

**Sexual values and lifestyles among young people
from Berlin's precarious working-class milieus.
Findings of a qualitative interview research**

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Abstract

In youth sexuality research it is consistently found that the sexuality and relationship patterns of "today's youth" can be described across classes as egalitarian, permissive and partner-emphasized. The standards of "double standards" and "virginity" have been replaced by the standard of the "romantic ideal of love". Sexuality is lived primarily in fixed, exclusive, though sometimes short relationships with the imperative of sexual fidelity. But is this true in such a generalized way? What sexual values and lifestyles can be found in a milieu whose living situation can be described as precarious?

The data basis is formed by 16 guideline-based interviews with young people aged 15 to 21 years, which were conducted between September 2015 and November 2018. Data collection took place in the youth detention center Berlin-Brandenburg, the youth probation center Berlin and in the context of the "street". Data analysis was multi-method and oriented towards the Documentary Method, Grounded Theory and Content Analysis.

In the precarious milieu, the standard of double standards, which applies different evaluative standards to the sexual behavior of boys and girls, is dominant, although the standard of virginity has not completely disappeared. Boys enjoy more sexual rights growing up than girls. Sexuality is closely linked to symbolic capital, and sexual norms for boys and girls remain diametrically different in the precarious milieu. For boys, having sex is subject to strong competition and is linked to "honor," whereas having sex is transformed into symbolic capital within the peer group by means of successful communication. Sexuality is not only used in fixed relationships by lived out by boys. Boys "rule" over girls through the "good-girl-bad-girl" discourse, as they can easily label a girl as a "bad girl," a "slut" through labeling. As a result, kudos are given to those girls who are not outspoken and hold themselves back sexually. Knowledge of the injustice of the standard of double standards is acknowledged by both girls and boys, but remains inconsequential because gender and



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sexuality relations feel "natural" to the binary constructed genders and are firmly inscribed in the habitus of young people.

A systematic and persistent flaw in youth sexuality research is the widespread assumption that sexual values and behaviors based on them are more or less similar across adolescent groups. However, the group of adolescents and their environments of origin are far too heterogeneous to assume that a single sexual standard is recognized by all adolescents as the "right" one and that there is only "one way of sexual living." Socio-cultural diversity, expressed in diverse values and ultimately in diverse sexual lifestyles, is therefore the norm, not the one standard and the one sexual lifestyle. Milieu approaches are needed to reflect socio-sexual diversity and to avoid that the gender and sexuality relations of certain social classes get the label "deviant", so that young people are marginalized as a consequence.

Keywords: Adolescence, working class, sexuality, gender, precarious living conditions