

From a Lecture by *Oberstudiendirektor* Kurt Hahn at a Sex Education Workshop for Young People at Jugendburg Bilstein/Sauerland (September 14, 1950)

Abstract

The erosion of familial and social structures during the war and the postwar period, as well as the direct contact with occupying soldiers, refugees, and so on, meant that many young Germans were confronted with sexuality much earlier than before and in an unfamiliarly open form. In 1950, to do justice to this new reality, educator Kurt Hahn advocated sex education for young people beginning at puberty. At the same time, he wanted to see sex education emphasize the psychological dimension of sexuality alongside the physical one.

Source

[...]

State authority has largely vanished. The postwar school, with teachers who are frequently disciplined and occasionally also dismissed, has only a fraction of its former authority. To these dangers, which are exacerbated by the chaotic postwar conditions, are added the [normal] natural, developmentally-driven tensions – independent of the special circumstances of the times – of our 15- to 18-year-old school youth. The earlier onset of puberty, which already started appearing decades ago on account of urbanization, has progressed even further since. Because of the great influx of refugees, school classes are partially made up of a jumble of students whose ages vary far more greatly than before. Younger students have always been imperiled by older students, usually those repeating a grade who like to act as class “educators,” but this is even more the case today. We can say without exaggeration that when it comes to sexuality, our fifteen year-olds today are in the know, with very few exceptions.

Already in quiet times, the heightened sexual drive in a state of awakening meets with an insufficient force of emotional resistance. The sad postwar years, when discipline and order, propriety and integrity had shockingly low currency, bear some responsibility for the fact that so many young people, after the first great upheavals associated with the discovery of the mysterious, guilt-inducing experiences of the body, more and more seldom feel the desire, in moments of calm reflection, to come out of their dark prison of guilt-entangled physicality into the bright light, in order to rebuild with faithful confidence the world they have destroyed. So many feel quite well in their dull and unbridled devotion to the sexual urge, with the satisfaction of desire being attainable at any time, and they suppress any feelings of inferiority that might arise. What a few decades ago was truer of the working youth, whose developmental years unfolded more coarsely and unsentimentally, on account of their harsher life conditions, than those of the bourgeois youth, now largely applies to the rest of today’s youth as well, because of the brutalizing influence of the war: *eros* as an emotional component of puberty that appeals to humans’ better self plays a much weaker role today than it used to.

[...]

What kind of help can be offered? After all, the great difficulty is and will be to truly connect with young people at this age. The prerequisite for this, that young people open up to the teacher, is an absolute imperative that is grounded in natural authority, love, and attachment.

In my experience, biology class is especially well suited for sex education.

[...]

Source: *Die Höhere Schule* (1951), no. 6; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann and Georg Wagner, *Das gespaltene Land. Leben in Deutschland 1945-1990. Texte und Dokumente zur Sozialgeschichte* [*The Divided Land. Life in Germany, 1945-1990. Texts and Documents on Social History*]. Munich: C.H. Beck, 1993, pp. 296-98.

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