

‘Nicht so schnell!’: Female sexuality and socialism in DEFA youth films

By: [Faye Stewart](#)

Stewart, Faye. “‘Nicht so schnell!’: Female Sexuality and Socialism in DEFA Youth Films.” *New Perspectives on Young Adult GDR Literature and Film*. Ed. Ada Bieber and Sonja E. Klocke. Special issue of *Colloquia Germanica* 50.1 (2017/2019): 35–54.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26756829>

***© 2019 Narr Francke Attempto Verlag. Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from Narr Francke Attempto Verlag. This version of the document is not the version of record. ***

Abstract:

Female sexuality in DEFA youth films comprises the two distinct yet intertwined paradigms of purity and promiscuity. In this article, I examine these two archetypes in conjunction in order to reveal their ideological significance within wider national and transnational discourses during the Cold War. My study uncovers the persistence and interdependence of the young female prude and slut in five popular DEFA youth films produced between the 1960s and the late 1980s: Joachim Hasler’s *Heißer Sommer* (1967); Bernhard Stephan’s *Für die Liebe noch zu mager?* (1973); and Herrmann Zschoche’s *Sieben Sommersprossen* (1978), *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton* (1980), and *Grüne Hochzeit* (1988). In these films, the virginity and purity of young female characters are consistently aligned with socialist values and collectivism, while permissiveness or sexual experience suggest bourgeois influences and individualism.

Keywords: children’s films | sexuality | virginity | Joachim Hasler | Bernhard Stephan | Herrmann Zschoche

Article:

The German Democratic Republic’s commitment to producing children’s and youth films reveals its estimation of its young generations as central to envisioning socialist futures. DEFA, East Germany’s state-owned film studios, produced 160 to 200 films for and about children, adolescents, and young adults.¹ Children’s and youth films spoke to the desires and concerns of their target audiences while fulfilling political and social directives, keeping sight of their ideological mandate to promote a narrative of social progress and to shape the next generation of socialist citizens, laborers, and leaders. In addressing emerging sexual maturity for young audiences, DEFA cinema for and about youth brought discourses of nationhood and political ideologies together with depictions of gender, desire, and intimacy. In DEFA as in other cultural traditions, girls and young women bear the symbolic weight of signaling national strength,

¹ Estimates of the number of children’s and youth films DEFA made from 1946 to 1992 are approximate, due to the challenges of defining the genre. Dieter Wiedemann and Benita Blessing enumerate these challenges, with Wiedemann indicating that there were over 200, including some 160 to 180 feature films (111), while Blessing cites the lower figure of 160 (“DEFA” 244; “Defining” 252). For more on the difficulties of labeling the genre, see Stefan Röske 53–60.

fecundity, and futurity. Whether in their roles as unruly daughters and rebellious teenagers; as nurturers and mothers; or as students, workers, and vacationers, female youth in East German films conveyed social hopes and anxieties while also functioning as politicized ciphers. In this study, I read female sexuality in five popular DEFA youth films as comprising two distinct yet intertwined paradigms: purity and promiscuity. These films include Joachim Hasler's *Heißer Sommer* [Hot Summer] (1967); Bernhard Stephan's *Für die Liebe noch zu mager?* [Too Young for Love?] (1973); and three works by Herrmann Zschoche, *Sieben Sommersprossen* [Seven Freckles] (1978), its sequel *Grüne Hochzeit* [Just Married] (1988), and *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton* [Next Year at Lake Balaton] (1980). These patterns of young female sexuality in DEFA productions bear ideological weight within wider national and transnational discourses during the Cold War. Virginal girls are a common symbol in East German cinema for the socialist state, solidarity, and incorruptibility. Their more experienced, desirous, and seductive counterparts embody challenges to socialist morality through bourgeois values or the allure of the West. Emphasizing the persistence and interdependence of gender archetypes, this study traces continuities in sexual discourses over the last two decades of the GDR's lifetime.

Children's and youth films can be broadly defined as productions that seek to entertain young viewers, and whose main characters are under the age of twenty. The primary texts under scrutiny here can be categorized as youth films or young adult films due to their focus on teenagers. Although they address more "adult" topics like marriage and pregnancy, they are made for young spectators, even if their target audiences are not strictly "children."² The films educate viewers about love and intimacy, advancing the SED's aims to mold the youth into productive citizens: "Teaching young people the right things about sex and relationships, for example, would result in sound marriages and happy family life. Both were essential if men and women were to contribute to the workforce, and children to be raised as confident 'socialist personalities'" (McLellan 24). DEFA's youth protagonists model behaviors for their spectators as they acquire an understanding of themselves and the world within as well as beyond the GDR – an understanding that is closely intertwined with the films' negotiations of gender, desire, and intimacy.

With narratives set in the present-day GDR, these productions directed by Hasler, Stephan, and Zschoche belong to a subgenre of children's cinema identified by Benita Blessing as the children's everyday film and by Dieter Wiedemann as the *gegenwartsorientierter Kinderfilm* [children's film oriented toward contemporary life]. The children's everyday film is one of three main subcategories of children's live-action fiction cinema – alongside children's historical and fantasy films – that are "designed to stimulate young cinema-goers to follow the protagonists' actions and ideals" (Blessing, "Defining" 252).³ Moviegoers also learn to eschew the behaviors

² In a study of children's films coauthored by Bernd Sahling, Klaus-Dietrich Felsmann describes productions like *Für die Liebe noch zu mager?* and *Sieben Sommersprossen* as films "mit Blick auf ältere Kinder" [with an eye to older children], setting them apart from those made for younger child audiences (32).

³ These categories do not include documentaries or animated films, which DEFA also made for children. The three subgenres Blessing identifies have been the focus of most scholarship on East German children's cinema. Röske concurs that these are "die drei wesentlichen Genres" [the three basic genres] in his study of everyday and historical children's films by Helmut Dziuba (49). Blessing's "'Films to Give Kids Courage!'" analyzes all three types, while Wiedemann discusses everyday films and fairy tales in his essay. Additional scholarship on the fairy tale film includes Sebastian Heiduschke, *East German Cinema* 53–59; Christin Niemeyer, "Between Magic and Education"; and Qinna Shen, *The Politics of Magic*.

of the character foils and antagonists. Due to their realistic settings, Wiedemann explains, East German productions of this genre had a strong impact that stemmed in part “aus einer Nähe zu jenen Prämissen und Regularien, die den Alltag vieler DDR-Bürgerinnen und -Bürger bis 1989 bestimmte” [from a proximity to the very premises and formalities that determined the everyday lives of many GDR citizens until 1989] (116). Depictions of gender and sexuality in such productions are part of this bigger picture, conveying contemporary concerns about social expectations, cultural developments, and political policies that defined the lives of both children and adults in East Germany.

In the cinematic culture of the GDR, the female archetypes of the virgin and the promiscuous girl were not just products of 1950s postwar morality but persisted over the decades. Idealized depictions of innocent girls in films of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s betray a lasting interest in linking young femininity with abstinence, nature, and the color white. Chaste girls become emblematic for socialist ideals, and, by extension, the socialist nation. By contrast with this ideal, youthful female promiscuity takes on pejorative hues in DEFA films, where female-embodied erotic desire is aligned with decadence, selfishness, and capitalist influences. Examining these two archetypes in conjunction reveals that the young female prude and slut are not discrete types but rather symbolically and ideologically intertwined.

The virtuous girl whose origins lie in the values of the 1950s has both transnational and specifically East German significance. After World War II, traditional gender roles provided a foundation for reestablishing social order in East and West Germany: the turmoil of the war and the postwar era had compromised youth sexual integrity through disease, rape, prostitution, and lack of privacy (Fenemore, “Growing” 72–73). Embodying a rejection of Nazi perversions of the past, girls became a screen for the projection of national fantasies of innocence and rebirth. They also represented the procreative and political future: “Their emerging sexuality was accompanied by certain obligations to the German nation that superseded individual biological or emotional desires” (Blessing, *Antifascist* 99). Asserting girls’ indispensable sexuality necessitated its containment and deferral. Mark Fenemore notes that, “In both German states, girls were expected to be pretty and chaste, their grace, charm and elegance only betraying innocence and virtuousness” (*Sex* 105). Blueprints for healthy generations to come entailed depictions of girls as selfless, industrious, and devoted to their families, such as those found in the pastoral idylls of the popular West German *Heimatfilm* [homeland film] of the 1950s. Fenemore identifies hairstyles and footwear – specifically “plaits and sensible shoes” – as features of this dominant feminine paradigm (*Sex* 105). Equally meaningful in DEFA’s filmic portrayals of adolescent femininity were white clothing and natural settings signaling purity and wholesomeness.

The escalation of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s produced national dimensions to East German representations of girlhood. The discourse of abstinence aligned itself with Leninist and Stalinist ideologies of sacrifice and the sublimation of sexual energies for the greater social good (see Fenemore, “Growing” 80–81). The GDR distinguished itself from the FRG by heralding communalism over individualism. While Western styles and American culture in particular appealed to many a youth in East as well as West Germany, “the implications of the changes produced by Western youth culture were particularly explosive [in the GDR] because they coincided with and ran counter to a revival of traditional ideas about how young women should behave” (Fenemore, *Sex* 105). The SED, the GDR’s ruling party, was suspicious of styles

resembling those popular in the United States or that gave the impression of exoticism or rebellion. Virtuous girls in East German media thus signaled both an affirmation of socialist values and a rejection of capitalist cultures.

East German coming-of-age films celebrate this ideal feminine type. The virgin protagonists of *Sieben Sommersprossen* and *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton* remain chaste despite their boyfriends' and suitors' attempts to bed them. *Für die Liebe noch zu mager?* also features a virgin protagonist, though she becomes sexually active by the film's end. These films engage in sex education by acknowledging teenagers' emotional maturity; distinguishing between love, sex, and nudity; and addressing contraception, pregnancy, and abortion. On the one hand, in celebrating virginity and true love, the films adhere to the directives of the SED's 1963 *Jugendkommuniqué* [Youth Communiqué], which pushed for greater attention to adolescents' needs and desires while embracing traditional notions of love as the basis for healthy relationships in a socialist society.⁴ On the other hand, these films speak to social concerns of the 1970s, which saw increasingly open discussions about youth sexuality, a cultural shift ushered in by Erich Honecker's accession to the GDR leadership and loosening of censorship in 1971, and East Berlin hosting the *Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten* [World Festival of Youth and Students] in 1973.

Each of the films I analyze here offers a character foil to the innocent female teenager in a sexually assertive, experienced, or permissive competitor for the affections of the male love object. In addition to promiscuity's moral and ideological functions in characterizing feminine anti-role models, it introduces the subjects of pregnancy and young motherhood, edifying young spectators about the life-changing stakes of sex. Perhaps due to the risk of pregnancy, such films imply that female promiscuity is more problematic than male promiscuity. Josie McLellan notes the pervasiveness of sexual double standards: despite the GDR's official stance embracing gender equality, girls faced higher expectations of obedience, conformity, and monogamy than boys (46–47). While boys can have sexual relations with multiple girls without such behavior being censured or vilified, desirous or experienced girls bear the weight of social disapproval and embody warnings to young audiences.

Such is the case with the promiscuous blond bombshell Brit, who causes trouble in the collective in Joachim Hasler's 1967 blockbuster hit, *Heißer Sommer*. Hasler's musical differs from the other films I analyze because its depiction of desire is considerably tamer and its social critique is less overtly sexualized than in later productions. The late 1960s were a time of increased cultural constraints, following the SED's Eleventh Plenary of 1965 and the banning of numerous political and socially critical films.⁵ True to contemporary mores, *Heißer Sommer* opts for conservative depictions of chaste romance, avoiding nudity or explicit sexuality. Its plot conflict revolves around the age-old rivalry between the sexes: eleven girls and ten boys journey from Leipzig to the Baltic coast, playing pranks on each other, singing popular Schlager melodies, and

⁴ The *Jugendkommuniqué* refers to a Walter Ulbricht speech that was published as *Jugend von heute – Hausherren von morgen: Kommuniqué des Politbüros des ZK der SED zu Problemen der Jugend in der DDR* (1963). For the history, content, and impact of the *Jugendkommuniqué*, see McLellan 25–26; Fenemore, *Sex* 167–68; and Herzog 74–75.

⁵ For more on the film censorship, the Eleventh Plenary, and their effects on film production, see Creech 55–58; Hake 128–40; and Heiduschke 77–83.

becoming romantically entangled along the way.⁶ The GDR's policies on gender equality comically take on mathematical proportions in the film's cast of characters: eleven girls plus ten boys would seem to add up to one girl being left out, but when two girls – twins – flirt with the same boy, we might hope for an even outcome. However, flirty Brit entertains the affections of two boys, Wolf and Kai, leaving the film's female lead Stupsi without a male admirer, though Stupsi clearly has feelings for Kai. Tensions, jealousy, and secrecy unfold, leading to blows between Kai and Wolf. *Heißer Sommer* contains drama and violence but eschews sex for good, clean, intellectual fun: Brit spends a night with Wolf in a barn, but instead of having intercourse, they recite poetry and fall asleep fully clothed.

White clothing and natural settings belong to the visual vocabulary of female sexuality that *Heißer Sommer* shares with the later coming-of-age films I analyze here. The white jacket and pants Brit wears on her night with Wolf, which recall other white garments she has previously donned and resonate with the white beds shown in a cross-cut of the girls's sleeping quarters, signal innocence and purity. The scene's setting in a barn, with Brit and Wolf sleeping in the hay alongside a dog, naturalizes chastity. *Heißer Sommer's* pastoral scenery – fields, beaches, and bodies of water – suggests the inevitability of desire among teenagers, but also emphasizes their childishness and naïveté. The soundtrack further characterizes the teenagers as immature and inexperienced with songs like Chris Doerk's "Männer, die noch keine sind" [Men Who Aren't Yet Men] and "Was erleben" [Experience Something].

Hasler's film uses female characters to dramatize a conflict between Eastern collectivism and Western individualism, warning that selfishness can cause social disruption. The cinematic grammar structures this message through visual contrasts between ensemble sequences – including the opening and closing scenes – in which the gendered groups dance and sing joyfully in unison about shared goals and experiences, and scenes emphasizing the unruly or unreciprocated desires of individuals or couples. Such framing portrays collective endeavors as producing healthier subjects and more gratifying outcomes than those that serve the needs of just one or two. Excessive self-interest and individualism were qualities that ran counter to the East German ideal type, which heroicized the quintessentially socialist values of altruism, compassion, and community-mindedness. Coupling up and treating members of the opposite sex like possessions, *Heißer Sommer* implies, causes friction with socialist values, a message that resonates with 1950s school bans against heterosexual relationships because they "weakened the collective spirit and lowered group morale" (Fenemore, *Sex* 109). Brit's inability to commit to either boy ultimately leads to her departure, but the musical finale shows her rejoining the collective, a utopian ending that suggests the possibility of reconciliation in a healthy socialist community.

Hasler's musical shares plot and setting elements with Zschoche's later road movie *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton*: both tell of summer adventure and romance for teenagers hitchhiking to the shores of East Germany and Bulgaria, constructing these socialist geographies as offering heaps of fun. As Sebastian Heiduschke notes, vacationing is central to *Heißer Sommer's* message:

⁶ Schlager is an upbeat, sentimental pop music genre with roots in the Weimar era, which underwent a revival with the success of homegrown rock 'n' roll stars in East and West Germany of the 1960s and 70s. Music was central to *Heißer Sommer's* blockbuster success, as two of the leading roles were played by the East German pop stars Chris Doerk (Stupsi) and Frank Schöbel (Kai), who sang many of the songs on its soundtrack.

“Travel to the Baltic Sea appears to be a regular pastime for East Germany’s teenagers, thus normalizing society and putting it in line with citizens of Western nations having the freedom to travel at leisure” (89). Indeed, excitement, passion, and beautiful scenery are close at hand within the GDR’s boundaries. Mobilizing the genres of the musical and the beach party film, the latter of which became popular in the US in the 1960s, Hasler’s blockbuster demonstrates that “young comrades could remain committed to socialist ideals while enjoying American-style pop tunes, sports, and flirtations” (Hake 135). But *Heißer Sommer*’s narrative, which neither leaves the GDR nor addresses national identity, betrays its production in the 1960s, after the closing of the border with the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the enforcement of travel restrictions.

While *Heißer Sommer* shows innocent East German girls having fun on vacation, Stephan’s 1973 *Für die Liebe noch zu mager?* tells a story of sexual awakening and politicizes its female characters as laborers and nurturers rather than carefree travelers. Stephan’s protagonist, eighteen-year-old Susanne, is a productive member of socialist society: when she is not doing exemplary work in the textile plant, she participates in political demonstrations, volunteers for the Red Cross, and does the housework in the apartment she shares with her father and brother. But Susanne is romantically unfulfilled: as Henning Wrage notes, “the film contrasts her personal disorientation on the one hand and her unproblematic social functioning on the other” (279). Her lack of romantic ties apparently enables her to be a model citizen.

Susanne remains a virgin for most of *Für die Liebe noch zu mager?*, though she eventually becomes involved with her neighbor Lutz. At first Lutz does not see Susanne as a potential mate and instead gets her permissive friend Daisy pregnant. After several unsuccessful attempts to gain Lutz’s affections, Susanne lashes out, losing the respect of her coworkers, who tear down a picture on the factory bulletin board heralding Susanne as “eine unserer Besten” [one of our best]. Unfulfilled sexual desire, it seems, engenders unproductive behavior, causing problems in the workplace. However, both matters are soon resolved: Susanne’s supervisor defends her and rehanges the article, Susanne gets back to work, and Lutz finally reciprocates Susanne’s affection. A montage of shots of Susanne and Lutz at play and at work – the two going places together, Susanne enjoying the attention of other men, Lutz working as a plumber, Susanne in a first aid class, and a close-up of the spindles at the textile plant – links their romantic bliss and Susanne’s desirability with productive and gratifying labor. But this harmonic state is short-lived, as Lutz soon leaves to join a freight ship crew: he wants to travel, especially to socialist Cuba and Vietnam, though he is open to stopping in Western or Middle Eastern locales like London, Brussels, and Alexandria too. It seems fitting that the boy who wears “echte Levi’s” [real Levi’s] – an indicator of Western capitalism and individualism – should leave the GDR and the East German girl who loves him to see the world. Lutz’s wanderlust appears selfish in contrast with Susanne’s guilelessness, loyalty, and charity, which come across as the more desirable socialist qualities. The final sequence, a shot-reverse-shot of Susanne looking at the photo of herself on the factory bulletin board, shows that she has blossomed into a confident woman, reconciling self-knowledge with her social (and socialist) engagements.

White garments and natural settings figure centrally in the virgin’s character development in *Für die Liebe noch zu mager?*, as well as in Zschoche’s later teenage dramas. In Stephan’s film, white clothing announces Susanne’s chastity: she often wears white or pink while she is a virgin

– we first meet her in a white dress and off-white sweater; in later scenes, she wears a white jacket, blouse, underclothes, and shoes – but prefers more colorful attire after becoming sexually active. Some of Susanne’s white clothes have colorful collars and embellishments along the hems, which create visual links to the white leotard with a red neckline worn by champion Soviet gymnast Olga Korbut, whom Susanne watches on television. White apparel thus acquires political significance, signaling a connection between innocence, strength, and socialism. The sequence showing Korbut’s celebratory pose after her gold-medal performance in the 1972 Summer Olympics precedes the film’s dramatic climax and resolution, foreshadowing Susanne’s victory in the tacit competition with her friend and coworker Daisy for Lutz’s attention: if Susanne works hard, she will win her trophy. Keeping her eye on the prize also means that Susanne must fend off advances from other boys. Before becoming involved with Lutz, Susanne briefly entertains the affections of another boy, Martin, who takes her into a wooded area where they fool around. Susanne initially shows interest, removing her pale pink dress to reveal white underclothes. But when Martin tells Susanne to close her eyes, she realizes that he is not the boy she wants to see atop her and pushes him away.

In this scene as well as the later scene in which Susanne loses her virginity to Lutz, natural settings imply innocence and purity. Exiting the thicket alone after her flirtation with Martin in *Für die Liebe noch zu mager?*, Susanne rubs a fistful of grass over her face and neck, as if to cleanse herself. The lush outdoor setting naturalizes Susanne’s decision to abstain, though in ensuing scenes with Lutz, arboreal backdrops do the opposite, establishing their intimacy as natural because she has loved him all along, waiting patiently for him to reciprocate her feelings. In what Sabine Hake characterizes as a “provocative portrayal of the ambiguities of desire,” the film celebrates Susanne’s initial abstinence as well as her later deflowering (143). It is in the woods, where Susanne has followed Lutz to work, that he sees her as a sexual being for the first time, admiring her curves. The next scene shows their first sexual encounter in a greenhouse filled with exotic plants where Lutz works on the plumbing. Amid low-hanging vines and against the aural backdrop of an educational nature tour introducing the greenhouse’s exotic species in a voiceover, Susanne and Lutz fall into each other’s arms and disappear among the foliage, as if they were part of the nature story we hear amplified overhead. Juxtaposed with their implied sex act, the nature narrative in the voiceover reads as a parody of contemporary sex education: “Even when it was taught in schools, observers felt that it was not tackled early enough or with enough focus on human beings, as opposed to plants and animals” (Fenemore, “Growing” 83). Just as the woods previously served as a fitting milieu for the preservation of Susanne’s virginity, so too do they now set the stage for her to give it to her true love. The film’s discourse of love aligns itself with contemporary ideologies about youth sexuality that “sex between young people who loved each other could not be wrong, whether or not they were married” (McLellan 26). It also fits with the post-reunification romantic narrative that “the GDR had enabled a natural, uncommercialised sexuality, unsullied by the demands of capitalism” (McLellan 206). Stephan’s filmic ending implicitly celebrates the GDR as a fitting milieu for girlhood to flourish into womanhood without sully socialist values.

Susanne’s coworker and confidante Daisy is her promiscuous counterpart in *Für die Liebe noch zu mager?* Like Brit in *Heißer Sommer*, Daisy only considers her own needs and desires, selfishly ignoring those of her female friend. We first meet Daisy when Susanne confesses to her that she has a crush on Lutz. Daisy ignores Susanne’s declaration, responding only that she had a

fling with him. She seems startlingly uninterested in Susanne's hopes and dreams, which comes as no surprise, given that the English name "Daisy" points toward foreignness, evoking beauty and ephemerality.

Daisy's pregnancy is central to the film's socialist moral. Daisy already has one child (whose father is apparently not around) and claims to be pregnant by Lutz, though she is also sleeping with Susanne's brother (who could presumably be the father). Lutz is willing to take responsibility for the pregnancy, prompting Daisy to fantasize about respectable family life, but there is no indication that they genuinely care for each other or that the relationship will last. Daisy – who, among the girls I analyze here, most closely exemplifies a "slut" in her promiscuity – embodies a warning about what can happen to East German girls who sleep around: lasciviousness and young motherhood inhibit her full social development. By contrast with Daisy, Susanne becomes more fully integrated into the socialist collective through her relationship with Lutz, but this is only made possible when Daisy opts for an abortion, thus renouncing her claim on Lutz. With the decadent Daisy as a character foil, the film heroicizes Susanne's selflessness in helping the friend who slept with the boy Susanne loves. Susanne collects money from their work brigade and – despite a jealous outburst that culminates in Susanne devouring the chocolates her coworkers bought for Daisy – visits Daisy in the abortion clinic, bearing flowers and apples. By dramatizing the social taboo surrounding abortion but refraining from heavy-handed moralizing against Daisy, *Für die Leibe noch zu mager?* evokes sympathy for her and celebrates a liberal, worker-friendly GDR, where abortion had been permitted under certain conditions since 1965 and available to all since 1972, a year before this film's release (see McLellan 62–64). By showcasing the accessibility of abortion, the film gestures toward the GDR's progressiveness vis-à-vis the West; in combination with access to childcare, financial independence, and job opportunities, abortion rights factored into East German women's overall ambivalence toward feminism (see Herzog 81, 84). In West Germany, by contrast, the early 1970s saw widespread feminist campaigns for abortion law reform, a battle that was ongoing as Stephan's film appeared. Susanne exemplifies community-minded socialist values by showing compassion for the friend with an unplanned pregnancy, while the unflinching depiction of abortion underscores the GDR's support of women's emancipation.

By contrast with the girls of Stephan's film, the female main characters of Herrmann Zschoche's dramas *Sieben Sommersprossen* and *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton* refrain from having sex. Zschoche's films share themes with *Heißer Sommer*, celebrating chastity and following parallel arcs narrating teenagers' romantic adventures on summer vacation: *Sieben Sommersprossen*'s fourteen-year-old Karoline and fifteen-year-old Robert attend summer camp in rural East Germany, while *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton*'s eighteen- or nineteen-year-old Ines and Jonas travel separately across Eastern Europe. The age of consent for heterosexual sex in the GDR was fourteen, and Zschoche's films assert that their teenaged protagonists are mature enough to make decisions about sex. Participating in dominant East German discourses of the 1960s and 1970s, these works tame the perceived threat of youth sexuality by connecting it with love and self-awareness (McLellan 26–32). Teenagers Karoline and Ines are innocent but not naïve: they know their boyfriends desire intimacy and can get it elsewhere, but they refuse to do anything they are not ready for.

Authority figures like the teenagers' parents are neither role models nor positive influences, instead representing unhealthy or repressive attitudes towards sex and relationships. Such scenarios echo the sentiments of East German sexologist Rudolf Neubert, who suggested in the 1960s that parents and teachers might be in greater need of sexual enlightenment than their children (cited in Fenemore, "Growing" 83). The adults' troubled approaches to sex and relationships correspond with their apparent belonging to the Nazi generation and are set into relief against "popular values [in the GDR], which simply saw sex as the customary way to express love" (Herzog 73). Glimpses into Karoline's and Robert's parents' lives touch on divorce, neglect, alcoholism, and materialism; and the camp director in *Sieben Sommersprossen* attempts to suppress any cultural influences that might give the teenagers ideas about love and sex, including a performance of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Ines's parents in *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton* are a paradigm of dysfunction: the meddling mother and her browbeaten husband seem most at ease when they are apart. Mother Irene is exceedingly interested in her daughter's budding sexual maturity, and her attempts to encourage it (by inviting Jonas to spend the night) or contain it (by pushing Ines and Jonas to wear engagement rings on their trip) construct her as controlling, intrusive, and overly concerned about appearances. Through such adult characters, the films dismiss bourgeois attitudes in favor of open discussion about sex, while at the same time celebrating abstinence in a sort of strategic prudery.

Zschoche's critically acclaimed romance dramas celebrate Karoline's and Ines's embrace of chastity as appropriate and natural. Zschoche's directorial choices, such as the use of natural settings, nudity, and white clothing, underline this message. Notably, both films feature scenes in which naked and desirous teenagers in pastoral settings appear to be on the verge of having sex but then do not. The best-known sequence in the 1978 *Sieben Sommersprossen* puts nature, nudity, and abstinence on full display: Karoline and Robert spend a day together in the camp's rural environs, during which they undress, swim in a river, run through tall grass, and lie naked in a field discussing sex. Their nudity is neither problematic nor transgressive but matter-of-fact, confirming McLellan's claim that, "by the 1970s and 1980s, nude bathing had been refigured in official discourse as a symbol of a young, forward-looking East Germany" (167). Equally progressive is the film's frank treatment of sex. Karoline is a virgin but not a prude: though Robert suggests they could get married (likely an attempt to seduce her), she wants to wait. As this scenario indicates, the virgin girl archetype of postwar East German culture – Fenemore observes that, "[t]o preserve their 'freshness and purity,' impulses and desires had to be controlled and repressed" (*Sex* 105) – persisted for decades, well into the 1970s. As in *Für die Liebe noch zu mager?* and *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton*, the female partner in *Sieben Sommersprossen* bears the burden of saying no to sex. Karoline wants to be with Robert, but not at the cost of making hasty or risky choices; moreover, she'd like to finish her studies before becoming a bride. This resonates with Dagmar Herzog's assertion that, "[i]n the East, discussion of sex was seen [...] as a means for orienting people toward the future" (73). In line with socialist ideology, Karoline wants to prepare for a future not just as a wife and mother, but also as a member of the workforce.

Sieben Sommersprossen implies that the GDR's young citizens will build a better foundation for the socialist future if they exercise self-control and wait until they are older for sex and marriage. The film thus indirectly addresses the high rates of young marriage and divorce in the GDR, due in part to housing shortages and the challenges of finding apartments for young couples and

families (see McLellan 54–55, 78–80). If it is difficult to draw a more overt political message from Zschoche's film, this is because, in the words of Wrage, it "reveal[s] a significant disconnect between the demands of the political and the needs of private life, a form of alienation or even schizophrenia that was indeed typical for the later years of everyday life in East Germany" (279). The nude scene's idyllic setting isolates the teenagers from their social environment and naturalizes Karoline's virginity and self-awareness, resonating with two intertwined discourses that McLellan identifies as pervasive in the GDR: on the one hand, ideas about nudity as both close to nature and distinct from sex, and on the other hand, trends in erotic art of naturalizing nudity by locating it outdoors (160–62, 180–83). Citing Ina Merkel, Wolfgang Engler points to a disconnect between nudity and eroticism in DEFA films: "Die Nacktheit, gekoppelt mit profanen Gesten, soll am Ende enterotisierend wirken" [Nudity, coupled with profane gestures, should, in the end, be de-eroticized] (cited in Engler 267). The scene ends in comedy: Karoline and Robert discover that the clothes they left on the river bank before swimming have been stolen by mischievous boys, and, in desperation, they don the women's undergarments they find hanging on a nearby clothesline. Desexualized by this comical feminine attire – both are in white underwear or sleepwear: Robert sports white one-piece bloomers bearing pink bows and Karoline wears a modest white nightgown – the teenagers return to the camp, where they channel their desire for each other into a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* with them in the starring roles. The substitution of literature for intimacy recalls the barn scene in *Heißer Sommer*, when Brit and Wolf recite poetry instead of copulating. Young love, we learn from these scenarios, is purest when it can be disentangled from sex and flourish without erotic baggage, and what better place to nurture it than in the youths' paradise of the GDR?

Zschoche's youth films celebrate female virginity and young love, with seductive and sexually experienced girls embodying anxieties over bourgeois preoccupations and capitalist influences. Marlene in *Sieben Sommersprossen* is Karoline's sexually experienced counterpart who poses a bigger danger to Karoline than to their shared male love interest, Robert. Coming from a more affluent family than the working-class Karoline, whose alcoholic single mother struggles to support three daughters (one of whom is herself a single mother), Marlene feels entitled to both the starring role in *Romeo and Juliet* and the affections of Robert, the cutest boy in the camp. When Marlene senses that Robert's interests lie elsewhere, she manipulates the situation by attempting to sabotage his budding relationship with Karoline. Feigning kindness to Karoline, Marlene is doubly decadent by offering Karoline birth control pills and then reporting her to the camp director for having the pills. Through their alignment with Marlene, the pills – implying her previous sexual experience and casualness towards intimacy – serve less to educate young viewers about contraception than to warn of the risks inherent in sexual activity. Marlene personifies selfishness, bourgeois entitlement, and decadence, and her unscrupulous behavior is a warning to East Germans about Western corruption with money, sex, and deceit. But, true to the socialist values heralding humility and the working class, Karoline ultimately wins the boy and gets to play Juliet, while Marlene almost gets ejected from the camp for her duplicity.

Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton resonates with *Heißer Sommer* and *Sieben Sommersprossen* in depicting young East Germans flirting on vacation, but unlike their predecessors, the protagonists of Zschoche's 1980 road movie leave the boundaries of the GDR. *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton* shows viewers that other socialist countries offer adventure without posing too great a threat to a girl's well-being, integrity, or virginity. When teenaged lovers Ines and Jonas's

plans to travel together from Berlin to the Black Sea coast are derailed by an argument with Ines's parents, Ines journeys across Eastern Europe alone and arrives safely at her destination. Ines wears the same demure long-sleeved white blouse and long skirt throughout the voyage, except for one scene in which she is shown alone and restless in her hotel room in white undergarments, the white blouse hanging beside her. Like in *Für die Liebe noch zu mager?*, the white bra and panties in *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton* signal innocence, foreshadowing Ines's enduring chastity: they echo the strikingly similar underwear of another East German girl whom Jonas attempts to seduce and who turns him down in an earlier scene. Ines too meets a potential fling on her voyage, a Bulgarian boy in Nesebar who invites her into his untidy seaside shack, where he halfheartedly attempts to straighten up, picking up a dark-colored bra hanging over a chair and tossing it out of sight. The abandoned bra signals promiscuity and stands in contrast with Ines's bright white underwear from the hotel scene. Ines's Bulgarian suitor speaks little German, but some words are easily understood: he mentions flirting, adventure, and romance, evoking an exotic image of the Black Sea and the excitement it holds for visitors, while also spelling out his intentions. As the boy undresses, Ines runs away, preserving her virginity. Though the Bulgarian tries to seduce Ines, he presents no real threat, and, having shown her the way to her hotel, he has already been more helpful than harmful. Through crosscutting, the film creates parallel scenes of Jonas and his friends having positive experiences with helpful locals too, generous Poles and Hungarians who offer them food, rides, and shelter.

East German coming-of-age films place the responsibility of abstaining on their female protagonists. While boys seem ready for intimacy at almost any time, it is the girls who repeatedly say no. Perhaps the greatest menace to Ines's agency and integrity is not the foreigners but rather her boyfriend Jonas, who is eager to have sex after dating for five months. In *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton*'s opening scene, Ines gets angry with Jonas for being too physically assertive. Despite this, the two purchase a tent together for their upcoming vacation, a transaction that implies Ines's equal footing with Jonas in the relationship and her openness to becoming more intimate. However, the prospect of intimacy never materializes, as they spend most of the story apart and only meet again at the end, when Ines finds a naked Jonas in their tent with another girl, Shireen. Ines is furious, though the film's conclusion points toward reconciliation. She meets Jonas again on a beach, where she hands him his watch, as if to suggest that, if he can wait until the time is right, she will reward him with intimacy. Here as in other scenes, the backdrop of the sea naturalizes both their youthful passions and Ines's abstinence. Depicting Eastern Europe as an expansive recreation area replete with stunning landscapes, unexpected adventures, and intercultural exchanges, Zschoche's film advances an image of the Soviet Bloc as an exciting yet safe travel destination. Like its musical predecessor *Heißer Sommer*, *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton* "convey[s] the message of a happy young generation of East Germans on summer vacation" by celebrating the lands behind the Iron Curtain as "presenting young people with an abundance of opportunities" (Heiduschke 89, 88). Indeed, as both the dialogue and imagery suggest in *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton*, Eastern Europe offers breathtaking views and titillating diversions that rival those of the Swiss Alps and the Mediterranean Sea.

Ines's rival, the Dutch Shireen, is explicitly linked with the West through her nationality. Moreover, her decadence is sexualized when she tries to seduce Jonas as they hitchhike across Eastern Europe together: two scenes show the two unclothed youths on the verge of having sex.

Despite Jonas's attraction to Shireen, they are not meant to be together and never consummate the act: "Wenn zwei nackte Körper miteinander im Bett zu sehen sind ..., dann handelt es sich nicht um wirklich echte Liebe, sondern es wird gerade fremdgegangen" [When two naked bodies are seen in bed together ..., then it's not a matter of real, true love, but rather of unfaithfulness] (Merkel cited in Engler 267, ellipsis in the original). But unlike the virgin teenagers in *Sieben Sommersprossen* whose innocent and unassuming nudity I discuss above, Shireen conflates nudity with sex and undresses primarily to tempt Jonas; the Dutch girl's nakedness thus signals hedonism and egocentrism. Shireen's attempts to seduce Jonas are unsuccessful, the first because Jonas says he is unable, and the second is interrupted by Ines's arrival. These disruptions resonate with Fenemore's assertion that, in the view of the SED, "[y]oung people required prophylactics not only against unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, but also against the corrupting influence of the West" ("Growing" 85). The film's ending diffuses this threat by sending Shireen away: she heads to India to explore tantric philosophy, while Jonas stays in Bulgaria to reunite with the chaste Ines.

In *Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton*, nature plays a more nuanced role in constructing female sexuality than in the other films I study here. In combination with Shireen's exaggerated Dutch accent and frequent citation of tantric aphorisms, her white blouse, unpretentious appearance, and fondness for nature come across as constructed, deceptive, and hollow. Shireen's idealization of the "naturalness" of local agrarians – "Ich fühle, dass die Menschen hier unverdorben sind, ursprünglich und bescheiden" [I feel that the people here are unspoiled, primal, and humble] – simultaneously valorizes Eastern Europe and constructs Shireen as shallow and trite. Shots of peasants steering boats, fishing, and working in the background as she utters these words create a visual contrast with Shireen's leisurely bourgeois posture as she rides down the river in one of their watercraft, exoticizing their labor and simplicity. Moreover, Shireen's interest in Buddhist traditions and attempts to appeal to Jonas with tantric mantras read as thinly veiled warnings against the seductive allure of foreign ideas and indoctrination, especially given the SED's suspicious view of religion altogether. Based on Joachim Walther's 1975 East German novel *Ich bin nun mal kein Yogi* [I'm Just Not a Yogi], Zschoche's film (like the title of the book that inspired it) conveys a preference for Eastern European geographies and cultures over those of other regions.

Zschoche's 1988 film *Grüne Hochzeit* figures as the more mature and insular sequel to *Sieben Sommersprossen*, narrating the challenges of young marriage and parenthood. *Grüne Hochzeit* picks up the story of the romance between Robert and Karoline three years later, but with new actors in the roles – and Karoline's name inexplicably changed to Susanne. The teenagers are still madly in love, but after Susanne gets pregnant at seventeen, she and Robert marry and struggle to raise twin babies on a tight budget. Zschoche's film educates young audiences about sex and its consequences: if at first Susanne and Robert share tender moments in bed together, we soon see them fighting, each holding a baby, over the copy of *Kamasutra* they received as a wedding gift. By stressing the couple's difficulties, the film confronts its viewers with the risks of sex: teenagers may feel physically ready for intimacy, but are they emotionally mature enough to handle pregnancy and parenthood? The challenges of marriage and child-rearing prove almost too great for Robert and Susanne, who have affairs and temporarily separate before reconciling at the film's end.

Both Robert's and Susanne's affairs are fleeting, but the contrast between their lovers and the selfish behavior of Robert's paramour Jeanine girds the film's moral framework. *Grüne Hochzeit* casts Robert's lover, the outgoing Jeanine, in a negative light in comparison with both Susanne and Susanne's caring lover Paul. Paul gains the viewer's sympathy by helping Susanne with home repairs and childcare, while Jeanine, who works as a runway model and aspires to be a seamstress, is always exercising, dancing, or on the go, coming across as vain and superficial. In opposition to Robert's wife Susanne, who dresses modestly in loose-fitting clothes (and, especially in the first half of the film, often in white), his lover Jeanine wears high-end fashions (usually including at least one black garment), jewelry, and an exotic hairstyle of beaded braids. Jeanine's personal and professional engagements link her to bourgeois assets and foreign interests: she lives alone in a nice apartment, financed by a divorced father who works in Africa, and travels to Hungary and Bulgaria to model in fashion shows. Though she works in Eastern Bloc countries rather than the capitalist fashion centers of Paris, London, or Milan, her style choices resonate with current trends in western music and popular culture. While Fenemore maintains that in the GDR of the 1950s and 1960s, "[o]vert interest in Western music or fashion was enough to condemn young women as sexually promiscuous" (*Sex* 23), this was no longer the case in the late Honecker era. In the mid to late 1980s, when an ever wider range of consumer and western products were available in state-run Intershops, Jeanine's fashion choices have less explicit moral implications. For contemporary viewers, Jeanine's interest in style and appearances might subtly caution against conflating the increasing availability and allure of consumer goods in the GDR with the socialist principles on which it was founded. The last scene in which Jeanine appears exposes her duplicity and frivolity: Jeanine reveals to Robert that she hid a letter from his wife and then attempts to distract him through seduction, spraying gold glitter on herself. But Robert sees through her ruse: all that glitters is not gold, and he leaves his lover to return to his wife and their twins, who are aptly named Romeo and Juliet. Ending on a hopeful note for their reconciliation, the film celebrates true love over superficial sexual attraction.

Grüne Hochzeit's moral might be encapsulated in the three words a very pregnant Susanne exclaims on the ride to her wedding: "Nicht so schnell!" [Not so fast!] The message that teenagers should approach sex, marriage, and child-bearing slowly and carefully comes across in all of the DEFA youth films discussed here. This cinematic theme is remarkably consistent over time, despite the increasingly complex gendering of social responsibility in the late GDR. When viewed alongside the playfulness and nuance of Stephan's and Zschoche's earlier productions, *Grüne Hochzeit*'s heavy-handedness seems at odds with sociocultural developments. It also comes across as formulaic and outdated in comparison with the contemporary documentary *Winter Adé* [Farewell to Winter] (dir. Helke Misselwitz, 1988), which offers "a collage of women's voices that resists any singular narrative of gender in the GDR" (Crech 221). Indeed, perhaps *Grüne Hochzeit*'s schematic depiction of female sexuality is evidence of the limitations and stagnation of the youth film genre under the weight of East German political and pedagogical imperatives in late socialism.

Sex and political symbolism were intimately intertwined in East German films for youth audiences. Virgin girls were to be understood and emulated as paradigms of socialism, while promiscuous or permissive girls exemplified the alluring yet decidedly negative qualities of selfishness, greediness, and foreignness. By analyzing these prescribed and deviant feminine

roles together, I have fashioned a cultural history of the GDR through youth sexuality from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. The gendered paradigms of feminine virginity and permissiveness are embedded within a wide-reaching cultural-ideological matrix, and they take politicized forms in many other East German films beyond those analyzed here. Other DEFA productions show innocent girls in white dresses, such as *Sabine Kleist, 7 Jahre* [Sabine Kleist, Age 7] (dir. Helmut Dziuba, 1982). White attire also stresses naïveté and youthful optimism with young adult female characters, like in *Bis daß der Tod euch scheidet* [Until Death Do Us Part] (dir. Heiner Carow, 1978) and *Unser kurzes Leben* [Our Short Life] (dir. Lothar Warneke, 1980). Further DEFA films explore promiscuity, premarital sex, and pregnancy through female figures' experiences of community, labor, and solidarity; examples include *Frauenschicksale* [Destinies of Women] (dir. Slatan Dudow, 1952), *Berlin-Ecke Schönhauser* [Berlin-Schönhauser Corner] (dir. Gerhard Klein, 1957), and *Jana und Jan* [Jana and Jan] (dir. Helmut Dziuba, 1991).

My analysis of youth films from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s suggests that East German sexual culture was perhaps more repressive than progressive, at least if we measure such attitudes by the sexualities of its young fictional female figures. Such a claim partially resonates with the work of Josie McLellan, who has demonstrated that, while women's social roles were widely debated and evolved over the GDR's lifetime, there was little "discussion of how changing gender roles challenged traditional notions of masculinity and femininity" (14). However, while McLellan argues for an understanding of "the changes [...] in East German sexuality" as "revolutionary" (21), my study instead suggests that, with respect to young and especially female subjects, filmic depictions of sexual mores remained comparatively rigid, falling out of step with social changes. Despite the vastly transformed lived experiences of and gendered expectations for East German girls and women from the 1960s to the 1980s, coming-of-age films unwaveringly assigned responsibility for nurturing future socialist generations to female characters in terms of abstinence, true love, marriage, and fidelity. For at least the last two decades of the GDR, girl spectators would learn that the best way to approach sexuality was by hitting the brakes: "Nicht so schnell!"

Works Cited

Blessing, Benita. *The Antifascist Classroom: Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany, 1945–1949*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

———. "DEFA Children's Films: Not Just for Children." *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture: A Companion*. Ed. Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014. 243–62.

———. "'Films to Give Kids Courage!': Children's Films in the German Democratic Republic." *Family Films in Global Cinema: The World beyond Disney*. Ed. Noel Brown and Bruce Babington. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015. 155–70.

———. "Defining Socialist Children's Films, Defining Socialist Childhoods." *Re-Imagining DEFA: East German Cinema in Its National and Transnational Contexts*. Ed. Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke. New York: Berghahn, 2016. 248–67.

Creech, Jennifer L. *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2016.

Engler, Wolfgang. *Die Ostdeutschen: Kunde von einem verlorenen Land*. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1999.

Felsmann, Klaus-Dieter, and Bernd Sahling. *Deutsche Kinderfilme aus Babelsberg: Werkstattgespräche – Rezeptionsräume*. Berlin: DEFA-Stiftung, 2010.

Fenemore, Mark. “The Growing Pains of Sex Education in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), 1945–69.” *Shaping Sexual Knowledge: A Cultural History of Sex Education in Twentieth Century Europe*. Ed. Lutz D. H. Sauerteig and Roger Davidson. New York: Routledge, 2009. 71–90.

———. *Sex, Thugs and Rock ‘n’ Roll: Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany*. New York: Berghahn, 2007.

Hake, Sabine. *German National Cinema*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Heiduschke, Sebastian. *East German Cinema: DEFA and Film History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Herzog, Dagmar. “East Germany’s Sexual Evolution.” *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*. Ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2008. 71–95.

McLellan, Josie. *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2011.

Niemeyer, Christin. “Between Magic and Education: The First Fairy Tale Films in the GDR.” *Cinema in Service of the State: Perspectives on Film Culture in the GDR and Czechoslovakia, 1945–1960*. Ed. Lars Karl and Pavel Skopal. New York: Berghahn, 2015. 189–204.

Röske, Stefan. *Der jugendliche Blick: Helmut Dziubas Spielfilme im letzten Jahrzehnt der DEFA*. Berlin: DEFA-Stiftung, 2006.

Shen, Qinna. *The Politics of Magic: DEFA Fairy-Tale Films*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2015.

Wiedemann, Dieter. “Der DEFA-Kinderfilm: Zwischen Resteverwertung und Politikdiskursen – Überlegungen zum Umgang mit einem Kulturerbe.” *Kindheit und Film: Geschichte, Themen und Perspektiven des Kinderfilms in Deutschland*. Ed. Horst Schäfer and Claudia Wegener. Munich: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2009. 111–24.

Wrage, Henning. “DEFA Films for the Youth: National Paradigms, International Influences.” *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture: A Companion*. Ed. Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014. 263–80.

Films Cited

Für die Liebe noch zu mager? [Too Young for Love?]. Dir. Bernhard Stephan. DEFA, 1973.

Grüne Hochzeit [Just Married]. Dir. Herrmann Zschoche. DEFA, 1988.

Heißer Sommer [Hot Summer]. Dir. Joachim Hasler. DEFA, 1967.

Sieben Sommersprossen [Seven Freckles]. Dir. Herrmann Zschoche. DEFA, 1978.

Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton [Next Year Lake Balaton]. Dir. Herrmann Zschoche. DEFA, 1980.