idea of it is alien and unpleasant to them *‘to lie there and explore myself.’* Other reasons were that they were in a steady relationship and in relationships, as we will see, the partner is responsible for their sexual satisfaction. Masturbation was also rejected for religious reasons (especially by young women with a migrant background). Or the young women have tried masturbation and did not find it satisfying. A small group (10 %) thought the notion of masturbating was ‘gross’. Here are some examples of the very different contexts in which women address their reservations about masturbation:

**Nele, 18:** *‘My best friend does it. Like I said, I don’t think it’s bad, it’s just that I can’t imagine it for myself.’*

**Deena, 17:** *‘I think it just doesn’t do very much for me. I’ve never really tried it, but I’ve never had a situation where I’ve thought that I would like to touch myself.’*

**Eva, 18:** *‘(...) My girlfriends talk about it but I don’t have the desire to do it. I’m not that interested yet. Maybe it depends on whether I’ve gone that far with a boy before, maybe I’ll need it afterwards, I don’t know.’*

**Dilek, 17:** *‘Have you ever masturbated?’ ‘No (very quietly).’ ‘Why [not]?’ ‘I think that’s gross. If I wanted it that badly, then I would find a boy, I would do it with a boy, rather than masturbate.’ ‘What is gross about it?’ ‘It’s disgusting (giggles), no, it’s gross, I don’t know, I’d never do that, never mind how urgent it was, I wouldn’t do it.’*

*Franzi, 17: 'I tried [masturbating] once and thought it's not so nice. I think it's quite natural, but I also think it's gross if I do it to myself. When Dieter does it, it's different.'*

In summary, it can be said that the boys' and girls' attitudes reflect their different practices. The young people who have masturbated before have a more positive and relaxed attitude towards masturbation; those who have never done it, who have only done it very rarely or who did so with little 'success' express more rejection, reservations and disinterest.

### 5.4.2 Masturbation and orgasm

If we dismiss the very early, often prepubescent 'masturbation attempts', masturbation almost always leads to an orgasm in boys. 17-year-old Max describes quite calmly that he has masturbated 15 times in the past four weeks and had an orgasm 'every time, really'. Among girls on the other hand, masturbation does not lead to orgasm every time. Of the 64 girls where this information was asked about, 50% say they had their first orgasm during sex with a partner. Around a quarter had never had an orgasm and another quarter experienced their first orgasm while masturbating. The young women have varying degrees of difficulty achieving orgasm while masturbating: on the one hand the girls report that they simply found out by 'trying it out', others in turn have had the experience that it 'doesn't work'. Here are some example statements:

*Maya, 17: 'I think if you give it a try, you learn. I didn't copy it from anywhere.' 'Learning by doing?' 'Yes, exactly.'*

*Sissi, 18: 'I think [I had my first orgasm] when I was ten, when I started masturbating.'*

*Janina, 19: 'Have you ever masturbated?' 'I've given it a go (laughs). Doesn't really work.' 'Could you elaborate, did you try it several times or in the past?' 'I tried several times. Definitely. I've spoken to my gynaecologist about it and to my friends and many said it takes some people a long time to achieve orgasm. Sometimes it can take years. Unfortunately I haven't found it yet.' 'That means you've tried several times, but you don't quite know what to do or you aren't managing to have an orgasm?' 'Exactly.' 'And what did your gynaecologist say about that?' 'It's normal, it takes time. You need experience. You only get to know your body over the years.'*

The difference described here regarding the boys' and girls' orgasm experiences has been known about since the Kinsey surveys, i.e. since the 1950s.<sup>236</sup> It is also known, however, that this difference is particularly marked in early adolescence and is reduced significantly with increasing age.<sup>237</sup>

For boys, masturbation is very frequently associated with watching pornography on their own, largely in the form of online video clips. More than 90% of all boys have already masturbated to pornographic online clips, many do so regularly (cf. chapter 4.2).<sup>238</sup> Masturbation aids from the past, such as magazines with nude pictures or pin ups (Playboy, Hustler, etc.), nude pictures and erotic literature found by chance have almost been pushed out completely by the new, multifaceted offerings of the internet. On the one hand the latent arousal of boys through the chance encounter with pornography is heightened, on the other hand pornography is sought out and used deliberately in order to feel desire and be aroused. The desire the boys refer to here has positive connotations. Boys do not experience themselves as being 'under pressure'. They rarely associate negative feeling such as a bad conscience, worry or ambivalences with masturbation.

**Cornell, 19:** *'It was in the evening. I was watching television. Everything was quiet and then I watched something slightly erotic and then I was in the mood so I had a wank.'*

**Timo, 17:** *'I was sitting at home, bored, all day long. I had nothing to do and thought: 'What can I do? It doesn't matter then, um, yes...' (grins)'*

**Benni, 19:** *'When I'm aroused [I watch porn] quite often.'*

**Markus, 19:** *'If I'm going to do it, I'll use a porn film for that.'*

**Artur, 17:** *'I was home alone in the evening and hadn't seen my girlfriend that day, at least not in the afternoon, and I don't know, I get in the mood for watching a porn film.'*

<sup>236</sup> Kinsey et al. (1948, 1953)

<sup>237</sup> Wallen, Lloyd (2011)

<sup>238</sup> Only three of the 80 young men surveyed rejected masturbation at the time of the survey or they said they had never masturbated before. Ronny and Maxim, both 17, said 'no' when they were asked if they had ever masturbated, but they gave no reasons. Chris (19) said that he had not been masturbating any more for the past two and a half months and it required a 'a lot of discipline' to abstain. Before that time he spent a lot of time consuming pornography and masturbating, 'in bad weeks even ten hours' (for in depth account, cf. chapter 4.2).

There are not that many male respondents who say that they sometimes masturbate without the support of the visual stimulation. Instead of pornography they use thoughts of their own girlfriend, classmates, celebrities and fantasies of heterosexual anal sex and sex in unusual places to get aroused.

**Ibrahim, 17:** *'During the time when I had a girlfriend I thought of her when I masturbated (...) or about having sex with my girlfriend.'*

**Jan, 17:** *'For example, it would be exciting to do it in the shower or something like that. [With] someone I know. From my circle of friends.' 'Are your fantasies different from pornography?' '(...) They are different. [It's] more affectionate.'*

**Felix, 18:** *'Of course I have erotic fantasies and they're to do with Julia and with my girlfriend, there's nothing really in the other direction. (...) Of course I have fantasies about what else we could do together and I've thought back at situations. But they were largely real situations.'*

For girls on the other hand, pornography plays almost no role as a 'masturbation aid'. To them, using pornography for masturbation seems absurd and odd – they class it very clearly as male behaviour. *'Some guys sit in front of that and do it (laughs). I don't think I'd sit there and masturbate to a porn film,'* says Lisa (17), who is one of the few young women who has found pornography arousing. The girls largely get their arousal from memories and fantasies. The 'leading role' in these fantasies is played by their own boyfriend, their ex-boyfriend, celebrities (actors, musicians), friends and acquaintances. Some girls also become aroused through erotic films and literature:

**Tina, 19:** *'(...) sometimes you have fantasies about how you'd like it. (...) I don't often watch [films], I like reading these romantic or erotic novels. I have a book right now that is a lot about sex (laughs).'*

**Lisa, 17:** *'When I masturbate? I do that so rarely (laughs). Sometimes I think of my ex-boyfriend, how great it was with him. Or I saw something on television that I think of when I'm in bed in the evening.'*

**Bea, 17:** *'Yes, I sometimes [have erotic fantasies] (laughs). Usually just about me and my boyfriend. I imagine how we're doing it (laughs).'*

**Sophie, 18:** *'Maybe thinking of other men. It happens that (...) I think of a friend of mine who I think is attractive but who isn't my boyfriend.'*

**Gülhanım, 18:** *'I read a story that I thought was erotic and I thought: "Hm, I could give that a go." I had heard [that] from others.'*

## Does masturbation belong in a relationship?

Masturbation frequency depends on relationship status. However, this connexion is very different depending on gender. While boys masturbate significantly less often if they are in a steady relationship, the reverse is the case among girls (cf. table 20): the girls in a relationship masturbate more often (24 %) than unattached girls of the same age (15 %). The reverse conclusion is that if girls are having no or little sex with a partner because they are unattached, they also masturbate more rarely. With the boys however, it is the single ones who masturbate more often than those who are currently in a steady relationship.

Table 20: **Masturbation in steady relationships** (by gender)

	Occurrence of masturbation in the past 4 weeks (in %)		Masturbation frequency in the past 4 week (average)	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
In a steady relationship	24	58	0.6	5.5
Currently not in a steady relationship	15	85	0.3	8.1
Significance	ns	.02	ns	.06

Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

Within a relationship, sex with a partner is clearly preferred by both sexes. When asked about the reasons why they do not or only rarely masturbate, most girls said it was because they did not feel like it – because they had a boyfriend 'for that'. Some girls were only shown by their boyfriends in the first place that they could masturbate. Violetta (18) said: *[My boyfriend] showed me (...) that you can do something like that.'*

The girls often see pleasuring themselves as a kind of 'makeshift solution'; they primarily see their boyfriends as 'responsible' for their sexual satisfaction.

**Nadine, 18:** *'If I'm in a relationship, then I have sex. Then I don't need to do it myself.'*

**Nele, 18:** *'Do you masturbate sometimes?' 'No, I have my boyfriend for that.'*

**Katja, 19:** *'Have you ever masturbated?' 'No.' 'Have you considered doing that?' 'I'd say so.' 'Why aren't you doing it now?' 'Because I don't have a reason to, because I have my boyfriend (laughs).'*

**Cora, 18:** *'I have my boyfriend for that [sexual satisfaction]. Just doing it myself – I think I have a boyfriend, he can get me off.'*

The boys also have good reasons for preferring sex with a partner; they think sex with a partner is just 'better'.

**Steven, 18:** *'At the moment [I'm] not [masturbating] at all anymore. I don't know, I don't need it. If you've had sex, then masturbating isn't that great anymore. You know that sex is what's really satisfying, masturbating less so.'*

**Dieter, 18:** *'Like I said, extremely rarely. Almost never, because I have a girlfriend. And that's significantly better than masturbating.'*

Within an adolescent relationship, masturbation is considered normal and unproblematic by both sexes. If a partner masturbates, is not seen as a threat or as a form of infidelity or as a sign of an unsatisfying or too infrequent sex life with the partner. Sex with a partner co-exists peacefully with masturbation in teenage relationships, even though boys in steady relationships significantly reduce their masturbation frequency.

### 5.4.3 Conclusion

Masturbation is widespread among young people. There are, however, major differences between the sexes, both with regard to the occurrence and the frequency as well as the attitudes. For boys, masturbation is almost always the first sexual experience and they almost always have their first orgasm through masturbation. Girls start later and they do not always have an orgasm when they masturbate. Quite a few girls had not had any experience with masturbation at the time of the survey. Most of the young people who have masturbation experience think it is normal and unproblematic. This is especially true for the boys. The girls' attitudes to masturbation are less homogeneous. The spectrum ranges from rejection and repulsion to curiosity and enthusiasm. Both sexes are agreed that they prefer sex with a partner.

We can only speculate about the possible causes of these gender differences. It is likely that the multifaceted conditions of female sexual socialization make it more difficult for young women or prevent them from having a pleasurable autonomous relationship with their bodies and their sexuality. In many sex-education media the female body and female sexuality are still depicted exclusively in connexion with pregnancy and childbirth. Likewise, schools and biology books often do not name the clitoris. Finally, the debate that goes back to Sigmund Freud about the vaginal orgasm as an expression of mature female sexuality makes its contribution to female sexual socialization. At the same time, the suggestion that those young women who are not or not yet interested in masturbation are lacking in some way must be avoided. The (in itself, plausible) idea that both sexes learn about their bodies, their sexual reactions and sexual desires via masturbation should not be turned into a sex-education masturbation dogma.







# 6

## *Digression: Youth sexuality and migration*

### **6.1** *Migration and sexual experiences: quantitative results*

*Anja Wermann and Silja Matthiesen*

### **6.2** *Contradictory demands – young women's reactions*

*Anja Wermann and Silja Matthiesen*

### **6.3** *Restrained or revealing – young men's reactions*

*Anja Wermann and Silja Matthiesen*

# Digression: youth sexuality and migration

## 6

*Anja Wermann and Silja Matthiesen*

According to figures by the Statistisches Bundesamt, there were around 15.7 million people with a migrant background living in the Federal Republic of Germany in 2010.<sup>239</sup> The percentage of the population with a migrant background, measured taking the whole population of 81.7 million into account, is 19.2 %, roughly one fifth.<sup>240</sup> These figures are even higher for young people: according to estimates one third of all young people in Germany have a migrant background.<sup>241</sup> King (2010) believes that 27% of the population under the age of 25 are from families with a migrant background. We find similar conditions in our sample: 23 girls and 18 boys (41 respondents or 26 %) in our study have a migrant background.<sup>242</sup>

Even though roughly a quarter of all young people in Germany have a migrant background, there are few studies about the sexual behaviour of this group in the German-speaking world. Two BZgA studies were published on the subject in 2010. One examined the sexual experiences of young people (498 girls and 516 boys) with a migrant background compared with German young people, the other surveyed 608 young people with a migrant background about their attitudes, needs, desire for information and media preferences in connection to sexuality, love and relationships.<sup>243</sup> The BZgA studies have found notable gender differences regarding the attitudes to sexuality and sexual behaviour: girls focus more on safety, boys more on the 'pleasure factor'. The social acceptance of early sexual experiences is also 'developed in

**239** The Statistisches Bundesamt (2011) defines people with a 'migrant background' as 'all those who have moved to the current territory of the Federal Republic of Germany since 1949, as well as all foreign nationals born in Germany and all those born in Germany as Germans with at least one parent who migrated to Germany or was born in Germany as a foreign national'. Cf. Statistisches Bundesamt (2011)

**240** Statistisches Bundesamt (2011)

**241** BZgA (2010b)

**242** King (2010)

**243** BZgA (2010a); BZgA (2010b). These questions were supplemented by 'questions about living environment and social situation of the young people, about their migrant background and about aspects of their integration', which means all of the 'respondents could be placed in the model of the Sinus-Migranten-Milieu ®'. Cf. BZgA (2010b), p. 5

a clearly gender-specific manner'.<sup>244</sup> As is to be expected, education, age and milieu have an impact on the attitudes to sexuality and on the communication about this subject: 'the more modern the milieu, the more open and relaxed the young people are about sexuality and love; the older and more educated the young people are, the more responsible and conscious [they are]'.<sup>245</sup>

In addition to these studies, two further works address the question about the relationship between sexual experiences and migrant background among young people, without, however, basing themselves on concrete figures.<sup>246</sup> There are also two studies about family ideas, fertility behaviour, education and migration, but they do not relate to young people.<sup>247</sup>

In our study the topic of youth sexuality and migration was not a focal point. This means that the evaluation took place after the fact. The young people were not interviewed about how they experience any difference from their German peers (with regard to sexual attitudes, behaviours and gender relationship).

Nevertheless there are differences to be seen between the migrants and their German peers, and we shall present them in this chapter. We have divided our 160 respondents into three groups for the following evaluation. We have assumed that it makes a crucial difference to young people's sexual behaviour and attitudes towards sexuality whether they have grown up in a cultural background that is liberal towards sexuality or in one that is conservative towards sexuality. These backgrounds were defined as follows:

- cultural migrant background with a conservative or traditional view of sexuality/gender: at least one parent is from eastern or southeastern Europe (excluding EU), Asia, Africa or South America (33, respondents, of which 18 women, 15 men);
- cultural migrant background with a liberal view of sexuality/gender: at least one parent is from another EU country or North America (8 respondents, of which 5 women and 3 men);
- German cultural background: both parents are from Germany (119 respondents, of which 57 women and 62 men).

<sup>244</sup> BZgA (2010b), p. 7

<sup>245</sup> BZgA (2010b), p. 7

<sup>246</sup> Bueno (2009); Kizilhan (2008)

<sup>247</sup> Röhr-Sendlmeier, Yun (2006); Helfferich, Klindworth (2010). In addition there are the non-scientific, partially autobiographical book publications on the subject of migration and youth sexuality. Cf. Ate (2008); Kaddor (2010); Deistler-Kaufmann et al. (2011)

In this chapter the interviews with the young people with a migrant background are given a quantitative and qualitative analysis. Groups 2 and 3 are taken together for the quantitative analysis and then compared with group 1 with regard to their relationship and sexual experience. For the qualitative evaluation, we will only look at the young people in group 1, and the experiences of the 18 girls and 15 boys will be analysed and presented separately.

## 6.1 Migration and sexual experience: Quantitative results

*Anja Wermann and Silja Matthiesen*

The 33 respondents with migrant backgrounds that have conservative views about sexuality/gender did not differ from the other young people with regard to their age (18 on average) or education (around half attend a high school). Many live in Hamburg,<sup>248</sup> around 40% say they are adherents of the Muslim faith. There are significant differences in their sexual behaviour with regard to their experience with steady relationships (cf. table 21) and intercourse (cf. table 22) to date. What is interesting is that with regard to masturbation and pornography consumption (experience and occurrence in the past four weeks), there is no difference between young people from a migrant background with conservative views and their peers with liberal views.

Table 21: **Migrant background and steady relationships** (in %)

	Background with liberal sex/gender views	Background with conser- vative sex/gender views	Sign.
<b>Currently in love</b>			
Women (n = 62 or 18)	65	44	.07
Men (n = 65 or 15)	60	33	.06
Total (n = 127 or 33)	62	39	.01
<b>First steady relationship at 16 or younger*</b>			
Women (n = 62 or 18)	95	63	.001
Men (n = 65 or 15)	93	87	ns
Total (n = 127 or 33)	94	74	.002
<b>Currently in a steady relationship</b>			
Women (n = 62 or 18)	60	22	.002
Men (n = 65 or 15)	49	27	.10
Total (n = 127 or 33)	54	24	.001
<b>Intercourse with the current steady partner</b>			
Total (n = 69 or 8)	86	38	.006

\* The differences between the genders among the respondents from conservative cultures is almost significant (p = .10, one-tailed), Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

**248** In Hamburg, the percentage of young people with a migrant background is 42%. This is in line with estimates for cities, at 40%. Cf. Boos-Nünning (2009)

The data show that young people from cultures that have conservative views about sex/gender start steady relationships later, are less likely to have sex in the current relationship and are less likely to be currently in love. All in all we find a clear deferral of the first steady relationship, which could be interpreted as greater restraint or as a ban on heterosexual relationships during adolescence.

Table 22: **Migrant background and sexual intercourse experience** (in %)

	Background with liberal views	Background with conservative views	Sign.
<b>Sexual intercourse experience*</b>			
Women (n = 62 or 18)	89	22	.000
Men (n = 65 or 15)	79	60	ns
Total (n = 127 or 33)	84	39	.000
<b>Intercourse frequency (past 4 weeks)</b>			
Women (n = 62 or 18)	53	11	.002
Men (n = 65 or 15)	53	20	.02
Total (n = 127 or 33)	53	15	.000
<b>More than one sexual partner (only respondents with intercourse experience)</b>			
Women (n = 55 or 4)	58	100	ns
Men (n = 50 or 9)	64	100	.05
Total (n = 105 or 13)	61	100	.004

\*\*Here, the reversal of the gender difference is interesting; the women from conservative cultures are significantly less likely to have had sexual intercourse experience than the men ( $p = .04$ ), the women from liberal societies are more likely to have had sexual intercourse than the men (though this difference is not statistically significant).

Quelle: Source: BZgA, data set 'Youth Sexuality in the Internet Age', 2011

We also found significant differences between the groups with regard to intercourse experience – the much lower level of sexual intercourse experience among the migrant girls (22% experienced) is striking, both compared with the girls from liberal backgrounds (89%) and the migrant boys (60%).<sup>249</sup> This leads to a reversal of the gender difference in the group with a migrant background: while the women from liberal societies are sexually somewhat more experienced than the boys of the same age, it is exactly the other way around for young people from cultures with conservative views.<sup>250</sup>

**249** The greater restraint of the girls with a migrant background is also confirmed by the BZgA's study on youth sexuality: according to its data, 53 % of the girls with a migrant background have had sexual intercourse experience by age 17, while the same is true for 66 % of the girls without a migrant background. Cf. BZgA (2010a), p. 120

**250** Schmidt, in his work on the social history of youth sexuality, calls this the 'modern' or 'Scandinavian' (girls start sooner) and the 'traditional' (boys are sexually more experienced than girls of the same age) pattern and describes a trend for all European countries towards the 'Scandinavian pattern', which goes hand in hand with a reduction in double standards and an increase in women's self-determination. Cf. Schmidt (2004b); cf. also Bozon, Kontula (1998)

The reasons behind why the young migrant women are less experienced with relationships and sexual intercourse could be stricter standards with regard to sexuality and relationships, standards that are in place for them but not for their liberal peers. 'Muslim girls in general and Turkish girls specifically' are particularly reserved, the BZgA study on youth sexuality found. The extent of their tie to religion seems to influence their degree of reticence.<sup>251</sup> Further reasons for sexual restraint cited by the girls from migrant families are that they 'don't think close contact to the opposite sex is right before marriage' and that they are scared that their 'parents could find out'.<sup>252</sup>

Young people from conservative cultures are less experienced sexually, but if they are experienced at all, then they are more 'promiscuous', i.e. they are more likely to have had more than one sexual partner. We could speculate that the young people with a migrant background have not yet internalized the regulating factors of 'permissiveness with affection' as much as their liberal peers. Because of the small sample numbers (four women and nine men with a migrant background have already had sexual intercourse, the women have had an average of three sexual partners, the men seven) this is just an initial impression. The differences found here are low to moderate. This could be taken as a hint that young people from cultures with traditional sex/gender views are largely orienting themselves by the liberal pattern of Western youth sexuality. At the same time it becomes clear that adolescence, which is a period of change and detachment for all young people, 'demands double the transformations'<sup>253</sup> from young people with a migrant background because it is not just the transition into adulthood that is a challenge, so too is how to deal with their cultural background here in Germany.

The following qualitative evaluation has been performed separately for the young women and men. It is to illuminate the question of the different influences of family, religion and cultural standards on the sexual behaviour of young women and men with a conservative migrant background. We seek to describe the conflicts and individual solution strategies of the two sexes that result from the cultural differences.

**251** BZgA (2010a)

**252** BZgA (2010a), p. 8

**253** King (2010), p. 5



## 6.2 Contradictory demands – young women’s reactions

*Anja Wermann and Silja Matthiesen*

Young people with a migrant background always have to take a stance about the sexual norms, ideals and practices dominant in Germany. These can be summarized very briefly as follows.

- Liberal sexual attitudes and behaviours are dominant. They include the acceptance of non-marital relationships for young people, the acceptance of extra-marital sexuality for young people as well as the acceptance of masturbation and pornography.
- Young people have an egalitarian attitude towards the sexes, i.e. they demand the same sexual options and rights for men and women with regard to sexual self-determination, sex (before marriage) and sexual fidelity.
- In addition, the dominant ideals are those focused on relationships and love, which express themselves in the organization of sexuality in loving relationships and in the demand for fidelity and sexually exclusive relationships.<sup>254</sup>

Taking a stance to this Western pattern of youth sexuality can mean many different things for girls with a migrant background – liberalness, gender equality and relationship orientation could be rejected and dismissed in light of restrictive religious requirements; they could be desired and fought for in a strict parental home; they could be tried out secretly, and much more.

As already mentioned, 18 young women from a cultural background with conservative views about sex/gender participated in our study. All 18 respondents live in Hamburg, their cultural origins are very different. The largest group (eleven young women) have a Turkish migrant background, two an Iranian one, two a South American one, two an African one and one respondent has a southeast European migrant background. The circumstances of the young women are extremely heterogeneous: the parents could be from different countries, the parents and/or respondents have been living in Germany for different lengths of time and have varying degrees of integration; the homes vary in how liberal or conservative they are – and here it naturally plays a role whether both parents or just one of the parents is from outside Germany. Not least it is crucial whether the parent with the migrant background is at all involved in the parenting process, and if so, to what extent. In actual fact, the circumstances of the young women are ‘just as diverse as those of the long-established German population’.<sup>255</sup>

<sup>254</sup> Cf. BZgA (2010a); Dannenberg, Stich (2005); Schmidt (2004b) as well as chapter 2 above

<sup>255</sup> BZgA (2010b), p. 7

From the diversity of the social situations and the possible ways of dealing with the (at times) contradictory cultural demands, there are three main patterns among the 18 young women surveyed, which can be distinguished using several characteristics. We analysed the following:

- family background;
- contact to the opposite sex;
- experiences with and attitudes to steady (non-marital) relationships;
- experiences and attitudes to sexuality, pre-marital sexuality and virginity;
- the extent of their tie to religion and traditions;
- attitudes to education and work.

The three groups that will be described in detail in the following sections can be understood as three options for how young women deal with the task of integrating different cultural sexual norms.

### 6.2.1 The rebels

With eleven (out of 18) young women, the ‘rebellious daughters’ are the largest group. They all try to accommodate the divide between the conservative attitudes and prohibitions of their original culture as well as the liberal attitudes of the German culture where they live. The majority of those who have had a relationship, and all of the four women who have had sexual intercourse, are in this group. They desire sexual freedoms and demand to be allowed to make the same sexual experiences as their brothers and their liberal peers. The parents and the family on the other hand are largely (very) conservative and defend the attitude that their daughter should not have any contact to men, should not have a boyfriend and should not have sex before marriage:

*Akay, 18: [My 11-year-old brother] is already allowed to have a girlfriend. (...) He can come home and say, “Dad, I kissed a girl today. Is that bad?” My father always says, “No, you’re a boy, you’re allowed to do that” (...) I say for fun sometimes, “I kissed a boy today, what now?” Then I always get the look, “No, you’re not allowed, you’re a girl” (...). As a Turkish girl, you know about that. You don’t know any different.’*

*Tanja, 17: ‘(...) and then [my father] has a liberal touch: I’m allowed to choose my own husband. But he also behaves in completely the opposite way: I’m not allowed to talk to a man, I’m not allowed to see or meet a man, I’m not allowed to talk on the phone with a man. I’m not allowed anything. I don’t have the ability to choose the right one for me, for my*

marriage. That was also clear when my sister wanted to get engaged and my father freaked out. Since then she's been the biggest whore.'

**Ayse, 18:** 'My parents don't mind if I were to have a boyfriend in the future, but they want that to happen quite late. They also don't care who it is, what religion he has or what nationality. They just don't want me to [have] a boyfriend now because they say that boys aren't mature enough yet for that. The typical excuse (laughs).'

**Irem, 19:** 'If I were to meet up with a boy, I don't tell [my mother]. (...) I don't think she wants to hear it.'

**Dilek, 17:** '(...) In our family (...) we're not allowed to have a boyfriend. If I had a boyfriend, I wouldn't tell.'

The parental and religious prohibitions are not simply accepted by the 'rebellious daughters'. Instead they think about them and critically evaluate them. This necessarily leads to conflicts, with the home on the one hand, but also with the (secret) partners. The young women have to go against prohibitions and learn to stand up for their freedom.

The 'rebellious daughters' feel that certain religious requirements are external and imposed on them. They take a critical stance. At the same time they feel tied to some rules and might have internalized religious ideas of 'cleanliness' and 'honour'.

**Breaking with the virginity requirement.** This conflict is particularly clear when it comes to the subject of virginity. Some women express substantial ambivalence between their desire for sexual liberalness and their inner tie to religious rules. Irem (19) for example currently wants to adhere to the virginity requirement, but she secretly thinks it's 'ridiculous'.

**Irem, 19:** 'It's different for every family but it means a lot to me. It's the only thing I keep clean. It's really important to me that nobody has touched it and that it's clean (laughs). That's a gift. That's a gift I give to someone and it's clean and it's only for him. That's how we think of it. It's a gift.' 'Do you see it like that too?' 'To be honest, when I think of myself, if I were to ignore religion, ignore religion and what my parents think, I think I definitely (...) wouldn't be a virgin any more, definitely not. Mhm (negating) definitely not. I think, no, I wouldn't be. I would have thought, "Why should I be?" because everyone says how much fun it is. Why shouldn't I do it? I'd do it, yes, I'd do it.'

The women in this group who have had sexual intercourse do not rebel openly against parental and cultural prohibitions. Instead they break these rules secretly. The young women go to parties secretly, have relationships secretly and have sexual intercourse secretly. This secrecy requires elaborate information management in the family, as in Tanja's (17) case: *'[My (German) mother knew] about my first boyfriend (...). I didn't sleep with him, by the way, even though I was with him for a year. My sister knew as well, but my [Turkish] father didn't.'* The need for secrecy and the resulting betrayal of the parents is unpleasant, and associated with a bad conscience as well as inner conflicts, such as the stories of Akay and Tanja make clear:

**Akay, 18:** *'[For my parents, I'm] the good daughter who will pass her school exams, who's never had a boyfriend, never had sex, doesn't smoke, doesn't drink, the perfect daughter. And then suddenly, bam! She smokes, she had a boyfriend, this, that and the other... the perfect daughter's gone and some parents just didn't want to believe it, mine for example. (...) I have two faces, if I can say it honestly and openly like that. I've got used to it now. Outside I'm jolly, I've got a cigarette in my hand, alcohol in my hand, I'm very open. At home I'm the good daughter, who helps with the cooking and the cleaning, who reads a book. I don't know, I prefer life outside, but ... yes.'*

**Tanja, 17:** *'After my first time I felt really dirty and absolutely disgusting but I didn't regret it because it was really nice. But I still felt bad. Now I think it's part of so many people's lives, why shouldn't it be part of my life? During and afterwards it's totally fine, but when I go home, I always feel a little bit found out.'*

17-year-old Yasmin on the other hand does not have a problem with the fact that she has already had sexual intercourse despite a parental prohibition. She aggressively proclaims her power to make decisions about her life and her body:

**Yasmin, 17:** *'I'm quite alright with it. I don't regret it. I think it's my life and my body and I can do with that what I want. (...) It only hurts me as long as nobody knows about it. If it were to come out, my family's honour would be sullied. But because nobody knows, nobody's hurt. I know it and I think it's good.'*

**Complying with the virginity requirement.** It is not just the break with the ‘virginity requirement’ that can lead to conflicts, so too can the desire to remain a virgin. One particularly difficult circumstance for the ‘rebellious daughters’ is that they want to create some freedoms for themselves and have to fight for them in the home, but on the other hand they often create boundaries with partners and do not want to fulfil expectations. That then becomes a problem when they do not yet feel ready for sexual intercourse (Eva, Akay) or when they do not want to sleep with every steady boyfriend (like Dana, who has had sexual intercourse experience). These three women explain how they were pressured by (ex) boyfriends to go further sexually than they themselves wanted:

**Eva, 18:** *‘At some point he said to me: “It’s not okay, you’re giving me far too little affection, I can’t wait that long.” He wanted sex. And I’m not that kind of girl, I can’t do that. Then he said: “If it’s not going to get better, we can leave it straight away.” I told him: “You have to give me time (...), you should be proud of me that I’m not the kind of girl, but instead you put me under pressure.” And he said: “Quite honestly, I can’t do it.” And then we broke up, or he broke up with me.’*

**Akay, 18:** *‘After I heard about this brothel story, I asked him: “Do you really need that? (...) Why?” And he said: “Every man needs that from time to time and if you aren’t getting it from your girlfriend, then it’s just an issue.” I then thought: “Do I have to do that for him? Or am I going to do that for myself? Or will I leave it be completely?” I chose to leave it be completely. I just don’t feel ready to sleep [with him].’*

**Dana, 18:** *‘At some point (...) they [previous boyfriends] even wanted to have intercourse with me when I was sleeping. Of course I woke up because if you touch me, then I wake up immediately. And they were unfaithful to me too, with other girls, because I couldn’t give them what they wanted.’*

18-year-old Ayse also secretly has a boyfriend who would like to sleep with her. She, however, wants to wait until her wedding night and describes her ambivalent situation in detail:

**Ayse, 18:** *‘The desire is there and from time to time I have the opportunity, even though that may sound strange. And you get closer to each other, but just before I’m always the one who says, “Stop, it’s going too far, not yet.” (...) It would be ideal to wait to the wedding night (laughs). He has a greater desire than I do, he’s a boy after all (laughs).’*

The couple's attempt at a solution is that he is allowed to 'see her naked' and they can 'cuddle' and sometimes they get 'closer to each other in a different way'. Ayse describes the current compromise as follows:

**Ayse, 18:** *'And that's why we have to find these little evasions, so we didn't directly have sex (laughs). We always try to do other things, for example (laughs embarrassedly), this is going to be gross (embarrassed laugh). He's allowed to see me naked (embarrassed laugh) and all that and, um, I try to look the way he would like me to. (...) He tries to be gentle and as un-pushy as possible.'*

It is only 18-year-old Fatma who is 'officially' in a relationship and 'officially' experienced with sexual intercourse. Her story is not typical for this group in that conflicts with the parents do not play a role. Her parents are divorced, her mother has liberal view and Fatma lives in a flatshare. That means Fatma does not have this secrecy requirement. She describes other strategies for dealing with various cultural expectations. Her story, as well as that of 18-year-old Akay, are to illustrate how different the extent of sexual freedoms and the associated conflicts for the young women in this group are.

**Fatma, 18,** has parents from Turkey and they are Muslims, *'but not strictly practising'*. She herself says she is *'not religious'*. Fatma grew up with her mother, her parents separated when she was four years old. Fatma has been going out with Ali for ten months. Before that she had been in a relationship for three years. Her mother gets on very well with Ali. Fatma also gets on well with her boyfriend's family. To make the relationship *'public'*, Fatma says that *'out of respect'* you do not say *'this is my boyfriend or this is my girlfriend'*, instead *'you either keep it secret or you say 'we're promised to each other' or 'we want to share our future together' and we make that clear to everyone and that makes people look at this relationship differently in this culture.'* Fatma has slept with four men so far. She had *'sex relatively quickly'* with Ali because she assumed that *'he had already done it and it was a silly situation'*. But in actual fact he had still been a virgin. But the initial problems were dealt with quickly and now *'it's really good'*. Ali is a devout Muslim and would have liked *'it if we both had our first time together'*. But he does not reject sex before marriage. *'He wants it far [too much] for that,'* says Fatma and adds, *'it's crazy because (...) so many Turkish boys look for German girls (...), because they will let them sooner (...), at least that's what they believe.'*

**Akay, 18**, attends a high school in Hamburg and feels ‘put under pressure’ by her parents. She has been completely banned from contact with men, ‘be it friendship or be it a relationship’. But Akay does not stick to this ban because she thinks it is ‘quite ridiculous. I also think that’s the reason why Turkish women are so oppressed, because you just don’t have any experience’. She believes that young people should ‘have their first experiences at 17, 18’ and she is having these secretly. She has already had three steady relationships, she is currently still going out with the third, but she has not had good experiences with any of the three partners: ‘I trusted the first one, who cheated on me with his ex; I trusted the second one, he beat me; I trusted the third one, he went to a brothel’. Akay is currently still a virgin and does not ‘feel ready’ for sexual intercourse. Despite pressure from her third partner, she is holding firm. She tries to process the stressful experiences alone or in conversations with close girlfriends. During a particularly critical period, she sought help from a psychologist. Her parents do not know about any of this, because ‘that [would be] twice the shit, then I would have been beaten and my parents would have found out that I had a boyfriend.’

The subject of education plays a special role for the ‘rebellious daughters’. A strikingly large number (seven out of eleven) attend a high school, but even the four students attending a vocational college are planning to take the high-school leaving exam and then go on to university. They are all ambitious, career-oriented, very focused on their education and they have their sights firmly set on their professional future. A high level of education among young female migrants clearly leads to them adapting their attitudes to sexuality to the Western pattern and to them desiring more freedom and self-determination in sexuality.<sup>256</sup> In addition, the good educational opportunities give the young women new freedoms, such as when they are allowed to study in a different town with their parents’ consent.

The battle on the part of the ‘rebellious daughters’ for more sexual freedoms and equal rights leads to significant conflicts: the experiences with physical violence and crossing sexual boundaries, but also with internal psychological conflicts – from a constantly guilty conscience to spending several months in psychiatric treatment – are high in this group. The prospects and hopes of these young women are focused on a self-determined future. They try to climb socially in order to leave the nest and escape the cultural and religious restrictions of their birth culture.

**256** Röhr-Sendlmeier and Yun also think that ‘the young foreign adults with high-school qualifications have ideas about family (...) that are [similar] to those of the German survey participants’, which is particularly true ‘for Turkish women with a high-school education’. Cf. Röhr-Sendlmeier, Yun (2006)

### 6.2.2 The traditional girls

The three women with a Turkish background that we have put into the group of the 'traditional daughters' feel very tied to their birth culture and to Islam. They have largely adopted the cultural and religious values of their parents and consider them very important. Gönül (18) voluntarily wears a headscarf without her family telling her to do so. Levine (19) explains: *'Religion is everything for me, I'd say. My pride, my honour. I pay attention to everything when it comes to religion.'* As a result none of the three young women have had a relationship or sexual experiences yet. Two young women would be allowed by their families to have a boyfriend, but they are putting off having a relationship for various reasons:

**Lara, 16:** *'For my mother it's just important that I introduce him to her. She really wants to meet him before it turns into something serious. He should come and introduce himself so she can form an opinion of him. I don't know about my father, I don't think it's really going to interest him. (...) I used to think [I didn't have a boyfriend] because of my appearance, because I'm a bit chubby. And then I thought it was because I'm so shy.'*

**Levine, 19:** *'School is much more important to me than a relationship. But if a boy came along who is important to me and who understands me in every way, then I wouldn't say no. But it's really hard to find a boy like that.'*

For the family and in the culture, the daughter's virginity is of high value. Sex before marriage is out of the question for all three of them and is firmly rejected by all of them:

**Levine, 19:** *'It's important. If I had done that beforehand, that wouldn't have fit in with my family. And not at all with my brothers. As a dirty girl, I'd say. I'd feel, ... let's say, dirty (loud). Because then I would have slept with someone and with my husband. That's out of the question. I won't do it. (...) And if I didn't have a relationship, then I wouldn't do anything like that. With my husband, but not before.'*

**Gönül, 18:** *'No, not that. I've never had [sex]. Finding the big love is important, because it's not possible without love. I couldn't imagine it either. There definitely has to be love. If you only have sex with love, that has to be (smiles). Yes, definitely [I would wait until my wedding] because that's how it is with us and I wouldn't... I'd wait till the wedding.'*

**Lara, 16:** *'[My mother says] that I should wait for the right one. And of course she says no sex before marriage. That's important to me too. I don't know. I just think my husband should be my first one. I'll be with him for my whole life. That wasn't the case for my parents [they're divorced], but*



*I think that. I don't [want to marry] too early. Only when I've finished my education and I'm established in my job. Then I'd think about it.'*

The lives of these three young women is marked by significantly less conflict than those of the 'rebellious daughters', since they use their birth culture as a guide, instead of rebelling against it. They are converging on the liberal attitudes towards the sexes with regard to the professional and economic independence of women. All three of them also take it for granted that they will finish their education before starting a family.<sup>257</sup>

**Lara, 16:** *'Most of the people in my family still think that the woman stays at home and cooks, but I don't see it that way. I want to stand on my own two feet and not just be at home and look after the children and cook. [My parents] want me to stand on my own two feet and achieve something on my own, instead of having my husband bring the money home when I'm married so that I can take care of myself.'*

**Gönül, 18:** *'When I get married, I'd still like to work and not just sit at home.'*

The three traditional young women come from backgrounds where education is not central. They attend a vocational college. With them too it is striking that they have career ambitions and the desire not to stop at vocational qualifications, but to carry on with the university matriculation or some other further training. The case stories of Gönül and Lara give a comprehensive picture of the circumstances situations of the traditional young women:

**Gönül, 18,** lives with her three siblings *'with my parents'*. She currently still has Turkish citizenship and wants to *'wait and see'* whether she will get take German nationality or not. Her relationship with her parents is *'quite good really'*; there was only *'stress with the parents during puberty'*: *'[If I go out [too late] or shop too much (...), but otherwise there are no problems at the moment.'* She describes herself as an *'open girl, not shy'* and has many hobbies that include *'playing football'* as well as singing and dancing. On the *'women's day'* in the swimming pool she likes to go swimming, but *'rarely because I wear a headscarf'*. She has been wearing the headscarf since *'year five'*. Even though her parents are devout and she goes to the mosque with them, they were *'shocked'* about her independent decision. But Gönül says about her faith: *'[It's] important [to me] (...) that's why I also wear a headscarf (...), I'm happy*

**257** In Turkey, women often have fewer educational opportunities so that they become mothers young. In Germany the chances of achieving higher qualifications increase, which causes them to delay having their first child. Cf. Helfferich, Klindworth (2010)

*with it.' Even though she has contact with men via 'colleagues' – she is doing a 'three-year course in home and family care' – and through friends, she has not had a steady relationship yet. A steady boyfriend 'wouldn't be to have fun' but: 'If I had a steady boyfriend, I would (...) think that this is about marriage'. She has recently fallen in love with a 20-year-old acquaintance: 'I've [known] him for a long time [from the family circle]'. But she does not know how this will develop 'because it's new' and she has not yet revealed her feelings to him. They 'talk on the phone (...) and chat' from time to time so that she knows that he does not 'currently have a girlfriend'. She has not had any sexual experiences yet, she has never 'kissed' anyone either because 'I'm not like that, I don't want it that directly'. She can conceive of sexuality as part of a marriage: 'Love definitely has to be part of it.' She would like to have her first time on her wedding night, but she does not have any specific idea in her mind: 'I don't know. It's something new. You wait and you're engaged (...), you love each other. I don't know any more than that.'*

**Lara, 16**, was born and raised in Germany. Her parents are from Turkey but they are divorced. Lara lives with her mother, who works. For her, Turkey is 'a place to go on holiday where I visit my other relatives'. Even though she sees Germany as her home, she feels like a 'Turkish girl'. She explains: 'I'm different, somehow. Our views about life for example. I'm more in my religion and [my friends] are more in their religion'. Lara's religion is Islam: 'I've been raised that way. My parents aren't very strict about it. (...) They wouldn't force me, for example, to wear a headscarf. They leave that decision up to me.' Her parents are more liberal than the 'old-fashioned' relatives in Turkey and they would like Lara 'to be able to take care of myself'. Lara has not yet had a boyfriend and if she did, it would be important to her mother 'that I introduce him to her. She wants to meet him before it turns into something serious.' Sex before marriage is rejected by her mother. She thinks 'the husband should be the first one'. She wants to get married in her early twenties: 'When I'm secure (...) in my job.' She believes that her future husband, were she to meet him long before the wedding, would wait with the 'first time', explaining 'if we really loved [me]'.

For the traditional girls, there are no conflicts with their source families because they have largely internalized their value system and are following it. Although they deviate from the Western ideal of sexual permissiveness in their attitudes and behaviour, this causes little friction because the circle of friends tend to have similar views, and falling in love and relationships are avoided. Their 'abstinence' from relationships and sexuality is not seen as a deprivation or as a problem. It is justified

with the traditional tie between sexuality and marriage and is seen as morally good. The prospects of these young women lie in finding a suitable husband and tying love, sexuality and marriage together to suit the birth culture and their religion.

### 6.2.3 The sexually integrated girls

Among four young women the migrant background has a minor on their attitudes and their sexual experiences, or none at all. For three of the four women only one parent has a migrant background, the other is German.

17-year-old Renate and 18-year-old Antje both have an Iranian father with whom they have never lived and who has not played an active role in their upbringing and socialization; in both cases the parents separated very early: there is no need for these two young women to reconcile two different cultures, they are confronted only with the German culture in their family and among their circle of friends. For Julia (17) the Mexican culture of her father seems to play almost no role. In conversation she seems like a young woman without a migrant background with all the liberal sexual freedoms. It is only Gülhanım's (18) parents who have a Turkish migrant background. Gülhanım does not seem to have a problem reconciling her birth culture and the culture of the country where she lives. Her parents grant her many freedoms. She describes her family thus: *'We aren't Muslims, that's why I don't have any conflicts there.'* Gülhanım is very interested in Japan and the Japanese culture, which occupies her time. She has sought out a third culture as a reference.

Even though all four respondents have liberal attitudes, only one of them, Julia, has had a relationship. None of them have had sexual intercourse. Since the migrant background does not play a noticeable role in these young women, it is not surprising that they have hardly any conflicts with their parents apart from the typical conflicts of puberty.

What is striking is that for these four young women the career future does not have such a high standing as for the respondents in the other three groups. Julia wants to do *'something with art'*. Renate's career plans are still entirely open, Gülhanım wants to study Japanese language and culture and Antje *'probably want[s] to do a gap year doing volunteer work (...) or work and travel in Australia or somewhere like that'*. King explains the 'highly charged significance' of education for children of migrant parents – as can be seen in the first two groups – by saying that the 'improvement in status that the migration aims at is to be achieved in the subsequent generation by improving their standard of education'.<sup>258</sup> It is possible that this 'improvement function' falls away if the parents already enjoy a high status or if only one parent has a migrant background. To conclude, Antje and Gülhanım's stories will describe two constellations:

<sup>258</sup> King (2012), p. 5

**Antje, 18**, has never met her Iranian father, she has grown up with her mother who is *'half Dutch, half German'*. As a result, his religion and his cultural background had no influence on her upbringing. Antje has not been in love yet, to which she says *'It's sad but it's true, I know'*. She has not yet had a steady relationship or sexual intercourse. She emphasizes: *'But I'm not asexual or anything like that (laughs)'*. She has *'made out with people'* but *'there's still a boundary to sleeping with someone'*. In contrast to the young women who say no to relationships and sexual intercourse before marriage because of their cultural background, Antje feels pressure from her liberal environment. She says: *'[I think it's] not normal to still be a virgin at 18½ and to not have had a boyfriend and not have been in love'*. She thinks the *'lack of a father figure'* is the cause of her not having *'got involved quickly'* with the opposite sex. She also finds the *'emotional dependence'* that she sees in her girlfriends' relationships off-putting.

**Gülhanım, 18**, is very interested in Japan and Japanese culture, which alienates her Turkish parents: *'It bothers my parents a bit that I feel more of a tie with Japan than with Turkey. But I don't have any real interest in Turkish culture. (...) [I've] met some Japanese people because I go to a lot of events that have to do with Japan.'* Gülhanım wants to *'do Japanese studies'* after leaving school *'and then do a Master's in interpreting'*. There have not been any arguments with her parents about her big interest in Japan; *'from time to time there's an argument when I say I want to [go] to a Japanese concert and they ask why I don't go to Turkish concerts. 'Why don't you spend time watching some Turkish films?' But they accept it because I've been doing this since year three or four.'* Gülhanım says she is an *'atheist'*, her justification being: *'because I don't believe in God or some other religion. My parents don't either. We're not Muslims, that's why I don't have any conflicts there.'*

The four representatives of this group, whose migrant background does not have a perceptible influence on their sexual socialization, remind us of the diverse circumstances that are hidden behind the label 'migration'. This diversity should always be kept in mind so that the young people are not falsely seen as 'representatives of their original country or the country of their parents, instead of as individuals who were socialized here'.<sup>259</sup> The widespread assumption that sexual development is inevitably shaped by migrant background also turns out to be misleading. These four stories highlight that family situations should always be looked at with all their individual features and that

<sup>259</sup> Bueno (2009), p. 67

migrant families are not excluded from the late-modern pluralization of the relationship worlds.

#### 6.2.4 Conclusion

The quantitative and qualitative analyses, which illuminate the special living conditions of young women with a migrant background, can be summarized as follows:

The differences in sexual behaviour and in attitudes to sexuality between young people with a liberal cultural background and those with a conservative background are low to moderate. This can be seen as a clue that young people from traditional cultures largely orient themselves by the liberal pattern of Western youth sexuality. The 'sexually integrated' young women are particularly indistinguishable from their liberal peers.

One group of young women are affected by the traditional, conservative restrictions regarding gender that their original culture and religion impose. These grant the women less sexual freedom and less sexual self-determination than they do men of the same age. There are two reactive patterns to this double standard. On the one hand there are the 'rebellious daughters' who reject the prohibitions of their original culture and their home. They try, usually secretly and often accompanied by enormous psychological, family and relationship conflicts, to fight for new sexual freedoms as well as respect for their individual boundaries. On the other hand the 'traditional' women (currently) avoid conflicts with their family by largely adopting their value system. The resulting 'abstinence' of sexual freedoms and sexual self-determination is not seen as a problem; instead it is justified citing the traditional link between sexuality and marriage and it is seen as morally good.

### 6.3 Restraint or freedom? Young men's reactions

*Anja Wermann and Silja Matthiesen*

15 young men from a migrant background with conservative attitudes about sex/gender participated in our study. Eight live in Hamburg and seven in Leipzig. They have very heterogeneous backgrounds. Six have an eastern European migrant background, three of them are from Russia, the others are from the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Moldova; the remaining nine are from various countries (Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Algeria, Bangladesh, Jordan, India, Mexico). The largest group (seven respondents) are Muslim, one young man is an Orthodox Christian, while another respondent is a Jehovah's Witness. The level of their religious commitment varies: two young men (Orthodox, Muslim) do not care about their religion, the others (Muslims, Jehovah's Witness) say it is important to them. Six young men attend a high school, the other nine attend a vocational college. As was the case among the young women, the

circumstances here are also very diverse. This is often because of the different source cultures and depends on whether the young men were born in Germany or only came to Germany later on. Apart from in one case, the German language skills of the respondents are good to very good. In the majority of cases (eleven sets of parents) both parents have a migrant background, four young men have a German mother and a father with a migrant background. Four of the 15 sets of parents are separated or divorced. All of the young men with a migrant background still live with their parents.

For all 15 young men we examined similar features to those we looked at in the young women with a migrant background:

- relationship experiences to date;
- sexual experiences;
- attitudes to sexuality;
- the extent of their religious ties;
- their attitudes to women (as far as possible);
- their attitudes to work and education.

We can distinguish between two groups, which we will describe in the following sections.

### 6.3.1 The restrained boys

We have put eight young men into this group, including four of the six with an eastern European migrant background. All of them have had no or only very little sexual experience to date; six of the eight respondents have not yet had sexual intercourse. A further important common feature is that they want sexual intercourse ‘with a steady girlfriend’, i.e. they romanticize sexuality. They therefore follow the Western pattern where sexuality with another person is tied to a loving relationship.

*Daniel, 17: ‘I would really have to have feelings for her.’*

*Igor, 18: ‘[To me, sexuality means] that you (...) can [show] your closeness, that you’re (...) willing to make more of it, more of the relationship. It’s not just a ‘temporary relationship’ to get experience. (...) You don’t just say: “Yes, I’ve had sex today and tomorrow it’s bye bye.”’*

**Heinrich, 18:** *'I'm not the kind of person to approach other and (snaps fingers) says, "Hey, let's do it."*

The two boys who have had sexual intercourse, Heinrich (18) and Ibrahim (17), have only had sex while in steady relationships. Ibrahim has had two girlfriends with whom he has had sex, Heinrich has had one. They are both currently unattached. Heinrich has not had sex during his unattached period. Ibrahim also cannot conceive of sex outside of a relationship. He has rejected clear offers from women he did not know.

Only two of the eight respondents in this group are currently in a relationship. The reasons for why the other six men are unattached are varied. In the interview, only 18-year-old Andrej speculates whether there is a connexion here to his migrant background (language barrier):

**Andrej, 18:** *'Why don't you want a girlfriend right now? 'I'm bad at German and yes. (...) I can't talk so well.'*

**Igor, 18:** *'[For me] it is difficult to approach someone for this.'*

**Jakob, 18:** *'Shyness?!'*

**Heinrich, 18:** *'[I'm single because] I don't want those who want me and vice versa.'*

**Daniel, 17:** *'I always find the wrong ones.'*

Chris (19) and Dschamal (18), who are currently in relationships (both without sexual intercourse experience), have not yet had sex with their girlfriends for different reasons:

**Chris, 19:** *'I'm still a virgin and I don't have a problem with that. She's one too. She doesn't have a problem with that either. With my previous girlfriend that was the case too and for me sexuality isn't something necessary.'* (in a steady relationship for five months)

**Dschamal, 18:** *'We're both Muslims, but not really conservatively so, but we do both think it's important that you only have sex when you're married. (...) Of course if [we] were to marry, I'd sleep with her.'* (in a steady relationship for 30 months)



Dschamal and Ibrahim differ from the other Muslim men in our sample in that they interpret the rule of Islam – no relationship and no sex before marriage – as equally binding for both genders (even though this rule is often less strictly interpreted for men).<sup>260</sup> Both care about their religion. Ibrahim (17) has already slept with two women in steady relationships although he does think the abstinence requirement applies to him. He says: *‘Oh well, it happened these two times.’* Dschamal has stuck to the rule of sexual abstinence in his two-year relationship. Since he and his girlfriend want to get married, he thinks the relationship is legitimate, even though it still has to be kept secret from his girlfriend’s family.

Andrej (17) and Igor (18) are the only young men with a migrant background without relationship experience. However, Igor, in contrast to Andrej, wants a girlfriend and he also wants a sexual relationship with her. Igor’s story also makes it clear that the parents of the young men react very differently to their lack of a partner than the parents of the young girls do. It would appear that for an 18-year-old man, it is part of the family expectation that he has a girlfriend and so Igor finds his single status somewhat unpleasant:

*Igor, 18: ‘I don’t like it when I’m with friends or with relatives and they get on to this subject. My brother is currently in a steady relationship and then they say things like, “Your brother has one, why don’t you?”’*

There is also a clear gender difference when it comes to education. The young men are less ambitious than the young women surveyed; they want to get qualifications from a middle school or they want to finish their job training, but they do not want to go on to university. Apart from two of them, the five high-school students in this group do not have clear job or study goals yet. The case studies of Jakob and Dschamal paint a comprehensive picture of the circumstances of the young men in this group:

*Jakob, 18,* attends a vocational college in Hamburg and lives with his mother. They get on well, he can *‘definitely’* trust her. The parents are separated, as he puts it, *‘since I was born (laughs)’*. His father *‘lives in the Ukraine’*, he only knows him from *‘pictures’*. Jakob, like his parents, was born in the Ukraine, his mother took him to Israel for a few years (*‘because we had relatives in Israel’*), before moving to Germany with him. Jakob has *‘normal’* friends, does a lot of sports and plays *‘badminton’* in a club. It has been *‘a long time’* since he was last in love, that was *‘five years ago’*. He was with that girl for *‘one month’*, after that he had two more short relationships in the past three years, about which

<sup>260</sup> ‘Sex outside of marriage threatens the social order, which is why Islam has clear rules about the behaviour of men and women within and outside of marriage. (...) Islam affirms sexuality and in order to meet these needs, young women and men should marry relatively early.’ Cf. Kizilhan (2008), p. 4



he says: *'but they weren't serious, the relationships weren't serious' and 'then it gradually all came to a halt'*. Since he has been unattached he feels *'free'* but what he misses is *'sex'*. Jakob thinks: *'even though I haven't had that yet, I think it would be important'*. He would like a steady relationship, he thinks his *'shyness'* gets in the way.

**Dschamal, 18**, attends a high school in Hamburg. His father is from Bangladesh, his mother is German. The parents are separated, he lives with his father. He has been with Asija for two and a half years now. She attends the same school as him. Asija, like him, is Muslim and has an Afghan migrant background. Dschamal says that relationships between unmarried people of Muslim faith can be problematic: *'[It's a] risky business. In our case you don't just have a girlfriend here and there in our culture, you have one for your whole life.'* They see each other at school and as often they can outside of school, but they have not spent the night together. Asija's parents are not allowed to know about the relationship. *'they're very conservative Muslims and all hell would break loose (...), they would beat her [Asija] if they were to find out. It would be quite dangerous. That's why we always have to be careful when we're out or we're going for a meal somewhere.'* His parents on the other hand know that he is in a relationship with Asija. *'My father likes Asija very much. My father's also a bit more tolerant. He's not the strict Muslim father, he doesn't say, 'no, that's not okay', because he was in Germany when he was 16, he's very liberal. He tells everyone, 'each to their own'. He's religious and prays five times a day, but he's very tolerant. (...) [My mother] also likes my girlfriend very much.'* He feels love for Asija and also feels loved by her. The future plans are clear to them: *'We want to get married, that's where all of this has been going.'* The *'first time'* is to take place during the wedding night. *'We're both Muslims, we're not overly conservative, but we both think it's important to wait until marriage to sleep together. (...) Like I said, that's my view too. Of course, if [we] got married, I'd sleep with her. (...) I wouldn't want to sleep with her now because I think that would destroy something.'* They kiss and cuddle and talk openly about sexuality. The first time is something good in his mind: *'[It's something] everyone looks forward to. My wedding night, red bed, red bedsheets.'*

Apart from Andrej, who leads an abstinent lifestyle, as well as the Muslim respondents Dschamal and Ibrahim, whose attitudes to sexuality and their ways of thinking (although in Ibrahim's case not his behaviour) are shaped by their family's Islamic culture, the young men in this group have a lot of similarities with the liberal young people: they accept non-marital relationships and premarital sexuality, they feel that women and men have equal rights (Dschamal is also egalitarian in the sense that he does not give himself rights that he does not give his girlfriend) and they have ideals focused on relationships and love. They want to have their sexual experiences with a steady girlfriend, who means something to them. Whether their single status and the associated lack of experience with sexual intercourse is tied to their migrant background remains unanswered in many cases. These boys do not report conflicts with the family or psychological conflicts within themselves.

### 6.3.2 The promiscuous boys: permissiveness without affection

We have put seven young men into this group: five have an Islamic background (four of them say their religion is important to them), two are from eastern Europe (one of them is Orthodox, but religion is unimportant to him). These seven respondents have an above average level of sexual experience (measured by the number of sexual partners to date). They tend towards 'permissiveness without affection', they are okay with sexual intercourse without romantic feelings and outside of steady relationships. All seven respondents have had relationships, two of them, Karim (17) and Franz (18), are currently in a steady relationship. The difference between the two could not be greater. Karim openly admits to not being in love with his girlfriend. He pretends to the 14-year-old he loves her so that he can sleep with her. Franz on the other hand says the following about his girlfriend: *'She's a dream woman. I love her. I just love that girl.'* The desire for a relationship is more ambivalent and less well developed among the single men in this group than among those in the restrained group:

*Devran, 17: '[Being single is] better than being in a relationship (...). Then I'm not so (...) scared, or something when she wants to go out. And I get to go out more often with my friends and cousins (...). [On the other hand] you want to be in love and have that bond. I miss that sometimes, but otherwise everything's okay. It's not that important to me to have a girlfriend because I'm just starting my training.'*

*Johannes, 18: 'If I think about it, the last one dumped me because I didn't have time. It was a really stupid issue. I don't know if that will happen again? That's why I'm a bit more careful.'*

**Max, 17:** *'I've thought about it and I'm going to wait. Maybe I'll get a steady girlfriend later. It depends on the girl. Maybe I'll meet a new one. But otherwise I only want a steady relationship when I'm 20, 26. Then I'll have a steady relationship and can have a child and everything. I want to enjoy my life as a teenager for now.'*

**Klaus, 18:** *'When it comes to girls, it's a law, like in physics, that everything falls down. I don't want the ones who want me and vice versa.'*

**Mehdi, 18:** *'I'm in the middle of the getting to know each other phase, maybe it'll become a steady relationship, maybe not, but I don't feel like I must have a steady relationship again.'*

All of the young men in this group are open to sex outside of relationships and without an emotional tie. The number of sexual partners lies between four and more than twenty. This group therefore confirms the result of the BZgA study on Youth Sexuality: 'Young men with a migrant background tend to change partners often.'<sup>261</sup>

Conflicts in the home are rarely mentioned. Only the Lebanese mother of 18-year-old Franz is not quite convinced of his two-and-a-half-year relationship: *'She says that I'm still too young. I told her I was 18 and all that. It's still a small problem for my mother.'* Conflicts with the home as a result of the sons' many sexual experiences are not mentioned by a single one of our respondents. The young men do not have to keep their relationships or sexual experiences secret. Only Johannes mentions a conflict regarding his (Muslim) religion, which is 'very important to [him]' but it does not burden him. When asked whether his religion had an impact on his sexuality, he says:

**Johannes, 18:** *'Not at all really, because I'm responsible for it myself, if I... It doesn't have an impact. I do it anyway. Maybe it's not allowed, but you do it anyway.'*

The young men's promiscuous behaviour is not made into a problem, neither in their own families, nor measured by the religious standards of their culture. On the contrary: *'I had sex with a lot of women, I'm an experienced man,'* says Mehdi (18) proudly. But only Karim behaves irresponsibly towards his sexual partners. About the first time with his current girlfriend, he says: *'I don't know if she wanted it, but I wanted it.'* All the other young men care that their partners also want sexual intercourse, even if they do not have any romantic feelings for them. They respect women's sexual self-determination and distance themselves from macho behaviour:

**Mehdi, 18:** *'I wait until she is up for it too. I'd never say: "Come, let's have sex". I think that's not very polite or elegant.'*

<sup>261</sup> BZgA (2010a), p. 145

**Johannes, 18:** *'No, I'm the kind of guy who waits. I don't do the whole macho thing.'*

**Devran, 17:** *'They were really quite tipsy so the girl wanted to sleep next to me. We were staying the night there and then she started kissing me. I responded of course. I mean, what man would say no to that? And then she wanted to go further, but I said no because I don't like it and I won't do it when alcohol is involved. She doesn't know what she's doing.'*

18-year-old Franz is also vocal and firm about equality of the sexes: *'In my eyes women should have equal rights. I don't like what happens between some people because they're living being too, just like us, and they have the same rights. That's the way I see it.'*<sup>262</sup>

The seven young men's visions for the future resemble those of their liberal peers: they all want to get married and have children. But they are not yet searching for *'the one'*, they first want to enjoy their *'everyday teenage life'* (Max, 17). Even Franz (18), who calls his current girlfriend his *'ideal woman'* does not want to commit yet: *'She's dreaming of having her own flat with me. She wants children and a car so I can drive her around. I don't see it that way. Moving in, yes, but more than that? I don't know yet. I love that girl, she's my ideal woman, but I can't say for certain yet, I'm a realist.'* The wishes for the future are shaped by traditional gender roles. The young men take it for granted that they will be the providers in their future families.

**Franz, 18:** *'[In ten years' time] my own shop, sporting goods, and a car and my own flat. A wife, two children. Well, fine, not two. To be honest, I want five children.'*

**Karim, 17:** *'Flat, car, money (...) so that I have something to offer them [the wife and children].'*

Education and job training (six of the seven young men attend a vocational college, one goes to a high school) are important as a means to securing a livelihood and providing for a family in the future. As was the case among the restrained young men, they do not exhibit the same professional ambition and the clear focus on climbing socially that are characteristic of most of the young women with a migrant background.

The following two case stories illustrate that there is a broad spectrum within the *'permissiveness without affection'* group as well.

<sup>262</sup> It becomes clear that his gender-equality opinion has its limits when reading through his statements about pornography consumption (cf. chapter 4.2).

**Mehdi, 18**, lives with his parents and his younger sister. They have been in Germany for the past three years. The family is from Iran, the parents are Christian, Mehdi is Muslim, but feels 'close to Christianity.' He says, *'[I don't] care what religion people have. The main thing is, you have a God everyone respects. And that's it for me. You have to respect all religions.'* He attends a vocational college in Hamburg and has met all of his 'mates through school'. Mehdi is currently single, but up until a year ago he had a relationship that lasted a year and a half. It 'makes no difference' to him what religion or cultural background his girlfriend has. He has had four relationships and 15 sexual partners. He had the first two relationships 'in Iran, but they weren't so steady'. He had two further relationships in Germany, and he had his first time with his third girlfriend. *'I broke up with her right after. After one week, I had a different girlfriend and with her I had sex.'* After the end of the last relationship he has slept with 13 women: *'I would have liked to get to know them [the girls] better, but at the time I felt like I hated girls – after the separation.'* Being single has advantages and disadvantages for him: *'Being single is good, but after a while it feels bad because you need someone from time to time, in addition to your parents, who you can talk to.'* He wants a girlfriend 'but it's not necessary.' He has two views of sexuality, from the perspective of a loving relationship and from the perspective of sex as a single person: *'When you're in love, you say you love someone and when you have sex with them, the love grows. But if you just want to have sex, then you say, 'yes, I've had sex with many women – I'm an experienced man, I know what I'm doing.'*

**Karim, 17**, attends a vocational college in Hamburg. He lives with his siblings and his parents. The family are from Afghanistan. He is Muslim and is 'somewhat' religious. Two years ago he had a six-month relationship with a girl he was very much in love with. When he found out that she cheated on him, he broke up with her: *'She had sex. She had sex with someone she didn't know and I didn't know. A week later her best friend told me.'* Now he has been going out with a 14-year-old girl for two months, but he is not in love with her. She believes that he loves her because *'I tell her that.'* He is with her because they are having sex. He likes the following aspect about that: *'I know that whenever I want sex, I can have it.'* They slept together for the first time after a week and a half. *'It just happened, I don't know if she wanted it, but I wanted it.'* About sex he says: *'[It's] normal for me, I'd say it's better than sitting at home and having a wank.'* Their method of birth control is coitus interruptus but sometimes they do nothing. Regarding a potential pregnancy, Karim says: *'Then she'll go to the gynaecologist and, what do I know, get rid of the baby.'* About his previous relationships he says: *'[I had] a few girlfriends I was with just for the sex. But at times it just wasn't worth it but at other times it was. Of course you have to tell them: 'I love you, you're the most important thing in my life' (...)*

*so that they do it.* Karim says he has slept with '15 to 20 or more' women so far. Sexuality is something 'nice' for him, whereas relationships are 'not something nice. (...) it's exhausting'. Nevertheless he wants to be married in ten years' time, but first he has to find 'the partner for him'.

These seven young men have fewer similarities with the liberal young people when it comes to their behaviour and attitudes: they accept non-marital relationships and sexuality (for themselves) and they largely confirm that women have equal rights, but their ideals are less focused on relationships and love. They feel claustrophobic quickly in relationships and are therefore happy, in their current period in life, to enjoy the sexual freedoms of their single life. For the future they want steady relationships and want to get married. They do not report having conflicts in the home.

### 6.3.3 Conclusion

The following can be said, in summary, about the circumstances of young men with a migrant background: as we said about the young women, the differences in sexual behaviour and in the attitudes to sexuality in young people from a cultural background with liberal sex/gender views and those from a cultural background with conservative sex/gender views are low to moderate. Presumably the young people from traditional cultures largely orient themselves on the liberal pattern of Western youth sexuality. Certain groups, like the 'restrained' young men, do not differ from their liberal peers.

Unlike the young women, the young men from conservative cultures are not under the surveillance of their parents, they are not banned from sexuality and relationships before marriage. That makes it easier for them to take on the norms and patterns of their Western peer group. They merely need to romanticize their ideas about sexuality and the interaction between the sexes (the way Western middle-class boys and men did decades ago<sup>263</sup>). This integrative effort has evidently been successful for many of the boys from cultures with traditional views about gender who are growing up here.

One factor that stands out is that one group of boys from conservative countries, if they are sexually experienced, enter short-term sexual relationships more often. In addition to the 'permissiveness with affection' there is an optional 'permissiveness without affection' during unattached periods.

<sup>263</sup> Schmidt (1993)

At the start we noted the following as being a mark of young people's modernization process: liberal sexual attitudes and behaviours, gender equality – in the sense of recognizing the same sexual rights and options for both genders – as well as a strong tie between sexuality and love and relationships. This modernization process can be less advanced for young people with a migrant background. This presents young women and young men with very different challenges: young women with a migrant background fight for more sexual self-determination and sexual freedoms. For young men sexual freedoms are (have always been) given to a much greater extent. Their learning task involves a process that young people in Germany underwent between the 1970s and 1990s, namely integrating the romanticization of male sexuality into sexual behaviours.







## *Final Considerations*

## Final Considerations

160 young people from Hamburg and Leipzig were surveyed for this study. There were two reasons why we opted for this (for qualitative studies unusually) high number of interviews: firstly we wanted to investigate quantitative tendencies in an explorative manner for certain groups, and secondly, we wanted to depict the broadest, most heterogeneous spectrum of different experiences for both genders. This worked well by approaching the young people through different types of school – with two important limitations.

- Young people with a homosexual orientation did not participate in the study – the results are based on young women and men who call themselves heterosexual. As a result, important questions remain unanswered: It is likely that non-heterosexual young people use the internet differently, maybe they also watch different pornography. We do not know to what extent the internet gives gay and lesbian young people specific information, how it is used to find sexual and relationship partners, whether it facilitates coming-out and whether it serves as a tool for self-acceptance, emancipation and empowerment. A substantiated, empirical study on these questions would be much to be desired.
- Young people who attend special-needs schools or no school at all were not reached. It is often assumed that these young people – those who quit school or those from particularly educationally deprived, disadvantaged social circumstances – are less capable of dealing with pornography and the sexual offerings of the internet in a critical and thoughtful manner than those young women and men surveyed here. We can only issue a warning about such assumptions, which are not based on any kind of empirical research. Whether and to what extent young people from certain vulnerable groups (e.g. young people in precarious living conditions, young people with lower intelligence, young people with serious health issues and young people in care) use the sexual offerings of the internet in a different way is unknown. This is another area in which differentiated empirical studies would be greatly to be desired.

Despite the high case number, this is a qualitative study, which means that the results do not make a claim to being representative. The ability to generalize from them is limited and they do not hold for all young people. Nevertheless, we assume that we have given a good portrayal of how the mainstream 16–19-year-olds use the sexual offerings of the internet. The following summary of results therefore have the status of empirically founded assumptions about young people in cities in 2009.

### **Young people's relationships are romantic and characterized by the ideals of love and fidelity**

For most of the young people we surveyed, sexuality is part of a loving relationship. A relationship is only 'steady' to them when they are sleeping with their partner. The relationships are close and romantic, the parents consider them positive and they support them and usually integrate them into everyday family life. Sexuality and loving relationships validate each other in a reciprocal fashion. This means that 16–19-year-olds tend to sleep together no later than two to three months after the start of a relationship, to show or to test whether it is a 'proper' relationship. Relationships are shaped significantly by the ideals of love and fidelity – the confrontations and rules about the subject of jealousy and the guarantee of sexual exclusivity have an important bonding function.

→ Chapters 2.1.1, 2.1.3, 2.2.2

### **Sexuality in relationships is organized in an egalitarian and consensual manner**

Young women claim the same sexual rights and options as men. They experience – almost always – that their demand for equality and reciprocity is respected in the relationship. One example of this is that contraception is seen as a shared task: young people tend to use reliable contraception in their steady relationships, they are careful about it and they deal with it as a couple. They consider contraception a shared task, they talk about contraception and the responsibility is shared. All of these things are good foundations for successful contraception. It can be seen as a success of comprehensive, target-group-appropriate sexuality education. Most young people are happy with the sexual aspect of their relationship. They experience that the longer the relationship goes on for, the higher the quality of their sex lives with their partner.

→ Chapters 2.1.3, 2.1.4, 2.2.2

## **Young people generally follow a serial-monogamy pattern in relationships**

Young people are generally serial monogamists, although sometimes the relationships are short. In the period between 13 and 18 years of age, they will have one or two longer steady relationships. They hope for lasting relationships, but they only want their relationship to stay as long as they feel looked after and find it satisfying and vital. The majority of the young people we interviewed have already had more than one steady relationship. The young people are aware that serial relationships are more the norm than the exception in their age group and among adults these days. If they doubt the durability of their relationships over the coming year, it is for four highly pragmatic reasons: their age, their upcoming development, their required job mobility and the instability of relationships these days. The serial nature of relationships is not regretted as a failure, instead it is accepted as an opportunity to gather different experiences with different partners.

→ Chapters 2.1.1, 2.1.5

## **Being unattached is a sexually somewhat barren transition phase between relationships**

Being unattached as a teenager is normal and to be expected: two thirds of the time between the 13th and 18th birthdays is spent thus. These periods are interpreted as temporary transitional stages; they are characterized as processing the past relationship and searching for the next one. Young people of both sexes feel ambivalent about their unattached periods: on the one hand they enjoy the freedoms of not being tied down, on the other hand they long for the intimacy and closeness of a relationship. Sexually speaking, these periods are only exciting and fulfilling for a few young people: around a third of all unattached people have had at least one no-strings sexual encounter during their single period. If we look at the total number of sexual intercourse instances in the past four weeks, the sexual restraint of unattached young people becomes even clearer: 95 % of all instances of sexual intercourse in the past four weeks took place in steady relationships. Conversely that means that only around 5 % of the sexual intercourse instances were had by unattached people, who make up 50 % of the respondents. Even though this somewhat crude count is not an accurate representation of the emotional significance of every single sexual encounter, it does once again confirm the close link between sexuality and love and relationships in the desires and the sexual practice of young people.

→ Chapter 2.2

## **The internet offers a new place for sexual experiences, which is largely used by young people for chatting, flirting and looking for a partner**

Exclusively sexual contacts online or via the internet are extremely rare among young people. Online flirting is the most widespread activity; it initially serves experimentation, then later finding a partner. One third of the young people have met an online contact in person, most of these contacts were ended after the first meeting, however. Around one fifth have had a relationship and only a minority (6 %) have had casual sex with a person they met online. The vast majority (94 %) will not send or post naked images because they are aware of the associated risks. For most of the young people surveyed, cybersex is part of the sexual opportunities of the internet that can be tried, but do not have to be – only 13 % of the young people have experience with it, most young women and men reject this form of sexuality.

Young people are also confronted with unpleasant situations, if their chat partner behaves aggressively online, if he/she directly asks for sexual services, if he/she urges them to engage in sexual activities or if he/she exposes himself/herself online. 15 % report sexual harassment online or via the internet. Young people demonstrate great media competency; they know how they can protect themselves in these situations.

→ Chapters 3.1, 3.2, 3.3

## **Dealing with pornography is hugely gender-dependent during the teenage years: girls watch pornography later, more rarely and almost never use it for masturbation**

At first glance the most noticeable thing about the results is most young women's low level of interest in pornography. We find various causes for this: since girls often do not know their way around the rapidly changing pornographic opportunities of the internet, they struggle to find those pornographic films and images that could be arousing to them. Another reason is that girls could expose themselves to the risk of social devaluation in certain social groups if they publicly admitted a pro-pornography position. If young women do express an interest in pornography, they experience psychological and interpersonal conflicts surrounding the role of the female gender. This attitude challenges both feminist ideals and the classic ideals of femininity of women's focus on relationships and emotions. For girls today, being uninterested in pornography stabilizes and protects their female gender identity. For boys the exact opposite is the case: clear interest in pornography serves to support and affirm their developing male heterosexual gender identity.

→ Chapters 4.1.1, 4.1.2

### **The ready availability of pornography leads to its normalization, not to sexual depravity**

Young people make a clear distinction between their real and the virtual sexual world. They do not want to replace the one with the other. From the pornographic material they consume, they take on sexual skills and variations that suit their sexual desires. That is presumably why they start trying out oral practices and different positions earlier these days. They critically distance themselves from the image of women that is portrayed in pornography; they do not see themselves as being at risk of adopting it. Male young people are choosy about what is available online. It is their sexual preferences and structures that determine their pornography consumption, not vice versa. Internet pornography has replaced conventional masturbation aids, without increasing masturbation frequency. Young people's involvement with pornography is much less sensational than the public discussions about it.

→ Chapters 4.1.1, 4.2.2

### **Enormous gender differences can be found in how boys and girls deal with pornography and masturbation**

Masturbation is widespread among young people but there are big differences between the sexes with regard to whether they do it and how often they do it, as well as their attitudes about it. For boys, masturbation is almost always the first sexual experience and they almost always experience their first orgasm through masturbation. Girls start later, do not always have an orgasm when they masturbate and quite a few girls had not yet had any masturbation experience at the time of the survey. Most of the young people who have had experience with masturbation accept it as normal and unproblematic. The girls' attitudes to masturbation are less homogeneous, the spectrum ranges from rejection to curiosity and enthusiasm.

→ Chapters 4.1.2, 4.2.2, 5.4

### **Young people with a migrant background largely use the liberal Western pattern of youth sexuality for orientation**

The differences in sexual behaviour and the attitudes to sexuality between young people with and without a migrant background are low to moderate. This can be taken as an indication that young people from cultures with traditional views about gender largely orient themselves on the liberal pattern of Western youth sexuality. There are three markers for the modernization of youth sexuality in highly industrialized society: liberal sexual attitudes and behaviours, gender equality – in the sense

of granting the same sexual rights and options to both genders – and a strong tie between sexuality and love and relationships. In light of this, we have found that the modernization process can be less advanced for young people with a migrant background. This presents young women and young men with very different challenges: young women with a migrant background fight for more sexual self-determination and sexual freedoms. For young men, sexual freedoms are very much more a given. They have to undergo a process that young people in Germany already underwent between the 1970s and 1990s, namely to integrate the romanticization of male sexuality into their sexual behaviours.

→ Chapters 6.1, 6.2, 6.3

### **Young people's self-regulation competence is demonstrated by their ability to integrate the new sexual opportunities of the internet into youth sexuality**

The biggest challenge for young people in recent decades, with regard to their sexuality, was not being overwhelmed with internet pornography and not – for heterosexual young people – how to deal with the threat of HIV/AIDS, instead it was the freedoms they suddenly acquired and were able to take advantage of over the course of the sexual revolution in the late 1960s. Early youth studies from the 1970s<sup>264</sup> and later follow-up studies<sup>265</sup> show that young people take advantage of the new liberal attitudes and moved the average age of the first steady relationship and the first sexual intercourse downwards by quite a bit. But the lapse or loss of effectiveness of parental and social prohibitions did not lead to anomie. Young people today organize their sexuality in relationships, they are consensual and egalitarian; they use effective contraception and the pregnancy rates among women under the age of 18 are low in sexually liberal societies.<sup>266</sup> The sexual revolution and its consequences have shown that in times of sexual change, young people are capable of great adaptive feats; they demonstrate a great ability to self-regulate a sexuality which is no longer controlled by strict social norms. According to our study, this self-regulation ability also holds for the most recent serious changes to their sexual environment, the almost unlimited availability of pornographic material.

→ Chapters 2.1, 4.1, 4.2

<sup>264</sup> Sigusch, Schmidt (1973)

<sup>265</sup> E.g. BZgA from 1980, cf. BZgA (2010a); overview in Schmidt (2004b)

<sup>266</sup> Matthiesen et al. (2009)





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# 9

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# Acknowledgements

First and foremost we would like to say thank you to all of the young women and men who had the courage and who took the time to talk to us about their experiences with relationships, love, sexuality, pornography and the internet. Without their participation and their immense openness, this study would not have been possible.

We would like to thank the Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung (BZgA) for its support and funding. We would like to extend a warm thank for to the Hamburger Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung (Hamburg education authority) as well as the Sächsische Bildungsagentur, Regionalstelle Leipzig (Leipzig education authority) and the participating schools in Hamburg and Leipzig for their co-operation and help.

A big thank-you also to the interviewers in Hamburg and Leipzig who were very committed to their task and worked very hard in transcribing the interviews, making a significant contribution to the quality of the data.

We need to extend a special thank to the scientific advisors to the study. We consulted with them about the planning, execution and evaluation of the study and we discussed the results with them in inspirational meetings. We would also like to thank Dr Uta Starke (Leipzig), who was committed and effective in organizing the survey in Leipzig.

A special thank-you to the Institut für Sexualforschung und Forensische Psychiatrie: Prof Peer Briken and the colleagues at the institute accompanied our work with interest and a critical eye.

Silja Matthiesen and the research team in Hamburg, September 2013





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The present qualitative interview study looks at the question of how today's teenagers and young adults live out their sexuality and relationships, and what form their guiding values and ideals take. The aim was to discover how the sexual socialization of young men and women is influenced by the internet, chatrooms or other social networks. A further section of the study examines how the interviewees cope with free access to pornography on the web.

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