

A Queer Wall in the Head:

Using Oral Histories to Map Gay Desire Across Cold War Germany

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ABSTRACT

This article uses oral histories to examine divergences in how gay men from East and West Germany remembered the sexuality of their youths. Finding that East German men recalled their sexual exploits in far more detail than did West German men, the article argues that this divergence is the result of a complex interlacing of factors. Ultimately, the article contends that these factors reveal a queer wall in the head that continues to delimit how gay German men understand their actions, their pasts, and their identities.

It was autumn 2016, and I was standing in a cramped room at *Lebensort Vielfalt*, a retirement community for queer people in Berlin's Charlottenburg neighborhood.¹ In a room with about twenty older men, I passed around a sign-up sheet, asking those interested in being interviewed to put down their names and contact information.

Between 2016 and 2018, I interviewed fourteen gay German men, most of whom had been born in the 1950s and had come of age in either East or West Germany. I conducted the research as part of my dissertation project, which examined homosexuality in Cold War Germany, and which took me to ten archives around Germany and in the United States. Compared to the hundreds of trial records and thousands of secret police documents that I consulted, these oral histories were a small piece of my work. As I met with more and more narrators, though, I discovered that the interviews took on lives of

their own, that the evidence I gathered from them not only changed my perspective about the research, but also came to scaffold my project as a whole.

Unlike archival records, oral histories—as numerous scholars in the field note—are sources created in tandem, a collaboration between historian and narrator. As a result, the interviews take on a performative aspect, forcing the historian to consider their own role in the source’s creation. At the same time, because the source cannot be taken as the narrator’s unmediated memory, but rather as the result of this performance, oral sources are not objective, as Alessandro Portelli points out in his seminal article “The Peculiarities of Oral History.”² Yet, that very lack of objectivity makes oral histories intriguing sources that offer insight not only into the past but also into how the past is construed in the minds of contemporaries. Oral histories shed light not only on the period in history, about which they purport to tell us, but also on ourselves and the political needs of our present.

At the same time that oral history was coming into its own as a methodology and as a disciplinary subfield, the history of sexuality also began to make inroads into the academy. As Nan Alamilla Boyd notes, many early works in the history of sexuality make broad use of oral history.³ But the affinity between the two subfields is not merely one of happenstance. Scholars working at this intersection have commented that queer oral history benefits from a productive tension between methodologies that, as Kevin Murphy, Jennifer Pierce, and Jason Ruiz argue “makes it different.”⁴

In her pivotal 2008 essay on queer oral history, Boyd contends that the social construction of identity posited by queer methodologies conflicts with oral history’s assumption that “narrators will be able to articulate a coherent or consistent

representation of themselves as historical actors.”⁵ Boyd thus points to the fact that, notwithstanding a few prominent holdouts, queer studies has taken it almost as a given, since Michel Foucault published the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* in 1976, that identity is a construct determined by social norms. Conversely, Boyd indicates, some oral historians assume their narrators are possessed of a stable identity about which they can speak insightfully and consistently. These two claims, Boyd suggests, contradict each other.

Whereas Boyd concludes that it is almost impossible “to escape the trap of subjectivity” because “oral histories are always offered up in relation to the larger gay and lesbian research project,” Murphy, Pierce, and Ruiz come to a very different conclusion.⁶ They contend that the very unknowability of oral history that Portelli identifies is precisely what makes it a productive interlocutor for queer history, going so far as to argue that “oral history might be best understood as a queer methodology.”⁷ Once oral history abandons its methodological insistence on the narrator’s objectivity, it complements, rather than contradicts, queer theory’s persistent questioning of knowledge and identity. Both fields, that is, take an interest in destabilizing the apparent objectivity of empirical evidence.

In the burgeoning study of sexuality in postwar Germany, oral history has become a favored vehicle of scholarship and memory alike. Benno Gammerl, in particular, has made oral history the crux of his engagement with queerness in West Germany. Working at the intersection of the histories of emotions and sexuality, Gammerl’s work relies on oral histories with thirty-two West German gay and lesbian narrators to chart shifts in how they conceived of emotions tied to their queerness.⁸ In so doing, he gets underneath

the political and social changes that often dominate histories of sexuality. For instance, his work locates generational differences in how lesbians and gay men experienced and elucidated their queerness.⁹ Similarly, Jürgen Lemke's pioneering interviews with East German gay men and Maria Borowski's study of gay and lesbian East Germans both employ oral history to examine the inner lives of queer people in the communist state.¹⁰ Oral history has also proven significant for how Germans today remember queerness in the postwar era.¹¹

In contrast to most histories of homosexuality in postwar Germany, my research was comparative, examining gay experiences in the two Germanies in tandem.¹² I asked how different social, political, and economic contexts shaped the oppression and liberation of gay men in the two different countries. The fact that the two states were carved from the same nation only makes some of my findings all the more striking, as the two states diverged quickly on matters relating to homosexuality. In researching this past, I turned to oral history because I believed it would offer an intimate view of how gay men experienced both the persecution of the early Cold War years and the political activism of the 1970s and the 1980s. I hoped that their memories would lend a certain humanity to what might otherwise have been sterile accounts gleaned from government archives. In this article, I therefore build on existing scholarship not only to think through the use of oral history in a transnational historical context, but also to examine what it can tell us about queerness in East and West Germany.

Although I expected to find divergences in how the East and West German states regulated sexuality, I had not anticipated finding that my East and West German narrators would participate in the interview process in fundamentally different ways. Yet, that is

precisely what I discovered. As I interviewed more and more witnesses, it seemed that I could see the outline of the so-called “wall in the head” that continues to separate East and West Germans in the reunified nation.¹³ My interview partners spoke about their sexualities in fundamentally different ways, emphasizing, in particular, different kinds of sexual experiences. These interviews thus point to the unexpected ways in which queer oral history might allow historians to map transnational differences. This article elucidates some of those differences, thinks through why they might have existed, and posits what they might tell us about not only the lingering “wall in the head,” but also practices of queer, transnational oral history.

In so doing, this article also ruminates on how oral history might contribute to the ongoing project of queer temporalities. Whereas narrative history (and modern time more generally) is frequently conceived in a linear fashion with prescribed moments of significance, queer theorists have recently explored how people experience time in non-linear ways and how queer individuals, in particular, assign different causality and significance to the passage of time than do normative time regimes. Remaining alert to this heterochronicity, especially as it manifests in memory, can thus reveal how time and history matter to people in different ways. In the context of transnational oral history, I argue, attentiveness to the temporality of memory destabilizes the very idea of sexuality, allowing us to grasp the heterochronicity of queer identities in Cold War Germany.

Methodology

When I started researching gay persecution and liberation in East and West Germany, I had a set of open, rather nebulous research questions. I was interested in understanding how the East and West German states treated their gay citizens—what politicians, bureaucrats, judges, and police officers believed and did about homosexuality. I also wanted to unearth how queer people in both Germanies thought about their political subjectivity in relation to their sexual identities. What sort of political movements did the intersection of citizenship and sexuality produce in the two Germanies? And I wanted to compare the trajectories of homosexuality's encounters with the East and West German states.

As a result, when it came to interviewing witnesses who had lived through the era after World War II, I was most interested in what they found compelling in their own memories. I had no interest in telling my narrators what I thought the most salient moments, ideas, or phenomena were. To borrow Boyd's words, I hoped "to follow rather than lead the conversation," so that these men could help me understand their sexual and political subjectivities and the relationships between them.¹⁴

Because of this goal, I met narrators in a place of their choosing, and I endeavored to say as little as possible during the interviews. I always began with a general question, asking the narrator to tell me when and where they were born and what their earliest gay experiences were. From there, some narrators would speak at length before turning to me for a new question. Others offered clipped, narrow answers and then asked me directly what my next question was. While I had my own sense of important milestones, I tried not to hint at these in my questions and instead to keep the focus on what my narrators

thought significant about their own sexual pasts. At the end of the interview, I would sometimes ask follow-up questions about specific events or episodes about which I wanted to know more.

To find interview partners, I employed two different techniques. First, I used the well-known snowball method.¹⁵ From an initial interview with an American who had studied and lived in Germany in the 1980s, I met German interview partners, who then put me in touch with other interlocutors. It was through this method that I met most of the East German narrators. As I mentioned at the start of this essay, I also went to the queer Berlin retirement community *Lebensort Vielfalt*, where I was introduced to over a dozen gay men, of whom several volunteered to speak with me.

Because I carried all of these interviews out with men who lived in Berlin, there remains a clear bias in the sample toward Germany's capital. The once-divided city offered gay men on both sides of the Iron Curtain a distinctive experience. West Berlin was what one of my interlocutors called "an island in a red sea," surrounded by communist East Germany.¹⁶ It was, legally, not even part of West Germany, and it attracted artists, misfits, queer people, and draft dodgers from the more conservative Federal Republic.¹⁷ East Berlin, on the other hand, was the capital of the German Democratic Republic and its largest city. It boasted more gay-friendly bars than any other city in the country and, with its large cultural scene, offered more lines of employment to gay men. At the same time, the men I interviewed came from all corners of the country, everywhere from a village near the Harz mountains in East Germany to the spa town Baden-Baden in the Black Forest. Their residence in Berlin was the result of their own election to move to a metropolis that they perceived as a place where they might be able

to live out their sexuality more freely.¹⁸ It is to how they remembered the sexuality of their youth that we now turn.

Remembering Sex

Although I was interested in uncovering differences in how the East and West German states treated gay men—and in how gay activists approached these two states with demands for rights, privileges, and protections—it eventually dawned on me that my East and West German interlocutors spoke about their sexuality in different ways. These dissimilarities did not necessarily manifest in straightforward descriptions of different government policies or juridical regimes under which they had grown up, but rather as differences in the very ways that they conceived of the relationship among their sex lives, their emotions, their sexual identities, and their life stories more broadly. In fact, one of the most substantial—and surprising—differences was in how men from East and West Germany talked about sex itself.

I met seventy-eight-year-old Erik A. somewhat unexpectedly at his home on a cold January morning in 2017.¹⁹ I had arranged to interview his partner, whom I had met at *Lebensort Vielfalt*. When we had emailed to arrange the interview, he had not mentioned that I would be interviewing two people at once. Nonetheless, I was thrilled to speak to them both and, after briefing them about my research and how their interviews would be used, I began by asking my standard opening question.

SAMUEL CLOWES HUNEKE: Ok, normally I start with: Where were you born? And, what are your earliest memories of being gay?

ERIK A.: . . . Already as a young person, I—you asked how it was, as a young person—for me the women all seemed alike and the men all different. I have a memory of coming from the bathing beach Wannsee. There was a group of people, and I could always describe the men, the women were practically all the same to me. And then I already noticed—and then, yes—and good—it was punishable then. Here in Berlin, I was, of course, in the *Klappen*—or the toilets—and amused myself there, which don't exist today. I was also in Grunewald, cruised [*gecruised*] there and had the luck that—that I, with me, that is, that I didn't come under police surveillance.²⁰

In this passage, Erik touched fleetingly on his first sexual experiences. Locating his memories at the West Berlin resort lake Wannsee (a prominent cruising spot), he recounted in rough terms his early desire for men and how it manifested.²¹ He also mentioned that he would later go cruising in other public places—that is, he would linger in these areas looking for sexual partners. This was a common activity for men who sought out sex with men in the postwar decades. But he did not volunteer further details. In fact, Erik devoted more time to the persecution of gay men—alluding to the fact that adult male homosexuality was then still criminalized under paragraph (§) 175 of the West German penal code and that the criminal police patrolled cruising sites—than he did to his earliest sexual experiences.²² This balance suggests that Erik's memories were a complicated amalgamation of anxiety and desire. It also indicates a clear connection between West Germany's juridical persecution of male homosexuality and the ways in which gay West German men remember their sexuality in those years.

Such information was useful to my project of understanding how the West German state policed sexuality and the effect it had on gay men. Yet, when I looked closer, Erik's linguistic choices too appeared imbued with meaning. He employed vague terms or even euphemisms to describe these sexual experiences, telling me that he "amused himself" or referring to homosexual acts as an unnamed "it." This substitution is curious, a strange elision in the curated memory of someone who, by his own admission, cavorted in the forests and public toilets of West Berlin.

Erik's vagueness stands in sharp contrast to the way that a second narrator, Carsten I., answered my initial question. An East German man born in 1954, Carsten had grown up in a village outside of Potsdam, near the capital. Unlike Erik, he delved into his sexual past in great specificity, which he recounted in the kitchen of his Berlin apartment over coffee and cookies.

S.C.H.: Perhaps you want to start with when and where you were born, where you grew up, how so, when did you know you were gay, and such—

CARSTEN I.: —I grew up in a relatively poor household. . . . I noticed that I already felt drawn to men. I can remember maybe already at ten or eleven but couldn't concretely name it. But I can remember when, for example, I, on the streetcar, saw someone, a man, an older man—not old, but older than me of course—that I sought him out physically. Perhaps to touch his hand. . . . At fourteen, that was the first experience. I went swimming at that time, perhaps also at twelve or thirteen, fairly regularly with pals, friends. . . . Sometimes we were in twos and threes in a changing cabin in the lower level, so to say, at the edge of the

pool. And there were always holes bored [into the wood]. And we looked through them, of course, most of them wanted to see naked women.

S.C.H.: Yes, yes, of course.

C.I.: I didn't know what I wanted to see. At any rate, at some point I was alone in the cabin and looked through and shocked myself, because I, somehow, saw a large male penis there. So, it really was that I was shocked. Yes, I went away and went to the swimming pool. While swimming, I noticed that I was repeatedly, pointedly touched, and some hand became lost in my swimming trunks. Then at some point, I don't know, maybe, something took me to the men's toilet. And, it was definitely the man, someone was standing at—at the urinals, already with an erect member and then he stood next to me. And then I think he touched me there, where, you know. And then, after about ten seconds, I exploded.²³

In contrast to Erik, Carsten volunteered intimate details about his youthful sexual exploits. Like Erik, he began his narration with an explanation of his burgeoning affinity for men as a teenager. But even here, he offered far more information than did Erik, telling me that he experienced urges to be close to the older men he saw on public transportation. When it came to describing his first sexual encounter, Carsten explained in intricate detail how he first came to see naked men at the public baths and how a man masturbated him for the first time. The language he employed was graphic—"penis," "member," "exploded"—and suggests that he felt no apprehension about sharing these memories with a relative stranger. While the content of Carsten's memory is not so very different from Erik's—both admired men they saw in public, and both eventually

progressed to engaging in sex with men in public places—the language they employed, and the explicitness of their memories diverge markedly.

It would be difficult to draw any firm conclusions from these two interviews in isolation. What significance does it have, after all, that one person speaks in vague generalities about his early gay experiences, while the other describes them in graphic detail? Yet, as I conducted interviews, I noticed a trend. The East German men I interviewed seemed relatively open about their sexual pasts. They often relished giving me blow-by-blow accounts of sexual encounters. The West German men, like Erik, tended to speak in euphemisms and to move past such encounters rapidly. Unlike their East German counterparts, they did not dwell on those memories.

I met another East German narrator, Ulrich Z., on January 13, 2017. Sitting in his kitchen, I asked him to begin by recounting his birthplace and his earliest gay memories. Born in January 1959, Ulrich described how he first came to experience his homosexuality as a teenager.

S.C.H.: We can start with, in what year, where, in what family situation you were born, and what are your first gay memories, when you can, that is, not, it doesn't have to be self-consciously gay, but—

ULRICH Z.: . . . The first time that I really came in contact with, with gays or similar was in the *Klappe*. Do you know the term *Klappe*?

S.C.H.: Mmhmm, yes.

U.Z.: So, in the toilet. In the Dresden main train station. There I—I wasn't studying there yet, so probably during my apprenticeship and then I lived in

Dresden on and off—and in the toilets there were just youths who stood around there and looked at cocks (*Schwänze*). And that was the first [pause] absolutely the first contact where I thought [pause] what is this here? I believe they are, they are gay. Yes, they are interested more in men and not, and not in women. . . . I had my first gay contact, then, on December 24, 1979, in the army, the National People's Army. On December 24, that, of course, is Christmas Eve. The whole Tuesday we drank. What else does one do in the army? Drank a lot of alcohol. And one by one they dropped off and Stefan and I were left. We were then a group of perhaps—what do I remember?—fifteen people, and two were left behind. And we danced together. And while dancing, we carefully [pause] touched each other in the, in the, in the balls with our knees. And that was, of course, very sexually animating. And then, I was with the radio in the army, had my own room. Or, at least, the others who slept with us weren't there for Christmas. Had duty at the radio station or were on vacation at home. So, I had the run of the place (*sturmfreie Bude*), as one so beautifully says, and took him with me and that's where I really had my first gay sex. It was totally amazing.²⁴

Like Carsten, Ulrich spoke at length about his early sexual encounters, and he described these incidents in specific detail. Talking about “cocks,” the effect of alcohol, and how he and Stefan slowly touched each other's genitals while dancing, Ulrich conjured scenes of sexual encounters in language that few of my West German interlocutors employed. In all of these interviews, my initial question asked only about the narrator's earliest or first gay experiences, leaving it up to the narrator to interpret this question as they would. It seems

significant that the East Germans I interviewed tended to associate their memories not merely with burgeoning sexual identity, but also with pleasurable and specific sex acts. Similarly, Peter Rausch, a well-known East German gay activist, whom I interviewed twice in the winter and spring of 2017, described in great detail going to watch men at the pissoirs at Alexanderplatz as a sixteen-year-old, where he learned the art of cruising. He later had his first sexual experience on the Märkisches Ufer in East Berlin.²⁵

Ulrich's memory is also representative of gay male experiences in East Germany insofar as he located homoerotic activity in the military, the National People's Army (NVA), which was founded in 1956.²⁶ Although gay men were technically barred from East Germany's security services, Ulrich painted the military as a homoerotic site.²⁷ In a similar manner, Peter Rausch recalled that while he himself did not have relations with other men while enlisted in the army, he heard of soldiers and officers who had.²⁸

These interviews resonate with work on masculinity in the East German military as well as studies of so-called "situational homosexuality" in single-sex institutions.²⁹ Tom Smith, for instance, argues that literature and film about the East German military depict homoerotic "desire and intimacy as products of military environments more widely."³⁰ I too found archival evidence of homosexuality in the military, the police, and the Stasi.³¹ Such evidence fits well with Ulrich's memories, which posit the NVA as a space both imbued with anti-gay animus and rife with the possibility of homoerotic desire.

The ways that Ulrich, Carsten, and Peter Rausch described their sexuality suggest East German gay men are (and perhaps were) more comfortable talking about sex than West German gay men. Yet, others who have conducted oral histories of East and West

Germany often focus on generational change. Gammerl, for instance, indicates that West German narrators of different generations exemplify fundamentally different ways of talking about their emotional and sexual pasts.³² Borowski too traces generational differences among queer narrators in East Germany.³³ In light of such conclusions, it is worth asking if the difference between Erik on the one hand and Carsten, Ulrich, and Peter Rausch on the other is one of age. After all, Erik was born in the Nazi era, around 20 years before the three East Germans.

Ultimately, though, I found Erik's reticence to speak about sex mirrored in numerous other West German interviews. Take Volker K. as an example. Born in Dortmund in 1956, Volker trained as a book dealer. He moved to Munich as a teenager for his civil service (*Zivildienst*) and then to work in a bookshop. Like many of the other narrators, Volker recalled engaging in sex with men in public at a fairly young age, but, like Erik, spoke of these encounters only in generalities.

S.C.H.: When did you know at first that—

VOLKER K.: —that I was gay?

S.C.H.: Yes, exactly.

V.K.: That is a good question. One doesn't really know exactly. It always interested me and I [pause] as a teenager, there were always books standing around about psychology and child psychology for teachers or whatever. And then at fourteen or sixteen I looked in them and it always said in them that it was a transitional phase, or that one is flexible and *floating*. Actually, I had always also had sex. I went to the pool and allowed myself to be seduced (*verführt*) by

perhaps older men—they weren't so much older. I thought it was great. But I also had a girlfriend. At sixteen, seventeen, eighteen I had a girlfriend and didn't think much more about it. . . . And I think I really realized that I was gay when I was eighteen, when I met someone, really fell in love.

Like Erik—and in stark contrast to the East German men whom I interviewed—Volker alluded to early sexual encounters with other men but did not speak in detail about them. We find out that he allowed himself “to be seduced” by older men at the public pool—just as Carsten had been. But unlike Carsten's memories, we hear no further details about these encounters. The language remains vague and then pivots rapidly to relationships with women. Volker's way of remembering his sexual history is typical of the West German men I interviewed. In another interview, for instance, Torsten V. who was born in Stuttgart in 1952, described an encounter as a teenager in a bath on the northern island of Sylt. He told me that one man “took the initiative, didn't just stare and then I—that it came to—to that.”³⁴ Torsten did not name, let alone describe this experience. Like Erik's “it,” sex with a man here remains identified only as “that.” As with other West German narrators, Torsten mentioned that he had had sex with other men but did not volunteer detailed information about those encounters and used veiled language to refer to them.

Another element of Volker's testimony will leap out to those familiar with the history of homosexuality in twentieth-century Germany, namely his use of the word “verführen” (to seduce). His verb choice is significant because it borrows from mid-twentieth-century anti-gay discourse. Starting early in the century, sexologists and

politicians argued that homosexuality was not a congenital condition, but rather one acquired through seduction at a young age.³⁵ In 1935, the Nazi government had revised §175, making it far easier to successfully prosecute. The change led to a ten-fold increase in convictions in the mid-1930s and to around 50,000 men being sentenced between 1935 and 1943. The government also added a new sub-paragraph, §175(a), which included harsher punishments for a range of qualified homosexual offenses, including for a man who “verführt” a man younger than twenty-one.³⁶ The fascist regime hoped to stamp out homosexuality by preventing its alleged spread through seduction. Both the Nazi version of §175 and §175(a) remained on the books in West Germany until 1969. In East Germany, the Nazi version of §175 was repealed in 1950, but §175(a) remained in force until 1968.³⁷

Volker was not the only one of my interlocutors to adopt this language. Samuel R., for instance, an editor born in 1956 in Hamburg, recalled a man who lived in the country outside Marburg, where he studied. Samuel noted, “of course he wanted to seduce me and then did seduce me.”³⁸ That West German men employed this language hints at how anti-gay laws colored the very ways in which they conceived of their sexuality.

Furthermore, West German narrators described the 1950s and 1960s, when the Nazi version of §175 was still in force and was used to convict over fifty thousand men, as awful decades. For instance, Hubert U., the fifth son of a baker born in 1947, insisted that West Germany in those years was “a mendacious society. It was truly terrible. And dark.”³⁹ In contrast, East German witnesses did not paint such bleak pictures. Focusing on their sexual exploits, East German men did not dwell on the anti-gay propaganda that

continued to color East German views in those decades. The East and West German men whom I interviewed thus spoke about their early sexual experiences in profoundly different ways. East German men described their youthful sexual exploits in vivid detail, while most West German men relayed such experiences only briefly, in veiled or euphemistic terms. Unexpectedly, the interviews thus suggested a somewhat rosier portrait of gay life in East Germany, a repressive communist dictatorship, than in democratic West Germany.

Conclusions

In 1990, John Borneman wrote in his introduction to the English translation of Jürgen Lemke's interviews with East German gay men that "if Jürgen Lemke were to interview the men in these pages today, their stories would undoubtedly differ from those told before."⁴⁰ As they assimilated to capitalist democracy in the wake of reunification, Borneman hypothesized, their responses would come to resemble those of West German men. In one regard, my interviews seem to bear Borneman out, for it is true that the men I spoke with did not always offer factually divergent accounts of their sexual awakenings. Most of them first had sex with men whom they met in some public setting, often a public bath. Many of them, both East and West German, also dated or even married women. Most had also enjoyed long-term relationships with men at some point in their lives. All of my interlocutors described slow and uneven processes of coming out to their friends and families. Nonetheless, these interviews contradict Borneman in at least one regard: as we have seen, my East and West German interlocutors described their earliest sexual experiences in drastically different terms.

What, then, might account for this divergence? West German narrators' allusions to §175, and to their surveillance by the criminal police, suggest that discrepancies in how the East and West German law treated homosexuality offer one possible explanation. As noted earlier, both the Nazi version of §175 and §175(a) remained in force in West Germany until 1969.⁴¹ In the first twenty years of the country's existence, courts convicted over fifty thousand men under the two laws.⁴² These prosecutions do not capture all the forms of harassment, discrimination, and taboo faced by queer West Germans in the 1950s and 1960s, of course, but they offer a convenient metric by which to grasp the scope of the government's animus against gay men and of the persecution that they faced. While West German narrators did not volunteer detailed information about their sex lives, they might well have simply been manifesting the psychological burden of decades of state-sanctioned persecution.

In fact, when West German police interrogated men under suspicion of homosexual activity, they often questioned them about their sexual lives, the kind of truth imperative, which Foucault would later identify as central to the modern construction of sexuality.⁴³ Police records stored in regional archives around Germany contain a disturbing level of detail about arrested men's sexual acts, often including information about when and how they orgasmed. Because many judges, prosecutors, and medical doctors believed homosexuality to be a socially transmittable condition, rather than a congenital identity, courts often weighed such evidence to determine if the accused was a "habitual" homosexual, likely to offend again, or merely someone playing out a youthful indiscretion or acting under the influence of alcohol.⁴⁴ In a similar vein, Gammerl notes that West German gay and lesbian interlocutors were much more interested in speaking

of their identities in terms of emotion rather than “physicality” or “hedonism.”⁴⁵ This tendency he too links to §175, arguing that homophile campaigners against the law in the 1950s and 1960s stressed emotional intimacy over sexual freedom as a way of painting homosexuality in a respectable light.⁴⁶ It seems unsurprising that men who came of age under such a juridical regime might be less inclined to speak of such matters when recalling early memories of their sexual identities.

In East Germany, a very different legal regime prevailed. The communist Supreme Court struck down the Nazi-era version of §175 in 1950, replacing it with the considerably milder version that was in force until 1935.⁴⁷ While there are no comprehensive statistics of the number of men convicted under §175 and §175(a) in the Democratic Republic, all evidence suggests per capita convictions were far lower than in West Germany.⁴⁸ Moreover, because of a change to the law in 1957, the East German regime largely stopped prosecuting men who engaged in consensual adult sex with each other.⁴⁹ It is thus entirely believable, from a legal perspective, that East German gay men would have had far more freedom to explore their sexuality and might thus recall such encounters more fondly. Such conclusions fit well with recent scholarship on sexuality and gender in Eastern Bloc states, which has revealed how communist countries were often more progressive on such issues than the democracies of Western Europe.⁵⁰ Differences in law and the regulation of sexuality thus undoubtedly account for some of the divergence in how East and West German narrators spoke about sex.

Nonetheless, relying on such an explanation alone risks painting East Germany as some sort of queer utopia. In spite of early progressive moves, including early work on a new penal code that would have expunged §175 entirely, the East German government

remained highly inimical to queerness in its early decades.⁵¹ As we have seen, homosexuality was officially banned in the security services. Likewise, I have discovered cases of gay men purged from the ruling Socialist Unity Party for their homosexuality.⁵² East German newspapers, which government censors regulated, often printed articles ridiculing the allegedly rampant homosexuality that they argued characterized life in West Germany (and West Berlin in particular).⁵³ Such anti-gay propaganda was meant to discredit capitalism and to shore up support for the regime's project of building socialism. The tangible animus of East German government and society in the 1950s and 1960s puts paid to any notion that life for queer people was demonstrably better there than in West Germany.

While the narrators' memories highlight a very real difference in how East and West German law treated gay men, other factors likely contributed to their starkly divergent ways of remembering sex. Similarly, in an American context, both Nan Alamilla Boyd and Jason Ruiz found narrators were hesitant to speak about sex.⁵⁴ Interestingly, Boyd discovered, "As the conversation turned to sex . . . gay men would talk endlessly about the subject, but the lesbian/queer women I interviewed would not."⁵⁵ Both Ruiz and Boyd attribute reticence to talk about sex to the "veil of homonormativity" posited by Kevin Murphy in his queer oral history of the Twin Cities in Minnesota.⁵⁶ They suggest that the political economy of neoliberal sexuality, which arose long after the events that their narrators were recalling had ~~actually~~ occurred, demanded silence about pleasure behind a façade of homonormative conformity.

Boyd and Ruiz's findings suggest that queer oral historians must search for causation beyond proximate memory descriptions if they are truly to understand why and

how queer narrators remember their lives the way they do. A cursory glance at Jürgen Lemke's oral histories likewise intimates that more proximate causes may have led to these divergences between East and West German gay men's memories. For although some of Lemke's narrators, especially younger ones, did share explicit and detailed recollections, others did not.⁵⁷ And while his interviewees did suggest that "their life is in many regards like the life of all others in the GDR," as Irene Runge wrote in the introduction to the 1989 German edition, the specific bifurcation in recollections of sex that appeared in my interviews is not readily visible.⁵⁸ Carried out almost forty years ago, these interviews thus suggest that we must look nearer to our own time to fully grasp why East and West German men in the late 2010s recalled their youthful sexual exploits in such divergent ways.⁵⁹

If we look forward about twenty years, we come to another stark divergence in the gay histories of East and West Germany that may explain some of the contrasting characterizations of desire among these narrators. In 1982, the first cases of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) showed up in West Germany.⁶⁰ Caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the disease spread fear and confusion across the country. While the West German federal government eventually succeeded in arresting its rapid spread by means of an aggressive safer sex campaign, the crisis was undoubtedly a turning point for gay men there.⁶¹ As in other countries, HIV, which is primarily spread through sexual contact and needle sharing, led to a virulent debate over gay sexual pleasure. While AIDS organizations and the government actually created advertisements that wed the idea of sexual pleasure and safer sex, commentators ranging from conservative Bavarian politicians to the famous gay film director Rosa von Praunheim

condemned the gay subculture's hedonism.⁶² While many of my West German narrators did not dwell on the AIDS epidemic in the same way one might expect a gay American man of that generation to, some of them did briefly mention the disease. Erik A., for instance, remembered that he withdrew from the gay scene after the advent of AIDS and his partner recalled it as "a shock."⁶³ Other interview partners recalled friends they knew who had died of the disease and the chilling effect it had on gay life in the 1980s.

In contrast, East Germany witnessed vanishingly few cases of AIDS in the 1980s. Rainer E., an East German man born in 1958, remembered: "For me it wasn't a topic at all. It only really became one after the *Wende* [the fall of the Berlin Wall]."⁶⁴ In 1985, when West Berlin alone recorded 1,576 new HIV cases, East Berlin recorded none. Two years later, East Berlin recorded nineteen new cases, while West Berlin recorded 1,332.⁶⁵ Scholars attribute HIV's far slower spread in East Germany to a number of factors, including the lack of a commercial gay subculture (especially the absence of gay saunas), the regime's relatively rapid prophylactic response, and severe border restrictions.⁶⁶ In fact, *Der Spiegel*, one of West Germany's principle news periodicals, called the Berlin Wall "the condom of the GDR."⁶⁷ Rainer Herrn similarly found in the late 1990s that none of his interview partners who had come out before 1989 had experienced AIDS "as a personal threat."⁶⁸ The very different experiences of HIV and AIDS on either side of the Iron Curtain might well color narrators' memories of sexual pleasure in general. While West German gay men were taught to be suspicious of or even fear sexual pleasure in the 1980s, East German men escaped the crisis comparatively unscathed.

Not only does this hypothesis illustrate how oral histories combine reflection and affect from different moments in a narrator's life in non-linear ways, but it also brings to

mind recent queer theoretical interest in chrononormativity. Elizabeth Freeman has argued that neoliberalism shapes “the contours of a meaningful life by registering some events like births, marriages, and deaths, and refusing to record others.” Queer scholarship, she suggests, might instead pursue “a deviant chronopolitics” tied to both the pleasure of queer bodies and the historical loss that scholars such as Heather Love and Judith Butler have interrogated.⁶⁹ In the unexpected additions and subtractions that memory performs, oral history can become a vehicle for interrogating the regulated progress of historical time.⁷⁰ The impact of trauma such as AIDS reminds us that the ways we think with historical sources, and oral histories in particular, are never simply linear and are instead often elucidations of queer time.⁷¹ Narrators conceptualize their own personal histories—and thus too their identities—in terms of formations that are never simply historicist in their construction. Rather, these memories and the manner of their imbrication point to, as Carla Freccero suggests, “the queer temporality of embodied being in all its sensate complexity.”⁷² Or, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, they reveal how each of us blasts open the continuum of our own past each and every day.⁷³

Similarly, the ways in which queer histories of East and West Germany were remembered and discussed in German media at the time of the interviews may have influenced how my narrators recalled their youthful sexual experiences. As I collected interviews in 2016 and 2017, the German government publicly proposed and then passed a law that expunged West German §175 convictions and offered reparations to those men still alive who had been convicted under the law.⁷⁴ With so much public attention devoted to West Germany’s continued employ of the Nazi statute, it is perhaps no wonder that my West German interlocutors often focused on the persecution they

experienced, rather than the pleasure they presumably took in their youthful sexual escapades.

By the same token, since reunification it has become a trope of popular culture that East Germany had looser sexual mores than its western twin. Late in the Cold War, for instance, East German sexologists published studies purporting to show that East German women reached orgasm more often during sex than West German women.⁷⁵ Indicative of this trend, a recent article in *Berliner Zeitung* claimed, “In the East, sexuality was more natural and more normal, in the best sense, much earlier.”⁷⁶ In 2016, Kristen Ghodsee argued in a *New York Times* op-ed that state socialist countries were, on the whole, better on sex and gender issues than their capitalist counterparts.⁷⁷ In this discursive environment, it is perhaps also no surprise that East German narrators would recall their sexual exploits in more affectionate and explicit terms. These interlocutors may also have assumed that, as a Westerner and a foreigner, I was unfamiliar with sexual mores under socialism and wanted to educate me.

Moreover, there is a general tendency among East Germans to look back at the dictatorship with a certain fondness. *Ostalgie*, a portmanteau of east (*Ost*) and nostalgia (*Nostalgie*), is the term coined in 1992 to describe this phenomenon, which, to Western observers at least, appeared so strange.⁷⁸ Historians have since used it to make out the “wall in the head” that continues to divide “*Ossis*” and “*Wessis*,” even thirty years after reunification.⁷⁹ It is not a stretch to suggest that lingering *Ostalgie* may have also colored narrators’ memories. These present-day distinctions between East and West Germans, and how they perhaps manifested in these interviews, illustrate how oral history can reflect the social and political needs of the present, as Portelli suggests. These interviews

do not answer the question of why *Ostalgie* exists—a question with which historians have long preoccupied themselves—but rather illustrate how the political and social imperatives captured in the term *Ostalgie* make themselves visible even in something as seemingly unrelated as the sexual exploits of gay men early in the Cold War. These recollections thus intimate the existence of a queer wall in the head of gay Germans almost thirty years after the fall of the physical wall on the night of November 9, 1989.

Thus, when we ask what precisely caused these affective divergences in narrators' memories, we are left with a number of distinct possibilities. Disparities in persecution, in how each country handled AIDS, or in how each country is remembered today might each account for some of these differences that only become legible in the comparison of oral histories taken from distinct national contexts. These interviews thus highlight how historians can employ queer oral history, productively, even if only tentatively, in service of transnational comparison. They help elucidate, as Roderick Ferguson indicates, how “heterogeneous sexual formations” are “derived from the various national histories that constitute those sexual formations.”⁸⁰

In making out those sexual formations, these oral histories point to how sexuality is constructed both socially and subjectively across space and time. For all its superficial simplicity, my initial question for the narrators to describe their earliest gay memories gets to the heart of what gay identity actually is. How we talk about identity—and how we affix identitarian meaning to memory—is at its base the very constitution of identity itself. That is to say, the work of labelling one's desire “gay” or of thinking about it with certain valences comes only after those acts have already occurred—perhaps in some cases long after, as Joan Scott famously warns.⁸¹ If we are to take the project of queer

temporality seriously in the practice of oral history, it means inhabiting a tension of both accepting the narrator's lived experiences as recounted by them and remaining attuned to how the processes of recounting those experiences shape them and the identities they purport to display. Doing so allows us to make out the heterochronic constructions of identity, which rely on both subjective retellings of memory and the social structures that both inhabit and inhibit those retellings.

The divergence in how these two sets of narrators remembered their earliest gay memories suggests that gay identity actually means something different to these two sets of men, at least as they remembered them in tandem with me. Taken as a whole, these interviews reveal a particular facet of the construction of sexual identity. But, in contradistinction to Boyd, they suggest how differences in social, political, and cultural circumstances can lead to stable differences in self-representations of identity across time and space. The construction of identity does not preclude narrators from speaking of their identities in largely consistent, though always subjective, ways. This body of interviews thus illustrates how queer critique and oral history in a transnational comparative context can complement each other by highlighting the social and subjective constructions of identity at an (inter)personal level. The interlacing of desire and identity highlighted here thus points, however tentatively, to the lingering social and political divisions of the Cold War within the innermost subjectivities of queer Germans today.

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² Alessandro Portelli, “The Peculiarities of Oral History,” *History Workshop* no. 12 (Autumn 1981): 96–107, here 103.

³ Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Who is the Subject? Queer Theory Meets Oral History,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17, no. 2 (May 2008): 177–189, here 180-189. See also Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987); George Chauncey, Jr., *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993).

⁴ Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Jason Ruiz, “What Makes Queer Oral History Different,” *Oral History Review* 43, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2016): 1–24, here 1.

⁵ Boyd, “Who is the Subject,” 179. Boyd and Horacio Ramirez argue elsewhere that oral history does not “entail taking every recorded declaration as factual truth,” but rather that the researcher must “commit to listening carefully for what narrators’ recollections reveal about their time and place in history.” Horacio N. Roque Ramirez and Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Close Encounters: The Body and Knowledge in Queer Oral History,” in *Bodies of*

Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History, ed. Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–20, here 5.

⁶ Boyd, “Who is the Subject,” 189.

⁷ Murphy, Pierce, and Ruiz, “What Makes Queer Oral History Different,” 8.

⁸ Benno Gammerl, *anders fühlen: Schwules und lesbisches Leben in der Bundesrepublik: Eine Emotionsgeschichte* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2021), esp. 29–31; Benno Gammerl, “Erinnerte Liebe: Was kann eine Oral History zur Geschichte der Gefühle und der Homosexualitäten beitragen?,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 35 (2009): 314–345; Benno Gammerl, “Mit von der Partie oder auf Abstand? Biografische Perspektiven schwuler Männer und lesbischer Frauen auf die Emanzipationsbewegung der 1970er Jahre,” in *Rosa Radikale: Die Schwulenbewegung der 1970er Jahre*, ed. Andreas Pretzel and Volker Weiss (Hamburg: Männerschwarm, 2012), 160–176.

⁹ Gammerl, “Erinnerte Liebe,” 341.

¹⁰ Jürgen Lemke, *Ganz normal anders: Auskünfte schwuler Männer aus der DDR* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1989); Maria Borowski, *Parallelwelten: Lesbisch-Schwules Leben in der frühen DDR* (Berlin: Metropol, 2017), 104f-237. See too Rainer Herrn, *Schwule Lebenswelten im Osten: andere Orte, andere Biographien* (Berlin: Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe e.V., 1999).

¹¹ See, for instance, *DDR unterm Regenbogen* (Jochen Hick, 2011); *Mein Wunderbares West-Berlin*, (Jochen Hick, 2017); “Archiv der anderen Erinnerungen,” *Bundesstiftung Magnus Hirschfeld*, accessed October 2, 2020, <https://mh-stiftung.de/projekte/interviews/?cookie-state-change=1601653276134>; Patrick Henze,

Schwule Emanzipation und ihre Konflikte: Zur westdeutschen Schwulenbewegung der 1970er Jahre (Berlin: Querverlag, 2019), 421–422.

¹² Samuel Clowes Huneke, *States of Liberation: Gay Men between Dictatorship and Democracy in Cold War Germany* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).

¹³ Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.

¹⁴ Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Talking about Sex: Cheryl Gonzales and Rikki Streicher tell their Stories,” in *Bodies of Evidence*, ed. Boyd and Ramírez, 95-112, here 104.

¹⁵ Patricia Leavy, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 34.

¹⁶ Holger G., interview, January 5, 2017. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

¹⁷ Fabian Rueger, “Kennedy, Adenauer and the Making of the Berlin Wall, 1958–1961” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2011), 19–20; Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 12.

¹⁸ The allure of metropolises for queer people, gay men in particular, is a well-established theme in the historiography. See Gammerl, *anders fühlen*, 98–105; Gammerl, “Erinnerte Liebe,” 331; Irene Runge, “Ganz anders und normal?” in Jürgen Lemke, *Ganz normal anders*, 9 ; James Keller, “Theodor and Dieter,” in Jürgen Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany: Interviews by Jürgen Lemke*, ed. John Borneman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 135.

¹⁹ Except in cases where the narrator gave consent to be cited by name, all names have been anonymized.

²⁰ Erik A., interview, January 5, 2017.

²¹ Simon Dickel and Anne Potjans, “Racial Seeing and Sexual Desire: *I Berlin Harlem* and *Auf den Zweiten Blick*,” in *Sexual Culture in Germany in the 1970s: A Golden Age for Queers?*, ed. Janin Afken and Benedikt Wolf (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 193–214, 204.

²² Jennifer V. Evans, “Bahnhof Boys: Policing Male Prostitution in Post-Nazi Berlin,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 4 (2003): 605–636, 621; Jennifer V. Evans, *Life Among the Ruins: Cityscape and Sexuality in Cold War Berlin* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 124–127; Clayton Whisnant, *Male Homosexuality in West Germany: Between Persecution and Freedom, 1945–1969* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 29–32; Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 52–55.

²³ Carsten I., interview, November 11, 2016.

²⁴ Ulrich Z., interview, January 13, 2017.

²⁵ Peter Rausch, interview, January 31, 2017.

²⁶ Lisbeth van de Grift, *Securing the Communist State: The Reconstruction of Coercive Institutions in the Soviet Zone of Germany and Romania, 1944–1948* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 87; Rüdiger Wenzke, *Ulbrichts Soldaten: Die Nationale Volksarmee, 1956 bis 1971* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2013), 43; Tom Smith, *Comrades in Arms: Military Masculinities in East German Culture* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 8.

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- ²⁷ See Jennifer Evans, “Decriminalization, Seduction, and ‘Unnatural Desire’ in East Germany,” *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 3 (October 2010): 553–577, here 564.
- ²⁸ Peter Rausch, January 31, 2017. See too the recollections from “Joseph” in Lemke, *Ganz normal anders*, 135–136.
- ²⁹ Geoffrey J. Giles, “The Denial of Homosexuality: Same-Sex Incidents in Himmler’s SS and Police,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2 (2002): 256–290, 273–278.; Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*, 95. On situational homosexuality in prisons, see Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 102.
- ³⁰ Smith, *Comrades in Arms*, 200.
- ³¹ Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 76–78.
- ³² Gammerl, “Erinnerte Liebe,” 341.
- ³³ Borowski, *Parallelwelten*, 238–249.
- ³⁴ Torsten V., interview, January 9, 2017.
- ³⁵ Javier Samper Vendrell, *Seduction of Youth: Print Culture and Homosexual Rights in the Weimar Republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 16–37; Harry Oosterhuis, “Medicine, Male Bonding and Homosexuality in Nazi Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 2 (April 1, 1997): 187–205, here 189; Clayton J. Whisnant, *Queer Identities and Politics in Germany: A History, 1800–1945* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2016), (avoid ff. if possible) 23ff.
- ³⁶ Christian Schäfer, “Widernatürliche Unzucht.” *Reformdiskussion und Gesetzgebung seit 1945* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2006), 319.

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- ³⁷ Hans-Georg Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland. Eine politische Geschichte* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1989), 152–153; Teresa Tammer, “Schwul bis über die Mauer. Die Westkontakte der Ost-Berliner Schwulenbewegung in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren,” in *Konformitäten und Konfrontationen. Homosexuelle in der DDR*, ed. Rainer Marbach and Volker Weiß (Hamburg: Männerschwarm, 2017), 70–88, here 70.
- ³⁸ Samuel R., interview, November 22, 2016.
- ³⁹ Hubert U., interview, January 27, 2017.
- ⁴⁰ John Borneman, “Introduction” in *Gay Voices from East Germany*, ed. Borneman, 1–10, here 9.
- ⁴¹ Robert G. Moeller, “Private Acts, Public Anxieties, and the Fight to Decriminalize Male Homosexuality in West Germany,” *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2010), 528–552, here 529–530.
- ⁴² Stefan Micheler, “. . . und verbleibt weiter in Sicherungsverwahrung.’ Kontinuitäten der Verfolgung Männer begehrender Männer in Hamburg 1945–1949,” in *Ohnmacht und Aufbegehren: Homosexuelle Männer in der frühen Bundesrepublik*, ed. Andreas Pretzel and Volker Weiß (Hamburg: Männerschwarm, 2010), 62–90, here 68; Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 39–40.
- ⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 59.
- ⁴⁴ E.g., Hessische Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden (HHStAW), Abt. 461, Nr. 36418, p. 201; HHStAW, Abt. 461, Nr. 18990, p. 26; Generellandesarchiv Karlsruhe (GLAK), Abt. 309, Karlsruhe, Nr. 2262, p. 19.
- ⁴⁵ Gammerl, “Erinnerte Liebe,” 315.

⁴⁶ Benno Gammerl, “Affecting Legal Change: Law and Same-Sex Feelings in West Germany since the 1950s,” in *From Sodomy Laws to Same-Sex Marriage: International Perspectives since 1789*, ed. Sean Brady and Mark Seymour (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 109–122, here 113–114. Boyd similarly notes the intentionality with which her American narrators would not discuss sex, for fear that it was not “appropriate” for the historical record; Boyd, “Queer Theory Meets Oral History,” 189.

⁴⁷ Evans, “Decriminalization,” 536.

⁴⁸ Erik Huneke, “Morality, Law, and the Socialist Sexual Self in the German Democratic Republic, 1945–1972” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013), 208; Klaus Berndl, “Zeiten der Bedrohung: Männliche Homosexuelle in Ost-Berlin und der DDR in den 1950er Jahren,” in *Konformitäten und Konfrontationen*, ed. Marbach and Weiß, 21–27; Klaus Berndl and Vera Kruber, “Zur Statistik der Strafverfolgung homosexueller Männer in der SBZ und DDR bis 1959,” *Invertito: Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Homosexualitäten* 12 (2010): 58–124, here 88.

⁴⁹ Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 69–70.

⁵⁰ See Borneman, “Introduction,” 5–6; Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2011), 206–215; Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 304–319; Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 141–178.

⁵¹ E. Huneke, “Morality,” 179–96; Evans, “Decriminalization,” 558–560; McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 114–143; Kyle Frackman, “Persistent Ambivalence:

Theorizing Queer East German Studies,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 66, no. 5 (April 16, 2019): 669–689, here 676–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1423220>;

Borowski, *Parallelwelten*, 238–249.

⁵² *Die Behörde des Bundesbeauftragten für die Stasi-Unterlagen* (Stasi Archives or BStU), MfS, AU, Nr. 307/55, Nbd. 5, 137; BStU, MfS, WR, Nr. 683, 48–50. For discussion of these cases, see Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 73–78.

⁵³ E.g., “Tiergarten ein Verbrecherparadies: Enthüllungen der in Hamburg erscheinenden ‘Bildzeitung,’” *Berliner Zeitung*, October 23, 1953; “Strichjungen, Mörder und Diebe,” *Berliner Zeitung*, July 8, 1955; “Westberliner Frauen als Freiwild: Westmächte unterbinden Razzien der Westberliner Polizei,” *Berliner Zeitung*, September 14, 1951.

⁵⁴ Boyd, “Talking about Sex,” 102–105; Jason Ruiz, “Private Lives and Public History: On Excavating the Sexual Past in Queer Oral History Practice,” in *Bodies of Evidence*, ed. Boyd and Ramírez, 113–129, here 120–128.

⁵⁵ Boyd, “Talking about Sex,” 103.

⁵⁶ Kevin P. Murphy, “Gay was Good: Progress, Homonormativity, and Oral History,” in *Queer Twin Cities*, edited by Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Larry Knopp (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 305–318, here 315–316.

⁵⁷ For instance, Lemke’s interview partner T., born in 1963, recalled the toilets on Alexanderplatz, remembering that “the old men kneel on the greasy tiles and give blowjobs.” Lemke, *Ganz normal anders*, 76.

⁵⁸ Irene Runge, “Ganz anders und normal?” in Lemke, *Ganz normal anders*, 7–12, here 10. It is also possible, because the volume was edited and published before the fall of communist censorship, that more explicit memories were either reformulated or removed.

⁵⁹ The interviews which Rainer Herrn carried out a decade after Lemke's lend credence to this hypothesis. Unlike Lemke's subjects, Herrn's seemed to have recalled their sexual lives fairly explicitly, although it is difficult to gauge precisely, as Herrn quoted selectively from his subjects, as opposed to Lemke, who published full protocols of his interviews. Herrn, *Schwule Lebenswelten*, esp. 118–120.

⁶⁰ Michael Bochow, "Reactions of the Gay Community to AIDS in East and West Berlin" in *Aspects of AIDS and AIDS-Hilfe in Germany* (Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, 1993), 19–45, here 28.

⁶¹ For more on the AIDS crisis in West Germany, see Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 176–186; Henning Tümmers, *AIDS. Autopsie einer Bedrohung im geteilten Deutschland* (Göttingen: Wallenstein Verlag, 2017), 136–213; Martin Reichert, *Die Kapsel. Aids in der Bundesrepublik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018), 73–130.

⁶² Rosa von Praunheim, "Gibt es Sex nach dem Tode?" *Der Spiegel*, November 26, 1984, 228–229; Rosa von Praunheim, "Bumsen unterm Safer-Sex Plakat," *Der Spiegel*, May 14, 1990, 244–249; Rosa von Praunheim, *Feuer Unterm Arsch*, 1990; "Aids: Sex-Verbot für Zehntausende?", *Der Spiegel*, January 12, 1987, 161.

⁶³ Erik A., interview, January 5, 2017; Holger G., interview, January 5, 2017.

⁶⁴ Rainer E., interview, April 11, 2017.

⁶⁵ Bochow, "Reactions of the Gay Community," 38.

⁶⁶ Bochow, "Reactions of the Gay Community," 32–34.

⁶⁷ "'Die Mauer war das Kondom der DDR.' Aids und Homosexuelle in den neuen Bundesländern," *Der Spiegel*, October 12, 1992, 126–135.

⁶⁸ Herrn, *Schwule Lebenswelten*, 120.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Freeman, “Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography,” *Social Text* 23, no. 3–4, 84–85 (December 1, 2005): 57–68, 58, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-23-3-4_84-85-57; Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁷⁰ Jennifer Evans, “Introduction: Why Queer German History?” *German History* 34, no. 3 (2016): 371–384, 376-378.

⁷¹ Gammerl too notes the queer temporalities of his narrators’ recollections. Gammerl, “Affecting Legal Change,” 119.

⁷² Carolyn Dinshaw et al., “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2–3 (2007): 177–195, here 193.

⁷³ “The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called ‘Once upon a time’ in historicism’s bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history.” Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 253-265, here 262.

⁷⁴ “Entschädigung für verurteilte Homosexuelle,” *Die Zeit*, July 1, 2016, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2016-07/paragraf-175-homosexualitaet-diskriminierung-justizministerium-gesetz-entschaedigung-rehabilitierung>.

⁷⁵ McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 207.

⁷⁶ Gregor Gysi, “Sex in der DDR: Selbstverständlich und im besten Sinne alltäglich,” *Berliner Zeitung*, October 2, 2020, <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/30-jahre-einheit/sex-ddr-sexualstrafrecht-freiheit-homosexualitaet-mauerfall-gregor-gysi-li.105378>.

⁷⁷ Kristen Ghodsee, “Why Women Had Better Sex Under Socialism,” *New York Times*, August 12, 2017. Ghodsee’s argument was recapitulated in German-language media as well. See Markus Diem Meier, “Warum DDR-Frauen den besseren Sex hatten,” *Tagesanzeiger*, August 22, 2017. Ghodsee later published a volume expanding on this argument: Kristen Ghodsee, *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism and Other Arguments for Economic Independence* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2018).

⁷⁸ Paul Cooke, “Ostalgie’s Not What It Used to be: The German Television GDR Craze of 2003,” *German Politics & Society* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 134–150, here 134.

⁷⁹ Sheffer, *Burned Bridge*, 247–251; Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 3.

⁸⁰ Carolyn Dinshaw et al., “Theorizing Queer Temporalities,” 180.

⁸¹ Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (July 1, 1991): 773–797, here 797.