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S A Woman in the Polish Model of Sex Education in the Stalinist and Post-Stalinist Period

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Abstract After the Second World War, Poland imposed a socialist system and Marxist ideology. Communist propaganda proclaimed the slogans of emancipation and equality of women through work. This situation changed the relationship between the sexes and how roles were performed. Moral changes, a demographic explosion, high divorce and abortion rates were a serious scratch on the image of an ideal society for the communists. Sexual education was to counteract the negative trends. The article aims to show the im-

age of a woman that emerges from the publication of sex education during the period of Stalinism and post-Stalinism. The compact publications recommended by the Society for Conscious Motherhood (1946–1962), supported by the communist authorities, were selected for the analysis. The female themes are a mixture of scientific knowledge and Marxist ideology. Sex education aimed to prepare responsible wives and mothers who would reconcile traditional roles with professional work. The knowledge of rational fertility management (contraception) was to ensure the fulfilment of the roles. With an emphasis on emancipation and equality, women were also held responsible for the quality of sex life, the welfare of marriage, family and socialist society. The argument for such an approach was to result from the natural differences between the sexes. The results of the analysis showed inconsistency and inconsistency in the emerging image of a woman and expectations regarding the performance of social roles.

Keywords sexual education, woman, socialism, conscious motherhood

Introduction

After the Second World War, Poland found itself under the influence of the USSR and adopted the socialist regime. The communist authorities popularized the slogans of the classics of Marxism, including the

emancipation of women through professional work. Polish women were to bear the trouble of maintaining their homes and supporting men who were mentally and physically mutilated by the war (Doniec, 2019). The implementation of the six-year economic plan and the difficult economic situation resulted in the mass employment of women also in “male” professions. The professional work of women introduced significant changes in everyday functioning and the mutual relations between the sexes (Pauluk, 2005). Women migrated from the countryside to the cities; were burdened with reconciling work with family roles (Jarska, 2015). Many of them gained economic improvement, social advancement and sexual freedom (Fidelis, 2010). The lifestyle taken from home based on Christian values – (see Pauluk & Jagielska, 2020) – confronted the imposed Marxist ideology in workplaces or youth organizations.

Immediately after the war, communist propaganda encouraged Polish women to reconcile traditional and new roles, i.e. mother, wife, workers, and tractor driver. From the mid-1950s, along with the slow-down in economic development, the authorities recommended women return to their traditional roles. After the death of Joseph Stalin (1953), there was a political thaw and criticism of the Stalinist system, including the exploitation of women at work. The process of their mass layoffs began, and the magazines reminded women of their traditional calling (Pauluk, 2005; Doniec, 2019). Apart from the strikes, Polish women also started to fight to respect their rights (Fidelis, 2010).

The period of the thaw, the ideas of the 1960s cultural revolution, the presence of young women outside the family home and their parents’ control resulted in moral changes (Fidelis, 2010). While in the era of Stalinism Soviet women, strong workers who despise private life, portrayed in workers’ uniforms, were the examples to follow, in the 1950s the image of a “kitten” woman imitating American movie stars and characterized by a liberal approach to sex appeared. At that time, the image of women striving for their external appearance appeared, and: “The place of workers in overalls, working with tools and machines, driving a tractor or a bus was taken by women in fashionable dresses

and bathing suits, usually staying in the home, urban and beach spaces. or while shopping” (Fidelis & Stańczak-Wislicz, 2020, p. 423).

Society for Conscious Motherhood (SCM) for Sex Education

The new political and systemic conditions encouraged discussions about human sexuality. They became the subject of the authorities’ interest. Thanks to the thaw, pathological phenomena began to be revealed, such as domestic violence, sexual abuse and prostitution of women. The results of research showing that divorce and abortion are serious problems have been released. In 1955, data was published, which showed Poland was second in the world in terms of the number of divorces (Za: Fidelis, 2010), and high rates of termination of pregnancies leading to complications (Za: Ignaciuk, 2022) and venereal diseases (Kozłowska, 2012). Such phenomena and their scale were serious flaws in the image of a socialist society.

After the war, both in Poland and around the world, there was a demographic explosion. In the mid-1950s, most socialist countries in Europe legalized abortion for social reasons. On April 27, 1956, Poland also adopted the law on the permissibility of termination of pregnancy, arguing it with the high rate of illegal abortions. After the act entered into force: “there was a significant increase in the number of procedures performed in hospitals with the justification of difficult life situation”. In 1961, the number of recorded procedures for these indications was the highest, it increased more than five times compared to the state in 1957 (Ignaciuk, 2022, pp. 81–82). According to the historian – Jerzy Kochanowski – the liberalized act was for the authorities not only a step towards the equality of women but also a birth control tool. The Catholic Church was critical of the law, and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński called it “the law of the death of the nation” (Kochanowski, 2017).

One of the forms of counteracting unfavourable phenomena was to be sexual education (Pauluk, 2005). The first Polish lesson in sex education took place in 1908 (Kościańska, 2017), while the institutionalized form developed after the Second World War (Jamrozowicz, 2020). It was then that the Conscious Motherhood Society (1957) resumed its

activity, dating back to the 1930s. Sexual awareness, promotion of a culture of sexual life and conscious parenting planning were considered to be the main goals. Therefore, large-scale campaigns were carried out, teaching materials were printed, clinics were run and contraceptives for women were produced (Ignaciuk, 2022).

SCM was an organization supported by communist authorities. Its members and associates were specialists in various disciplines and professions: doctors, educators, psychologists, sociologists, and sexologists, who disseminated knowledge in psychological and pedagogical journals. They took up the issues of birth control, abortion, biological and social factors responsible for gender differentiation, co-education, and moral and ethical issues related to human sexuality. The activity of SCM members also focused on the preparation and translation of scientific papers, guides and textbooks. Mikołaj Kozakiewicz (1923–1998) was an activist particularly involved in the field of sexual education, introducing it to schools and “the socialist educational system” (Source: Bibby, 1962, p. 9). He regretted the small pedagogical achievements: “Both in the interwar period and in People’s Poland, larger books devoted to the basics and methodology of sex education can be counted on the fingers” – he wrote in the Preface to the new textbook (In: Bibby, 1962, p. 5).

This leading activist of SCM presented a list of recommended publications (See Bibby, 1962, pp. 299–303), which included works from 1946–1962, including a textbook by Dr Andrzej Majda, *Sexual Education of Children and Youth* (1961), referring to the Swedish model of sex education and Cyril Bibby, *Sexual Education* (1962), a textbook based on English solutions (See Kozakiewicz, 1969).

Polish experts eagerly used foreign models because they collaborated with activists for conscious motherhood beyond the Iron Curtain. Being aware of the immense influence of the Catholic Church, they attempted to adapt foreign solutions to Polish cultural conditions. They proposed a model of sex education that they considered to be between the conservative (Catholic) and liberal approaches – mainly the influence of Sigmund Freud (Kozakiewicz, 1969).

A Woman in the Polish Model of Sex Education

1. The Ways of Equality of Women with the Marxist Ideology in the Background

In textbooks relating to sex education, women's issues were an important element. It was recommended that the issue of emancipation be "smuggled" into all subjects. History lessons were to be an opportunity to illustrate the forms of oppression of women throughout history and her liberation in the new system (Engels, 1949; Bibby, 1962, p. 100). The promotion of technical professions was pointed out because, as it was pointed out, the reproductive function pushes women away "from everything except the kitchen, church and childbearing" (Majda, 1961, p. 62). It was suggested to recall the models of women activists, social activists, revolutionists and scientists. Geography lessons were to make people aware of the positive impact of the socialist revolution on the liberation of women, while social and economic sciences were to show the importance of civil marriage as a way of legalizing marriage (Bibby, 1962). The socialist family was to be based on the equal rights and obligations of the spouses. Young people were to be familiar with the provisions of the Constitution and the 1956 Act, which gave women the right to choose to use contraceptives and to have abortions for legal, medical and socio-economic reasons. Hence, the students were to familiarize themselves with the medical, legal and social possibilities of birth control.

Sex education has been treated as a part of socialist education, a cradle-to-grave process (Bibby, 1962). The education was to be led by teachers, doctors and youth leaders. It was believed that parents themselves required sexual education and well-formed socialist morality (Łopuski, 1961; Bibby, 1962), their negative impact on the child's development was noticed due to their prudishness and their "unnatural way of reacting to ordinary childish curiosity" (Majda, 1961, p. 178).

In the scientific dimension, the authors of the works referred to the knowledge of physiological maturation, hygiene, and normal and pathological sexual behaviour (Bilikiewicz, 1958; Giese, 1959; Majda, 1961; Van del Velde, 1946, 1948). In their deliberations on the

relationship between the sexes, they referred to ideology. The situation of women in marriage, family and society before and after the socialist revolution was compared. In the first case, it was an image of a woman always discriminated against, in the second – she emancipated, fulfilling her needs and aspirations. The reasons for discrimination were found in oppressive class relationships and traditional styles of education based on the patriarchal family model, and for liberation – in the revolution that “ended the political, legal and economic handicap of women” (Makarenko, 1949, p. 99).

Polish promoters of sex education were closer to the scientific achievements of Western European or American researchers than to the classics of Marxism. The Soviet creator of communist education recommended great restraint on sex life in fear of developing “a vulgar rationalist view of the gender sphere, to create a cynicism that often allows adult people to tell others their most intimate experiences with such ease” (Makarenko, 1949, p. 105).

2. A Woman in a Marriage and Family – between Equality and Discrimination

The authors associated the implementation of social roles with biological and psychological differences between the sexes: “a woman’s soul is fundamentally different from a man’s soul. Mentality and feeling male and female – occupy two opposite poles; the same is true of the temperament and strength of character of men...” (Van de Velde, 1946, p. 59). Logical thinking, losing work in men, as well as emotionality, changing mood and impulsiveness in women, were pointed out. Perfect marriage and sex life depended on the man, arguing that: The husband’s “managerial role” is primarily based on the quality of the male psyche, the essential quality of which is independence; the female psyche is rather passive. These essential features already settle the matter; it should also be remembered that proper erotic tension can never be maintained in a marriage in which the husband is not a man in the full sense and the wife is not a woman” (Van de Velde, 1946, pp. 99–100). Women seek support from the stronger sex: “Let the husband interest his wife in his work, let him take the trouble to manage her life...”

(Van de Velde, 1948, p. 11). In textbooks from the 1960s, it is noted that differences between the sexes cannot be a reason for discrimination against women (Bibby, 1962).

The ideas about marital love and the instrumental treatment of women in a socialist and bourgeois society were contrasted (Lanota, 1960). In addition to praising marriages based on love, and respect concluded based on mature decisions, at the same time publications are promoting friendly marriages, which are the equivalent of the so-called trial marriages (Lindsey, 1949).

The inappropriate attitudes of men towards women were explained by traditional upbringing, and his despotic power over women as an object of pleasure (Makarenko, 1949). The bourgeois system has been criticized for the development of female prostitution (Bibby, 1962; Engels, 1949; Lanota, 1960), and the increasing number of abortions as a consequence of superstition and superstition. The man was presented as sex susceptible to addictions that harmed women's lives, i.e. alcoholism, betrayal, sexual abuse, and violence. Discrimination and sexual abuse against working women were criticized: "It was not the fantasy that put the girl on scaffolding or paving the street, but a hard necessity. It is not mockery that is due to her, but respect. When girls work together with their boyfriends, many feel that they can treat them as candidates for satisfying their sexual inclinations. First, play and harassment, and when it succumbs, it is a cynical opinion that they are all" (Łopuski, 1961, p. 50).

The factors and mechanisms of discrimination were presented in the context of the historical development of societies, with examples from the lives of women (readers' lists) (Lanota, 1960; Jackiewiczowa, 1961). The implementation of education based on gender equality and the introduction of a socialist system were to restore the dignity of women and prevent their further discrimination (Engels, 1949; Majda, 1961; Bibby, 1962). It was supposed to eradicate double moral standards, i.e. the consent to pre- and extra-marital sexual contacts of men, considering them a relic of the bourgeois past (Lanota, 1960). It was recommended to create opportunities for men to perform "female" jobs, but also to help with household chores: "Stop taking the position

of a parasite in the family. [...] Don't let your mother or sister tire you out of bringing water and pouring out buckets, which require a little more strength" (Łopuski, 1961, p. 104). It was believed that equality was fostered by co-education (Schindel & Rot, 1958), conducted from an early age: "If children use shared toilets and washrooms, if boys and girls play naked in the sun together, there is little likelihood of over-exposure to the body of the opposite sex (Bibby, 1962, p. 74). Coeducation of young people in sports clubs and youth organizations was to ensure that: "relations between girls and boys, as well as love and marriage life, are shaped by the requirements of morality posed by the new, socialist life" (Schindel & Rot, 1958, p. 174).

3. Fertility and Motherhood – about a Woman's Obligations towards a Socialist State

In the capitalist system, the work of a woman and a man was seen as a reflection of unfair social relations. The stronger man (master), having at his disposal the means of production, has power over the woman (servant), which creates antagonisms between the sexes (Engels, 1949). The importance of a family based on mutual love and respect for each other husband and wife was emphasized, noting that "A healthy and strongly connected family, the smallest of the collectives, is the surest support of a socialist society" (Schindel & Rot, 1958, p. 170). From the 1950s, a serious problem for the socialist society was the high fertility rate of Polish families. The slogans of conscious parenting have become ubiquitous. The knowledge of the principles of conscious fertility management by women was equated with patriotic duty. It was warned that frequent pregnancies put a strain on her physical and mental health, lead to premature old age, and hinder the fulfilment of professional roles (Majda, 1961). It was warned that further population growth would make it impossible to provide places for children in nurseries, kindergartens, and schools, and would pose a risk of an economic crisis. The effects of the excessive birth rate were to be high financial outlays for the termination of pregnancy. They were reminded of the benefits offered by the state, the activities of the clinic, and the availability of legal abortion procedures. Abortion was recommended when

a student was found to be pregnant, arguing that expelling her from school was disciplining and protecting other students (Majda, 1961).

Although the importance of partnership relations was so strongly emphasized (Schindel & Rot, 1958), the woman was made responsible for birth control, the welfare of marriage, family and socialist society. It was argued that “Almost every woman wishes to become a mother in good time” (Schindel & Rot, 1958, p. 73), she is responsible, more sensitive than a man, and less prone to addictions, e.g. promiscuity is contrary to her inherent modesty and restraint (Van de Velde, 1948). The woman was responsible for raising children to be good citizens, for the sexual awareness of children of different sexes and ages (Majda, 1961, pp. 187–191), and for clarifying doubts related to puberty (Bibby, 1962; Chatys-Skirzyńska, 1958; Lester, 1958).

The advice was addressed mainly to future mothers and potential victims of reckless male behaviour: “remember – he does not suffer from sexual intercourse, he does not become pregnant and does not give birth” (Jackiewiczowa, 1957, p. 24). Girls were warned against unplanned pregnancy and social ostracism: “When two young people have reunited, and especially when a trace of this relationship is visible to curious eyes (e.g. pregnancy) – the common opinion usually turns against a woman. Keep this in mind and don’t count on laxity (even though this opinion is wrong). Folk wisdom sees a man as a seducer above all” (Jackiewiczowa, 1957, p. 26). Girls were advised to be cautious in their relations with men: “If you were wiser, you would know that at the bottom of these” motherly “anger lies concern and love for you, and most of all fear for your fate, the fear that someone would hurt you, that you would they did not unnecessarily and prematurely attract all those torments and sufferings that make up the so-called ‘women’s lot’” (Jackiewiczowa, 1957, p. 21).

Women were blamed for educational mistakes and failures (e.g., lack of emotional maturity). Among women, “hysterical” mothers driven by superstition and superstition and opponents of sex education at school were noticed (Majda, 1961).

In publications for sex education, it was recommended to reconcile marital and family roles with professional work, which, together

with education and economic independence, made a woman attractive. A woman's work protected her from an unsuccessful marriage life: "Today, women are working. They have access to education on an equal footing with men. They have various professions. They have broad interests, views, important tasks to fulfil, and their own money. Have they stopped being women? Don't they want to be loved? Yes, they do. But if they are looking for lasting love – they must be wholesome people" (Majda, 1961, p. 39). The opposition was a woman – a "kitten", who could be liked but not respected (Łopuski, 1961), who "attracted a man briefly and only as long as he is young" (Jackiewiczowa, 1957, p. 39).

Summary and Conclusions

The publications for sex education from the Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods contained content on the roles of women, her rights, and relations with men. There is an attempt to combine Marxist ideology with scientific achievements. An incoherent and contradictory model of the roles of women emerges, which reflects the policy of the state towards them. The façade of the slogans of equality is noticed. The roles were not redefined adequately to the needs and expectations of women.

Despite the promotion of co-education, the girls received advice on how to prepare for marriage and family life. The content on parental functions is a contradiction of the proclaimed ideals of socialist upbringing, i.e. conscious parenting and partnership relations. Women are treated instrumentally, especially when, in return for taking advantage of the benefits of the welfare state, they are expected to take responsibility for birth control, and care for children and their husbands. In addition, a woman must earn her dignity and respect by taking on several roles at the same time.

Under the slogans of equalizing life opportunities for one sex, men are discriminated against by presenting them in a negative light, which probably does not help to build mutual respect, love and partnership relations between them.

The chaos of the proposed values is visible, sometimes rigorism is recommended, other times moral relativism. Criticizing the imperialist

“morality” and the “American lifestyle” that strips women of their dignity, at the same time issues related to the everyday difficulties of Polish women and the appearance of implementing equality policy in the practice of life are ignored.

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