

Aneta Bołdyrew

The discourse on sexual education in the social, health and educational press of the Kingdom of Poland at the beginning of the 20th century

Piotrkowskie Zeszyty Historyczne 15, 97-116

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Aneta Bóldyrew

(Katedra Historii Wychowania i Pedagogiki UŁ, Łódź)

The Discourse on Sexual Education in the Social, Health and Educational Press of the Kingdom of Poland at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Deep changes affecting social life morality in private and public sector taking place at the turn of the 19th century in the Kingdom of Poland evoked reformatory tendencies in the publicists and intelligentsia. One of the most meaningful topics discussed during the meetings of scientific committees, congresses and conventions was, discussed later in social and specialist press, the issue of the sexual education of the young generation. From the beginning of the 20th century with the development of reformatory tendencies of morality, an important role was prescribed to this education¹. The changes in attitudes towards the enlightenment of children and youth were supposed to become the basis of new morality in sexual behaviour and social reforms. The issue of sexual education was ever present in social newspapers, health, hygiene and pedagogic newspapers at the beginning of the 20th century. The press was an important forum for exchanging views, and, at the same time, it took the role of an organizer of the movement to propagate the idea of sexual education in different social groups. The texts written by the publicists usually offered numerous postulates and reports from congresses, rallies, lectures, sexual education in other countries, and book reviews devoted to this issue (both handbooks and theoretical texts)².

¹ The article is a longer version of the text prepared for the conference *Medizin und Sprache. Die Sprache der Medizin* which took place in Magdeburg, September 19–21, 2013.

² J. Sikorska-Kulesza, „Skąd się wziął twój braciszek?” *Początki dyskusji o wychowaniu seksualnym dzieci i młodzieży na ziemiach polskich*, [in:] *Kobieta i mał-*

The propagators of sexual education agreed as far as the basic principles were concerned. They believed that due to the young generation being brought up without lies, hypocrisy and ignorance, a new society, free of the problem of prostitution, pornography, venereal diseases and infidelity would be created. In each of the concepts the basis for idealistic vision was the right upbringing of children and youth. There were different attitudes towards the topic and different ways of defining the aims of sexual education, there were different languages and tones of utterances depending on whether the author of the text was a doctor or a hygienist, a representative of a feminist group, a priest, an educational activist or a pedagogue. Many texts emphasized the need to rationalize the process of education. Teaching children and youth about sexual life was to prevent the young generation from the negative influence of „the street” and social pathologies. The old fashioned attitude towards the issues of sexual education in many families and schools was emphasized as *a contemporary way of treating those things by teachers does not stand up to criticism*³. Many texts used interchangeably the terms „to educate” and „to make aware”, although the second term was most frequently used. Making aware meant *health and hygienic teaching which is able to strengthen the influence of morale*⁴.

A dialogue concerning education on sex was the reflection of the world-view of the opponents. Just before World War I it was obvious that the issue of youth and children’s sexuality had become an important and serious problem, both in an individual and social aspect, which was worth the deep thought and careful analysis of scientists, educators and parents. At the same time, during the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, the tendency to control more strictly and teach about sexuality of children and youth became more dominant. As M. Foucault wrote, *the sex of children and youth becomes an important element of originating numerous phenomena and discourse strategies. It is possible that both children and adults were prohibited from discussing it in a particular way – it was disqualified as coarse and vulgar. But it was only the other side of*

żeństwo. Społeczno-kulturowe aspekty seksualności. Wiek XIX i XX. Zbiór studiów, ed. A. Żarnowska, A. Szwarc, Warszawa 2004, p. 26.

³ T. Męczkowska, *Bez obłudy*, „Ogniwo” 1903, no. 27, p. 648.

⁴ V. Drigalski, *Stanowisko rodziców wobec płciowego uświadamiani ich dzieci*, „Zdrowie” 1909, p. 746.

*and maybe a condition for the functioning of other discourses – versatile, anisotropic, in subtle hierarchy and clearly articulated around the whole net of authority relations*⁵.

The discussion of sexual education in the Kingdom of Poland was initiated at the turn of the 19th century by the community of doctors. The meaningful participation of this professional intelligentsia in a public debate of modernization of social relations and social changes was not accidental. From an ideological point of view it was the result of the assumption that doctors were predestined to explain the rules of functioning of all areas of social life. It was the consequence of accepting the natural sciences methodology as universal and explaining the processes taking place in the human community⁶. During the period after the January uprising in the Kingdom of Poland, doctors had the best conditions among the scientific committees. They were not censured so strictly, they were well organized and they were supported by highly qualified staff using the freedom of assembly⁷. The community of doctors in the Kingdom of Poland had a large number of hygiene and medical periodicals. The most popular and the longest in print was „Medycyna” (which appeared between 1873–1907), „Kronika Lekarska” which appeared between 1879–1907, and in 1907 it was linked with „Medycyna” and from that time on until 1918 it appeared as a weekly periodical „Medycyna i Kronika Lekarska”. There were also „Gazeta Lekarska” (1866–1921) and „Zdrowie” (1855 – to present, from 1934 under the title „Zdrowie Publiczne”)⁸.

⁵ M. Foucault, *Historia seksualności*, transl. B. Banasiak, T. Komendant, K. Matuszewski, Warszawa 2000, p. 34.

⁶ B. Skarga, *Porządek świata i porządek wiedzy. Ze studiów nad filozofią polską epoki pozytywizmu*, [in:] *Z historii filozofii pozytywistycznej w Polsce. Ciągłość i przemiany*, ed. A. Hochfeldowa, B. Skarga, Wrocław 1972, p. 17–44.

⁷ J. Żurawicka, *Czasopiśmiennictwo popularyzujące naukę w Warszawie w II połowie XIX wieku. Przegląd tytułów i problemów*, [in:] *Życie naukowe w Polsce w drugiej połowie XIX i w XX wieku*, ed. B. Janczewski, Wrocław 1987, p. 117; L. Zasztowt, *Popularyzacja nauki w Królestwie Polskim 1864–1905*, Wrocław 1989, p. 237; A. Boldyrew, *Inteligencja polska wobec problemu patologii społecznych w przestrzeni wielkiego miasta w Królestwie Polskim na przełomie XIX i XX w.*, [in:] *Człowiek, natura, kultura – studia z historii, antropologii medycyny i farmacji społecznej*, ed. B. Plonka-Syroka, Wrocław 2009, p. 345–369.

⁸ A. Boldyrew, *Czasopisma lekarskie i higieniczne na ziemiach polskich na przełomie XIX i XX w. jako źródło do badań nad patologiami społecznymi (na przykładzie prostytucji)*, „Studia z Historii Społeczno-Gospodarczej” 2011, p. 187–213.

When beginning the discussion of sexual education it was emphasized that it was useful as far as the improvement of health and morale were concerned⁹. According to doctors' views, sexual education was to propagate the right models of sexuality in the context of health. It was also supposed to become the form of prevention for venereal illnesses and prostitution. The most important task of making children and youth sexually aware was, in doctors' opinions, the prevention of degeneration of society, understood eugenically. At the same time, doctors criticized the model of education, which was blamed for the demoralization of adolescent boys from upper social groups. The inertness of the family and school environment was confirmed by the results of research conducted in 1898 and 1903/1904 among academic youth in Warsaw. The results were published in a separate book by the author of the first questionnaire, Z.J. Kowalski and in „Zdrowie” and also in „Czystość”¹⁰. The results of the research depicted the tendency to early sexual initiation among young men and a large number of venereal illness. Alarming results were the main reason for the medical community propagating the idea of sexual education. At the beginning of the 20th century the most frequently formulated aim created by the medical community was the slowing down of sexual initiation and sexual restraint up to the moment of having a family. The doctors emphasized the negative influence of the Malthusian model of social life, which propagated the marriage of men at the age of about 30. Obvi-

⁹ W.Ch., *Z towarzystwa berlińskiego higieny szkolnej. O uświadamianiu młodzieży w sprawach płciowych*, „Zdrowie” 1906, p. 835–836; G. Rozenfeld, *Wyskok i życie płciowe*, „Zdrowie” 1906, p. 109; Freund, *W sprawie seksualnego uświadamiania młodzieży szkolnej*, „Zdrowie” 1907, p. 681; M. Lischnawska, *O płciowym uświadamianiu dzieci*, „Zdrowie” 1907, p. 489; Th. Altschul, *Płciowe uświadamianie młodzieży*, „Zdrowie” 1909, p. 427; Z. Bendl, *O zapobieganiu zбочeniom seksualnym młodzieży*, „Zdrowie” 1909, p. 428.

¹⁰ Z.J. Kowalski, *Stan zdrowia i warunki higieniczne studentów Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego w świetle cyfr*, Warszawa 1899; idem, *Hygiena i etyka życia płciowego*, Warszawa 1901; T. Łazowski, K. Siwicki, *Życie płciowe młodzieży akademickiej warszawskiej*, „Zdrowie” 1905, p. 919–920, 1003–1004; 1906, p. 20–36, 75–97, 143–177; M. Michałowicz, *Młodzież szkolna w okresie dojrzewania*, „Zdrowie” 1911, p. 6; „Czystość” 1906, no. 12, p. 139–144, no. 13–14, p. 172–175, no. 15, p. 181–187, no. 16, p. 205–208, no. 17, p. 204–218, no. 18, p. 234–236, no. 20, p. 258–268, no. 21, p. 282–288, no. 22/23, p. 294–303.

ously, it did not propagate premarital sexual abstinence¹¹. Rational awareness popularized among the young generation as far as sexuality was concerned was supposed to improve the generally understood morale. The sexual education of men was to prevent prostitution and venereal illnesses, which were perceived as dangerous, from an ethical point of view, social pathologies and at the same time they were considered in eugenic categories. A characteristic feature of the articles written by doctors and hygienists was the exposition of erotic freedom of boys and young men, which was frequently called demoralization. It was also described as a negative phenomenon that high school students and university students had sexual intercourse with women from the poorest environments. The results of the research confirmed that they often paid for the erotic service of maids, workers, seamstresses, villagers, prostitutes who were paid the smallest sums of money. Both doctors and women's liberation activists drew attention to the fact that such behaviour negatively influenced the relations between sexes and between the rich and the poor social groups, between the customers and prostitutes. In 1906 W. Chodecki wrote about the hypocrisy of the elite, burdening them with responsibility for the maids' prostitution¹². Exposing this aspect of youth sexuality allowed many doctors to put more interest in the sexual education of young men. One of the aims of this education was the better treatment of women from lower social groups. L. Wenic, describing the methods of fighting with prostitution and venereal illnesses, wrote that *only the rational bringing up of children, common schools for both sexes, making the children aware of their sexuality, teaching about sexual purity next to economic and social reforms facilitating the protection of children, normalization of work, and finally equality of all, in the face of law, regardless of sex and medical help for everybody, introducing obligatory premarital medical checking, these are the only ways which can take us to the wide area of fighting venereal illnesses and degeneracy of future generations*¹³.

¹¹ A. Böldyrew, *Matka i dziecko w rodzinie polskiej. Ewolucja modelu życia rodzinnego w latach 1795–1918*, Warszawa 2008, p. 20.

¹² W. Chodecki, *Co pcha służące w objęcia prostytucji*, „Zdrowie” 1906, p. 565. See also Hananer, *Prostytucja i służba*, „Zdrowie” 1905, p. 515.

¹³ L. Wernic, *Podstawowe drogi do walki z chorobami wenerycznymi*, „Zdrowie” 1906, p. 520.

One of the most important tasks which was faced by the medical community was convincing the public opinion that sexual restraint does not cause health problems. In 1902 S. Sterling emphasized that *doctors should destroy the superstition that sexual restraint is harmful for youth*¹⁴. L. Wernic went even further and tried to convince the public that *sexual restraint influences the length of life (...), it improves the stronger development of mental possibilities and ethical rules*¹⁵. Unfortunately, the conviction that sexual abstinence is harmful for young men was very popular at the beginning of the 20th century, also among doctors. Therefore, the group of progressive hygienists and doctors paid much attention to convince, first of all, their colleagues from the medical community.

The problem of the sexual education of children and youth was mostly discussed by doctors in „Zdrowie”. They drew attention to the fact that a professional programme should be prepared for school environment mostly¹⁶. As it was already mentioned the most important element of this programme was to propagate sexual abstinence among children and youth. One of the first specialists discussing the issue was doctor K. Stróżewski who, most of all, criticized the early sexual initiation and interest in sex and eroticism created by mass culture. He tried to convince the public that young people should stay in sexual restraint until the age of 25. He thought that doctors should create the hygienic education programme including also the issue of satisfying the sexual impulse and they should take care of propagating the programme in society, especially among young people¹⁷. Doctor Z. Srebrny, in his article which appeared in „Zdrowie” in 1905, claimed that it is indispensable that the issues connected with bodily hygiene and sexual education should appear in school curriculum. He was in favour of coeducation which, in his opinion, was a meaningful element in building proper relations between the youth of both sexes who would lose the sick interest in the sexuality of the opposite sex. He also claimed that exaggerated in-

¹⁴ The department of hospitals and poor houses. The meeting on March 7, 1902 (S. Sterling, *Kilka uwag w sprawie walki z syfilisem*), „Zdrowie” 1902, p. 488.

¹⁵ L. Wernic, *op. cit.*, p. 519.

¹⁶ W. Jezierski, „Drażliwe kwestye” w nauczaniu szkolnem, „Zdrowie” 1906, p. 569; B. Nowożycki, *Koncepcje wychowania seksualnego w latach 1904–1914 według prasy Warszawskiego Towarzystwa Higienicznego*, „Postępy Psychiatrii i Neurologii” 2007, vol. 16, z. 4, p. 345–350.

¹⁷ K. Stróżewski, *W kwestyi higieny życia płciowego*, „Zdrowie” 1901, p. 103–110.

terest of the young in eroticism could be lowered by organizing the physical education lessons in fresh air. He also postulated the tactful informing of young people about the dangers resulting from venereal illnesses¹⁸.

The model of sexual education was criticized by L. Wernic at the Convention of Natural Historians and Doctors in Lvov in 1907. The text was later published in „Zdrowie”. In Wernic’s view, the contemporary norms led to early sexual initiation and demoralization of young men which in consequence, implicated a high rate of venereal illnesses and frequent contacts with prostitutes. Wernic claimed that children, first in their families, later in the school environment, should be given competent information about procreation and sexuality, suitable for their age and sensitivity. The aim of the education was to pass concrete knowledge to children and youth but also to teach them responsibility to prevent them from prostitution and unwanted pregnancies. Wernic emphasized that, at the age of 14–16, youth should be educated as far as consequences of venereal illnesses are concerned. He assumed that school children and youth should once a week participate in lectures given by school doctors who, in his opinion, were very well prepared for discussions on hygiene and ethics of sexual life¹⁹.

Many doctors joined the issue of sexual education directly with the issue of prostitution among girls from poor groups of society. These girls were mostly visited by pupils and students. Therefore, the proper education was incorporated into the reforms postulated by the advocates of legalizing prostitution. Changing the official repressive character of the control over prostitutes depended on the efficiency of activities preventing prostitution, among them being the sine qua non condition, the system of education. Doctors from Łódź, for instance S. Skalski and S. Sterling, propagated the popularization of sanitary education, fighting with alcoholism, educational activity among the young generation and creating organizations and committees for the young (sporting, artistic) which were to guarantee a reasonable way of spending free time and prevent the young

¹⁸ Z. Srebrny, *Sprawy seksualne w higienie szkolnej*, „Zdrowie” 1905, p. 649–642.

¹⁹ L. Wernic, *O uświadamianiu płciowem młodzieży w okresie szkolnym i przed-szkolnym*, „Zdrowie” 1907, p. 455–463; idem, *Kiedy należy rozpocząć uświadamianie młodzieży*, „Nowe Tory” 1907, p. 542–547.

from demoralization²⁰. There were many controversies among doctors concerning the range of sexual education, including the problem of offering information on sexually transmitted diseases and possibilities of preventing them. Some specialists claimed that it would be too drastic to pass this knowledge to young people and it would result in keeping the diseases secret²¹.

The medical community claimed that it was necessary to develop medical and psychological research of sexuality at the age of puberty. Doctors accepted the burden of taking care of the young generation and protecting them from venereal diseases and they believed in the power of their authority. They assumed that they should educate the youth, especially propagate among young men's sexual restraint. A. Wysłouch in 1904 wrote that *in this matter doctors can do a lot as a young man will listen to them rather than priests, parents or teachers*²². It was a general opinion that there are unlimited possibilities of education in this matter.

The authors of theoretical texts directed to the medical community and educators often resorted to *quasi* of eugenic rhetoric, as well as the guidebooks or the articles written for young people. Thus W. Miklaszewski, for instance, tried to convince young people that while choosing a spouse *the choice is partially a matter of instinct and partially a matter of reasonable choice, the aim of which is to protect descendants from a genetic burden. In spite of that, you know quite well how many diseases, disabilities, and degeneration of the body and spirit passes from parents to children*²³. In his proclamation to mature young people Miklaszewski warned against the consequences of accidental sexual intercourse, calling it degeneration. He wrote about the results of diseases such as infertility and early death, and passing diseases to the future husband and children. Writing about „degeneration and fall” he emphasized: *check*

²⁰ The department of hospitals and poor houses. The meeting on March 7, 1902 (S. Sterling, *Kilka uwag w sprawie walki z syfilisem*), „Zdrowie” 1902, p. 488–489; S. Skalski, *Prostytucja w guberni piotrkowskiej*, „Zdrowie” 1906, p. 554–555.

²¹ *Wniosek do walki z chorobami wenerycznymi*, „Zdrowie” 1905, p. 153–154; *Chorób płciowych zwalczanie przez szkołę*, „Zdrowie” 1909, p. 108; Boas, *Czy płciowe uświadamianie młodzieży winno się rozciągać i na choroby płciowe, oraz zapobieganie takowym*, „Zdrowie” 1909, p. 746.

²² A. Wysłouch, *W sprawie walki z przymiotem*, „Zdrowie” 1904, p. 59.

²³ W. Miklaszewski, *Odezwa do młodzieży dojrzewającej*, „Nowe Tory” 1906, no. 9, p. 887.

*in hospitals for mentally ill, check the statistic of criminals, crimes, abuse, check the reasons for poverty or impoverishment, and you will see that all the people or their closest descendants are the victims of unawareness*²⁴. Eugenic rhetoric based on the fear of degeneration of race fostered a repressive treatment of sexuality and gave the doctors a social right to limit the freedom of an individual as far as sexuality was concerned.

While discussing scientific aims and the basis of sexual education, the people often created pseudo intellectual dialogues which, in fact, hindered understanding among the participants of the discourse. At the beginning of the 20th century the tendencies to put sexual education in eugenic categories was visible. Many texts, however, lack precision: there are no epistemological or ontological explanations concerning the core of sexual education, no rational explanation of the problem in theory and practice. This can be seen, for example, in the paper on the tasks of sexual education presented in May 1904 by P.S. Czajkowski during the session of the Łódź department of the Warsaw Hygienic Society. In the report printed in „Zdrowie” it was emphasized that the horrible state of the sexual morale of youth and the workers of a factory evokes the necessity to take up the right preventive activities. Attention was drawn to the development of academic pedagogy with the aim of fighting with „sex demoralization”. *Sexual pedagogy ascertaining negative results of sexual morale resulting from psyche, physiology and social situation, and also resulting from heritage, adjustment and constant fighting for a living by the scientific method and not by moralizing, fights with destructive power*²⁵. Writing about sexual pedagogy P.S. Czajkowski claimed that *it is based on general rules of development and on the rules of organic evolution. Those rules are thus heredity and adaptation*. He also emphasized that *sexual education begins before the child is born to this world and it is based on the self-preservation of parents before they get married, and then until the child is born*²⁶.

Similar problems connected with sexual education were mentioned by pedagogues and educational activists using in their statements similar rhetorical phrases and arguments. They emphasized

²⁴ Idem, *Odezwa do młodzieży dojrzałej*, „Nowe Tory” 1906, no. 10, p. 977.

²⁵ P.S. Czajkowski, *O zadaniach pedagogii seksualnej*, „Zdrowie” 1905, p. 81.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

in this case the preventive meaning of education which was supposed to save the youth from depravation, acquiring the wrong habits and the negative process of socialization²⁷. Many pedagogues used the achievements of doctors and they tried to popularize this knowledge among the educators by publishing it in pedagogical and social periodicals. M. Falski, among others, quoted the questionnaire conducted by Z.J. Kowalski when he was working on different aspects of life of secondary school students. In the text published in „Nowe Tory” he wrote about the sexual life of the young, about the sources of their knowledge, visiting prostitutes in the brothels, street prostitutes – so called „streetwalkers”, peasant girls.²⁸ M. Falski’s article, just like the books, brochures or journalistic texts by I. Moszczeńska devoted to the problems of sexual education, were pioneering for this topic. They opened an area for discussion of the topics connected with sexuality of the young and a space for educational activities connected with this and opposing preservative tendencies and tabooing of the issue by some of the representatives of school education who claimed it was immoral.

In pedagogical texts the model of sexual education became an important holistic element of the educational model. It was emphasized that the aim of educating children and youth should be the versatile development of personality of the educated child and preparing him or her for a creative and independent life in an ever changing society. The rule of responsibility for attitude towards sexuality became one of social competence which was suppose to be developed all the time. The pedagogues drew attention to the fact that sexual education is an integral part of general education, its aim is to pass on the knowledge of physiology and sexuality and to shape the right morale and ethics. In the opinion of educators and teachers the aim of sexual education was not only providing information but also educating. Therefore, in the pedagogues’ texts the general educational aspect was mostly emphasized²⁹.

²⁷ W. Jezierski, „Drażliwe kwestje” w nauczaniu szkolnym, „Nowe Tory” 1906, no. 3, p. 291–295.

²⁸ M. Falski, *Niektóre dane z życia młodzieży szkół średnich*, „Nowe Tory” 1906, no. 8, p. 867–878.

²⁹ *Zagadnienie płciowe w wychowaniu*, „Nowe Tory” 1911, no. 1, p. 59–63.

The joint responsibility of family and school for the education of children and youth in this aspect was emphasized by pedagogues³⁰. Just like doctors, the pedagogues promoted the idea of sexual restraint which was supported by religious, ethic, social and medical arguments. The newspapers frequently emphasized the necessity to transfer theoreticians' ideas into pedagogical practice and working out the methods and didactic means necessary for introducing sexual education in a school and family environment. Attention was drawn to individual features of a child, his or her social predispositions, especially in the case of children and younger people³¹.

Educational and social activists stressed not only the individual but also the social dimension of sexual education. In „Głos” in 1904 it was written: *Sexual education should originate, or rather a child should be prepared for it, much earlier than one can mention making a child sexually aware. It is based on creating strong and wide social instincts*³². L. Krzywicki in „Prawda” stigmatized the „strange prudery” of parents in making youth sexually aware, which led to the situation when *a girl discovers physiological secrets when she gets married*³³. In 1904 in „Głos” the opinion of the opponents of sexual education was criticized as they claimed that sexual education influenced an aroused libido. It was stressed that libido was evoked by biology rather than education or cultural environment so making the young people more aware did not evoke the sex drive. Besides, it was emphasized that treating sexual drive in categories of *incurable disease of humanity* or treating it as a sin or downfall is an anachronism which is deeply rooted in the *official asceticism of the Catholic church*. Passing knowledge to children, both boys and girls, was perceived as a necessary condition of an upbringing that allowed one to fully realize one's humanity. It was stressed that one needed to take care of the intellectual and ethical development of a child, hoping that it would shape his proper personality *then libido will be expressed in an adequate way*. At the same time, in the case of educating boys, it was necessary to imbue in them that prostitution was a disgraceful thing. *Let us teach them most of all the*

³⁰ *W sprawie uświadomienia*, „Nowe Tory” 1909, no. 4, p. 328–334.

³¹ *Jak uświadomiłam moją dziesięcioletnią córeczkę?*, „Nowe Tory” 1909, no. 1, p. 46–60.

³² *Z królestwa obłudy*, „Głos” 1904, no. 23, p. 357.

³³ K.R. Żywicki, *Spółczesność a młodzież*, „Prawda” 1900, no. 42, p. 499.

*willingness, skills and the power to control their instincts; then let us teach them aversion to all kinds of slavery, humiliation of human dignity. Let us develop in them the awareness that using poverty or ignorance should evoke horror in them and they should flush with shame*³⁴. It was ironically written that avoiding discussions with growing children about sexuality leads to indifference in the face of those problems, treating prostitution in categories of an „emergency exit”. The text was concluded with the statement: *you must agree that in such a case the greater burdock and the stork are the best solutions to the problem*³⁵.

At the beginning of the 20th century, translations of foreign guidebooks directed to parents and books directed to children themselves appeared on the Polish publishing market, which were devoted to the issues of procreation. Pedagogues and teachers in social and professional periodicals published reviews of such books discussing their content³⁶. The Polish publication of E. Ethelmer's book entitled *Skąd się wziął twój braciszek* evoked much interest. T. Męczkowska's review was published in „Ogniwo”; she stressed there the importance of the book claiming that it was perfect material facilitating work for those mothers and educators *who in fact agree that the matters should be made clear but they cannot cope with the form in which they should do it*³⁷. The same year the review of E. Ethelmer's book was published in „Przegląd Pedagogiczny”³⁸. The book by M. Oker-Blom entitled *Na wsi u wuja doktora* was described in 1906 in „Nowe Tory”. The book was to help in teaching sexual education to the youngest children, explaining the rules of physiology and the ways of reproduction of organisms in the world of animals and plants³⁹.

³⁴ *Z królestwa obtudy*, „Głos” 1904, no. 23, p. 357.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ T. Jaroszyński (review) A. Moll, *O uświadamianiu płciowym*, „Nowe Tory” 1909, no. 5, p. 458–459.

³⁷ T. Męczkowska, *op. cit.*, p. 648.

³⁸ I.M. (review), E. Ethelmer, *Skąd się wziął twój braciszek?*, „Przegląd Pedagogiczny” 1903, no. 12, p. 152. Cf. S. Kopeczyński (review), *Czy szkoła ma za zadanie uświadamiać młodzież w sprawie stosunków płciowych?*, „Przegląd Pedagogiczny” 1905, no. 14/15, p. 199.

³⁹ M. Oker-Blom, *Na wsi u wuja doktora*, Warszawa 1906. See also the review of the book – „Nowe Tory” 1906, no. 8, p. 831–832.

In pedagogical periodicals reports from scientific meetings were also published, in which the issue of sexual education was discussed. M. Laskowiczówna in „Nowe Tory” discussed the third International Congress for School Hygiene which was organized in Paris on August 2–6, 1910. During the plenary discussion the issue of sexual education was mentioned. Laskowiczówna reported on these issues stressing that during the conference the opinions of those participants who perceived sexual education as one of the most meaningful and most difficult in educating youth dominated. They also claimed that the discussion of doctors and teachers is indispensable. At the same time, she noticed that many participants ignored the problem of sexual education. Commenting on the opinions reflected in the French press criticizing the issue, Laskowiczówna wrote: *Those facts together with the flexible mood of representatives of Paris, discrete silence, fear to call the things by name, touching the painful wounds, show how important the need is to begin rational sexual education*⁴⁰.

The issue of the sexual education of the young generation was considered as extremely important, especially by the representatives of female activists. In the opinion of radical female activists, the basic aim of sexual education should be the creation of „new morality” rejecting relativism in the sexual behaviour of women and men and leading to mental transformations and moral changes in relations between sexes. The condition *sine qua non* of changing the attitude of men towards women was supposed to be the right sexual behaviour of children from their youngest age. According to suffragettes, traditional patterns of female and male sexuality, obligatory norms, accepting standards of morality which are different for both sexes, and the lack of educational activities – all the conditions became the reason for many pathologies in family and social life. In the opinion of suffragettes, the common belief that women should satisfy men was the main reason why women were in a subject position, also sexually. It also became the reason for social acceptance of prostitution, sexual freedom of young men and infidelity of husbands, allowing at the same time the strict treatment of the sexuality of girls and women.

Female activists also claimed that the increase of interest in widely understood sexual education on the turn of the 19th cen-

⁴⁰ M. Laskowiczówna, *Wychowanie płciowe na III Międzynarodowym Kongresie Higieny Szkolnej*, „Nowe Tory” 1911, no. 5, p. 458.

tury was, to a large extent, their success. In the groundbreaking female press at the beginning of the 20th century it was frequently emphasized that in the previous decades the lack of knowledge of sexuality or even physiology of young women was perceived as the expression of their femininity and purity. The criticism of sexual morality made by the suffragettes created the right atmosphere for the sexual education of children and youth as well. It was assumed that female representatives are predisposed to peddle the ideas among wider groups of people.

Women involved in feminist movements were both participants and observers of the conferences during which the problems of sexual education were mentioned. Later on they published reports in newspapers for women. The problems of sexual education became the object of discussion during the First and the Second Congresses of School Hygiene in 1904 and in 1907, and also during the already mentioned Third Congress. Doctor H. Kon-Feldblum in „Ster” presented the conclusions drawn from a lecture given by doctor M. Chotzen from Wrocław drawing attention to the most meaningful points of his lecture and assessing it herself. She stressed that sexual education should begin at a very young age, and then it should be gradually and progressively constructed at the age of puberty and adulthood. She emphasized the need for sexual restraint but without exaggerated exposing of the positive aspects of absolute abstinence. In accordance with the postulates of female activists she stressed that the moment of starting sexual activity should equal with the time of starting a family.

As a doctor and an active member of female movements she agreed with Chotzen's ideas that premarital purity should concern both sexes. She emphasized that sexual education, just like all other areas of education, should be perceived as the area of the activity of family and school which should be different but complementary at the same time. In a family environment one should take into consideration individual predispositions of a child, his or her intellectual possibilities and psychological development which guaranteed the creation of a family individual system of sexual education. In a school environment it was necessary to conduct education in such a way that the methods, forms and content should be adjusted to all the pupils. The problems of sexual education should, in H. Kon-Feldblum's view, be integrated with other school subjects so not only

with biology but also religion, ethics, history and literature, and the people who were able to restrain their sexuality should be presented as an example worth following. H. Kon-Feldblum also wrote that school is obliged *before letting out the pupils to the world, to give them the clues concerning hygiene of sexual life, teach them about venereal diseases and their influence on the individual's life, teach about marriage and children, and warn the pupils against the negative results of extramarital life. This part of teaching should be done by the school with the agreement of parents*⁴¹. She recognized chatty lectures and lectures as the right form of passing on the knowledge. She also emphasized that the knowledge of parents and children should be increased so that they would be able to educate others. Following Chotzen, she stressed the necessity to teach widely and extensively during the courses about anatomy, physiology, psychology. She claimed that school hygiene and sexual pedagogy should become a permanent element of teachers' training college agenda. She also assumed that the issues of sexual education should be discussed during meetings for parents organized by schools⁴². *Everyday newspapers and literature should also give more space to this important educational issue and lead to the moment when mothers would think and debate about sexual education of their children as much as they think and debate about their feeding*⁴³.

The activists of feminist movements expected from the education of the young generation not only a passing on of a wide range of knowledge but also the development in the generation of the feeling of equality and solidarity between both sexes, mutual respect, and the ability to search for individual way of life. They criticized the limits put on girls as far as teaching them about hygiene and physiology was concerned, without discussing the aspects connected with sexuality or venereal diseases, which was propagated by some specialists. The female doctors and teachers connected with emancipation movements insisted that sexual education in the case of both sexes must become a holistic educational process encompassing many areas, including the sexuality of a human being. Few activists shared Nałkowska's views that the erotic freedom of women should

⁴¹ H. Kon-Feldblum, *O wychowaniu seksualnym na Międzynarodowym Kongresie Higieny Szkolnej*, „Ster”, 1910, p. 380.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 381.

be accepted. Cutting away from radicalism they propagated a common norm for men and women based on sexual asceticism before getting married and then, mutual faithfulness⁴⁴.

Priests and publicists supporting the Catholic church in the Kingdom of Poland distanced themselves from the issue of sexual education. In Galicia and the Prussian Partition Polish priests expressed their views concerning this issue and they also discussed their own concepts and methods supporting the sexual education of children and youth and publishing publicist texts, books and brochures. In the Kingdom of Poland, for a change, priests were very reserved as far as the issue of this sphere of education was concerned. Many publications, however, emphasized the prior role of educational influence of the church and family in shaping moral and ethical attitudes, and under this category went sexual education as well. It was stressed that children and the young should be taught responsibility for their behaviour, including the sexual sphere of their life. As for biology, the prior aim of sexual education was the preparation for marriage and family duties. Catholic priests criticized the interference in the sexual life of a man, being afraid of, on the one hand propagating sexual freedom, on the other, promoting antinatalism together with Malthusianism and neo-Malthusianism.

In „Przegląd Katolicki” the demoralization of the young attending grammar school or students was frequently described and the authors regretted that the young took up sexual life so early. Without a detailed description of educational effects, it was stressed that adults are responsible for the low morale of the youth. In 1883, commenting on the close relations between grammar school pupils and actresses, it was written that *the most responsible for this situation are definitely teachers, parents and educators. We think that instead of moralizing and threatening actresses, who will be inculcated by publicists, it is more reasonable to criticize those who are interested in the good of the youth or who should be interested*⁴⁵. Quoting the research conducted by Kowalski, the authors regretted that Warsaw students have a low level of health and frequent sexual con-

⁴⁴ J. Sikorska-Kulesza, *op. cit.*, p. 40–41.

⁴⁵ *Gimnazjaliści i aktorki*, „Przegląd Katolicki” 1883, p. 288.

tact. It was stressed that the whole society should care about the state of morale of young boys in the face of maturity⁴⁶.

In „Rola” the idea of making children and youth sexually aware was deeply criticized. The editors of this periodical were highly unwilling to accept all reformatory movements, ideas of sexual education in any shape, and coeducation. The periodical „Rola”, famous for anti-Semitism, turned these issues into an object of manipulation, used to justify their own ideologies. Sexual education was perceived as very harmful for public morality and Polish culture. It was treated as a danger to the national being. Most of all, the activists of women’s movements were claimed to have the worst intentions and propagating sexual education. It was claimed that they had betrayed national ideals or were of Jewish origin. The striving of the people of Jewish origin to deprave and demoralize Christians was described. Not only was the concept of sexual education criticized but also coeducation. *The publicists and Jewish journalists, pretending to have pedagogical intentions, desecrate explicitly our national and catholic feelings, exhorting to such a system of education of youth which would facilitate dissipation and which would allow the schools to become brothels*⁴⁷. The supporters of coeducation were accused of *imposing by force villainy and dissipation already in schools*⁴⁸. Such views and such a way of expressing them was unusual; a great majority of publicists and public opinion distanced themselves from such rhetoric.

The supporters of sexual education in the Kingdom of Poland at the beginning of the 20th century influenced to a huge extent the tone of discussion of this issue, also after the war. They influenced the extent to which sexuality was discussed, categorizing it either as usefulness or harmfulness, decency or demoralization. The beginning of the debate which lasted in press until 1914 allowed to follow in what form and why sexual activity was claimed to be the area

⁴⁶ *Everyone should do what is his duty: parents should implant positive rules and they should follow them in their own life; pedagogy should harden the will and teach a healthy outlook on life; medicine should rationally take care of development of physical strength, teach about better nutrition and positive relaxation; prefects should point to a real destiny of a man on the earth – and we should pray for the noble intentions and their work and take it in our prayers to heaven. Smutna statystyka, „Przegląd Katolicki” 1900, p. 141.*

⁴⁷ *Na posterunku, „Rola” 1905, p. 505.*

⁴⁸ *Ibidem, p. 506.*

of morality. The concerns about education of youth was connected with the tendency to treat sexual education of the young as an instrument allowing control of sexuality in society, which created the danger of accepting repressive morality.

Summing up, it must be emphasized that the popularization of the idea of sexual education in the wide medical community of doctors, hygienists and pedagogues in the Kingdom of Poland at the beginning of the 20th century was connected with accepting the rule of moral rigour in this area of educational activity. In many texts the issue of sexual education was treated in categories of paternalistic rules which differed much from reality. The results of research made it visible unequivocally that youth learned mostly from their peers. In the case of richer groups of society, also due to the contacts with maidens. Therefore, mediation of adults was not necessary to gain sexual knowledge but it was accepted by authorities as an indispensable element for proper education in this matter.

All participants of the discussion stressed the social meaning of the behaviour connected with sexuality and education in that matter. They claimed that they were particularly important in the time of modernization of society. The faith in the power of education and the possibility of the shaping desired attitudes of the young towards sexuality was characteristic. This belief connected the representatives of different world views. The supporters of sexual education claimed that rational sexual education has a positive influence not only on physical health but also psychological and emotional health of youth⁴⁹.

Publicist texts had an important meaning for the popularization of ideas of sexual education, reaching different groups of recipients with versatile backgrounds. They played a meaningful role in popularization of basic knowledge of this aspect in the process of education in family and school environment. They also facilitated the process of creating positive social atmosphere around the issues, which had been previously tabooed or marginalized. Articles, notes and press reviews allowed for interdisciplinary conceptualization of the problems of sexual education, treating this area as an important realm of activity of doctors, hygienists, pedagogues, psychologists, priests and moral philosophers. It must be however stressed that the

⁴⁹ Cf. M. Gawin, *Rasa i nowoczesność. Historia polskiego ruchu eugenicznego*, Warszawa 2003, p. 82–83.

analysis of publicists texts from the beginning of the 20th century reflects the fact that there were still many problems connected with sexuality which were tabooed, for instance pedophilia, and particularly homosexuality, even in the community of specialists. Emphasizing the presence of many issues connected with the problems of sexual education in the press one needs to remember that many editorial boards did not decide to publish texts concerning these issues. L. Krzywicki in 1900, criticizing hypocrisy and ignorance of erotic love, wrote in the press about avoidance of social issues connected with hygiene, health and sexual education. *Those problems, so vivid, are banned. No respectful newspaper which takes care of the morality of its readers would discuss the questions although they popularize the names of the authors who, in the least healthy way, fire up the imagination of the readers or they advertise saucy operas, the purpose of which is to fire up the least human instincts*⁵⁰.

Summing up, one needs to stress the meaningful participation of the medical and hygiene community in opening the discussion on sexual education which facilitated the exposure of the medical aspects of the issue. To some extent it limited some educational problems, marginalized the issues connected with methodology of teaching and didactic means. The situation resulted from better living and functioning conditions in the last decades of the 20th century of the medical community, and pedagogues who had been kept under surveillance of partition authorities. The common discussion of sexual education issues, the belief that sexual education of youth should be analyzed and should become the aim of intervention of doctors and pedagogues influenced the stable agreement and cooperation of the specialists which constituted a precious tradition of cooperation. The opening of the discussion of sexual education was a meaningful and valuable element of social transformations of Polish society. Its result, not really intentional, was the appearance of the tendency to control and repress the sexuality of youth.

⁵⁰ K.R. Żywicki, *op. cit.*, p. 499.

Streszczenie

Retoryka dyskusji o wychowaniu seksualnym w prasie społecznej, zdrowotno-higienicznej i pedagogicznej w Królestwie Polskim na początku XX w.

Kwestii wychowania seksualnego młodego pokolenia od początku XX w., wraz z żywiołowym rozwojem tendencji odnowicielskich w zakresie obyczajów, przypisywano szczególnie ważną rolę. Problematyka ta na początku XX w. była stale obecna w prasie społecznej oraz czasopismach zdrowotno-higienicznych i pedagogicznych. Pisano o potrzebie racjonalizacji procesu edukacji, a uświadamianie dzieci i młodzieży w zakresie życia seksualnego miało uchronić młode pokolenie przed niekorzystnymi wpływami „ulicy” i patologiami społecznymi, być podwaliną nowej moralności w zakresie obyczajowości seksualnej, umożliwiającą głębokie przeobrażenia społeczne. Wierzano w użyteczność edukacji seksualnej w zakresie poprawy stanu zdrowotnego i etycznego, w wymiarze indywidualnym i kolektywnym oraz jej prewencyjne działanie w zakresie chorób wenerycznych i prostytucji, co miało zapobiegać eugenicznie rozumianej degeneracji społeczeństwa. Zwolennicy wychowania seksualnego przekonywali, że racjonalne uświadamianie seksualne pozytywnie wpływa na zdrowie fizyczne, ale także psychiczne i emocjonalne młodzieży. Teksty publicystyczne miały istotne znaczenie dla popularyzacji idei edukacji seksualnej, docierając do różnych grup odbiorców, o różnym stopniu przygotowania. Odegrały znaczącą rolę w upowszechnianiu podstawowej wiedzy na ten temat, wykorzystywanej w procesie wychowania w środowisku domowym i szkolnym. Przyczyniły się do budowania korzystnego społecznego klimatu wokół problemów, wcześniej tabuizowanych i marginalizowanych. Artykuły, notatki i recenzje prasowe sprzyjały interdyscyplinarnemu ujęciu problemów edukacji seksualnej, traktowania tej dziedziny jako ważnego obszaru badań lekarzy, higienistów, pedagogów, psychologów, duchownych, etyków. Jednocześnie nadal faktem była tabuizacja wielu problemów związanych z seksualnością – na przykład pedofilii, a zwłaszcza homoseksualizmu – nawet w środowisku specjalistów.