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## SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN POLISH SCHOOLS

### Abstract

The aim of this publication is to discuss the current state of sexuality education in Poland, officially referred to as “preparation for family life”. Its core curriculum is based on maintaining sexual abstinence, preferably until marriage. Hence, it tries to impose a fixed model of sexuality by providing cultural scenarios that, with reference to moral reasoning, focus mostly on the negative effects of becoming sexually active before marriage. These scenarios also tend to support traditional gender roles and point to the family as the most important part of social life. However, according to studies both experts and young people stress that “preparation for family life” is being taught in a poor manner, failing to introduce reliable, age-adjusted sexuality education. Therefore this paper points out that by trying to impose a fixed and unified model of what sex and sexuality should be, “preparation for family life” fails to take into account the conditions of late modernity, which provide both a diversity of accessible sources of knowledge about sexuality and a plurality of cultural scenarios available to young people through these sources. Consequently, this paper stresses the importance of designing a tailor-made sexuality education program which would be based on reliable information and supported by up-to-date, scientific research. Hence, it would not only meet young people’s expectations but also provide apparatuses corresponding both with young peoples’ actions and other, available sources of knowledge on sexuality. This would deliver a plurality of cultural patterns as a valuable resource to construct one’s sexual scripts.

**Key words:** sexuality education, preparation for family life, young people, cultural scenarios.

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## SEXUALITY

Regardless of the historical period, human sexual behavior has always been subject to normative control. One could argue that modernization has brought about changes (e.g. industrialization, increasing rationalization of society and expert systems) which have had a great influence on the way intimacy, as well as sexuality, are perceived today (Giddens 2008). These changes have also been associated with new forms of control. An important aspect of these forms of control has been their gathering of data about citizens. Not just economic data, but also sociological, demographic and biological data. The data was meant to be used for rational policing of societies (Foucault 1979). Hence, the institutional need to control human bodies<sup>1</sup> has facilitated the emergence of new ideas of sexuality, and the sexual revolution, as well as technological and medical development, has brought about social changes which put greater emphasis on human sexuality<sup>2</sup>. The way people negotiate and live out their sexuality has become more permissive and sexual behaviors, which were formerly treated in Western culture more as private matters, have gradually become a subject of public discourse<sup>3</sup> and the subject of social sciences and political debates (Coleman, 2008).

It is quite common to use binary juxtapositions in the discourse about sexual life. The terms used include: “good” and “bad”, “normal” and “deviant”, “psychological and social”, “natural and biological”, “nature” and “culture”, “individual” and “society”, “freedom” and “control” (Giddens 1992; Archard 1998; Waites 2005; Weeks 1986). However, one could argue that nothing is sexual in its essence. It can become sexual by attributing a sexual meaning to it (Plummer 1975). Hence sexuality is a construct, it is plastic (Giddens 1992) and can be understood not only as “sexual practices but also sexual identities and varied historical and cultural forms which sexual identities and practices can take” (Holland et al. 1998; 23). It is biology that sets the capabilities of the physical body and determines the boundaries of these capabilities. Biology, however, does

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<sup>1</sup> This included acquiring information about health, fertility, demography etc.

<sup>2</sup> This refers mainly to sociological interest, as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the works of “the founding father” of psychiatry – Sigmund Freud, sexologists such as Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft – Ebing, Magnus Hirschfeld, as well as Alfred Kinsey, Virginia Johnson and William Masters.

<sup>3</sup> Discourse is understood as ‘a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event (or person or class of persons), a particular way of representing it or them in a certain light’ (Burr 2005: 48).

not create scripts or patterns according to which people live out their sexuality. Rather, social relationships create these scripts or scenarios.

The diversity of settings in modern social life is one of the key features of late modernity, or as Bauman calls it – liquid modernity (Bauman 1992). Nowadays, social conditions offer multiple possibilities for behavior, rather than universal models or fixed guidelines (Giddens 1991). The shift, from the primary legitimization of one's basic values by tradition and religion, towards individual freedom and autonomy has also influenced the enhancement of confidence in individualism as the point of reference guiding people's actions and opinions.

Sexuality, being subject to norms and regulations, both influences and is influenced by society as a whole as well as particular human interactions and personal relationships. At a time of simultaneous pluralisation of possibilities and individualization, which is the result of people being given more 'informed choices', people are able to independently choose elements which constitute their own biographies. Consequently, sexual identities are also subject to individualization. The availability of different sources of knowledge on sexuality and the plurality of ways people can negotiate their sexuality, are used by individuals in creating and sustaining their coherent, yet revised, biographical narratives (Giddens 2001).

Gagnon and Simon (1984) provide a theoretical framework which helps specify the course of action in constructing these narratives. They argue that people, through negotiations and interpretations, follow different scripts according to which social interactions are organized. This process takes place on three different levels: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intra-psychic scripts. Cultural scenarios, which consist of general, vague, unpredictable "instructional guidelines which exist on the level of collective life", are the object of interest of those who analyze resources that young people can draw from (Gagnon, Simon, 1984: 53). Hence, a closer look at cultural scenarios could provide a deeper understanding of two main issues: what kind of information/knowledge about sexuality is provided through available sources, and who do young people consider as their 'significant others' – the normative reference groups influencing their actions. Of course these two can, but do not necessarily have to, overlap<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> This also is associated with the division between sexuality education, focused on providing information and knowledge, and sexual upbringing or "preparation for family life", understood verbatim and providing norms according stipulating how one should, or should not, behave (Długolecka in: *Feminoteka*, 2013).

## YOUTH SEXUALITY

In today's Western culture, one of the dominating cultural narratives presents childhood as a period of 'innocence and incompetence' (Archard 1998: 119). Hence some argue, that there is 'no place for sexuality in children's lives if their well being is to be sustained' (Scott et al, 1998: 702). As a result of this cultural assumption, according to which children are "non-sexual, (...) subjects without any rights or degree of competence" (Waites 2005: 14), young people<sup>5</sup> are 'protected' by adults who tend to juxtapose sexuality with the cultural idea of childhood innocence (Thomson, et al. 2004). However, as previously mentioned, today people (including youth) are offered a variety of possibilities which result in a vast number of potential choices. Hence being taught to perceive sexuality merely in "black and white" terms may result in a lack of preparation to lead a healthy and responsible sexual life (Izdebski, et al., 2011). This traditionally common neglect of youth sexuality has led to a relatively recent increase of interest by social scientists in conducting research in this area<sup>6</sup>, and the improvement of youth's sexual wellbeing is gradually becoming a public issue.

Another reason that the debate concerning youth sexuality is of vital importance is that recent studies show that the average number of adolescents who engage in sexual encounters at a younger age is rising, and that younger generations tend to present increasingly permissive attitudes towards sex, which is evident in their growing consent towards premarital sex (Wróblewska 1998, 2007, Woynarowska et al. 1999, Woynarowska 2007, Izdebski 2012). However, research also shows that young people use contraception irregularly. Moreover, legal regulations in Poland restrict access to abortion<sup>7</sup>, and the vast majority of

<sup>5</sup> As adolescence is a socially constructed transition phase between childhood and adulthood, defining it becomes problematic due to the lack of a single, fixed definition. Therefore the terms "young people" and 'youth' are used in relation to both the period of early adolescence (11–16 years of age) and late adolescence (16–19 years of age) (Kurzępa 2009: 21).

<sup>6</sup> Research on child and youth sexuality has included such topics as: maturation, sexual awareness, masturbation, sexual initiation, and sexual partners. See: Jaczewski, Radomski (1980); Kozakiewicz (1980); Izdebski (2012); Kultys (1992, 1994); CBOS (1998, 2008); Wróblewska (1998), Woynarowska et al. (1999). Recently the number of studies conducted using qualitative methods has increased, focusing on: the experience and awareness of youth sexuality and sources of knowledge concerning sexuality – Kurzępa (2009); socialization to gender roles in school – Kopciewicz, Zierkiewicz (2009); the state of school sex education – Chomczyńska-Miliszkiwicz (2002); Józefowska, (2009, 2014); sexualization of girlhood and aggression amongst girls – Stadnik, Wójtewicz (2009); sexual activity and premature parenthood: Izdebski, Niemiec, Wąż (2011).

<sup>7</sup> Since the introduction of the Act in 1993 there have been constant debates and disagreements over worldviews between the 'pro-life' and 'pro-choice' supporters (see: Matuchniak-Krasuska

contraceptive methods are not subsidized by the state and are only available to young people with a prescription.

An additional problem lies in the fact that doctors are reported to interpret the Polish law very restrictively, and often prescribe contraceptives only to adolescents of age. Younger people usually need their parents' consent<sup>8</sup>. All of the above suggests that there is a great need for educating young people about the risks and consequences of engaging in sexual activities.

### SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE REGARDING SEXUALITY

As late modernity provides both a diversity of available sources of knowledge about sexuality, and a plurality of cultural scenarios that are available through these sources, young people have a wide scope of scripts they can draw from. Also, being able to reflect upon their actions, which results from the acceptance of different cultural scenarios, young people expect knowledge to be acquired primarily at home (72.9%) or in schools<sup>9</sup> (61.6%) (Izdebski et al. 2011). Nevertheless, their expectations are often not met. Studies show<sup>10</sup> that at the beginning of this century young peoples' primary sources of information regarding sexuality were peers (69.5%), books (42.5%) and newspapers (33.3%) (Izdebski 2005). Recently, the Internet has also become one of the most popular sources of such information<sup>11</sup> (Izdebski 2011).

During the first period of an individual's life, his or her family is the normative reference group. Yet even though parents are mostly considered responsible for their children's primary sexual socialization<sup>12</sup> (Izdebski et al. 2011), actual

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1995). The latter, including feminist organizations and leftist circles, point out the hazards of the current legislation, such as the growth of the backstreet abortion industry. According to The Federation for Women and Family Planning, the estimated number of illegal abortions performed annually oscillates between 80.000 and 200 000 (Desperak 2010).

<sup>8</sup> The legal age at which a person can engage in sexual activities is 15, yet paradoxically a girl who is not yet 16 years of age needs her parents informed consent to go on birth control.

<sup>9</sup> Teachers should also be open and not ashamed to discuss intimate topics and should have a high level of empathy, assertiveness, and be knowledgeable and able to talk about difficult, controversial and even perverse topics (Kurzepa 2009: 184).

<sup>10</sup> Quantitative studies are available which provide information about the sources young people most often draw upon to obtain their knowledge on sexuality, there is however a lack of studies which would relate to the ways of negotiating cultural scripts provided by these sources of knowledge.

<sup>11</sup> In a representative study, 79.5% out of 10,016 persons, aged 18–59, used it in this sense (Izdebski 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Studies show that 59% of the society considered sexuality education a responsibility of both the parents and schools, and 34% considered it only a parental responsibility (CBOS 2007).

conversations about intimacy and sexuality within families are rather rare (Kurzępa 2009; Izdebski 2012<sup>13</sup>). As a result, parents often provide cultural scenarios which present a rather restrictive approach towards sexual behavior (Ponton 2011). As individuals get older, secondary socialization agents, such as peers, educational institutions, the media and legislators have a greater impact on shaping their sexuality (Moore, Rosenthal, 1996). When group norms become more important for the individual than family norms, an individual's identification with their sex and gender roles is enhanced (Lew-Starowicz, Długońska 2006: 236). Thus the peer group has a strong influence on individual decisions regarding sexuality, by providing knowledge and patterns which show what is and what is not acceptable in one's social circle (Wąż 2011; Kurzępa 2009: 148). Some young people however, perceive their peers as "not reliable" (Kurzępa 2009: 199), and turn to other sources of knowledge, like the media, which are said to have an enormous influence on sexuality (Moore, Rosenthal 1996; Królikowska 2009). Apart from the omnipresent sexualized images visible on television, the internet is responsible for an onslaught of sexual content (Wąż 2011: 64). This latter source, however, has its good and bad sides, both being a result of how easily accessible it is. On one hand, the Internet provides answers to various questions related to sexuality that people otherwise might not get. On the other hand, free access to pornography offers cultural scenarios which show skewed images of sex, and are often based on objectifying people and glorifying sexual experiences, while omitting their emotional component (Zabielska 2009).

While parents who fail to engage in conversations about sexuality with their children offer scenarios that present sexuality as a social taboo<sup>14</sup>, the media provides viewers with sexualized content, where sexuality is anything but taboo. Home-based sexuality education is still uncommon and trying to verify the information young people get from their peers and the Internet is a very difficult, if not impossible, task. Hence it is important to focus on sexuality education at

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<sup>13</sup> Amongst 3,200 respondents, almost one half (48.1%) declared that their parents did not talk with them about topics regarding sexuality, even though the vast majority stated that they had a very good or good relationship with their parents (85.6% with the mother and 72.7% with the father) when they were adolescents.

<sup>14</sup> Discussing possible sources from which young people derive their knowledge on sexuality, as well as cultural scenarios that these sources could present, would take more space than an article. Therefore, the chosen cultural scenarios can be considered as generalized and somewhat simplified examples, based on the results of the above-mentioned quantitative studies. There is a need to bear in mind, however, that different sources of knowledge provide a variety of possible cultural scripts.

school<sup>15</sup>, which could potentially provide knowledge in the fastest and most effective way by simultaneously granting a vast number of young people scientific, reliable and institutionally unified knowledge. Scenarios presented by means of school-based sexuality education could put emphasis on responsible ways of living one's sexual life and provide apparatuses that correspond with young people's actual behaviors, as well as with the other sources from which they draw their knowledge on sexuality.

### PREPARATION FOR FAMILY LIFE IN POLAND

Sexuality education in Poland was established by law in 1969. Its aim was to educate young people about the anatomical and biological concepts of sexual life, as well as issues related to parenthood and family. In 1973 it became obligatory under the title of "preparation for life in a socialist family" (pol. *przysposobienie do życia w rodzinie socjalistycznej*) (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2009). After numerous changes<sup>16</sup> in the following years, 1999 brought about a shift in the title and curricular content, applying *preparation for family life* to Polish schools. In accordance with international acts<sup>17</sup> and amended national legislation<sup>18</sup>, the Polish government is obliged to implement sexuality education, which has to be unbiased, religiously neutral and based on scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, since 2009 it is a non-obligatory subject<sup>19</sup>, which starts in fifth grade of elementary school, takes 14 hours per year<sup>20</sup> (including 5 hours separately for boys and girls) and is taught by a pedagogue

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<sup>15</sup> According to the WHO's and UN's' guidelines, sexuality education is supposed to provide young people with, *inter alia*, information on the current knowledge on human sexuality and the ways to prevent becoming infected with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2009). In addition they aim to build attitudes and value systems that are socially recognized as appropriate, and hence are a source of cultural scenarios.

<sup>16</sup> See: Wejbert-Wąsiewicz (2009).

<sup>17</sup> Such as: The Universal Declaration of Sexual Rights, The Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Universal Declaration of Sexual Rights, and the final documents adopted during the World conference on Population and Development in Cairo and during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

<sup>18</sup> Regulation of the Minister of National Education from February 17<sup>th</sup> 2012, Journal of Laws No. 2012 Item 300

<sup>19</sup> This means that if students who are of age (or their parents, if they are younger) decide not to take part in classes they need to give the headmaster a written statement.

<sup>20</sup> However, given the official program's broad scope and the number of teaching hours devoted to its implementation, going through the entire curriculum becomes almost an impossible task and requires the teachers to take a selective approach towards the topics discussed. Hence, very often the actual information provided is being delivered in a poor manner, failing to take into account the

who completed a supplementary course<sup>21</sup> (a university-based postgraduate course or one of the courses organized by the Ministry of Education). The official core curriculum of “preparation for family life”<sup>22</sup> can be classified according to the WHO<sup>23</sup> as type “A” (WHO BZgA 2012: 5), otherwise known as “chastity education” or “abstinence education”. It provides information based on cultural scenarios which represent a restrictive model towards sexual ethics (Kozakiewicz 1985). In terms of moral reasoning, the core curriculum – and so the available scripts – focus on the negative effects of having sex before marriage. It also supports traditional gender roles and portrays starting a family as the most important role one can have in society. This also applies to the content of the official textbooks.

All of the textbooks which currently are recommended by the Ministry of Education (including the vast majority of those which have been previously), not only fail to present up-to-date, scientific knowledge regarding human sexuality, but often are based on heteronormative and patriarchal standards (see: Chomczyńska-Miliszkievicz 2002; Wąż 2011; Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2009; Zabielska 2009; Femi-noteka 2013). The “Wandering towards adulthood” (pol. *Wędrując ku dorosłości*) series<sup>24</sup> has been subjected to a lot of criticism since it was published. Among other things, the authors openly promote using natural methods of contraception (Zabielska 2009), and marginalize preventive healthcare (Pawłowska, Synakiewicz 2015). Rather than addressing the problems youth might encounter, social reality is presented in an idealistic and wishful way, and the language used is “often moralistic and full of pathos” (Chomczynska-Miliszkievicz 2002: 28). What’s more, the authors create “a family-centered model and thus the only “right” kind

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achievements of modern science and the results of up-to-date studies on human sexuality, including gender studies (Chomczyńska-Miliszkievicz 2002).

<sup>21</sup> By the end of 2011 there were 14,578 teachers, 25% of which were not qualified to teach the subject (Feminoteka 2013).

<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that even the name “preparation for family life” indicates the emphasis on social structure and on the family as the proper/only place for sexuality (Parker et al., 2009).

<sup>23</sup> The WHO recognizes three types of sexuality education programs. The second – type “2” or “B” – referred to as “general sex education” and emphasizes different possibilities in deciding about one’s sex life. It considers abstinence before marriage as one of the options, but also highlights the importance of using contraception in those cases where people do not want to wait until marriage. The third program (type “3” or “C”), called “holistic sex education”, or “comprehensive sexuality education” shows different possibilities of sexual activity in the wider perspective of an individual’s general and sexual development (WHO BZgA 2012: 5).

<sup>24</sup> This series provides textbooks recommended by the Ministry of Education at every educational level.

of love – heterosexual love – appears in almost every context and fragment of the course books” (Suszyńska 2012: 77). The scenarios provided give the idea that “sexual intercourse takes place, or should only take place, within a heterosexual marriage” (Pawłowska, Synakiewicz 2015). These scenarios are deeply rooted in a traditional, conservative, patriarchal and heteronormative discourse, which places the heterosexual family in the centre of social life. It is important to stress that the Ministry of Education did not recommend any textbook which would provide young people with alternative scripts. This sheds light on the possible shape of knowledge presented by teachers, who use these textbooks in class.

The reported reasons why students decide to drop out of the course include situations when the class takes place very early in the morning or late in the afternoon, situations whereby students (usually dissatisfied with their previous experience) assume they will not learn anything new or useful in class (Józefowska 2009, Skonieczna 2014), and cases when teachers lack knowledge or are unable to openly discuss issues regarding sexuality (Kurzepa 2009).

Young people also stress the necessity of providing knowledge which would be based on the awareness of possible risks of engaging in sexual activity, for example the prevention of unwanted pregnancies, the development of psychosocial skills, and information about sex per se. (Izdebski 2012). Yet the sparsely available reports<sup>25</sup> that discuss the content of “preparation for family life” classes in detail (Józefowska 2009; Skonieczna 2014) reveal that actual topics discussed in class often vary from young peoples’ declarative expectations. It is not uncommon for teachers to simply screen educational videos (which present patriarchal, nuclear families) and fail to later discuss them with their students

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<sup>25</sup> “Ponton” published two reports which presented young people’s voices on “preparation for family life” (Józefowska 2009, Skonieczna 2014). The first one (2009) was based on a number of emails sent voluntarily by young people. Out of 637 emails received, 252 persons stated that they never took part in a “preparation for family life” class, while 376 attended these classes in middle and/or primary schools. The second report (2014), was based on an online survey available on [www.jakaedukacja.pl](http://www.jakaedukacja.pl) website. It included 3363 respondents aged 11–30 who took part in the study.

It is necessary to be aware of a number of shortcomings in both reports. First of all the results of both studies demonstrate a primarily negative evaluation of the classes attended, but perhaps those who find sexuality education to be on a satisfactory or good level do not feel the need to share this information with others. The second report, published in 2014, seems to be even more problematic. The distribution of sex and age of the respondents (74% of the respondents were women, and 70% of the sample was aged 21–30) does not reflect that of those students who could potentially attend family life education. Furthermore, taking into consideration the age of the respondents, the report may reflect the state of sexuality education from 10–15 years ago rather than the current one. Nevertheless both reports, due to the lack of any comparable sociological research, provide important information.

(Skonieczna 2014). On the other hand, sometimes the information provided, such as advising girls to bathe in water mixed with vinegar as a way of post-coital contraception, is based on nonscientific knowledge which not only could mislead young people, but also be hazardous to their health (Józefowska 2009: 8). Teachers are also said to disseminate myths and stereotypes concerning human sexuality. One of the biggest hazards takes place when the information provided regarding sexuality, contraception, pregnancy or even rape, are grounded in the Catholic dogma, which not only results in presenting theological concepts as scientific, sexological knowledge, but may also lead to homophobic discourses (Józefowska 2009, Skonieczna 2014).

The state of “preparation for family life” is therefore assessed as unsatisfactory not only by young people, but also by, e.g. independent sex-education organisations, sexologists, pedagogues, and pro-choice and feminist organizations. These groups suggest changing the current core curriculum<sup>26</sup> and basing it on a holistic<sup>27</sup> approach<sup>28</sup> towards sexuality. The central issue lies in the fact that the binding model of sexuality education discourse treats sex solely from a moral-religious perspective, and fails to incorporate also a psychological-sexological view<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See: The agreement concerning the dissemination of sexuality education to children and adolescents in Polish schools, signed on January 20th 2009 by NGOs, teacher unions and known scholars.

<sup>27</sup> One of the biggest concerns raised by opponents of implementing general or holistic sexuality education is that it might be a reason for a further decline in the age of sexual initiation and lead to a growth of the number of sexual encounters between young people. Although some studies show that attending sexuality education has no measurable effects on the age of initiation (Lew-Starowicz Szczerba 1995), others show that it conversely delays it (UNAIDS 1997; Zabielska 2009). Also, comprehensive sexuality education has been proven to be more effective in lowering the risk of teenage pregnancy (Kohler, et al. 2008), as abstinence-only programs pose a risk of leaving young people uninformed about issues regarding sexuality (Collins et. al 2002).

<sup>28</sup> This approach is integral to UNESCO’s strategy on HIV and AIDS prevention. Presented scripts are based on a relativistic approach towards sex and sex education, and focus not only on providing information on sexual behavior and ways of preventing venereal diseases. This kind of education emphasizes the fact that from the youngest age educating children about their sexuality can contribute towards their general development in a positive manner. For example: providing them with knowledge about the body can result in advancement of a positive body image and contribute towards building their self-confidence and help them development a feeling of responsibility (BZgA WHO 2012: 35). The available scenarios guide teens through subjects such as self esteem, mental and physical health, as well as family life and sexual decision-making.

<sup>29</sup> These axiological bases are the foundations of the contradictory sexual ethics that underlie the discussed approaches as to what sexuality education should look like. The binding model still prevails, not only disregarding other models but labelling them as bad and, using moral reasoning, depicting their possible effects as immoral. This is because the Catholic Church has in Poland a lot

(i.e. Kochanowski 2013). Hence it fails to correspond not only with today's reality and the plurality of scenarios available to young people, but also with their actual preferences. It also ignores young people's ability to act independently, as well as the available knowledge about the way they live and negotiate their sexuality.

The "preparation for family life" curriculum fails to keep up with social and cultural changes regarding sexuality, and in consequence, with young people's needs and actual behaviors, which present increasingly permissive attitudes towards (premarital) sex. Hence the scripts presented in class seem incongruent with young people's declarative needs, and their far less conservative attitudes towards sexuality.

## CONCLUSIONS

Due to the pluralisation of discourses concerning various aspects of sexuality, individuals nowadays have access to a variety of cultural scenarios in constructing their biographical narratives. Those scripts that are offered via the "preparation for family life" course (in its curriculum, textbooks, and in class) provide a normative, immutable and unchangeable idea of how young people should live their sexual life. By referring to moral reasoning, they focus on maintaining sexual abstinence and stress the negative effects of starting one's sex life before marriage, a position which is incongruent with many young people's declarative needs and their less conservative attitudes towards sexuality.

Therefore, the model of sexuality education type "A", which is binding in Poland, fails to adapt to today's reality, where multiple possibilities preempt fixed behavioral models, and the cultural scenarios which it provides poorly correspond with those offered from other sources. As a result it is often rejected and operates marginally. Hence the remaining sources of knowledge, such as peers or the Internet, play the biggest role in providing young people with cultural scenarios regarding sexuality, as they seem more compatible with young people's needs.

By getting to know which cultural scenarios people draw upon in order to negotiate their sexuality and how they influence their everyday interactions, it may be possible to provide scripts which would show ways of making responsible choices and meet young people's expectations. This could provide the basis for constant improvement at the educational, institutional and even medical levels. This in turn could bring about tangible effects, such as potential protection from

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of influence on the way sexuality is perceived and talked about. This however is a vast subject which would need to be discussed in a separate paper.

the threats and hazards to peoples' physical and mental health. This is especially important in the case of young people. Yet, the quality of information regarding sexuality presented to young people is usually assessed as poor. This inconsistency between the levels of knowledge and practice can have serious consequences for their wellbeing. Sociological research therefore ought to aim at attaining a deeper understanding of the basis of individual sexual behavior in a social context. Due to the fact that the discourse concerning youth sexuality is dominated by the voices of adults, there is a need to conduct social research which would focus on listening to young people's needs and opinions. This is especially important because, by not taking into consideration the voices of subjects that the sexuality education is aimed at, results of the programs will bring about partly ostensible actions.

Quantitative studies, though without doubt crucial in terms of getting a fuller picture of social phenomena, often fail to recognize deep meanings and subtle experiences, which are extremely relevant in the case of sexuality. Therefore it is crucial to conduct more qualitative research, which would not only provide information about who young people consider as their 'significant others' in the choice of alternative sexual scripts, but what scripts they provide and what is the impact of these authorities on the actual sexual practices and on the meanings attributed to the sexual sphere of individuals. All these points are designed to facilitate the construction of a tailor-made sexuality education program which would meet young people's expectations, simultaneously providing them with reliable knowledge based on up-to-date scientific research.

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## **EDUKACJA SEKSUALNA W PRAKTYCE POLSKICH SZKÓŁ**

### Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia aktualny stan edukacji seksualnej w Polsce, realizowanej w czasie lekcji „wychowania do życia w rodzinie”. Podstawa programowa przedmiotu oparta jest na zachowaniu abstenencji, najlepiej do momentu zawarcia ślubu. W efekcie jest on próbą narzucenia stałego modelu seksualności poprzez dostarczanie scenariuszy kulturowych, które w odniesieniu do moralnego rozumowania, głównie skupiają się na negatywnych skutkach rozpoczęcia życia seksualnego przed ślubem. Scenariusze te opierają się także na tradycyjnym podziale ról płciowych, który jednocześnie wspierają, oraz przedstawiają rodzinę, jako najważniejszą część życia społecznego, do której każdy człowiek powinien dążyć. Badania jednak pokazują, że zarówno eksperci, jak i sami młodzi ludzie podkreślają, że „Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie” nie spełnia swojej funkcji, ponieważ często nie przekazuje dostosowanej do wieku, rzetelnej edukacji seksualnej. W artykule podkreśla się zatem, że próbując narzucić stały i jednolity model tego, czym powinny być seks i seksualność, program „wychowania do życia w rodzinie” nie bierze pod uwagę realiów późnej nowoczesności obejmujących zarówno różnorodność dostępnych źródeł pozyskiwania wiedzy o seksualności, jak i pluralizmu scenariuszy kulturowych dostępnych za pośrednictwem tych źródeł. Analiza skupia się również na wykazaniu znaczenia, jakie ma „szyta na miarę” edukacja seksualna, która przekazywałaby rzetelne informacje poparte najnowszymi badaniami naukowymi. Taka edukacja nie tylko wyszłaby naprzeciw oczekiwaniom młodych ludzi, ale dostarczyłaby narzędzi, które korespondowałyby zarówno z działaniami młodych ludzi jak i innymi źródłami, z których czerpią oni wiedzę o seksualności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja seksualna, wychowanie do życia w rodzinie, młodzież, scenariusze kulturowe.