



Submitted: 13.01.2019

Accepted: 25.03.2019

Suggested citation: Jamrozowicz B. (2019). *Dorośla „troska”, dziecięce „potrzeby”, społeczne sposoby zarządzania dziecięcą seksualnością*, „Edukacja Elementarna w Teorii i Praktyce”, vol. 14, no. 1(51), pp. 57–69. DOI: 10.35765/eetp.2019.1451.04

Barbara Jamrozowicz

ORCID: 0000-0001-8744-1631

Institute of Pedagogy
Jagiellonian University

Adult “Care”, Children’s “Needs”, Social Ways of Managing Child Sexuality¹

KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

sexuality, children,
discourse needs,
moral panic

In the majority of societies, sex is a practice attributed to adults, however, the sexuality of children is considered a permanent object of social anxiety. Analyses related to child sexuality require more than the presence of diverse ways of understanding what serves the best interests of children. Following M. Stainton Rogers, I assumed that it is necessary to explore the discourse which will allow to find out where the values found in the construction of child sexuality came from. The point of reference for these explorations has become the discourse shaping the western policy and social practice. Within it, there are strivings to identify the basic “needs” of children and find solutions to the “problems” associated with the implementation of these “needs”. In this text, the discourse of needs serves as a starting point for historical interpretations and contemporary ways of “creating” childlike sexuality. In my deliberations, I identified the elements of the discourse of “needs” and “problems” of children associated with

¹ In the article I used fragments of the doctoral thesis entitled: “Sexual Education Models in Junior High and High School”, prepared under the supervision of Z. J. Danilewska PhD at the Institute of Pedagogy of the Jagiellonian University (2016).

sexuality. I have not omitted the discourse of new threats generated especially in the public space in which children function. Next, I looked at the activities connected with solving the “problems” of child sexuality (including the practices of their normalization). These considerations were accompanied by an analysis of the structure of children and their sexuality, which are at the center of specific “threats”. Referring to the “needs” and “problems” of childhood sexuality, I also paid attention to the tensions generated in relation to them.

Introduction

In most societies, sex as a practice is “reserved” primarily for adults, but children are considered to be a permanent object of social anxiety in relation to sexuality. This is related to the treatment of their sexual practices as a matter of the utmost importance for survival and for a successful (inter alia in relation to population policy) functioning of society (see McKay 1998: 14). It should be taken into account that children’s sexual behaviors, implemented by children, have their “counterparts” in sexual practices attributed to adults. These include, among others: exhibitionism, self-stimulation, sexual anxiety, interest in sexuality, sexual obtrusiveness or voyeurism (see Friedrich, Grambsch, Broughton, Kuiper, Bielke 1991, for: Friedrich WN, Fisher J., Broughton D., Houston M., Shafran CR 2012: 51 – 52). By delineating the limits for acceptable practices in relation to sexuality, society is to become not so much, or not only, a collection of obedient, disciplined bodies of individuals, but above all a healthy, strong social body (see Foucault 1979). This justifies the presence of the concern for what is related to intimate desires, pleasures and ways of being in the world among people who are far from crossing the “threshold” of adulthood. What is of particular importance is which sexual behaviors of children can be treated socially as natural, appropriate and free from the risk of demoralization or illness (cf. Foucault 1995).

For the purpose of this text, I have found that analyses about child sexuality require more than just the presence of different ways of understanding what serves the best interests of children. Following M. Stainton – Rogers (2008: 175), I assumed that it is necessary to explore the discourse which may allow to find out how specific constructions of child sexuality are created. The reference point for these explorations will be the shaping of the western policy and social practice, the discourse of needs within which there are strivings to identify the elementary needs of children and find solutions to problems related to the implementation of these needs (Stainton Rogers 2008: 176). It will serve as a starting point for historical interpretations and contemporary ways of “creating” child sexuality. I will begin my deliberations with

the identification of historical and contemporary elements of the discourse of the needs of children related to sexuality. I will not omit the discourse of the “new” threats generated mainly in the public space in which children function. Next, I will look at the activities connected with solving the “problems” of child sexuality (including the practices of their normalization). These considerations will be accompanied by the analysis of children’s structures and their sexuality, which are at the center of specific “threats”. Referring to particular areas of the analysis of the needs and problems, I will especially emphasize the tensions generated in these areas.

Historical construction of the needs and problems related to child sexuality

Regulations created in given communities do not appear out of nowhere, but are shaped in a certain process. It is no different in the case of identifying, naming and evaluating the manifestations of child sexuality. According to narratives of historians, over the centuries, the ways of perceiving sexuality of children were associated with the attribution of characteristics from “potential hypersexuality” (see, among others, Kozakiewicz 1973: 198) to, paradoxically, unblemished “innocence” (Aries 1995: 104 – 106; 111 – 119). As a consequence of this state of affairs, children could be idealized and demonized, and further defined by the state of “becoming”, crossing “initiation stages” constructed and controlled in a specific historical and cultural manner (see Wyn, White 1997).

Starting from the mid-nineteenth century, sexual practices of young people began to undergo gradual problematization. Despite the fact that children were not yet widely regarded as the official “social category”, their sexuality has become an area of social anxiety (see Harari, Vinovskis 1993). Among the suspicious practices, above all, onanism was indicated, which was supposed to not only hinder self-discipline, but also break the community framework and bring “damage” to the social order. “Lonely sex” was considered anti-social (see Laquer 2006: 266, Bartos 2013: 8-12), “pathogenic” and “unnatural”. “Premature” interest in sex, sexual arousal, and above all the onanist release of “sexual tension” was to have a negative impact not only on the health and maturation of the individual. Masturbation was perceived as something that destroyed human organism and brought fatal consequences to future generations (see Foucault 1995). Theorists differed only in the assessment of the consequences of this type of sexual activity: they were, among others, warping feelings, lowering the level of intelligence, nocturnal hallucinations, suicidal or murderous tendencies (see Weeks 1986: 50), and inhibited growth, tuberculosis, blindness and epilepsy, as well as subsequent moral collapse and bankruptcy (see Tannahill 2013, Kościńska 2012).

“To strengthen” the status of onanism as a deviation, people linked it with the construct of “madness” – an onanist was supposed to renounce power of reason, requiring educational and pedagogical supervision and regime (see Foucault 1995: 45 and further).

Interpreting the above, M. Foucault noted that in modern societies the patterns of controlling sexuality underwent transformations – in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the main subject of social regulation was marriage – the social institutions directed people’s aspirations to it and to procreation. However, this attitude changed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, because social institutions did not focus only on sex and its relationships with marriage, but also focused on children’s sexuality (see Foucault 1995: 101). In this context, Foucault considered it legitimate to distinguish among the four main strategies for controlling knowledge and the power of sex, pedagogization of children’s sex. Children started to be perceived as not only interested in sex, but also capable of sexual activity which is dangerous for them. This justifies placing them at the center of attention of doctors, educators, priests and the entire “apparatus” of education (see Foucault 1995: 28; 74 and further). The consequence of this state of affairs was the construction of child sexuality as a property – something that is “placed” between the family and the state apparatus in the sphere of medicine and education. “Non-adult” sexual body, however, belongs primarily to the family and no one else should have more power over it. The child is in some way responsible for the practice of onanism, but not guilty, and masturbation alone has no “endogenous causality.” It is not regarded as sexual, let alone as hypersexual, but rather as sexless. Therefore, masturbation is not a bad habit of the child – the “fault” (problem) comes from outside of them, and parents (and other “designated” entities) can get involved in the process of sexual activity through the production of an “appropriate” form of the child’s sexuality (cf. Szpakowska 2004: 118 – 119).

Ultimately, in this discourse, the child can be regarded as having no sexual needs, but innocent, sensitive and in need of the supervision of adult guardians (see Thorne, Luria 1986: 177, Rubin 1984, Kehily, Montgomery 2008: 99). The arguments for sexual prohibitions referred to the immaturity of children, their sensitivity and inability to understand sexual situations (see Rouyer 2004). Young people were placed here in the perspective of the deficit – they were perceived as weak, and not being in power / authority, and further demanding moralizing and “protecting” against contact with potential “destructive” sexual experiences (see Moran 2000, Weeks 1986). This contact generates a problem – preventing it “requires” a series of thoughtful actions, including the reorganization of relations between them and adults, and the children are monitored by experts. As a consequence of this state of affairs, what was previously concealed could be included in the field of scientific interest, undergo medical treatment and inclusion in the area of public education.

Needs and problems of (in) child sexuality as areas of social care – contemporary interpretations

The precursor of the “new” approach to child sexuality was Z. Freud. He assumed that the sexual activity of a child is a “ground” for shaping adult sexuality (see Wildlocher 1969: 189-190). Parts of the body that were not analysed by psychologists started to be the areas of considerable importance for both emotional and sexual health. According to Z. Freud, shaping the sexual sphere begins in early childhood, although libido (or erotic-sexual instinct) is initially expressed in an imperfect and infantile manner. At that stage, sexuality was supposed to manifest itself in the liking of sucking (oral phase), in the pleasure of defecation (anal phase) and in masturbation (phallic phase) (see Freud 1987; 1990; 1999; 2009, see Mandal 2003: 17), after which the sleep phase (latency) was to occur, which was only later to go into the genital phase. Among the characteristics of the child, he also pointed to the train for exhibitionism, watching, as well as the manifestation of sadistic and masochistic tendencies. Based on this type of phenomena present in the youngest, Freud called the child a “multiform pervert” (see Wildlocher 1969: 191 – 193). The treatment of child sexuality as an area for constructing “needs” and “problems” is also nowadays associated with specific children’s constructions (cf. Weeks 1986: 212), and further with fixing them in the wider reality. What falls within and outside the standard is present in the classifications created by sexologists and psychologists (see Bromberg, O’Donohue 2013, Brzezińska 2010, Dąbkowska 2013, for: Dąbkowski, Dąbkowska 2014: 106 – 11). They specify the sexual health determinants of children, and what should be regulated in sexual development, how far should it reach and – above all – what criteria should be used when making assessments and then (optionally) subordinating them to specific treatments aimed at ‘normalization’”. The accepted classifications also regulate what concerns the ways in which children function in the context of their sexuality and generate the intended interventions in a defined way. Researchers of child sexuality draw attention to the fact that intense changes taking place in developmental stages preceding adulthood, immaturity of mental structures and dependence on carers, require that the area of phenomena and behaviors, other than in the case of adults, are considered to be within the norm (see Izdebski 2001).

Analyses of various aspects of children’s development indicate that their normal sexual activity is manifested mainly in the form of behaviors:

- masturbating, combined with the induction of pleasant sensations due to the stimulation of their own erogenous areas. Such practices are already observed in infants in the second half of the first year of life (see Beisert 2006c: 8, cf. Smoter 2017). When the stimulation of these areas is aimed at achieving pleasure and repeats itself – you can talk about the emergence of masturbation aimed at feeling

pleasure. Another type of masturbation is experimental masturbation, in which the cognitive motivation appears along with the sexual motivation. In rare cases, this practice may be threatening for a child (in the course of striving to get to know the body, it may be damaged), hence it requires vigilance from the child's guardians. Similarly, in the case of the third type of masturbation – instrumental, undertaken to achieve goals other than sexual and signaling the emergence of a problem with which it is difficult for the child to cope (Beisert 2006a: 8);

- indicative, which are primarily oriented to gain knowledge about the differences in the anatomy of girls / women or boys / men, and the functions with which those differences are connected. As a result, children may try to watch and view other people. Often, there is also the mutual presentation of genital organs among children. Orientative behaviors also include questions asked by children (children and adults) that relate to sexuality. In most cases, their goal is to obtain or verify knowledge, but also to satisfy emotional needs (see Beisert 2006c: 8-10, cf. Smoter 2017);
- interactive, and among them children's sexual / erotic games, typical of pre-school age. The function of these games is to use sexual expression in a relationship with a peer, satisfy curiosity, acquire new information and provide pleasure. Researchers of child sexuality emphasize that this type of play may be preceded by the observation of someone's sexual activity, but it happens that it is a reaction to the traumatic situation experienced by the child, allowing the tension to recover. In the latter case, one can speak about exceeding the norm of developmental sexual behaviors, which may be connected with the necessity of providing support to a child (see Beisert 2006c: 10-11, cf. Smoter 2017);
- creative – that are combined with making drawings, pictures, poems and stories with sexual motifs. Through this type of expression, and also through sharing such works with adults, children can safely obtain feedback on what attitudes towards sexuality the adults represent (see Obuchowska, Jaczewski 1992, Beisert 1991; Beisert 2006b; Beisert 2006c: 10-11, cf. Smoter 2017).

The literature of the subject emphasizes that the behavior discussed above may be directed to the training of gender roles (and therefore a social goal is involved), gaining knowledge about gender differences or about how procreation occurs (it can be assumed that this is a cognitive goal) and to satisfying the need for closeness in relation to another person (and therefore, the emotional goal) (see Obuchowska, Jaczewski 1992, Beisert 1991, Beisert 2006b, Beisert 2006c: 10-11, Smoter 2017). However, incomplete knowledge of adults about the regularity of sexual development sometimes means that children's typical sexual behaviors are perceived as abnormal or ambiguous. Such reactions are strengthened by the diversification of both the sexual behavior of children and their social interpretations. The responsibility for

their production is currently burdened with mass communication media, including the Internet in the first place. They would contribute to problematization of child sexuality – “speaking” to children (see Willis, Jones, Canaan, Hurd 1990) and “creating” their bodies. These phenomena include:

- *sexualization* – separated by the American Psychological Association (APA 2009) as a process in which the individual’s self-esteem is derived only from its defiant appearance or behavior; the person strictly follows the existing social standards that make them sexy; the person is sexually objectified, which means that they are seen and assessed by other people in their socio-cultural environment in the category of a thing to be used, not as a unit capable of making independent choices or decisions; sexuality is imposed on the person: it is understood in different manners but it is never independently selected by the person (see Grzelak 2006, Wójtewicz 2008, Stadnik, Wójtewicz 2009, APA 2009). This phenomenon is often analyzed in the context of the pornography discussed below (treated both as its cause and its effect) and “plastic sexuality” (treated as a type of decentralized sexuality, “liberated” from the requirement of reproduction, focused on the ability to freely search for more and more new sexual experiences – see Szlendak 2005: 33, Giddens 2006: 11). With this approach, there would be a “pull” from the sexuality of age restrictions when blurring the boundaries between childhood and maturity², the effects of which would be particularly visible in relation to the health (psychosexual, physical) of girls;
- *pornographization* – as a result, what used to be considered as “obscene” sexual statements, products and services, becomes available to an increasingly younger audience, and the development of new communication technologies supports, replaces or reconfigures more and more exposed sexuality, making it a part of everyday of life (see McNair 2004: 87-88, Baudrillard 2005: 174);
- *pedophilization* – sometimes discussed along with sexualization and pornographization; seen as a process of feminine rather than male objectification, forcing women to infantilize their image and become a “false child” (see Nijakowski 2010: 309), which is to contribute to violence / abuse and sexual harassment of minors and adults³.

² This refers to the phenomenon of age compression, associated with the market empowerment of a child / teenager, which entails treating them in the category of a sexual object and imposing on them the adoption of a “sexy and seductive adult-like” way of consuming their own sexuality – see M. G. Durham (2010), *Efekt Lolity. Wizerunek nastolatek we współczesnych mediach i jak sobie z nim radzić.*, Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka; A. Szymanik (2011), *Zjawisko kompresji wiekowej we współczesnych rodzinach: „dorosłe” stroje „niedorosłych” dziewcząt [w:]* red. H. Liberska, A. Malina, *Wybrane problemy współczesnych małżeństw i rodzin*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Difin SA, 175.

³ The practice of “inducing” can be seen as sexual exploitation, which, as defined by the WHO, is the inclusion of children in sexual activity that they are unable to fully understand and give them informed

- It is assumed that the spaces in which one can “encounter” the above discussed phenomena are in fact beyond control (not only because of the universal access to websites containing erotic and pornographic content) (see Waszyńska, Zielona – Jenek 2016; Skierkowska 2014). For this reason, children are early and blindly involved in the roles of adults, including those that involve exposing, exploiting or “abusing” their immature sexuality, and perhaps they are exposed to different kinds of sexual abuse (see Majchrzak 2010: 83, Wołosik 2011). It is noticeable that the awareness of such state of affairs generates in the social discourse the “need” to intensify actions aimed at protecting children.

Children, sexuality, moral panic

Narratives regarding child sexuality usually refer to their immaturity, sensitivity and inability to understand sexual situations (cf. Rouyer 2004). Children are perceived here as: innocent and in need of remedial action against external factors of sexual risk (see Thorne, Luria 1986: 177, Rubin 1984). The sexual risk discourse itself can be defined here as a construct composed of a set of historically and culturally specific processes, confirming the “common sense” assumption that child sexuality is a social problem requiring intervention. In this context the sexual risk for the child is greater if the child is deprived of the sense of security, while the “sexual risk factors” and “demoralization” first of all take on the external dimension, and actions are promoted to free the social space from the phenomena that are abusing sexuality. What is defined as abuse in relation to the sexuality of minors is usually understood as an extremely deviant act, striking the axiological foundations of society (see Nijakowski 2010: 151; 154; 309). In this context, the social diagnoses of children’s sexuality often use concepts and normalizations regarding social conditions and relationships. For example, in response to the disclosure of pedophile acts and due to the popularity of child pornography, the criteria for perceiving the social environment as dangerous are tightened (see Nijakowski 2010: 309 – 310). Then, the conditions under which

consent and / or for which they are not matured, or for which they cannot agree in a legally valid manner and / or which is inconsistent with the legal or moral norms of a given society. We may deal with this type of activity if it occurs between a child and an adult or a child and other child if these individuals, because of their age or development, are in a relationship of power, dependence and care (see M. Sajkowska (2002). *Wykorzystywanie seksualne dzieci. Ustalenia terminologiczne, skala zjawiska, oblicza problemu społecznego*, „Dziecko krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka” 1(1), 2-9). Definition of sexual abuse of the WHO recognizes the motivation and purpose of an adult to be the criterion differentiating sexual exploitation from other activities. Regardless, a lascivious act can be regarded as an attack aimed at the psychophysical development of a child (see K. March-Holka (2011), *Przemoc seksualna wobec dziecka. Studium pedagogiczno-kryminologiczne*, Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, 19).

children function are analyzed⁴ and the actions taken by the children themselves are analyzed – assessing whether there are any deviations from the norm. Control is thus aimed at those whose future is threatened and those who carry a social threat (see Beals 2008). It is sometimes connected with outbreaks of moral panic⁵, and with them the construction of figures: a “typical” pedophile and an “endangered” child. First and foremost, the latter requires “appropriately designed” educational practices, but there is no consensus as to whether and how they should be implemented in a family or non-family environment (pre-school, school). Responsibility for undertaking these activities seems to be now dispersed and shifted between the private and public sphere entities.

Conclusion

In the literature of the subject, it is often acknowledged that entities of the public sphere – and above all families – play a key role in enforcing the sexual behaviors of their children in accordance with the prevailing standard. This would prevent sexual “dissidents” by allowing the social sexual resources to be protected (cf. Rubin 1984: 159). On the other hand, parents would be accused of not teaching children responsibility, but also not taking responsibility for their safety, well-being or protection against sexual dangers (see Thorne and Luria 1986, Wyness 2006, Fields 2008, Connell and Elliott 2009). In this sense, those institutional practices that are strategically related to the “good” of children (see Irvine 2002: 108) acquire significance. An example can be two social campaigns that appeared in the last twenty years in the media: “Bad Touch” (I edition: 2002, II edition: 2010) (“Bad touch” campaign, <http://zlydotyk.pl/> [access: 20/12/2018]) and “Gadki” (2015) (“Gadki” campaign, <http://gadki.>

⁴ From January 1, 2018, the names and other details of the most dangerous rapists and pedophiles were posted in the public section of the Sexual Perpetrators’ Register of Sex Offenses. As the Minister of Justice Z. Ziobro notes: *[t]o protect our children, we put more than the anonymity of criminals* (Register of Sex offenders: <https://www.ms.gov.pl/informacje/news,10232,dane-najgrozniejszych-pedofilow-i-rapists-juz.html> [accessed: 21/12/2018]).

⁵ Moral panic occurs when “generators of morality” identify a phenomenon in socially problematic and / or abnormal terms, and above all threatening the social order (see M. Soin (2011), *Fakty, wartości i panika moralna*, „Studia Socjologiczne”, 2 (2011); S. Wargacki (2009), *Zjawisko paniki moralnej jako wyznacznik granic moralności*, „Pedagogika” XVIII). In the next step, “generators of morality” identify people or groups of people who are perceived as the realization of a threat, and then distort and exaggerate this social problem. Usually, statistics and media are used to show the phenomenon in the public sphere. Visibility, and especially the embodiment of the “problem” generate intense and excessive reactions (see S. Cohen (1972), *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, London). Analysts note that this type of panic rarely solves the real problem, because those who are raising it derive from the previously existing discursive structures of the victim in order to justify the treatment of a “specific social defect” – see J. Weeks (1998), *The Sexual Citizen*, “Theory, Culture and Society” 15 (3-4).

fdds.pl/ [accessed: 20/12/2018]). Interestingly, both are not so much (and not only) directed at the protection of children's safety by adults, as at the awareness of children themselves, which results in their empowerment (for example by shaping their sense of agency through specifying borders in relations with adults). In this context, the family's sharing of their responsibilities with public sphere entities, and thus the extension of normalization activities from the family circle to the non-family one (cf. Mann 2010) can also be combined with the inclusion of children in self-protective activities. It turns out, therefore, that it is not only the people who protect child innocence will determine whether children will be potentially exposed to situations that threaten their sexual development or if they will be located outside the network of threats.

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ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Dr Barbara Jamrozowicz
 Institute of Pedagogy
 Jagiellonian University
 e-mail: barbara.jamrozowicz@uj.edu.pl