

»Macht die Pille frei?«¹

The contraceptive pill in West German media in times of its introduction and implementation

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Abstract: 2021 marked the 60th anniversary of the introduction of the Pill in Western Germany. It was heavily discussed in the public media in the 1960s and 1970s and, depending on its discursive embedding, symbolized societal progress, sexual liberation or neglect but also heteronormative oppression. Drawing on the results of a historical discourse analysis² by the author of this paper (Hartmann 2021), the main purpose of this article is to briefly reconstruct this discursive diversity of the pill.

Keywords: Pill; Contraception; Discourse; Sexual Liberation; Feminism

Introduction

Sixty years after *the pill* has first been introduced in West Germany, hormonal contraception is still a wildly contested technology – especially its side-effects are a common subject of public discussion and critique (see for more recent and more popular examples Kebekus 2021; Nguyen-Kim 2021). Even though these discussions are ongoing, the historical signification as the technique that

1 »Does the pill make you free?« is the title of a 1972 public television documentary (Sander und Schumann 1972) in which young teenage women articulate their critique and rejection of the pill.

2 West German newspaper articles and other journalistic content as well as material from the Second Women's Movement have been analysed (timespan: 1958–1989) for this purpose. For an overview of the analysed material see Hartmann (2021, 218–236).

brought sexual autonomy to women seems to be broadly accepted. In recent years, even critical discourse fragments still refer to the liberating power of the pill in the time of its introduction (cf. e.g. Gärtner 2020) as a main point of reference.

A hint for a more critical view on the pill can be found in user statistics. The »Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung« (BZgA)³ acquires data on the usage of the pill that show a decline in the prevalence of the pill as a contraceptive (cf. BZgA 2018, 10), where it had been relatively constant for a long time before. Despite that, the pill is still the predominant form of contraception and taken by millions of women every day in Germany alone.

At the beginning of its implementation, this development was not yet foreseeable and the pill was discussed and evaluated from a wide variety of societal perspectives. Drawing on the results of a historical discourse analysis by the author of this paper (Hartmann 2021), the main purpose of this article is to briefly reconstruct the discursive diversity that accompanied and co-shaped the establishment of the Pill in the 1960s and 1970s in West Germany.⁴ The focus is not on the actual usage of the pill and the resulting individual, social, and societal changes, but on the *discourse* about the pill and the different attributions of *meaning* and *framings* that in turn also constructed the historical artifact of the pill.

Therefor the discursive meaning or the construction of the societal meaning in public discourses in West Germany will be examined and illustrated with historical content of different media. A special focus will be dedicated to the effects that were ascribed, feared or hoped for. The article shows, that the pill had indeed more diverse significations, than it is collectively remembered (cf. Adams 2019). To show the diverse meanings and the struggle for hegemony, the following paragraphs trace the discursive development of progressive as well as conservative, feminist and social emancipatory positions.⁵

3 The BZgA is an agency of the German Ministry of Health.

4 From a historiographical perspective, the pill has already been the object of numerous studies (Oudshoorn 1994, cf. e.g.; Watkins 1998; Marks 2001; Malich 2012; Tone 2012; for German contexts e.g. Dose 1989; Silies 2010; Leo und König 2015; Niethammer und Satjukow 2016; Roesch 2018; Heinemann 2021).

5 This article does not claim to provide a complete overview, but attempts to trace the development by way of illustrative examples.

Discursive embedding of the pill in West Germany

At the time of its introduction, it had not been clear, that the pill would become the predominant form of contraception. Prior to what can be called the normalization of the pill (cf. Hartmann 2021, 125–126), it was mainly discussed as an element in the rather general discourses of *neo-Malthusianism* on the one hand and discourses about sexual liberation and its possible dangers on the other hand. Especially during the research and development of the pill and still present in the so-called ›sex-wave‹ (»Sexwelle«), neo-Malthusian discourse elements were used to articulate the necessity to control the fertility of certain populations. The intellectual and activist movement traces its origins to the writings of the English theologist Robert Thomas Malthus (1766–1834) in his 1798 *Essay on the Principle of Population* (Malthus 1977) and, in particular, its 1803 reissue (Malthus 1905a; 1905b; cf. Tellmann 2013, 136–142).

The starting point for neo-Malthusianism⁶ is the assumption that poverty, misery and suffering can be contained by limiting population growth. To achieve this goal, however, it does not call for sexual abstinence and the renunciation or postponement of marriages, as Malthus did, but for the spread and further development of contraceptive methods. This contraceptive practice should be flanked by education, which should encourage people to have fewer children. This is supposed to provide better living conditions for the thereby reduced number of children as a result. Like Malthus, the representatives of the neo-Malthusian discourse see poverty in the excessive number of children or the excessive multiplication of the poor population. However, they are far more optimistic about progress and technology than Malthus. Thus, they assume that economic problems and their consequences can be combated with the spread of modern contraceptives. But in contrary to public criticism of their demands, they did not advocate liberalization of sexual relations or promiscuity or childlessness (cf. Rainer 2004: 88–193).

Neo-Malthusian positions were part of the post war overpopulation discourse which had its roots in the US and which dominated the discourse about the pill in the West German media in the early year of its implementation. It refrained from the topics of sexual ethics and its dangers. In fact, it

6 Prominent speakers were Francis Place (1771–1854), George Drysdale (1825–1904), Charles R. Drysdale (1829–1907), Helene Stöcker (1869–1943) and Margaret Sanger (1879–1966). Sanger was part of the development network of the pill (cf. Marks 2001, 54).

largely refrained to talk about western societies at all. Instead, it focused the growth in population in the ›underdeveloped‹ countries which was framed as a worldwide danger to stability and prosperity (cf. Hartmann 2021, 82–83 and 126–127).⁷

Before the so-called *sex-wave* (a mass medial wave of sexualisation, especially of women's bodies), the topics of sexual liberation, neglect or autonomy are generally avoided by the pro pill discourses. The progressive effects of the pill are seen in its use for the purpose of controlling the population growth and avoiding the medical and sometimes social risks of pregnancies. The formation of this line of discourse can be observed as early as 1958 when the magazine *DER SPIEGEL* published an article about the pill as a mean to fight the so-called overpopulation:

The contraceptive research scientists [...] are convinced that one day the uncontrolled growth of populations will demolish the world economy as well as social systems, which could lead to new wars. Scientists like Pincus and Rock therefor believe that especially atavistic peoples of Asia should be supplied with ›harmless, secure, simple and cheap‹ means of contraception. (*DER SPIEGEL* 1958)⁸

Like other (post-)colonial mechanisms, the neo-Malthusian discourse of overpopulation in connection with the pill also served to enhance the value of one's own society: While ›the others‹ were supposed to restrict themselves, all those who were counted among the ›we‹ were allowed to regulate their family size in a self-determined way.

Most of the analysed material framed the pill as part of the *socio-medical progress*. That does not mean that every woman should get access to the pill, but it was agreed, that the pill should be developed, distributed and used under certain conditions. In the early phase of its introduction, a straight rejection of the pill can only be seen from *conservative* positions, with the catholic church being its main actor. The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (Paul VI. 1968), in which the pope banned the pill for his followers, can be understood as a crucial

7 The (post-)colonial discourse of overpopulation was embedded in the material constitution of the pill: for example, testing of the Pill was conducted in the 1950s in the unincorporated territory of the U.S., Puerto Rico, among other places, with poor women of color (cf. Kunz 1989).

8 The quotations presented in this article were translated from German into English by the author.

discourse event for the ultimate marginalization of the conservative rejection of the pill (cf. Hartmann 2021, 98f). In the mass media, this positioning has been marginalised from the start of the debate.

Another example (besides the Catholic Church) of a conservative positioning on the subject gets articulated through a professional statement from approximately 400 West German physicians called the *Ulmer Denkschrift* (»Ulmer Memorandum«, Der Vorstand der Ärzteschaft des Kreises Ulm 1965). In contrast to the Catholic Church, they did not reject the pill in general, but they wanted full control over the access and they expressed their concerns about sexual neglect or liberation which is the same to them. In their memorandum, they ask the German Health Secretary to intervene into the »ongoing birth-control propaganda« (Der Vorstand der Ärzteschaft des Kreises Ulm 1965, 2138). This statement was – even though it was published in the special-discourse of medicine (»Deutsches Ärzteblatt« – »German physicians journal«) – discussed broadly and can be seen as an attempt to strengthen or reinstate the medical authority on the subject of reproduction and sexual ethics. Interestingly and in contrast to most other discourse fragments from special- or inter-discourse, medical knowledge played no part in constructing the medical authority and at one point the authors even distance themselves from a technical or scientific view on sexuality. Instead, they demanded to fight the »cause for the abortion-pestilence« (Der Vorstand der Ärzteschaft des Kreises Ulm 1965, 2139), which they identify »in the uninhibited public and private sexualisation and the subversion of the ethical and moral essence of our people«⁹ (Der Vorstand der Ärzteschaft des Kreises Ulm 1965, 2139). More concretely they demanded the preservation of the prohibition on advertising for any means of contraception and its extension on articles in the mass media, the preservation of the prescription requirement for the pill as well as the preservation of the prohibition of sterilisation for other than medical reasons (cf. Der Vorstand der Ärzteschaft des Kreises Ulm 1965, 2138). Apart from this conservative intervention into the public discourse, the statement can also be seen as a try to manifest medical authority over social or ethical questions.

9 The Ulmer physicians did not reject the pill under all circumstances, but in their own line of thinking they would have to. This is also shown in their language which resembles the NS (cf. in particular on the NS language Silies 2016, 209–216). The fact that they nevertheless accepted the pill if the access is controlled by their colleagues shows the fear of being marginalized as it happened to the catholic church and the Christian conservative discourse.

This approach made the pill acceptable even in a *value-driven conservative* discourse. The medical authority and the socio-ethical judgement of gynaecologists was clearly articulated. They installed themselves as guards who control the access to the pill to prevent sexual neglect especially of young and unmarried women and they demanded that their expertise as well as ethical judgement should be trusted.

With the *liberal-individualistic* discourse becoming hegemonial (around 1966, cf. Hartmann 2021, 90–97) and the pill becoming the symbol of sexual liberation and finally a normalised technology (from around 1968 onwards, cf. Hartmann 2021, 98–110) a lot of these questions vanished from the discussion or were reframed in an individualistic way that focused the individual women and her decision to take or not take the pill. The pill became firmly embedded in the heterosexual relationships of women. Anne-Marie Durand-Wever, co-founder of the German family planning organisation *Pro Familia* for example, put her argument for the use of the pill already in 1964 solely on the success of the heterosexual relationship which should be helped by the family planning organisation opposed to the danger of unplanned pregnancy which in turn could ruin the sex life of the couple and make the man go after his assumed polygamous sex drive. In an interview under the headline *Keine ungewollten Kinder mehr!* (»No more unwanted children!«, Rober und Rober 1964) for the woman's magazine *Constanze* she said:

Women can in this respect [of men looking for heterosexual contacts outside of marriage; note by KVH] rely on the laziness of the masters of creation. The man will refrain from all the efforts it takes to have other lady friends, he won't have to lie at home and he doesn't have to fear to procreate illegitimately. With a woman who regulates her own ability to conceive, the man will think twice about the allures of infidelity. It is my believe that a woman who has only planned children will hold a very powerful weapon against the – as we believe – polygamous nature of the male sex drive. Even polygamous men will someday understand: At home I can love without jeopardies, but outside it's a dangerous game. (Rober und Rober 1964, 8)

Female sexuality was displayed as a mean or a wanted good which can be used to tie their husbands to the concept of monogamous, heterosexual relationships. The elimination of the risk of pregnancy was conceived as a weapon or a mean of female power against the male disposition to look for different sex partners. It became the free decision of women whether they want to take the

pill or not, relatively free from ethical concerns or biopolitical demands. But as a private decision the consequences also would be theirs to take. Men by contrast were viewed as naturally polygamous and not responsible for their needs and actions. With the focus shifting from ethical and societal considerations to the private decision of women, the mind and psyche of these women were shifted to the centre of attention with the consequences often being the pathologization of women whose decisions did not follow the new norm.

The shift from general ethical concerns regarding the sexuality of women and couples to individuals and their decisions also transferred the socio-medical concerns regarding the society as a whole or even the world society to the medical effects the pill has on the individual user. Therefor the discursive battles since the 1970s mainly unfolded around the medical knowledge about side-effects of taking the pill. Medical knowledge thus replaced ethical or population-based forms of knowledge, but that did not mean, that the medical authority of physicians and pharmacists was unchallenged or that the field of medical knowledge itself was completely homogenous. We can see an ambivalent referral to this knowledge in the German public and references to different research studies stating different risks and side-effects. From ›There are no serious side-effects at all‹ to ›The pill causes cancer and embolisms‹ diverse views get articulated and discussed.

Ethical concerns about the sexual liberation vanished from the main arenas of public discourse while the *sex-wave* disconnected the sexual intercourse from the purpose of procreation and installs the heterosexual intercourse as something nice and healthy that has an intrinsic value and should be pursued by everybody. The hegemonial discourse of the late 1960s and 1970s constructed the pill as this wonderful tool that can liberate female sexuality from the fear of unwanted pregnancy and has only minor – if at all – side-effects on the health of the users. The Side-effects, which had been pretty much neglected before, are now being recognized and reported in a rather neutral way, but were not accepted as a reason for not taking in public discourse for a long time. The newspaper article *Einmal pro Woche – Warum so viele die Pille nicht nehmen* (»Once a week – Why so many woman don't take the pill«, von Koerber 1974) can illustrate this point: The author poses the question why ›only‹ 46 % of married women who don't have a child wish take the pill. To understand this rejection different scientific studies on the personalities of these women were being investigated. The irrationality of this rejection was taken as a prerequisite and the explanation of these irrational decisions had to be found in biographic or moral flaws of these women. One cited study explained the decision against

the pill out of a »predominantly authoritarian education«, another one stated that these women are »less independent« or that they took the »alarming press coverage of the alleged dangerousness of the pill [...] too seriously« (cf. von Koerber 1974).

It is very telling that women only figured as objects to scientific studies and that they were not allowed to speak for themselves. Perceived side-effects got explained away by referring to »deformed« or »deficient« personalities; rational reasons like not having sexual intercourse on a daily basis were being noted at best, but not really taken into consideration. Instead of trying to understand the subjective experiences with the pill, they were put down as imaginations: »Unpleasant side-effects like headaches and sickness of the pill that are being perceived at the beginning of the usage, are – that is known for sure by now – almost exclusively psychogenic.« (von Koerber 1974).

Despite this tendency to psychopathologise side-effects and possible reasons to not take the pill a lot of different products with different ingredients and in tendency fewer quantities of hormones have been brought onto the market to deal with the experienced and/or feared side-effects during the normalisation period. The hegemonial liberal-individualistic discourse referred to these different products and stated, that there should be the right pill for each individual woman. In this view, woman who experience side-effects therefor should just try out different products until they find the right one.

The medical risks and side-effects also become the main concern and the driving force behind the politicisation of the pill by the *Second Women's Movement* (cf. Hartmann 2021, 110–126). In the *Second Women's Movement*, just like in the liberal-individualistic discourse, the side effects had been the starting point for a criticism of the pill: Why is the pill praised when there are so many women who report side effects or have even experienced severe to fatal effects?

But there are only few other similarities between this feminist discourse and the hegemonial ones. Feminists of this movement criticised social circumstances¹⁰ like the female responsibility to procreate or the very unevenly split reproductive work that cannot be addressed by simply offering a tool to avoid pregnancy. They argued that some of these circumstances are even getting enhanced by the pill and its societal significance, like the male demand for sexual

10 The feminist collective »Brot & Rosen« (Bread and Roses) also articulate an anti-imperialist position and criticize the social inequality worldwide and the neo-Malthusian population politics in general (cf. Brot & Rosen 1972, 61–74).

intercourse and the need fulfilling role women shall take in this relation. In distinction to the hegemonial discourse, the feminist approach was getting more and more critical of heterosexuality and its social forms, which were perceived as the prerequisite for a need for the hormonal contraception, which could be perceived as unhealthy or unnatural.

As it is one of the main effects or functions of discourses to create subjects or to subjectify people, it is especially interesting to take a look at the role women ought to play in these discourses about the pill (cf. Hartmann 2021, 166–172). In a fiercely disputed first phase the (potential) users could only appear as constantly pregnant by nature, (irrational) test objects, patients of gynaecologists or help seeking wives and mothers that fear another pregnancy. During the *sex-wave* women became the objects of sexual liberation and male's desire.¹¹ The following passages will focus this sexualisation and the critical reaction by the Second Women's Movement.

A speaker position during that time was the journalistic author who promoted sexual education. These »sex experts« played an important role in the construction of the sexual liberation discourse as they brought in popular elements from psychoanalytical special discourses to construct the pill as the symbol (and also the material instrument) of sexual liberation (cf. Hartmann 2021, 156–157). In this notion, the technical manipulation of the female body and its reproductive functions became connected to the psychoanalytical concept of repression and liberation of the sex drive, which was loosely derived from Sigmund Freud and especially from Wilhelm Reich's ideas of a »Sexual Revolution« (Reich 1971). The concept, which was articulated in the analysed material stated that the sex drive was situated with the males and is fundamentally

11 While analysing the relevant discourses, the author of this paper discovered four forms of subjectivation. 1) The women as *objects of population policies*: They were seen as the cause at fault for the growing world population and are described as too uneducated and too undisciplined to use contraception. The pill had to be easy to take because of their boundedness. 2) The second subject-type is *the married woman, who sought for medical help* against her own irrationality, the dangers of her own body and the sexual demands of her husband. 3) During the *sex-wave*, the *feminist* subjects emerged. They collectively questioned the gender hierarchy and acquired their own medical knowledge about their bodies opposing the medical authority. Only now were women gaining their own agency in the pill discourse. 4) In and through the *informed patient* subject, which gradually became the hegemonial one since the beginning of the 1970s this autonomy was mainly preserved despite the recognition of medical knowledge and its experts (cf. Hartmann 2021, 166–172).

polygamous. The hetero sexual needs of men thus have to be met by women, who themselves don't have that drive, which is perceived as the origin of sorrow for both genders. One of the sources of women's lack of sexual drive was considered to be the fear of pregnancy, which loses its ground if pregnancy can be avoided safely. The pill taking woman – or better: wife – thus is conceived as a solution to the disparity in sexual needs. Another possible solution is seen in polygamous relationships, where one man can sleep with different women, who combined can meet his sexual needs.

To which extend the concept of the unevenly spread sex drive was used to put women in a serving position and even tolerate male violence, can be seen in a popular ›soft‹ pornographic movie called *Oswalt Kolle: Das Wunder der Liebe Teil 2, Sexuelle Partnerschaft* (›Oswalt Kolle: The miracle of love Part 2, Sexual relationships‹; Neve 1968). The female protagonist is described as ›frigid‹, so she has no interest in heterosexual intercourse, which is perceived as a problem that needs solution. Her ›sexlessness‹ is analysed to be derived by that of her mother, not in a biological way but rather by learning: As a child she witnessed her mother being raped by her father several times, which is seen as the cause for her own frigidity. The rape¹² is seen as a direct and normal consequence of the female sexlessness and the problem in this marriage is not the – in present terms – sexualised violence but rather the fact that the daughter witnessed it. Kolle's (the speaker) advise therefor is to »safeguard the children from witnessing the parental coitus« (Neve 1968, from minute 16:46 onwards). Experiences like that are framed as the cause for the repression of the female sex drive. The pill – so say the male experts in the introduction of the movie – won't liberate this repression, but it will at least lift the fear of unwanted pregnancy and therefore should be available for all who need it (Neve 1968, from minute 16:46 onwards).

During the *sex-wave* it is obvious that the newly appointed solution to the problem of sexual repression regards women and men very differently. Women appeared in an objectified, passive position there to fulfil the needs of actively sex seeking men. While the male sex drive became liberated, the female sexuality remained silent and passive. When females rose their voices and articulate their critique of the pill and its risks and side-effects, this was taken as an articulation of fear of their own sexuality and backwardness in terms of sexual

12 It is not called rape but the mother is heard making defensive noises (Neve 1968, from minute 16:46 onwards) – besides rape in marriage had only become a crime in Germany in 1997 when the term ›outside of marriage‹ has been deleted from §177 StGB.

ethics. Critique or concerns about the pill thus became psychopathologised. Women who did not want to take the pill seemed to be uptight and full of fear. This ›diagnoses‹ was then taken as the basis for requesting them to search for their own, true and not repressed sexual needs, who were believed to be complementary to those of men. This psychoanalytical liberation discourse culminated in the invitation for women to enjoy these times of sexual liberation together with men.

This is the point where the *Second Women's Movement's critique of the heterosexual norm* had its starting point. They revealed the concept of sexual drive or lust as a male one and demand for other concepts of sexuality, where women have the ability to act for themselves, have their own kind of lust or can develop their own sexuality without being defined as the counterpart of male lust. An example for this critical reflection of the new sexual norms that have been developed by the advocates of sexual liberation can be seen in the documentary *Macht die Pille frei?* (»Does the pill make you free?«, Sander und Schumann 1972) broadcasted on state television in 1972. The main subject of discussion was the promised emancipation as a reason to take the pill. A young woman who took part in an all-female discussion group of teenagers believed that despite all the side-effects and consequential complications, »considering all the advertisement or propaganda which has been made for the pill, it surely has not been difficult to make women believe subconsciously that they were so emancipated just because they take the pill.« (Sander und Schumann 1972, from minute 27:20 onwards).

The collective authors from the women's group »Brot und Rosen« (»Bread and Roses«) took the pill into consideration and compare it to other means of contraception. In their 1972 published (it is considered *grey literature* as it has not been published by a big publisher) *Frauenhandbuch* (»Women's Handbook«; Brot & Rosen 1972) they examined the condom as well as the coitus interruptus which they both dislike for different reasons. But in contrast to the pill which is in tendency »invisible and impalpable« (Brot & Rosen 1972, 73) these methods still indicated to both sexes how »awful it is to have a child in this society« (Brot & Rosen 1972, 72) and therefore still reference »societal struggles« (Brot & Rosen 1972, 72). In their analyses the pill hinders this societal struggle as it conceals its function and the underlying problems especially from men. They hereby addressed a consequence of the normalisation of the pill which has a depoliticising and privatising effect. They also addressed the notion that women would learn »to love loving« (Brot & Rosen 1972, 72) through the pill and instead gave

testimony to the obstacles that often have to be faced if one wanted to negotiate the usage of the pill in a hetero sexual relationship:

Many women would like to throw the pills in the trash one by one, but most young men are so strongly convinced by the miracles of the pill, that one doesn't even dare to express one's concerns because one has to fear to be considered as iffy or hysterical or outdated. Now – from an ethical point of view – women are the only ones held responsible for pregnancy. (Brot & Rosen 1972, 73)

Here the consequences or better the subjectivising effects of the new hegemonial norm which was the pill-taking women were articulated from the perspective of the subjected. They feared that the power of the new norm will result in their concerns being denounced as iffy, meaning they are considered as unwilling to contribute to male sexual pleasures, meaning they will be seen as uptight or even hysteric which was a pathologization or at least irrational, outdated or even reactionary thinking and behaviour. The discursive strategy of embedding the pill in the concepts of progress and sexual liberation showed its impact as fear of being rejected or not accepted if one abstains from the norm. Women who opposed this new male demand for constant sexual availability were said to be in need of an amendment and their discontent with their new role or the practice of pill taking was regarded as a manifestation of an outdated and anti-pleasure consciousness. The Second Women's Movement gave women an active role, a voice and empowers them to articulate their critique regarding the relations of the sexes or the new ideas about sexuality and allowed them to gain subjectivity of their own, that is to speak for and about themselves and not to be spoken about by physicians, pharmacists or psychological sex experts.

Another kind of critique brought forwards by the Second Women's Movement – but also by parts of the leftist, *social emancipatory* movement – was focused on the sexual forms that resemble the forms of commodities. This critique of sexuality in capitalistic societies focused the formation of the demands for sexual liberation in economic contexts, where sex was something that could be consumed like a meal or a movie, which served the recreation of labour force. Whereas the discourses of liberation and its critique were still located

within a supposedly repressive sexual dispositive¹³, this critique took a step further back and analysed the fight for sexual liberation as part of a new or changing dispositive with new power relations and effects. This critical discourse conceded that the liberation of sexual needs and practices from the repression of sexual ethics does not have the effects of liberation, but induce in fact new norms and new kinds of conform behaviour regarding the quantitative expansion of consumable, hetero sexual contacts. Based on the idea of ›repressive desublimation‹ developed by Herbert Marcuse (cf. Marcuse 1994, 76), the former chairman of the German Socialist Student organisation SDS Reimut Reiche (1971) for example argued already in 1968 that the fight for sexual liberation had lost its revolutionary moment because its goals and demands could all be fulfilled within the existing system (cf. Reiche 1971, 14–15). He was not against free access to the pill, because that would be »reactionary« (Reiche 1971, 14), but he also believed that the fight for a (non-repressive) sexual liberation cannot be fought on these grounds anymore because the once revolutionary demands, one of which having been free access to safe and secure contraceptives, had already been transformed into »demands for the optimisation of the technical and social conditions of sexual practice« (Reiche 1971, 15). From this perspective the pill can be viewed as part of this ›optimisation‹ which lost its potential for qualitative change in gender or sexual relationships, rather focusing the quantitative expansion of hetero sexual contacts. These arguments can also be found later in the works of critical sexual scientist Volkmar Sigusch who also criticized the sexual liberalization process and the danger of capitalist appropriation (cf. Sigusch 1979).

Conclusion

We can see a widely spread meaning was asserted to the pill, it's usage in different contexts, it's users and possible reasons to take it or refrain from taking it. From the symbol of sexual liberation to the enhancement of the patriarchal grip on women and their sexuality, from endangering ethics and morals to lifting all repressions and creating a new mankind of sorts, from a tool to rationally

13 A term that was developed by Michel Foucault (1983) to address all the discourses, institutions and practices that work together to produce and regulate sexuality and procreation.

regulate the population to a private decision that has nothing to do with society, diverse aspects and perspectives were articulated, though not necessarily at the same time or with the same chance of being considered as true.

This article shows that a one-dimensional view of the Pill falls short: understanding it as a mere tool of women's autonomy still runs the risk of disregarding powerful discursive embeddings and attributions of meaning. A closer look reveals, that (post)colonial elements can be found in the discourse of overpopulation, the invoked ›sexual liberation‹ is limited to heteronormative practices, and parts of the women's movement adopted the pill as an occasion for manifold feminist critique. Women's movements and their insights in particular are commonly threatened by a ›collective oblivion‹ and their historical reconstruction is urgently needed.

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