

Postmodern Childhood in Germany

Online Publication 2005

By
Prof. Dr. Ignatz Kerscher

Childhood Play and Sexual Behaviours

- Since education in sexuality and education for parenting
- share a common basis,
- it may be helpful to sketch the possible role and position
- these two aspects of education hold
- in the usual developmental sequences
- of play and sexual behaviours
- children pass through as they mature.

Development of Skills

- Throughout his or her growth and development,
- the child is expected to experience certain events and to develop certain skills,
- so that a development of a mature consciousness and behavior will be promoted.

Early Mother-Child Relationship

- Optimal mother-child behaviour
- like breast-feeding during infancy
- is believed to stimulate mental activity of the baby
- and to establish a trustworthy relationship between parent and child.

Emotional Security

- Based on an intensive mother-child relationship,
- the time spent in play and fun experiences between the two
- would promote a sense of playful exploration
- and form the basis of interpersonal relationship,
- as well as emotional security.

Social Abilities

- The basis of an intensive mother-child relationship in early childhood (FREUD)
- enhances the ability of a child
- to play with other children
- and successful join in peer-group activities.

Peer-Group Activities

- Peer-group activities,
- especially involving play activities among young children,
- is believed

- to develop the social aspects of personality (PIAGET, KOHLBERG).

Social Development

- It seems that social development of an individual,
- especially in peer-group activities (G.H.MEAD: social functions of play and game),
- includes the acquisition of communication skills.

Acquisition of Communication Skills in Peer-Groups

- Skills trained in peer-group activities encompasses
- procedures to manage human relations,
- leadership development within a group,
- coping skills between boys and girls,
- between elders and the young, and
- between the strong and the weak.

Human Relationship Skills

- As a person grows and becomes ready to engage in heterosexual or homosexual relationships and sexual behaviours,
- these human relationship skills
- will become necessary to deal with the opposite sex
- or with another person of the same sex.

Parenting Skills

- Likewise, the above mentioned skills
- are needed
- when a person becomes a parent.

Changes in

Postmodern Society

- Together with increasing urbanization and modernization
- Germany is witnessing the emergence of a new type of young people.
- These youngsters do not accept traditional institutional human relationships.
- They prefer living exclusively at the keyboard of a computer, communicating via networks, and avoiding direct human relations with the others.

New Type of Person

- These young people are often lacking in interpersonal relationship skills
- in the sense of human relationship with the others,
- and unskilled in heterosexual or homosexual relations in later adolescent life.

Singles

- Symptoms are found in the increase of singles,
- and the increase of divorces,
- indicating
- the lack of patience,

- human relationship manoeuvring skills,
- and inability to maintain a married relationship.

Lower Children Rate

- According to the latest national statistics,
- the average German couple has 1,28 children,
- one of the lowest rates in the world.

Changes in Family Life

- This tendency to a small number of children
- is a reflection of postmodern changes in society
- and a high-economic, growth-centered family life
- with the wife being a highly educated career woman.

Lack of Public

Child-Care Systems

- This tendency for German couples to have few children
- may also reflect the lack of sufficient public child-care systems,
- which pressures mothers to stay home and take care of their children.

Inflexible Working Hours

- Many German women are reluctant to have more children
- because of inflexible working hours,
- long-distance commuting to work,
- the high costs of housing,
- and the lack of child-care facilities.

The Past Society

- In the Middle Ages, German family was often situated in a large farmers house,
- where several persons related by kinship lived together on the same land in the same house.
- This arrangement accommodated different families of three or four generations.

Childhood in the Past

- The children learned many important matters
- from the members of the various families,
- as well as from their own immediate brothers and sisters (ARIÈS).

Many Children in the Past

- With many children in each family,
- each child enjoyed excellent educational opportunities within the family community.
- Everyday life in the community functioned as the community education.

Advent of Modernization

- The advent of modernization brought an urban life style
- that forced the extended family and neighborhood community

- to abandon its educational function.
- In addition, the daily human exchanges
- and the network system with the neighbours were lost.

Premodern Community

- In the premodern community,
- children of similar ages formed peer-groups
- and played together near their farm homes,
- in a backyard, in an open field or in the barn,
- or in the streets of the villages or towns.

Informal Sex Education

- The children often obtained interesting and helpful information related to sex
- observing the farm animals.
- In this manner, sexuality education went on
- in an informal manner.

Doctor/Nurse Play

- In the past the children often enjoyed
- the „doctor/nurse play“ within their peer-group
- in a secret space.
- These plays provided sexual information and fantasy,
- which in turn helped the children to form a healthy sexual identity (ERIKSON) of their own.

Contemporary Childhood

- Children in contemporary Germany,
- now have fewer brothers and sisters in their family.
- So they seldom have opportunity to cope with a small baby,
- with a younger child, and
- with an older and stronger child.

Early Childhood Training

- Many young children start a training in preparation for school success very early.
- The parents think, this may provide a better opportunity for future school advancement.
- Training in piano, ballet and swimming, for example,
- is becoming a common practise among children of all ages.

No Time for Play

- As a result, the children have very little time
- for spontaneous activities
- such as playing
- and spending time together with the children of the peer-group.

Lack of Social Abilities

- One`s ability to live socially and peacefully

- with other people of different types and capabilities
- is usually cultivated
- in those childhood circumstances
- characterized as traditional socialisation.

Human Relation Skills

- Human relations require skills in sexual-related behaviours,
- such as talking with
- and obtaining trust
- from the peers of the other sex.
- These are skills that may not be attained
- by merely reading books, magazines and watching television programs.

Lack of Communication Skills

- Contemporary German children are not in the position to experience such education.
- We find young grownups today
- who lack the skills of living, playing, and communicating with young people of the same and/or other sex.

Television and Computer

- Contemporary children love to watch television programs,
- play television/computer games,
- and read comic books or magazines (like „BRAVO“)
- during the precious free activity hours
- (perhaps an hour or so in the late evening),
- after finishing all the previously scheduled programs.

Sex Information on Television

- While there is much information related to sex and sexual behaviours
- on television, internet and magazines,
- exposures to this information is not sufficient
- when they have to use it on their own,
- cognitively and affectively.

Passive Manner of Learning

- Children, youth and adolescents need to perceive sex information
- in the context of actual human relations and experiences in reality.
- Most contemporary German children
- build their knowledge concerning sex
- in a passive manner
- that result in distortion and inflexibility.

Positive Attitude towards Sex

- The sex-related knowledge should be actively acquired by each individual
- with a positive attitude in order for one
- to handle sexuality in later life constructively and with enjoyment.

Abstract Information

- The psychosexual development processes of the infants, children and youth of contemporary Germany
- are experienced in television programs, internet information and abstract textbooks
- rather than in actual experience-orientated activities in reality.

New Problems

- It is not to imply or suggest
- that today`s children will grow up
- to become sexual deviants or criminals.
- But perhaps they face new problems with intimacy,
- with steady-going partnerships, and
- to maintain a longlasting relationship,
- necessary for the ability of parenting.