

## SEXUAL LIFESTYLES IN THE FIELD OF CULTURAL DEMANDS

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**Abstract:** In the research we focus on the construction of the sexual lifestyles of young people—undergraduates—in Slovakia and ask “which cultural sources are used?” and “which cultural demands exert pressures on these constructions?” The analysis was based on the answers respondents provided to a questionnaire relating to the preferences of values, aspirations regarding partner and sexual life as well as the socio-economic background of respondents. On the basis of the factor analysis and other steps, we obtained five groups of respondents with different lifestyles: 1. Liberal—free, 2. Partner—monogamous, 3. Natural—instinctive, 4. Hedonistic—free, 5. Submissive—partner. The research proves that while constructing their sexual lifestyles, young people experience confusion as to their personal interests, preferences, internal orientation of partner relationships, and culturally prescribed norms of monogamous relationships.

**Keywords:** lifestyle, sexuality, partnership

### 1. Lifestyles

Conceptualizations of lifestyle are connected with the so-called period of sociology around the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries when sociology responded to the industrialization and urbanization of society. In connection with these social changes questions relating to consumption and ways of life began to attract attention. The concept of lifestyle was used by Weber (1919/1978) who claimed that society is not only structured economically, but is also stratified according to status, which is expressed by lifestyle. Simmel (1903, 1950) dealt with lifestyle in connection with life in large cities. Tarde pointed out that leisure and consumption were aspects of everyday life, whereby people could socialize and do something with their lives (Reimer 1995).

At present, the concept of lifestyle is used in a large number of disciplines: ethnology, sociology, social work, psychology, pedagogy, philosophy, political science, economics, mass communication, neurology, health sciences, etc. Studies have been conducted in parenting styles, coping styles, styles of learning, attachment styles, healthy and non-healthy lifestyles.

According to Reimer (1995) the current repeated interest in lifestyles is connected with processes of individualization in society, and with processes of rapid and radical change affecting the lives of people. The lifestyle concept also relates to studies into the

life of the so-called new middle class, which is educated, lives in cities and has a proclivity for consumption and entertainment. This concept had been introduced primarily as an alternative and rival to the classical concept of social class, which was increasingly regarded as lacking the ability to describe the structure of an individualized, highly differentiated, and increasingly dynamic society. According to current studies, the concept of lifestyle could also be considered to complement the concept of social class (Rössel 2008). Lifestyle is also connected with postmodern reorganization and the combining of various elements of culture, for example, combining popular culture with so-called high culture, etc. Theoretically, in the second half of the twentieth century the lifestyle concept was inspired mainly by Bourdieu's cultural sociology and his theory on how everyday life is organized. He points out that societal subgroups (milieus) differ in terms of life conditions and style. In his concept of style he combines Marxian and Weberian class analysis (education and economic capital) with an account of Simmel's shared subjective values. Also current studies (Haunschild 2011, Sinus-Sociovision) show that milieu groups differ in their material life conditions (upper, middle, lower class) and also in their shared values and beliefs (conservative, modern and experimental). Lifestyle depends on the status of an individual in her/his social space. Bourdieu speaks about the *field* of lifestyles. According to the status of an individual in the social space some lifestyles are more or less probable. For example, having great economic capital can mean that actors lead extravagant and visible lives. Having little capital leads to an interest in popular amusement. A field is a social space with "a set of objective power relations that impose themselves on all who enter the field and that are irreducible to the intentions of the individual agents or even to the direct interactions among the agents" (Bourdieu et al. 1985, 724).

Bourdieu's critics argue that this concept might have been valid in 1960s France, when lifestyle choices were greatly influenced by social position, and the quantity and type of capital an individual wielded. Other authors point out that it is also necessary to take into account the fact that fields of lifestyles relate to political and economic fields and that these fields can be differentiated to a great extent (Reimer 1995).

## **2. Partnership and sexual lifestyles**

In traditional theories the concept of lifestyle is associated with the public sphere and sexuality is associated more with the private sphere, and individual personal aspects. The duality of "the public"—"the private" is thus also reflected in these concepts.

However, sexual experience, behaviour and preferences are to a great extent subject to cultural influences. The way in which we become sexually acting and sexually perceiving individuals is determined by dominant conceptions of sexuality, and within these frameworks we develop our sexual identity. Sexual lifestyle is a construct through which people perceive, describe and organize their experiences and lives, and they also construct their sexuality in this way. Sexual lifestyles are constructs that include normative patterns of sexual desires and sexual behaviour. Sexual behaviour can thus be understood like any other culturally determined behaviour. All societies develop, extend and confirm the sexual scenarios that explain how sexuality is to be lived and realized (Simon, Gagnon 2000). The societies of the Western world witnessed a cultural and social transformation in sexuality during the 1980s

and 1990s, a process called the neosexual revolution. Sexuality is no longer a great metaphor for pleasure and happiness, nor is it as greatly overestimated as it was during the sexual revolution. It is now widely taken for granted, much like egotism or motility (Sigusch, 1998).

Several Slovak studies have also shown that sexuality cannot be studied as a phenomenon outside its socio-cultural environment (Popper, Nemčoková 1996; Bianchi 2001; Lukšík, Supeková 2003; and others).

In our view, in terms of the sources from which sexual lifestyles can be formed, we might consider primarily some of the more dominant discourses on sexuality that are widespread in society. These relate chiefly to the Christian tradition strengthened by Victorian morality, which emphasizes monogamous relationships and the reproductive function of sex. They also include medical and sexuological discourses on controlling sexual instinct and on reproductive health, and liberal discourse emphasizing freedom and personal choice, and finally perhaps the discourse on HIV/AIDS that draws attention to risks relating to sex and the personal responsibility of an individual (Gagnon, Parker 1995; Lukšík, Supeková 2003).

Sexual lifestyles have been pluralized. In their work many authors (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1994; Beck-Gernsheim 1998; Schmidt 1996; in Slovakia, for example Marková 2007a,b; Lukšík, Marková 2010, etc.) stress that in postmodern society there are a variety of possible partner and sexual lifestyles. Those who have addressed the issue empirically, however, suggest that there are only a few clear-cut sexual lifestyles. Four sexual lifestyles have most frequently been identified (Schmidt et al. 2003; Dekker, Matthiesen 2002): 1. Single—no permanent relationship, alone, 2. separated cohabitation—permanent relationship, living apart together, 3. Cohabiting—unmarried, living together, 4. Marriage—permanent relationship, married couple. Haavio-Mannila et al. (2003, 2002) analyzed 166 autobiographies written by men and women from Finland on their sexual lives and partnerships and identified five types of sexual lifestyle: 1. Content monogamy, 2. Devitalized relationships (relationships where the partners remain together despite the fact that they are sexually and/or emotionally unsatisfied), 3. Serial relationships, 4. Parallel relationships, and 5. Searching for a partner. Other authors limit the variety of sexual lifestyles even further by pointing out that traditional discourses on female lives and their plots cast heterosexual romance and marriage as the ultimate success (Greer 1999), at which point the woman's "story" ends (Gilbert and Walker 1999).

### **3. Research methodology**

Studying lifestyles is greatly problematic. Reimer (1995) believes that reducing people's lifestyles to several small dimensions is absurd. On one hand each individual has a unique lifestyle in some way. A person creates her/his lifestyle according to what is on offer in the cultural milieu, and also on the basis of satisfying her/his needs and interests and realizing her/his visions of life. However, lifestyles are also social in nature. Various social groups, for example, particular types of managers, young people, the retired, etc., share similar lifestyles. We also suggest that lifestyles are bound to the social and economic structures of society and also to the cultural milieu of a particular society. However, if we take into account the impact of Bourdieu's field with its "set of objective power relations that impose themselves on all who enter the field" and its lifestyles, then it is possible that lifestyle are not individually,

but socio-culturally constructed. If it is assumed that the same milieu groups differ in their material life conditions but also in the shared values and beliefs underlying their lifestyles, then in our research we shall also focus on some objective conditions (socio-economic situation, education level) and the shared values and beliefs of respondents, particularly in the area of sexuality.

In our research we posed the following questions: Which cultural sources and which individual choices are used to construct the sexual lifestyles of young people/ undergraduates in Slovakia? What influence do socio-economic status and the educational level of the respondents have on these lifestyles?

#### *Method*

A questionnaire method was used within the framework of wider formulated research mapping minority and majority sexual lifestyles of young male and female adults and socio-cultural contexts in Slovakia. For the purposes of this paper we have selected and analysed some of the answers relating to self-descriptions on sexuality provided by our respondents in the questionnaire. The task of the respondents was to evaluate themselves in relation to twenty-two 7-graded bipolar scales reflecting qualities and behaviours relating to sexuality, for example reserved versus seducing, exceptional versus moderate, exercising self-restraint versus free, etc. In the other part of the questionnaire respondents had to allocate values according to how important they are in sexual and partner relationships. They were given 15, or possibly 18 values, such as tradition, personal freedom, responsibility, pleasure, emotional understanding, planned parenting, trust, etc. All answers given by respondents including those on types of sexual and partner relations were used in the study, (for example the number of permanent partnerships lasting a year or more, those of less than one year, unplanned one off sexual contact, etc).

#### *Research sample*

The research sample consisted of 685 participants—full-time students and part-time distance students at University Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra, Comenius University in Bratislava, the University of Mathias Bell in Banská Bystrica, Prešov University in Prešov, and local branches elsewhere in Slovakia. The sample breakdown was 69.1 per cent female and 30.9 per cent male, 80.1 per cent declared themselves to be Catholic or Evangelical, 94.3 per cent declared themselves to be heterosexuals, 3.6 per cent bisexuals and 2 per cent homosexuals.

#### *Analysis of the results*

The results were mathematically and statistically analysed using SPSS software. Sexual life styles were identified on the basis of a factor analysis of respondents' self-descriptions of their sexuality. The answers were recorded on bipolar scales, for example *open* versus *reserved* discussions on sexuality. The groups of respondents who fully corresponded to the particular factors were then compared using further characteristics: values in partner and sexual relationships and sexual conduct.

## 4. Results

The first step was to conduct a factor analysis<sup>1</sup> of respondents' self-descriptions of sexuality. The items in the questionnaire that focused on this area were potentially ones that could indicate two sides to lifestyles: cultural demands and individual choices, for example liberal, romantic, exceptional, etc. That is why we chose to use the findings from this part of the questionnaire in pursuing our aim (to obtain a description of sexual lifestyles and how they are created on the basis of cultural demands and individual choices). Five factors were obtained on the basis of the factor analysis. Then respondents who agreed with all the items that corresponded significantly to particular factors were chosen. We then discovered which other items from the self-descriptions respondents with agreed significantly. These items were added to descriptions of particular factors (they are expressed by dashes in our text).

**Factor A:** free, liberal, regards sexuality as very important in a person's life, believes that sexuality should not be directed by external norms—it should be governed only by inner individual norms on what is normal and what is not normal.

- Openly discusses sexuality
- open to new sexual experiences
- not taking tradition into consideration
- monogamous

**Factor B:** monogamous, responsible, having a deep relationship with one partner

- endeavouring to have a stable functioning relationship
- romantic
- responsible
- tolerant

**Factor C:** Natural, based on the particular situation and circumstances, searching, choosing, seducing, if necessary, allowing a free sexual response

- searching
- considering sexuality as very important
- exceptional
- wild

**Factor D:** Focused on achieving orgasm, sexual satisfaction, demanding that one's needs are satisfied, independent

- striving to have a functional partnership
- leaving room for personal independence

**Factor E:** Adjusting to the needs and interests of the partner and making an effort in her/his sexual satisfaction.

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<sup>1</sup> Factor analysis: extraction method: principal component analysis; rotation method: varimax with Keiser normalization; rotation sums of squared loadings: factor A: 12.1%, factor B: 11.3%, factor C: 10.1%, factor D: 10.1%, factor E: 9.5%.

Finally it was found that the respondents in all the groups analysed agreed significantly that people do not need norms relating to sexuality—each individual has his/her own limits for considering what is normal.

As shown in Table 1 most respondents fall into two groups, A and B. However, when the respondents who agreed significantly with all items that fulfilled particular factors and preferred particular values were chosen, we discovered that in addition to the five calculated factors—groups—there were also many combined factors—groups. They were: AB (19 respondents), AC (13 respondents), AD (1 respondent), AE (8 respondents), BC (4 respondents), BE (21 respondents), CD (2 respondents), CE (3 respondents), DE (2 respondents), ABC (2 respondents), ABE (6 respondents), BCE (1 respondent), BDE (1 respondent), CDE (1 respondent). Taking into consideration the scope of this study, these factor groups will not be further analysed here. However, this finding indicates that there is a large variety in preferences on partner relationships and sexuality.

A comparison of the particular socio-demographic characteristics of our respondents in the groups studied on the basis of factors A-E mentioned above indicated that all our respondents are of approximately the same age, religious orientation and gender—in all groups the majority of our sample were women, in terms of gender the only exception was the group that originated on the basis of factor E, where women and men composed approximately half the sample (Table 1).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristic of the respondents—five groups A – E

Group	N	Age (Me)	Women (%)	Strong religious orientation (%)	University education: undergraduate degree (%)	Childhood domicile–village (%)	Currently domiciled – village (%)
A	52	22	71.2	94.2	34.6	28.8	19.2
B	144	23	82.6	97.2	37.5	44.4	36.1
C	7	22	71.4	100.0	42.9	14.3	14.3
D	2	24 and 44	100.0	100.0	50.0	0.0	50.0
E	21	21	47.6	90.5	42.9	28.6	28.6

### *Marriage and partnerships*

The most common partner status among our respondents was a permanent partner relationship living apart (62 per cent – factor A group, 43 per cent – factor B, E group). There were more married respondents in factor C group (29 per cent) and factor B group (22 per cent). The majority of respondents from the whole sample who were not in a permanent relationship were again in factor B group (22 per cent). During statistical testing we did not find any differences between particular factor groups regarding education, domicile, childhood domicile, or socio-economic situation. A statistically significant difference was

found in the size of the current domicile. Factor A and C groups live in cities. Factor B group had a stronger religious orientation.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Plans to have children*

The particular groups differed also on whether they planned to have children or if they already have children. There was a dominant trend to postpone the birth of children to a later period in life in all factor groups (from 45.5 per cent to 53.2 per cent) with the exception of factor C group (16.7 per cent). In factor groups B, C and E approximately one third of respondents already have children (26.6–33.3 per cent), two respondents from group D have no children and in group A 9.1 per cent of respondents have children.

#### *Plans on kinds of partnership and sexual life*

Out of the various options on how to arrange their partner and sexual life later in life, the factor groups chose the following: a majority selected marriage and monogamy—no other sexual relationship (from 61 per cent to 80 per cent), and fewer chose cohabitation (unmarried, living with one permanent sexual partner and having no other sexual partners). The only exception in the whole sample was factor C group who preferred cohabitation (71 per cent) to marriage (29 per cent).

#### *Differences in sexual behaviour*

We also investigated differences in sexual behaviour among the particular groups. In factor B group there were characteristically fewer permanent relationships and other sexual relationships and a later onset to sex life. There were more partnerships and greater sexual activity in factor groups D and E. In factor E group this was caused by the higher proportion of men in this group (Table 2).

Table 2: Characteristics of sexual behaviour of respondents in groups A – E

Group	N	Stable relationships: One year and more (Me)	Stable relationships: Less than one year (Me)	Sexual relationships with no commitments (Me)	Unplanned, unrepeated sexual contacts (Me)	The onset of sex life (Me)
A	52	1	2	2	1	17
B	144	1	1	1	1	18
C	7	2	1,5	2	1	17
D	2	4	2	7 and 4	2	17
E	21	2	2	3	3	18

<sup>2</sup> Kruskal – Wallis Test, religious orientation: Chi-Square=12,2, df=4, Asymp. Sig=0,016; current domicile: Chi-Square=14,2, df=4, Asymp.Sig.=0,007.

Next we concentrated on the value preferences on the sexual and partner relationship. As can be seen in Table 3 more or less the same values feature in the whole sample, the only differences among respondents are in the emphasis placed on some of these values. These values correspond to the characteristics of particular factors, for example factor D, where a great emphasis is put on hedonism, not on love, but on having an open relationship, independence, etc.

Table 3: Values preferred in the sexual and partner relationship: Five groups A – E

Group	N	Values preferred in sexual relationship	Values preferred in partner relationship
A	52	<b>Love</b> Fidelity	<b>Emotional understanding</b> Trust Mutual respect and recognition
B	144	<b>Love</b> <b>Intimate closeness</b> <b>Fidelity</b> Responsibility	<b>Mutual respect and recognition</b> Emotional understanding Trust
C	7	<b>Passion</b> <b>Mutual agreement</b> Love Fidelity	Emotional understanding Trust
D	2	<b>Stability</b> <b>Independence</b> Passion Fidelity Security	<b>Trust</b> <b>Openness</b> <b>Commitment</b> Emotional understanding
E	21	<b>Love</b> <b>Intimate closeness</b> Responsibility Passion Fidelity	Emotional understanding Trust Mutual respect and recognition

Bold – the most preferred values

In all factor groups there was minimal preference for the following values in sexual relationships: tradition, enjoyment, physical satisfaction and attraction, and the following ones in the partner relationship: marriage-oriented, planned marriage, adequate income, shared views on belief, distribution of tasks and work, equal interests, equal influence on partner decisions, potential for personal development, sharing leisure time, passion, freedom and security.

## Discussion and conclusions

The aim of our study was to study the sources young people in Slovakia use to create sexual lifestyles. The analysis was based on answers respondents gave in a questionnaire on

the preference of values, aspirations relating to partner and sexual life, sexual life as well as the socio-economic background of the respondents. On the basis of the factor analysis and other proceedings we obtained five groups of respondents with different lifestyles: 1. Liberal, free (factor A group), 2. Partner, monogamous (factor B group), 3. Natural, instinctive (factor C group), 4. Hedonistic, free (factor D group), 5. Submissive, partner (factor E group).

If we ask which cultural sources young people in Slovakia use to create their sexual lifestyles, then according to our results, the following are the main trends: individualism within a liberal discourse; a monogamous imperative resulting from the Judaeo-Christian tradition; an instinctive construction of sexuality, with a probable biologising medical discourse with sexuality in the background; and hedonism stemming from consumerism as a way of life. We can also speculate that the source of a submissive accommodating sexual life style may be a consequence of the long standing passive, non-participative way of life in totalitarian and post-totalitarian society.

The trend towards individualism is present in all types of sexual lifestyles with the exception of the fifth (E) but differs in each of them. In the first lifestyle (A) it is a liberal discourse that lends support to the openness and freedom of the individual and sexual experimentation. It is likely that this lifestyle is in tension with the generally preferred values of fidelity, trust and mutual respect and with the need for a stable monogamous partner relationship, which is a long-term vital aspiration.

Construction of freedom in the second lifestyle (B)—partner monogamous—is limited externally, but it can develop within romantic ideas or within the framework of the relationship (value of mutual tolerance of partners). In relation to sexual behaviour it is typical for this group of respondents to have a lower number of permanent relationships as well as other sexual relationships and the onset of a sex life is later in comparison to the other groups. The third lifestyle (C) was called natural, instinctive, as if without limits. The cultural source of this style may be an instinctive construction of sexuality within a biologising discourse on sexuality, whose foundations may be found in the Freudian concept of sexuality. The fourth factor (D) hedonistic, free, relates to the fulfilment of one's own hedonistic sexual interests, being independent and having personal freedom, which the female respondents obtained after having had several partner relationships and some sexual experience.

However, aspirations for a monogamous relationship were also evident in this lifestyle. As was the case with the first factor (A), the third (C) and the fourth (D) factors conflicted, perhaps even more distinctive with generally preferred values of fidelity, trust and mutual respect and with the need to create a stable monogamous partner relationship.

In the sexual lifestyles there is tension between how an individual sees herself/himself, what she/he thinks of herself/himself, how she/he behaves (e.g. she/he is free, not bound, natural, taking delight in life and partner-oriented) and what the value background of the partner relationship represents (that is love, fidelity, trust, responsibility, mutual respect and recognition and also an ordered norm of a monogamous relationship. It can also be explained in terms of an instinctive knowledge of linguistic appropriateness, an awareness of social rules and competences, which were proven by the respondents' answers to our questions (Crystal, Davy 1969; Machin, Leeuwe 2005).

Sexual lifestyles are oriented inwards. The young people studied declared that they did not need norms on sexuality and that everybody had their inner limits for considering

what is normal. This finding may point to the values of individualism and also to the fact that sexuality is restricted to the private sphere and that it is seen as being a private thing, as something that each individual decides about independently. Sexuality and intimate relationships as constructed by the respondents did not appear to relate to their outer social connections: taking decisions about marriage, planning marriage, having an adequate income, common views on faith, distribution of housework and chores, shared leisure time, etc. An evident orientation inside the relationship was recorded in the fifth factor regarding the submissive partner (E), which may even represent the fact that there is some dependency on the partner, and may be a problem in dealing with the values of mutual respect and recognition between partners, which is socially accepted and desirable at the present time.

In this study we also raised the question of what impact the socio-economic status and educational level of respondents might have on lifestyles. The differences we found indicate that in differentiating between particular sexual lifestyles, socio-economic conditions are not a strong influence, whereas the socio-cultural field of the type of domicile was (small or large) and social relationships and also religious orientation were also connected with this. General education and economic capital appears to be less significant than the socio-cultural field and shared subjective values.

The behavioural aspect of sexual lifestyles corresponded to constructions in the area of sexuality: a partner monogamous lifestyle was apparent not only in the value preferences and self-definitions in this area but also in the lower occurrence of sexual activity (permanent or chance) and vice versa. For example a hedonistic, free sexual lifestyle was characterised by the larger number of partner and sexual relationships.

The results confirmed previously found diversity in constructions of sexual lifestyles (Marková 2007a), although this diversity is always limited by cultural boundaries defined and enabled by the particular society. The stated findings indicate the sources used and the boundaries within which norms on sexual lifestyles have been created. Aiming for a monogamous relationship in marriage is in line with the findings that heterosexual women construct unmarried status as a temporary stage, one in preparation to marriage (Sandfield, Percy 2003). The questionnaire method used does not enable us to specify in detail the particular discursive sources of the sexual lifestyles nor does it allow us to relate them to media idols created and disseminated by the media. This will be the task of further qualitative analyses.<sup>3</sup>

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