

Debating Sex: Education Films and Sexual Morality for the Young in Post-War Germany, 1945–1955*

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Summary

After 1945 rapidly climbing figures of venereal disease infections menaced the health of the war-ridden German population. Physicians sought to gain control over this epidemic and initiated large-scale sex education campaigns to inform people about identification, causes and treatment of VD and advised them on appropriate moral sexual behaviour as a prophylactic measure. Film played a crucial role in these campaigns. As mass medium it was believed film could reach out to large parts of society and quickly disseminate sexual knowledge and moral codes of conduct amongst the population. This essay discusses the transition of the initial central role of sex education films in the fight against venereal disease in the immediate post-war years towards a more critical stance as to the effects of cinematographic education of the young in an East and West German context.

Keywords: sex education films, VD education, post-1945 Germany, public health, sexual morality, East and West German sex education

Introduction

Sex education films are central instruments for conveying norms of sexual knowledge and conduct. With a focus on German sex education films of the late 1940s and 1950s the essay asks how sex education films handled sexual

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