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FREE-FLOATING SEXUALITY AND ITS LIMITS. THE SOCIAL CONDITIONING OF EARLY FIRST HETEROSEXUAL INTERCOURSE IN SLOVENIA

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to assess the empirical relevance of the claim that contemporary Western sexuality is increasingly free-floating. After defining free-floatingness as the progressive decoupling of sexuality from social and cultural constraints, it focuses on the association of some social factors with the timing of the first heterosexual intercourse (FHI) in Slovenia. The theoretical expectation that this association is weak, especially in the younger age cohort, is only partly confirmed by the data. They indicate that among men the timing of FHI is largely disembedded from its social context, yet this is not the case with women. On this basis, it may be argued that the claim about the decoupling of sexual behaviour from its social and cultural context – even if it is meant to indicate just a trend of change – is questionable.

Key words: sexuality, sociology of sexuality, sexual revolution, modern societies, sexual culture, first heterosexual intercourse

LA LIBERE FLUTTUAZIONI DELLA SESSUALITÀ E I SUOI LIMITI. CONDIZIONAMENTI SOCIALI E PRECOCITÀ DEI PRIMI RAPPORTI SESSUALI ETEROSESSUALI IN SLOVENIA

SINTESI

Scopo dell'articolo è controllare empiricamente la rilevanza di alcuni aspetti della tesi secondo la quale nelle società occidentali contemporanee la sessualità sia sempre più libera, intendendo con ciò riferirsi anche a una riduzione della sua esposizione a limitazioni di natura sociale e culturale. Nell'articolo, il rapporto tra decisioni riguardanti la sessualità e circostanze sociali viene analizzato in riferimento ai condizionamenti sociali sull'età dei partner al momento del primo rapporto sessuale in Slovenia. I dati confermano solo in parte le previsioni teoriche in base alle quali tale forma di condizionamento – in particolare nella generazione più giovane – sarebbe debole. Nei maschi, l'ingresso nella vita sessuale di coppia è più o meno indipendente dalle circostanze sociali analizzate, mentre nelle femmine tale correlazione è abbastanza forte e non ci sono indizi che possano far pensare a una sua diminuzione. A giudicare dal caso analizzato, la validità della tesi riguardante Le libere fluttuazioni sessualità è dunque da mettere in discussione.

Parole chiave: sessualità, sociologia della sessualità, rivoluzione sessuale, società moderne, cultura sessuale, primo rapporto sessuale eterosessuale

NEO-SEXUAL REVOLUTION AND FREE-FLOATING SEXUALITY

Theoretical analyses of changes in the social organisation of sexuality in Western societies in the last five decades suggest that their course has been far from linear. The sexual revolution in the 1960s represented a dramatic break with the established sexual morality and forms of sexual behaviour, yet these breakthroughs were soon endangered by the »counterrevolutionary forces« which took sway in the 1980s (McLaren, 1999, 193–218). However, only a decade later the field was again marked by transformations which »are indeed revolutionary, and in a very profound way« (Giddens, 1992a, 3; also see Weeks, 2003, 114; Bauman, 1999, 25). These transformations have recently amounted to nothing short of a »neo-sexual revolution« (Sigusch, 1998, 4–7).

Although most authors theorising the recent transformations of sexuality agree about their revolutionary character, there is not much consensus on why they deserve this designation. Nevertheless, in analyses of the phenomenal aspects of the neo-sexual revolution the processes of differentiation and individualisation most often come to the fore. According to these views, the revolutionised sexuality is characterised by **the cacophony of options** (Weeks in Schmidt, 1998, 227). To cope with this situation, men and women have to organise all aspects of their sexual life **in a self-determinated way that nevertheless respects others' limits and boundaries** (Schmidt, 1998, 227).

The process of differentiation in the field of sexuality has been facilitated by the demise of the remnants of repressive sexual morality and the ascent of »moral pluralism« (Weeks, 2003, 85). This cultural transformation has withered away the normative constraints to which sexual activities were exposed in the Western world until recent times. To use the broad options created by the new sexual culture and to act »in a self-determinated, way« individuals have to possess resources which enable them to recognise the possibilities for action, to make competent decisions and to act on this basis. In other words, the neo-sexual revolution has only been possible in so far as the transformations of sexual culture have been complemented by processes of the »sexual empowerment« of individuals and the social equalisation of sources of power in intimate life. The key component of the former process has been the increase in individuals' competencies to organise their sexual life autonomously and of the latter one towards gender equalisation, i.e. the elimination of unequal access to power resources for men and women.

These processes have enabled the unprecedented individualisation of sexual expression. Nevertheless, as already indicated, contemporary Western sexuality is not characterised by unlimited »self-determination«. All partnered sexual activities are constrained by a general demand to respect the partner's »limits and boundaries«. This demand not only has pragmatic grounds (i.e. it facilitates sexual communication and is obeyed for this reason) but is an expression of a general social norm which »explicitly forbids treating another sensationseeker as a sex object« (Bauman, 1999, 32). This norm constitutes the core of new sexual morality. In contrast to the pre-revolutionary morality, it does not regulate sexual preferences and activities in detail, i.e. does not endorse certain sexual acts and prohibits the others, but it only protects the autonomy of sexual partners and thus sets general »guidelines« for communication between sexual partners (see Weeks, 2003, 84). Precisely, it defines the cultural and social space in which negotiations between sexual partners, »founded on a belief in consensual, ratified behavior, and in explicit verbal agreement« (Schmidt, 1998, 225), are conducted.

The processes of the differentiation and individualisation of sexuality are embedded in wider social and cultural transformations of societies which are termed by different analysts as modern with different prefixes (high, late, post, reflexive etc.). Neither differentiation nor individualisation is limited solely to the field of sexuality. They pervade all social spheres. Therefore, the transformations of sexuality can be seen as an expression of the growing complexity and fragmentation of contemporary societies. Paradoxically, these processes have made the socio-cultural organisation of sexuality basically similar to the organisation of other societal subsystems, but at the same time they have led to the structural and functional separation of sexuality from them. In other words, structural social forces which have induced the neosexual revolution have also contributed to the selfreferential cultural and social organisation of sexuality. In consequence, the field of sexuality has been increasingly underdetermined by external social and cultural forces. This idea has been emphatically expressed in the claims about the free-floating character of contemporary sexuality (see Giddens, 1992a, 14; Bauman, 1999, 28).

Although different authors express the idea of neosexual revolution in different ways, the basic logic of its explanation seems to be relatively uniform. This can be well exemplified by Giddens' influential account of the transformations of »sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies« (1992a). Four concepts feature prominently in his analysis - pure relationship, confluent love, democratisation of intimacy and reflexive construction of individual identity. The first two refer to the interactional and normative framework which structures sexual in sexuality-related intimate communication in high modern societies. The conditions and modalities of partnered sexual activities are negotiated in relationships which are free of external constraints. It also implies that partners enter this type of sexual-intimate relationship and persist in it as long as they experience it as more gratifying (and dignifying) than other available relationships (see Giddens, 1992a, 58). The democratisation of intimacy refers both to the preconditions and results of a pure relationship. It is founded on the autonomy of partners and their equality in power resources (see Giddens, 1992a, 118-192). Broad equality in rights and resources enables a pure relationship, but at the same time makes the outcomes of »intimate negotiations« unstable and the relationship vulnerable. Finally, the notion of reflexivity points to individuals' endeavours to cope with the multitude of options and uncertainties related to them. With the rise of morality of negotiation, individuals have to possess the ability to make decisions, to deal with the unintended consequences of decisions and to integrate them into a meaningful whole, which is the basis of a (changeable) sexual identity (see Giddens, 1992a, 28-

For those who value the tradition of sociological ideas more than innovations in terminology, the background ideas of Giddens' and similar accounts of neo-sexual revolution are not as novel as they are often presented to be. In many respects they resemble the classical accounts of Western modernisation, most obviously Durkheim's analyses of the rise of individualism in modern societies. As is well known, Durkheim argues that the core modernisation processes have been social differentiation (»the division of social labour«) and the generalisation of cultural values and norms, which has culminated in the »cult of the individual« (Durkheim, 1992, 48; see Lukes, 1988, 156-158). These processes have led on the societal level to the functional separation of social spheres, whereas on the micro level they have enabled the voluntaristic aspects of social actions to come to the fore. The autonomy of individuals based on the functional differentiation and generalisation of values has provided fertile grounds for individualism. Nevertheless, the function of the overriding »cult of the individual« has not only been to foster individualism, but also - by demanding, as Giddens puts it »respect for the independent views and personal traits of the other« (1992a, 189) - to provide a robust normative framework for the variety of social interactions. Despite this, in the age of individualism - as Durkheim emphatically stresses - individuals and their social ties are exposed to uncertainties and social solidarity can be undermined by excessive individualism.

Even if we leave aside other classical accounts of Western modernisation, which can also be productively used to explain the modernisation of sexuality (see Bernik, 2010), the question cannot be avoided of why these ideas have not been employed in studying transformations of sexuality until recently. It seems that the answer lies in the fact that the modernisation of sexuality has not run parallel to the pace of other social spheres' transformations. More precisely, traditional sexual morality and forms of sexual behaviour survived long into

modern era to be finally transformed in a revolutionary way in the second half of the twentieth century and – according to those arguing for the neo-sexual revolution – once again at the end of the century. Considering this, it can be argued that studying the delayed – in comparison to the other social spheres – modernisation of sexuality demands the highly selective use of mainstream sociological ideas and primarily a high level of theoretical innovativeness. Needless to say, this has been an easily recognisable hallmark of the analyses of the neo-sexual revolution.

The claim about the delayed modernisation of sexuality can be challenged considering the results of (the few) sexual behaviour surveys conducted before the first sexual revolution. When they were published, their results were upsetting because they revealed a pronounced gap between the uniformity and rigidity of the prevailing sexual morality and the diversity and flexibility of the reported sexual behaviour (see Ericksen, Steffen, 1999; Kinsey et al., 1948). In other words, the surveys suggested that the »pre-revolutionary« sexuality was far from being unchangeable and monolithic. On this basis, it may be argued that the transformations of sexuality started much earlier and have been more congruent with the modernisation of other social spheres than is assumed by the »delayed modernisation« thesis, but its slow transformations have been invisible to the public eye. Moreover, they have not been visible even to the mainstream social sciences. But when the transformations of sexuality have finally been »discovered«, they have been termed revolutionary (or neo-revolutionary). From this point of view, the modernisation of sexuality has not been delayed, but is mostly invisible.

In our view, the thesis about the invisible modernisation of sexuality seems heuristically more promising than the delayed modernisation thesis. It points to the low level of attention the mainstream social sciences have paid to the systematic study of sexuality and their inability to duly detect the signs of change in this »remote« social sphere. It seems that the recent growth of research on transformations of sexuality has tried to make up for the long-lasting sociological neglect of this topic. Yet, despite the growing stock of knowledge on changes in sexual behaviour and attitudes accumulated by surveys in the last five decades, the theories of neo-sexual revolution pay surprisingly little attention to it. Most of them seem good examples of »free-floating« theorising which neither tries to generalise on the basis of systematic empirical knowledge nor expresses its propositions in a form that allows the testing of their validity. The predicament of such theorising is well expressed in the claim that "the post-modernization of sex is much more prevalent in the discourses on sexuality than in the real sex lives of men and women« and that the neo-sexual revolution »has apparently reached only a minority, the lucky daring few« (Schmidt, 1998, 238). It seems that these »daring few« are mostly (young) men and women of the upper middle class, i.e. people inhabiting the social world to which most sociologists belong.

In line with our claim that the main flaw of the theorising on the neo-sexual revolution is its inattention to »the real sex lives of men and women«, i.e. to empirical evidence on trends of change in contemporary sexuality. The aim of this article is to examine the empirical relevance of the claim about the free-floating character of contemporary sexuality using the example of early first heterosexual intercourse (FHI) and exploring its embeddedness in the social context in Slovenia. Precisely, by considering data stemming from a national survey of sexual lifestyles in Slovenia (Klavs, 2002) the article will try to find out to what extent some aspects of sexual behaviour have been freed from social constraints.

SOCIAL (DIS)EMBEDDEDNESS OF THE TIMING OF FIRST SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

The concept of free-floating sexuality is broad enough to allow many different interpretations and accentuations. As indicated, this article will focus only on its behavioural aspect, i.e. on the idea that in the course of the neo-sexual revolution sexual behaviour is getting increasingly idiosyncratic and fluid. This claim implies that social differences (such as age, gender, place of residence etc.) and inequalities in power resources are no longer related in any systematic way to variations in sexual behaviour. The same applies to cultural constraints. In an increasingly pluralistic sexual culture, individuals can freely select the cultural guidelines which best suit their sexual preferences, provided that their decisions and actions do not violate the abstract »cult of the individual«. As sexual biographies are undetermined by individuals' social and cultural status, they are also becoming increasingly unpredictable. In other words, the neo-sexual revolution transforms once stable and well integrated sexual biographies into a loose array of discrete preferences, decisions and experiences. In these circumstances, »a person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor ... in the reactions of the others, but in the capacity to keep particular narrative going« (Giddens, 1992b, 54), i.e. in a person's ability to integrate repeatedly the fragments, which constitute her or his sexual life, into a meaningful biography.

Our analysis cannot address the question of the social and cultural (dis)embeddedness of sexual biographies in the era of the neo-sexual revolution in its full complexity, but focuses just on one biographical event – first sexual intercourse (FSI). As this experience also has many aspects, the analysis will be limited to only one of

them, i.e. its temporal dimension. We will examine the question of to which extent the timing of FSI is free-floating with regard to some aspects of individuals' social status.

Theoretical thesis: FSI as the key event in sexual life courses

The decision to limit our analysis to the timing of FSI has been motivated by a broad consensus in sexual behaviour research that data about the modalities of FSI provide on the one hand a valuable insight into the prevailing sexual culture and patterns of social organisation of sexual life and on the other hand into individual responses to cultural and social circumstances. Even in societies with permissive sexual culture the FSI has an exceptional symbolic value (see Laumann, 1994, 321) and represents on the biographical level »one of the most central turning points in the sexual life course« (Haavio-Mannila et al., 2002, 51). Considering this, it can be argued that data on the modalities of FSI do not speak of this event only, but provide important information about the social and individual scripts guiding the process of sexual growing up and the entry to partnered sexual life.

As indicated by Bozon (1996, 143-175), the latter claim applies especially to data about the timing of one's FSI. His analysis of entry to the word of adult sexuality in France shows that the timing of the FSI is strongly related to many aspects of the subsequent sexual life course. According to his findings, early starters have a more complex sexual life than late starters: »They have far more sexual partners than the others, not just during adolescence but throughout their lives, including periods of conjugal existence. These are the individuals who have the largest number of extra-conjugal partners, who get married the least, and who are most likely to have separations. They also have the greatest diversity of sexual experiences and practices. Lastly, they are more likely than the others to believe that sexuality can be dissociated from emotions« (1996, 173). Nevertheless, these findings do not apply to men and women equally. Whereas men who experienced their FSI early differ from their late starting counterparts in both their behaviour and attitudes, the respective categories of women vary mostly in behaviour and much less in attitudes.

A replication of Bozon's study based on secondary data from five Western European states (including France) showed that a similar relationship between the timing of the FSI and subsequent sexual life can be found elsewhere. In all the analysed states the early starters tend to have a more complex sexual life than the late ones, but the differences between both categories are

¹ In Bozon's study, the categories of early and late starters are defined relatively, i.e., 25 percent of respondents in each generation who experienced their FSI the earliest belong to the early starters and the same share of those who had their first intercourse the latest to the late starters (see Bozon, 1996, 163).

more pronounced in sexual behaviour than in attitudes. Again, this applies more to men than women; the early starters among women differ significantly from their late starting counterparts in sexual behaviour, but only slightly in attitudes (see Bozon, Kontula, 1998, 56–60).

Similarly, the first national Slovenian general population survey about sexual lifestyles, attitudes and health showed that, in comparison with individuals experiencing their first heterosexual intercourse (FHI) at a more mature age, those reporting an early FHI (before the age of 16) were more likely to have had higher odds for at least two heterosexual partners during the year preceding the survey and at least 10 lifetime heterosexual partners. In addition, women with an early FHI were more likely to report having been a teenage mother than those with a later FHI and the proportion of men who reported having been diagnosed with at least one bacterial sexually transmitted infection was higher among men with an early FHI than those with a later FHI (see Klavs et al., 2006).

When explaining his findings Bozon acknowledges that "the first sexual intercourse is doubtless not a decisive event in its own right" (1996, 173). Although his analysis shows that its modalities are related to the respondents' social status, he argues that "its timing and circumstances in which it occurs are revealing of an order of priority held by individuals" (Bozon, 1996, 173). Both the characteristics of the FSI and subsequent sexual life course are in his view influenced primarily by individuals' dispositions towards sexuality. Social structural forces are important only insofar as they influence the formation of these dispositions. In this perspective, "the fact of having begun sexual life early is related to attitudes that are reinforced during adolescence and remain present throughout one's life" (Bozon, 1996, 169).

The claim about the paramount role of the individual's dispositions in shaping one's sexual life course is only partly in accordance with the views that high-modern/post-modern life courses are socially underdetermined. It suggests that the effect of social structures (such as educational status and gender) on the timing of one's FSI is mediated by attitudes, which can be highly personal and thus independent of the individual's social status. If one's attitudes are free-floating, i.e. highly individualised, the same applies to other aspects of his or her sexual life course. But Bozon argues that these attitudes – once they have formed – remain relatively im-

mutable through ones' whole sexual life course. In other words, in his view their stability is the main source of stability and predictability of sexual life courses. In this respect, Bozon differs radically from those neo-sexual revolution theorists who emphatically argue that contemporary sexual life courses are characterised by high fluidity and marked discontinuities (see Giddens, 1992a; Bauman, 1999; 2003). His thesis also finds little support in the results of empirical analyses which indicate that the relationship between sexual behaviour and attitudes is far from linear (see Laumann et al., 1994, 510). Taking the results of theoretical and empirical analyses into account, it seems highly unlikely that sexual attitudes do not change across one's entire sexual life course and that they influence sexual behaviour in a uniform way.

Even if Bozon's conclusions about the centrality of the FSI in sexual life courses are too deterministic and apodictic, his study indicates that the FSI, and especially its timing, should not be understood as just one event among many others which constitute sexual biographies. It seems that the timing of one's FSI is at least in some respects indicative of sexual behaviour patterns in later life. This holds implications for the potentially »broader« interpretation of the results of our analysis. If our data suggested that the timing of FSI, in particular early FSI, was socially underdetermined, we could speculate that this is also true to some extent for other events in one's sexual life course. Thus the results of our analysis, although limited solely to early FHI, could indirectly suggest that some other aspects of sexual lifestyles may also have the free-floating character of high modern/postmodern sexuality.

Empirical analysis: The social conditioning of early FHI² in Slovenia

The data on which our analysis is based were collected in the framework of the first national general population survey about sexual lifestyles, attitudes and health in Slovenia (see Klavs et al., 2002, Klavs et al., 2009).³ The data collection methods were adapted from the British National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL) conducted in 1990/1991 (Johnson et al., 1994) and were thoroughly piloted in Slovenia (Klavs, 2002). Similar to much of the recent empirical sex research, the aims and objectives primarily reflected public

² In our analysis only data about first heterosexual intercourse (FHI) are taken into account.

We used a stratified two-stage probability sampling of 18-49-year-old Slovenians with over-sampling of the 18-24-year-old age group. The data were collected between November 1999 and February 2001 at respondents' homes via a combination of face-to-face interviews and anonymous self-administered pencil and paper questionnaires. Respondents were asked their age at their first heterosexual intercourse (FHI) using a showcard in the face-to-face component of the interview. Those who reported this age were asked several questions about the FHI event. Questions about the main information source about sex at the time of their FHI, age at menarche for women and demographic characteristics were asked face-to-face. Questions about sexual lifestyle and STI were self-administered. Weights were computed to adjust for over-sampling of the young, the differences in survey responses and any remaining differences between the achieved sample and available Slovenian population estimates according to statistical regions, types of communities, gender and age groups, based on Central Population Registry data for the year 2000.

health concerns about health risks related to sexual behaviour (see Gagnon, 1988) and not theoretical discussions of the revolutionary transformation of sexuality in high-modern/post-modern societies. In contrast to the theoretical discussions which have paid surprisingly little attention to the influence of the AIDS epidemic on the social organisation of sexuality, the empirical research has chiefly focused on this topic since the mid-1980s. Many aspects of sexual lifestyles, especially those related to sexual pleasure, which featured prominently in earlier surveys, have largely been neglected in the AIDS era. Nevertheless, in the Slovenian survey a lot of information about many aspects of sexual behaviour and attitudes and their social and cultural context was collected. As indicated, our analysis focused solely on data concerning the relations between some social characteristics of respondents and the timing of their FHI, in particular early FHI (before the age of 16).

The multivariate analysis of associations of respondents' age, education level, religious affiliation, the size of communities in which they lived, family structure (living with both parents up to age of 15 or not) and main information source about sex (first partner or peers, parents, school) with early FHI revealed pronounced gender differences in the social patterning of early FHI (see Klavs et al., 2006). With the men, only family structure remained statistically significantly related to early FHI (the share of those who experienced their FHI before the age of 16⁴ was higher among those who had not lived with both parents until the age of 15 than among those who had (24.5% and 13.3%, respectively) (see Appendix 1). With the women, an early FHI was statistically significantly associated with their education level (the highest odds of being an early starter was among respondents with a low level of education), community size (higher odds for an early FHI was found among those living in larger cities), main information source about sex (higher odds of being an early starter was found among those for whom the main information source about sex was either their first partner or peers). Irrespective of these factors, women in the youngest

birth cohort (1975–82) had a significantly higher odds of experiencing their FHI before the age of 16 than their counterparts in the older cohort (1950–64). In addition, an early age at menarche (before the age 13) also increased the odds of an early sexual debut. These findings do not support the thesis about the free-floating character of contemporary sexuality.

We conducted further analyses to explore the associations between the above mentioned social factors and an early FHI within three different age cohorts of men and women (born during 1950-1964, during 1965-1974 and during 1975-1982). Drawing on »neo-sexual revolution« theories it could be expected that the strength of these associations would be waning from the older to the younger age cohort. In other words, the sexuality of the younger generation should be more free-floating than that of the older ones. Giddens' claim that »men are laggards in the transition now occurring « in sexuality and intimacy (1992a, 59) also suggest that the decoupling of sexual behaviour from social constraints is more pronounced in women than in men. In such a case, one would expect that the highest level of »free-floating« would be observed in the youngest generation of women.

The results presented in Appendixes 2, 3 and 4 provide some evidence in support of these claims – but only for men. The strength of the association of an early FHI with community size, and family structure seems to have been decreasing through time and both of these factors were statistically significantly associated with an early FHI in multivariate models only for men born during 1950–1964.

Amongst women, the structure of associations is much more complex. In all their generations the lowest education level was statistically significantly associated with higher odds of an early FHI; however, the strength of this association seems to have been decreasing from the oldest to the youngest generation.⁵ In addition, in the younger generation of women (born during 1975–1982) community size and early age at menarche became strongly associated with higher odds of an early FHI in contrast to older generations.⁶

Statistical analyses were performed using STATA version 7.0. Response rates were calculated from unweighted data. Univariate and multivariate analyses of association between early FHI (before the age of 16) and selected explanatory or outcome variables were performed by a logistic regression to obtain pseudo-maximum likelihood estimates of odds ratios (OR) and adjusted OR (AOR) together with 95% confidence intervals (CI) and adjusted Wald tests of significance. Tests for trend (pt) were based on the inclusion of a linear term in the logistic regression model.

⁸⁴⁹ men and 903 women aged 18-49 years were interviewed. The overall survey response rate was 67.0% (63.3% among men, 70.9% among women). Of these, 92.3% of men and 93.9% of women reported their age at FHI, 7.1% of men and 5.8% of women reported they had not yet experienced FHI and 0.6% of men and 0.3% of women declined to answer.

⁴ In contrast to Bozon's study, in our analysis the respondents were divided into two categories only, those who experienced their FHI before the age of 16 ("early starters") and those who experienced the event after the age of 16. Thus, in our study the early age at FHI was defined absolutely, i.e., irrespective of gender and age cohort, and not relatively as in the French study. The survey data on which our analysis draws clearly indicate that (also) in Slovenia the average age at FHI has decreased in the last three decades (see Klavs et al., 2002).

⁵ The majority of respondents in the younger generation studying for the third degree had not yet finished their studies when the survey was conducted. That is why in the younger generation only the difference between lower and middle education level is meaningful.

⁶ This suggests that the social and cultural meaning of the menarche and its impact on sexual behaviour have changed in a relatively short period of time.

These results indicate that social conditioning of the timing of FHI differs not only between genders, but has also been changing over time (between age cohorts). Whereas in women there was no evidence that the relevance of the social context for early FHI had been decreasing, there was some evidence of the opposite trend in men. In the older generation of men and women the social conditioning of the FHI timing was similar. In the middle and younger generation of men it was highly underdetermined, but that is not the case with the youngest women. In contrast to the claims derived from the thesis on free-floating sexuality, the highest level of »freefloatingness« - measured by the early timing of a FHI was seen among the two younger generations of men, whereas there were no signs that the social embeddedness of women's sexual behaviour was becoming weaker in time.

Discussion: Paradoxes of free-floating sexuality

If we assume that the data about the social embeddedness of FHI timing, in particular early FHI, at least partly indicate the social conditioning of the whole sexual life course, we could broaden the interpretation of our findings into a more general hypothesis that women's sexuality is more socially constrained than men's sexuality. In other words, women's decisions regarding the timing of their FHI - and probably also the other key decisions in their sexual life courses – depend more on their social characteristics than men's decisions. Our results provide some evidence that, in this respect, gender differences in the social conditioning of early FHI are not decreasing. Thus, we could speculate that women's sexual expressions are still more socially »repressed«, whereas men's are becoming less constrained. This could suggest that the social patterning of sexuality has been - despite all changes - still quite traditional, with women's sexual behaviour still being exposed to - at least some - constraints and men's sexual behaviour characterised by freedom. But then it is hard to explain why in the last three decades in Slovenia the proportion of those who experienced their FHI before the age of 16 has changed significantly among women and only slightly among men (see Appendix 1). As a result, the gender gap with respect to early starters, which was pronounced in the older generation, has almost disappeared in the younger generation.

This indicates that the repression/freedom perspective cannot explain how it is possible that women's sexual behaviour is still socially »repressed«, but at the same time more changeable than men's.

This paradox can be at least partly explained when the social factors taken into account in our analysis are not seen as constraints, but as resources which influence

individuals' potential actions. More precisely, educational attainment, (non-)religiosity, modes of (sexual) socialisation and even the place of living can be seen as social resources which in different ways condition individuals' capacities to make and implement decisions (also) in their sexual life. In this perspective, differences in timing of the FHI among women and probably also in some other aspects of their sexual life courses can be partly explained by the quantity and quality of the social resources they possess. In contrast to women, sexual decisions in the middle and younger generation of men are not conditioned by the resources taken into account in our analysis. When seen from this perspective, our findings are more in line with the claim that a »revolution in female sexual autonomy« and men's rather slow adaptation to it (see Giddens, 1992a, 28) is one of the key characteristic of the neo-sexual revolution. Nevertheless, this does not apply to all women. Because they do not possess the same social resources which condition sexual behaviour, their sexual behaviour differs accordingly. As far as men are concerned, our data indicate that the FHI timing and probably some other aspects of their sexual behaviour are not conditioned by the same social forces as women's sexual behaviour or are even not exposed to social influences to the same extent as women.

The gender differences in social conditioning of FHI timing which have come to the fore in our analysis are in line with the results of many surveys focusing on the »gender of sex« (see Schwartz, Rutter, 2000). Summarising these results, Baumeister states that »sociocultural factors such as education, religion, political ideology, acculturation and peer influence generally have stronger effects on female sexuality than on male« (2000, 368). On this basis he argues that women are characterised by higher »erotic plasticity« than men, i.e. female sexuality is, as compared with male, socially and culturally more »flexible and responsive« (Baumeister, 2000, 347). Baumeister's elaboration of the thesis on women's erotic plasticy (also see Diamond, 2008, 17-53) indicates that the causes of this phenomenon are complex and far from easily determinable, although its social implications are obvious. Women's sexuality is, more than men's, adaptable to changes in the social and cultural context. This implies that women are not only more susceptible than men to a repressive social and cultural sexual climate, but also to a permissive one. On this basis, it can be argued that the social and cultural embeddedness of female sexuality can in sexually permissive societies be a source of its free-floatingness, i.e. a source of its individualisation. Paradoxically, just the opposite applies to men. Because of their low responsiveness to the changing social and cultural context, they are less able to benefit from the permissive sexual climate.⁷

Ivan BERNIK et al.: FREE-FLOATING SEXUALITY AND ITS LIMITS. THE SOCIAL CONDITIONING OF EARLY FIRST HETEROSEXUAL INTERCOURSE ..., 153–166

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS FREE-FLOATING SEXUALITY?

The aim of our article has been to assess the empirical relevance of the claim that contemporary sexuality is increasingly free-floating. Defining free-floatingness as the progressive decoupling of sexuality from social and cultural constraints we focused on the association of some social factors with FHI timing in Slovenia. The expectation that this association should be weak, especially in the younger age cohort, was only partly confirmed. Our data suggest that with men the timing of FHI is largely disembedded from its social context, whereas with women there was some conflicting evidence of the decreased social conditioning of early FHI.

The theoretical relevance of these findings seems limited by its low generalisability. As stressed earlier, it is only based on an analysis of the social embeddedness of FHI timing. Although FHI and its timing hold a special place in sexual life courses, there is no doubt that many other sexual experiences are not socially and culturally patterned in the same way as FHI. In addition, our analysis included only a limited number of more or less unsystematically selected social factors. Last but not least, Slovenia is probably not the best place to study the social and cultural implications of the neo-sexual revolution. It may well be that it is (also) characterised in the field of sexuality – compared to West European states – by a »delayed« (post-) modernisation and has not yet entered the age of the neo-sexual revolution (see Bernik, Hlebec, 2005).

Despite these limitations, the results of our analysis are highly similar to findings based on sexual behaviour surveys conducted in Western Europe and the United States (see Laumann et al., 1994, Schmidt et al., 2006, Bozon, Leridon, 1996, Hubert et al., 1998, Johnson et al., 1994, Haavio-Mannila et al., 2002). They almost unanimously show that »social forces are powerful and persistent in determining sexual behavior« (Michael et al., 1995, 245). These forces are not only embodied in vague and fluid »social currents« which shape the general cultural setting in which individual decisions are made, but also in individuals' social status such as gender, class, age and marital status. Although sexual morality is becoming pluralistic, the data (see Laumann, 1994, 509-540; Wellings et al., 1994, 225-258) regarding sexual attitudes show there is a relatively broad, although probably only temporary, consensus on the social rules governing the key aspects of sexual behaviour. This implies – if we again draw on a conclusion based on US data - that »the costs of breaching the social pressures may be high, and the rewards of going along may be great (Michael et al., 1995, 246).

As already indicated, our findings are also consistent with the results of similar studies as far as gender differences in the social and cultural patterning of sexual preferences and behaviour are concerned. In both Western societies (see Baumeister, 2000) and post-socialist Slovenia the social and cultural embeddedness of female sexuality is stronger than the male one. Also in this respect our analysis offers only a minor contribution to the ample and systematic evidence which questions the validity of the claim of the free-floating character of modern sexuality. In opposition to this bold claim, the data suggest that both tendencies are at work in contemporary sexuality - certain sexualities are increasingly free-floating, whereas the others remain highly influenced by social and cultural forces. These trends also imply that contemporary sexuality is more differentiated than the theories of the neo-sexual revolution are often willing to admit.

The conclusion on the low level of validity of the free-floatingness thesis is based on assumption that sexuality is free-floating when it is decoupled from social and cultural influences. This makes it underdetermined, i.e. idiosyncratic and unpredictable. As indicated in the discussion in the previous section, an alternative definition of free-floatingness seems sociologically even more meaningful. According to this definition, freefloatingness does not consist in sexuality being free from social and cultural influences but in the individual's possession of social and cultural resources which enable her or him to act competently in the sexual field characterised by the »cacophony of options«. In this perspective, the individualistic, i.e., idiosyncratic and unpredictable, character of contemporary sexuality is primarily socially and culturally constituted.

The alternative definition of free-floatingness generates an image of contemporary sexuality which differs significantly from the one presented in previous paragraphs. The most obvious difference lies in the fact that, in this perspective, female sexuality can be designated as more free-floating than the male one. But this image is also unsupportive of the claim about the free-floating character of sexuality in the neo-sexual revolution age because it indicates that the transformation of contemporary sexuality is characterised by different trends and that the trend toward its free-floatedness is far from universal. This finding speaks in favour of the conclusion that the neo-sexual revolution has indeed preached only a minority, the lucky daring few« and that there are more women than men among them.

⁷ In heterosexual relationships men have to adapt at least to some extent to their female partners. Considering that, it can be argued that heterosexual men's adaptation to the changed sexual climate is mostly indirect, i.e. through their encounters with the changing female sexuality.

IVan BERNIK et al.: FREE-FLOATING SEXUALITY AND ITS LIMITS. THE SOCIAL CONDITIONING OF EARLY FIRST HETEROSEXUAL INTERCOURSE ..., 153–166

Appendix 1: Association of selected factors with early first heterosexual intercourse (FHI) (before age 16) for men and women in Slovenia (univariate and multivariate analysis).

Priloga 1: Povezanost izbranih faktorjev z zgodnjim prvim heteroseksualnim odnosom (FHI) (pred 16. letom starosti) za moške in ženske v Sloveniji (univariatna in multivariatna analiza).

		FHI ^a <age 16<br="">%</age>	Bases ^b	OR°	p value (95% Cl ^d)	Δ.	OR ^{e*}	p value (95% CI)
Men	Birth cohort (approximate age ^f)	/0		OK	(93 /6 CI)		OK	(93 /6 CI)
141011	1950–1964 (35–49)	13.7	418	1	p=0.52		1	p=0.44
	1965–1974 (25–34)	16.2	262	1.2	(0.7 - 2.0)		1.3	(0.8 - 2.2)
	1975–1982 (18–24)	17.1	198	1.3	(0.8 - 2.0)		1.3	(0.8 - 2.2)
	Education				p=0.36			p=0.24
	z1st stage secondary	19.4	113	1	p=0.36 $p_t = 0.04$		1	p=0.24 $p_t = 0.10$
	<1 st stage secondary 1 st or 2 nd stage secondar	15.1	638	0.7	(0.4 - 1.3)		0.7	(0.4 - 1.2)
	Tertiary	12.3	122	0.7	(0.4 - 1.3) (0.3 - 1.2)		0.7	(0.4 - 1.2) (0.2 - 1.2)
		12.3	122	0.0	(0.3 – 1.2)		0.5	(0.2 - 1.2)
	Religious affiliation	12.6	500	1	0.04		4	0.00
	Roman Catholic	12.6	580	1	p=0.04		1 -	p=0.09
	None	30.7	250	1.6	(1.0 - 2.5)		1.5	(0.9 - 2.4)
	Community size							
	<100,000	14.5	734	1	p=0.23		1	p=0.17
	>100,000	18.7	143	1.4	(0.8 - 2.2)		1.4	(0.9 - 2.3)
	Living with both parents to age 15							
	Yes	13.2	704	1	p=0.003		1	p=0.004
	No	24.5	139	2.1	(1.3 - 3.5)		2.1	(1.3 - 3.4)
	Main information source about sex							
	First partners / peers / other	16.7	651	1	p=0.25		1	p=0.25
	Parents	11.0	109	0.6	(0.3 - 1.4)		0.6	(0.3 - 1.3)
	School	11.4	107	0.6	(0.3 - 1.2)		0.6	(0.3 - 1.3)
Women	Birth cohort (approximate age ^f)				p<0.001			p<0.001
vvoinen	1950–1964 (35–49)	5.2	416	1	p<0.001 p _t +< 0.001		1	p<0.001 p _t +<0.001
	1965–1974 (25–34)	5.7	255	1.1	(0.5 - 2.3)		1.4	(0.7 - 3.0)
	1975–1982 (18–24)	14.4	190	3.1	(0.3 - 2.3) (1.8 - 5.4)		4.7	(0.7 - 3.0) (2.5 - 8.8)
		11.1	150	3.1	(1.0 3.1)		1.7	(2.3 0.0)
	Education	15.5	159	1	r +0 001		1	m 40 001
	<1 st stage secondary 1 st or 2 nd stage secondary	5.6	524	1	p<0.001 (0.2 – 0.6)			p<0.001 (0.1 – 0.3)
	Tertiary	5.6	176	0.3	(0.2 - 0.6) (0.1 - 0.8)		0.2	(0.1 - 0.3) (0.1 - 0.5)
	,	3.4	170	0.3	(0.1 – 0.6)		0.2	(0.1 – 0.3)
	Religious affiliation							
	Roman Catholic	6.7	577	1	p=0.21		1	p=0.66
	None	9.0	260	1.4	(0.8 - 2.3)		1.1	(0.6 - 2.0)
	Community size							
	<100,000	6.3	696	1	p=0.02		1	p=0.004
	>100,000	12.0	165	2.0	(1.1 - 3.7)		2.5	(1.3 - 4.8)
	Living with both parents to age 15							
	Yes	6.7	723	1	p=0.12		1	p=0.10
	No	10.8	138	1.7	(0.9 - 3.2)		1.7	(0.9 - 3.3)
	Main information source about sex							
	First partners / peers / other	9.5	515	1	p=0.008		1	p<0.001
	Parents	4.0	261	0.4	(0.2 - 0.8)		0.3	(0.1 - 0.6)
	School	4.1	77	0.4	(0.2 - 1.1)		0.3	(0.1 - 0.9)
	Age at menarche			-	(3.2)		0	(211 0.5)
		6.2	610	1	n=0.03		1	n-0.0F
	13 years old	6.2 10.3	610 237	1.7	p=0.03 (1.0 – 2.9)		1.7	p=0.05 (1.0 – 2.9)
	< 13 years old	10.3	23/	1./	(1.0 – 2.9)		1./	(1.0 – 2.9)

a – first heterosexual intercourse; b – weighted count of individuals; c – odds ratio; d – confidence interval; e – AOR = adjusted OR;

All individuals who refused to report their age at FHI and 4 individuals who reported FHI at a younger age than their first heterosexual experience were excluded from the analyses. Numbers of individuals (bases) vary according to the number of missing values for individual variables. 85 individuals with a religious affiliation other than Roman Catholic were excluded from the analysis of association of religious affiliation with early FHI. Only 863 men and 838 women (unweighted counts) without missing values for any of the variables in the model were included in the multivariate analyses. The results of the univariate analyses from the thus restricted data are not shown, but are very similar to those shown.

^{*} Adjusted for all variables in the table except for religion; f – approximate age at interview; ‡ – trend.

IVan BERNIK et al.: FREE-FLOATING SEXUALITY AND ITS LIMITS. THE SOCIAL CONDITIONING OF EARLY FIRST HETEROSEXUAL INTERCOURSE ..., 153–166

Appendix 2: Association of selected factors with early first heterosexual intercourse (FHI) (before age 16) for 18–24 year-old men and women in Slovenia (univariate and multivariate analysis).

Priloga 2: Povezanost izbranih faktorjev z zgodnjim prvim heteroseksualnim odnosom (FHI) (pred 16. letom starosti) za moške in ženske v starosti od 18 do 24 let v Sloveniji (univariatna in multivariatna analiza).

		FHIª							
		<16		Ur	Unadjusted		Adjusted ^d		
		years old							
					p value			p value	
		%	Bases	OR ^b	(95% CI ^c)		OR ^b	(95% CI°)	
Men	E.L:								
	Education	10.6	2.4	1	0.01				
	<1 st stage secondary 1 st or 2 nd stage secondary	19.6	24	1	p=0.81				
	3 rd level	16.6	168	0.8	(0.4 - 1.9)				
		23.0	5	1.2	(0.2 - 7.2)				
	Religious affiliation								
	Roman Catholic	15.2	125	1	p=0.42				
	None	18.8	61	1.3	(0.7 - 2.4)				
	Community size								
	<100,000	17.2	170	1	p=0.93				
	>100,000	16.6	27	1.0	(0.4 - 2.4)				
	Living with both parents until 15								
	Yes	15.8	172	1	p=0.12				
	No	25.9	25	1.9	(0.9 - 4.0)				
		23.3	23	1.5	(0.5 1.0)	H			
	Main sex information source	10.0	1.46	1	0.10				
	Peers / other	19.0	146	1	p=0.10				
	Parents	4.6	25	0.2	(0.0 - 0.9)				
	School	17.3	25	0.9	(0.4 - 2.2)				
Women									
	Education								
	<1 st stage secondary	21.2	25	1	p=0.05		1	p=0.06	
	<1 st stage secondary 1 st or 2 nd stage secondary	11.8	150	0.5	(0.2 - 1.2)		0.6	(0.3 - 1.4)	
	3 rd level	29.6	15	1.6	(0.4 - 5.6)		2.2	(0.6 - 8.0)	
	Religious affiliation								
	Roman Catholic	10.7	121	1	p=0.01				
	None	22.6	61	2.4	(1.3 – 4.7)				
		22.0	01	2.1	(1.3 1.7)	H			
	Community size	11.0	155	1			1		
	<100,000 >100,000	11.2 28.4	155 35	3.1	p<0.01 (1.5 – 6.7)		3.2	p<0.01 (1.6 – 6.7)	
	·	20.4	33	3.1	(1.5 – 6.7)		3.2	(1.6 – 6./)	
	Living with both parents until 15		1			Щ			
	Yes	13.8	164	1	p=0.46				
	No	18.2	26	1.4	(0.6 - 3.3)				
	Main sex information source								
	Peers / other	17.1	102	1	p=0.22	Щ			
	Parents	9.4	62	0.5	(0.2 – 1.1)				
	School	13.2	24	0.7	(0.3 - 2.2)				
	Age at menarche								
	13 years or older	9.8	127	1	p<0.01		1	p<0.01	
	< 13 years old	25.3	59	3.1	(1.6 - 6.2)	ΙT	3.6	(1.8 - 7.4)	

a – first heterosexual intercourse; b – odds ratio; c – confidence interval; d – adjusted for all other variables in the multivariate model; e – approximate age at interview

Methods for complex survey data (svy commands) in STATA were used to obtain estimates of proportions and numbers of individuals. A logistic regression for the survey data was used to compute pseudo-maximum likelihood estimates of odds ratios with 95% CI and results of adjusted Wald tests for significance.

Ivan BERNIK et al.: FREE-FLOATING SEXUALITY AND ITS LIMITS. THE SOCIAL CONDITIONING OF EARLY FIRST HETEROSEXUAL INTERCOURSE ..., 153–166

Appendix 3: Association of selected factors with early first heterosexual intercourse (FHI) (before age 16) for 25–34 year-old men and women in Slovenia (univariate and multivariate analysis).

Priloga 3: Povezanost izbranih faktorjev z zgodnjim prvim heteroseksualnim odnosom (FHI) (pred 16. letom starosti) za moške in ženske v starosti od 25 do 34 let v Sloveniji (univariatna in multivariatna analiza).

		FHI ^a						
		<16		Unadjusted		Adjusted ^d		
		years old					•	
		%	Bases	OR ^b	p value (95% CI°)	OR ^b	p value (95% CI°)	
Men	Education	13.7	20	1	p=0.94			
	Education	16.3	28 190	1.2	ρ =0.94 $(0.3 - 4.9)$			
	<1 st stage secondary 1 st or 2 nd stage secondary	17.4	44	1.3	(0.3 - 4.9) (0.3 - 6.6)			
	3 rd level	17.4	44	1.3	(0.3 – 0.0)			
	Religious affiliation							
	Roman Catholic	12.5	163	1	p=0.17			
	None	20.5	88	1.8	(0.8 - 4.2)			
	Community size							
	<100,000	15.8	214	1	p=0.70			
	>100,000	18.1	48	1.2	(0.5 - 2.8)			
	Living with both parents until 15							
	Yes	13.9	215	1	p=0.08			
	No	26.9	46	2.3	(0.9 - 5.8)			
	Main sex information source							
	Peers / other	19.3	172	1	p=0.27			
	Parents	13.5	48	0.7	(0.2 - 1.9)			
	School	6.8	41	0.3	(0.1 – 1.4)			
Women								
	Education							
	<1 st stage secondary	19.2	35	1	p=0.01	1	p<0.01	
	1 st or 2 nd stage secondary	3.5	155	0.2	(0.0 - 0.6)	0.1	(0.0 - 0.5)	
	3 rd level	3.7	65	0.2	(0.0 - 0.9)	0.1	(0.0 - 0.7)	
	Religious affiliation							
	Roman Catholic	5.1	173	1	p=0.43			
	None	8.0	72	1.6	(0.5 - 5.4)			
	Community size							
	<100,000	5.1	201	1	p=0.49			
	>100,000	7.9	54	1.6	(0.4 – 6.1)			
	Living with both parents until 15	_						
	Yes	5.9	210	1	p=0.82			
	No	4.9	45	0.8	(0.2 - 4.0)			
	Main sex information source							
	Peers / other	7.9	155	1	p=0.17	1	p=0.07	
	Parents	2.8	84	0.3	(0.1 - 1.6)	0.3	(0.1 - 1.1)	
	School	0	16	-				
	Age at menarche							
	13 years or older	4.9	182	1	p=0.42			
	< 13 years old	7.8	73	1.7	(0.5 - 5.7)			

a – first heterosexual intercourse; b – odds ratio; c – confidence interval; d – adjusted for all other variables in the multivariate model; e – approximate age at interview

Methods for complex survey data (svy commands) in STATA were used to obtain estimates of proportions and numbers of individuals. A logistic regression for the survey data was used to compute pseudo-maximum likelihood estimates of odds ratios with 95% CI and results of adjusted Wald tests for significance.

Ivan BERNIK et al.: FREE-FLOATING SEXUALITY AND ITS LIMITS. THE SOCIAL CONDITIONING OF EARLY FIRST HETEROSEXUAL INTERCOURSE ..., 153–166

Appendix 4: Association of selected factors with early first heterosexual intercourse (FHI) (before age 16) for 35–49 year-old men and women in Slovenia (univariate and multivariate analysis).

Priloga 4: Povezanost izbranih faktorjev z zgodnjim prvim heteroseksualnim odnosom (FHI) (pred 16. letom starosti) za moške in ženske v starosti od 35 do 49 let v Sloveniji (univariatna in multivariatna analiza).

		FHI ^a							
		<16		Unadjusted		A	Adjusted ^d		
		years old				, aocea			
		7			p value		p value		
		%	Bases	OR^b	(95% CI°)	OR^b	(95% CI°)		
Men									
	Education								
	<1st stage secondary	22.0	61	1	p=0.15	1	p=0.07		
	<1 st stage secondary 1 st or 2 nd stage secondary	13.4	280	0.5	(0.3 - 1.2)	0.5	(0.2 - 1.1)		
	3 rd level	8.5	73	0.3	(0.1 - 1.1)	0.2	(0.1 - 0.9)		
	Religious affiliation								
	Roman Catholic	11.5	292	1	p=0.27				
	None	16.8	102	1.6	(0.7 - 3.4)				
		10.0	102	1.0	(0.7 3.1)				
	Community size	12.5	250	-	0.17	-	0.02		
	<100,000	12.5	350	1	p=0.17	1	p=0.02		
	>100,000	20.0	67	1.8	(0.8 - 3.9)	2.6	(1.2 – 6.0)		
	Living with both parents until 15								
	Yes	11.5	335	1	p=0.02	1	p=0.01		
	No	22.7	82	2.7	(1.1 – 4.5)	2.4	(1.2 - 4.8)		
	Main sex information source								
	Peers / other	14.4	333	1	p=0.91				
	Parents	12.1	36	0.8	(0.2 - 2.9)				
	School	12.3	41	0.8	(0.3 - 2.5)				
	301001	12.3	71	0.0	(0.3 – 2.3)				
Women									
	Education								
	<1st stage secondary	12.7	98	1	p=0.01	1	p<0.01		
	1 st or 2 nd stage secondary	2.9	218	0.2	(0.1 - 0.6)	0.1	(0.0 - 0.5)		
	3 rd level	2.8	96	0.2	(0.0 - 0.9)	0.1	(0.0 - 0.5)		
	Religious affiliation								
	Roman Catholic	5.9	263	1	p=0.30				
	None	3.1	126	0.5	(0.1 - 1.9)				
	Community size				(011 110)				
	<100,000	4.7	340	1	p=0.44	1	p=0.12		
	>100,000	7.1	76	1.5	(0.5 - 4.7)	2.5	(0.8 - 8.0)		
	Living with both parents until 15				,				
	Yes	3.9	349	1	p=0.02				
	No	11.8	66	3.3	(1.2 - 9.2)				
		11.0	00	3.3	(1.2 - 9.2)				
	Main sex information source	7.4	257	- 1	0.00	1	0.00		
	Peers / other	7.4	257	1	p=0.09	1	p=0.08		
	Parents	2.1	116	0.3	(0.1 – 1.2)	0.2	(0.0 - 1.2)		
	School	0	38			-	-		
	Age at menarche								
	13 years or older	5.4	301	1	p=0.52				
	< 13 years old	3.6	106	0.7	(0.2 - 2.4)		<u> </u>		

a – first heterosexual intercourse; b – odds ratio; c – confidence interval; d – adjusted for all other variables in the multivariate model; e – approximate age at interview

Methods for complex survey data (svy commands) in STATA were used to obtain estimates of proportions and numbers of individuals. A logistic regression for the survey data was used to compute pseudo-maximum likelihood estimates of odds ratios with 95% CI and results of adjusted Wald tests for significance.

IVAN BERNIK et al.: FREE-FLOATING SEXUALITY AND ITS LIMITS. THE SOCIAL CONDITIONING OF EARLY FIRST HETEROSEXUAL INTERCOURSE ..., 153–166

PROSTOLEBDEČA SPOLNOST IN NJENE MEJE. DRUŽBENA POGOJENOST ZGODNJEGA PRVEGA HETEROSEKSUALNEGA SPOLNEGA ODNOSA V SLOVENIJI

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POVZETEK

Članek analizira empirično relevantnost teze, da je sodobna spolnost vse bolj prostolebdeča. Ta teza ima pomembno mesto v diskusijah o spreminjanju spolnosti v sodobnih zahodnih družbah. Na enostaven način je prostolebdečnost spolnosti mogoče definirati kot njeno postopno izmikanje družbenim in kulturnim vplivom. S tem spolno vedenje postaja nepredvidljivo in idiosinkratično. Ob predpostavki, da je starost ob prvem spolnem odnosu (PSO) povezana z nekaterimi drugimi značilnostmi kasnejšega spolnega življenja, je veljavnost teze o prostolebdeči spolnosti v članku preverjena na odnosu med družbenimi dejavniki in zgodnjim PSO. Podatki, na katere se opira raziskava, so bili zbrani z raziskavo spolnih življenjskih slogov v Sloveniji med letoma 1999 in 2001. Ti podatki le deloma potrjujejo teoretsko pričakovanje o šibki povezanosti družbenih dejavnikov in starosti ob PSO. Medtem ko je vstop v aktivno partnersko življenje pri moških dokaj neodvisen od analiziranih družbenih dejavnikov, pa to ne velja za ženske. Pri njih tudi ni opaziti znakov zmanjševanja družbene pogojenosti tega dogodka. Ob upoštevanju teh ugotovitev je mogoče trditi, da je veljavnost teze o prostolebdeči spolnosti vprašljiva.

Pri analizi teoretske relevantnosti empiričnih ugotovitev se članek osredotoča na vprašanje o utemeljenosti izhodiščne definicije prostolebdeče spolnosti. Če prostolebdečnost spolnosti razumemo kot njeno osvobajanje izpod družbenih in kulturnih omejitev, empirični podatki sugerirajo sklep, da je ženska spolnost kljub vsem spremembam, ki jih je doživela v zadnjih desetletjih, še vedno družbeno »kontrolirana«, medtem ko se moška izmika tem omejitvam. Presenetljivo dejstvo, da je ženska spolnost izpostavljena družbenim omejitvam in hkrati spremenljiva, kaže, da v družbah s permisivno spolno kulturo temelji prostolebdeče spolnosti niso v njeni ločenosti od družbenih in kulturnih vplivov, ampak v izpostavljenosti tistim vplivom, ki posameznikom in posameznicam omogočajo avtonomno in kompetentno sprejemanje spolnih odločitev. Z vidika te alternativne opredelitve prostolebdeče spolnosti je mogoče pojasniti različno dinamiko spreminjanja ženske in moške spolnosti v sodobnih družbah.

Ključne besede: spolnost, sociologija spolnosti, spolna revolucija, moderne družbe, spolna kultura, prvi heteroseksualni spolni odnos

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