The emancipation of masturbation in twentieth-century Hungary

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Abstract. In this article, I discuss the emancipation of masturbation in twentieth-century Hungary, focusing on the socialist, Kádár era (late 1950s to late 1980s), which I claim was the time when the discourses concerning masturbation underwent profound transformation. I use Thomas Laqueur’s periodization of discourses on masturbation in the West and make the case that in Hungary, due to its twentieth-century political and intellectual history, which affected both the institutionalization of sexology and discourses on sexuality, there is a markedly different chronology. In Hungary, interwar socialists were the first to suggest a new approach toward masturbation but these ideas remained marginal during the Horthy regime and in the ‘Stalinist’ 1950s. In the early years of the Kádár regime, debates about sexual morality reformulated what should be understood under socialist sexual morality. The concept of socialist humanism, especially Imre Hirschler’s work, linked early 1960s sex education with the interwar socialist discourse on sex and paved the way to the emancipation of masturbation and the establishment of a post-Stalinist, socialist sexual ethics. In the 1970s and 1980s, iconic sexologists like Vilmos Szilágyi and Béla Buda moved away from socialist humanism and continued Hirschler’s work, but mirroring the perspectives of contemporary Western science.

I

As for the first love-related self-satisfactions and deviations of youths, Totis has the same extremely permissive, forgiving, almost encouraging opinion as psychoanalytical authors in general – forgetting that this is not objective sex education any more, but an excess coming from the opposite side and representing the opposite pole,
which is as powerfully destructive as the petty-minded, threat-mongering orthodox view.¹

I agree that the threats [made by adults to children] that masturbation would cause problems in the future may become reality very easily, but the extremist, exclusive wording is not convincing here. In important questions of social education, one has to use much more careful and cautious wording in texts that claim the status of an expert’s opinion.²

These two quotes, despite being thirty-two years apart, represent the standard reactions to the sex educators’ argument for accepting adolescent masturbation. The two quotes above were addressed to two eminent socialist gynaecologists of interwar Hungary, Béla Totis and Imre Hirschler. They belonged to a group of socialist doctors in the 1930s who strived for progressive sex education for the working classes in a long-spanning Christian conservative regime. Their inspiration lay both in research visits to the Soviet Union and in the ideas and sex education practice of Wilhelm Reich, Max Hodann, Magnus Hirschfeld, and other leftist experts of the German-speaking world. How did it happen that Totis and Hirschler were both criticized by intellectuals on the political left and that, thirty-two years apart, they were considered both radical and not professional enough? How could masturbation be a danger in Hungary in the 1930s and still in the early 1960s?

As for why masturbation historically appeared and then disappeared as a problem, and for a periodization of the history of masturbation in the West,³ we can turn to Thomas Laqueur’s monograph, Solitary sex.⁴ The medical discourse that made masturbation a source of all illnesses and a kind of ‘original sin’, as Laqueur documents, began in the early eighteenth century. For two centuries, sex educators demanded that adolescents stop this habit and asked parents to warn and punish their children.

Laqueur’s longue durée history of masturbation shows two major breaks challenging the dominance of the pathologizing discourse on masturbation. The first is what he calls the ‘Freudian discourse’. Freud’s theory on psychosexual development recognized a ‘pansexual’ phase in children in which attention was given to the self as there was no clear object of desire yet. Autoeroticism would arrive as a ‘natural’ stage of development, while the socialization of the adolescent into society made them control their masturbatory or other asocial

¹ Endre Illés’s book review of Béla Totis’s Az ifjúság nemi problémái, in Nyugat, 1932/4.
² István Haraszti’s reply to Imre Hirschler’s article in Pedagogia Szemle, 1964.
³ Michel Foucault’s Abnormal also provides a periodization of masturbation, focusing mostly on the biopolitical reasons for expert and state involvement in children’s sexuality. Foucault’s arguments are important for understanding the origins of the medicalization of masturbation and the state’s interest in the bodies of children. For the purposes of this article, however, Laqueur’s work is more directly relevant. Michel Foucault, Abnormal: lectures at the Collège de France, 1974–1975 (New York, NY, 2003), pp. 231–62.
Laqueur calls the second major discourse ‘liberationist’, galvanized by modern sexological research, beginning with Alfred Kinsey’s books on sexuality in the late 1940s to early 1950s. Kinsey showed that masturbation was, shockingly, a ubiquitous habit among adults as well. In 1966, William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson found that the clitoris was the source of all female orgasms, thus challenging the Freudian dogma that ‘immature’ clitoral orgasms would be replaced by the ‘real thing’, i.e. vaginal orgasms by way of intercourse in adulthood. According to Laqueur, the counter-culture of the 1970s in the West politicized masturbation and framed it in terms of sexual liberation. They radically challenged the old register of sexual deviance, especially the taboos on sexual habits and partner selection. In this paradigm, providing oneself with the gift of pleasure became a synonym for the autonomous political subject.

In this article, I will look at how and why masturbation was emancipated in twentieth-century Hungary, focusing on the socialist, Kádár era (1956–89), which I claim was the time when the discourses concerning masturbation underwent profound transformation. The intellectual and political context in Hungary points towards a markedly different periodization than what Laqueur offers for the West. The sexual politics of both the Horthy regime (1920–44) and the Stalinist regime in Hungary (1948–56) allowed neither an open discussion of masturbation, nor an institutionalized approach to sexology. It was in the early years of the Kádár regime that debates about sexual morality enabled experts and intellectuals to express a wide range of opinions concerning issues like premarital sex, promiscuity, and masturbation. These debates also served to formulate an understanding of socialist morals. The idea of socialist humanism connected 1960s sex education with the interwar socialist discourse on sex, catalysed the emancipation of masturbation and the establishment of a post-Stalinist, socialist sexual ethics.

Laqueur’s observation concerning the two major breaks in the discourses in the West does not emerge in the same way in Hungary. Proponents of socialist humanism acknowledged adolescent masturbation not simply as part of individual psychosexual development. They showed understanding to the pains of adolescent libido and saw guilt-free, responsible sexual conduct as a cornerstone of a new socialist society. In the 1970s and 1980s, a new generation of sexologists minimized the emphasis on the public, focusing more on the private: each citizen being responsible for their own happiness and that of their partner’s. In this second reappraisal, there was a marked shift towards interpreting sex in light of the latest findings of contemporary Western science. Consequently,
the emancipation of masturbation was extended to adults, linking it with learning how to find sexual pleasure. Expert knowledge was emancipatory but not liberationist and, due to a lack of sexuality-related feminist or LGBTQ activism in Kádár-era Hungary, emancipation occurred in a heteronormative context.

II

Since the first half of the twentieth century, sexual reform in both Western and Eastern Europe was largely associated with the political left. The sexual emancipation of women, the liberalization of abortion and contraception, and the decriminalization of homosexuality were all related to freeing the working class from superimposed bourgeois morals. Masturbation was part of this trend. In Sweden, the left-wing National Union for Sexual Education used sex counselling and school campaigns to fight for the de-pathologization of masturbation in the 1930s and 1940s. The World League for Sexual Reform, sexologist and reformer Magnus Hirschfeld’s initiative, attracted researchers and activists mostly from the left. Masturbation was a central topic of the 1932 meeting of the League in Brno and both the Brno venerologist Antonín Trýb and the Berlin sex educator Max Hodann emphasized that it was unthreatening. The handful of socialist experts of sexuality in interwar Hungary, inspired both by contemporaneous sexology and by a Marxist interpretation of psychology, were part of this network: Béla Totis, medical doctor and author of numerous books on sexuality, was invited to represent Hungary in Brno. Totis, in his 1931 book for adolescents (Az ifjúság nemi problémái: levelek fiamhoz – The sexual problems of youth: letters to my son) claimed: ‘medical science does not know of any physical or psychological illness that would come about as a result of onanism’, and that ‘it is the natural state of the developing person, one which almost everyone goes through’.

Sándor Schönstein, who established sex counselling à la Wilhelm Reich in a worker’s district in Budapest in the 1930s, believed that the fight for the individual’s sexual freedom needed to be linked up with socialist revolution.

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because ‘having a profound think-through of the sexual problem can in itself bring one to reject the current social order and the will to establish a socialist society’.\textsuperscript{15} Another outspoken Freudo-Marxist and the so-called ‘Hungarian Wilhelm Reich’, Béla Neufeld,\textsuperscript{16} who briefly worked at Hirschefeld’s Institute for Sexual Science, participated in the 1932 Brno conference, and in his report clearly sided with the de-pathologization of masturbation.\textsuperscript{17}

These Hungarian socialist doctors had various links to German-speaking Europe, but they also looked towards the Soviet Union as a model for sexual pedagogy, claimed that masturbation was only problematic if it endangered the social integration of a child, and that it was not the cause of mental or physical illness, but a symptom of trauma. Bálint advised parents to search for the cause rather than punish their child for masturbating.\textsuperscript{18} Neufeld claimed that Soviet youths ‘who did not know the atmosphere of sexual repression were happy and positive’.\textsuperscript{19} At the same time, in Hungary these experts were on the margins: they were socialist and Jewish. In the conservative, anti-Semitic Horthy regime (1920–44, after Governor Miklós Horthy), the dominant discourse on sex education deemed masturbation a sin and a medical danger and often linked it to ‘unpatriotic’, Jewish influence.\textsuperscript{20} The Communist Party was banned and the Social Democrats remained a small opposition party.

The mostly Jewish, often left-leaning, members of the Budapest School of Psychoanalysis\textsuperscript{21} were in high regard internationally but marginal at home.\textsuperscript{22} They held similarly progressive views. Alice Bálint, expert in psychoanalytic pedagogy, claimed that masturbation was only problematic if it endangered the social integration of a child, and that it was not the cause of mental or physical illness, but a symptom of trauma. Bálint advised parents to search for the trauma rather than punish their child for masturbating.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Established by Freud’s friend and colleague, Sándor Ferenczi. See Judit Mészáros, ‘Sándor Ferenczi and the Budapest School of Psychoanalysis’, \textit{Psychoanalytic Perspectives}, 7 (2010), pp. 69–89.
\textsuperscript{21} Mihály Bálint claimed that both the anti-Semitism of the Horthy regime and the fact that psychoanalysis was considered a left-wing activity put members of the School under immense pressure. Quoted in Anna Borgos, \textit{Holnaplányaok: Nők a pszichoanalízis budapesti iskolájában} (Tomorrow-girls: women in the Budapest School of Psychoanalysis) (Budapest, 2018), p. 260.
The growing anti-Semitism in Hungary followed by its entry into the Second World War posed a mortal threat to all these progressives. Most noteworthy members of the circle of psychoanalysts emigrated from Hungary before the war, while the socialist doctors were killed by the Hungarian Nazis or deported to concentration camps. The year 1945 therefore represents an important discontinuity in Hungary: almost all influential interwar sexual progressives were not around to see Soviet-style sexual politics materialize.

Stalinism in Hungary introduced an era of asceticism and silence on issues of sexuality, similar to other Eastern bloc countries, such as East Germany or Poland. Béla Neufeld, returning from a concentration camp, documented his disappointment with the sexual conservatism of the time in his unpublished diary.

This ‘great silence’ on sexuality in Hungary in the 1950s meant that the official line on masturbation was much less permissive than interwar socialists had imagined. A classic example of available sex education from this time is the Soviet pedagogue A. S. Makarenko, whose book on pedagogy was translated into Hungarian in 1949 and whose teachings became a point of reference for the pedagogical literature of the 1950s:

If you start telling them [the children] about the most secret details of the relations between a man and a woman, you are bound to develop their curiosity toward the sexual sphere and subsequently a prematurely excited imagination...Another important condition of sex education is the maintenance of a normal work load...A certain normal pleasant sense of fatigue towards the evening, an awareness of one’s duties and jobs throughout the day and in the mornings – all this is an important conditioning factor that develops the child’s imagination and helps them to distribute their strength evenly in the course of the day.

‘Excited imagination’ and praising the usefulness of exhausting children with work puts this squarely in the framework of a zero-sum game of sexual

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In this context, the spilling of sperm consumes energies which should rather be used for productive work.

One source discussing masturbation openly in the Stalinist era was a fifteen-page brochure for parents published in 1952, titled *A serdülő gyernek nevelése* (Raising the adolescent child). The authors claimed that ‘masturbation is extremely widespread’ and if parents and teachers keep silent about it, this improper custom would become the norm. They recommended that advice not be guided by threats or irony since ‘onanism is not an illness or sin’, but rather a symptom, or ‘sign of a certain age’ that needed to be recognized. They told parents and educators to assist in the battle adolescents were fighting because, if it ‘becomes large-scale, it drains a lot of energy which distracts one from everyday work’. Just like Makarenko, the booklet told parents to keep adolescents busy with games, reading, and sports instead.

The year 1956 marked a break in Hungary not just because of the revolution that brought an end to Stalinism, but the Kádár regime (named after the party secretary János Kádár) inaugurated a new era of sexual politics. A 1956 decree made abortion free and easily accessible, homosexuality was decriminalized in 1961, and 1967 saw the manufacture of contraceptive pills. After a decade of almost complete silence, issues of sexuality could be discussed and debated in the open, which meant that new, more permissive sexual discourses appeared and gained momentum.

Yet, the truths of interwar Christian sex educators still prevailed, and masturbation remained a problem. It took a progressive doctor, already active in the interwar era, to make the first steps toward changing the attitudes of experts and laypeople in Hungary. Imre Hirschler was a contemporary of Totis, Neufeld, and Schönstein, and even though he did not publish anything on sex education before the Second World War, as a friend of Schönstein and member of the illegal Communist Party, was one of the doctors organizing the sex education talks held for Budapest workers in the early 1930s. Hirschler, already well known as a gynaecologist before 1945, survived the war and became head of the gynaecology department of the prestigious Central State Hospital in Budapest in 1950 where he remained for twenty-five years. Hirschler’s 1958 book, *A nők védelmében* (In defence of women), became one of the most quoted and most read sex education books in Kádár-era Hungary. It was reprinted on six occasions between 1958 and 1969 and

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sold around 600,000 copies (in a country of 10 million). In 1964, the Academy of Sciences surveyed fifty-seven male university students on their sex education, thirty-two of whom said they had read Hirschler’s book.

Even though both women and men read it, the book was dedicated to women’s sexuality, as the experienced gynaecologist Hirschler believed that women were much more limited by social rules than men, and therefore, their sexual health needed more attention. Aside from arguing for gender equality, Hirschler took a humanist approach to raising adolescents. He maintained that there was no one-size-fits-all solution for every teenager boy and girl and therefore every parent needed to ‘attempt to direct the adolescents under their guardianship by a careful observation of their personalities, taking into account their individual qualities’. Hirschler added that parents should restrict their own ‘subjective point of view’ based on their own coming of age, as these might not align with their child’s sexual needs. Hirschler’s argument that emphasized the agency of adolescents rang familiar to Béla Totis, who, in 1931, had argued for ‘an individual solution that fulfils the wishes of one’s own soul’, adding that one can only be ‘one’s own guide in the maze of sexual life’. Hirschler’s view on masturbation was very clear: he stated that it was not harmful for body or soul, only when somebody experienced guilt or was being shamed. He went out of his way to address the fear that masturbation could be practised too often. He emphasized that individual differences could vary, and balanced individuals would only resort to it when needed. As no number could be associated with ‘too much’, Hirschler saw a problem with threatening youths with ‘excess’, as it could cause unnecessary anxiety.

In the final part of the chapter on adolescents, Hirschler reiterated what educators/parents needed to do: become knowledgeable in the fields of natural and human sciences; then think about their own childhood to be able to empathize; finally, aim to understand and to help, and never to threaten or shame their children. He believed that adolescents only needed to learn one golden rule: that in treating others in matters of love, they should always think about the happiness of ‘the other, of others’.

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34 In fact, the 1958 book sold out its original run of 100,000 copies within months. See review of ‘A nők védelmében’ (In defence of women), Magyar Nemzet, 16 May 1958, p. 7.
36 Imre Hirschler, A nők védelmében (In defence of women) (Budapest, 1965), pp. 17–19.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., p. 30.
39 Totis, Az ifjúság nemi problémái, pp. 4–5.
40 Ibid., p. 35.
41 Ibid., p. 36.
42 Ibid., p. 39.
43 Ibid., p. 40.
that in the new socialist society, devoid of exploitation and oppression, a ‘true humanism’ could come about in which ‘the happiness of the individual did not conflict with the happiness of other people and the interest of the whole society’.44

Lajos Székely, director of the Health Education Centre of the Health Ministry echoed Hirschler’s humanism in one of the first guidelines for school-based sex education in 1967. He emphasized that the goal of sex education was for ‘youth to view sex as an organic part of life…and to recognize in time that one’s sexual instinct needs to be controlled by reason and will and harmonized with the collectivist view of our society which is based on socialist humanism’.45 Székely shared Hirschler’s ideas when discussing sexual norms in socialist societies, arguing that in sexual relationships youths must learn to ‘respect the other person, their rights, needs, desires, intention and bodily and mental health’.46

Given its immense success, it is fair to say that a generation of Hungarians encountered sex education to a large degree through Hirschler’s work. Following the decades when masturbation was deemed sinful and a threat to (Christian) purity, a subsequent decade of near silence on the topic, and coming at a moment when the majority of experts considered masturbation dangerous, it is significant that it was an interwar socialist who inaugurated the emancipation of masturbation. Hirschler’s socialist humanism was rooted in the discourse of the interwar left; his language on mutual respect, the happiness of the individual, and the good of the collective was in line with what he had been practising in the 1930s, and thus established a continuity between interwar and post-war socialist discourses on sex. In fact, his ideas on raising adolescents as individuals with a will of their own, and his discourse of a guilt-free, natural sexuality, had a very different emphasis from Makarenko’s and other contemporaries as it was one of agency and empathy, not of authoritarianism.

III

From the historian János Rainer M.’s overview of the sixties in Hungary, we learn that the decade between 1962 and 1972 was one of pluralization and opening up culturally, economically, and also politically.47 The 1968 New Economic Mechanism was one of the most profound and radical economic reforms in the Eastern bloc.48 Hungarians were allowed to travel to the West and a general amnesty was given to many political prisoners in 1963.49

44 Ibid., p. 41.
45 Lajos Székely, ‘A nemi felvilágosítás és nevelés kérdéséhez’ (To the question of sexual enlightenment and education), Gyermekgyógyászat, 18 (1967), pp. 487–9, at p. 487.
46 Ibid.
47 János Rainer M., Bevezetés a kádárizmusba (Introduction to Kádárism) (Budapest, 2011), pp. 149–83.
48 Ibid., p. 165.
49 Ibid., pp. 165–8.
Kádárist consolidation in Hungary was very much pragmatic, focusing on improving the living standard and – learning from the rigidity of the Stalinist regime that led to a revolution in 1956 – consciously non-ideological. For the Hungarian intelligentsia of the time, the increased cultural-intellectual autonomy that allowed a plurality of opinions and a more progressive lifestyle opened up a vision of a ‘Hungarian model’ of socialism that cared both for community and individual.50

The philosopher Miklós Lehmann contends that the decade up to 1973 was ‘the most prolific era of Hungarian Marxist philosophy’.51 In his analysis, he points to two major debates of the 1960s, one on ‘alienation’ in socialism and the other on anthropology, that is ‘the place of the individual’52 in Marxist society. In both of these debates, Ágnes Heller and Mihály Vajda, both renowned philosophers and disciples of Lukács, played an important role, imagining a humanist socialism, in which the existing social alienation could be overcome.53 Heller’s most celebrated book searched for concrete ideas on how in modern socialism one could find day-to-day ideals that would enhance authentic community and work against capitalist type alienation.54 In this quest for a more humanist and less alienated socialist society, the debates also included sexuality.

Despite Hirschler’s presence, the discourse in the late 1950s remained dominated by a handful of old-style experts, including doctor István Harasztí55 and the Lutheran clergyman László Dezséry.56 The first public debate on sexual morality started in 1962 when a young writer, László Gyurkő, attacked Dezséry’s sexual conservatism.57 Gyurkő maintained that the socialist revolution and the end of economic exploitation would soon automatically bring about a positive change in sexual morality, and ethics that included pleasure not just work.58 Two other prominent pro-pleasure participants in the debate were both of Gyurkő’s generation, coming of age after the Second World War: philosopher Ágnes Heller and sociologist Tibor Huszár. They likewise argued for a liberation of sexual pleasure and

51 Miklós Lehmann, ‘Az elidegenedés- és antropológia-vita politikai összefüggései’ (The political consequences of the alienation and the anthropology debate), conference paper presented on 19 Nov. 1998 at the conference ‘Magyar történetírás a XX századról’ (Hungarian historiography on the 20th century).
52 Ibid., p. 8.
53 Ibid., p.11.
54 Ágnes Heller, A mindennapi élet (Everyday life) (Budapest, 1970).
55 István Harasztí, A nemi élet kérdései (The questions of sexual life) (Budapest, 1958).
56 László Dezséry, Lányok–Fiúk (Girls–boys) (Budapest, 1958). Dezséry also hosted a weekly show on national radio called Hétvégi Jegyzetek (Weekend notes), where he read his writings on social issues.
the right for youths to decide for themselves what was right and wrong in matters of sex.\textsuperscript{59}

The 1962 intellectual debate on sexual pleasure had an important follow-up round in \textit{Pedagógiai Szemle} (Pedagogical Review) in 1963–5. At the heart of this expert debate was István Haraszi’s 1958 book and the issue of masturbation. Invited by the editors to contribute to the discussion, Imre Hirschler debated with child psychologist István Harsányi. Hirschler targeted Haraszi’s 1962 book for failing to sufficiently de-pathologize masturbation, taking issue with the fact that Haraszi deemed masturbation as ‘usually’ unharmful and, during one’s coming of age, ‘almost’ normal. Hirschler believed that Haraszi also erred by attributing significance to masturbation in the etiology of premature ejaculation, impotence, and frigidity. Hirschler ultimately reiterated the message of his own book, citing the importance of eliminating all possible guilt surrounding masturbation.\textsuperscript{60}

Harsányi, whose views were supported by a handful of other participants in the debate, argued that ‘the goal of all sex education is to educate people so that they can live a healthy, harmonious life, which begins with shaping healthy, well-trained, solid and obedient bodies’.\textsuperscript{61} He thought that adolescents who developed in a healthy way would be much less tempted by the pernicious path of teenager sexuality: excessive masturbation, becoming sexually active too soon, and homosexuality.\textsuperscript{62} Even though Harsányi seemed to have rallied a conservative majority of sex educators, doctors, and pedagogues behind him, when Pál Bakonyi, deputy head of the National Pedagogy Institute, closed the debate, he endorsed the paradigm advocated by Hirschler instead. Bakonyi underlined that Hirschler’s argumentation on masturbation was ‘logical’ in that it was mainly the guilt that led to harm and not masturbation itself; he called for a more concrete set of explanations and guidance for teachers and parents dealing with youth masturbation.\textsuperscript{63}

By 1965, after a round of public intellectual and expert debates, it was clear that a new wave of thinking had emerged: one that supported the principle of pleasure-seeking in sex, that looked at the necessity of teen masturbation with great understanding, and that sought to pass the baton to adolescents in determining their own sexual ethics.


\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.

A 1977 interview with Hirschler, already two years into his retirement, revealed much of the principles of his humanist generation. He stood by his convictions that socialist morals were not prudish and that adolescents had to face difficulties in the long shadow of bourgeois morality. When the interviewer pointed to the fact that socialist morals were at some point “ascetic”, Hirschler argued that socialism “in its essence wants to change human life so that it becomes a society of people who approve of pleasure”.64 He added that nobody had “laid down the theses of socialist morality” but that it could definitely be said what it did not stand for: “it did not believe in asceticism and sexual abstinence”.65

In this interview, Hirschler overlooked the passionate debates he himself had been part of in the 1960s, which sketched out a socialist sexual morality and sex education in Kádárist Hungary. It was the Marxist humanism of the 1960s, partly inspired by Hirschler and interwar socialist ideas on sexuality, that eliminated the asceticism that Hirschler in 1977 remembered as never having been a true socialist approach. The first steps towards a wide-scale emancipation of masturbation came from those who believed it part of a “true humanism”, one that could only be accomplished within the framework of a socialist society.

This humanist and progressive approach to adolescent sexuality had traces elsewhere in the Eastern bloc, but in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries the 1960s did not bring about similarly profound changes in expert opinion on masturbation. Igor Kon indicates that in the 1960s – after decades of silence – an article calling for sex education stirred a debate in the Soviet Union as well.66 However, the Soviet vision of sex education was rather conservative: two sex education books from the GDR were translated into Russian in the 1960s and a foreword written to one of them by the eminent sexual psychologist Victor Kolbanovsky reflected Makarenko-like aspirations: youth were to be educated away from sex and shepherded towards work and exhausting activities.67 Kon, a Soviet sociologist and promoter of progressive sex education, noted that it was the Hungarian publisher, Kossuth Kiadó that invited him to write his first book on sexology, which was first published in Hungarian in 1981,68 then in German in 1985, but only in 1988 in Russian.69

East German experts, similarly to Hungary, published a number of sex education books in the 1960s–70s but we cannot find a Hirschler-like approach to

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64 Interview with Péter Nádas, which originally appeared in Gyermekünk (Dec. 1977), pp. 10–12; the full transcript can be found here: www.elyseum.hu/nadasinterju.pdf, quotes from p. 16. For further information, see the posthumous blog run by Hirschler’s son: www.elyseum.hu (accessed 22 Oct. 2018).
65 Ibid., p. 17.
67 Ibid., pp. 96–7.
69 Kon, The sexual revolution in Russia, pp. 101–5.
masturbation. Siegfried Schnabl’s *Mann und Frau intim* from 1972 endorsed adolescent masturbation, ‘with perhaps the exception of individual cases of excessive addiction to masturbation’ but warned, ‘it would certainly be wrong to encourage masturbation. Sexuality becomes meaningful only through the love of two people.’ To choose masturbation over sex with a loving partner was perverse.71 Rudolf Neubert, who had more or less the same prestige in the GDR in the 1960s as Hirschler enjoyed in Hungary,72 in his 1969 book advised that masturbation was normal for adolescent development, but excess was dangerous, and that the ‘nervous system’ might be overexcited, which could cause damage.73 Neubert also assumed that girls, if raised well and if healthy, would not be interested in masturbation, except if ‘seduced by an overexcited girl’.74 The two leading Polish sexologists in the 1960s, Tadeusz Bilikiewicz and Kazimierz Imieliński, were similarly limited in their progressiveness: masturbation, though acceptable for adolescents, had to be avoided in excess and it was ‘immature’ and ‘unaesthetic’, needing to be replaced later by married sex.75 In Czechoslovakia, the 1960s marked a turnaround towards a more ‘normalized’ sexuality76 and a 1977 expert publication by sexologist Vladimír Barták advised men to seek an expert on abnormality if they preferred masturbation over sex, plus did not acknowledge the existence of female masturbation.77

It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive overview of expert knowledge on masturbation in the Eastern bloc,78 but the above summary indicates that Hungary, more specifically Hirschler’s humanism, was unique in at least two ways. First, it did away with the notion of ‘excess’, and thus took a leap towards de-pathologization. Secondly, it did not gender masturbation as much as in other socialist countries: female adolescent masturbation (and desire) was acknowledged and accepted. It could therefore be argued that Hungary spearheaded the emancipation of masturbation in the Eastern bloc and, importantly, this process was rooted in early socialist ideas.

72 He wrote the first, and as Donna Harsh reminds us, for a long time, the only manual for married couples in 1957, which was then republished twenty-one times. See Donna Harsh, *Revenge of the domestic: women, the family and communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton, NJ, 2007), p. 134.
74 Ibid., p. 81.
75 Jarska, ‘Modern marriage and the culture of sexuality’.
In 1973, a handful of disciples of the Marxist philosopher György Lukács, including Ágnes Heller and Mihály Vajda, were officially banned from doing research and participating in public debates. As these philosophers were at the centre of the key debates (including the one on sexuality), this state ban marked the end of the 1960s in Hungary. The 1973 crackdown on Heller, Vajda, and others was part of a conservative backlash that slowed down economic and social reforms as part of Kádár’s more cautious politics in the early 1970s, which was somewhat related to the invasion of Czechoslovakia. This turnaround meant that the Party lost interest in and toleration of Marxist humanism or calls for plurality within Marxist thought. Instead, the regime supported a gradual turn towards consumerism, individualization, and depoliticization. Hungarian society in the coming years would increasingly focus on ‘tending to their gardens’, living a less political life, caring for private happiness, which was guaranteed by economic security, the relative freedom of movement, and hopes of ‘catching up’ with the West. These political changes were reflected in the discourse on sexuality as well.

In 1972, a young psychiatrist Béla Buda published a book with the ambitious title, A szexualitás modern elmélete (The modern theory of sexuality), which provided an overview of the contemporaneous state of sexology both in Hungary and abroad. Buda painted a bleak picture of local research afflicted by ‘omissions’ of the 1950s and a limited access to foreign publications. Buda made it his mission to educate Hungarian experts about the advancement of sexology. He referenced 150 English-language sources out of a total of 195, yet Hungarian sexological experts from the 1950s did not make it into his sources. In Buda’s 1976 in-depth article on masturbation, 17 sources were English-language, 11 German (only 2 from East Germany), while 3 out of the 4 Hungarian references were his own publications. Buda relied on Western sources in all his publications, arguing that Hungarian sexology was lagging behind.
In August 1979, he and two other Hungarian sexologists visited the Meeting of the International Academy of Sex Research in Prague. Buda praised Czechoslovak sexology and criticized the situation at home. He demanded that the ‘two-three leading people in the field of neurology and psychiatry’ give the go-ahead for an organized sexology in Hungary. The open complaint sparked a debate in Orvosi Hetilap (Medical Weekly), and shortly afterwards institutionalization began. In 1980, the Hungarian Psychiatry Association was established and then in 1983 Buda helped set up a Sexological Working Committee within the Association.

Buda’s example is just one of several attesting to a changing of the guard. The emerging sexuality experts in the 1970s–Vilmos Szilágyi, Jenő Ranschburg, Péter Popper, or Elvira Lux—all came from the psy-sciences (as opposed to gynaecologists Totis and Hirschler, and the dermatologist and VD expert Haraszti) and as a group, at least compared to their predecessors of the 1960s, they took less interest in the struggle to define ‘socialist morality’ or ‘socialist humanism’. By turning to Western sources, they opted for a break with the past: if Hungarian sexual science was backwards, it did not make sense to go back to Hungarian classics, but rather emulate advanced schools of sexology, which in the 1970s, by and large, meant the West. Even though in the 1970s and 1980s both Czechoslovakia and Poland were regularly regarded as having exciting and advanced schools of sexology, Hungarian psy-scientists continued to focus mostly on American and West German expert knowledge.

89 Ibid., p. 43.
90 Ibid.
92 Vilmos Szilágyi, ‘A szexuális kultúra és a szexuálterápia úttörője’ (A pioneer of sexual culture and sex therapy), in Emőke Bagdy, Zsolt Demetrovics, and János Pilling, eds., Polihistória: Köszöntések és tanulmányok Buda Béla 70. születésnapja alkalmából (Polihistory: salutations and essays for the 70th birthday of Béla Buda) (Budapest, 2009), p. 112. Imre Hirschler was the first honorary president of the Working Committee, Vilmos Szilágyi its secretary.
93 In the twentieth century, psy-sciences, or psychological sciences, became primary techniques of knowledge/power in a Foucauldian sense, evaluating human conduct and ‘disciplining human difference’. See Nikolas Rose, Inventing our selves: psychology, power, personhood (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 13 and 105.
95 For the achievements of Czechoslovak sexology under communism, see Lišková, Sexual liberation, socialist style. For Poland, see Agnieszka Kościańska, ‘Sex on equal terms? Polish sexology on women’s emancipation and “good sex” from the 1970s to present’, Sexualities, 19 (2016), pp. 236–56.
Historians of psychology and psychiatry writing in the 1990s predominantly placed the work of psy-scientists in the Kádár era within a dichotomy of freedom versus oppression: by turning away from Soviet science and bringing in Western ideas, psy-scientists were supposedly contributing to the liberalization of the regime. Melinda Kovai challenged this narrative in her 2016 book, arguing that these experts rather abandoned the (socialist) objectives of using science for broader social change by ignoring large-scale social problems like alcoholism, suicide, and adolescent deviance. These experts, says Kovai, saw these problems as a pathology of the individual’s personality and did not link them to the social. In the discourse on sexuality, similarly, the new generation of experts seem to have abandoned the idea of transforming society through a change of sexual morality and habitual behaviour. There was no more talk about a Marxist sexuality that potentially could be less alienated than its capitalist twin.

While the Western-oriented sexological trend gained momentum in the 1970s, the emancipation of adolescent masturbation still did not meet unanimous expert approval. Leading experts, like Lajos Székely of the Health Enlightenment Centre, continued to label masturbation a ‘bad habit’, while László Dobos, a long-time sex educator, asked fathers not to let their children ‘spend too much time on the toilet, or rest for too long in the warm bed or take coloured theatrical magazines to bed’. Imre Aszódi and János Brencsán, authors of one of the most popular books on sexuality in the 1970s, A házasélet abc-je (The ABC of married life), would still ‘recommend against going into excess’ as the adolescent years were ‘the last opportunity to prepare a meaningful life, to read, to study, to improve one’s skills, to do sports’, and that masturbation would ‘steer one’s attention away’. Béla Buda himself was at points contradictory in his 1972 A szexualitás modern elmélete. First claiming that ‘in itself, the significance of masturbation is minimal’ and that ‘the natural development of sexuality is inhibited by the


98 Lajos Székely, Családi élet iskolája (School of family life) (Budapest, 1971), p. 83.

99 Dobos László, Az apák felelőssége a nevelésben (The responsibility of fathers in education) (Budapest, 1972), p. 67.

100 Imre Aszódi and János Brencsán, A házasélet abc-je (The ABC of married life) (Budapest, 1979), p. 106.

101 Buda, A szexualitás modern elmélete, p. 148.
guilt connected to masturbation’, emphasizing how natural and normal it was for adolescents to masturbate. Later in the book, however, he linked masturbation to pathologies like female frigidity and male impotence, if ‘it took place for too long or very intensively, for [many] years’. He explained, however, that this was due exclusively to psychological reasons: the fear of failure in sexual encounters and the additional taboos that one’s individual upbringing put on sexuality. Moreover, in cases of ‘excessive, too frequent, and too long-lasting masturbation’, one could become focused on the orgasm only. For men, this could mean a shorter time to ejaculation and increasingly simpler fantasies. For women, it meant that the ability to have an orgasm would be linked to the clitoris only and so ‘normal’ intercourse could never live up to masturbatory pleasures.

By 1976, Buda showed less concern about the above dangers. In his article dedicated to masturbation (Az önkielégítés – Masturbation), he argued that even if it happened ‘with great frequency and for a long period of time’, masturbation did no harm. He contended that there was no evidence of a history of more frequent masturbation in men with sexual disorders, while for women he even linked regular orgasms in coupled sex to the habit of masturbating, arguing ‘masturbation is beneficial for the sexual development of women’. Like Hirschler, Buda warned medical experts not to use the word ‘excessive’ so that adolescents did not develop unnecessary guilt and shame.

Advice sections in popular youth and women’s magazines emerged as a new and important forum for discussing sexuality in the 1970s. Even though the authenticity of the submissions can be questioned, such columns can be a useful source when looking for the dominant norms in sexual knowledge. In Hungary, most experts running such columns were medical doctors and/or sexologists. A study published in 1983 documented that 43 per cent of such health advice concerned sexuality. These columns, the study reported, had a dual function: education, as for the lack of institutionalized sexology, and entertainment, as erotic magazines were unavailable.

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102 Ibid., p. 150.
103 Ibid., p. 154.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., p. 155.
106 Ibid.
107 Buda, ‘Az önkielégítés’.
108 Ibid., p. 2903.
109 Ibid., p. 2904.
110 Ibid., p. 2906. Buda cited a more current source, the sexual psychologist Vilmos Szilágyi, as the ‘representative of modern sexual pedagogy’.
111 Eszter Zsófia Tóth and András Murai, Szex és socializmus (Sex and socialism) (Budapest, 2014), pp. 62–3.
112 Vilmos Szilágyi was a leading sexologist while Pál Veres, Sándor Székely, László Buga, and Péter Bolya (Dr B. P.) all had degrees in medicine.
A key finding of the study was that experts seemed to provide contradictory answers to the same questions. On the topic of sexual freedom of teenage girls, one doctor in *Magyar Ifjúság* (Hungarian Youth) told a sixteen-year-old that she was ‘playing with fire’ as any sexual activity with her partner would surely lead to intercourse and further dangers. At the same time, Sándor Székely in *Családi Lap* (Family Paper) told another 16-year-old to avoid penetrative sex but rather ‘satisfy her desires without intercourse’, via petting; in *Új Tükör* (New Mirror) experts advised two thirteen-year-olds to wait or to buy a book on sex education and read it ‘if they cannot wait’.

Székely, when asked about this ‘inconsistency’, referred to the ‘international sexological experience’ he drew upon, emphasized similarities (neither expert suggested intercourse to teenagers), and added: ‘basically, for sexually mature girls, masturbation should be recommended’. All in all, it seems that by the 1980s experts were not particularly bothered about the plurality of sex advice.

Advice on masturbation was similarly inconsistent. In 1983, the expert in *Ifjúsági Magazin* wrote: ‘doctors only say that masturbation is not harmful – but not that one should do it all the time! So one should resort to this makeshift solution only if one really feels the need for it.’

Doctor László Buga, expert in the rural magazine *Szabad Föld* (Free Land), was even less permissive in 1981, claiming: ‘masturbation is dangerous because it is done alone’, and telling youths if they are unable to stop to ‘go to a psychiatrist...for tranquillizers or treatment’.

Yet, when reading *Családi Lap* in 1975, youths could be reassured that ‘it has clearly and without a doubt been proven that masturbation is a normal phenomenon of sexual satisfaction and in itself does not cause any physical or mental harm’.

In 1983, Dr B. P. in *Új Tükör* promoted the excess theory once again, writing that ‘masturbation is not harmful, especially not in adolescence: it fosters psychosexual development. We only have a problem with it if it happens too often or if it is a solution for frustrations (lack of success).’

Finally, Pál Veres, perhaps the most famous ‘agony aunt’ of the time, tended towards the ‘harmless’ end of the spectrum when writing in 1982: ‘I don’t recommend pursuing any form of satisfaction until total exhaustion, this is – just like it is for any other activity – harmful. For humans, and this is true here as well, what one can do with ease will be the border [between harmful and acceptable].’

The shift in expert discourse was discernible; despite the few examples warning of excess both in advice columns and books, by the end of the 1970s, sexual modernity meant accepting the scientific fact that masturbation...
was normal adolescent sexual behaviour, not causing physical or mental diseases, rather to be encouraged than discouraged. There was one exception, however, on which both ‘progressives’ and ‘ascetics’ agreed.

V

Aside from acknowledging masturbation as essentially harmless during adolescence, both socialist humanists and the 1970s ‘Westernized’ discourse warned of one problem: masturbation coupled with homosexual fantasies or activities. Back in 1931, Totis argued that homosexuality was an ‘acquired psychological quality’:121 through masturbation, boys could fixate on the pleasure of their own genitals, which might keep them attracted to bodies similar to theirs.122 Despite these anxieties in interwar Hungary, Totis can be considered a progressive because he lobbied for repealing the law criminalizing male homosexuality. Decriminalization occurred in the early Kádár years (in 1961), but despite the change in the legal framework, experts kept presenting homosexuality as abnormal and dangerous for adolescents. Imre Hirschler repeated Totis’s arguments that homosexuality was not an inborn result of ‘hormonal disturbances’, but the outcome of ‘effects that a young person is subjected to in the course of sexual coming of age.’123 Thus, Hirschler warned, it was dangerous to masturbate with same-sex peers, as one’s first sexual experience was crucial in determining sexual orientation.124

Béla Buda linked the same argument to Konrad Lorenz’s theory on imprinting. Lorenz’s famous duck experiment, he argued, could probably be applied to humans as well, where the first sexual encounters might compel the individual to look for the same kind of excitement for the rest of their life.125 Buda linked the mechanism of imprinting to all types of ‘perversions’, including ‘fetishism’ and ‘transvestism’126 before turning to homosexuality, claiming that the ‘orgasm could be attached in an imprinting-like manner to this abnormal form of release’, adding, ‘homosexuals usually take adolescents or even smaller children as the most desirable partner or sexual object and therefore they try to get closer to them, to seduce them’.127 What Buda was saying is very much in line with other Eastern European sexologists, who at the time, according to Kateřina Lišková, tended to explain sexual deviations by way of social factors, including

121 Totis, Az ifjúság nemi problémái, p. 126.
122 Ibid., pp. 128–9.
123 Hirschler, A nők védelmében, p. 37.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid., pp. 137–8.
126 Ibid., p. 139.
127 Ibid., p. 140.
imprinting theory, while Western sexology was moving towards a biological etiology of sexual ‘abnormalities’.\(^{128}\)

Buda became more permissive later on, declaring in 1978 in *Ifjúsági Magazin* that homosexuality was not a deviance but ‘a unique version of sexual attitudes and behaviour’. Consequently, he argued, the solution to the question of homosexuality was a ‘mature, patient, non-judgemental social attitude that respects the psychological rights of others’.\(^{129}\) However, he still described it in terms of deficient psychological development: (male) homosexuality mostly a result of a distant, absent father and a controlling mother maintaining sexual taboos.\(^{130}\) He stressed: ‘homosexuality, even if we don’t see it as an illness biologically – and perhaps psychologically – is a less desirable state than heterosexuality. Therefore, preventing it is important.’\(^{131}\)

This article represented the most progressive attitude one could openly express within the confines of the existing discourse on sexual orientation.\(^{132}\) Still, it mirrored the predominant expert view that homosexuality was an undesirable occurrence, and as adolescents could be seduced, one had to make sure that masturbation was not coupled with homosexual activities or fantasies. This was the old discourse inside out: not anymore was masturbation responsible for ‘illnesses’, including homosexuality; suddenly the sexual orientation threatened the otherwise innocent act.

There was no alternative that would challenge the accepted truths created by this expert discourse. Hungarian sexology, inspired by state-of-the-art Western science, was selective in its sources of inspiration, failing to represent the ‘liberationist’ discourses. Learning about non-pathologized experiences of homosexuality directly through gay and lesbian voices was out of the question both in sexological literature and in the mass media: no gay rights organizations were formed until 1988, and even in the sex-advice columns we find very little evidence of the lived gay experience.\(^{133}\) This negative association between imprinting, early adolescent sexuality, masturbation, and homosexuality


\(^{130}\) This fully social etiology fitted the Eastern European pattern mentioned above. Interestingly, a leading Czechoslovak psychiatrist at the 1968 Prague conference, Vladimír Vondráček, tried to open a middle way by claiming that the father’s role in inheritance was social, while the mother’s was biological. Lišková, ‘Sexological spring?’, p. 120.


\(^{132}\) Aszódi and Brencsán in *A házasélet abre-je* claimed that homosexuality ‘spread via a young person coming under the influence of an older homosexual’ (p. 80). Vilmost Szilágyi, just like Buda, saw it as a botched version of psychosexual development; it was undesirable for society, as society needed more children. See Vilmos Szilágyi, *Szexuális kultúránkról* (On our sexual culture) (Budapest, 1986), pp. 284–7.

\(^{133}\) Questions on homosexuality only made it once to the sex advice column of *Ifjúsági Magazin*, and the response was pathologizing, the expert offering heterosexual relationships as the best ‘cure’. See ‘Doktor úr, kérem’, *Ifjúsági Magazin*, 20 (1984), p. 55. Judit Takács
remained part of scientific knowledge until the late 1980s and was a major exception to full emancipation: even if socialist humanists and Western-oriented sexologists contributed to a major turnaround with relation to masturbation, their association of imprinting theory and homosexual seduction with early adolescent masturbation showed no major evolution since the work of Béla Tóth in the 1930s.

VI

In the 1980s, with the institutionalization of sexology and the dawn of sexual therapy in Hungary, a further emancipation of masturbation took place: for adults, especially for women. After the ‘Sexological Working Committee’ was established in 1983 with the help of Béla Buda and Vilmos Szilágyi (Imre Hirschler receiving an honorary position), it soon organized the first major sexological conference (in 1985). One of its focal subjects was sex therapy. In the conference volume, Vilmos Szilágyi reported on the seventy-two-hour sex therapy course they put together, Miklós Tóth wrote about the latest international developments in the field, while Imre Aszódi contemplated the obstacles to introducing systematic sex therapy in Hungary. The beginnings of the institutionalization of sexology in Hungary thus went hand in hand with a growing number of psychiatrists learning about and practising the methods of modern (Western) sex therapy.

As it focused on achieving the ‘satisfying orgasm’, the advent of sex therapy affected the discourse on masturbation. One of the most important sexual dysfunctions identified by Masters and Johnson was female ‘orgasmic dysfunction’, and thus sexologists Miklós Tóth, Vilmos Szilágyi, and Elvira Lux made an effort to address the issue. Lux, a psychiatrist at the Semmelweis Medical University in Budapest, in her influential 1981 book Sexual pszichológia (Sexual psychology) was the first sexologist to create visual material focusing on the importance of the clitoris and its stimulation also notes the lack of homosexuality-related topics in the 1970s. Takács, ‘Disciplining gender and (homo)sexuality’, pp. 166–7.

134 Szilágyi, ‘A szexuális kultúra és a szexuálterápia úttörője’, p. 112. Imre Hirschler was the first honorary president of the Working Committee, Vilmos Szilágyi its secretary.


139 Elvira Lux, Sexualpszichológia (Sexual psychology) (Budapest, 1981).
during intercourse. The book, just like other publications intended for expert use was read by a much wider audience and had to be republished several times. She recommended a therapy for women to ‘dissolve masturbatory guilt’ originating in the childhood taboo of touching their genitalia. This taboo was often carried over to coupled sex and extended to their male partners. She detailed a way in which women could learn to accept clitoral orgasms and how men could (here is where the visual material became important) use their hands to rub the clitoris during intercourse.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 146–52.}

Miklós Tóth, psychiatrist in the city hospital of Szentes, published a lengthy scientific article on the female orgasm in 1983.\footnote{Miklós Tóth, ‘A női orgazmus problémája és jelentősége a terápia szempontjából’ (The problem and significance of the female orgasm from the perspective of therapy), \textit{Magyar Pszichológiai Szemle}, 40 (1983), pp. 436–51.} His complex analysis was based almost exclusively on contemporaneous English-language literature\footnote{E.g. Helen Singer Kaplan, Joseph LoPiccolo, and, of course, Masters and Johnson. Out of fifty-four references, only one was Hungarian (Buda) and three articles were from Freud.} and differentiated between physiological, technical, and experiential levels of orgasm, focusing not just on the biology (clitoral vs vaginal orgasms), but also on how women could reach an orgasm and what the experience of the orgasm meant to them and their relationship.\footnote{Tóth, ‘A női orgazmus problémája és jelentősége a terápia szempontjából’, p. 443.} In the article, he mentioned ‘masturbatory programmes’ developed by Western scientists\footnote{In Czechoslovakia, Stanislav Kratochvíl had already introduced Masters and Johnson-style therapy in the 1970s. There was one major difference: in Czechoslovakia the female orgasm had already been researched in the 1950s and the new style of therapy only meant that sexologists’ attention shifted from the social causes of female pleasure (being productive members of society) to coupling techniques resulting in orgasms. See Lišková, \textit{Sexual liberation, socialist style}, pp. 147–76.} in which negative attitudes towards masturbation needed to be eliminated for both men and women, success often depending on how quickly these attitudes changed. He even mentioned the use of erotic material in therapy for both women and men, as ‘women are stimulated just as well as men are’.\footnote{Tóth, ‘A női orgazmus problémája és jelentősége a terápia szempontjából’, p. 449. For reference, he used the article William A. Fisher and Donn Byrne, ‘Sex differences in response to erotica? Love versus lust’, \textit{Journal of Personality and Social Psychology}, 36 (1978), pp. 117–25.}

Vilmos Szilágyi published a book on sexual culture in the same year. He emphasized the importance of masturbation in treating both female orgasmic dysfunction and male premature ejaculation. For the former, he referred to Kinsey’s findings that masturbation increased a woman’s ability to orgasm, and cited the Soviet sexologist A. M. Sviadosh’s claim that masturbation therapy had already proven beneficial in treating frigidity.\footnote{Vilmos Szilágyi, \textit{Szexuális kultúránkról} (On our sexual culture) (Budapest, 1983), pp. 130–1.} As for men, Szilágyi contended that premature ejaculation often stemmed from a lack of sex education and taboos that forced youths to masturbate quickly and secretly.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., pp. 146–52.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., pp. 152–76.
\textsuperscript{143} E.g. Helen Singer Kaplan, Joseph LoPiccolo, and, of course, Masters and Johnson. Out of fifty-four references, only one was Hungarian (Buda) and three articles were from Freud.
\textsuperscript{144} Tóth, ‘A női orgazmus problémája és jelentősége a terápia szempontjából’, p. 443.
\textsuperscript{145} In Czechoslovakia, Stanislav Kratochvíl had already introduced Masters and Johnson-style therapy in the 1970s. There was one major difference: in Czechoslovakia the female orgasm had already been researched in the 1950s and the new style of therapy only meant that sexologists’ attention shifted from the social causes of female pleasure (being productive members of society) to coupling techniques resulting in orgasms. See Lišková, \textit{Sexual liberation, socialist style}, pp. 147–76.
Importantly, Szilágyi emphasized that masturbation could be the cure for premature ejaculation: practising delaying the orgasm alone was the easiest way to unlearn bad reflexes.\textsuperscript{148}

Sex therapists and sexologists around the Sexological Working Group were actively emancipating female pleasure and masturbation for both sexes. Their primary aim was improving psychosexual health and helping the sex life of the heterosexual couple. Even though Lux focused on explaining the importance of the clitoris to both sexes, she added that women should not strive to orgasm during every intercourse, because if they were always satisfied, their male partners would become less active.\textsuperscript{149} Thus, despite having done much to bring female sexual pleasure to the forefront, Lux’s goal in doing so was nonetheless geared toward making heterosexual coupled-life work better. There was no sign of a ‘clitoral sexuality’ that would exit the hetero/homosexual binary, steer away from coupled life, and put female sexual pleasure in the spotlight.

VII

In this article, I have argued that the emancipation of masturbation in Hungary that started out in the late 1950s was a product of ‘socialist humanism’ rooted in the work of interwar socialists. Imre Hirschler, the catalyst of this emancipatory process, was a member of this Freudo-Marxist group. I also showed that both the periodization and the intellectual background of the emancipatory discourse on masturbation was different for Hungary from what Thomas Laqueur observed in the West.

Instead of a wave of interwar ‘Freudian’ discourse, and then another wave of ‘liberationist’ discourse in the 1960s–70s, in Hungary we find a marginal socialist humanist discourse in the 1930s, which triumphs only three decades later, as neither the interwar Christian nor the ‘Stalinist ascetic’ regime allowed masturbation to be freed from the moral and medical stigma of the preceding centuries. The pluralization of sexual discourses in the early 1960s allowed socialist humanism to co-exist with conservative views on sex. Socialist humanism emphasized individual agency for adolescents and recommended an approach based on empathy. It differed in its arguments from both discourses that transformed masturbation in the West. First, it was not as focused on individual psychosexual development as the Freudian discourse because it regarded society as having a more profound influence on sexuality than an immediate family set up. Secondly, it emphasized that socialism needed its own sexual morality to strike a balance between individual pleasure and the good of the collective. However, unlike the Western liberationist discourse, socialist humanism did not make masturbation into one of the means of combating patriarchy.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., p. 134.
Hirschler’s work, which was mirrored later by sexologists like Elvira Lux, underscored that women’s sexual problems required more attention than men’s. Still, masturbation was not a goal in and of itself: it remained rather a milestone on the road to adult, coupled sexual pleasure.

For sexology, just like for the psy-sciences in general, Melinda Kovai’s argument stands: that from the 1970s on, experts primarily aimed at improving the life of the individual within the context of their immediate milieu, with little view of the broader, social perspective. The ideas of the New Left did not gain much traction in Hungary, partly due to censorship; local feminist discourses did not focus on sexuality, and LGBTQ voices also did not have space for public expression. The Hungarian emancipation of masturbation did not bring about changes in the discourses on homosexuality. With homosexuality only tolerated after 1961, while actively discouraged by both socialist humanists and 1970s psy-scientists, the newly emancipated practice of masturbation was markedly heterosexual. Masturbation was supposed to help prepare adolescents for adult heterosexual life, and it provided a way to treat sexual dysfunction in adult heterosexual couples. The association of masturbation with homosexual fantasies appeared and reappeared in the scientific literature as a source of danger; in fact, the old logic was turned around: it was no longer that masturbation would lead innocent adolescents to homosexual behaviour, rather it was the ‘homosexual temptation’ of adolescents that would be reinforced by otherwise harmless masturbation.

I have also argued that while socialist humanism triumphed in the 1960s, in the following decade a new generation of psychologists and psychiatrists, led by Béla Buda and Vilmos Szilágyi, turned towards contemporaneous Western science to look for arguments supporting the emancipation process already underway. In the 1980s, the institutionalization of sexology in Hungary took place in parallel with a boom in (Western-style) sex therapy, where adult female masturbation was encouraged for couples who sought a more fulfilling sex life.

What then, in light of the above, constitutes socialist morality? First, the plurality of sex education in the Kádár era points towards a deliberative answer. Experts (and officials, intellectuals, etc.) were in constant discussion, debate, and negotiation as to what moral principles should serve as the foundations of the ‘new’ socialist society. Secondly, a clear process towards de-pathologization is evident, even if in the 1960s its sources were different

150 Lišková observes a similar process in 1970s Czechoslovakia, where sexologists did not believe any more in using their science to induce social change and focused on sex therapy within the private sphere of a family that was built on strict gender hierarchy. Katerína Lišková, ‘Sex under socialism. From emancipation of women to normalized families in Czechoslovakia’, Sexualities, 19 (2016), pp. 211–35.

than in the subsequent two decades. In the end, we might agree with Imre Hirschler that nobody had a real monopoly over socialist sexual morality in Kádár-era Hungary and there were no specific theses for sexual reform; but one thing is for sure, socialist morality did not represent asceticism and sexual abstinence.