

Sex Education and the Depiction of Homosexuality Under Khrushchev

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During the Khrushchev thaw, from the early 1950s to the early 1960s, the Soviet state launched a campaign on sex education, publishing a whole series of manuals on the subject. This represented an important shift in the official Soviet policy towards sex: from prevailing silence on sex issues to their examination in sex education brochures aimed at Soviet young people. These manuals were introduced in the hope of restricting the sexual activity of Soviet young people and to raise their awareness of venereal diseases, abortion and some facts about human physiology. In addition, some of these publications featured homophobic passages on homosexuality, labelling it a ‘sexual perversion’.

This chapter examines the sex education manuals published in the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev era (1956–1964) and explores how their framing of sex education changed over this period. It argues that during this period the main focus of the manuals’ discussions shifted from the initial task to eliminate ‘the vestiges of the capitalist past’ to a focus on confronting ‘ideological diversion’ of the West. This chapter also explores the treatment of homosexuality in these texts hypothesising on why its descriptions appeared in these manuals. The chapter starts with a brief exploration of the Stalinist era and the Stalinist era sex education manual. Then it proceeds to the Khrushchev era, demonstrating how the ideas expressed by Stalinist-era physicians remained in the Khrushchev-era sex education manuals and were reframed thereafter in accordance with contemporary political developments. The third section of the chapter elaborates on the treatment of homosexuality in these manuals and how they were affected by changes in sex education narratives.

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THE FIRST SOVIET SEX EDUCATION MANUAL

The emergence of the first Soviet sex education manual *Healthy Marriage and Healthy Family* (1948), written by Soviet doctor L.A. Zalkind, seems extraordinary. It attests to the fact that despite the rigid ideological controls and total silence about sex peculiar to the Stalinist era, there were still professionals who expressed the need for sex education among young people.¹ The reasons why the Stalinist government allowed the publication of this sex education manual remain unclear. New archival materials and sources can offer new insights and possible explanations for its publication.

The questions of sex education in the manual were treated with an overt Marxist gloss. Zalkind heralded the victory of socialism in Soviet society, which, according to him, had brought about women's liberation and equation of their rights with those of men. Socialism was said to have rid society of such undesirable phenomena as depravity and prostitution, to have reinforced the institution of the family and to have decreased both the divorce rate and the incidence of venereal diseases. Likewise, according to Zalkind, the victory of socialism had raised public consciousness and the cultural level of Soviet people; old 'bourgeois morality' was gradually being replaced by 'communist morality', stemming from interest in the building of communism. However, to Zalkind's chagrin, some undesirable phenomena framed by him as 'remnants of bourgeois morality' (such as adultery, the disrespectful treatment of women and even depravity) still ailed Soviet society. Their elimination was declared to be the most important task of sex education in the Soviet Union.

The achievements of the socialist revolution and communist morality were counterpoised by Zalkind to life in the West and 'hypocritical' bourgeois morality, which supposedly permeated Western society. Western youth (gendered as masculine) was depicted as depraved, since, according to the author, it resorted to the services of prostitutes and was generally prone to promiscuity and sexual depravity. In contrast, the lifestyle of Soviet young people was depicted as completely antithetical: Soviet adolescents were more concerned with the interests of the collective and society, their approach to marriage and family was more 'critical and conscious', their sexual attitudes were said to be more restrained.²

Three years later, *Healthy Marriage and Healthy Family* (1951) was republished, having undergone several changes in its content. In this revised edition, the detrimental effects of 'established deleterious habits and prejudice of the past' as well as 'vestiges of the capitalist past' lingering in Soviet people's consciousness were framed as undesirable even more rigorously. Some of the chapters were reworked to emphasise the treacherous nature of these phenomena. Whereas the first chapter of the first edition was simply titled 'Marriage in bourgeois society and in our country', the title of the first chapter in the second edition was more elaborate: 'Marriage in bourgeois society and the fight against the vestiges of bourgeois attitudes towards marriage in our country'.³

These two editions of the same sex education manual were the only successful attempts by Soviet doctors to contemplate sex education and bring their ideas within the reach of the Soviet reading public under Stalin. Their publication suggests that different perspectives regarding sex education were apparently allowed within a tolerable range of opinions. While Zalkind deplored parents' inability to engage in the sex education of their children due to their own ignorance, he was also cautious not to challenge the official Soviet policy towards sex, which sought to prevent young children from early sexual maturation. Zalkind constantly reminded his readers that sex education, if conducted improperly, might trigger premature sexual curiosity.⁴ Zalkind's ambiguities towards sex education, as well as his repetitive warnings about the existing 'capitalist vestiges of the past', are discernible also in the narratives of the first Khrushchev-era sex education manuals.

KHRUSHCHEV'S 'THAW'

After Stalin's death in March 1953, the so-called period of the 'thaw' set in. This was characterised by important transformations in Soviet society distinctive from the Stalinist period: millions of Soviet political prisoners were amnestied and released from labour camps and the Soviet Union became more open to the outside world. Khrushchev's Secret Speech to the XX Communist Party Congress in February 1956 launched the process of de-Stalinisation in the Soviet Union, which manifested itself in significant relaxation of censorship and gave more freedom of information in the media. This freedom extended to issues surrounding sexuality, gender and the family: abortion was decriminalised in 1955 and the Soviet government started publishing more sex education manuals.

Soviet chief doctors, however, were very cautious in their approach to introducing such topics to the broader public, especially to young children. The Stalinist approach towards sex education, which sought to prevent children and adolescents from obtaining any information about sex, was still dominant. Moreover, Soviet chief physicians espoused different standpoints on sex education.⁵ Perhaps as a result of such diversity of opinion, the first years of the Khrushchev era did not see the publication of any new sex education manuals, although Zalkind's *Happy Marriage and Healthy Family* was republished for a third time in 1956. The third edition contained some amendments: all mentions of Stalin were excluded and all of the passages citing abortion as crime were removed since abortion was now legalised. Despite these changes, the focus of Soviet sex education remained the same: the removal of 'vestiges of the capitalist past'.

The first genuinely Khrushchev-era sex education manual was titled *Sex Life and the Family* (1958) and was written by A.G. Stankov, a rural doctor from Ukraine. The author framed his arguments for sex education around the necessity to confront venereal diseases, which in turn, were blamed on 'vestiges

of the past'. According to Stankov, it was important to raise public awareness of these 'vestiges' since they also allegedly resulted in moral degeneration, sexual disorders and venereal diseases.⁶ Stankov's narratives moved along the familiar trajectory laid down by Zalkind: he proclaimed that family and marriage were not a private matter in the Soviet Union and demonstrated the same ambivalence towards the issue of sex education, arguing for its introduction on the one hand and warning against excessive elucidation of sex issues on the other. Stankov also preferred to talk about bud and amoeba reproduction before talking about human reproduction and even discussed the issues of castration and transplantation of reproductive glands, which were described in Zalkind's books. It remains unclear whether Stankov was merely imitating Zalkind's discussions (in the absence of any other template) or following particular handed-down instructions on how to frame his manual. Considering these similarities, one gains the impression that this could be the case.

The next Khrushchev-era sex education manual was *Questions of Sex Education* (1959), written by Soviet physician T.S. Atarov, who put a new emphasis on the importance of 'communist morality' in the sex lives of the Soviet people. Unlike Stankov's *Sex Life and Family*, which highlighted the importance of raising young people's awareness of venereal diseases and human physiology, Atarov's book shifted from this approach to assign primary importance to moral education. Such a stance reflected the views of Soviet senior officials, including Khrushchev himself, who stressed the importance of communist morality at the XXI Communist Party Congress in 1959 and explained that it was based on 'devotion to Communism', 'consciousness of societal duty', 'active participation in labour for the benefit of society' and 'intolerance towards the destroyers of social order'.⁷ This could be the possible reason for Atarov's book being extremely moralistic, bringing the issues of morality to the fore. Despite this novelty, Atarov's manual maintained continuity with Zalkind's and Stankov's manuals on 'bourgeois vestiges of the past'. In fact, Atarov dedicated more attention to them and even examined particular cases, wherein communist morality was violated due to 'bourgeois vestiges' at work. The examination of these cases fitted well with the official discourse on the importance of communist morality.

Questions of Sex Education (1959) also introduced another element to the discourse on sex education: the link between a healthy sex life and healthy daily life (*zdorovyi byt*).⁸ According to the author, only 'healthy' environments could prevent young children from early sexual maturation. Elaborating on his point, Atarov offered examples of 'unhealthy' environments and factors conducive to it: for example, if parents allowed themselves to demonstrate excessive affection to one another in front of their child this might infringe on the moral development of their offspring.⁹ Young people's dietary habits had to be healthy as well: excessive consumption of sweets, spices and smoked food might trigger 'increased sexual arousal'.¹⁰ On top of all that, working conditions were also of paramount importance: those young people who worked in restaurants or cafes were particularly susceptible to premarital liaisons and the unhealthy awakening

of sexual feelings. Atarov advised employers to hire only adults to work in such places.¹¹

By 1959, the Soviet Union had thus seen the publication of only three sex education manuals: *Healthy Marriage and Healthy Family*, republished for the third time, *Sex Life and Family* and *Questions of Sex Education*. The narratives of these manuals moved along a similar trajectory, proclaiming that the primary goal of Soviet sex education was the elimination of ‘the vestiges of the capitalist past’, which were allegedly the reason for all of the undesirable phenomena still lingering in the Soviet society (notably venereal diseases). Soviet physicians attributed these remnants to the ‘serious shortcomings’ in the education of youth.¹² Yet, they were cautious not to challenge the basic essence of the Soviet education system; they claimed that ‘immoral behaviour’ was not characteristic of Soviet youth.¹³ The authors of these manuals also shared a similar ambiguous attitude towards sex education: on the one hand they stated that it was important; on the other hand they made clear that on no account did they intend to indicate that it was necessary to introduce immature children to such topics. Such an approach towards sex education was combined with the exigencies of communist morality, which was proclaimed by Soviet officials to be the principal guide of Soviet people’s lives.

In 1960 the Soviet State Medical Publishing House brought out several brochures on sexual education: *The Youth becomes a Man* (1960), written by a Czechoslovakian professor of sexology, Josef Hynie, and with a print-run of 200,000 copies¹⁴; *The Girl Becomes a Woman* (1960) by Rudolf Peter, Vatslav Shebek and Josef Hynie with a print-run of 300,000 copies¹⁵; and *Questions of Sex* (1960) by East German hygienist Rudolf Neubert with a print-run of 100,000 copies.¹⁶ These books stood in stark contrast to the previously published Soviet manuals on sex education. They dared to open a relatively frank discussion on sex with young readers, a task which Soviet sexologists so far had failed to accomplish. These new publications almost ignored the ideological underpinnings inherent in earlier Soviet sex education manuals.

With fresh evidence on the behind-the-doors discussions of these manuals’ reception by Soviet top physicians, some light can be shed on the reasons why these books were published in the Soviet Union. One possible reason for such a decision could be the fact that Soviet physicians were aware of the fact that sexology in Czechoslovakia and East Germany was more sophisticated. In fact, by the late 1950s, sexology was already an established and legitimate field of academic and scientific inquiry in Czechoslovakia. At this time, Czechoslovakia could boast the Czech Institute of Sexology, which had been founded in Prague in 1921 and compared to similar institutions in Berlin and Vienna had a far more sophisticated approach to sexology.¹⁷ Hynie directed the Institute from 1934 and 1974 and clearly had a strong international reputation as an experienced sexologist; thus, his works and those of his colleagues were translated into Russian and presented to Soviet readers.¹⁸

Compared to earlier Soviet manuals, *The Youth Becomes a Man* and *The Girl Becomes a Woman* indeed seemed to be more understanding of the problems

and questions which young people might potentially have; the narratives of the manuals were less didactic and more engaging. More importantly, it was Hynie's profound medical experience (as well as that of his colleagues), which shaped the content of these books and made them less moralistic; for instance, the familiar tropes about 'capitalist vestiges of the past' and passages on 'communist morality' were absent.

Such a detour from the mainstream sex educational narrative about 'the vestiges of the capitalist past' and 'communist morality' (along with obvious discrepancies between Soviet and East German realities) was more evident in another foreign sex education manual, also published in the Soviet Union in 1960, *Questions of Sex*. In fact, Soviet doctors responsible for the publication of this manual were aware of such shortcomings and that is why they felt compelled to provide an introduction to the manual, reminding readers of 'the vestiges of the capitalist past' that were allegedly still prevalent in the Soviet society and the importance of 'communist morality', which was supposed to guide every Soviet person (in the editor's foreword to the book it was noted that Neubert failed to elaborate sufficiently on 'communist morality').¹⁹ The inclusion of these points in the introduction suggest that by 1960 there had formed a preferable way of framing and treatment of such topics among Soviet authors, a template, which went hand-in-hand with Khrushchev's pronouncements on the importance of 'communist morality' and earlier discourse on the 'vestiges of the capitalist past'. *Youth Becomes a Man* and *Questions of Sex* deviated from the usual way of writing on sex education.

The following 3 years did not see the publication of any sex education manuals. The possible reasons for this remain unclear. Drawing on some commentaries provided by Soviet professor of psychology V.N. Kolbanovskii in the medical journal *Soviet Healthcare* it may be inferred that the divergence of opinions regarding sex education could be one explanation.²⁰ The publication of sex education manuals, however, was resumed in the wake of the June 1963 Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

The decision to organise this Plenum was related to specific political developments in Soviet society in 1961 and 1962 that led the Soviet leadership to believe that 'detrimental Western influences' were seeping into the Soviet Union, corrupting Soviet people's minds. What seemed particularly disturbing for Soviet officials were 'negative' effects of Western culture, to which Soviet people were now exposed, either on their trips overseas or even at home mingling with foreign tourists visiting the Soviet Union.²¹ According to Khrushchev himself, some prominent Soviet cultural workers, instead of propagating socialist ideals, had fallen prey to the 'ideological diversion of the West' imitating 'inferior bourgeois traits' in their art, which were presumably alien to the Soviet people.²² These anxieties essentially legitimized Khrushchev's claim for greater ideological propaganda against bourgeois influences from the West and made the Soviet leader backpedal on almost every front.

The June 1963 Plenum of the Communist Party Central Committee was arranged to tackle this problem. It was devoted to the 'tasks of ideological battle

in contemporary conditions' and stressed the importance of the strengthening of ideological propaganda in the face of 'the bitter ideological fight on the international arena'.²³ It was decided to 'increase political vigilance' against 'imperialist sabotage', the displays of which had already manifested themselves in the Soviet society, in the art of some prominent Soviet cultural workers and in some 'depraved' Western theatrical plays shown in Moscow theatres.²⁴ The delegates of the Plenum coincided in the opinion that 'imperialist ideologies are trying in every way possible to influence Soviet people; their main objective is unstable elements, that is individuals who are not politically and ideologically case-hardened'.²⁵ Educational work was stated to be the most effective means of confronting this malevolent capitalist ideology.²⁶

The Plenum led Soviet sex education authors to reframe their discussions of sex education accordingly. Soviet physicians were now expected to address the issues of sex in a similar anti-Western vein. From this point on, sex education discourse became more defensive: it essentially became an effective Soviet instrument for the dissemination of anti-Western propaganda. While earlier sex education manuals were merely expected to set their narratives around communist morality and 'capitalist vestiges', the authors of sex education manuals published in the wake of the Plenum were apparently expected to extrapolate the Plenum's decisions on their discussions of sex education, suggesting that the main threat to a healthy sex life of the Soviet people was now coming from the West. In fact, in one brochure this point overshadowed all others: thus, the foreword to *On Sex Education* (1964) explicitly stated that the task of sexual education was to prevent young people from acquiring 'deleterious views' (*vrednie vzgliady*) on sex, as the 'deleterious ideological influence of the West with its propagation of the animal importance of sexual attraction is still insinuating in our country in different forms'.²⁷ The authors of another manual *Marital Hygiene* (1964) stated: 'Unfortunately the pernicious influence of bourgeois ideology, dominating the literature and arts of the capitalist countries, is taking its toll on a group of less stable representatives of Soviet youth in regards to morals'.²⁸ The eradication of negative bourgeois influence required the joint work of parents, educators and doctors.²⁹

The authors of *On Sex Education*, *Marital Hygiene* and *Hygiene of Sex Life* (1964) devoted more energy to descriptions of Western society's inherent degeneracy. Soviet physicians suggested that it was the economic structure of the capitalist system that was inherently perverted and which constituted a threat to the 'sincere and chaste' nature of sexual relations between people. In particular, they contended that with the emergence of capitalist society and the prevalence of a 'buy and sell' attitude, economic inequality had become widespread, and this forced women to indulge in prostitution as the only means they could resort to in order to survive. The proliferation of prostitution, for its part, spawned nightclubs with erotic dancing and binge drinking, which were referred to as 'dens of depravity'. Young people in the West, having at their disposal such a wide assortment of potentially corrupting institutions (the aforementioned nightclubs, rampant prostitution, cinema and television)

became increasingly susceptible to vice: their sexual interest displayed itself earlier than that of youth in the socialist countries and their attitude to sexual relations was necessarily limited to deriving a transient pleasure.³⁰ Although these narratives were not new (Zalkind's *Healthy Marriage and Healthy Family* had depicted Western society in the same vein), they became more pronounced and elaborate, as it was now especially important to deconstruct the nature of the 'perverse ideological influence' coming from the West.

The professedly high level of unemployment in Western society was now more accentuated by Soviet physicians as the root of various kinds of antisocial behaviour:

Obvious and veiled vice of the social realm corrupt young people in capitalist countries physically and morally and they often adopt the path of a criminal. This is fostered by the prevailing unemployment in the West, which provokes a desire to live for the day.³¹

Soviet conditions were presented as an effective and healthy alternative to the depraved Western world. The aptitude of Soviet institutions to help Soviet people engage more deeply in productive labour and social life was counterpoised to Western institutions, which allegedly facilitated the pleasure-seeking desires of an individual: 'Sexual continence in our country can be feasibly achieved, for we have a variety of possibilities for sublimation. Devotion to work, studying, science or social activities alleviate the problem of sexual continence before solemnizing a marriage'.³²

HOMOSEXUALITY IN KHRUSHCHEV-ERA SEX EDUCATION MANUALS

The descriptions of homosexuality in the Soviet sex education manuals of the Khrushchev era seem inconsistent with official Soviet policies: homosexuality had been criminalised in 1934 and the only public mention of it was contained in the second edition of *the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* (1952).³³ Thus, a reasonable question arises: why familiarise young people with the phenomenon of homosexuality in a country where it was a punishable crime and a taboo for any discussions? Sources documenting the behind-the-scenes discussions of these manuals' content among Soviet physicians can shed new light upon this curious inconsistency. This section offers an interpretation of the descriptions of homosexuality in the Khrushchev-era sex education manuals and examines how they were modified in the wake of the June 1963 Plenum on ideology.

The first Soviet sex education manuals to mention homosexuality were, as we have seen, the translated versions of sex education manuals from Czechoslovakia and East Germany: *The Youth Becomes a Man* by Josef Hynie and *Questions of Sex* by Rudolf Neubert. Each of their understandings of homosexuality appears somewhat different, but both descriptions are homophobic. For instance, Hynie presented homosexuals as insidious and dangerous

individuals. In the first Soviet sex education manual to mention homosexuality, Hynie provides the following:

One can find people who have abnormal attraction to individuals of the same sex; they are called *gomoseksualisty* (homosexuals). *Gomoseksualisty* are aroused by and satisfy themselves with adolescents and youngsters, even though the latter have a normal interest towards girls. *Gomoseksualisty* go all out to gain the affection of the youngsters' society; they buy sweets and cigarettes for youngsters, tickets to the cinema, give them money, help to do home assignments and generally pretend that they unselfishly love youngsters. However, after such preparation, they sooner or later proceed to act. Do not let them touch you! Do not be shy about reporting them to your parents or educators, do not hesitate to report such attempts aimed at you or other young men! Both parents and educators will willingly help: homosexuality is a punishable crime, *gomoseksualisty* are perfectly aware of that: that is why it is not difficult to get rid of them!³⁴

When we compare the ways in which different problems and 'perversions' are treated in *The Youth Becomes a Man*, homosexuality in this book stands out as the most dangerous threat to the healthy sexual life of youngsters: while boys indulging in indecent conversations about sex with their comrades might be talked out of it and the habit of masturbation may be broken by active participation in social life, homosexuality was a hopeless case of moral degeneration, which could not be disciplined and had to be eradicated from society and even punished. Furthermore, being concerned only with satiation of their abnormal sexual desires and the invention of new tricks aimed at seducing youngsters, homosexuals stood alien to the main foundations of socialist society, such as labour and family life. Homosexuals were not simply useless as their interests were necessarily limited to the infinite search for young men, they were also dangerous as they tried to seduce young boys against their will. Hynie did not provide any explanation for why homosexuals existed in society and why he considered them to be paedophiles; as 'a friend of youth' he merely gave his young readers comradely advice: to report homosexuals to their parents or educators. Hynie also did not seem to acknowledge the existence of female homosexuality as no such thing as lesbianism was mentioned in the manual addressed to girls.

While Hynie's description of a homosexual smacked of overt homophobia, the contemporary views of Czechoslovak sexology regarding homosexuality were not as unequivocal. In the 1950s and 1960s Czechoslovak sexology was instrumental in promoting heterosexual norms and traditional family values, but at the same time it showed concern for the issue of homosexuality. For example, in 1961, Czechoslovak doctors and sexologists initiated a debate on the abolition of the article in the Czech criminal code criminalising homosexual relations between consenting adults. This debate triggered the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Czechoslovakia in 1961, which rendered Czechoslovakia one of the first countries to make homosexuality legal.³⁵ Therefore, in 1960 with Hynie's sex manual publication, the Soviet Union was importing ideas and

views on homosexuality that had already become somewhat outdated among prominent sexologists from one of the Soviet Union's closest allies.

The topic of homosexuality was carefully and gradually disclosed in another sex education manual addressed to Soviet youngsters, also published in 1960 (and republished in 1961) under the title *Questions of Sex* (1960) by Rudolf Neubert with a print-run of 100,000 copies.³⁶ Unlike Hynie's book, where the narrative on homosexuality was incorporated into the chapter dedicated to masturbation, *Questions of Sex* had a separate rubric for 'sexual perversions', under which homosexuality was discussed. When talking about the topic, Neubert essentially replicated the prevalent Nazi readings of homosexuality, which argued that homosexuality was either the result of seduction perpetrated during adolescence, or that it was necessarily coupled with crime or mental problems.³⁷ Neubert was an East German hygienist whose views on homosexuality were typical of East German medical thinking of that time. According to the current medical and moral definition of sexual norms in East Germany, homosexual desire was a result of one's seduction by an older homosexual, with the latter being 'effeminate and politically unreliable cosmopolitans who threatened to spread their malevolence to the innocent'.³⁸ Such readings of homosexuality presented by East German sexologists were offered to Soviet readers in the form of Neubert's book.

It is in no doubt that the reason for the inclusion of 'sexual perversions' in the Soviet version were not merely due to the Soviet censors' and editors' oversight: they reworked and abridged the original version, making it shorter and editing out some details mentioned in the original version.³⁹ Neubert explained that initially he was unwilling to talk about 'sexual perversions' as 'diseases and morbid phenomena should be in the competence of doctors'; however, since these topics sometimes featured in the conversations of young people and even of adults, the author felt compelled to write a passage about it.⁴⁰

Unlike Hynie's description of homosexuality, Neubert's writing expanded on homosexuality's presumed causes and suggested some ways to treat it. He emphasised the biological nature of homosexuality: 'the reason for such a deviation is the incorrect development of endocrine glands. There are people with alterations in the pancreas, who suffer from childhood with "sugar illness". In the same way, there are people whose sex glands develop incorrectly from childhood'. Even in suggesting the congenital nature of homosexuality, Neubert deemed it necessary to treat homosexuality with hormone preparations, surgery and psychotherapy:

Medical science has found ways to treat this anomaly partially with hormonal drugs or by means of surgery through the transplantation of glandular tissue. However, more often, an already tried medical method is employed – psychotherapy, that is, an educative influence imposed by the doctor on the patient.⁴¹

Unlike Hynie, who advised his readers to report homosexuals to law-enforcement agencies, Neubert's attitude seems to be somewhat more lenient: homosexuals had to be treated, rather than just removed from society. He did, however, note that such treatment was essential: 'People with such deviations from the norm cannot have healthy relations with people around them and that is why they are to be subject to serious treatment'.⁴²

An incorrect upbringing was also offered as a possible cause for the development of sexual perversions, although these cases were encountered not as often as those where sexual perverts were genetically predisposed: 'Perverted inclinations may appear in individual cases as a result of a depraved upbringing or under some other unfavourable circumstances'. These 'circumstances' might occur as a result of parents' irresponsible attitude to their children:

Deviations from the norm can be prevented provided that parents pay enough attention to their children. If parents are busy with their own business and amusements while children are on their own [...] there is a danger that this will produce some undesirable phenomena.⁴³

Lack of occupation was another reason for homosexuality and sexual perversions: 'A person whose life is not filled with joyful labour seeks to make use of his energy in various follies (*sumasbrodstvo*)'. Thus, in a socialist society, where collective labour was of the utmost importance, instances of perversions were an exception:

All these phenomena are more characteristic of the obsolete, decaying capitalist world, rather than a developing and growing society. Often various perversions are the consequence of satiety and a frivolous way of life. In the majority of cases this can be said about the perverted progeny of rich families or anti-social elements.⁴⁴

The next mention of homosexuality appeared in *Hygiene of Sex Life* (1964), which was written by Soviet doctors. Once again, more evidence is needed to establish the underlying reasons for the inclusion of information on homosexuality in this manual. It is possible that the authors' treatment of homosexuality was affected by the June 1963 Plenum's pronouncements as homosexuality was framed as a phenomenon characteristic of the West. Homosexuality in this manual was framed as the result of unemployment in the West:

the most important reason for homosexuality lies in those conditions of the capitalist countries, which prevent starting a family [...], unemployment, the uncertainty about the future, lack of housing or its unaffordability, the uncertainty about whether one will be able to provide sustenance for future children – all these factors provide conditions for sexual perversions.⁴⁵

Even though this particular passage does not plainly explain the logic of how homosexuality and uncertainty about the future are linked with each other, a section from another sex education manual published in the same year discloses

the inferential link between homosexuality and allegedly precarious social conditions in Western society:

Sexual debauchery and promiscuity are rooted in a deeply erroneous logic about the necessity to 'get everything out of life' (*vzyat' ot zhizni vse*)...[...] in bourgeois countries such thoughts are based on the uncertainty about the future, the constant threat of unemployment and the absence of any room for growth for young people in the future...⁴⁶

Promiscuous sexual activity resulting from uncertainty about the future was believed to be the key reason for sexual perversions: 'Promiscuous sexual activity is always related with excess, which leads to satiety, which prompts a desire to irritate the nervous system more actively. This, in turn, leads to sexual perversions'.⁴⁷ In the face of ostensibly unreliable Western social institutions and lack of occupation, therefore, young people were believed to become more desperate and sceptical about their future. According to Soviet physicians, they had no other option but to live their lives to the full and welter in endless sexual pleasure (since they could not afford to have a family), which drove them to seek new and sophisticated ways of appeasing their sexual desire, with homosexuality being one of the best options to do that.

When delineating the notion of homosexuality, the authors of *Hygiene of Sex Life* reluctantly admitted that homosexuality was a phenomenon that might also be found in Soviet society, although very rarely: 'Along with normal (sexual) attraction in very rare cases an attraction to the same sex is observed, so-called homosexuality (*gomoseksualizm*)'. They continued:

The latter is [...] the result of psychopathic alteration of personality. Socially created reasons for mental perversions, for homosexuality in particular, are military barracks, prisons of the capitalist countries, where many men lead an unhealthy life. The homosexuality-breeders are also private male institutions, which are very common in the West.⁴⁸

The authors sweepingly discussed the roots of homosexuality, not providing any credible evidence for their claims and hampering understanding of the logic of their descriptions. Yet, if one places these claims in the overall narrative on sex and sexual perversions contained in this manual, it becomes clear that the authors did not just randomly refer to homosexuality as a 'psychopathic alteration of personality'. An explanation for what might trigger such a condition was essentially provided in the preceding section of *Hygiene of Sex Life*, where the authors discussed 'excessive sexual desire', which was a sign of 'neurasthenia, hysteria and psychasthenia with signs of sexual obsession'.⁴⁹ Since, allegedly, homosexuality, like other sexual perversions, was a result of sexual excesses, then it comes as no surprise that a 'psychopathic alteration of personality' (that is homosexuality) was a direct consequence of it.

CONCLUSION

Although it might initially appear surprising, the first attempts to make a case for sex education in the Soviet Union emerged during the extremely conservative period under Stalin. Sex education first became available to the Soviet public with the publication of *Healthy Marriage and Healthy Family* (1948), which was dedicated to topics dealing with sex that had not previously been openly discussed: human physiology, and sexual relations between man and woman. This book also delineated the overarching goal of Soviet sex education: the fight against ‘the vestiges of the capitalist past’, the term that embraced all of the undesirable phenomena existing in Soviet society at the time: venereal diseases, extra marital sex and adultery (though homosexuality did not feature among them).

These ideas gained momentum in the sex education manuals published during the Khrushchev era. *Sex Life and Family* (1958) appears to follow the sex education narrative patterns of its predecessor. The goal to fight against ‘the vestiges of the capitalist past’ was complemented here by the idea of imposing communist morality on Soviet people’s sex lives, as evident in *Questions of Sex Education* (1959). This development apparently was the result of official discourse amongst Soviet politicians, including Khrushchev himself, who stressed the importance of communist morality in his official speeches.

In 1960, the Soviet government decided to introduce two sex education manuals, from Czechoslovakia and East Germany, that took a different perspective from earlier Soviet sex education manuals with their focus on ‘vestiges of the capitalist past’ and ‘communist morality’. Furthermore, these new books also talked about homosexuality, which was presented as both a crime and a disease. It is hard to establish with certainty why such a topic was allowed to appear on the pages of Soviet translated versions, but it is clear that this was no mere oversight on the part of Soviet editors; it was a conscious decision.

As cultural contacts between the Soviet Union and the United States expanded under Khrushchev and the Soviet government became more anxious about the consequences, Soviet sex education manuals saw corresponding changes. After the Communist Party June 1963 Plenum, which was devoted to strategies of confronting ‘ideological influence of the West’, Soviet sex education changed its focus from the goal of eliminating ‘vestiges of the past’ to the fight against the ‘advancing bourgeois ideology’ that allegedly sought to influence ‘unstable elements’ in Soviet society. As a result, Soviet authors for the first time mentioned homosexuality in a sex education manual, now framing it as a characteristic trait of Western society.

After Khrushchev’s removal from power, Soviet sex education manuals continued to be published in the Soviet Union, with their content now less influenced by anxiety about ‘ideological influence of the West’. Instead, Brezhnev-era sex manuals became more focused on increasing young people’s awareness of the physiological aspects of their bodily maturity. Throughout the ensuing ‘stagnation’ period, homosexuality was mentioned even less frequently

and few allusions to it were apparently informed by the Soviet ‘sexopathology’, which emerged in 1964 and defined it as a medical condition. For the remainder of the Soviet period, such readings of homosexuality became widespread among doctors and Soviet law-enforcement agencies, and they have continued to be pervasive after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with catastrophic consequences that are all too evident today.

NOTES

1. The official Stalinist approach towards discussions of sex consisted of re-channelling the sexual energy of Soviet people. See D. Gorfin, ‘Polovaya zhizn’, in *Bol’shaya sovetskaya entsiklopedia* (hereafter BSE), Moscow: Izdatel’stvo ‘sovetskaya entsiklopediya’, 1940, vol. 46, pp. 163–9.
2. L.A. Zalkind, *Zdorovyi brak i zdorovaya sem’ya*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1948, p. 36.
3. L.A. Zalkind, *Zdorovyi brak i zdorovaya sem’ya*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1951, p. 5.
4. Zalkind, *Zdorovyi brak i zdorovaya sem’ya*, 1951, p. 62.
5. These differences are evident, for example, in a documented presidium meeting held on 29 December 1955 of an education board of the RSFSR Ministry of Education, which discussed the manuscript of a new manual on biology *Human Anatomy and Physiology*: GARF A-2306/75/1074/1-26.
6. A.G. Stankov, *Polovaya zhizn’ i sem’ya*, Kiev: Gosudarstvennoe meditsinskoe izdatel’stvo SSSR, 1958, p. 5.
7. See, for example, Deborah A. Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev’s Russia*, New York: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 11.
8. T.S. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1959.
9. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, p. 29.
10. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, p. 54.
11. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, p. 54.
12. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, p. 59.
13. Atarov, *Voprosy polovogo vospitania*, p. 61.
14. J. Hynie, *Yunosha prevrashaetsya v muzhchinu*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1960.
15. R. Peter, V. Shebek and J. Hynie, *Devushka prevrashaetsya v zhenshinu*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1960.
16. R. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1960.
17. V. Sokolova, ‘State Approaches to Homosexuality and Non-Heterosexual Lives in Czechoslovakia during State Socialism’, in Hana Havelkova and Libora Oates-Indruchova (eds.), *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism*, Oxford: Routledge, 2014, p. 85.
18. Sokolova, ‘State Approaches to Homosexuality’.
19. R. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1960, p. 5.
20. V.N. Kolbanovskii, ‘O polovom vospitanii podrastayushchego pokoleniya’, *Sovetskoe zdravookhranenie*, no. 3, 1964, p. 19.
21. The Khrushchev government started worrying about the potential undesirable consequences that the exchange of tourists between the Soviet Union and the United States might entail as early as 1955, when for the first time Soviet citizens received permission to apply to travel overseas, including to capitalist countries. Therefore, only ‘politically prepared’ and ‘stable from the perspective of morality and everyday life’ Soviet citizens were accepted to travel abroad. Accordingly, to

- prevent Soviet citizens from excessive mingling with foreigners, the Soviet press warned Soviet citizens about Americans engaging in anti-Soviet behaviour. For more details see: Anne E. Gorsuch, *All this is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. On other kinds of socio-cultural interactions between the Soviet Union and the United States, see Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003.
22. On 1 December 1962, Khrushchev attended an exhibit of paintings and sculptures, organised by the Moscow branch of the Union of the Soviet artists, where he expressed his infuriation at a number of abstract works, which according to him were 'alien' to Soviet people (he even suggested that homosexual influences might be at work). For details, see Abraham Brumberg, 'Tempest in a Gallery', in *New Republic* vol. 148, no. 7, 1963, pp. 17–20. On the following day the main Soviet newspaper *Pravda* denounced 'inferior bourgeois traits' in the works of those Soviet cultural workers, labelling them traitors of the Soviet 'realistic art'. For further details, see 'Iskusstvo prenadlezhit narody', *Pravda*, 3 December 1962, p. 1.
 23. B.P. Bortsov, *XXII s'ezd partii i iyun'skii (1963g.) Plenum TSK KPSS o zadazhakh ideologicheskoi raboty v sovremennykh usloviakh*, Kiev: Vyshaya partiinaya shkola pri TSK KP Ukrainy, 1964, p. 16.
 24. V. Ageev, O. Korogodzkii, P. Novikov, *Iyun'skii/1963/ plenum tsentral'nogo komiteta KPSS i ego istoricheskoe znachenie*, Moscow: Moskovskoe gorodskoe otdelenie obshchestva 'Znanie' RSFSR, 1963, pp. 10–13.
 25. Bortsov, *XXII s'ezd*, p. 16.
 26. Bortsov, *XXII s'ezd*, pp. 17–18.
 27. N.I. Chuchelov, *O polovom vospitanii*, Moscow: Meditsina: 1964, p. 4.
 28. A.A. Gabelov and Ye.B. Derankova, *Gigiena braka*, Moscow: Meditsina, 1964, p. 67.
 29. Gabelov and Derankova, *Gigiena braka*, p. 67.
 30. S.A. Artemiev, V.D. Kochetkov and G.G. Shta'nko, *Gigiena polovoi zhizni*, Moscow: Znanie, 1964, p. 20.
 31. Gabelov and Derankova, *Gigiena braka*, p. 27.
 32. Gabelov and Derankova, *Gigiena braka*, p. 19.
 33. On criminalisation, see Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 186. For the encyclopaedia mention, see BSE, 2nd edn, vol. 12, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'sovetskaya entsiklopediya', 1952, p. 35.
 34. Hynie, *Yunosha prevrashtaetsia v muzhchinu*, p. 36.
 35. Sokolova, 'State Approaches to Homosexuality', p. 86.
 36. R. Neubert., *Voprosy pola*, Moscow: Medgiz, 1960.
 37. See, for example, D. Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 197.
 38. Cited in Jennifer V. Evans, 'Decriminalization, Seduction, and "Unnatural Desire" in East Germany', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2010, p. 560.
 39. R. Neubert, *Die Geschlechterfrage*, Rudolstadt: Greifenverlag, 1956, pp. 80–2.
 40. Neubert, *Die Geschlechterfrage*.
 41. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, p. 44.

42. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, p. 44.
43. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, p. 44.
44. Neubert, *Voprosy pola*, p. 44.
45. Artemiev, Kochetkov and Shta'nko, *Gigiena polovoi zhizni*, p. 20.
46. Chuchelov, *O polovom vospitanii*, pp. 24–5.
47. Chuchelov, *O polovom vospitanii*, p. 25.
48. Artemiev, Kochetkov and Shta'nko, *Gigiena polovoi zhizni*, p. 20.
49. Artemiev, Kochetkov and Shta'nko, *Gigiena polovoi zhizni*, p. 19.

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