

THE FEARS OF GAY TEACHERS AND THE COLLECTIVIZING EFFECTS OF EMOTION WORK

Affects, Emotions, and Emotion Work in the History of the Working Group of Homosexual Teachers and Educators in the *Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft* Berlin 1978–1991

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the formation of the Working Group of Homosexual Teachers and Educators in the *Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft* (German Education Union, GEW) in 1978 was influenced by the affect of fear, and how emotion work emerged as a key aspect of the formation and collectivisation of the group in its first decade until 1991. To this end, we review the state of affect and emotion research in German queer history, analyse the role of fear in the formation of the group in the late 1970s, and explore the group's continued emotion work in the 1980s. We deliberately highlight the aspects of fear and emotion work. While queer and trans studies have paid much attention to anger (Stryker 1994; Landridge 2008; Milani 2021; Malatino 2022), the same cannot be said for fearful emotional states. Although there is a growing body of work on affect and emotion in German queer history, emotion work has only been implicitly addressed. We therefore highlight the role of both fear and emotion work in the history of the GEW's Working Group of Homosexual Teachers and Educators between 1978 and 1991. In discussing the history of the group, we show how not only affect and emotion but also emotion work can be key to historical change, and we touch on the question of how productive the historiographical distinction between affect and emotion is.

Keywords: Homosexuality, History of Education, History of Emotions, History of West Germany, Emotion Work

Introduction

“Every heterosexual teacher recounts his private life with a naturalness. Be it reports from vacation, of the last weekend, about the family and the kids. The gay teacher keeps secret this realm of his life, even if he invents “his fiancée”. It is unimaginable for him, to talk about living together with his boyfriend or the problems of his relationship. He [the gay teacher] is afraid to reveal himself because he fears the general social discrimination and because the male colleagues could maybe experience him as a threat. It is possible that we find a male colleague attractive. This fear often leads to neurotic fears of contact towards colleagues” (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18–19).¹

1 „Jeder heterosexuelle lehrer erzählt mit einer selbstverständlichkeit von seinem privatleben. Seien es berichte vom urlaub, vom letzten wochenende, von der familie und von den kindern. Der schwule lehrer verschweigt diesen bereich seines lebens, auch wenn er “seine verlobte”. erfindet. Es ist für ihn unvorstellbar, über das zusammenleben mit seinem freund oder die probleme seiner beziehungen zu reden. Er hat angst davor, sich erkennen zu geben,

As the quote above illustrates, the decriminalisation of male-male sexuality between adults in West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany or FRG) in 1969/73² and the emergence of lesbian and gay liberation movements from the beginning of the 1970s onwards did not put an end to the experiences of discrimination and marginalisation of LGBTIQ* (lesbians, gay, bisexual, trans*, inter*, and queer*) people³ (Griffiths 2021; Huneke 2022). As the quote further shows, homosexuality remained a taboo, especially in schools. When sex education was introduced in public schools in 1969, the official guidelines drafted by the *Kultusministerkonferenz* (conference of ministers of education of the German states) listed homosexuality under “socio-ethical problems of human sexuality as well as penal provisions for the protection of youth and sexual offences” along with contraception, promiscuity, prostitution, rape, abortion, and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (Bundestag 1969, 3–6).

It does not come as a surprise, then, that education politics and policy were an important issue for the lesbian and gay movements from the

weil er die allgemeine gesellschaftliche diskriminierung fürchtet und weil die männlichen kollegen ihn möglicherweise als bedrohung erleben. Es könnte ja sein, daß wir einen kollegen attraktiv finden. Diese angst führt häufig zu neurotischen kontakt- und berührungssängsten kollegen gegenüber.“

- 2 Male-male sexuality had been criminalised by §175 since the very beginnings of the German National state. In contrast to East Germany which had returned to the milder pre-Nazi version of §175 in 1950, the FRG had retained the version of §175 that had been tightened under National Socialism post 1945 (Huneke 2022, 64). Male-male sexuality was decriminalised in the FRG by the 1969 reform with a higher age of consent of 21 compared to 18 for heterosexuals. A further reform in 1973 lowered the age of consent to 18, but §175 was not abolished until 1994, after German reunification (Griffiths 2021, 32–33).
- 3 While the contemporary movements referred to themselves as gay and lesbian movements, this article opts to use the acronym of LGBTIQ* to honour the activists of varied gender and sexuality experience as well as expression who were part of these groups.

beginning of the 1970s. The *Homosexuelle Aktion West Berlin* (“Homosexual Action Group West Berlin, HAW”), for example, had a working group on pedagogy and successfully organised protests against the dismissal of a gay teacher, Reinhard Koepp, on the grounds of being homosexual in 1973 (Mücke 1985).⁴ The teacher was reinstated with the help of legal assistance provided by the *Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft* (“Education and Science Workers’ Union, GEW”), but as the group’s further work proved unsuccessful, it disbanded in 1975. Instead, several homosexual teachers decided to organise within the GEW in 1978. Our article traces this process of organisation and highlights the importance of affects, especially fear, and of emotion work for their collectivization. Most of the group’s surviving archival material consists of public-facing documents such as brochures, articles, flyers or meeting programmes, while no internal material such as minutes of meetings have been preserved. In fact, internal discussions have only been preserved through contemporary publications by the gay teachers in an attempt to document their work. We will therefore base our analysis on the public materials⁵ and focus on the public display and socio-political interdependence of affect and emotion.

The gay teachers within the GEW Berlin⁶ initially formed out of fear of

- 4 We use ‘gay’ as a re-appropriated identity category of gay men (equivalent to the German ‘schwul’) and ‘homosexual’ in a more descriptive manner that can encompass both male-male and female-female homosexuality.
- 5 The source material stems almost entirely from the contemporary witness and co-founder of the gay teachers’ group, Detlef Mücke, whose archival material is currently being processed into the archive of the *Schwules Museum* Berlin. Mücke co-founded the group and collected nearly all of its printed materials.
- 6 While the working group was founded under the name of ‘Arbeitsgemeinschaft Homosexuelle Lehrer und Erzieher’ [working group of homosexual teachers and educators], it was predominantly a group of male teachers from the outset and only used the moniker of homosexuality in official proceedings, preferring to refer to themselves as gay. Due to this history and an official name change to being the “working group of gay teachers” (AG Schwule Lehrer) in 2016, we refer to the group as ‘gay teachers’ for short throughout the article to use

continued discrimination and marginalization, as the 1978 article *Die angst des schwulen lehrers im dienst*⁷ (“the fear of the gay teacher in service”), quoted above and further elaborated on below, vividly illustrates. Fear also played an important role in their initial public messaging and was the focus of their emotion work. How did fear influence the formation of the group and their ongoing collectivization? In which ways was the group’s history in later years, including their activities and aims, shaped by fear?

In addressing these questions, we explore ways of integrating theoretical and methodological perspectives from the history of emotions and affect studies into our empirical research. In terms of our empirical research, we analyse the way in which not only affects but also emotion work can be key to historical change. In terms of theory, we consider how productive the historiographical distinction between affect and emotion really is for historiographical research.

It should be noted that it was no coincidence that both the HAW pedagogical group and the gay teachers were based in West Berlin. Craig Griffiths has recently relativised the role which large cities generally, and West Berlin specifically, played for the gay movement (Griffiths 2021, 2, 58), yet Berlin has been a hub of LGBTIQ* subculture and politics since at least the Weimar Republic (Huneke 2022, 24). The socio-political conditions of West Berlin undoubtedly facilitated the emergence and continuation of gay action groups working on education politics.

In the first part of the article, we introduce the history of emotions as an approach to queer history that has been popular in Germany. In the second

their self-designation. The abstracted collective of and individual male-male desiring teachers are referred to as ‘homosexual teachers’ for differentiation purposes.

7 Between 1978 and 1996, the journal of the GEW Berlin used lower case writing with the exception of capital letters at the start of sentences (Will 2007: 24).

part, we use these approaches to analyse the role of affects and emotion work in the formation of the working group of homosexual teachers and educators within the GEW Berlin in 1978. In the third part, we give an outlook on the group’s continued emotion work throughout the 1980s, when group members increasingly sought to replace feelings of fear with feelings of joy. In the fourth and final part, we draw our conclusions and highlight the mutually constitutive relationship between affects and social structures.

Affects and emotions in German queer history

German queer history has been slow to adopt perspectives from affect studies and the history of emotions. However, some of the most theoretically ambitious recent work is distinguished by its interest in the historical effects of affects, emotions, and feelings. For instance, in her work on East German lesbian history, Maria Bühner has made productive use of Ann Cvetkovich’s *Archives of Feeling* and Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward* (Bühner 2019; Cvetkovich 2003; Love 2009). In her discussion of two documentary projects on lesbians in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), a collection of memoir essays and a television documentary, she interprets them as “archives of feelings” that both question well-rehearsed historical chronologies – such as the 1970s as the decade that brought fundamental change to LGBTIQ* lives – and bring emotions to the centre of historical inquiry, “not only for politics and community building, but also for individuals and their personal journeys” (Bühner 2019, 243).

Bühner (2019, 255) does not explicitly define “emotion” or “affect” but suggests the following distinction between affects and feelings:

It might be a productive way to think about these sexual experiences that are rooted in a bodily experience and certain vague sensations

as affects. Affects that still needed to undergo a process of understanding to find words for them, make sense of them, and transform them into feelings that could be grasped and articulated.

This appears to be a good working definition for our purposes, too, as long as we bear in mind feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's reminder that "—you can separate affect and emotion, you even can have a rationale for doing that, but it needs to be understood as a method allowing you to do certain things and not as corresponding to a natural distinction that exists in the world". (Ahmed and Schmitz 2014, 98.)

In what follows, we will make such a methodological distinction by referring to affects as a reactive and emotions as a conscious state of feeling. For the sake of clarity, we use "feeling" only in the narrow sense of lived experiences of affects and/or emotions. We suggest that an affect can be transformed into emotion by performing emotion work. We define emotion work, in turn, as the conscious work that is performed to manage individual or collective emotions.⁸ Emotion work can be part of political work – as we will discuss in the case of the gay teachers – but also, part of intimate relationships or occupational relations (as in emotional labour).

A useful model to consider/analyse how emotions shape social structures is Ahmed's conceptualisation of affects and emotions as "sticky". With her, we argue that emotions have collectivising effects and "work by sticking figures together (adherence), a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective (coherence)". Importantly, she argues that specific emotions are tied to

⁸ Hereby, we do not follow Gould's definition of emotion work that encompasses "efforts, conscious and not" to alter one's own and others' emotions (Gould 2009, 28) but focus on conscious efforts alone following our methodological distinction between affect and emotion. We consciously do not use the term emotional labour as it refers to labour which is explicitly required as part of a job or an occupation (Hochschild 1983). Emotion work, as we define it, is not limited to wage labour relations but has a more expansive meaning.

specific groups of people "through 'sticky' associations between signs, figures, and objects". (Ahmed 2004, 119–121.) We will turn to this model in analysing the group's continued emotion work throughout the 1980s.

In his research on the history of emotions of gay men and lesbian women in West Germany, Benno Gammerl (2009, 315) has argued that because of the legal reform, "the social frame of same-sex emotionality changed significantly around 1970" in Germany. We will trace how and when this change manifested in terms of fear, which was the central affect for the formation of the group of gay teachers. To conceptualise fear, historian Joanna Bourke's work points us to the mediatory role of emotions. She notes:

[E]motions such as fear do not only belong to individuals or social groups: they mediate between the individual and the social. They are about power relations. Emotions lead to a negotiation of the boundaries between self and other or one community and another. (Bourke 2003, 124).

These mediations and negations oftentimes operate by (de-)legitimising the expression of emotions by particular individuals or social groups. Bourke explains this via the example of anxiety and fear: while fear refers to an "immediate, objective threat" as opposed to anxiety's "anticipated, subjective threat", the distinction between them usually "rests on a distinction between the rational and the irrational" (Bourke 2003, 126). Practically speaking, the fearful emotional states of a dominant social group or individual would be expected to be framed as rational fear, and conversely the fearful emotional states of an oppressed social group or individual would be expected to be framed as irrational anxiety.

While affects and emotions are influenced by social structures in the ways which we have outlined, it is important to remember that emotional states

themselves remain fluid and defy simplistic categorisation. The example of fear and anxiety is an excellent one, since the German *Angst* can be translated as both, and the assessment of its expression is therefore not immediately obvious. Just as the perception and framing of affective and emotional states is connected to specific social structures, they are always dependent on their geographical, cultural, and historical contexts. In what follows, the case of the group of gay teachers will serve as an example of this mediatory role of emotions. As we will show, affects were structured by society. Through the teachers' processing of these affects into emotions, they then played an important role in changing these very conditions.

The fearful formation of the gay teachers 1979/80

As mentioned in the introduction, §175 of the criminal code criminalised homosexual acts between adult men until 1969. For teachers, a conviction under §175 of the criminal code in the FRG did not only result in the loss of their status as civil servants but possibly even a prison sentence. While the 1969 reform abolished threat of incarceration, homosexual teachers could still lose their status as civil servants. In 1973, Reinhard Koepp, a gay teacher in West Berlin, was fired after his superiors had become aware of his homosexuality. While Koepp was reinstated after protests and legal action, the question of whether a teacher would have to face disciplinary action if his homosexuality became known remained unresolved.

After two short-lived pedagogy working groups within the HAW, some of their former members set out to address the ongoing discrimination by forming a working group of gay teachers within the GEW West Berlin (Mücke 1985, 158–161). Informal meetings began in March of 1979 and sparked conversations about the experiences of gay teachers. These led to three members writing an article that was published in the *Berliner*

Lehrerzeitung (“teacher’s journal of Berlin”) in July of 1979. This article can be regarded as a founding document of the gay teachers’ group, not only because it called for official recognition of the group, but also because it already presented a public statement.

The article’s title – *Die angst des schwulen lehrers im dienst. oder das tabu homosexualität im erziehungswesen* (“The fear of the gay teacher in service. or the taboo of homosexuality in the education sector”) – highlighted the significance of fear, while the subtitle introduced the main subject of the text, the taboo of homosexuality in West German schools in the 1970s. The authors identified two reasons for the nexus of fear and taboo. First, the responsible administrations refused to take a clear and public stand against the discrimination of homosexual teachers. Second, few same-sex desiring teachers had attempted to make their same-sex desire public. The majority of them, fearing discrimination and disciplinary measures, acted as discreetly and conformingly as possible (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18–19).

In the article, this fear was illustrated through interactions with colleagues, pupils, and parents. In contrast to their heterosexual colleagues, the gay teachers remained silent about their private lives in an effort not to reveal themselves as homosexuals. This was because they feared both “general societal discrimination” and being perceived as a potential “threat” because of “finding a colleague attractive” (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18)⁹. In interacting with pupils, the article portrays homosexual teachers as both being perceived as threatening as well as being in fact threatened: out of fear of being associated with the “societal prejudice that he is a seducer

9 „[Der schwule Lehrer] hat angst davor, sich erkennen zu geben, weil er die allgemeine gesellschaftliche diskriminierung fürchtet und weil die männlichen kollegen ihn möglicherweise als bedrohung erleben. Es könnte ja sein, daß wir einen kollegen attraktiv finden“.

of boys up to a sexual perpetrator of violence”, a gay teacher would try to conceal his homosexuality (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18)¹⁰.

This prejudice stemmed from the long-standing and entirely unfounded “seduction thesis”, which posits that homosexuality emerges because young people are corrupted through exposure to same-sex orientation or literal seduction by an adult homosexual of their gender (Samper Vendrell, 16-17). If their homosexuality were to become known, however, the gay teacher would indeed be threatened by homophobic behaviour from the pupils who would make him “run the gauntlet” (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18)¹¹. Finally, parents, would perceive same-sex desiring teachers as a double threat. Firstly, homosexual teachers would fear being perceived as seducing children into homosexuality. Secondly, they would also be perceived by the parents “as an attack on their own relationship, i.e. on the institution of civil marriage” (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 19).¹²

In different constellations, the authors ultimately described the same situation – in all three interactions, a gay teacher would be “afraid to reveal himself” which would ultimately lead to the “complete shutting out of his private domain” (Ibid). The backdrop to these emotional states was an emotional regime which corresponded to the contemporary discrimination against homosexuals: the fears of the heterosexual social group – being threatened by being considered attractive by a person of

10 „Trotz der bekannten tatsache, daß kein mensch zu einem bestimmten sexualverhalten verführt werden kann, wirkt auch im schwulen lehrer das gesellschaftliche vorurteil, daß er als verführer von jungen bis hin zum sexualgewalttäter gesehen wird. Um ja keinem verdacht ausgesetzt zu sein, wird er sein verhalten gegenüber schülern übergenau beobachten“.

11 „ein spießbrutenlaufen veranstalten würden“.

12 „Das vorleben einer anderen als der heterosexuellen beziehung wird aber nicht nur als bedrohung für ihre kinder angesehen, sondern wird von ihnen als angriff auf ihre eigene beziehung, d. h. auf die institution der bürgerlichen ehe empfunden“.

the same gender, young people being “seduced” to be homosexual, the heteronormative institution of marriage being challenged – were socially accepted and commonplace. By contrast, the fears of homosexual teachers to face a variety of discriminatory experiences were considered invalid or not even considered. As the introductory quote to our article notes, this would often lead “to neurotic fears of contact towards colleagues”. (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18–19.)¹³ On the one hand, the psychoanalytical framing of this conclusion can be contextualised by the popularisation of therapy and self-therapeutic practices since the 1970s in the FRG (Tändler 2016). On the other hand, by describing the fears of homosexual teachers of contact with heterosexual colleagues as neurotic, these fears were considered irrational. This assessment builds towards the conclusion we draw at the end of this article.

Taken together, the article describes the isolation of same-sex desiring teachers and the invisibility of homosexuality as mutually dependent phenomena: the isolation of homosexuals led to individual as well as collective marginalisation and discrimination. As long as isolated homosexual teachers existed solely as an abstract collective joined through sexual orientation and a shared profession, the situation was deemed hopeless. The fear that gay teachers felt on the job was identified as both the consequence of discrimination and the main obstacle to overcoming it. As the crucial first step to address and overcome the problem, the article designated the confession of a collective gay identity: “Make your gayness public!”¹⁴ (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 19). Notably, the article not only called on its readers to be gay in public but also fulfilled a performative act by publicly naming its three authors – Karl Dornhöfer, Jakob Hempel and

13 „angst davor, sich erkennen zu geben“; „völlige[n] verschließen seines privatbereiches“; „Diese angst führt häufig zu neurotischen kontakt- und berührungsängsten kollegen gegenüber“.

14 “Mach dein schwulsein öffentlich!“.

Detlef Mücke – and even providing phone numbers of two of them. The authors claimed that they had taken the step of making their gayness public among colleagues some years ago and reported that “fears towards gays among colleagues were removed” and that they themselves were now encountering “colleagues, the school administration and the pupils with less inhibition, less fear and more confidently” (Dornhöfer, Hempel, and Mücke, 19)¹⁵.

Five conclusions about the role of fear for the group of gay teachers can be drawn from the article, other contemporary documents, and an oral history interview with founding member Detlef Mücke.¹⁶ First, its founding members shared a fear of discrimination and a corresponding experience of marginalisation. The fear of such continued experiences and the aim to combat them was the impulse for the formation of the group (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18; Mücke 2021, 00:21:17). Hence, fear mediated between individuals and the social (Bourke 2003, 124). In the case of the gay teachers, this applied doubly. The continued structural discrimination and marginalisation of homosexuals after the decriminalisation of homosexuality caused homosexual teachers to be afraid of making their gayness public. This, in turn, led to further individualisation and invisibility. But the fear of continued discrimination also led to the formation of the group in an attempt to address and overcome it: the gay teachers organised to address their fear and its causes.

Second, the gay teachers utilised fear to make an appeal to empathy in hopes of achieving equality for themselves. In their initial public relations

work, they used rousing descriptions of the experience and conditions of homosexual teachers. At the same time, in self-organised events or negotiations with the educational administration, they presented themselves as confident and entitled to their rights. Although they did not use the framework of human rights, this mobilisation of emotions shows striking similarities to the role that Lynn Hunt has ascribed to empathy in the history of human rights. Hunt argued that “imagined empathy” served as the foundation of human rights. Similarly, the gay teachers strategically deployed pitiable descriptions of their situation to make an appeal to empathy and achieve protection against discrimination (Hunt 2008, 32; Dose et al. 1979, 22-24; Streit et al. 1980, 13; Mücke 1980, 18). Interestingly, this appeal to empathy was a contested way of messaging: some group members disagreed about the pitiful depiction of homosexual teachers, criticising “that the article conveys nothing of the self-confidence of a gay movement that is growing in strength, does not really affect the heterosexual reader, but rather urges him to pity the *poor gay*” (Schreiner 1980, 1)¹⁷.

The disagreement of the gay teachers over their public portrayal corresponds to the persistence of ambivalence as a “structural feature of gay liberation” in the 1970s (Griffiths 2021, 216). While the authors of the article depicted homosexual teachers as a fear-ridden, persecuted group in need of protection, other members of the working group would have preferred to present themselves as part of an increasingly strong and confident gay movement. Likely, this disagreement concerned both differing experiences among the groups’ members and differing opinions on how to strategically frame the public perception of the group.

15 „bei den kolleginnen und kollegen ängste schwulen gegenüber abgebaut wurden“; „anderen kollegen, der schulleitung und de[n] schülern[n] unbefangener, angstfreier und sicherer [begegnen]“.

16 The oral history interview was kindly provided to us by Stefan Zeppenfeld, who originally conducted it as part of a larger interview project by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on contemporary witnesses of union work in the FRG.

17 „daß der Artikel nichts vom Selbstbewußtsein einer erstarkenden Schwulensbewegung vermittelt, den heterosexuellen Leser nicht wirklich betroffen macht, sondern ihn geradezu dazu drängt, den »armen Schwulen« zu bemitleiden“.

Third, from the outset, internal exchanges about individual and collective experiences of fear played an important role for the work of the gay teachers. As they recount in the introduction of a self-published documentation of their group's work:

In the initial consolidation phase of the group, the focus was on the personal exchange of experiences; first of all, it was about finding out what constraints a gay teacher/educator is or can be exposed to, what reactions he has to expect from parents and colleagues, how he controls his behaviour, how pupils deal with the word "gay" and what awareness they have of homosexuality, etc. (Schreiner 1980, 1)¹⁸.

Fourth, these exchanges contributed to the consolidation of individual as well as collective identity. As the article about "the fear of the gay teacher in service" emphasized, this collectivisation was necessary to address and overcome the discrimination of homosexual teachers. The avowal of this identity can therefore be understood as both individuals overcoming fear through collective emotional work and as a mobilisation strategy of the collective of gay teachers. What Pretzel and Weiß described for the West German gay movement of the 1970s applies to the gay teachers in particular: "Becoming gay became the potential of the movement's ongoing mobilization" (Pretzel & Weiß 2017, 19–20). This practice is part of a larger tradition of consciousness-raising groups within the gay movement specifically and emancipatory movements generally in the 1970s (Haunss 2004, 203). Sharing experiences of marginalisation or discrimination allowed for a reflection and processing of these experiences and affects.

18 „In der anfänglichen Konsolidierungsphase der Gruppe stand der persönliche Erfahrungsaustausch im Vordergrund; da ging es erst einmal darum, herauszufinden, welchen Zwängen ein schwuler Lehrer/Erzieher ausgesetzt ist oder sein kann, welche Reaktionen er von Seiten der Eltern und Kollegen zu erwarten hat, wie er sein Verhalten kontrolliert, wie Schüler mit dem Wort „schwul“ umgehen und welches Bewußtsein sie von Homosexualität haben usw“.

Together, the gay teachers looked for and often found ways to deal with situations that were individually specific but collectively similar. These exchanges and discussions about problems of daily life "animated the individual often, helped him on, maybe freed him from his fears a little" (Schreiner 1980, 8)¹⁹.

Fifth, this emotional work was connected to the group's theory of change: discrimination could be overcome by gay identity politics and creating visibility. As a leaflet handed out by the group on Labour Day 1979 put it: "Gay teachers and educators! Put down your camouflage role, fight against your everyday oppression!" (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1979).²⁰

Identifying the invisibility of homosexual teachers as central to their discrimination brought both an interpretation of the experience of individual teachers and a collective solution: the group's emotion work was supposed to aid the individual's identification as gay teacher and, in turn, increase collective public visibility. Coming out as a gay teacher was meant to endow individuals with the ability to address and overcome their fears as part of a collective. The group's emotion work therefore offered not only a way to process difficult emotions, but also created meaning and empowerment for those who were willing to identify publicly as gay teachers.

19 „Auch und gerade der hautnahe Bereich des persönlichen Erfahrungsaustausches und der Diskussion von Alltagsproblemen hat in dieser Dokumentation keinen Niederschlag gefunden, obwohl er uns doch stets wichtig war und den einzelnen oft angeregt, weitergebracht, vielleicht auch etwas von seinen Ängsten befreit hat“.

20 "Schwule Lehrer und Erzieher! Legt eure Tarnrolle ab, kämpft gegen eure alltägliche Unterdrückung!"

Beyond fear? The gay teachers' emotion work in the 1980s

The gay teachers continued to centre emotion work in their activism long after their formation. In fact, it remained one of four key areas of their work together with education policy, public relations work, and networking. While sharing and processing fear remained an important part of this work, fear was not the only emotion. On the contrary, throughout the 1980s, the gay teachers actively engaged with overcoming fear and with attaching more positive experiences to the identity of being a gay teacher.

In regard to education policy, the gay teachers had two main demands from the start: a protection against discrimination and the equal treatment of homosexuality with heterosexuality in regard to curricula, educational material, the training of teachers, etc. (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 19). In negotiations with West Berlin's senator for schools, at the time the liberal democrat Walter Rasch, the gay teachers achieved a partial success in 1979. Rasch stated publicly that the homosexuality of a teacher becoming public – including themselves coming out and not being outed by a third party – was no cause for disciplinary action by the administration (Dose et al. 1979, 22–23).

For the first time in the history of the FRG, homosexual teachers had the legal security that they would not suffer legal consequences if their sexuality became public or they outed themselves. Legislative protections against discrimination were not passed, however, nor was the need for them acknowledged. Instead, Rasch reiterated that homosexuality should not be treated equally with heterosexuality in West Berlin schools (Dose et al. 1979, 23–24). After this initial, though partial, success, the gay teachers tried to influence education politics, lobbying both in West Berlin and the FRG at large throughout the following years and decade. Yet, they remained largely unsuccessful – letters to and conversations with Rasch's successors were as fruitless as addressing the Kultusministerkonferenz, the

assembly of ministers of education of the German states (Laurien 1985; Sekretariat der ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister 1985). In fact, both the demand for the equal treatment of homosexuality in school curricula and education materials and legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation were only fulfilled in the 21st century, and without direct involvement of the gay teachers.²¹ The gay teachers were more successful in gaining recognition and support from their union. After their work was initially dismissed as a purely private matter, the gay teachers successfully put forward a motion for the GEW to support the demands for an end to discrimination and the unequal treatment of homosexuality in curricula and education materials (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980, 15).

The public relations work of the gay teachers was focused on highlighting these two aims. They called attention to the discrimination of homosexual teachers and their own demands to redress the situation (cf. e.g. Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1979). Furthermore, whenever the gay teachers were in conflict – be it with politicians, the administration, or their own union – they publicised the disagreement and scandalised the other side's position as unjust in an effort to make it untenable. For example, when the chief executive of the GEW Hesse made dismissive comments about the formation of the working group of gay teachers, they wrote an open letter to criticise her position, asked her to engage with their work critically yet in solidarity, and demanded that she clarify whether she was stating her private opinion or representing the whole GEW Hesse (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980, 19–20).

21 The equal treatment of homosexuality in school curricula and education materials was ensured by a revision of the implementation regulation on sex education in Berlin school 2001, legal protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation were granted on the federal level by the Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz (AGG) in 2006.

Meanwhile, the networking activities of the gay teachers sought to encourage teachers across West Germany to organise themselves just like the Berlin working group had. At the week-long gay festival Homolulu happening in Frankfurt/Main in July 1979, they gave a workshop about homosexuality in schools (N.N. 1979). From 1980, they organised yearly meetings of homosexual teachers from all over West Germany over Pentecost with the explicit goal “to create the conditions for solidarity action and ultimately organising” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980, 6).²² The first Pentecost meeting in Hannover in 1980 closed with a final agenda point on the possibilities of forming groups of gay teachers and educators, “e.g. in emancipation groups, in the GEW”²³ (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980, 17). After a second meeting in West Berlin in 1981, the Pentecost meetings of gay teachers became an annual tradition at the Waldschlösschen Academy, a gay education centre with origins in the gay movement of the 1970s (Waldschlösschen Team 2022). During the meetings, different groups engaged with topics such as teaching materials or union politics (cf. e.g. Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980; Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1986; Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1989).

Emotion work, to which we turn next, was just as important during the Pentecost meetings of gay teachers, as Detlef Mücke, founding member of the gay teachers in (West-)Berlin, recounted in an oral history interview:

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- 22 „Unsere nächste größere Aktion – zu der ja auch diese Dokumentation erscheinen soll – wird das Pfingsttreffen für Lehrer und Erzieher in Hannover sein. Wir haben es mit Unterstützung von hannoveraner Freunden von langer Hand vorbereitet, um gerade den oft vereinzelt schwulen Kollegen in der Bundesrepublik ein Forum zu geben, auf dem sie mit uns und unter sich Erfahrungen austauschen, spezifische Probleme diskutieren, *die Voraussetzungen für solidarisches Handeln und letztlich eine Organisation schaffen können.*“
- 23 „z.B. in Emanzipationsgruppen, in der GEW”.

Besides the content-related programme, it is important to have a strengthening of the identity as a gay teacher. And everyone has to decide for himself, if he is coming out (...) but the exchange of experiences how others go their way is very, very important for empowerment. For the emancipation groups it is very important, on the one hand you need to have contents (...) on the other hand, however, the strengthening of the personality, dismantling the fears that one has (Mücke 2021).²⁴

The quote illustrates that the gay teachers’ entire theory of change – the collective enabling individuals to come out and individual coming-outs improving both individual as well as collective conditions – was based on collective emotion work. In fact, the collective of the gay teachers arguably formed through the sharing as well as processing of experiences (see Ahmed 2004, 119–21). Emotion work was tied to working on an individual and collective identity and vice versa. Consequently, both featured heavily in the Pentecost meetings of gay teachers from the very beginning: the very first agenda point of the first meeting in Hannover in 1980 addressed “experiences and behavioural possibilities to overcome our fears” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980).²⁵ Over and above that, every subsequent meeting made space in the agenda for an exchange of experiences. In the beginning of the 1980s, the focus of the emotion work was put on processing fear by coping with it and literally

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- 24 „Neben dem inhaltlichen Programm ist es wichtig eine Stärkung zu haben, der Identität als schwuler Lehrer und jeder muss selbst entscheiden, ob er sich outet (...) aber der Erfahrungsaustausch wie andere ihren Weg gehen ist sehr, sehr wichtig zur Stärkung. Für die Emanzipationsgruppen ist es ganz wichtig, einer-seits muss man Inhalte haben (...), auf der anderen Seite aber die Stärkung der Persönlichkeit, die Ängste, die man hat abzubauen“.
- 25 „Unsere Ängste als schwule Lehrer gegenüber Schülern, Eltern, Kollegen und der Dienstbehörde – Erfahrungsaustausch und Verhaltensmöglichkeiten, unsere Ängste zu überwinden.“.

aiming to “overcome” it (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1981, Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1982).²⁶

Fear also played an important role in relation to HIV/AIDS. At the Pentecost meetings, working groups were formed to discuss “personal, pedagogical, [and] legal aspects” of AIDS (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1989).²⁷ Unfortunately, no minutes of these groups’ meetings survived, but it is safe to assume that fear-centered emotional work played an important role. At the same time, the gay teachers tried to mitigate fears about AIDS publicly: in 1986, for example, they organised an information evening for teachers, educators, and pedagogues under the motto of “education instead of panic” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1986).²⁸

At times, the gay teachers also expressed anger. This was most often the case when the city’s education administration opposed their demand for the equal treatment of homosexuality in curricula and education materials. Having been met with refusal throughout the 1980s, the gay teachers wrote an angry response to an equally dismissive letter from school senator Jürgen Klemann, a Christian Democrat, in 1991. “Today, in 1991, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher (“Working Group of Homosexual Teachers and Educators”) is no longer willing to accept this discriminatory attitude,” they wrote. His letter was a “prime example (...) of prejudice and ignorance”. The senator’s refusal to allow the formation of lesbian and gay student groups could “only be

seen as ignorance or malice”. (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1991, 1f.).²⁹

Besides fear and anger, there was also joy. By the mid-1980s, the gay teachers’ collective practice of emotion work put an increasing emphasis on collective experiences of joy. Though sharing and processing experiences of discrimination remained a priority, this represented a shift away from their earlier focus on fear. As the invitation to the Pentecost meeting of gay teachers in 1986 put it:

THERE SHOULD BE A POSSIBILITY to address all the issues that are related to our existence as gay teachers (...).

THERE SHOULD BE A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING that troubles us as a “small (?), but (no longer?) radical minority” or makes us strong ...

BUT WE ALSO WANT TO EXPERIENCE TOGETHER that we are stronger together than each one alone. We want to be happy together, laugh and play together, celebrate a party, make an excursion, in short: enjoy the Waldschlößchen [sic] and its beautiful surroundings... (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1986)³⁰

26 „Verhaltensmöglichkeiten, unsere Ängste zu überwinden“; „Strategien zur Überwindung unserer Ängste“.

27 „AIDS: persönliche, pädagogische, juristische Aspekte“.

28 „AIDS. Aufklärung statt Panik. Informationsabend für Lehrer/innen, Erzieher/innen und Sozialarbeiter/innen“.

29 „Heute, im Jahre 1991, ist die »Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher« nicht mehr dazu bereit, diese diskriminierende Haltung zu akzeptieren.“; „Musterbeispiel (...) für Vorurteilsbeladenheit und Unkenntnis“ ; [die Ablehnung von lesbischen und schwulen Schüler*innengruppen kann] „nur als Ignoranz oder als Böswilligkeit angesehen werden“.

30 „ES SOLL GELEGENHEIT SEIN, alle Problemkreise anzusprechen, die mit unserem Dasein als schwule Lehrer zusammenhängen (...) ES SOLL OBERHAUPT FÜR ALLES PLATZ SEIN, was uns als „kleine (?), aber (nicht mehr?) radikale Minderheit“ bedrückt oder auch stark macht ... WIR WOLLEN ABER AUCH MITEINANDER ERLEBEN, daß [sic] wir zusammen stärker sind als jeder für sich allein. Wir wollen uns miteinander freuen, miteinander lachen und spielen, ein Fest feiern, einen Ausflug machen, kurzum: das Waldschlößchen [sic] und seine schöne Umgebung genießen...“ (emphasis in original).

Hence, there was now a new emphasis on joyful communal experiences to be “stronger together (...) happy together (...) and play together” (Ibid.). Following Ahmed’s (2004, 120) conceptualisation of emotions “sticking” to figures and objects, we suggest that the gay teachers attempted to associate their identity with not just fear, but also joy. The 1987 Pentecost programme noted that the meeting should not be “strictly work-related” and highlighted that “There will also be time for walking in the green surroundings and creative communal preparation of a party on Saturday” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1987).³¹ On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Pentecost meetings, the programme contained an “optimistic retrospection” which evidently centred a positive outlook on the past decade (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1989).³²

The emotion work of the gay teachers throughout the 1980s can be characterised by its optimistic outlook. Collective emotion work allowed them to move beyond fear and toward communal experiences of joy by 1986. The Pentecost meetings of gay teachers were an important space for networking and political work – but most of all the Waldschlösschen was a space in which gay identity, community, culture, and joy could be lived. This space was all the more important since the environments of work and politics remained challenging for homosexual teachers in West Germany throughout the 1980s. Even if after 1979 teachers in West Berlin no longer needed to fear disciplinary measures on the grounds of their sexuality, being out certainly did not put a stop to all kinds of discrimination. We would also like to stress that the situation of homosexual teachers in West Berlin was a relatively privileged one in comparison to other parts of the country and especially rural areas – arguably the joyful experiences and

31 „Allzu streng arbeitsmäßig sollte das Treffen aber nicht ablaufen (...) Zeit wird auch sein für das Wandern in der grünen Umgebung und die kreative gemeinsame Vorbereitung eines Festes am Samstag“.

32 „10 Jahre Pfingsttreffen – ein optimistischer Rückblick“.

affects accessible via the Pentecost meetings were all the more important to those most affected by discrimination.

Since affects such as fear and anger remained present in the lives of homosexual teachers, there also was continuous emotion work regarding the experience and processing of negative affects. The 1987 Pentecost programme still highlighted the need to “reduce professional and social discrimination against homosexuals” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1987).³³ The Pentecost meetings’ most important role, then, was to create a space in which positive experiences could be made and the individual as well as collective experiences of being a gay teacher could be joyful ones.

Concluding remarks

In summary, fear greatly influenced the formation of the gay teachers as the group both worked *on fear* by processing it through emotion work and worked *with fear* by consciously expressing it between 1978 and 1991. Their collective emotion work helped the individuals to negotiate and process experiences of discrimination and marginalisation as well as the corresponding affects to these experiences, primarily fear. The group pursued two strategies. In the short term, they tried to instrumentalise fear by using emotive descriptions of their experiences in their publicity work and thus creating empathy and support for their demands. In the long-term, they sought to overcome fear by processing fearful experiences and connected affects as well as identifying and coming out as gay teachers. They hence created a virtuous cycle of identity politics: increased individual and collective visibility of gay teachers was supposed to limit

33 „Abbau beruflicher und gesellschaftlicher Diskriminierung von Homosexuellen“.

and decrease experiences of discrimination, which would then enable more homosexual teachers to make their gayness public, and so on.

The gay teachers tried to empower themselves rather than focus on an appeal for protection. It is worth noting, however, that despite their focus on self-empowerment, a paradox remained within their identity politics. They called for the rights of the individual and the abstract collective of homosexual teachers in opposition to the contemporary governmental policies. In doing so, they addressed the state to provide and protect the demanded rights, therefore acknowledging its legitimacy.

Most importantly, fear had a collectivizing effect in the case of the gay teachers. From a larger abstracted collective of homosexual teachers, some of them formed a stabilised collective (Jungmann 2019, 226–227) – the working group within the GEW. The impulse for this collectivisation was the fear of continued marginalisation and discrimination; the collective stabilised itself through common emotion work. Hence, as much as emotional regimes are influenced by social structures, affects and emotions can play an important part in changing those same structures.

To conclude, we turn to the three major issues surfacing in our discussion. Regarding the productivity of the distinction between affect and emotion, we have shown that analytical distinctions – such as the one between affect as a reactive and emotion as a consciously processed state of feeling – are helpful in thinking about certain subjects. But we caution with Ahmed against confusing this methodological distinction with a binary framework of affect and emotion per se. This is especially true for historiographical research: with the possible exceptions of oral history interviews and videographic sources, the experience as well as expression of affect/emotion usually can only be accessed through written accounts and therefore in an intermediate way. This makes it difficult to differentiate between affect and emotion in historiographical research since it is

oftentimes impossible to assess whether and in how far an “affect” has been processed by emotion work into an “emotion”.

Second, as for the relation between affects, emotion work, emotions, and historical change, the example of the gay teachers demonstrates their connectedness, with social structures being an additional important factor. To weave them together in the simplest narrative: the decriminalisation of homosexuality enabled the gay teachers to openly identify as such, organise and do collective emotion work. Specifically, collective emotion work processed fear stemming from earlier and ongoing discrimination. It also empowered the members of the group to consciously adjust their emotional associations with the identity of gay teachers by increasingly centring joyful experiences instead of only processing fearful ones. Emotion work was hence inseparable from the continuous political work of the gay teachers. It enabled them to keep fighting and to successfully contribute over time to changing social and especially legal structures for the better. The processing of individual affective experience and the reframing of its meaning as part of a collective of gay teachers was key to the continuous existence and work of the group. Moreover, their collective engagement with emotions remained an important aspect of their political work, from the expression of fear in their formation, to the increasing attachment of joy to their individual and collective identities, the attempted calming of public fears about AIDS, and the expression of anger when their demands faced continued rejection of the education administration in the 1990s.

Third, while the group claimed to represent the interests of all homosexual teachers, no more than one or two dozen people organised within the group at a time. Total membership figures are undeterminable. Indisputably, however, the majority of the abstract collective of all the homosexual teachers in West Berlin did not join the stabilised collective of the group of gay teachers. For at least some if not most homosexual teachers, fear

continued to be a strong motivator to not publicise or even accept their same-sex desires until the 21st century. The fact that fear worked – and continues to work – both to keep some teachers’ homosexuality secret and to form a political group (based on its members’ openly lived gayness), demonstrates that there are no such things as positive or negative emotions but that every emotion can be productive in contingent ways. While some affects/emotions – such as fear in the case of the gay teachers – may be considered as negative, all of them and especially emotion work are productive in shaping collective, individual, and societal histories. Queer histories therefore need to continue to interrogate the workings of affects/emotions and their mutually constitutive relationship with social structures to paint a more complete picture of the histories of LGBTIQ* activism. What stories can be (re-)told, and in which ways, by paying close attention to the interplay of affects, emotions, emotion work, social structures, and historical change?

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