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Jacqueline Teed 9 April 2018

Initial Discourses on AIDS in East and West Germany

by

Jacqueline Teed

Paul Buchholz
Adviser

Department of German Studies

Paul Buchholz

Adviser

Barbara Patterson

Committee Member

Benjamin Reiss

Committee Member

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Jacqueline Teed

Paul Buchholz

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Abstract

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The first German case of AIDS was diagnosed in West Germany in 1982. During this time period, little was known about the disease, and throughout Germany, there was limited official scientific or political discussion or information regarding the growing pandemic. The 1980s AIDS crisis in Germany is further complicated by the division of the country into Soviet-controlled Eastern and democratized, American-influenced Western lands. As a result, from 1982 to 1985, the West German public relied heavily on sensationalized rhetoric perpetuated by the heteronormative West German mass media for AIDS-related information, while the East German public relied on highly restricted information reported by the East German government. The varying official discourses surrounding the AIDS crisis in East and West Germany resulted in different responses and reactions to the disease in each of the lands. More specifically, the East German government's controlled response to the epidemic helped to create an organized, unified front against the disease, which played a role in preventing the spread of the virus. On the other hand, the disorganized, hysterical, and misinformed response of West Germany generated reactions in the gay community that allowed for HIV/AIDS to spread. In this thesis, these varying reactions and responses to the German AIDS epidemic are analyzed using discourse generated by the mass media in West Germany and official governmental reports published by the East German regime. Michael Kiesen's 1992 novel, *Menschenfalle,* is also analyzed, in order to explore the representation of the disease in the private sphere of Germany, after the peak of the epidemic in Germany.

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Introduction

On June 5, 1981, the Centers for Disease Control released a report in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, outlining five cases of *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia (PCP), a rare fungal infection that almost exclusively affects people with severely compromised immune systems. These first cases were reported from three separate hospitals in Los Angeles, California, and two of the five patients died from associated complications within a couple months of seeking medical treatment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1981). Within days of the releasing the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, the Centers for Disease Control received hundreds of reports from physicians across the United States, who were also treating patients with PCP, as well as other rare Opportunistic Infections, such as Kaposi's Sarcoma (Curran et al., 1988). The sudden, widespread emergence of these unusual infections was especially troubling to public health scientists, as the cases were simultaneously emerging in previously healthy, relatively young men. Furthermore, all of the infected patients were homosexual men with a history of inhalant drug use; one patient had a history of intravenous drug use. The syndrome's association with homosexuality and drug-use led American scientists to first officially attribute the cause of this immunosuppression to "some aspect of a homosexual lifestyle or disease acquired through sexual contact" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1981).

This official article published by the Centers for Disease Control established an immediate link between homosexuality and this novel, fatal disease. As the number of cases of severe immunosuppression increased across the United States throughout 1981 and 1982, American scientists chose to refer to the mysterious immune disorder as "gay-related immunodeficiency" (GRID). The syndrome's label was specifically selected due to the scientific

belief that the disorder was the direct result of male homosexuality, or at least some facet of homosexual behavior, such as excessive use of sexual stimulants or illicit drugs (Altman 1982, 1). However, despite the increasing global spread of the severe immunosuppression in both heterosexual and homosexual communities, the disorder continued to be framed by American scientists and American media outlets as a gay disease indicative of a "certain lifestyle" (Altman 1982, 1). Constantly reiterated, spurious claims, such as "the general public need not fear an epidemic," were perpetuated by the American media at the early onset of the disease outbreak (Altman, 1982, 1). This ideology immediately permeated other countries around the world and led many people to believe that the syndrome was strictly confined to homosexual men, especially those living in the United States.

By September of 1982, GRID was given a new identity – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS); however, an overdue name-change was not enough to remove the globally increasing levels of stigma associated with the new disease. The American scientific community's first official public statement about the epidemic, which ascribed the disease to sexuality, immediately socially segregated infected people, as well as people engaging in behaviors that placed them most at risk of infection, from the general public. Therefore, upon the official publication of the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, homosexuality was immediately connected with this new, deadly virus. This very specific label of AIDS created a figurative, and at times literal, boundary between the "healthy" general public and the "diseased other" (Gilman, 1988, 365), which further stigmatized and marginalized an already vulnerable and discriminated-against subpopulation of many countries.

Lack of biological understanding of the disease further deepened the division between those infected, or most at risk of infection, and the general public. According to psychologist,

Gregory Herek (1999), stigma is more likely to be attached to diseases that are contracted through "voluntary and avoidable behaviors," especially if those behaviors create "social disapproval" (3). Diseases viewed as "unalterable or degenerative," communicable diseases, and "apparent" diseases that "disrupt social interactions" or are "perceived by others as repellent, ugly, or upsetting," also are evoke more stigma (Herek, 1993, 3). Therefore, the depiction of AIDS as a disease associated with people *choosing* a controversial, drug-using, and promiscuous homosexual lifestyle, along with its high fatality rates, seemingly high transmissibility, and dramatic and visible impact on physical appearance, may have caused many uninfected observers during this time period to respond to people with AIDS with distress and unique expressions of stigma.

With AIDS-related stigma increasing in many countries around the world, around 1983, people began to question the exact etiology of the AIDS-virus. Despite little concrete evidence, American scientists initially asserted that AIDS was a sexually-transmitted virus brought to the United States by poor Haitian immigrants; however, African, European, and Asian countries argued that American tourism, and possibly human-engineered bioterrorism initiated by the United States government, were the causes of the contagion (Chin, 2006, 27). The lack of accurate information about AIDS in the early 1980s added to the mounting fear of the disease, and due to this increasing panic, people responded to the crisis by "blaming the other" (Nelkin & Gilman 1988, 364). In the case of the AIDS epidemic, othering was used as a way to reinforce stigma surrounding homosexuality, as well as a way to prevent the spread of the disease to "normal" populations (Treichler, 1999, 60). Furthermore, in times of "communal anxiety," people use blame as an attempt to better understand elusive, lethal diseases, and to thus "control" outbreaks of the disease (Gilman, 1988, 362). In the case of the AIDS epidemic, after initially

targeting gay communities in the United States, many countries quickly directed blame towards other particular groups of people. More specifically, groups belonging to the "4-H Club," which includes homosexuals, Haitians, heroin users, and hemophiliacs, were identified in many countries as those responsible for the newly emerging disease (Treichler 1999, 316).

While fear of people with AIDS was a sentiment shared by many countries around the world in the 1980s, this fear of infection with the virus distinctly exhibited itself in each nation. For example, many countries responded to the AIDS epidemic with discrimination against people with the virus or those believed to be most at risk of infection. In the United States, people with AIDS were evicted from their homes, fired from jobs, and shunned by their families and friends; similar acts of ostracization, such as labeling people with the disease or suspected to be infected as "untouchables," and in some cases, murder, were taken in South Africa, Tanzania, and India (Herek, 1999, 1). These varying social reactions to people with AIDS represented the country-specific, cultural prejudices of each individual nation (Herek, 1999, 1). The individual nations' varying attitudes to the "disability, dependence, fear, and death" caused by the disease indicated the "most fundamental cultural, social, and moral values" within that particular nation during that time period – specifically, the public perceptions of behaviors associated with the transmission of the AIDS-virus, such as prostitution, homosexuality, and promiscuity (Brandt, 1988, 414-415).

Because disease is perceived by the general public on the basis of dominant cultural beliefs, values, and social expectations, individual societies have dissimilar responses to identical epidemic diseases (Sills, 1994, 123). In the case of the 1980s AIDS epidemic, the unique country-specific manifestations of AIDS-related stigma were based on local incidence and prevalence rates of the disease, as well as the pre-assigned cultural values and prejudices of each

nation regarding who was the "Patient Zero" for that specific country. The severity of the disease in each nation, coupled with inherent cultural biases, caused people to express their feelings about the disease, as well as people with the disease, in unique forms, whether it be through discrimination, isolation practices, or violence (Herek, 1999, 1).

Countries such as Germany present a unique opportunity to analyze the role of culture in the immediate reaction to the AIDS epidemic, as each section of the country was influenced by a different subset of cultural, social, and political systems during the 1980s. The division of Germany into Soviet-controlled Eastern territories and "free" American-influenced Western territories from 1945 to 1990, led to a general polarization of East German and West German identities during this time period (Howard, 1995, 49). This polarization was due to the discordant societal values and goals of the Communist East and the Democratic West. Because public perceptions of disease are so dependent on unique cultural factors and influences, it is possible that the two separate German identities in the 1980s played a role in the immediate reactions of people in East and West Germany to the AIDS crisis. In turn, these varying reactions of the general publics in East and West Germany may have impacted the ability of each respective section to respond to the epidemic. These initials reactions may have then impacted the subsequent spread of the AIDS virus. Therefore, the principal goal of this thesis is to examine the initial social perceptions of AIDS in East and West Germany surrounding the early stages of the AIDS epidemic and to analyze how these perceptions and reactions were portrayed in the discourse of the time period.

Chapter 1: Perceptions of Homosexuality

Because the 1980s AIDS epidemic in East and West Germany primarily affected homosexual men (Shannon, Pyle, & Bashshur 1991, 99), in order to fully understand the resulting social responses to the epidemic, one must first understand the social context and perceptions of homosexuality in Germany. The immediate responses to and perceptions of the AIDS epidemic in East and West Germany in the media and general public are deeply interconnected with the country's complex history of homosexuality; the extensive sexual research conducted during the German Imperial Period, the *almost* sexual liberation of the Weimar Republic, and the anti-homosexual agenda of the National Socialist regime may have influenced the mass media's perceptions of homosexual men in the early 1980s. Therefore, this chapter of this thesis provides a general overview of the varying perceptions of homosexuality in Germany, as well as a short summary of some of the prominent values in East and West Germany during the 1980s, in an attempt to provide context for the differing reactions in East and West Germany to the AIDS epidemic.

German Imperial Period (1871 - 1918)

In 1532, the Constitutio Criminalis Carolina, the first Criminal Code applicable to all German territories, was enacted under Charles V. Under Article 116 of this criminal code, "immoral sexual relations against the order of nature," such as sodomy and bestiality, were criminalized, and those caught engaging in such acts were sentenced to death by burning (Fudge, 2003, 24). However, with the decline of Charles V's power, German territories began to establish their own criminal codes, with many German states beginning to abolish the death penalty for

male-male sexual relations (Linhart, 2005, 80). By the 19th century, many German states completely removed all criminal prosecution of same-sex relations and sexual acts. In fact, in 1813, the German state of Bavaria was the first German state to completely decriminalize same-sex sexual acts between men, and by 1848, many other German states, including Wuerttemberg, Baden, Hanover, and Brunswick, also removed their respective anti-sodomy laws (Beachy, 2010, 807).

While many German states had decriminalized sodomy by the mid-nineteenth century, some German states chose to continue to uphold penal codes against male-male sexual behavior during the Imperial Period. For example, due to the opinion of the Prussian interior minister, who cited "popular German sentiment," Prussia created and implemented Paragraph 143 in 1851, which outlawed "unnatural sexual relations" amongst men (Beachy, 2010, 808; Linhart, 2005, 82). The development of Criminal Codes on a state-by-state basis proved to later be significant. During the unification of the German Empire in 1871, due to Prussia's influence in the Northern German Federation (the predecessor of the new German Empire), many of Prussia's laws served as the basis for the new Empire's legal institutions. Therefore, despite the general acceptance of homosexual acts in a majority of the German states, in 1871, Paragraph 143 of the Prussian Criminal Code, which criminalized sodomy, was adopted and implemented within the new German Empire as Paragraph 175 (Oosterhuis, 1992, 5).

At the end of the nineteenth century, Paragraph 175 stated: Die widernatürliche Unzucht welche zwischen Personen männlichen Geschlechts oder von Menschen mit Thieren verübt wird, ist mit Gefängnis bis zu zwei Jahren zu bestrafen;[...]." ("Unnatural fornication which is between male persons or between persons and animals is be punishable by up to two years of imprisonment;[...]") (Gollner, 1974, 165). However, the various courts of the German Empire

faced numerous challenges trying to enforce this law, primarily due to the multitude of interpretations of the legal statute. In 1876, the Supreme Court of Prussia, which had a significant amount of power in the German Empire, ruled on a case in a way that broadened the definition of sodomy to prohibit all sexual acts between males that were "intercourse-like." This ruling marked a shift away from the previously universal understanding of the law, which restricted the statute to only apply to those engaging in "anal-penetration" (Beachy, 2010, 808). While the Supreme Court of Prussia was dissolved in 1879, the Prussian Court's interpretation of Paragraph 175 further muddled the idea of sodomy by implying that "any male-male sexual act that could be analogized to heterosexual intercourse was illegal" (Beachy, 2010, 809). This varying and open interpretation of the legal statute caused many people in German society during this time period to question what forms of consensual sexual contact should be criminalized. Furthermore, this alteration of the legal statute caused the German public to question its definition of homosexuality, and what was viewed to be socially acceptable, well into the twenty-first century (Micheler, 2007, 89).

In terms of an immediate impact, the inclusion of Paragraph 175 into the German Imperial Criminal Code led to an influx of research regarding male homosexuality in the late nineteenth century, as well as public and political discussion around the topic. Prior to this time period, the German medical community and German public perceived male-male eroticism as a mental disease associated with "willful perversion," "the product of sexual excess," and "a diseased fantasy life" (Beachy, 2010, 810-811). However, beginning with the work of Johann Ludwig Casper Berlin's chief medical officer and a forensic pathologist, in 1851, many German psychiatrists and scientists began to explore the possibility that sexuality was an "inborn" trait that was somehow "hard-wired" into the human psyche, rather than a "perversion of a 'normal'

sexual tendency." Other German sexologists, such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, and Magnus Hirschfeld, also built upon Casper's theory of homosexuality and served as advocates for sexual minorities up until the end of the Weimar Republic in 1933. Furthermore, basing their actions on the developing scientific research, many people in German society publicly and openly declared self-proclaimed sexual differences and actively protested against Paragraph 175 during the German Imperial Period (Beachy, 2010, 804-805).

The increased discussion of homosexuality led to an increased support of homosexuality by the German general public during this time period (Linhart, 2005, 82). For example, as described by Robert Beachy (2010), the Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee (Scientific-Humanitarian Committee) in Berlin, which was the first "self-consciously" homosexual political organization, distributed over 50,000 pamphlets explaining homosexuality from 1899 to 1914 (824). Each of these pamphlets also contained a petition in favor of reforming Paragraph 175; by 1914, over 4,500 people had signed the petition. Furthermore, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee was gaining support not only from other scientists and members of the homosexual community, but also from members of the heterosexual community by the end of the German Imperial Period (Beachy, 2010, 824).

Weimar Republic (1919 - 1933)

As a result of the growing German political activism and sexology research of the German Imperial Period, many Germans were vehemently against the implementation and enforcement of Paragraph 175 during the beginning of the twentieth century, which they viewed as a governmental act of homophobic oppression. Those opposed to the legal statute claimed that

various sexualities were the result of a congenital condition, rather than a sign of sexual deviance, and therefore should not be criminalized or punished (Beachy, 2010, 813). This public perception of sexual variance significantly decreased the prejudice and discrimination against homosexuality in the Weimar Republic (Linhart, 2005, 82). While homosexuality was still illegal in Germany during the Weimar Republic, as described by Laurie Marhoefer (2015), it was far more tolerated in Germany than in other European nations during this time period, due to the extensive sexology research and political activism of figures such as Magnus Hirschfeld (208). As long as "immoral" sexual acts were confined to specific urban settings, most law enforcement agents in Germany tolerated the congregation of these groups of people and did not persecute them. This relative acceptance of various sexualities via the liberal police enforcement of Paragraph 175 was especially true in larger urban settings throughout the 1920s and led to a flourishing gay subculture in major German city centers, such as Berlin (Marhoefer, 2015, 208).

However, due to the extensive German sexology research during the Imperial Period and Weimar Republic, there was a growing public perception across Europe that homosexuality was a "German vice" (Beachy, 2010, 828). Many European scientists subscribed to the "degeneration theory" of homosexuality, which defined homosexuality as an illness caused by inherited traits. There were also circulating scientific theories that homosexuality was caused by a kind of "germ" that would "later be discovered by biologists" (Beachy, 2010, 818). Due to the contrasting scientific hypotheses of sexual orientation and the expanding European opinion of homosexuality as a "German vice," some Germans began to oppose the abolishment of Paragraph 175. This group of German citizens condemned homosexuality and felt that "immoral sexuality" under the Weimar Republic was a "wanton, boundary-less frenzy," especially in larger German cities (Marhoefer, 2015, 206). Members of the conservative women's movement,

moderate politicians in the Center Party, Protestant "morality activists," and right-wing conservatives (who were primarily associated with the German National People's Party) perpetuated this idea of "immoral sexuality" in order to combat the growing tolerance of homosexuality (Marhoefer, 2015, 14).

As argued by Marhoefer (2015), this more conservative view regarding sexuality in the Weimar Republic was rooted in Christianity, which valued heterosexual marriage and perceived homosexuality, prostitution, and sexual imagery in the German media as "immoral" (14). Claims of Germany becoming "the new Sodom and Gomorrah," as exemplified by the "no-longer holy Cologne," were perpetuated by those against homosexuality, such as Ulrich Stutz, a legal historian of the time (Marhoefer, 2015, 14). The right-wing condemnation of homosexuality began to spread the belief that deviant sexual acts, such as homosexuality and promiscuity, would cause Germany to "drown beneath a monstrous 'flood' of 'immorality." This kind of religious ideology caused people in Germany to begin to reject homosexuality and the abolition of Paragraph 175 (Marhoefer, 2015, 15).

However, despite the growing opposition against altering Paragraph 175 in both Germany and across Europe, those in favor of reforming and abolishing the statute were relatively successful until 1933. In 1922, Gustav Radbruch, a German criminal lawyer and legal philosopher, drafted another petition to completely abolish Paragraph 175 (Lindhart, 2005, 82). Combined with support from the German public and newly emerging gay organizations, such as Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, historians believed that Paragraph 175 would have abolished by the end of 1933 (Herzog, 2005, 89). However, that same year, much of the progress related to decriminalization of homosexuality was virtually undone, due to the mounting political, economic, and social instability of Germany (Linhart, 2005, 82).

National Socialism (1933 - 1945)

Beginning in 1929, the German Great Depression caused economic chaos across the nation, which allowed for the rise of the National Socialist German Worker's Party (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). Upon its rise to power in 1933, the radical National Socialist regime immediately began to lay the legal foundation against "homosexual behavior" (Micheler, 2002, 95). According to the regime, homosexuality was considered a threat to the German "Volk, Staat, und Rasse" (people, state, and race), as homosexual men were deemed degenerate, ill, and unable to integrate into the "Aryan German ideal" (Micheler, 2002, 96). Additionally, by 1933, many people in German society were beginning to view the Weimar Republic's tolerance of homosexuality as a sign of Germany's "decadence." Despite the fact that the National Socialist regime was not against "the homosexual," but rather "the homosexual behavior," the Nazis portrayed themselves as "moral crusaders" attempting to remove this "German vice" in order to "purify" German society (Micheler, 2002, 96; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

Furthermore, drawing upon the more traditional, conservative beliefs of homosexuality, as well as stereotypes of homosexual men during the Weimar Republic, the Nazis portrayed homosexual behavior to the general German public as a "contagion" that did not contribute to the growth of the "Aryan race," and thus weakened German society (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). The National Socialists did not view homosexuality as an innate or biological characteristic as suggested by sexologists of the Weimar Republic. Instead, during the Third Reich, homosexuality was believed to be a learned behavior, that could be spread like a disease, but could be eliminated, as long as those with the "disease" were removed from society (Beachy, 2010, 818). As a result, as argued by Robert Beachy (2010), many members of the

National Socialist Party had a slightly different attitude towards homosexual men, when compared to other minorities in German society, such as the Jews or Slavs (820). This varying attitude is based upon the belief of the Nazis, that the homosexual mindset could be changed, since it was caused by a "disease." Thus, homosexuality was not nearly as threatening to the German Aryan ideal as other marginalized groups in Nazi Germany, who could not change their "impurity" (Beachy, 2010, 820). This was an idea adopted by East Germany following the war, which actually increased the public's acceptance of homosexuality.

Additionally, homosexuality was counter to the goals of the National Socialist regime on multiple grounds. For example, men engaging in same-sex relations were seen as "population policy zeros," as they did not fulfill their duty to Germany to reproduce. There was also the idea of the homosexual as a dangerous "Jugendverführer" and "Jugenverderber" ("seducer" and "corrupter" of youth), who "lured" 'normal, healthy' young men into the immoral lifestyle of homosexuality (Micheler, 2002, 96-97). Furthermore, homosexual men during the Nazi era were perceived as the "antithesis of the National Socialist ideal," as homosexual men were often portrayed as "effeminate and degenerate" and unable to control themselves in a way that was conducive to maintaining a "civil" German society. This portrayal of homosexual men by the Nazis led to the idea of the "homosexual personality," which was depicted as an epidemic of corruption and depravity, that was not as threatening as the Jews, but needed to be stopped nonetheless (Micheler, 2002, 97).

In order to halt this "homosexual epidemic" in the Third Reich, the National Socialists began to immobilize much of the Weimar Republic's progress towards abolishing Paragraph 175 as early as 1933. Urban pubs and bars frequented by homosexual men and women were closed, Berlin-based homosexual organizations were disbanded, and Freundschaftblätter ("friendship

bulletins") in Berlin, which enabled homosexual men and women to connect, were removed (Micheler, 2002, 95). However, the Nazis' first step to eliminating gay and lesbian culture from Germany was May 6, 1933. On this date, students led by Storm Troopers (Sturmabteilung; SA), raided the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin and confiscated over 12,000 "degenerate" books and over 35,000 images, and destroyed the works in the book burning in Berlin (Holocaust Encyclopedia). The destruction of the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin was the beginning of the harsh persecution of homosexuality during the Third Reich, and it was followed by the implementation of strict, comprehensive anti-gay policy (Micheler, 2002, 96). In 1935, the National Socialists introduced a new sub-clause to Paragraph 175, which was stiffened to include all same-sex touching by men, as well as mutual touching, individual masturbation with another person present, and "erotic glances" (Herzog, 2005, 88). While the Third Reich did not always uphold this draconian law with strict sentencing, and some Nazis were ambivalent towards the law, by 1945, an estimated 100,000 men were arrested for violating Nazi Germany's law against homosexuality. Of these 100,000 men, it is estimated that over 50,000 men were imprisoned, and 5,000 to 15,000 men were sent to concentration camps (Herzog, 2005, 90; Oosterhuis, 1992, 188).

Division of Germany (1945 - 1990)

Following World War II, in 1945, Germany was divided into four zones of occupation – Soviet, American, British, and French – with the Soviet Union taking the eastern portion of the country, and the United States, Great Britain, and France taking the western portion of the country. By 1946, reparation agreements between the Allied and Soviet forces broke, and by

1947, the Western forces had united the western portion of Germany into one cohesive zone. By August 12, 1961, the Berlin Wall was constructed, and Germany was literally divided into two separate lands (Broadbent & Hake, 2013, 20).

Almost overnight, Germany, a country once unified by an identical history, political system, and connected series of life-worlds, was divided by a 30-mile line of barbed wire entanglements. The separation of Germany into East Germany (German Democratic Republic) and West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany) imposed two vastly different cultures and socio-political structures on each section of the nation. The opposing societal values and goals of the Communist East and Democratic West led to a general polarization of East German and West German identities during this time period (Howard, 1995, 49). As a result of these two varying cultural influences, each section of Germany developed two very different cultural contexts, which led to varying treatments and perceptions of homosexuality in each land.

Sociocultural Context of West Germany

Following World War II, the Western forces aimed to "democratize" Germany, while removing all remnants of Nazism and designing a policy that would strengthen West Germany as an ally to the United States (Merritt, 1971, 91). By the 1960s, this democratization led to an increasing acceptance of democracy and Western political and social change. Furthermore, American cultural influences, such as certain behaviors, clothing styles, and music became quite prominent in West Germany by the late 1960s and early 1970s (Doering-Manteuffel, 1999, 23).

However, as argued by Damar Herzog (2005), immediately following 1945, in terms of values, West Germany turned to conservative Christian values and morals, specifically in regard

to sex, gender, and family relations, as a way to handle its fascist past (184). As a result, in West Germany, the Christian churches played a major role in dictating official sexual norms, which were conservative and homophobic throughout the 1950s and early 1960s (Herzog, 2005, 184). However, these anti-gay Christian "morals" were similar to the "morals" of the Nazis. For example, in 1957, the Federal Constitution Court ruled that the Nazi's draconian version of Paragraph 175 reflected the Christian morals of German society and was not reformed until 1969 (Bochow, 3). The continuation of this Nazi-era law reflected the Church's view of homosexuality as a kind of perversion and intentional act of crime, which led to the criminalization and legal persecution of homosexual men. Additionally, aggressive police raids, house searches, and arrests were common from 1950 to 1969. In fact, during this time period, around 50,000 men in West Germany were punished for engaging in same-sex acts (Wasmuth, 2002, 175).

However, by 1968, which was the beginning of the sexual revolution in West Germany, homosexual rights activists, such as Martin Dannecker and Reimut Reiche, began to advance the gay political agenda. After the publication of *Der gewöhnliche Homosexuelle* ("The Ordinary Homosexual") in 1974, which outlines the beliefs and behaviors of hundreds of West German homosexual men, the West German public became more open to the idea of homosexuality (Herzog 2005, 154). By the 1970s, gay activist student groups, such as the Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin, began to form; by the late 1970s and early 1980s, these groups transformed into self-proclaimed "anarchist," "reformist" groups, intent on seeking sexual liberation against what they perceived to be a homophobic, oppressive government (Bochow, 5).

By the early 1980s, the gay rights' movement in West Germany was beginning to stagnate. While the social movement of the 1970s led to a development of a flourishing gay

subculture, which included gay cafes, bars, clubs, newspapers and magazines, and so on, many gay men in West Germany felt as if the emancipation movement of the 1970s was ending (Haus 2016, 119). Moreover, the election of a conservative government in 1983, led many members of the gay community to believe that West German society was undergoing a "spiritual-moral turn" ("geistig-moralische Wende") toward a more conservative way of life (Höres, 2013, 93). As described by Sebastian Haus (2016) in his analysis of the gay West German media, during this time period, gays and lesbians in West Germany were facing "harder times" (Haus, 2016, 119).

Sociocultural Context of East Germany

While the Christian perspective significantly influenced sexual norms in West Germany up until the mid-1960s, this was not the case in East Germany, where behavior was primarily governed by an atheist, Soviet-style communist regime, until the collapse of the East German government in 1990 (Herzog 2005, 184 - 185). Beginning with its inception in East Germany in 1946, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) demanded that its citizens adopt a set of character traits that most closely aligned with the conventional opinions and values of the communist East German government. Predominant leaders of the SED, such as Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker, expected that East German citizens live in accordance with a so-called "sozialistische Moral" (socialist morality) and "sozialistische Persoenlichkeit" (socialist personality) (*Die Zeit*, 1964, 1- 2). Lifestyles in accordance with such anti-capitalist values ensured that East German citizens were behaving in a way that best supported the propagation of communism, which, in the eyes of the Soviet Union, would ultimately lead to an advanced, utopian society for the working class (Ball, Dagger & O'Neill, 2016, 134). Furthermore, the SED

was required to enact the morally conservative and strict social directives put forth by the Soviet Union in East German society (Herzog, 2005, 199).

In order to guide East Germans in the adoption of this Soviet-oriented "socialist morality," in 1958, Ulbricht, the General Secretary of the SED, mandated that citizens abide by a list of ten specific characteristics and ideologies (Herzog, 2005, 186). These "Ten Commandments" included topics such as commitment to socialism and its progression, personal responsibility, and living "sauber" (clean) and "anständig" (decent) lifestyles (*Die Zeit*, 1964, 1-2). Any deviance from these "Ten Commandments" resulted in serious disciplinary action instigated by the Staatssicherheitsdienst (Stasi), the East German state security service (Whisnant, 2012, 12). While many intellectuals and non-conformists in East Germany disagreed with the implementation of such rigid behavioral restrictions, according to Josie McLellan (2007), a majority of the East German general public actually aspired toward such values (7). Decency and cleanliness were highly valued characteristics in East German society, and even upon reunification with West Germany in 1990, there was strong disapproval and social rejection of behaviors that were viewed by former East Germans as perverse, morally corrupt, or unclean (McLellan, 2007, 7).

Among the groups of people in East Germany who were identified to deviate from the socialist values of cleanliness and decency, and were thus rejected by society, were those perceived to be promiscuous, homosexual, or morally corrupt (McLellan, 2007, 90). As argued by Herzog (2005), these groups of people posed a threat to the advancement of an advanced, anti-capitalist society, as their behaviors were perceived by the SED as a sign of the state's weakness (198). Due to the mounting concern in East Germany surrounding the state's languishing economy, financial instability, wartime damage, and loss of "elites" to the Western

world, there was an intense internal pressure for East Germany to present itself as strongly as possible to its international counterparts (Herzog, 2005, 198). Therefore, the SED tirelessly worked to hide any evidence from the Western world that may suggest communism's lack of strength, as the information could possibly be used by "enemies" of socialism (Herzog, 2005, 198). Furthermore, the SED did not want to acknowledge or draw attention to the fact that, within a socialist society, there could be any marginalized groups, that could not easily be included as part of the "social whole" (Herzog, 2005, 199).

Out of all of the stigmatized social groups in East German society, homosexuality was especially frowned upon, and it was viewed as an "almost total taboo," well into the late 1970s (McLellan, 2007, 90). Drawing upon arguments used by the National Socialist regime, the East German government represented homosexuality to its citizens as a kind of diseased, "perversion" (Herzog, 2005, 197). As explored by Herzog (2005), research and publications by many prominent East German advice writers and intellectuals, such as professor and social hygienist Rudolf Neubert, supported the idea of homosexuality as a curable and preventable disease, that needed to be eliminated from society via hormone injections, surgery, or psychotherapy (197). Similar to the ideologies of the Nazi regime, homosexuality in East Germany was perceived to be the result of criminality, severe mental deficiency, or "seduction during the adolescent phase" (Herzog, 2005, 197). This kind of believed deficiency posed as a threat to the goals of the communist regime, as the East German government feared that homosexuality could be perceived by other nations as a weakness of communism. Therefore, the East German government attempted to indoctrinate its citizens in the ideology that homosexuality was a perversion of the "decadent" Western world, and that homosexuality was uncommon in strong, anti-capitalist nations (Herzog, 2005, 219)

However, by the late 1970s, homosexuality became viewed as more of a disease, rather than an intentional perversion or innate character trait; therefore, men in Germany were viewed as sick, and thus, with sympathy (Herzog, 2005, 197). This belief was perpetuated in Neubert's widely circulated book, *Die Geschlechterfrage*, (*The Gender Question*), where he describes homosexuality as a "deformation of the inner glands" and depicts homosexual men and women as a group of people who should be "pitied as much as those born with other deformations" (Neubert, 1978, 50). This kind of depiction of the gay community marked a shift in the public perception of homosexuality in East Germany. While homosexuality was completely restricted in the public sphere and closely monitored in the private sphere of East German life, many people in the East German public did not treat people engaging in same-sex relations as criminals, but instead, viewed them as a mentally ill minority in the population (Whisnant, 2012, 12). As a result of this pathologization of homosexuality, by the 1980s, many people in East Germany somewhat empathized with the gay community in the region. For example, according to a study conducted by sociologist Michael Bochow (1993), in 1974, 56% of people supported the legalization of homosexual partnerships (122). Additionally, many religious leaders and worshippers in East Germany, specifically those in the Protestant Church, allowed the gay community to organize and connect throughout the 1980s (Starke, 1994, 157).

Despite the growing tolerance of homosexuality in East Germany, upon the emergence of AIDS in the Western world in 1981, the East German values of inclusion and rigid social control became major facets of the AIDS-related discourse in East Germany. As examined in the following chapter, AIDS was portrayed by the East German government as a decadent Western disease, that would not impact the morally upstanding citizens of East Germany, as long as they followed the socialist code of morality. However, immediately leading up to the emergence of

AIDS in East Germany in February of 1987 (Shannon, Pyle, & Bashshur 1991, 99), the East German government's controlled response to the epidemic helped to create an organized, unified front against the disease, which played a role in preventing the spread of the virus. As explored in the next chapter, the cohesive and coordinated response of the East German media and government in the face of the epidemic presents a stark contrast to the disorganized, hysterical, and misinformed response of West Germany.

Chapter 2: Varying Reponses to AIDS in East and West Germany

In West Germany, mass media outlets significantly influenced the general public's immediate reaction to the AIDS epidemic. Relative silence of the West German government until 1987, combined with an already unknown, mysterious disease, left many people in West Germany without a reliable source of information during the early stages of the AIDS epidemic. As a result, heteronormative mass media outlets, such as *Der Spiegel* – West Germany's most highly circulated national news magazine – were able to position themselves as knowledgeable links between the West German general public and the abstract practices of American medicine and science. However, through misinformation and a huge influx of information, these mass media outlets created a general sense of hysteria and fear for many people in the West German public, as well as resentment and denial for some people in the gay community of West Germany during the early 1980s.

On the other hand, while freedom of the press created a constant bombardment of AIDS information to the West German public, this is extremely different from the situation in East Germany. Because East Germany was controlled by such a restrictive regime, there was not much opportunity for a mass media outlet to spread falsities about the epidemic in this section of Germany. Furthermore, due to the oppressive nature of the East German government, the East German public could not outwardly deny, question, or rebel against the information provided by the government, like the general public in West Germany. As a result, a majority of the information that the East German public received about AIDS was strictly essential and was restricted to information about how members of the East German public could best protect themselves from infection. Therefore, while some East German citizens did have limited access to West German television and radio news outlets, a majority of the information that the East

German public received was funneled through the East German government (Borneman, 1987, 226). As a result, there was not the same sense chaotic reaction to the epidemic in East Germany, as there was in West Germany, which may have played a role in restricting the spread of the disease.

The Initial Portrayal of AIDS in West Germany

Misrepresentation of and misinformation about AIDS in the West German mass media began on May 31, 1982. On this date, *Der Spiegel*, published "Schreck von drüben" ("Fear from over there"), which was the first official German publication to outline the emergence of AIDS in the United States. Due to the prominent platform, respectability, and high readership of *Der Spiegel* during the 1980s, as well as its position as the first organization to publicly discuss the disease, this news outlet had an open opportunity to positively influence the general public's perception of the country's imminent AIDS epidemic. However, rather than portraying the growing AIDS epidemic in North America as a serious public health issue, in its first article about the epidemic, *Der Spiegel* portrays AIDS a distant, American disease that should not be of concern for people in West Germany.

Using self-professed American medical and scientific "experts" as the basis for its information, the short article describes a fatal, grotesque "plague," "infesting" the American gay population (*Der Spiegel,* 1982, 187). The article explains that the cause of the condition is unknown, although it is likely due to a sexual enhancement substance or a disease-promoting behavior only found within the gay community. However, rather than emphasizing people with the disease, believed modes of transmission of the pathogen, or the symptoms of infection, as

done by American news media outlets, *Der Spiegel* focuses on American scientists' and "experts'" tireless search for the etiology of the puzzling "Kaposi epidemic" and the history of Kaposi's Sarcoma (*Der Spiegel,* 1982, 188). The publication then concludes that based on the history of infectious disease, West Germans should be aware that this novel American "cancer" will one day meet "experts" at the homosexual hubs of Europe, such as Berlin; however, West Germans should also recognize that, according to "experts," the disease is "thought to be a typically American infection, and for whatever reason, reserved for the New World alone" (*Der Spiegel,* 1982, 189).

Introducing AIDS to the West German public as a deadly plague solely reserved for gay Americans, that is strictly handled by "experts," not only set a precedence for the huge influx of misinformation that would characterize much of the media's coverage of the AIDS epidemic in West Germany, but also immediately positioned AIDS as a disease of the Other. In this article, homosexual men *in general* are not labeled to be "carriers" of the disease; gay *American* men are the people specifically designated (*Der Spiegel,* 1982, 187-189). The difference between attaching the stigma of the disease to gay men in general versus gay American men is important to distinguish, as this portrayal of the disease failed to show the West German gay scene that the disease could one day spread throughout its own community. Therefore, labeling gay American men as the ones most at risk of infection depicted AIDS as a foreign disease, and as a result, the gay West German community was less likely to accept that such a disease could occur in the West German gay population.

Furthermore, in addition to *Der Spiegel* describing the disease as a "typically American affliction" and "reserved for the New World," the article incorporated a photograph, which added to the stereotyping of the disease as a facet of gay American culture (*Der Spiegel*, 1982,

187). The image, which is directly underneath the title of the publication, is a photograph of two shirtless men, who appear relaxed, lying on top of each other, smoking marijuana. Underneath the image is the caption: "Homosexuals in America – immune deficiency through Hash?" This visualization of the disease, which could be considered the most easily understandable and accessible portion of the article, does not suggest any kind of "fear" in America (*Der Spiegel,* 1982, 187). Instead, the article suggests that the gay men in the United States are calm, while medical experts are the ones in the community that are expressing concern. This kind of imagery not only provided visual evidence to its readers that the disease was one of gay Americans, but may have also suggested to readers that they should not be worried about the epidemic. The depiction of two carefree men in America, where the disease is supposedly running rampant, may have created a kind of mindset in West German readers that they should also not express concern about the disease. Furthermore, posing the origins of the disease as a question, open to interpretation by the readers of the piece, sets the stage for allowing the disease to be interpreted in a way that the audience sees fit.

However, while "Schreck von drüben" frames American homosexual behavior as the biggest risk of infection, the relationship between homosexuality and the epidemic is not the most emphasized topic of the news article. Instead, American "experts," who are caring for those with the disease are at the center of the article and are, in a sense, somewhat Othered. For example, the article begins with a quote from a leading American cancer specialist, who states, "Patients need so much care… because our diagnosis is like a death sentence" (*Der Spiegel,* 1982, 187). One may argue that this beginning statement immediately depicts the "experts" as a separate group of people, who are powerful, paternalistic figures, able to grant death sentences through a simple disease diagnosis. The depiction of the experts as the main group of people in

society impacted by the epidemic, not only disconnects men who have sex with men from the situation, but may have also encouraged West Germans to feel as though they were separated from the epidemic.

Additionally, "Schreck von drüben" only includes accounts from American physicians and scientists, rather than people with the actual disease, and disease-related information relayed by these American "experts." The reliance on the expert's knowledge, further sets them apart from the general public. Moreover, the article states that "The disease awaits experts… in Europe," rather than stating that the diseases "awaits" people in the general European public (*Der Spiegel,* 1982, 189). This kind of language places the disease in the realm of "experts," a group of people with which not many people in general public may be able to identify, which somewhat removes the responsibility from the general public in handling the disease. This kind of othering may have caused West Germans to feel as though they were essentially helpless in the ongoing epidemic.

Furthermore, the tone of "Schreck von drüben" is relatively calm and relaxed, and it presents the disease as something that should not be feared by the West German public. While some rhetoric used throughout the article to describe the disease, such as "death sentence" and "lust plague," attempts to depict the seriousness of the situation in the United States, this kind of fear-based and emotionally-charged language is not used very frequently throughout the journalistic piece (*Der Spiegel,* 1982, 189). Instead, the article uses dense American political agendas and so-called American scientific facts to explain the disease. While this kind of description of the "plague" may have helped to limit immediate stigmatizing rhetoric directed toward the gay community in West Germany, *Der Spiegel* failed to present the illness as something requiring urgent attention in West Germany (*Der Spiegel*, 1982, 187). For example,

while labeling AIDS, in the article's title, as a kind of "terror" or "fear" from "over there" may incite anxiety in some readers, one may argue that the title of the article not only implies that the disease is far removed from West German society in a literal, geographical sense, but also represents the disease to the West German public as an abstract concept. In this context, using the word "fear" as a noun to label the virus, rather than using the disease's actual name, may have made the disease feel less realistic or tangible to West Germans, as the word "fear" is an abstract noun with which the West German public could not physically or emotionally directly engage in mid-1982.

Through the depiction of AIDS in its first article, *Der Spiegel* failed to explain the gravity of the situation to the German gay community and stereotyped the disease as one of gay Americans and experts. Labeling the disease as one of gay men, an already discriminated-against group of people in West Germany, began to establish a rapport of distrust and distance between the gay community and the heteronormative mass media. Furthermore, the characterization of AIDS as a gay American disease immediately influenced the gay community's and the general public's overall response to the disease, as the majority of people in West Germany viewed the disease as one of the Other and reacted to the threat with silence and inaction. Had the article been written in a way that accurately portrayed the disease to the public as something to be taken seriously, perhaps the West German public would have been more prepared once the infection became more visibly prevalent in society.

Following the publication of "Schreck von drüben" in 1982, the German mass media, general public, and government remained relatively silent about the new disease. Despite the identification of the first West German AIDS case in 1979, after *Der Spiegel's* first article, there was no additional information published by prominent West German figures or organizations

regarding the growing epidemic (Starker, 1998, 3). This immediate silence may have allowed people in West Germany to live in a kind of state of blissful ignorance. West Germans were not informed by the country's government or media about the epidemic, and they were given little knowledge about the topic. Therefore, for nearly one year, the only information that the West German public received from its own country was a short article, stating as fact, that AIDS was a disease of gay Americans.

However, on June 6, 1983, the relative calmness of many people in West German society quickly transformed into fear, panic, and denial, when *Der Spiegel* revived public discussion surrounding the new disease. In an article titled "Tödliche Seuche: Eine Epidemie, die erst beginnt" ("Deadly Plague: An Epidemic, which is first beginning"), which was the first cover story about AIDS in the German mass media, the magazine creates a threatening, apocalyptic scenario for people around the world. While the article begins with a detailed, grim description of the death of a gay American AIDS patient in New York City, the article transitions to a description of an ominous future for not only gay men, but for also everyone else in society. The article also urges gay men in West Germany to refrain from sexual activity (*Der Spiege*l, 1983, 144 - 163).

By posing a question to the reader, "Does a plague threaten? Will AIDS, like an apocalyptic rider, come upon humanity? Is there a modern plague in sight that will bring about death, hunger, and war, as it did in the Middle Ages?" (*Der Spiege*l, 1983, 144), West German media marked a dramatic shift in its depiction of AIDS. While "Schreck von drüben" portrayed AIDS as a minor disease limited to America, in this second article, AIDS is suddenly framed as a death sentence, caused by American gay men, that will soon imperil *everyone* – "even women and children." The article even states, "If it goes on like this with AIDS, no one can say how it

will end" (*Der Spiege*l, 1983, 145). This kind of language paints a fearful, plague-ridden future for people around the world. The article suggests that this new disease will push societies back to the Middle Ages, kill everyone, and basically lead to the demise of societies around the world.

In this article, homosexual men are also immediately attached to this world-altering, deadly disease. For example, the cover of the magazine depicts two nude, faceless male figures, erotically touching one another, with an image of a unidentified pathogen covering their genitalia. This cover image is significant, as it dehumanizes people with the disease and focuses public attention on the pathogen itself. Furthermore, as Jones (1990) notes in his analysis of AIDS-related political discourse, the general consensus of Germans during this time period was that, "Gays – American gays – are the source of AIDS… Bad gays are Americans from New York or San Francisco" (444 - 445). "Tödliche Seuche" is representative of this kind of public perception of AIDS, as in the article, American gay men are primarily blamed for the disease, and homosexual men around the world are portrayed as promiscuous sex-addicts, who will eventually cause the second plague of Europe and downfall of society.

Following the publication of "Tödliche Seuche," *Der Spiegel* began publishing coverage of the AIDS epidemic almost every week. Other news outlets, such as *Bild Zeitung, Tageszeitung,* and *Stern* followed suit, and within a few weeks, the West German media began to sensationalize the disease using fear-based language and imagery. For example, *Der Spiegel* used phantom imagery, allusions to America, and religious, moral-based overtones, throughout a majority of its articles from 1982 to 1990; in addition, almost all of these articles have some reference to or image of America, which further framed AIDS as a foreign, threatening disease. Furthermore, descriptions of AIDS as a "Killer-Krankheit" ("Killer disease) and "Zeitbombe" ("time bomb") became common labels for the disease, and phrases rooted in morality, such as

"the Lord always has a whip ready for the homosexuals," became commonly associated with the infection (*Der Spiegel,* 1983*,* 145 – 163). These various portrayals of AIDS immediately stigmatized people infected with the virus, namely homosexual men, which created a massive sense of fear of contagion in the general public.

Moreover, as Sebastian Haus (2016) argues, mass media outlets in West Germany published such fear-based, metaphor-filled reports as a way to raise awareness of the disease, create a sense of emergency, and spur members of the heterosexual and homosexual public into action. However, while Haus claims that mass media reports on AIDS and the use of AIDS metaphors galvanized the West German general public to combat the spread of the virus, he also argues that this was not the case in the West German gay scene (117). As Haus observes, in gay media outlets in the early 1980s, fear-based rhetoric, as used in *Der Spiegel*, had the opposite effect on the gay community in West Germany, which may have played a role in allowing the virus to spread amongst this community in West Germany.

The First Reactions of the West German Gay Community

By September of 1983, there were 41 identified AIDS cases in West Germany, with 36 of those infected identifying as homosexual men (Shannon, Pyle, & Baschschur, 1991, 95). However, despite the increasing prevalence of the disease in West Germany, as described by Haus (2016), a majority of the West German gay community immediately responded to *Der Spiegel's* "Tödliche Seuche" with resentment and denial (118). After a series of articles published by *Der Spiegel,* which labeled homosexual men as overly promiscuous and immoral, multiple liberal gay magazines and newspapers, such as *Stern, Siegessäule,* and *Rosa Flieder,*

attempted to defend the gay community (Haus, 2016, 118; Jones, 1990, 440). According to Haus (2016), these gay media outlets claimed that *Der Spiegel*'s depiction of AIDS was an over-exaggerated account of the situation, designed to sell magazines and support the West German government's anti-gay agenda (118 – 119). However, the gay media's attempt to support and defend the gay community, through denial of the disease and criticism of the mass media and conservative government, actually helped the infection to spread more rampantly amongst gay men. As explored by Haus (2016), the mass media's portrayal of AIDS, resulted in the gay media and some members of the gay community creating a kind of opposition to not just the heteronormative mass media, but also to the AIDS virus itself (119).

According to Haus (2016), beginning in October of 1983, *Rosa Flieder*, one of the most radical of West German gay magazines, published the first cover story about AIDS in the German gay media (118). In this article, the magazine claims that the mass media's hyperbolized depiction of AIDS, as a disease of immoral gay American men, promotes the heterosexual and West German government anti-gay agenda. The article also suggests that the disease is a kind of myth, designed by the mass media to remove homosexuality from society; in fact, the article questions *Der Spiegel*'s portrayal of AIDS as an epidemic (Haus, 2016, 118 – 119). According to Sebastian Haunss' analysis of *Rosa Flieder* (2013), the article then argues that the mass media over-emphasizes the disease itself, rather than focusing on people with the disease, which is taking attention away from the needs of the gay community; in addition, the emphasis on the disease itself, the article claims, places the disease within the realm of the heterosexual community, rather than the homosexual community, who does not face the same risk of infection as the homosexual community (227). Lastly, the article states, that if the media would "stop

talking about AIDS and begin talking about those who get the disease," the "problem" could be resolved (Haunss, 2013, 227).

However, while *Rosa Flieder* repeatedly criticized mass media for neglecting the gay community in West Germany, in many of its articles throughout 1983 and 1984, the magazine itself also fails to "talk" about those infected with AIDS (Haunss, 2013, 227). Not mentioning personal cases of the disease failed to humanize the epidemic and make it appear relatable and tangible to many members of the West German gay community. As a result, some people in the West German gay community may have lacked an awareness of the disease, as it was portrayed as a problem of the Other. However, in this sense, the Other was actually the heterosexual community, as the heteronormative mass media was the central source of AIDS discourse during the early 1980s. Furthermore, instead of promoting disease prevention in its articles, *Rosa Flieder*, as well as other gay news outlets and gay rights activists, chose to use AIDS as a way to criticize Germany's conservative government and advance the gay political agenda (Haunss, 2013, 227). Had *Rosa Flieder*, along with other gay news media outlets, connected with its readers and empowered them to engage in safe-sex practices, instead of flippantly representing AIDS as a condition of the Other or as part an anti-gay government agenda, the spread of the virus amongst the West German community could have potentially been slowed.

According to Haus (2016), many prominent figures in the gay community advanced the opposition to the AIDS virus and epidemic even further (119). Ronald Schernikau, an outspoken, far-left gay activist, was a critical voice in using discussion of AIDS as a platform to spread an anti-government sentiment, as well as advance the gay rights' political agenda. As examined by Laura Schütz, in 1984, *Siegessäule* published an article including a statement by Schernikau, that reads:

> Really nice! Something to fear again. It [the mass media] exploits everything. The new basis is AIDS.
>
> AIDS comes from the Americans and means: nothing helps (haha). The death rate of this disease, which occurs mainly in homosexual men, provides material for an illustrated series for the ahistorical mass-printing of this country (Degen & Bircken, 2014, 372).

In this statement, Schernikau sharply criticizes West Germany's handling of the disease, as well as its stigmatization of the gay community. Schernikau uses humor and sarcasm to depict the West German media as an ignorant entity that is using the disease to further punish, marginalize, and exclude an already discriminated-against community. According to Haus (2016), this kind of view of the mass media, as discriminatory and anti-gay, permeated the gay scene until 1985 (118). Furthermore, it is significant to note that in this statement, Schernikau does not emphasize the threat of AIDS to the German gay community; he treats the disease as something that is being blown out of proportion by *Der Spiegel*. He claims that AIDS is just another aspect of homosexual life that the conservative West German government will use to abuse gay men; he never depicts the disease a real threat to the West German gay community. Additionally, Schernikau's emphasize of AIDS as "coming from America," further distinguishes and depicts the disease as separate from the West German gay community (Degen & Bircken, 2014, 372).

During the early 1980s, due to public statements, such as Schernikau's, there was a growing opposition against AIDS, as well as a sense of denial, in the gay West German media (Haus, 2016, 118). These two perceptions caused a dangerous backlash in the gay community. More specifically, as argued by Haus (2016), discourse in the gay German media indicates that

some members of the West German gay community may have not only doubted the seriousness and reality of the AIDS epidemic, but may have also began to rebel against the threat of the virus (120). As the West German mass media continued to produce "anti-gay" news articles throughout 1983 and 1984 and urge gay men to refrain from sexual intercourse, a small subset of the West German gay community began to engage in high-risk, unprotected, promiscuous sexual activities, in an act of opposition, referred to as "fickt weiter" ("fuck on") (Degen & Bircken, 2014, 372). While this was not a prevalent practice in the gay community, the idea began in 1984, when a poem written by Ronald Schernikau began to circulate in the gay West German media. A line from the poem reads, "Who stops fucking now should also stop smoking, drinking, eating, working, driving cars, using spray cans, using lacquer plastic radios, [and] cinema" (Schernikau, 1984, 27).

In this poem, Schernikau urges members of the West German gay community to oppose the media's portrayal of the new disease. He suggests that sexual liberation in the gay community is as essential to life as food and water; giving up such an integral part of the gay identity would undermine the ongoing movement for social liberation, equality, and autonomy. In the case of the gay community, sex was one of the few areas where homosexual men were not completely oppressed or controlled by a heterosexually-dominated society. "Fickt weiter" implies that some people in the West German gay community may have felt as if the media's depiction of AIDS, and encouragement of homosexual men to refrain from engaging in sexual activities, was a way for the government and heterosexual community to further stifle the progress made by the gay rights' movement. And as suggested by the poem, regardless of the health consequences, many radical gay leaders would not allow themselves to be oppressed yet again.

As a response to the rebellion of the West German gay community, Sabine Lange and Bruno Gmünder, two concerned West German citizens, created Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe (DAH) in September of 1983, which was the first national gay self-help organization in Germany designed to stop the spread of the AIDS virus and AIDS-related misinformation (Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, 2017). As blatantly stated by the DAH in its 1985/1986 yearly report, the DAH formed due to concern that fear-based misinformation in the mass media was causing the disease to spread amongst gay men (Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, 1986, 6). This idea was illustrated further in 1984, when the DAH distributed a pamphlet that clearly lists its mission statement as, "The DAH in particular encourages the relatives of at-risk groups not to be driven into irrational anxiety by the sensational news in the media" (Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, 1984).

However, according to Michael Bochow, despite the goal of the organization to improve access to information, DAH was met with distrust by the gay community when it was first founded (6). Stigmatizing rhetoric in the mass media and a growing sense of denial and rebellion in the gay community may have contributed to this initial rejection of the organization. Furthermore, the two people who founded this organization, Lange, a heterosexual female nurse, and Gmünder, a worker in a bookshop, had little name-recognition within the gay community or a deep political connection with the gay rights' movement. Moreover, these two people were not far left or overly political in the West German gay community (Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, 2017; Bochow, 6). Their reputation as outsiders may have also led to an initial rejection of DAH.

Despite the initial rejection of DAH by the gay community, the non-profit organization began an education campaign in May of 1986, in an attempt to combat the spread of the virus. As described by John Borneman (1987), as part of this campaign, the DAH sent educational pamphlets to every West German household and extensive media coverage was devoted to

increasing awareness about the epidemic (226). However, because so little was actually known about the spread of the disease during the early stages of the outbreak, this campaign actually added to much of the confusion surrounding the disease. For example, the pamphlets included information about the AIDS virus being spread through saliva, which is false (Borneman, 1987, 226). Furthermore, despite efforts of the DAH to help stop the spread of the disease, the number of AIDS cases in June of 1986 was 1089 cases, and that number was only growing (Shannon, Pyle, & Baschschur 1991, 95).

Additionally, much of the West German media coverage continued to spread a large amount of misinformation. For example, conspiracy theories regarding the involvement of the United States in the epidemic, began to circulate. In 1987, *Der Spiegel* published an article, titled "AIDS-Virus from the CIA-Laboratory," claiming that the United States developed the AIDS virus as a way to eliminate the homosexual and black communities around the world. Later articles from the mass media also added to the confusion of many people in the general public, by circulating statements that caused people to wonder if the disease could be spread by saliva and if people with the disease should be quarantined (*Der Spiegel*, 1987, 3). While the influx of information may have been an attempt to help the public remain informed about the disease, and therefore aid in disease prevention, this information further created a general sense of hysteria and ignorance for many people in the West German general public.

The Initial Portrayal of AIDS in East Germany

The first publication to outline the AIDS epidemic in East Germany appeared in the *Berliner Morgenpost* in 1985. In this article, titled "AIDS – eine neue Infektionskrankheit,"

("AIDS – a new communicable disease"), Dr. Niels Sönnischen, East Germany's leading "AIDS expert" provides a very basic, straightforward account of the epidemic to the public (*Berliner Morgenpost,* 1985, 19). Throughout the article, Sönnischen explains the emergence of the "AIDS illness" in the United States in 1981 and emphasizes the specific people most at risk of infection. Referred to as "specific risk groups," Sönnischen explains that drug users and homosexual men are the two groups of people most at risk of infection (*Berliner Morgenpost,* 1985, 19). However, while Sönnischen explains that homosexual men are of greatest risk in East Germany, he does state that all people in Germany are at risk of the virus. After outlining the disease, Sönnischen very directly tells East Germans citizens that they must know the identity of sexual partners, avoid unsafe sex practices, and use condoms, in order to remain uninfected (*Berliner Morgenpost,* 1985, 19).

This immediate portrayal of AIDS in East Germany marks a stark contrast to the West's initial depiction of the disease. While the controlled and informed response of East Germany may be partially due to the fact that East Germans did have slightly more time to prepare for the epidemic, the government's immediate involvement in the disease may have also helped to prevent the same sense of panic that occurred in West Germany. Rather than providing its citizens with a huge influx of emotionally-charged claims, the first official publication in East Germany provided the public with a very definite set of facts, such as the origins of the disease, transmission and suggestions for disease prevention. This clear, straightforward depiction of AIDS did not require as much guesswork for the East German general public, which left less room for questioning the reality of the disease. Furthermore, telling the East German public that all people are at risk of infection, which is in line with socialist morality, may have helped to

create a more unifying front against the disease in East Germany, as all people in society were placed in the realm of risk.

However, as examined by John Borneman (1987), a sociologist living in East Germany during this time period, despite the portrayal of the AIDS epidemic by the East German government as a situation that all people should be concerned about, the general reaction to the AIDS epidemic by the East German public was that "…AIDS exists only under capitalism" (227). As explored by Borneman, however, due to this public perception, there was an increased rejection of "decadent" Western activities and values in the East German public, and an increased emphasis of socialist morals (227). As a result, people in East Germany, including members of the gay community, began to engage in safer sex practices, such as using condom use. Furthermore, Borneman claims that the East German government did not urge members of the East German gay community to "give up" sex; gay men were simply encouraged to engage in "clean" behaviors, such as sexual monogamy (Borneman, 1987, 227). This is quite different from the words of the West German mass media, which instructed gay men to stop having sex entirely. Therefore, based on the reaction of the gay community in West Germany, one may argue that the East German's approach to combatting the spread of the virus in the East German gay community, which was far more inclusive, may have helped prevent the spread of the disease, as gay members of East German society may have felt less been more likely to listen to the advice of the media.

As described by Borneman (1987), after the publication of "AIDS – eine neue Infektionskrankheit" in the *Berliner Morgenpost,* in 1986, the East German Ministry of Health published a series of educational pamphlets outlining prevention specific steps to avoid contracting the AIDS virus (227). Titled, "What does it mean to have positive indications of the

antibody against LAV/HTLV III," these pamphlets provided very strict guidelines of how women and men in East Germany could best protect themselves against the disease. Additionally, after the distribution of these pamphlets, *Neues Deutschland* and *Berliner Zeitung* published articles outlining safe sex practices for everyone (Borneman, 1987, 227). Again, it is significant to note that these pamphlets and articles were directed at all people in East German society and not just homosexual men. In part, this may have been due to the socialist morality, which requires that all people are seamlessly integrated into one collective society, with no outliers; however, this may be also be due to the fact that the East German regime was able to observe AIDS prevention techniques in other countries that were more immediately impacted by the disease and learn from the mistakes of those countries in preventing the spread of the disease.

Aside from these various publications, there was very little information given to the East German public about the AIDS epidemic, even after the first case of AIDS was identified in June of 1987 (Shannon, Pyle, & Bashshur, 1991, 99). However, generally, the East German government's controlled response leading up to the epidemic helped to cause less of a chaotic reaction in East German society when the outbreak actually began. Furthermore, the socialist design of the East German government made the disease less about homosexual men, and more about providing everyone in society with disease prevention tips. These various aspects of East Germany's approach to the AIDS epidemic are quite different from the government's and media's treatment of the disease in West Germany, and each of these respective approaches led to different social treatments of the disease in East and West Germany during the early 1980s.

Chapter 3: Reflection of the Epidemic through Literature

Language used in the mass media to describe the AIDS epidemic was not the only form of discourse to shape the public perceptions of the disease and of people with the disease in East and West Germany. Alternative forms of discourse, such as literature, emerged in response to the public discourse around the epidemic. While there was little to no creative expression in what was previously known as East Germany, former West Germany had an influx of creativity related to AIDS in the 1990s, after the peak of the epidemic. These forms of reflection and expression following the initial aftermath of the AIDS epidemic are valuable, as they direct attention away from the public discussion of AIDS and offer insight into the views of the private sphere, which may not have been publicly represented during the actual epidemic.

An example of the kind of creative response that emerged in Germany in the 1990s is Michael Kiesen's 1992 novel, *Menschenfalle* ("people's pitfall"). Using third-person omniscient narration, this novel depicts the life of a heterosexual male, David, during the early stages of the AIDS epidemic in Germany. In order to start a new life, after ending a long-term relationship, David moves to Berlin, from Stuttgart, Germany, in 1982. While David previously lived a very tame lifestyle, upon arriving in Berlin, he decides that he wants to embrace a more decadent way of life. He attends bars, discos, and saunas and begins to live a somewhat promiscuous lifestyle. He meets two friends along the way, a heterosexual woman named Petra, and a bisexual man named Johnny, and for a majority of their time together, they live carefree, somewhat reckless lifestyles. After four years of living in Berlin, however, David moves away from Berlin and moves to Munich. Upon moving to Munich, David begins to learn more about HIV/AIDS, and he becomes extremely paranoid that his previously promiscuous lifestyle may have infected him

with the virus. As a result, seven years after leaving Berlin, David returns to the country to trace and track the disease status of every single person with whom he had sexual relations in 1982.

Menschenfalle offers a particularly unique account of the German AIDS epidemic, as the author, Michael Kiesen, was living in the United States during the epidemic. As a result, Kiesen was likely influenced by the United States' AIDS social movement, as well as American writers, such as Susan Sontag and Paul Monette, who wrote some of the most influential works about the epidemic. Furthermore, as described by Douglas Crimp (1987), most creative expression related to AIDS is generated by gay men who lost friends and lovers during the 1980s epidemic (4). Kiesen, a German heterosexual man, living in the United States, does not appear to have any outward connection with the German AIDS epidemic, so Kiesen's perspective of the German AIDS epidemic is likely heavily influenced by the American AIDS epidemic and the German AIDS epidemic as portrayed by the West German mass media.

However, Kiesen's apparent reliance on the heteronormative West German media in writing his novel is evidence throughout the piece. While the book sleeve states that *Menschenfalle* is the first German novel to reject German society's depiction of AIDS as a "ghetto syndrome," the novel does nothing more than portray AIDS as a ghetto syndrome. Throughout the book, Kiesen attempts to shift the social constructions surrounding AIDS and frame it as a disease of everyone, rather than as a disease of the Other. More specifically, Kiesen aims to reject the German discourse of the 1980s in order to develop a new, more inclusive discourse surrounding the AIDS epidemic. However, due to its portrayal of sexuality, time, and the nationality, *Menschenfalle* creates a new discourse around the epidemic that actually perpetuates inaccurate German stereotypes of people with the disease; however, these

stereotypes help to characterize many of the beliefs of people in Germany during this time period, as well as the discourse perpetuated by the West German mass media in the early 1980s.

Sexuality

Emphasis of each character's sexuality is a major facet of *Menschenfalle*, as Kiesen provides an alternative discourse about sexuality that aims to destigmatize AIDS. Kiesen develops David as a heterosexual character, perhaps in an attempt to counter the media's depiction of AIDS as a disease of gay men and to suggest that AIDS can infect or affect any person, of any sexuality, at any time. However, it is never clear to the reader if David actually has HIV/AIDS; the reader only knows that David is paranoid about past viral infection. The only person in the novel to be knowingly infected with HIV, and to subsequently die from an AIDS-related disease, is Johnny, a bisexual male with an American heritage.

While the depiction of Johnny as a bisexual man *with* AIDS and David as a heterosexual man with a *fear* of AIDS may have been an attempt to challenge prevailing perceptions in the 1980s about the disease, in actuality, this portrayal promotes a dangerous stereotype. By specifically characterizing Johnny as a promiscuous bisexual man with AIDS, Kiesen promotes the misinformed opinion of many people in Germany during the 1980s, that AIDS is an American disease, spread by perverse men who are outside of the heterosexual community. While depicting the only character to contract HIV as a bisexual man, Kiesen may be attempting to merge the heterosexual and homosexual communities and imply that members of both communities may be infected by the virus. However, Kiesen's depiction of bisexuality also suggests that bisexual men serve as a dangerous liaison between the gay community and the heterosexual community, in terms of HIV transmission.

For example, despite David having engaged in high-risk sexual behavior throughout the entire first half of the novel, it is not until Johnny begins to express symptoms of infection mid-way through the text, that David becomes hyper-concerned about his own health (Kiesen, 90). While David never had any direct sexual contact with Johnny, David did have relations with Petra, one of Johnny's female partners. The narrator states, "If Petra had already been infected by Johnny or another guy, she could have passed on the disease to him [David]..." (Kiesen, 107). The idea that a woman could have sexual relations with a bisexual man infected with HIV/AIDS, and then spread the infection to heterosexual men, promotes a false stereotype about transmission of the disease that is prevalent in many cultures. From a physiological and anatomical standpoint, the sexual transmission of HIV from a woman to a man is highly unlikely; the woman is most at risk of contracting the virus from the man (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Therefore, it is highly unlikely that Petra gave David HIV derived from Johnny. As a result, the depiction of the bisexual man in *Menschenfalle,* as an entity that spreads disease between the homosexual and heterosexual community, is stigmatizing, inaccurate, and damaging. Additionally, while this depiction somewhat removes AIDS-stigma from the homosexual community, the portrayal of bisexuality places AIDS-related blame on the bisexual community; therefore, in this way, the novel fails to achieve its sole mission of creating the first German novel that challenges the "ghettoization" of AIDS, as the novel ghettoizes bisexual men.

Furthermore, portraying a bisexual man as the person responsible for infecting a heterosexual man with HIV, places all of the blame and responsibility for the disease onto the bisexual man. The characterization of Johnny as a decadent, bisexual figure in the novel, who David believes infected him with HIV, promotes the idea that the heterosexual man is the real

victim of the AIDS epidemic. Never does David acknowledge that he could have possibly been the person to infect Johnny through their mutual sexual partner; David constantly acts like the victim of the situation. For example, upon learning of Johnny's death near the end of the novel, rather than expressing sympathy, David immediately begins to wonder if Johnny was "incubating" the plague when they were both having sexual relations with Petra, and he states, "Lots of vitamins to take. For our well-being, Petra!" (168). In this statement, it is clear that David does not actually care about his friend's death; he only cares about his own health. This may be representative of the feelings of the heterosexual community in Germany during the 1980s, as AIDS was so deeply viewed as a disease of the Other. Moreover, it is interesting to note that David is not concerned about infection until it becomes possible that the infection could have spread to him from the homosexual community; this portrayal may also suggest that homosexual men during this time period were not necessarily concerned about AIDS, until it also began to directly affect their lives. This kind of viewpoint is similar to the argument of some West German politicians of the late 1980s, such as Peter Gauweiler, who were only concerned about the virus's ability to spread from the homosexual community to the heterosexual community and chose to ignore gay men infected with the disease (Jones, 1992, 444).

Time

AIDS provides the narrative framework of this novel, rather than being its centerpiece; each chapter alludes to the disease, but it is never explicitly mentioned. The chapters of *Menschenfalle* oscillate between the past and the present, with the final sentence of every single chapter ominously alluding to David's plague-riddled future. In this way, there are two main narrative foci that function in the novel, specifically, the past and the future. David reflects on

the past with nostalgia and positively describes it as a "world from yesterday" (Kiesen, 13). On the other hand, he fears his future, describing it as a "vultures circle" that is constantly looming over him (Kiesen, 69). Despite sections of the novel taking place in the present, David is never truly mentally in the present, as he is constantly in anguish about his future and the "entrance of the new plague" into his life (Kiesen, 51). The present just serves as a painful, fear-laden transition between these two times.

This kind of internal struggle may have been representative of people during the 1980s, who were concerned about having been infected with the AIDS virus. Because HIV is a dormant infection, that may take as long as ten years to express itself through symptoms, many people during the 1980s, were left in a state of limbo. People who believed they may have been exposed to the AIDS virus were forced to watch masses of people die grotesque deaths, as they anxiously waited for the first signs of the illness to develop within their own bodies. In *Menschenfalle*, David is also forced to play this kind of waiting game, as he attempts to track down and learn the disease status of every person with whom he had sexual contact.

Furthermore, the chapters of *Menschenfalle* are written as a series of short, introspective flashbacks, depicting the specific actions and sexual encounters that may have caused David to become infected with the virus. The chapters written in the present focus on David's concern with his future, as he is constantly worrying about the next few years of his life. For example, at one point in the novel, despite David not knowing his HIV serostatus, David becomes hysteric and begins to panic about his future. The narrator states, "A feeling pervaded him, which could be really only be described as fear… What should he do with his time left?" (Kiesen 107). Instead of answering this question, the chapter immediately ends, and the following chapter begins with a light-hearted portrayal of one of his past sexual encounters. The juxtaposition of

once happy memories, with fear and anxiety caused by these memories, might represent David's struggle in coming to terms with his past decisions. In dealing with the past, David must accept that a once fun lifestyle that allowed him to find acceptance, happiness, and freedom, may have actually caused him to become ill with not only a literal virus, but also with worry and emotional pain.

Moreover, the chapters that describe David's past life are only about one to two pages long. The length of these chapters, as well as the sheer amount of detail the narrator uses to depict such scenes, almost serve to represent David's past sexual encounters as flashbulb memories – short but intense experiences. These intense memories capture David's decadent past, and subsequently, force themselves into his present, which creates a sense of regret for David. As a result, it is almost as if David sees his life "flashing before his eyes" as he attempts to come to terms with the fact that his identity may one day change from a healthy, heterosexual man, to that of a stigmatized, diseased, dead man. Furthermore, the use of flashbulb memories may also indicate that David is constantly overtaken by such thoughts of worry, as he tries to come to terms with his potential new identity as a person living with AIDS; however, due to David's constant state of panic about the future and these repeating flashbacks, David can never actually accept his present state or leave the past behind. As a result, this internal struggle may signify David's inability to accept his new stigmatized identity as person who may soon be living with AIDS, which is a challenge that many people with HIV/AIDS must face.

Nationality

Nationality is also a significant theme throughout *Menschenfalle*. All of David's sexual partners at the beginning of the novel are women from countries around the world. While this

portrayal of the disease may be an attempt to symbolize the global aspect of the AIDS epidemic, and thus everyone's susceptibility to the disease, in a way, Kiesen's depiction of these women also suggests that AIDS is a foreign, and thus a threatening disease.

The women with whom David has sexual relations are depicted as foreign travelers, who speak little to no German and refuse to use condoms during sexual intercourse. For example, in the first sexual encounter described in the novel, David goes to a bar and meets a random Italian woman, who can barely speak German. Before they begin having sexual relations, David asks the woman if he should wear a condom, to which she replies "no, I do not like that," so they engage in risky, unprotected sexual intercourse (36). Portraying the Italian woman as the person who tells David not to wear a condom, represents the woman as a foreign entity, who is the one frivolously spreading HIV/AIDS to other countries. However, similar to his interactions with Johnny, David never thinks of the possibly that he could have transmitted HIV to any of these women. David is incapable of thinking that he could possibly be a kind of German "Patient Zero," who is spreading HIV during all of his unprotected, sexual encounters. In terms of reality, this kind of symbolism may represent Germany's constant need to blame the Other for bringing the disease to them and not ever thinking about the fact that some Germans also likely spread the disease to other nations.

Furthermore, the characterization of Johnny as an American who contracts AIDS further perpetuates stereotypes in Germany during the 1980s, rather than rejecting them. In the novel, Johnny is immediately introduced to David as an American, despite being born in Germany. He is labeled as American because his father comes from New York City, and many of Johnny's social ties are in America. However, Johnny's identity as an American overtakes all of his other social identities, and throughout the novel, he is referred to as "the decadent American" (Kiesen,

59). Johnny enjoys drinking, going to bars and clubs, and constantly having unprotected sexual intercourse with both men and women. Despite beginning to express symptoms associated with AIDS mid-way through the novel, Johnny continues to engage in unprotected sex. This characterization of Johnny confirms the perceptions of Americans in East and West Germany – that Americans are overly decadent, AIDS-ridden, and intent on spreading the infection around the world. Johnny then dies of AIDS, and David goes on to live a life that may or may not involve HIV/AIDS.

Overall, during the 1980s AIDS epidemic, there were varying public reactions to the disease in East and West Germany. While the West responded to the epidemic with an influx of AIDS-related information, the East responded with restrictive control. As a result, there was more acceptance of government-led disease prevention measures in East Germany than in West Germany, and the infection did not spread as quickly as it did in West Germany. Furthermore, the varying German reactions to the AIDS epidemic can be observed in *Menschenfalle,* which expresses many of the stereotypes prevalent in Germany during the AIDS epidemic. The relationship between the discourses of the West German mass media, the West German gay media, the East German government and media, and German literature, represent the power of language in managing public perceptions of HIV/AIDS, and thus creating various actions and reactions related to the epidemic.

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