



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

"Stop dressing like whores!"

Discourses in Polish Sexuality Education 2009-2016

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Tiivistelmä - Referat - Abstract <p>The purpose of this thesis is to study discourses in sexuality education in Polish schools 2009-2016. Polish sexuality education is an abstinence-based education influenced by Poland's Catholic Church and its moral views as it is holding an influential position due to constitutional alliance with the state of Poland. In 2012 the Catholic Church launched the so-called “anti-gender” campaign in which gender was considered a threat to traditional family values and a source of perversion. Conservatives frequently propagated the dangers of gender towards children to parents as presented as a threat to the Polish nation. This study examines why gender stereotypes, homophobia, and disinformation are promoted, and secondly, how the anti-gender campaign has impacted Polish sexuality education.</p> <p>The theoretical framework consists of central conceptions and Foucault's theory on biopower, according to which sexuality can be regulated and used as power strategies. This study is a qualitative study, as the research material consists of texts, documents, and media articles. The methodology for this study consists of content analysis, specifically data-driven content analysis, and critical discourse analysis, to evaluate observations from the data. The power strategies of biopower strongly supported my analysis and created a theoretical entity. Critical discourse analysis has been used as a background method to reveal power asymmetries from the research data.</p> <p>The results of this study were on a practical level that the sexuality education classes were poorly organized as it is treated as a secondary subject. Many of the teachers were incompetent to teach sexuality education who intentionally or unintentionally shared their personal views with the students. Some teachers were priests whose worldview was religious, promoting Catholic views in the classes. On a societal level, sexuality education was impacted by the Catholic Church, whose influence on educational policy was significant with the purpose of maintaining traditional social order and gender roles. Nonetheless, gender inequalities and negative attitudes towards sexual minorities exist in many Polish society domains, affecting the moral atmosphere and the teaching of sexuality education within the lack of will of conducting a proper curriculum. The anti-gender campaign affected sexuality education by making the concept of teaching gender in schools challenging or even impossible. Negative attitudes towards sexuality education increased in fear of gender making Polish children sexual and therefore endangering Polish future and values. The weaknesses of democracy and women's and LGBTQ+ movements, the Church's exceptional influence on society, and the strength of nationalist movements were all enablers of the anti-gender campaign.</p>		
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1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of sexuality education is immense in the lives of young people as it prepares them for sexual life with research-based knowledge. It is of high importance in preventing unintended pregnancies and pregnancies at an early age. It prevents sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV and AIDS. Besides, if taught appropriately, sexuality education helps young people develop skills to overcome difficulties related to relationships and communication by increasing their confidence to make reasonable decisions. Sexuality education is increasingly at the center of attention in terms of reducing gender-based violence and gender inequality. Studies show that social environment and social norms are potentially adjustable when educating young people early.¹

In Poland, sexuality education is called "preparation for family life," mainly abstinence-based education emphasizing traditional gender roles and marriage. The classes are reported to contain non-scientific information, often promoting gender stereotypes and the Catholic worldview to the students. It is obligatory for schools to provide it but non-obligatory for pupils to attend. Often, schools exclude sexuality education from curricula or tend to organize them in unfavorable hours. Teachers lack education in teaching the subject in a proper manner, and teaching methods vary depending on individual teachers. The level of sexuality education differs significantly between regions; in the capital and other cities, sexuality education is based more on scientific information, whereas in rural areas, the subject is taboo.²

In Poland, the Catholic Church and its concept of morality influence policymaking as it is infiltrated thoroughly in Polish society's power-levels. Specifically, when it is a question of abortion, contraception, premarital sex, and sexuality, the Church affects political decisions, educational policy, and sexuality education.³ Historically, the Catholic Church

¹ UNESCO, 2014, p. 12

² Parker, Wellings, Lazarus, 2009, p. 238-240

³ Misthal, 2015, p. 2



has been a crucial part of Poland and Polish identity⁴ and in many narratives belonging to the Catholic Church is part of Polishness.⁵ During the communist regime, religion was silenced, but as the rule weakened in the 1980s, the Church allied itself with groups and institutions, eventually fighting against communism alongside the Solidarity movement until the collapse of it in 1989.

After years of reinforcing its power, the Church confirmed its position in the post-communist society with the Concordat in 1993 between the Polish episcopate, the state of Poland, and the Vatican. The treaty verified the political status of the Catholic Church in Poland. Considerable to notice, the Concordat guarantees rare privileges for the Church and affects the influence of the state on the Church; the state cannot impact the Church, but the Church can impact the state.⁶ The relationship between the state and the Catholic Church gives the Church relative power in the legal and political discourse. During the last decades, the Catholic Church has intensified nationalist discourse creating a dichotomy between “us” and “them,” which has created a new form of religious nationalism in Poland.⁷

During communist rule, systematic school-based sexuality education was introduced in 1973, and the subject was to prepare students for socialist family life. A significant part of the classes was for highlighting social and psychological issues and less sexuality. The goal was to teach young poles for marriage and family life.⁸ Though the education's focus was family life, gender equality, birth control, and sexuality were discussed. Abortions were viewed negatively, though allowed for social reasons since 1956, contraceptives were emphasized as primary birth control.⁹ Despite the openness of sexuality education to some extent, the Catholic Church had an impact already in the

⁴ Porter, 2001, p. 294

⁵ Daniel, 1995, p. 402

⁶ Misthal, 2015, p. 33

⁷ Topidi, 2019, p. 1

⁸ Lišková, Jarska, Szegedi, 2019 p. 10–12

⁹ Lišková, Jarska, Szegedi, 2019 p. 12–15



1980s on the curriculum. After the collapse of communist rule, the influence increased significantly.¹⁰

In 2012, the Catholic Church of Poland launched a campaign against gender, which rapidly gained success among the public. In this context, the meaning of gender refers to the social construction of gender through which feminine or masculine identity is developed in a socialization process and eventually defines social rules (gender is more precisely defined in chapter 5.2).¹¹ According to the Catholic Church and the campaign, there is a "gender ideology" that will destroy Polish values and families and promote homosexuality and porn addiction. The concept of "gender ideology" became known by the Minister of Justice of Poland when he opposed the Istanbul convention¹² claiming its potential ideological threat against Polish values and families due to the word gender. The message of gender as a threat to Poland spread among conservative religious actors¹³, eventually causing anxiety among parents throughout the country who signed petitions to ban sexuality education in schools.¹⁴

In this study, the themes of gender stereotypes, homophobia, and disinformation are evaluated from the data regarding Polish sexuality education. These themes from sexuality education are situated in the larger picture of Polish culture, history, and debates. Additionally, the impact of the anti-gender campaign on sexuality education will be examined. The Catholic Church's role is also examined as it functions as the key player in the educational policy and the influencer in the moral questions among the public. As a timeframe for this study, I have chosen the time between 2009 and 2016 due to my research data (Ponton 2009, 2014 and 2016), the school reform in 2009, and the timing of the anti-gender campaign in 2012 onwards. This study is a cultural study that is interested in culture and cultural phenomena. The nature of cultural studies is clustering different interdisciplinary approaches¹⁵ without determined methodology or

¹⁰ Lišková, Jarska, Szegedi, 2019 p. 17

¹¹ Odrowąż-Coates, 2014, p. 1

¹² Istanbul Convention prevents and combats violence against women and domestic violence

¹³ Graff, 2014, p. 431–432

¹⁴ Wozniak, 2015, p. 433

¹⁵ Johnson, Chambers, Raghuram, Tincknell, 2004, p. 22-23



tradition. A cultural study is always dependent on its context and social and historical situations.¹⁶ It is concerned with interpreting cultural representations and practices to receive new knowledge or understanding through data analysis.¹⁷

As my theoretical framework, I have chosen Foucault's theory on biopower, which elaborates these themes mentioned above as power strategies. According to Foucault, when a state controls individuals' sexuality by a specific plan, it controls and regulates the individual's body and population.¹⁸ My study is qualitative research based on data-driven content analysis as a research method in which theory guides the analysis. I will use critical discourse analysis as a background research method to recognize power asymmetries and relations of power in discourses. The theory on biopower strongly supports my analysis as the analyzed themes of sexuality education and broader societal discourse have been divided according to Foucault's power strategies. However, the key idea is that the analytical units are not agreed upon or considered in advance.

I am interested in women's and minorities' rights and gender inequality, and this subject provides a chance to analyze the more or less non-researched topic of Polish sexuality education, its content, and connection to the Polish character of religion gender equality through education. I find it interesting to connect these themes to my theoretical framework as mechanisms to control social norms and behavior. Also, there is no significant amount of research on sexuality education in Poland's context in English; therefore, it is valuable to conduct such research. Since there is no consensus or the correct name for sexuality education as the key journals in the field is called, i.e., *Sex education*, *Sexuality research*, *Sexualities*, I will use the term *Sexuality education*. The term *Sexuality education* also considers a broader spectrum of sexuality as it is more than biology or our sexual behaviors compared to the term *Sex education*.

¹⁶ Grossberg, Nelson, Treichler, 1992, p. 6

¹⁷ Grossberg, Nelson, Treichler, 1992, p. 11

¹⁸ Wehr, 2003, p. 2–3



1.1 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Previous research regarding Polish sexuality education is mainly non-existent in terms of the research literature concerning this exact topic. However, based on Polish sex educator's group Ponton's reports (see chapter 3), Maria Wozniak wrote an article *Sexuality education in Polish Schools* (2015) to discuss the current state of sexuality education in Poland. She argues that the classes' preparation for family life' present abstinence-based teaching concentrating on the negative effects of sexuality and sexual activity before marriage. These classes fail to consider modernity by denying access to knowledge about sexuality that is reliable and scientific. By promoting disinformation and non-scientific information, teaching supports traditional gender roles and presents the family as the life goal for young people.¹⁹ The article has provided important information concerning my thesis despite being a short article.

I have also found one thesis, *Let's Talk about Sex: Gender, Nation, and Sex Education in Contemporary Poland* by Lauren Post (2015) from the Ohio State University, which examines the historical impact of the Catholic Church of Poland on gender roles and the weakness of feminist movement to challenge these traditional roles in sex education policy. Her thesis explores the historical background of Polish sexuality education and connects current legal and cultural issues preventing the establishment of comprehensive sex education.²⁰ She mentions the anti-gender campaign launched by the Catholic Church in 2012, which opposed "gender ideology" and its connections to sexuality education. The study remains shallow, especially when conducted without research questions and theoretical framework.

The phenomenon of the campaign against gender and the Catholic Church's role in the discourse has been studied more profoundly. Agnieszka Graff has conducted several studies and articles relating to gender discourse and situating her studies with the Catholic Church. In her article *Report from the gender trenches: War against 'genderism' in Poland* (2014), she has explained several reasons behind the phenomenon of the war

¹⁹ Wozniak, M., 2015. Sexuality Education in Polish Schools. *Przegląd Socjologiczny*. LXIV (64). 121-135.

²⁰ Post, L., 2015. *Let's Talk about Sex: Gender, Nation, and Sex Education in Contemporary Poland*.



on gender and the Catholic Church struggle and power in the discourse.²¹ In an older study of hers, *Looking at Pictures of Gay Men: Political Uses of Homophobia in Contemporary Poland* (2010), Graff looks at Poland's politicized homophobia in the post-accession period as an EU member. She argues that homophobia is a concept as much as sexual modernity, and they both are constructed – culturally and historically and yet are vulnerable to political pressure. Due to the EU's anti-homophobia rhetoric, Polish homophobia became a political issue and a threat to Polish identity.²²

Graff has concentrated on war against genderism merely in the Polish context and reasoning its historical developments that connect the phenomenon. Though Graff mentioned the transnational context in her article 2014, Elżbieta Korolczuk has written about the same phenomenon concentrating widely on the transnational aspect. In her article "*The War on Gender" from a Transnational Perspective – Lessons for Feminist Strategizing* (2014), she argues that groups established early in the 1990s collaborating at the local, national, and transnational level are the reason for the counterattack against women's and LGBTQ+²³ rights and gender equality. According to Korolczuk, the supporters of these resistance groups claim that Eastern Europe's and Russia's morals and values are protected from feminism and genderism from the West. The same narratives of children's sexualization by gender education are similar in Eastern Europe and in some Western countries. The war on gender is a transnational phenomenon reflecting conservative mobilization.²⁴

Anna Odrowaz-Coates *Gender in Crisis in Poland, Catholic Ideology and the Media* (2015) also looks at the anti-gender campaign but from the perspective of media discourse. She argues that Poland is divided between pro-gender and anti-gender people, and the media discourse has created an environment of turmoil. According to her article, the Catholic Church's anti-gender campaign should not be ignored as it may negatively

²¹ Graff, A., 2014. Report from the gender trenches: War against 'genderism' in Poland.

²² Graff, A., 2010. *Looking at Pictures of Gay Men: Political Uses of Homophobia in Contemporary Poland*.

²³ LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and others.

²⁴ Korolczuk, E., 2014. "*The War on Gender" from a Transnational Perspective - Lessons for Feminist Strategizing* Elżbieta Korolczuk.



impact women's rights. The more powerful positions in the society the gender opponents receive, the more it is a loss for generations of researchers and feminists. The article is a media discourse that has little empirical research in it.²⁵ All these articles provide a picture of the phenomenon, and they have similar outcomes in their analysis, though articles have their specific research angle.

Concerning childhood sexuality in the Polish context, Ewa Stanczyk's article *Cartoon characters, equality nurseries and children's 'best interests': On childhood and sexuality in Poland* (2018) examines childhood sexuality and children's innocence. She situates the fear of sexualization of children into the anti-gender campaign launched by the Catholic Church. She looks at earlier debates about children's sexuality in three case studies in Poland where debates about children's television series or cartoon characters have features stereotypically associated with adults. She also examines the educational program of gender equality that was established in some Polish nurseries in 2011. The anxiety caused by this program, the fear of turning boys into girls, is explored and connected to Poland's political context and the continuum of right-wing conservatism as the key actor in these debates.²⁶ Sexualization of children as a topic is more researched in general with different case studies.²⁷ Concerning sexuality education, it is claimed by the conservative right-wing and the Catholic Church that sexuality education makes children sexual. According to several studies, good sexuality education, in turn, delays the young people's first sexual intercourse and leads them to more responsible sexual behavior. A large number of studies related to sexuality education and sexual health have been conducted by WHO (2006, 2010, 2015)²⁸, UNESCO (2014, 2018, 2019)²⁹,

²⁵ Odrowaz-Coates, A., 2015. Gender in Crisis in Poland, Catholic Ideology and the Media.

²⁶ Stanczyk, E., 2018. Cartoon characters, equality nurseries and children's 'best interests': On childhood and sexuality in Poland.

²⁷ See: Page Jeffery, C. 2017. Too sexy too soon, or just another moral panic? Sexualization, children, and "technopanics" in the Australian media 2004–2015. *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(3), 366–380. Bragg, S., Buckingham, D., Russell, R., & Willett, R. (2011). Too much, too soon? Children, "sexualization" and consumer culture. *Sex Education*, 11(3), 279–292.

²⁸ WHO, 2006. Defining sexual health Report of a technical consultation on sexual health, WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA, 2010. Standards for Sexuality education in Europe. Cologne & WHO, 2015. Sexual health, human rights and the law.

²⁹ UNESCO, 2014. Comprehensive sexuality education: the challenges and opportunities of scaling-up, UNESCO, 2018. International technical guidance on sexuality education. An evidence-informed approach



UNFPA (2014)³⁰ , and BZgA co-operating with WHO (2010)³¹ and UNFPA and WHO (2016).³²

As mentioned in the introduction, the religious-conservative discourse, it is essential to remark Kyriaki Topidi's article *Religious Freedom, National Identity, and the Polish Catholic Church: Converging Visions of Nation and God* (2019). When considering Poland and the Catholic Church, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Church is not only one institution of society; rather, it constitutes Polish identity and nation. In this regard, the relation between the state and the Church is constitutional, giving legal and political power in many society sections. Religion and nationalism are operating hand in hand in this form of power relationship. This article situates secularization historically and religious development as part of the national identity. The new form of religious nationalism has created the division between our land and others.³³

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study examines Polish sexuality education and its promotion of gender stereotypes, homophobia, disinformation, and the impact of the anti-gender campaign on sexuality education between 2009 and 2016. Therefore, to identify these themes firstly in Polish sexuality education and secondly, find out the influence of the campaign on Polish sexuality education, I have set two main research questions:

- 1) Why are gender stereotypes, homophobia, and disinformation promoted in Polish sexuality education?

& UNESCO, 2019. Global Education Monitoring. Facing the Facts: The Case for Comprehensive sexuality education.

³⁰ UNFPA, 2014. Operational Guidance for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Focus on Human Rights and Gender.

³¹ WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA, 2010. Standards for Sexuality education in Europe. Cologne

³² BZgA, UNFPA, WHO, 2016. Sexuality Education, Policy brief No. 1.

³³ Topidi, K. 2019. Religious Freedom, National Identity, and the Polish Catholic Church: Converging Visions of Nation and God.



2) How the anti-gender campaign launched by the Catholic Church has impacted Polish sexuality education?

This study is essential, firstly, since the topic is widely unstudied, especially in English, and much of the attention of research has been focused on abortion policies in Poland. Sexuality education as a topic is important, and specifically Polish sexuality education, which is connected to Polish history and culture. The Polish sex educators' group Ponton, whose reports have been used in this study, are the first reports conducted concerning Polish sexuality education. Many other reports have cited exactly these reports when informing about the situation of sexuality education in Poland. To use the material to point out gender stereotypes, homophobia, and disinformation and connect these to the wider discourse at the societal level to find how the anti-gender campaign has impacted sexuality education has not been studied in English, nor have I found studies of this kind in Polish.

Secondly, the topic itself is important since studies show that sexuality education has a massive impact on young people's lives concerning teenage pregnancies, sexual relationships, and better knowledge about their sexuality to make responsible decisions.³⁴ To consider that sexuality education is a taboo in Poland and the state producing information related to the subject is minimal, it is vital to bring the issue into the light. Studying Polish sexuality education not only points out the current state of sexuality education but broader attitudes towards gender equality, women's rights, and the situation towards sexual minorities. Additionally, the Catholic Church's role in Polish society is an exception in Eastern Europe, and its impact on sexuality education is important to study. To this extent, it is essential to conduct this study.

1.3 REFLECTIONS ON MY ROLE AND THE RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY

It is essential to acknowledge that conducting a study is influenced by the researcher's life experiences, attitudes, values, and beliefs. Individuals construct knowledge; it is not

³⁴ UNESCO, 2014, p. 11



something to be discovered outside. Gender, age, ethnicity, economic class impact the observation's researcher makes even unconsciously. As an example, women may study feminist research due to their interest in issues such as gender and inequality. In contrast, sexual minorities may follow queer theory and study issues related to gay culture or homophobia. Therefore, qualitative research is never thoroughly neutral or free of bias in its nature.³⁵

To clear the relation of this study and my research position, I follow the post-structuralist research tradition, which recognizes the researcher's attitudinal state of mind based on life experiences and values. A post-structuralist researcher is skeptical due to the realization of living in an uncertain world.³⁶ Structuralist research tradition sees texts as a steady structure or entity with precise meanings. In contrast, post-structuralists see texts as pieces of writing without specific boundaries with unlimited directions, perspectives, and varying meanings.³⁷ They see human beings and texts as constructed by language that is always unstable within contested ideologies. The stable self-image that we produce concerning our surroundings and culture is actually unstable and delusion of what we think of our identity. There is no identity in itself; instead, we consist of beliefs, fears, intentions, and desires that are produced in a moment. Our experiences, conflicts, ideological contradictions of our culture are incorporated into our minds through language as we grow up, only to deny that we live in broken and vague existence of ourselves within broken and vague language.³⁸

A post-structuralist method to approach texts is *deconstruction*, where reading is seen as textual harassment that seeks to bring out the paradoxes and contradictions in the text.³⁹ Critical thinking can be enhanced through deconstruction. It can help us see that our experiences are determined by ideologies that we are not aware of because they are constructed into our language.⁴⁰ This self-observation plays a critical role in

³⁵ Saldana, 2011, p. 22–23

³⁶ Koskela, Rojola, 2000, p. 72–75

³⁷ Eagleton, 1996, p. 120–121

³⁸ Tyson, 2006, p. 257–258

³⁹ Koskela, Rojola, 1997, p. 75–76

⁴⁰ Tyson, 2006, p. 249



interpreting all meaning.⁴¹ To this extent, it is important to recognize the shortage of reliable data to study sexuality education in Poland. This I have considered when making the analysis. Therefore, I have quoted Ponton's studies' interviews to give a voice to students' experiences in their sexuality education classes. Contrarily, it needs to be considered to whom voices are given and whose voices are dismissed. A native Polish has verified translations of data conducted by the Polish language to be valid.

2 BACKGROUND OF POLISH SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Before 1973, no systematic school-based sexuality education existed in socialist Poland. During the post-war period, sexuality education programs were absent, and it was until the 1960s before the topic was discussed in Poland. After the liberalization of the abortion law in 1956, experts in sexuality expressed the need to introduce sexuality education in schools. The purpose of sexuality education was to prevent unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases in the context of marital happiness. The content of sexuality education consisted of certain sexual matters and lessons about sex life, but abstinence and restrictions were emphasized.⁴²

Sexuality education became school-based in 1973 as a new subject was introduced: "Preparatory course for a life in the socialist family." The rhetoric of the course name is to be put in the context of the growing importance of pro-family policies by the socialist regime in the early 1970s. Until 1986 the subject was non-compulsory. The education program highlighted social and psychological issues, and sexuality was present in one-third of the lessons. The purpose of sexuality education was to teach young people about marriage and family life, which were the primary aspiration of the Polish people. The development of sexuality education was similar in other socialist countries such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and they shared information through conferences. Sexuality education in Poland and Hungary shared common features addressing sex and

⁴¹ Koskela, Rojola, 1997, p. 75

⁴² Lišková, Jarska, Szegedi, 2019, p. 4–7



gender more openly, whereas, in Czechoslovak, the school curriculum of sexuality education was more conservative.⁴³

Polish sexuality education educated of "socialist love," which was a basis of marriage and family life where sexuality served individual pleasure and procreation. Socialist love was symbolically different from the capitalist conception of love and marriage, which were considered based on the economy and therefore dismissed. Gender equality was stressed, and gender roles were emphasized, albeit women were expected to be the primary caretakers as it was considered natural for them.⁴⁴ However, during socialist sexuality education, birth control was widely discussed, and contraception was accepted. Abortion was emphasized negatively, and the importance of family planning was underlined through contraception.⁴⁵

Although the considerate openness of sexuality education, the curriculum was influenced to some extent by Catholicism in Poland during socialism. It was only the end of the 1980s when the Church's pressure on sexuality education increased significantly due to the fall of socialism in 1989.⁴⁶ Along with the amendment to the Act of 7 January, 1993 on *Family Planning, Protection of the Human Fetus and the Pregnancy Termination*⁴⁷, courses on the "sexual life of an individual, principles of conscious and responsible parenthood, the value of the family, life in the prenatal phase, as well as on methods and measures of conscious procreation shall be introduced into school curricula."⁴⁸ After a plentiful of changes back and forth in educational programs, a new curriculum was introduced in 1998, and it came into force in 1999 with the name of *preparation for family life*. Due to the Act in 1993 and international agreements, the Polish government must provide and implement neutral sexuality education. Nevertheless, since 2009 sexuality education has been a non-compulsory subject, and

⁴³ Lišková, Jarska, Szegedi, 2019 p. 10–12

⁴⁴ Lišková, Jarska, Szegedi, 2019 p. 12–13

⁴⁵ Lišková, Jarska, Szegedi, 2019 p. 15

⁴⁶ Lišková, Jarska, Szegedi, 2019 p. 17

⁴⁷ Polish law on abortion in 1993

⁴⁸ Act of 7 January 1993 on Family Planning, Protection of the Human Fetus and the Pregnancy Termination: Article 4



the classes are conducted by teachers who have completed a supplementary course.⁴⁹ Sexuality education is considered to be 'abstinence-based education'⁵⁰ that provides restrictive education based on the negative effect of premarital sex.⁵¹

As Wozniak mentioned, a new core curriculum was introduced in 2009 for pre-school education and general education by the regulation defined by the Minister of National Education according to a report of EURYDICE 2009/2010^{52,53} Concerning primary school and lower secondary school, the report mentions that pupils can participate in preparation for family life classes, which are offered 14 hours per year.⁵⁴ The classes of preparation for family life are also included in the curriculum of upper secondary schools, but the school principals are responsible for the organization of the classes. The content of the classes is decided upon by the teachers according to the framework of the curricula. Classes can also be organized as separate classes.⁵⁵

In conclusion, Polish sexuality education has been school-based since 1973, and the classes concentrated on preventing unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases in the context of marital happiness. Sexual life and contraception were taught, but also abstinence and restrictions were emphasized.⁵⁶ The collapse of socialism created a space for the Catholic Church, and it gained influence on educational policy. In the 1990s the sexuality education changed to preparation for family classes that promote more abstinence-based sexuality education than during socialism. The same themes during socialism and after occur in sexuality education: family, marriage, and a

⁴⁹ Postgraduate course in university or a course provided by the Ministry of Education.

⁵⁰ Emphasizes abstinence from all sexual behaviors outside of marriage; may not include information regarding contraception; expect in terms of failures rates, or disease prevention methods.

⁵¹ Wozniak, 2015, p. 125–126

⁵² Report of organization of the education system in Poland 2009/2010 conducted by Eurydice (network of 43 national units based in all 38 countries of the Erasmus+ programme. Publishes descriptions of national education systems, and news related to the field of education) in cooperation with EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission) and the European Commission.

⁵³ Eurydice, p. 98

⁵⁴ Eurydice, p. 75

⁵⁵ Eurydice, p. 101

⁵⁶ Lišková, Jarska, Szegedi, 2019, p. 4–7



rather negative attitude towards abortion, though the latter was allowed on a request during 1956-1990.⁵⁷

2.1 CATHOLICISM AS THE NATION'S IDENTITY

Religion and Polish identity, in many narratives, are tied up together as one could not live without the other. Polish nation and its identity have been built upon a narrative in which the Catholic Church, as an institution, has preserved the national identity of Polishness and been in a key role in the independence struggle.⁵⁸ Belonging to the Catholic Church has traditionally signified as one of the most important factors of being a Pole and belonging to the Polish nation.⁵⁹

In Polish history, Catholicism was the central religion to Poland, albeit the country had periods where all kinds of religions were permitted. However, since the 15th century, during the Counter-Reformation, the Church established a new Catholic narrative in order to eliminate religious diversity.⁶⁰ The Church's position underwent changes as secularism increased in the 19th century but maintained its institutional power. In the early twentieth century, the Church was at the center of the question of whether the nation should be multiethnic or homogenous. In the 1920s and 1930s, Catholics embraced the messages of intolerance and exclusion specifically toward Jews. However, after World War II, the problem of the nation's diversity was gone. The boundaries of Poland were redrawn that automatically excluded Lithuanians, Belarussians, and Ukrainians. Germans were expelled by force, and Jews perished in the Holocaust. Poland was now religiously and ethnically homogenous, and it was easier for the Church to promote its narrative of Catholic Poland through history. However, Porter argues that Poland has always been homogenous despite other minorities living inside Poland's borders.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Kulczycki, 1995, p. 471

⁵⁸ Porter, 2001, p. 294

⁵⁹ Daniel, 1995, p. 402

⁶⁰ Porter, 2001, p. 292

⁶¹ Porter, 2001, p. 293–297



During the communist era, religion was under the strict control of the Communist Party, and all the religious signs were discouraged,⁶² though the Church maintained its autonomy on some level.⁶³ Communist writers attempted to re-write the Catholic narrative to a secular one. Nonetheless, as opposed, Catholic writers endeavored to embrace the narrative that Catholicism defines the Polish nation. In this narrative, the Catholic Church presents itself as the nation's spirit based on the historical narrative of Polish history as the Catholic one.⁶⁴ Despite the Communist rule's secular tone, silencing all of the religious characters among the population was impossible. During the last decades of communism, as it weakened, the Church mobilized itself in society around certain groups – not only Catholics who practice but groups of non-believers, with the support and influence of Polish Pope John Paul II. In the 1980s, the Church expanded its cooperation within the society between institutions and eventually became a symbol in the fight against communism along with the Solidarity movement and Lech Wałęsa. When communism collapsed in 1989, the years of consolidating its power in society was now absolute. The post-communist government not only legally recognized the Church's autonomy in relation to the state but announced social order based on Christian values.⁶⁵ With the Concordat in 1993 between the Polish episcopate, the state of Poland and the Vatican verified the political position of the Catholic Church in Poland.⁶⁶

Although Poland's and the Catholic Church's relationship is different and more profound compared to other Eastern European countries, the increase of religiosity was similar in many former communist countries after the collapse of communism. The renewal of the economic and societal processes resulting in social confusion and weakening living standards caused psychological issues and uncertainty. In this context, religion became an important element in people's lives. Increasing religiosity created a space for the Church to grow its social impact as the only moral authority to reinforce its vision on gender roles, abortion, sexuality education, homosexuality, and domestic violence in

⁶² Coleman, Sandfort, 2005, p. 6

⁶³ Daniel, 1995, p. 403

⁶⁴ Porter, 2001, p. 297–298

⁶⁵ Daniel, 1995, p. 403-405

⁶⁶ Misthal, 2015, p. 33



society and in policymaking.⁶⁷ Religion, family, and societal institutions – the primary subjects of social regulations of sexuality, changed as the socialist order, one party with strict control, transformed into democracy and pluralism.⁶⁸

The narrative that Catholicism defines the Polish nation has been more and more part of the political discussion since the 1990s. According to these arguments, Poland is based on Christian values, and therefore, there has been an impact of these values on constitutional legislation.⁶⁹ Though the Catholic Church is a crucial part of the Polish nation, the current condition of the alliance between the state and the Church is an outcome of the long-lasting attempt of the Church to become not only a political actor in the society but part of the structure of the state itself. The Church waited the right moment to ensure politics of its view for becoming years.⁷⁰ In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that Catholicism is a crucial part of Poland, which needs to be taken into account when one tries to understand Poland and its character of culture, history, and politics.⁷¹

3 RESEARCH DATA

My research data is a mix of reports conducted by Polish sex educators' group Ponton, reports from international actors such as the EU and the UN, and articles from the Polish media. Due to the position of sexuality education as a taboo in Polish society, the primary material is more or less absent. I have gathered the most relevant data available, and at times, secondary sources are used. Ponton has conducted the only studies that have asked about the experiences of Polish pupils of sexuality education. They have three reports in 2009, 2014, and 2016 and all of them are conducted by different methods. Also, the results of the reports show merely the negative side of the sexuality education classes since those who were satisfied with the classes presumably have felt no need to share their information. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of

⁶⁷ Coleman, Sandfort, 2005, p. 6-7

⁶⁸ Coleman, Sandfort, 2005, p. 6

⁶⁹ Porter, 2001, p. 297–298

⁷⁰ Mishtal, 2015, p. 34–35

⁷¹ Porter, 2001, p. 297–298



the shortcomings of the reports, but nevertheless, they offer necessary information due to the lack of any comparative sociological research in the field.

The first report of Ponton, "*What Does Sexuality Education Really Look Like in Poland?*" (2009) has been conducted in 2009 through 637 emails from students from which 252 never had sexuality education in school. The questions that were asked in the email were: if they had such a subject as education for family life, if so: who led it (educator, psychologist, teacher, or an outsider)? Was the knowledge transferred worldview-neutral? Were the lessons within class hours or as part of extracurricular activities? Were the youth satisfied with the classes? People who answered could decide whether to respond anonymously or with full information of their type of schools, class, and personal information. This study was the first of this kind of research conducted in Poland about sexuality education, and it has been cited in many other studies in the field.

The second report of Ponton "*Test of Preparation for Family Life, What Sexuality Education Looks Like in Polish Schools*" (2014) was conducted through an online survey to which 3363 people answered. The questions concerned the subject of "preparation for family life," its organization at various educational levels, the participation of young people in lessons, teachers who are conducting the classes, the teaching materials used, and the content provided. Most of the people who answered the online survey were women (74%). A significant proportion was aged between 21-15 (42%). Nearly 28% of people were aged 26-30, and 24% were in the age of 16-20. The smallest group was people aged between 11-15 (6%). This study's problem is the age of the respondents; most of them were not pupils of primary, lower, or upper secondary schools at the time of the survey. The results, therefore, may not indicate sexuality education in 2014, but earlier. However, the study still is valuable in researching sexuality education in Poland due to the lack of data.

The third report of Ponton, "*Review of the Implementation of the youth's right to sexual education. Implementation of Preparation for Family Classes. Pupils and Principals Perspective*" (2016), was conducted through interviews in order to receive information



about organizing the sexuality education classes and its quality in primary schools and lower and upper secondary schools. For this purpose, qualitative research was administered in Poznań, Warsaw, and Zielona Góra with students' and school principals' participation. Twelve group interviews were carried out, three with students of lower secondary and upper secondary schools, six students with primary schools (three meetings for boys and girls each). In total, 101 people took part in the study, including 21 girls and 24 boys from the 6th grade of primary schools, 17 students and 13 students of the 3rd grade of lower secondary schools, as well as 13 students and 13 students of the 3rd grade of upper secondary schools. Eighteen interviews were carried out with principals, including seven men and nine women. Principals had experience in the profession from 15 years up to 35 years.

My research data will also consist of reports from the EU and the UN. I will use one report from the EU 'Policies for sexuality Education in the European Union' from 2013 to provide information on Polish sexuality education. The UN report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, a mission to Poland' from 2010, and one report of the UN committee and Polish NGOs concerning Poland in 2014 are analyzed. Also, Polish media articles will be analyzed to receive a fuller picture of the discourse on sexuality education and gender. The articles have been chosen between the time of 2009 and 2016 by their relevance. Most articles are from *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the most predominant newspaper in Poland, and *Polityka*, a center-left newsmagazine having an important role in society's journalism. Furthermore, CBOS' (Center for Public Opinion Research) opinion polls have been used to find Poles' opinions.

4 RESEARCH METHODS

This study is *qualitative research*, which is a term for different approaches to studying social life. The data consist of non-quantitative material, including texts, interviews, field notes, documents, video recordings, pictures, and social media or internet sides that record human experiences. Research projects have different goals and purposes for which qualitative research is suitable by offering multiple observations, understanding



the complicatedness of human and social life, and the effectiveness of particular policies or phenomena. Outcomes may include a critique of existing social order or the inauguration of social justice.⁷² Qualitative research today has come into consideration of problems of analysis rather than problems of gathering data. The development has happened separately, and therefore it can be argued that qualitative research must be firstly understood through analysis. It is also worth considering when thinking about qualitative research about the reliability of the study. The entity of qualitative research is concretized into the problem of consciousness of subjectivity: how can I understand the other?⁷³

The aim of qualitative research is not statistical generalizations; rather, the approach is the aim of understanding the phenomenon and actions, which can be theoretically supported, ending it to a conclusion. It is essential to gather data from sources that know about the phenomenon or have experience of it. The criteria to choose a source of information must be considered and suitable.⁷⁴ In qualitative research, the collection of material and the choice of research methods is guided by a theoretical framework.⁷⁵ Thus, the theories of this study provide a framework for research, but the main emphasis is on new observations emerging from the data. I analyze the data through *content analysis*, which is a diverse research method for analyzing texts to specify conclusions and inferences of the messages.⁷⁶ My data consists of different texts, such as research documents, media articles, and reports. Therefore, content analysis and specifically data-driven content analysis as a research method are chosen to evaluate observations. Data-driven content analysis is one form of content analysis that aims to create a theoretical whole from the research material.⁷⁷

Content analysis is defined as a technique for valid conclusions from texts that are repeatable in the context the researcher uses. The findings that are made have many

⁷² Saldana, 2011, p. 3–4

⁷³ Tuomi, Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 68–69

⁷⁴ Tuomi, Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 85–86

⁷⁵ Alasuutari, 1994, p. 209

⁷⁶ Weber, 1990, p. 2

⁷⁷ Tuomi, Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 97



options as they may impact the sender, the receiver, or the message itself. Content analysis is often used to identify attitudes, views, and interests, whether it concerns different sizes of groups or individuals. Many authors define basic content analysis as a method that is used for analyzing literal communication content. The main concept of content analysis is the descriptive manner of analysis and data organization.⁷⁸

According to Krippendorff, contemporary content analysis has a new empirical orientation to seek valuable and valid knowledge or find reinforcing information for critique or actions. By examining texts, sounds, pictures, or other data, the researcher tries to understand their meaning to people and what their indication might be; enhance or prevent something. This is the core of the content analysis, to answer these questions, and for what methods used by natural sciences cannot reply. Initially emphasized material for content analysis are written texts but nowadays, the scope considers media communication too. Krippendorff argues that researchers can no longer limit themselves only to what is said in the content and in which channel and to whom. Instead, content must be analyzed by thinking about what the authors put into messages and what the messages literally contain.⁷⁹ As a research method, content analysis enhances the researcher's understanding of a specific phenomenon and helps to receive information on certain actions.⁸⁰

There are different opinions on whether written texts are readable objects or if texts are objects that include informative messages through interpretation. Many scholars define written texts as several other ways of communication, including movies, images, social media, television shows, and other forms of electronic data.⁸¹ When analyzing a newspaper, one may take verbs from an article that describe a specific issue in a certain way. Negative verbs describing the issue demonstrate resentment, whereas positive verbs are connected to support or liking. In this way, the researcher can make conclusions from the data that are not said directly or are connected in another way to

⁷⁸ Drisko, Maschi, 2015, p. 2–3

⁷⁹ Krippendorff, 2013, p. 2–3

⁸⁰ Krippendorff, 2013, p. 24

⁸¹ Drisko, Maschi, 2015, p. 6–7



the topic.⁸² One feature of content analysis, a strength, is that the data may not always be produced for research purposes, rather the data is original in its form. It has been argued that researchers usually select this kind of data due to its feature of minimizing bias generated by the researcher in the data. Nevertheless, the material needs to be carefully selected and consistently analyzed.⁸³

In this study, the research data has been categorized by themes, a method of content analysis to systemize the data for different topics relevant to the research problem. The idea is to find views to a certain theme from the data.⁸⁴ In data-driven content analysis, analysis units are selected from the data according to the study's purpose and task. The key idea is that the analytical units are not agreed upon or considered in advance. In principle, the importance of theory as a guide for analysis is related to methodology so that the methodological commitments expressed in the study guide the analysis.⁸⁵ As going through the data, I have selected analysis units that are supported by the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework has guided my analysis, and eventually, I have been able to create a theoretical entity. As with all research methods, the weaknesses must be acknowledged. Content analysis is criticized because its mechanism and nature of coding are too simple without providing a coherent and comprehensive analysis of texts or phenomena. Therefore, the study's reliability needs to be recognized⁸⁶, which I have done in chapter 1.3.

The process of data-driven content analysis in this study is conducted followingly: the first step is a reduction in which a document or other report is written open to remove irrelevant information. This I have conducted through summarizing information or grouping them into smaller sections. Relevant expressions concerning research questions were highlighted. Secondly, I have clustered the data by previously found expressions to units related to phenomenon or conception. Thirdly, after clusterization,

⁸² Drisko, Maschi, 2015, p. 12

⁸³ Drisko, Maschi, 2015, p. 13

⁸⁴ Tuomi, Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 93

⁸⁵ Tuomi, Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 95

⁸⁶ Maier, 2018, p. 6



the data is abstracted; in other words, conceptualized. I have conceptualized my data as proceeding from the use of original information from linguistic expressions to theoretical concepts and conclusions. The data-driven content analysis is based on interpretation and inference, which moves from empirical data towards a more conceptual view of the phenomenon under study. In this case, the theory and conclusions are constantly compared with the original data when forming a new theory.⁸⁷

Due to the nature of my study, I want to include as my background method *critical discourse analysis* (CDA), a multidisciplinary approach, which studies discourse through language that is utilized as a “social practice.” CDA is relevant to my study as it addresses issues of power asymmetries, discrimination, and structural inequities as manifested in the language in domains such as education, media, and politics.⁸⁸ Therefore, with this method, I can recognize the structural inequalities and imbalances of power concerning language, for example, towards women through gender stereotypes in Polish sexuality education.

The most prominent endeavor to formulating the theory of CDA is Norman Fairclough's *Discourse and Social Change* (1992a)⁸⁹, in which a social theory is constructed, and a methodological design is provided for critical discourse analysis in practice. As a method, CDA considers social order socially constructed and, therefore, changeable due to its views that history is relative. CDA also views that discourse is impacted by ideology (necessary to notice that ideology is conceptualized) and interpretation of texts through analysis reveals discourses reinforcing existing power.⁹⁰ These points within my theoretical framework support my study for finding power mechanisms in the discourses emerging from Polish sexuality education. Discourse, like its definition, is a practice that represents the world through signifying it and 'constituting and

⁸⁷ Tuomi, Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 108–113

⁸⁸ Blommaert, Bulcaen, 2000, p. 447–448

⁸⁹ Other studies related to CDA: Fairclough (1992b, 1995b), Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999), van Leeuwen (1993), van Dijk (1993a, c, 1997), and Wodak (1995, 1997)

⁹⁰ Locke, 2004, p. 1–2



constructing the world in meaning.¹ The meaning of the texts is traditionally defined as something that comes from texts and is situated and understood within the outside world. Meanings are also divisible with other readers. A new alternative approach to meaning concerns a view of seeing literacy as socially constructed that readers read as members of particular social groups. Various texts not only need different ways to read them, but the same text can also be read in various ways to produce different meanings.⁹¹

CDA is not an approach of a specific direction in discourse studies; instead, it offers a different theorizing angle. The crucial feature of CDA is the analyst's distinct awareness of their role in society and tradition that argues against science, where values cannot be thoroughly dismissed. Concretely, social structure impacts, and social interaction engenders scholarly discourse, including theory formation, explication, and discourse analysis.⁹² Discourse happens in two ways: institutions, situations, and social structures shape and is shaped by discursive events. Fundamentally, it sustains the status quo but frequently helps to convert it. Since discourses have a significant impact socially, they tend to influence power relations by producing or reproducing balance or unbalance between different groups. The usage of language to ideological goals and the relations of power is often vague to people: the purpose of CDA is to adduce these cloudy dimensions of discourse.⁹³

⁹¹ Locke, 2004, p. 12–14

⁹² Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352–353

⁹³ Fairclough, Mulderring, Wodak, 1997, p. 357-358



5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND MAIN CONCEPTS

In this chapter, the main concepts and theoretical framework are evaluated. Firstly, the conceptions of sexual health and sexuality education are explained, considering the legal framework and definitions. There are three different approaches to sexuality education, which are assorted. Secondly, definitions of gender and gender roles are explained, considering the context of society. Lastly, I present my theoretical framework of Foucault's biopower as power mechanisms and concentrate especially on Foucault's part of sexuality as a strategy of power.

5.1 SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Sexuality is a fundamental part of being a human, and it will develop when as we grow up one way or another.⁹⁴ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sexual health is a crucial part of an individual's health, both physical and emotional. It is also essential in the social and economic development of communities and countries. Good sexual health depends on several different contributors: entry to comprehensive knowledge about sexuality and sexual health care, knowledge about sexual activity, and an environment that promotes sexual health. The level of sexual health depends on national laws and policies that govern health care services. Criminal, civil, and administrative laws can also hinder or foster matters related to sexual health.⁹⁵

Sexual health has been defined by WHO firstly in 1972 and then updated in 2002 followingly:

Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ WHO, 2010, p. 21

⁹⁵ WHO, 2015, p. 4

⁹⁶ WHO, 2006, p. 5



Sexual health is one of the aspects related to the theme; sexual rights have also been defined as a draft in 2002 by WHO that embraces the rights to information and education.⁹⁷ Sexual health and sexual rights are attained through information and access to sexuality education, which, according to WHO (2015), means "learning about the cognitive, emotional, interactive and physical aspects of sexuality." Empowering children and young people to receive information and know-how in order to understand and enjoy their sexuality and have meaningful and safe relationships with other people is the purpose of defining sexual rights. Internationally approved human rights recognize high-quality sexuality education and the rights to receive and enter applicable information to sexual health.⁹⁸ Young people should be emboldened by sexuality education to take responsibility for their sexual health and make choices that enhance their quality of life. The start of sexuality education is in early childhood and progresses until adulthood. Education should aim to support children's and young people's sexual development, and age-appropriate sexuality education should be accessible to all children. Today, sexuality education focuses primarily on the positiveness of being a human being and its possibilities as an origin of enjoyment. The need to prevent illnesses and unwanted pregnancies comes second. Additionally, internationally accepted human rights and explicitly emphasizing the part of the right to know should be the basis of sexuality education.⁹⁹

Several studies have shown that national programs of sexuality education in schools have decreased teenage pregnancies, abortions, and sexually transmitted diseases (STI) and HIV infections among young people. Good quality of sexuality education impacts young people's attitudes and values and contributes to preventing abuse and unhealthy dynamics in relationships. Sexuality is influenced by gender inequality and social norms,

⁹⁷ WHO, 2010, p. 18-19

⁹⁸ BZgA, UNFPA, WHO, 2016, p. no page numbers. This right has been accepted by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and also in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Moreover, sexuality education is advocated for in the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and its importance has been underscored by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education in a 2010 report to the United Nations General Assembly devoted exclusively to this topic and by the European Court of Human Rights in 2011.

⁹⁹ WHO, 2010, p. 20



which means that young women may not have control over their sexual relationships in many countries. In turn, men may feel pressure to act according to male stereotypes that promote destructive behavior. By introducing long-term sexuality education, the environment of social norms and stereotypes may lead to rethinking the existing norms and build respectful relationships and roles between men and women.¹⁰⁰

There are several myths about sexuality education. One is that sexuality education boosts young people's sexual activity. However, researches show that good quality of sexuality education delays the first sexual intercourse and increases more responsible sexual behavior. Sexuality education has also been claimed to ruin children's innocence, which would make children easier targets for pedophiles to attack. These claims have been studied to be opposite: children benefit from age-appropriate sexuality education, it supports their sexual development, and they learn to recognize abusive persons and situations. Most young adults build their sexual relationships based on models they learned in early childhood. Children are capable of recognizing different types of relationships at an early age before they act on their sexuality, and therefore, sexuality education is of high importance that children learn specific skills to understand what happens to their bodies, what kind of relationships are appropriate, and recognizing their feelings.¹⁰¹

According to WHO (2010), sexuality education that is only informal is insufficient for the needs of today's societies. As sources, family members, parents, and other relatives are essential in the learning process but inadequate as the only source of information since they may lack crucial information. Young people also prefer learning about sexuality from other sources than their parents. Today, modern media has become the main source of information for young people, but a large part of the information on the internet is unreliable, unrealistic, or can even show biased gender roles (pornography). For this reason, the importance of sexuality education has increased to correct misleading information from different sources.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰. BZgA, UNFPA, WHO, 2016, p. ei ole sivunumeroita

¹⁰¹ BZgA, UNFPA, WHO, 2016, p. no page numbers

¹⁰² WHO, 2010, p. 21-22



Sexuality education is a lifelong process, and it should be appropriate for specific age groups. To pursue this, sexuality education should be enhanced by engaging policymakers, educators, and scientists to implement optimal strategies for society. Networking and cooperation with religious and cultural organizations either directly or indirectly are recommended in order to engage minorities, migrants, or others for whom sexuality education in school may not be the only effective one.¹⁰³ Also, the competence of the teachers is important when conducting sexuality education, though high-level professionalism is not necessary. For not conducting sexuality education at all, improper instructor alone should not be the reason for it. Educators for the topics need to be open to the subject and have a high motivation to teach it. Educators should also aim for neutral language in their teaching and base sexuality education on human rights and diversity acceptance.¹⁰⁴

There are three different approaches to sexuality education: abstinence-based sexuality education (1), health and safety-oriented sexuality education (2), and comprehensive sexuality education (3). Abstinence-based education (1) teaches abstinence as a tool to prevent unwanted results of sexual activity and presents moral views of abstinence as the only applicable way of choice. There are varieties in this type of education: abstinence-only education promotes abstinence as the only method excluding other aspects of topics, whereas abstinence-plus also includes teaching abstinence, information about contraception, and sometimes sexually transmitted diseases (STIs).¹⁰⁵ However, often, abstinence-only education misrepresents the facts about contraception and abortion following a lack of knowledge in preventing pregnancies or in safety issues.¹⁰⁶ Religion and attitudes towards sex are widely examined, and the results show that religious conservatism is linked to the intolerant approach of sex and specifically restrictiveness with premarital sex. Yet, this is a generalization and depends on the religious landscape, but it can be indicated on some level that religious people

¹⁰³ WHO, 2010, p. 28

¹⁰⁴ WHO, 2010, p. 31

¹⁰⁵ Dent, Maloney, 2016, p. 152

¹⁰⁶ Conti, 2012, p. 13



would support abstinence-based sexuality education rather than comprehensive sexuality education.¹⁰⁷

Health and safety-oriented sexuality education (2) includes abstinence as an option but also provides information on sexuality, contraception, and practices to sexual experiences that are safe. This type of sexuality education is often referred to as a comprehensive one (3) if they are compared with abstinence-based sexuality education (3). Nevertheless, health and safety-oriented sexuality education has been developed as another type of education as a reaction to abstinence-based education, concentrating more on behavioral results. This kind of sexuality education often dismisses sexuality as personal growth instead emphasizes problem-solving by focusing on the delay of the first sexual intercourse or does the education of contraception reduces unwanted pregnancies.¹⁰⁸

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) (3) is described followingly: "CSE seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality – physically and emotionally, individually and in relationships." Sexuality is considered from a holistic point of view that also takes into account the development of emotions and social context. CSE recognizes that information alone is not enough: it is essential to teach young people skills to tackle issues regarding sexuality safely and support the development of their attitude and values positively. CSE provides scientific and accurate information and adjusts possible myths about sexuality education. Many of the issues are included, such as gender roles and society's social norms and their influence on masculinity and femininity within the family. It supports the development of young people in many aspects of their life: critical thinking, communication, negotiation skills, confidence, assertiveness, and ability to take responsibility. Open-mindedness and respect for self and others play an essential role in teaching. CSE aims not to cover only biological and physical aspects of development but a wide range of issues relating to sexuality. It recognizes humans as

¹⁰⁷ Dent, Maloney, 2016, p. 154

¹⁰⁸ WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA, 2010, p. 15



sexual beings overall, which means that it concerns more than just preventing unwanted pregnancies or diseases but human sexuality as a whole.¹⁰⁹

5.2 GENDER, GENDER ROLES, AND SOCIETY

Gender describes the socially constructed characters that women and men are usually associated with. The difference between gender and sex is that the latter refers to biological differences, whereas the former refers to social construction where women and men learn to grow as they grow. Gender identity and gender roles come into existence through learned behavior.¹¹⁰ Since the concept of gender is created socially, it is considered as a social construct that is constructed in interactions with other people in their environment but simultaneously relying on the biological aspects of both sexes and their differences. The social construction is presented by the fact that individuals or groups define individual's values, behavior, or statuses based on their biological sex, but these definitions or requirements depend on societies and cultures even also even inside of the societies, regions, and cultures.¹¹¹

People are born usually biologically female or male, but they must learn about gender. Gender identity is created through a process of socialization in which individuals learn norms that are referred to their sex and its role in society. Their definition of themselves is developing, not only in childhood but throughout life. Since gender is a social construction, it pierces social life, institutions, social expectations, and interactions. People are used to crossing the expectations of their gender, sometimes maintaining it, sometimes altering it. In childhood, adults may encourage girls and boys to express different behavior.¹¹² Boys' aggressive and girls' passive behavior is often embraced, which confirms their traits in their acts and plays. Fundamentally, different expectations from boys and girls result in a treatment based on their gender.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ IPPF, 2006b, p. 6

¹¹⁰ WHO: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/gender/gender-definitions>

¹¹¹ Blackstone, 2003, p. 335

¹¹² O'Brien, J. 2009, p. 356

¹¹³ O'Brien, 2009, p. 360



In adult life, men and women in a society are expected to take roles based on their characters according to their sex. Traditionally, women are pictured to be more nurturing than men, and therefore women are often promoted and expected to behave in a nurturing way. One traditional way women are engaging in traditional roles is staying home with children and being outside of employment. In this arrangement, men are considered to be the leader of the family by making important decisions but also providing life financially. The feminist perspective claim that since gender roles are socially determined, they can be changed through which new kinds of roles can be pursued. It is important to acknowledge that gender roles are not simply ideas of how men and women should behave in society but also associated with levels of power that sexes exercise in society. One simplistic example of this power is men's economic power over their families and women if men are breadwinners.¹¹⁴

Outside of the family, gender roles are often linked to in workplaces where traditionally, women and men are expected to complete different tasks and roles based on their sex. Many companies and corporations may maintain typical gender roles by granting parental leaves to mothers alone and not creating an atmosphere where men can also stay home with children if there is a legal framework to do so. Positions in companies have been traditionally segregated by sex, favoring men in executive positions whereas women in secretarial ones. Characters that refer to men and women as employees often picture men as ambitious and women interested in workplace relationships. Based on these examples, gender roles are often created from stereotypes that women and men are traditionally expected to behave in different social constructs.

Gender stereotypes are usually simplified concepts about men and women and their possible differences. These exaggerated pictures of both sexes may be harmful in the sense that because men are considered tough with no emotions and women 'too emotional,' behavior that is not stereotypical is causing too narrow roles since people are individuals. People who tend to maintain traditional gender roles are impacted by their elderly of their family and family traditions, whereas people who embrace equality

¹¹⁴ Blackstone, 2003, p. 337



between women and men are more likely to believe that their sex should not define individuals.¹¹⁵

5.3 FOUCAULDIAN THEORIES OF POWER: BIOPOWER

This study's theoretical framework consists of Foucault's theories of power and specifically his theory on biopower. Biopower offers comprehensible explanations for the study's research questions and therefore chosen for this study. I will first explain Foucault's theories of power and biopower more on a general level and then concentrate on his analysis of sexuality, repressive hypothesis, the norms, power, and knowledge. Foucault's theoretical framework on biopower covers a wide area of subjects related to power and sexuality, and at times, these themes overlap, which may be hard to distinguish their meaning as such.

Foucault defines biopower in his analysis *The History of Sexuality: An introduction* (1990a) as a power, which can access the body as it functions through norms rather than laws, is internalized by the individuals rather than coming from the top of the power pyramid with orders and is distributed throughout to the society rather than located to a certain place or an institutional body.¹¹⁶ However, Foucault identifies different modern powers such as sovereign power and disciplinary power in addition to biopower. In sovereign power, the top of the power, such as the king, executes orders to his ministers, and they execute orders to their subjects. Disciplinary power can be built from the bottom to the top, and individuals are in the center of the effect of this power by producing individuals "as its objects, objectives, and instruments."¹¹⁷ These different powers are mentioned because it is important to note the change of the form of the powers in the last centuries. Also, Foucault overlaps disciplinary power and biopower with each other, and therefore the disciplinary power is shortly discussed.

¹¹⁵ Blackstone, 2003, p. 337-338

¹¹⁶ Taylor, 2011, p. 43

¹¹⁷ Taylor, 2011, p. 13-14



Biopower is power over life, and it differs from disciplinary power in the sense that the former works merely through the state, groups, and populations (important to note: the state is also involved in many institutions) while the latter works primarily through institutions and self-regulation. In biopower, the state may manage the population at the individual level and at the group level. Biopower can be executed at the disciplinary level through institutions when schools, hospitals, and other institutions nurse and handle individuals, and those who deviate from norms will be targeted. The other level of targeting the population is the state level, which has the knowledge and understanding of the whole population and how to administrate the norms and regulate them to the wanted direction or solve certain problems. It is important to note that at times Foucault argues that both biopower and disciplinary power belong under the definition of biopower but having different distinctions of the power of life, and at other times, they are described as two distinct forms of power.¹¹⁸

If we think of discipline power as a form of biopower, according to Foucault, there are two basic forms constituting two poles of 'development' related together to a group of relations. The first pole concentrates on the human body and its capacity as a machine for discipline and economic control by identifying *an anatomo-politics of the human body*. Later, the second pole was identified, concentrating on the collective level of the population, reflecting on the mechanisms of processes of life and biology such as births, deaths, health, and indicators of life expectancy. This control of regulation is identified as a *biopolitics of the population*. These two power levels, or as Foucault states, "two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed," are automatically entwined by the thought that population consists of individuals and individuals make up the population.¹¹⁹ It is important to note these techniques of biopower; however, this study focuses on the biopower itself.

How does biopower help to explain sexuality education and discourses on sexuality in Poland? To answer this question, the theory needs to be explained further. Biopower

¹¹⁸ Taylor, 2011, p. 44-46

¹¹⁹ Foucault, 1976, p. 139



works primarily at the state level, and the state's primary goal is to guarantee life to its population. To perform this, the state controls certain aspects of human life, such as public health, housing, birth rates, fertility, immigration. To clarify, biopower, more than anything else, "administers life," and to thrive in that, the state needs to obtain estimations over statistics on certain factors in society such as mortality rates. Since the state may be concerned about what kind of babies are born into the society and where and in what kind of families and how many, the key to influence these things is to influence and control human sexuality and sex. In biopolitics, the state must be concerned about its individuals that are not engaged in reproductive sex. Additionally, the state must know how many people of the population use contraceptives or how many people are engaging or not engaging in sexual acts. The state must intervene or compensate for different kinds of sexual behaviors. In both levels of biopower, the individual's use of his or her body and the whole population's health, sex is playing a very important role.¹²⁰

To incorporate the study to the theory, biopower explains how Poland controls the different aspects of Polish citizens' lives through its institutions. Sexuality and sex are controlled through abortion policies, contraceptives, and education. Besides, Catholicism and its moral guidance and norms influence policies according to which the population is expected to behave. Typical for Poland is the non-scientific control that is not based on research but rather on beliefs that are very much alive and rooted in Catholicism. However, through these non-scientific beliefs, the state must believe in promoting its population's health, whether it is productive or not. I believe that the initial goal of the state of Poland is to increase the birth rate of the Polish population and guide them to the right conception of sexuality through these actions, which the theory on biopower explains, but in a way that is influenced by the non-scientific methods and policies of the Catholic Church. To explain further how the biopower supports my research questions, I will go deeper into Foucault's thinking on sexuality in the following subchapter.

¹²⁰ Taylor, 2011, p. 46–48



5.3.1 SEXUALITY AND BIOPOWER

Concerning sexuality, Foucault discusses in *The History of Sexuality: An introduction* (1978) about discourses around sexuality in the Western world, and according to Kelly, Foucault claims that biopower explains the importance of sexuality during the last centuries. To point out the difference between sex and sexuality, according to Kelly, for Foucault, sex is a meeting point between the control of the individual and the regulation of the population. The reason is that sex is between two persons, but it also produces children who are fundamental to the survival of the population. Sexuality again, when it exists, has become its design of control, such as categorization of sexual perversions through which there is a concern over reproduction that ends into social control of individuals.¹²¹ The examples of the strategies for control of the individuals are presented later in this chapter. According to Kelly, for Foucault, sexuality is not natural; rather, it is in the power relations, a cross-point where social power relations meet.¹²² Sexuality in biopower is in the center of the formation of normality. Sexuality produces certain truths about individuals: one may be subjected through his/her sexuality and thus used as a means in the "disciplinary production of subjectivities." In the process of normalizing power, sexuality creates a specific phenomenon in which the body and population meet.¹²³

From the birth of power technologies in the nineteenth century, sexuality became an object of interest for governments, medical professionals, educators, and other actors.¹²⁴ One's sexuality and one's essence need to be regulated to control the population to determine the individual's 'truth.' This regulation was firstly made through religious confessions where one needed to admit his or her sins to the representatives of the Church. After the birth of technologies in the 19th century, the regulation was made through psychoanalysis, where a person's mind was explored. Lastly, the regulation was made through politics, which became the basis for regulation to control

¹²¹ Kelly, 2013, p. 103

¹²² Kelly, 2013, p. 77

¹²³ Kristensen, 2013 p. 35–36

¹²⁴ Foucault, 1976, p. 20–28



populations' behavior and produce information.¹²⁵ Based on the received information, standards were established, and political and economical operations were launched to regulate disciplines. Campaigns raising morality were introduced to discipline the body and regulate populations.¹²⁶ Through these processes of receiving information, a variety of "perversions" were turned into rules that defined and still define normal and abnormal behavior and norms. Sexualization of children and masturbation was deviance from normal, and parents were shamed for not rearing their children in a correct way defined by the environment.¹²⁷ In other words, scientific discourse in medicine created the normal and abnormal, excluding "defective" groups and justifying it by its scientific status.¹²⁸

Over the last two centuries, concerning the politics of sexuality, women, children, and people with perversions have been in the center of attention, and according to Foucault, as Kelly states, this reflects disciplinary mechanisms and the use of biopolitics.¹²⁹ Against the repressive hypothesis¹³⁰, which has generally reflected the Victorian era of tabooing sex and sexuality, Foucault argues, according to Downing, that sexuality was indeed disclosed as never before.¹³¹ Sexuality is productive and can be used in all kinds of strategies; thus, it is not repressed, and besides, it is very adaptable in a political sense.¹³² Therefore there is no simple political strategy of sexuality that is offered in the repressive hypothesis. Foucault presents four strategies or units that represent the mechanisms of knowledge and power that places sex into the center of attention:

1. *A hysterization of women's bodies*: a strategy towards women in which bodies between women and men are compared, but women being disqualified from

¹²⁵ Taylor, 2011, p. 61

¹²⁶ Foucault, 1978, p. 146

¹²⁷ Taylor, 2011, p. 61

¹²⁸ Kristensen, 2013, p. 36

¹²⁹ Kelly, 2013, p. 104

¹³⁰ In *The History of Sexuality: An introduction (1978)*, Foucault argues that sexuality has not been repressed since the Victorian era as it is often understood. Instead, the form of talking about sex and sexuality changed. See the chapter "repressive hypothesis", p. 41

¹³¹ Downing, 2008, p. 88

¹³² Kelly, p. 77



certain aspects of men's can-do. At the same time, women are given a special status in the sense of reproduction, but their sexuality is associated with a negative reflection of hysterization; dragging it into the sphere of medicine and reproduction into a social and public sphere.

2. *A pedagogization of children's sexuality*: children are associated both to be sexless (from a psychological point of view) and constantly sexual (from an anatomy perspective). Sexual behavior was extremely inappropriate, but it was figured that all children had sexual tendencies. Inappropriate behavior has been tackled through education, intervening with the family of the children, schools, and medical professionals that sexual potential would not occur.
3. *A socialization of procreative behavior*: sexual reproduction became the society's interest through economic reasons by measures on the fertility of couples. Sex becomes a question of public policy through family planning.
4. *A psychiatrization of perversions*: sexuality is categorized into two distinct domains, biological and psychological. Sexual disorders are analyzed through these domains, and finally, curative procedures are proposed.

All these four strategies are the effects of the production of sexuality. Sexuality is not natural; rather, it is a specific “network” that forms together with bodies, desire, and discourse strategies of knowledge and power.¹³³ Against the repressive hypothesis, these examples show that the discourse around sexuality increased, only its shape altered.¹³⁴ Foucault explains his thesis that supports the opposite of the repression of sexuality: sexuality is one of the many devices of power, and it has increased massively since the eighteenth century¹³⁵ with having essentially other purposes than reproduction. Sexuality is constantly connected to power and knowledge, considering “the intensification of the body.”¹³⁶

¹³³ Foucault, 1978, p. 103–106

¹³⁴ Kelly, 2013, p. 77–78

¹³⁵ According to Kelly p. 79, the English translation has changed Foucault's original century from eighteenth century to seventeenth century. Therefore, I have marked it to be eighteenth century, though the reference says otherwise.

¹³⁶ Foucault, 1978, p. 107



The rise of sexuality in the West and its use as a device of power started from the religious confessions before the nineteenth century. They have been central to the formation of sexuality since they originally were about the questions of marital relationships. Family in the formation of sexuality was of importance and is still today, but it is not the central part of it; rather, its part increased as family relations were categorized psychologically. Being a bad parent led to a diagnosis of sexual disorders such as homosexuality, hysteria, or sexual precociousness. Sexuality suddenly became a threat to the family and society itself. Improper sexual behavior was strictly supervised, and besides, families were now objected to monitor the alarming sexuality around them. The four category-list above show that all these are now implemented through the family.¹³⁷

To connect sexuality and biopower with the research questions concerning sexuality education in Polish schools and discourses on sexuality in Poland, it is important to go back to Catholicism and its confessions. The Church laid the ground for certain concerns of sexuality that in the context of Poland still exists. For example, the sexualization of children was a concern of the Church since medieval times, as well as there were certain regulations for married couples and women's behavior.¹³⁸ Certain rules and norms that control discourse on sexuality – when, where, how much, and whom to speak about sex – governed by institutions such as the Church revealed specifically its power through confessions; all of the individuals' personal yet private matters were exposed. Sex could not be hidden; instead, guidance was given on appropriate sexual action. The Church's morality guidance defined norms of one's sexual life.¹³⁹

In the beginning, confession was the Church's technique to examine one's personal and public behavior, but later, it expanded outside to secular domains and state institutions.¹⁴⁰ Medicine, education, jurisprudence obtain an individual's private amusements. Institutions limit the freedom of choice and bolster the boundaries in

¹³⁷ Kelly, 2013, p. 79–80

¹³⁸ Kelly, 2013, p. 86

¹³⁹ Wehr, 2003, p. 4–6

¹⁴⁰ Kelly, 2013, p. 85



which individuals must stay. These boundaries designate the approval of an individual; the closer they are to the concept of the sexuality of their choice, the more they fit the “discursive truth.” Deviations from the standards are punishable, and eventually, those who have internalized the sexual morality are incompetent to distinguish discursive norms as practices of power but a natural way of living.¹⁴¹ As said, the norms on sexuality have developed since medieval times, firstly in the Church’s domain but later also within other secular institutions. Connecting to Poland, the country has a strong Catholic Church that, together with secular institutions, lay sexual norms and sexual discourse.

With the expansion of confessions to secular institutions, we can tie the above-mentioned (p. 36-37) four strategies into the elaboration, three of them relating particularly to the secularization of confessions:

1. Children’s sexualization as a strategy is performed through pedagogy
2. Socialization of procreative behavior is related to economics
3. Psychiatrization of sexual disorders is in the domain of medicine

The hysterization of women cannot be tied up into one area of practice; instead, it exists in all the mentioned domains; women’s bodies are the ones that reproduce offspring to the society, and their primary task is to bear the children. At the same time, women are “being pathologized in their own right.” All these strategies are established in the roots of Christianity on which pedagogies and regulations have been built up during the past centuries.¹⁴²

However, as we have seen norms developing from Christianity, their institutionalization emerged in the late twentieth century. Norms are standards that define normal and give them social meaning. They can be seen, but at the same time, they are invisible; body mass can be measured and be stated as abnormal, but certain unspoken norms that are internalized by the population are not recognized but are a natural part of living. Gender

¹⁴¹ Wehr, 2003, p. 4–6

¹⁴² Kelly, 2013, p. 85–86



norms are often the norms that are unseen and unrecognized. Despite medicine to be the one shaping our norms, it has not always pursued that: it changed in the eighteenth century from individualistic cure to a concept of a model person who is assumed to live not only a healthy life but also expected to fulfill the standards for physical condition and pursue relations to other human beings as it is morally acceptable. According to Taylor, this is a huge change that needs to be understood in the history of medicine as an individual's health is not cured individualistic but from the point of view of "normality."¹⁴³ Biological functioning as a source of norms to establish something "unnatural," though scientific facts cannot be evaluated as unnatural, are perceived as wrong or unacceptable. For example, homosexuality has been considered to be unnatural in the sense of biology.¹⁴⁴

To conclude with Foucault's words: "sex is the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations, and pleasures."¹⁴⁵ Sex is constructed and enforced by power on our bodies and desires rather than something we need to liberate. Rather than being repressed, power is productive everywhere in society, including sex, and it is productive in everything we do in ways that are not understood yet noticed.¹⁴⁶ Comparing to a heart that exists whether it is named or not, sex only comes into existence at the end of the process of naming each body parts, pleasures, and all the things related to sex and sexuality, however, still existing individually without 'the device of sexuality.' Therefore, sexuality is not natural, and this is the hidden element of biopower. All this considered, sex is still fundamental to sexuality and human beings and their existence.¹⁴⁷ Sexuality is individual but universal; it confirms the continuum of the species and yet personal. With these two standard poles, sexuality is used as a means to access both in order to regulate the body and the population.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Taylor, 2011, p. 62

¹⁴⁴ Kelly 2013, p. 113

¹⁴⁵ Foucault, 1978, p. 155

¹⁴⁶ Kelly, 2013, p. 1

¹⁴⁷ Kelly, 2013, 113–114

¹⁴⁸ Wehr, 2003, p. 2–3



5.3.2 THE REPRESSIVE HYPOTHESIS

In *The History of Sexuality: An introduction (1978)*, Foucault mentions the repressive hypothesis according to which the conventional understanding of the history of sexuality is often claiming that sexuality has been repressed vastly, especially from the Victorian period to the present day.¹⁴⁹ Sex was not liberated or significantly different in the pre-Victorian era; merely, it was not that of repressed as considered in the Victorian era but still considered clandestine, and sex outside marital bed has been sinful through centuries. However, according to the hypothesis, during the Victorian era, sex became more silent. It was not banned, but all the signs of it. Sex was only allowed in the sphere of the marital bed. The success of it was not perfect, but due to the repression, people suppressed sex by themselves if sex was seen in the wrong place. In its limited sphere, sex becomes compulsory because one must marry and have children as sex is allowed only in reproductive function. If this function is not fulfilled, one can be considered to be abnormal and not sexually complete. This, of course, does not apply to the children who are considered to be free of sexuality. If a child shows any sort of signs of sexuality, they are repressed.¹⁵⁰

According to Kelly, Foucault opposes the hypothesis but at the same time recognizes the core elements of the repression but sees them as being part of a much larger whole. He does not deny the repression but criticizes the hypothesis as it is interpreted as the only correct history of sexuality. As a power model, repression is too narrow. Power is a negative force and productive in which negative and repressive dimensions function and take part in the productive operation. Considering the repression of sexuality, as Foucault analyzes, it is only “the production of sexualities, of discourse about sexualities.”¹⁵¹ Even though we think, sex is liberated during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries or at least more liberated than before, many demand sex to be hidden. To bring an example of Poland, religious conservatives of whom many think that sex is too liberated from moral guidance of religious norms and therefore there is a need to

¹⁴⁹ Foucault, 1978, p. 49

¹⁵⁰ Kelly, 2013, p. 16–17

¹⁵¹ Kelly, 2013, p. 22–23



influence family, marriage, and discussion on sex and sexuality. However, albeit it may seem like pro-liberation and conservative groups are opposed to one another, they are still part of the social whole.¹⁵²

Even though sex as a direct theme of speak was to be hidden, however, the amount of discourse increased, not only as secret sex talk but also as official talk as the written is the only way to study the change of the development. Also, Kelly states that Foucault makes a point that silence is always accompanied by discourse. There are always things one does not say, and things one does say. Silence itself is not repressive; instead, it is inevitable. His example to describe this is strongly related to the research theme of this study. Since the sixteenth century, frequency in confessions increased, and minor sexual acts were inquired about in order to discover the tiniest sexual thought or indication of a sexual act. For Foucault, this changed the sexual discourse until today; it was not only the act but the intention that became more important. The control expanded inside of the human body to its feelings and thoughts.¹⁵³

Just to note, Kelly states that Foucault centers his thoughts around Catholicism in the Western world, though, in Northern Europe, Protestantism is the main religion. The confession was indeed a feature of Catholicism, whereas Protestants had discarded it after the Reformation. In his writings, Foucault may reflect mostly on Catholicism in France, but his arguments fit Poland's Catholicism. According to Kelly, he states that by increasing confessions and changing modification, the discourse is transformed from the enjoyment of sex into an "enjoyment of the act of confessing." From confession, the prohibition against talking about sex has been growing out of the religious context. Gradually public interest was, firstly, the reason why the information of sex was needed. The change in talking about sex was no longer about their souls and religious aspects of life but practical and secular. As the administration developed and the term "population" came into use, the state needed information on their population's behavior to promote their health and other aspects of life.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Kelly, 2013, p. 24

¹⁵³ Kelly, 2013, p. 31–32

¹⁵⁴ Kelly, 2013, p. 32–35



To conclude, the main point of Foucault's objection according to Kelly to the repressive hypothesis is that sex was before only a matter of the Church, but in the nineteenth century, it became the center of discussion in various places such as in medicine, biology, psychology, pedagogy, and politics. This was not, however, an easy process. The conventional understanding of the repressive hypothesis is that there is resistance against the liberation of sex. Foucault rejects this and says that the secrecy of sex is not a fundamental thing to be discovered; rather, it is indispensable when the discourse about sex is expanding. Western late modernity has not invited the secrecy of sex as it has always been there, but the idea that the secrecy must be ended in the elaboration of discourse that uncovers its true nature. However, this can never end the secrecy since no secrecy exists. We think there is an imagined thing that will be reached through speaking, but surprisingly, there is nothing to be revealed.¹⁵⁵

5.3.3 POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

Foucault discusses the subject of power and knowledge in his work, through which he tries to elaborate that power works through institutions, individuals, and cultures, and customs.¹⁵⁶ For him, power is something that comes from below and is everywhere between relations of individuals; it is not institutional or strategic but "...the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society".¹⁵⁷ Power relations are widely distributed between individuals, teachers, and health care professionals who monitor sexual and gender norms and deviations from those. Foucault describes this specific phenomenon as a "dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being localized in them."¹⁵⁸ This distribution of power is a fine example in the context of Poland: teachers, doctors, and other professionals have the power to spread the information according to the norms accepted by the society and pupils and patients are expected to act according to them, not only because it is a must, but partly because it is that of internalized that it is left

¹⁵⁵ Kelly, p. 38–39

¹⁵⁶ Taylor, 2011, p. 56

¹⁵⁷ Foucault 1990a:93 in Taylor 2011, p. 59

¹⁵⁸ Foucault 1990a:94 in Taylor 2011, p. 59



unquestioned. If it is questioned, it is hard to act against those norms. The moral norms that are acceptable in society can be seen in the sexuality education in Polish schools that reflect the educational policies where young Poles' norms are adapted.

In the distribution of power, everyone is actually the “subject” and the “object” simultaneously. For example, a young student asks something from the teacher who keeps the lessons on sexuality and sex education. If the teacher answers to the student that something he/she asked is wrong and should not be done because it is terrible, the student starts to watch himself/herself and becomes his/her own inspector. As a result, the student is watching his/her own behavior, and yet, he/she is also an object of others of his/her behavior. Foucault’s point of this is to show that power may be found in unexpected places.¹⁵⁹

6 DISCOURSES IN POLISH SEXUALITY EDUCATION

In this chapter, I will analyze Polish sexuality education and its promotion of gender stereotypes, disinformation and homophobia, and the anti-gender campaign's impact on sexuality education. Four themes emerged from the data, and therefore, I have divided my analysis into four chapters: *gender stereotypes and disinformation*, *sexual minorities – a threat to traditional family values*, *anti-gender campaign*, and *sexualization of children and socialization of procreative behavior*. Polish sexuality education is called ‘Preparation for Family Life,’ but I am using a short-term ‘PFFL.’ Interviews are cited in the text from the sources to give a voice to the experiences of the Polish young people.

6.1 GENDER STEREOTYPES AND DISINFORMATION

A report of the United Nations from 2010 evaluates the Polish sexuality education classes to be narrow, concentrating on marriage and family. Other subjects such as sexuality and reproduction are taught to a limited extent, pointing to natural family

¹⁵⁹ Taylor, 2011, p. 58



planning methods and abstinence before marriage. The report also highlights the non-scientific teaching relating to contraception and abortion but also mentions that the classes promote gender stereotypes and disinformation about different sexual orientations.¹⁶⁰

The report of the European Parliament notes in 2013 that the content of sexuality education classes is not based on scientific knowledge. Gender stereotypes, intolerance towards homosexuality, disinformation, and religion-related teaching are common. Often, girls and boys are separated from teaching only about their own gender, resulting in a lack of knowledge of the opposite gender. Despite changing the sexuality education classes mandatory in 2009 by the Ministry of Education, the attendance is optional due to the parents' possibility of withdrawing their children from the classes.¹⁶¹ The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and several Polish NGOs share the same view of Polish sexuality education in 2014 to be poor and contain gender stereotypes in teaching and textbooks. The report stresses the name of Polish sexuality education "preparation for family classes" refers to the classes to be more concentrating on family values, not significantly on sexual and reproductive aspects of health. The subject is considered to have the same or lower status than religion, but usually, the sexuality education classes are often marginalized or neglected.¹⁶²

Even though sexuality education has been compulsory to offer in schools since 2009, based on the analysis of Ponton's report in 2014, in some primary, lower, and upper secondary schools, the PFFL classes are not provided at all. The PFFL classes' attendance is the highest in primary schools and the lowest in upper secondary schools. The latter is sometimes explained by the Matura exams¹⁶³ that pupils need to take but also have a low reputation: the subject is controversial and not reviewed necessary.¹⁶⁴ The UN

¹⁶⁰ United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, 2010, p. 8

¹⁶¹ European Parliament, 2013, p. 26-27

¹⁶² UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, KARAT Coalition in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations on behalf of CEDAW Coalition of Polish NGOs, 2014, p. 39-40

¹⁶³ Exams in the end of the upper secondary school

¹⁶⁴ Ponton, 2014, p. 2-5



committee's Report on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and several Polish NGOs evaluates that the PFFL classes are taught by teachers whose primary teaching subject is not relating to sexuality education. Sometimes, the classes are conducted by priests or nuns whose worldview may be based on religious beliefs influencing their ability to provide information based on scientific facts.¹⁶⁵

When analyzing Ponton's reports, the same theme of incompetent teachers can be pointed out. Teachers conducting the classes are often catechists or priests and teachers of other subjects such as Polish language, biology, history, or computer science. Sometimes librarians conduct the classes or company representatives visit schools and mainly share information on puberty and menstruation, showing samples of hygiene and menstruation products. Often company representatives share information about menstruation only to girls; boys have no alternative class. The PFFL classes and their topics are often emphasized by the stereotypes or the teacher's personal views. Instead of giving objective and neutral information, the teacher's personal views are dominant. Also, teachers feel ashamed to talk about the topics related to sexuality and sex, and therefore the content of the lessons is often unrelated to the actual topic.¹⁶⁶

Gender stereotypes and traditional gender norms are mostly emphasized in the classes when the teachers' view is dominant. In these classes, students feel that they are not free to express their own opinions and views. On the other hand, teachers who emphasize scientific knowledge and create a safe space for discussion are brought to the light. In some cases, the PFFL classes are based on relevant topics, and scientific methods are used, but in some cases, the higher school level, the more Catholic views, and gender stereotypes are embraced.¹⁶⁷

A teacher in primary school presented a healthy attitude, answered questions, was not afraid to recall examples from her own life. In junior high school, it was "Church" propaganda, which did not consent to any discussion or objection to

¹⁶⁵ United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, 2010, p. 8

¹⁶⁶ Ponton, 2009, p. 5–6

¹⁶⁷ Ponton, 2014, p. 6–9



the presented examples. In primary school, scientific and personal knowledge was used, and in junior high school – propaganda.¹⁶⁸

In primary school: sex and sexuality are related to the family and happy children; in junior high school, they are based on Catholic views, and in high school on the worldview of the teacher, which consisted in perceiving the female gender as inferior, which must be male subordinate.¹⁶⁹

In the first citation, the PFFL classes in primary school are presented with a good manner of approach, but in lower secondary school, the Catholic views are dominant in the classes. In the second citation, the same theme repeats; the higher the school level, the more Catholic views are emphasized. Additionally, gender stereotypes are brought up, evaluating that women are inferior compared to men. Some teachers have a strong religious attitude towards the main topics such as sexuality, physicality, contraception, and they often compass their personal views to the pupils. Often content that embraces gender stereotypes where men are seen as the oppressor and even accepting violence in marriage and towards women, presenting them as the responsible ones for it, are mentioned as part of the teaching.¹⁷⁰ This kind of non-scientific teaching can be, according to Wozniak, not only misleading but also risky concerning young people's health and events that might appear due to false information. It is also harmful to present the Catholic worldview as scientific knowledge that may lead to phobias towards LGBTQ+ people.¹⁷¹

Historically the Church has influenced education and the development of young people's values. With the involvement of education, it is easier for the Church to maintain its legitimacy. Religion as a subject during Communism was excluded from curriculums or was under strict control if it existed. From 1989 onwards, with the Catholic Church's increasing power, it succeeded in institutionalizing its influence in the educational system by giving priests natural status as teachers. The Church's role in relation to Poland's state has been signed in 1993 and ratified in 1998. It guarantees that the clerical

¹⁶⁸ Ponton, 2014, p. 7

¹⁶⁹ Ponton, 2014, p. 7

¹⁷⁰ Ponton, 2009, p. 10

¹⁷¹ Wozniak, 2015, p. 130



authority can determine the content of the Catholic religion in education and textbooks used. Also, to teach religion, one must apply for authorization from their diocesan bishop. Otherwise, one is not eligible to teach religion.¹⁷² Though the linkage between sexuality education and religion cannot be directly made, it can be deduced that the Polish Catholic Church is involved with public education and sexuality education. According to the analyzed material, priests and catechists teach sexuality education, and textbooks used in the classes can be religious books or contain religious content.

The teaching methods vary among schools. In some classes, teachers do not use any material. If materials are used, films are mostly mentioned as a common method of showing topics related to sexuality education. However, most of the films mentioned are outdated, showing sexuality as something negative and shameful. They also reinforce common myths and stereotypes as presenting homosexuality as a disease. The most frequently mentioned film was "Silent Scream," which, accordingly to the next quotation, contains disinformation about abortion:¹⁷³

I most remember the screening of the film "Silent Scream" about abortion. The girls left the class shaken, crying, terrified. The teacher (PE)¹⁷⁴ did not say words to make it clear that today, termination of pregnancy, in its early stages, consists of taking a few pills and not in "tearing the body of an innocent baby."¹⁷⁵

In the film, abortion is most likely pictured as a bloody and horrendous event where the baby is killed, leaving an uncomfortable picture about abortion. As the young person says in the citation, today, a pill will terminate the pregnancy in its early stages without the murderous aspect of the event. In addition to films, also textbooks are used. The most often mentioned textbook was "Road to Adulthood," which contains stereotypical or religious contents. Some books mentioned are not included in the list of approved textbooks; one mentioned book of this kind was John Paul II's encyclical. Other materials

¹⁷² Topidi, K., 2019, p. 10

¹⁷³ Ponton, 2014, p. 10

¹⁷⁴ Teacher of physical education

¹⁷⁵ Ponton, 2014, p. 10



include promotional material from companies or organizations, such as Pro-life magazine, materials from sanitary or tampon companies.¹⁷⁶

The most discussed topics in the PFFL classes are the human body, knowledge about puberty, knowledge about hygiene, information on sexuality, contraception (natural methods emphasized), information about pregnancy, STDs, knowledge about relationships, and family. Sexual violence is covered much less frequently.¹⁷⁷ Concerning sexuality, the content is concentrated on sexual initiation, sexual orientation, and sexual behavior. In some classes, the knowledge of sexuality is science-based, but in some classes, gender stereotypes are emphasized, claiming that boys are thoughtless and emotionless, seeking only sexual intercourse. The girls are told that they should start a family as married and as a subordinate to their husband and avoid sexual contact before that to remain valuable in boys eyes:¹⁷⁸

A girl who is no longer a virgin is to others a bitten apple that everyone abhors touching". Listening to this, I was no longer a virgin and felt worthless and disgusting.¹⁷⁹

Girls who have had sexual intercourse are no longer 'wanted,' and they are perceived as 'ruined.' Girls' are persuaded to maintain abstinence until marriage, and in the cases of girls having had sexual intercourse, it is said to be unacceptable. Concerning sexual violence, girls' roles are traditional and promoting stereotypes: girls are mainly taught not to provoke boys with their clothing and behavior. In some classes, girls had 'exercises' on how to say 'no' to a boy who tries to convince the girl to have sex with him if the girl does not feel like it. There is no message towards boys in terms of respecting other people's intimacy or that boys are responsible for sexual violence:¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Ponton, 2014, p. 11

¹⁷⁷ Ponton, 2009, p. 9

¹⁷⁸ Ponton, 2014, p. 17–18

¹⁷⁹ Ponton, 2014, p. 18

¹⁸⁰ Ponton, 2014, p. 18–19



Rapes were discussed, only those on women: “the woman herself provokes a man. Stop dressing like whores!”¹⁸¹

According to the citation, rapes are concerning only women since they provoke men to rape. Rape happens due to women’s clothing choices. This message promotes that girls are responsible for sexual violence as the boys cannot control themselves if girls provoke them either with their behavior, clothing, or words. According to Dragiewicz, teaching that embraces a patriarchal constitution supports violence against women. The more men socialize with men who advocate violence, the more contributing this factor is to women experiencing domestic violence.¹⁸²

Sexual violence towards women is common in Poland every year; about 800 000 women suffer from sexual and physical violence. In 2012 Poland signed with other European countries the *European Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence* (Istanbul Convention), but its ratification was delayed as it was considered as a threat to Polish and Catholic values. The Minister of Justice of Poland stated that the document was perilous for promoting “feminist ideology” and eliminating traditional family roles, lifting homosexual relationships. In 2015 the convention was ratified, but according to Wojnicka, that has changed nothing in the discourse. She argues that the case of the Istanbul Convention shows the institutionalized dominance of the Catholic Church in the questions of women’s rights and gender equality, and traditional gender roles are driven over them.¹⁸³

Knowledge about family and relationships is often communicated from a heteronormative point of view. Only one family model of two parents, a man and a woman are socially accepted. Single parents or non-heterosexual people are incomplete families:¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Ponton, 2014, p. 19

¹⁸² Dragiewicz, 2011, p. 90–91

¹⁸³ Wojnicka Katarzyna, 2019, p. 41–42

¹⁸⁴ Ponton, 2014, p. 13–14



During high school classes, people tried to make us believe that a family with one parent is a pathological family. The teacher explained that it is broken, and the child is not surrounded by such love as from two parents. From the rest of his translations, it could be concluded that it is better to have two parents and even to quarrel and beat each other and beat this child than a loving mother or father...¹⁸⁵

A family with one parent is broken and not capable of offering a safe childhood for children. Even violence is accepted if there are two parents – a woman and a man in the family. The roles inside the family are traditional, and women should take care of the family and children, and the husband takes care of earning money:

During the classes, which took place in the second grade at the technical school on Saturday morning (which already speaks for itself), the lady spoke over and over about the fact that the husband is earning money for the family, and the woman, for the sake of the children, has to give up her professional life and devote ourselves entirely to running the home.¹⁸⁶

In the citation, the PFFL classes are placed on weekends, Saturday mornings, which is an unfavorable time for young people. Also, the teacher is emphasizing her own views on how to organize a family. According to this class, girls should stay home and marry early to take care of their children. Also, girls are told that sexual violence inside the marriage is acceptable, and the woman should stay with her husband, even in a case of violence. The ‘no’ girls were practicing against boys or pedophiles ‘does not work in the marriage.’¹⁸⁷ In marriage, the natural family planning methods are often presented as the only right option to use as birth control, which has no side effects. These methods include the thermal-symptomatic method, diary, and sometimes intermittent intercourse. Sexual abstinence is encouraged before marriage, but this concerns mostly only girls as they are considered responsible ones who should ‘close their legs’ in order to prevent unwanted outcomes.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Ponton, 2009, p. 12

¹⁸⁶ Ponton, 2009, p. 13

¹⁸⁷ Ponton, 2014, p. 14

¹⁸⁸ Ponton, 2014, p. 15



The best contraceptive is an aspirin held in her knees because if a girl does not spread her legs, there is no problem.¹⁸⁹

Contraception and condoms are pictured as harmful birth control methods, and it is claimed that they do not protect from diseases or pregnancies. Young people understand that only 'safe' protection is the natural method, but nevertheless, they may not prevent unwanted pregnancies:

The educator in a lofty tone told how her friend got pregnant despite using the spiral and gave birth to a child with a spiral in the head. Overall, the classes spread the fear of using contraception that was supposed to be ineffective or harmful. I had a lot of girls in class who believed in all of this and thought it would be best to use a calendar. In the third grade, one of them gave birth to a child.¹⁹⁰

The teacher in the class claims that a spiral does not prevent pregnancies, and the child was born with a spiral in the head—this information distributed fear among students of using contraceptives and other methods of birth control that are safe. Disinformation impacted girls so that they believed in natural methods of birth control such as calendars resulting in one student giving birth.

Gender stereotypes are emphasized in the PFFL classes, often presenting girls as submissive and housewives, whereas boys are aggressive and dominative, steering for employment after graduation. Disinformation, covering a wide area of subjects, exists partly because of lack of knowledge, teacher's incompetence in teaching sexuality education, and the Catholic Church's power in the sphere of education. Gender stereotypes are often harmful to women, putting them to a narrow understanding of women's place in society. According to Foucault's theory on biopower, women have been controlled through history and considered the 'secondary sex' compared to men.¹⁹¹ The Church's morality guidance defined sexual norms,¹⁹² which, in fact, still defines moral norms in present Polish society. Biopower explains that sexuality, after

¹⁸⁹ Ponton, 2014, p. 15

¹⁹⁰ Ponton, 2014, p. 14

¹⁹¹ Kelly, 2013, p. 79–80

¹⁹² Wehr, 2003, p. 4–6



religious confessions, became institutionalized as sexuality was categorized in a psychological sense. If a family is different from traditional, its sexuality is a threat, and it must be cured. A single parent or a parent in homosexual relations, sexuality is seen suddenly as a threat to the traditional family and society. Alarming sexuality should be monitored and excluded.¹⁹³

Historically, the Church defined moral norms, in its essence, the foundation of specific roles and behavior that are considered appropriate for women and men. Foucault's theory on biopower elaborate a strategy towards women: *hysterization of women's bodies* in which bodies between women and men are compared, but women are disqualified from appropriate domains for men. Women being disqualified from certain aspects, their bodies are, however, promoted in the sense of reproduction, but simultaneously, their sexuality is a negative "reflect of hysterization" which steers women's sexuality into a sphere of medicine. Through the aspect of reproduction and medicalization, women's sexuality is dragged into a public sphere, which is in the interest of the state concerning family planning among the population.¹⁹⁴ Even though Foucault means women's hysterization in the 19th century, the linkage can be drawn: women's sexuality has been an object for controlling the population, values, marriage, and acts as a power mechanism in the society. Human sexuality and especially women's sexuality are in the center of biopolitics – in the PFFL classes, girls are encouraged to stay abstinent before marriage, marry early, and have children as young and as many as possible. Promoting a specific family model is connected to values but also reproduction; sex must be reproductive.¹⁹⁵ As analyzing the material and taking biopower into account, promoting traditional gender roles and disinformation on sexuality and other topics is a strategy for the population's growth.

Due to Polish history and the Church's institutionalized power in different areas of society since the 1990s, traditional gender roles and stereotypes are deeply rooted in Polish society. Media, advertisements, political statements promote gender

¹⁹³ Kelly, 2013, p. 79–80

¹⁹⁴ Foucault, 1978, p. 103–106

¹⁹⁵ Taylor, 2011, p. 46–48



stereotypes. Women are underrepresented in politics, the labor market, and in positions of power. Overall, the proportion that women are seen in the media as journalists, researchers, and experts is lower than that of men – this not only mitigates their achievements as experts but also embraces the concept that women are not capable of succeeding in these roles. Gender stereotyping reinforces discrimination and sexism towards women and picture them as inferior compared to men.¹⁹⁶ Additionally, Poland has never had a strong feminist movement, and gender inequalities are common. Besides media and private actors, governmental institutions also promote masculinity and femininity models in traditional and conservative contexts where masculinity is hegemonic and femininity subordinated. In the questions of women’s role in politics, their reproductive rights, education reforms, and the discourse on the controversial rise of gender ideology, the media has taken a masculinist worldview.¹⁹⁷

6.2 SEXUAL MINORITIES – A THREAT TO TRADITIONAL FAMILY VALUES

Polish sexuality education contains gender stereotypes and disinformation, not only towards women but also towards sexual minorities. Ponton’s report from 2009 elaborates that young people reported hearing teachers say that homosexuals should be isolated. According to the citation, homosexuals should vanish from the world, considering it as a disease:

...She said about homosexuals, deeply indignant, that such people should not be in the world, that this is some kind of disease and it is impossible for any feelings to be associated with it.¹⁹⁸

Many of the teachers are not tolerant towards homosexual people, and students who identify themselves as homosexuals feel unnormal or have stopped participating in the classes.¹⁹⁹ The films used in the classes present sexuality as shameful and homosexuality as a disease. Also, textbooks are considered homophobic, especially when religious

¹⁹⁶ UN, KARAT, CEDAW, 2014, p. 25

¹⁹⁷ Wojnicka, 2019, p. 37

¹⁹⁸ Ponton, 2009, p. 13

¹⁹⁹ Ponton, 2014, p. 3



materials were used.²⁰⁰ Sometimes, family relationships are communicated from different angles where homosexual couples are considered normal. However, the family is often presented from a heteronormative point of view, which has no place for other family models than the traditional with a woman and a man in it. These claims affect young people, and some may have problems accepting their homosexuality.²⁰¹ When discussing sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), AIDS is linked to homosexuals and black people, claiming that AIDS is rampant among them. Also, other kinds of stereotypes are promoted: since homosexuals have thousands of partners, they suffer from AIDS.²⁰² According to Ponton's reports, young people acknowledge that the PFFL classes are not a reliable source of information concerning sexuality or homosexuality. They often turn to the internet or peers to receive perhaps information that is not colored by the teacher's view.²⁰³

Homophobia is more common in rural areas than in larger cities. Traditional values are, in general, more common in rural areas, including negative attitudes toward divorce and abortion.²⁰⁴ In a survey of CBOS²⁰⁵ in 2013, when asked about "*attitude to ethical norms and different lifestyles*," 43% disapprove of homosexuality "as always wrong." However, it is mentioned that despite the high percentage, there is an increasing number of liberal attitudes towards homosexuality when considering surveys from earlier years before 2013.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, in another survey of CBOS done in the same year, 2013, only 12 % of Poles think of homosexuality as normal, and 83 % consider homosexuality a deviation from norms. According to the report, during 2010-2013, the number of accepting homosexuality has risen, yet an increase of intolerance has also risen at the same time. When looking at a longer perspective than three years, there is a slight decrease in intolerance. Homophobia is common among the oldest and least educated

²⁰⁰ Ponton, 2014, p. 10–11

²⁰¹ Ponton, 2014, p. 13–14

²⁰² Ponton, 2014, p. 15

²⁰³ Ponton, 2016, p. 13

²⁰⁴ CBOS, 2013. https://www.cbos.pl/EN/publications/reports/2013/117_13.pdf

²⁰⁵ The Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in Poland

²⁰⁶ CBOS, 2013. https://www.cbos.pl/EN/publications/reports/2013/111_13.pdf



who consider them religiously active. Higher-educated and non-believers consider the opposite of accepting homosexuality as normal.²⁰⁷

To tie my analysis on homosexuality to Polish sexuality education and society within my theoretical framework, Foucault's third strategy explains that homosexuality is originally considered a sexual disorder and a mechanism of power in the production of sexuality. In the strategy of *psychiatrization of perversions*, sexuality is distributed to biological and psychological domains through which sexual disorders are analyzed. If disorders are found, they must be cured.²⁰⁸ Categorizing homosexuality as a sexual disorder with the proposal of cure is a mechanism of power. Power relations are distributed among the population between individuals, health care professionals, teachers who spread norms on sexuality and gender and monitors unnatural behavior. This power mechanism is not specifically a strategic one or institutional; instead, it occurs in this particular society through the complex strategical way in different apparatuses without noticing its presence. In other words, individuals spread the desirable norms that are perhaps the state's goal to other individuals without acknowledging it. The conceptions of natural and unnatural sexuality are internalized in the minds of the people that it comes naturally to exclude unwanted sexual behavior or desires.²⁰⁹

The survey results above on attitudes towards homosexuality provide information that Poles are not specifically tolerant towards homosexual people: in 2013, even 83 % consider that homosexuality is a deviation from norms. To consider, there are no survey questions on whether homosexuals must be cured in the present society; instead, people do recognize that homosexuals exist. However, according to Wildstein (2014, p. 38) in Żuk & Żuks article (2019), it is considered that even though homosexuality exists in nature, it does not mean that it is natural.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ CBOS, 2013. https://www.cbos.pl/EN/publications/reports/2013/024_13.pdf

²⁰⁸ Foucault, 1978, p. 103–106

²⁰⁹ Foucault 1990a:93-94 in Taylor 2011, p. 59

²¹⁰ Żuk & Żuk, 2019, p. 12



Homosexuality is considered in Poland as a threat to national identity within religious aspects of the Catholic Church. Homosexuality as a concept is alien to Polish culture, and it threatens national values and the traditional family model and social structure. The Polish right-wing perceives homosexuality also as foreign in the sense of the EU's interference to private matters inside of Poland. Yet, this is not a local phenomenon; this kind of rhetoric of right-wing perceiving sexual minorities as a danger to the nation and national identity has increased in many Eastern European countries.²¹¹ Mole in Žuk and Žuk's article (2019) argues that sexualities that differ from heteronormative sexuality are a threat to the narrative of patriarchal structure and family, simultaneously failing to fulfill their biological expectations of sex and sociological aspect of gender. They mix the traditional gender roles in private and public and disrupt the society's homogenous entity, causing confusion among the public, specifically if the norms are essential to the Catholic Church.²¹²

Poland's political context of homophobia and nationalism is connected to the ruling party's change in 2015. The Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) appeals to nationalist and anti-Semitic themes and promotes them in their politics, approving and endorsing homophobia in public. For PiS, Catholicism is a natural part of the Polish society and identity, and thereby the Church has an even more influential position than before in determining policies and tendencies concerning social or educational policy. It is worth to notice that the rhetoric of the PiS is not pivotal to the entire Polish society. However, the ever-deepening coworking of the PiS and the Catholic Church can be productive in the sense of excluding sexual minorities out of public life.²¹³ Though the Catholic Church has a considerable nationalist clergy supporting the politics of the PiS, there are signs of the progressive side which may demand the Church to stand down supporting secular nationalist policies. The Church's dilemma is to satisfy all the parties as the number of regular churchgoers decreases and PiS deepens its nationalist policies.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Žuk & Žuk, 2019, p. 6

²¹² Mole, 2016 in Žuk & Žuk, 2019, p. 6

²¹³ Žuk & Žuk, 2019, p. 7

²¹⁴ Topidi, 2019, p.15



Nonetheless, the trend of homophobia is not new and has existed in Poland throughout its history. In 2005 Poland created a reputation as a homophobic country through European Parliament's notions, banning several LGBT demonstrations and making homophobic statements by the politicians.²¹⁵ In 2013 57% of homosexuals felt socially excluded in CBOS' survey research.²¹⁶ In the nationalist narrative, managing fear is one feature of building desired atmospheres in society. In this narrative and also in the wider context of Eastern Europe, the victims are supporters of gender equality and the LGBTQ+ community. In this atmosphere of fear, the strengthening of power and controlling opposition is possible when there is always a threat from the outside justifying the policy.²¹⁷

6.3 CAMPAIGN AGAINST GENDER

The word "gender" suddenly reached a large audience through newspapers and TV stations in 2013. Gender was the center of attention for several months, which before was a word known only to experts. Debates were present in social media, tabloids, and blogs. It was mentioned regularly in the Polish Catholic parishes picturing gender as a perversion source and a threat to the traditional family. The dangers of gender towards children were continuously propagated to parents as presented as a threat to the Polish nation. Gender quickly the topic of cartoon drawings and jokes – often picturing gender as a character of a hairy man in burlesque dress warning that gender is dangerous. Behind this sudden reveal of gender in headlines, the Catholic Church's anti-gender campaign had slowly started in 2012 when Minister of Justice Jarosław Gowin resisted Poland's ratification of the Istanbul Convention that counter violence against women and domestic violence. The Convention was perceived as an attack and dangerous to Polish values and families as it contained the word gender. In 2013, liberal and open-minded Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, against his usual performance, stated publicly that "gender ideology is worse than Communism and Nazism put together."²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Graff, 2010, p. 583

²¹⁶ CBOS, 2013. https://www.cbos.pl/PL/publikacje/public_opinion/2013/10_2013.pdf

²¹⁷ Żuk & Żuk, 2019, p. 19

²¹⁸ Graff, 2014, p. 431–432



The Polish Catholic Church encountered its first pedophile scandal later in 2013, following inspections of many priests. The national media revealed specific information about the incidents to which the Church was pressured to answer. In a TV interview, Archbishop Michalik explained that the victims drew priests to conduct perverse acts causing deeper scandal among the public. Later in his attempt to cover his earlier statement, Michalik said the absence of love in families going through divorce and gender ideology are the reasons for pedophilia to occur. In this context, the mobilization of the extreme right succeeded in demonizing the word gender as the threat to the family and the one that causes pedophilia. The campaign used strong words such as “death” and “murder.” Graff gives an example in the article of her lecture “Gender – Blessing or Curse?” in a public debate in 2013, which was a turning point in her understanding that different views on gender roles and sexual freedom were dissipated in Poland. The lecture was interrupted by demonstrators with a smoke bomb yelling “Stop Gender!”, “Shame on you!” and “This is Poland!”

Later in 2013, a pastoral letter was revealed in Poland's Bishops' Conference and read in most parishes throughout the country.²¹⁹ Representatives claimed the following:

God based the family on the foundation of marriage...such family will be a suitable environment for bringing up children...The gender ideology is the product of many decades of ideological and cultural changes that are deeply rooted in Marxism and neo-Marxism endorsed by some feminist movements and the sexual revolution...According to this ideology, humans can freely determine whether they want to be men or women and freely choose their sexual orientation. This voluntary self-determination, not necessarily life-long, is to make the society accept the right to set up new types of families, for instance, families built on homosexual relations...The danger of gender ideology lies in its very destructive character both for men...Humans unsure of their sexual identity are not capable of discovering and fulfilling tasks that they face in their marital, family social and professional lives... We also appeal to institutions responsible for Polish education...which in the name of modern education carry out experiments on children and young people. We call on educational institutions to engage in the promotion of an integral vision of man.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Graff, 2014, p. 432-433

²²⁰ Pastoral letter of the Bishops' Conference of Poland to be used on the Sunday of the Holy Family 2013:

https://web.archive.org/web/20140629155002/http://episkopat.pl/dokumenty/listy_pasterskie/5584.1



The letter claims that gender ideology is originally deduced from Marxism and Neo-Marxism, leading to the destruction of families and marriages. Men and women are created the way they are to be married and raise children in this particular institution – any indifferent family will raise children in an unfavorable environment. Families built on homosexual relationships, or families of single parents, are condemned as these people cannot fulfill their tasks in family, marriage, or professional life. Also, Polish sexuality education performs experiments on children under the name of ‘modern’ education. Gender ideology is a threat and a cause for the breakdown of marriages, collapse of traditional family values and models, and children's early sexualization. It can be indirectly analyzed that the Church condemns all of the external as a threat that is not in the sphere of traditional man-women-marriage with children and incriminates gender ideology as a negative phenomenon to the whole society.

The letter is considered to be a response to Pope Benedict's XVI Christmas speech in 2012, which announced that human sexuality is now based on gender theory where individuals can socially choose their gender – it is not defined at birth. The reaction of Polish bishops followed the outcome of the pastoral letter, many of them calling gender the death of civilization. In late 2013, Bishop Marek Mendyk, the head of the Church's Catholic Education Commission, urged to abolish of gender ideology from Polish sexuality education.²²¹ The debate around gender was different in the Catholic media and secular ones. In secular magazines, many authors claimed that the war against gender is in the center of attention in the religious public due to its attempt to draw attention from the pedophilia scandal.²²²

Joanna Podgórska writes in an article in Polish newsmagazine *Polityka* December 2013 that priests travel around the country lecturing about gender to be the devastation of man and family. Catholic circles organize meetings with parents on how to protect their children from the destruction of gender. She also connects the pedophile scandal to

[,Pastoral letter of the Bishops Conference of Poland to be used on the Sunday of the Holy Family 2013.html](#)

²²¹ Odrowąż-Coates, 2014, p. 28

²²² Odrowąż-Coates, 2014, p. 29



draw the attempt elsewhere, creating gender as Poland's worst enemy.²²³ Odrowąż-Coates refers to an article *On Children for Adults* in *Polityka* published in January 2014 that expresses parental concern that gender debate has caused. The article claims that gender politics leads to early sexualization of children, unnormal sexual behavior, and pornography addiction.

Odrowąż-Coates also refers to Lena Kolarska-Bobińska, the Minister of Education and Tertiary Education, in early 2014, when asked about the heated discussion of gender, she argued that scientific research with freedom is necessary, allowing further development of social theories to research social phenomena.²²⁴ To this extent, later in January 2014, The Ministry of Education and Tertiary Education stated officially that the Ministry supports freedom of scientific research, including gender studies, despite the ongoing debate on gender. The Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań also announced a letter to clean the name of gender studies and gender specialists that were now also the anti-gender campaign targets. The letter disapproved the disinformation around the word gender as well as manipulation with it. The claims of gender studies causing homophobia were condemned.²²⁵ However, the debate expedited in the first months of 2014, becoming the main subject of social interactions, social media, and the parishes' speeches every Sunday.²²⁶

It is noticeable that Ponton's report from 2009 has no mention of gender, whereas, in the report from 2014, gender is mentioned negatively among young Poles. Gender is pictured as a dreadful invention from the 21st century that tries to change the inequality between women and men. Gender is also linked to Nazism, whose purpose is to signal gender to be very atrocious:

²²³ Podgórska, 2013. <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1564277,1,kosciol-walczy-z-nowym-wrogiem.read?backTo=https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1575103,1,certyfikowane-szkoly-wolne-od-gender.read>

²²⁴ Odrowąż-Coates, 2014, p. 29-30

²²⁵ Odrowąż-Coates, 2014, p. 30-31

²²⁶ Odrowąż-Coates, 2014, p. 29



Gender is a 21st-century invention that leads to pathology...women and men are not equal;²²⁷

Gender is a corollary of Nazism.²²⁸

According to Ponton's study on sexuality education in 2016, when interviewing school principals about the PFFL classes, even a small amount of parents' refusals on their children's participation in the classes are taken as an indicator of unfavorable reception of the subject. Opinions discussed in the media, fearing that the child will encounter unsuitable content, affect parents to withdraw their children out of the PFFL classes.²²⁹

There are parents who are very restrictive about this subject and say that their child will not attend. Especially that there are various things in the media that say.²³⁰

When asked about the topics included in sexuality education, some had no objections to the current curriculum, but some indicated that topics related to gender are an exception. The common concern is that ideological issues should not be promoted in the classes that may offend or harm people's feelings or even advocate 'unhealthy sexual behavior.'²³¹ Principals also emphasize the challenge to organize the classes; the allocated number of classes is only 14 hours during the school year, and some of the classes contain topics of gender, and therefore the curriculum needs to be adjusted.²³² This shows that the war against gender ideology has changed attitudes towards gender in sexuality education. The Church's anti-gender campaign was successful in the sense that the word gender now has a negative connotation, and it is referred to as something bad, especially when concerning children.

According to Odrowąż-Coates, the Catholic Church in Poland has created the war against gender to draw attention from its own crisis: besides the pedophilia scandal, the fear of the feminist movement gaining popularity demanding new roles leads to lower birth

²²⁷ Ponton, 2014, p. 20

²²⁸ Ponton, 2014, p. 20

²²⁹ Ponton, 2016, p. 22

²³⁰ Ponton, 2016, p. 23

²³¹ Ponton, 2016, p. 27

²³² Ponton, 2016, p. 22–23



rates and lower numbers of churchgoers.²³³ The anti-gender campaign shows that despite secularization, the Catholic Church still holds a prominent position in impacting the public's opinion. Though this campaign has upturned intolerance, it has also drawn attention to gender and existing gender barriers. Considering gender ideology, the majority of the public recognizes it as anti-religious.²³⁴

Gender ideology is not only a local phenomenon in Poland, as many researchers argue, but more of a transnational phenomenon. Comparable movements have been recognized in other Eastern European countries such as Ukraine, Russia, Hungary, Slovakia, Georgia, and some Western countries. The number of religious-based organizations opposing gender equality in Europe is increasing.²³⁵ The mobilization of anti-gender campaigns is identical in many countries, suggesting that regardless of the newly emerged concept of “gender ideology,” the resistance against gender equality is an older tradition.²³⁶ Graff argues that Poland may be the key player in the anti-gender discourse in this transnational context, having the Catholic Church as a political actor when considering the vulnerability of right-wing extremism in Eastern Europe. The enablers of the anti-gender campaign are the weaknesses of democracy, women’s and LGBTQ+ movements, and the power and durability of the nationalist movements.²³⁷

It needs to be recognized in order to receive a full picture of the war against gender ideology in Poland, that the Catholic Church and right-wing circles are producers of the social order that promotes traditionalist models, and this is the crucial distinction between Western Europe and Eastern Europe, where the cultural revolution of Enlightenment never happened.²³⁸ According to Korolczuk, gender as a controversial topic has been interpreted as a cultural war, not as a new one, but as a series of wars since 1989. Considered as a backlash from progression following the accession into

²³³ Odrowąż-Coates, 2014, p. 31

²³⁴ Odrowąż-Coates, 2014, p. 32

²³⁵ Korolczuk, 2014, p. 45–46

²³⁶ Korolczuk, 2014, p. 48

²³⁷ Graff, 2014, p.

²³⁸ Żuk & Żuk, 2019, p. 9



European Union and international pressure from organizations, it has created a wall of resistance.²³⁹

6.4 SEXUALIZATION OF CHILDREN AND SOCIALIZATION OF PROCREATIVE BEHAVIOR

The Polish war against gender ideology (see chapter 6.3) was initially revealed from European regulations combating discrimination based on gender and gender equality, especially in education. The moral panic of gender spread fear of putting Polish children in danger, gender, causing early sexualization and unhealthy sexual behavior. Children were feared to turn into homosexuals and victims of perverse homosexual men. These arguments were the core of the Catholic Church's anti-gender campaign, warning parents to protect their children's innocence. It was emphasized that children are the future of the nation, and therefore their education, welfare, and ideological views must be observed and controlled. In this discourse, the defenders of gender studies and "gender ideology" are pictured as kidnappers of children with communist doctrines and simultaneously promoting the European Union's politics that penetrates the Polish private family sphere.²⁴⁰ Protecting children's innocence from influences that might corrupt them is historically an old idea and is common in many cultures²⁴¹, but within the anti-gender campaign in Poland, the idea was brought into the light to the public that created hysteria around sexuality education 2013 onwards.

Polish newsmagazine *Polityka* published an article "*Sneaky gender lurks on preschoolers*" in January 2014 by Joanna Podgórska, who argues that hysteria around gender increases; sexuality education is corrupt, and schools' are places of masturbation and pedophiles. The tone of accusations has become absurd, and newspapers of right-wing fabricate shocking headlines.²⁴² Antoni Bohdanowicz wrote in Polish news website *Natemat* an article about Beata Kempa, a member of Parliament, who established in January 2014 a parliamentary committee to stop gender ideology, that aims to prevent

²³⁹ Korolczuk, 2014, p. 45

²⁴⁰ Korolczuk, 2014, p. 44–45

²⁴¹ Stanczyk, 2018, p. 811

²⁴² Podgórska, 2014, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1566673,1,podstepny-gender-czyha-na-przedszkolaki.read>



gender teaching in schools and kindergartens. She opposes gender ideology mainly due to its threat to dress boys as girls. She claims that gender spreads fear in schools that must be stopped immediately.²⁴³ The fear that boys dress as girls come from the incidents called “equality nurseries.” The concept of these nurseries was introduced in 2011 when Poland received considerable funding from European Union, and at the same time, guidelines were handed to schoolteachers to avoid gender stereotypes in kindergarten, including teaching sexuality and openness and respect towards it. Guidelines emphasized different activities in an educational sense and proposals on playing toys that are perceived as toys for the opposite sex. Non-traditional freedom was offered to children, and the atmosphere was to be open where non-stereotypical gender behavior and gender equality were welcome.²⁴⁴

The equality program became scandalous when a picture from kindergarten in Piotrowice spread in the media. In this picture, a boy was dressed as a hairdresser with a wig whose purpose was to show children that a boy can be a hairdresser and a girl policewoman. The equality program was conducted in several kindergartens governed by the same Foundation for Preschool education (FEP). The scandal in the media caused parents eventually to withdraw their children out of the program, yet the parents chose to put their children in these kindergartens and played an active role in its conduction.²⁴⁵

The conservative voices took the nurseries under attack, claiming it had “catastrophic consequences” on children who were under threat. Polish right-wing internet portal *wPolityce.pl* published an article where a methodologist of primary education, Dorota Dziamska, claims that the equality program is not an educational program and it should be demolished. According to her knowledge, these children, especially boys who were encouraged to play with girls’ toys or wear a dress, started crying and fled to the toilet or bit the teacher. She argues that the program tears down boys' dignity since girls dress for their nature, but boys are very offended by this kind of behavior. These kinds of

²⁴³ Bohdanowicz, 2014. <https://natemat.pl/90069,beata-kempa-wyruszyla-w-polske-ostrezgac-przed-ideologia-gender>

²⁴⁴ Stanczyk, 2018, p. 819

²⁴⁵ Żuchowicz, 2014. https://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,15280923,Ideologia_gender_w_przedszkolu_czyli_koniec_rownosci.html



activities ruin children's psyche and can impact their adulthood.²⁴⁶ This conservative attack caused anxiety in many liberal circles working with women's rights, LGBT, and gender equality. To answer back, dozens of NGOs wrote an open letter to defend the equality program as it had a positive impact in promoting gender equality in general.²⁴⁷

All in this hysteria about gender among pre-schools and schools, Minister Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, the government's Plenipotentiary for Gender Equality, tried to emphasize that gender is equal rights, not a program to transform boys into girls. In *Gazeta Wyborcza's* article, she says that she does not understand the hysteria around gender and the program of equality in kindergarten. Gender is a study of gender equality – the anti-gender campaign attack has misunderstood gender's real purpose.²⁴⁸ According to Graff, the outcome of Kozłowska-Rajewicz was not successful in stopping the campaign against gender, which spread its warnings about the sexualization of children into school posters, petitions to ban sexuality education, and teachers who talked about gender in the PFFL classes were fired. At the end of January 2014, two people were considered the anti-gender campaign leaders: Beata Kempa and Dariusz Oko. Both of them campaigned on the TV and radio, claiming the central message of the Church; gender leads to destruction and sex mania.²⁴⁹

According to Foucault's theory on biopower, *pedagogization of children's sexuality* is one of the strategies of power and knowledge to centralize sexuality in the discourse. Children are considered psychologically sexless but anatomically sexual. Children's sexual behavior has traditionally been considered extremely inappropriate, leading to diminishing any potential sexual behavior by education, monitoring families and schools, and medicalization.²⁵⁰ Adults seek to maintain their position of authority in relation to children though as studies today have shown, the perception of children's innocence is

²⁴⁶ wPolityce.pl, 2013. <https://wpolityce.pl/spoleczenstwo/73272-takie-eksperymenty-odzieraja-dzieci-z-godnosci>

²⁴⁷ Stanczyk, 2018, p. 819-820

²⁴⁸ Wielowieyska, 2014.

https://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,15230442,Kozlowska_Rajewicz_Gender_to_nie_zaglada_cywilizacji.html

²⁴⁹ Graff, 2014, p. 433

²⁵⁰ Foucault, 1978, p. 103–106



a social construct to reinforce their hegemonic position. This dominance is justified through protection and knowledge that is connected to adult's wisdom and experience, but simultaneously it means that the rules of adult life such as morals and behavior are imposed on children marginalizing their own opinions. Maintaining children as asexual beings and in need of protection embraces traditional gender roles, family values, and stereotypical attitudes towards sexuality and gender.²⁵¹

Protecting children's innocence is also translated into the prohibition of access to knowledge: children cannot properly learn about their bodies and explore other roles than traditional ones. In this context, children's sexuality is shaped by existing sexual tendencies and desires. Many studies show that children have sexual behavior, including sexual fantasies, arousal, and masturbating, leaving these needs without support for society's expectations. In the idea of innocence, children are viewed from a heteronormative angle and expected to carry on the idea of the traditional family model, yet these expectations are conducted through concepts that support the idea of the model family, such as interest in finding a partner, reproduction, and heterosexuality. Even though considered asexual, children constantly experience heterosexualization in social relations, educational experiences – in private and public life. When this heteronormative *status quo* is threatened, the public may encounter moral panic, spreading anger and fear to the unknown.²⁵² Children are used as a means to maintain the heteronormative social order and human relationships by prohibiting access to knowledge. This prohibition is justified by protection, including denying not only access to sexual knowledge but also discovering unaccepted behavior or media.

In Poland, this kind of rhetoric of protection of children from gender and sexuality as a strategy is not promoted only among conservatives and the Church but in the media along with. Thereby childhood sexuality is a controversial subject and taboo, and the concerns of the future population are heated in the media debates creating large-scale public concern.²⁵³ To draw Foucault's strategy of pedagogization of children's sexuality

²⁵¹ Stanczyk, 2018, p. 810-811

²⁵² Stanczyk, 2018, p. 811–812

²⁵³ Stanczyk, 2018, p. 813



together, the fear of sexualization of children in sexuality education where gender is promoted, the society's first concern is the future of the nation including the notion of "what kind of children" are raised in "what kind of society." The fundamental fear underneath is that the children of the future are ruined by content that is unsuitable for them, simultaneously ruining the Polish values but also the birth rate by introducing families and relationships that may not emphasize reproduction.

Polish birth rate has continuously decreased since the 1960s, being the lowest in 2003, 1,22 births per woman. In 2009, the birth rate was 1,4 per woman, in 2013 1,29, and in 2016, 1,39 per woman.²⁵⁴ Polish news site National Bank of Poland, *Observator Finansowy* writes in 2016 that Poland has a very low fertility rate among European countries. Fertility decreases along with economic development, the level of education, and equality between women and men where women are entered into the labor market and can choose their role more freely in society. However, the article mentions that Nordic countries such as Finland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, had an increasing fertility rate until recently due to high female employment, good access to childcare and benefits, decreasing the costs of having a child. In turn, in Poland, women have lower chances of negotiating working time than men, meaning that the balance between work and home is inflexible. Conclusively, the solution is not to push women out of the labor market; instead, it is suggested to relieve the combination of work and children for women to increase fertility rate – making it more desirable and easier for women who want to have careers and children.²⁵⁵

Relating to the birth rate, I want to include Foucault's fourth theme, is *socialization of procreative behavior* that explains society's interest in sexual reproduction by controlling the population's fertility. Reproductive sex and family planning are at the center of attention, forming public policy in favor of the growing birth rate.²⁵⁶ The aim of focusing on marriage, natural contraception methods, and traditional gender roles in

²⁵⁴ The World Bank: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=PL>

²⁵⁵ Arak, 2016. <https://www.observatorfinansowy.pl/in-english/macroeconomics/poland-a-country-with-a-fertility-rate-lower-than-china/>

²⁵⁶ Foucault, 1978, p. 103–106



public and the teaching of sexuality education in schools is part of Poland's national identity and a strategy towards population growth. In the material and media articles, the more profound concern of all the hysteria around gender and the fear of gender equality comes into the light as a concern over the future of the nation. As Warat argues, children play an enormous role in the nationalist-religious discourse keeping the society in its current form: "they are shown as vulnerable, confused about their gender roles, and in need of protection from the influence of equality education" but at the same time, laying the responsibility of the nation's future onto their shoulders.²⁵⁷

Ponton's reports on sexuality education in Poland show that the 'Preparation for family life' as a subject is a secondary one compared to other subjects in the school curriculum. The classes' poor organization is impacting students' attendance, which according to Ponton's study on sexuality education in 2009, explains that pupils often ask their parents to sign for refusals since the classes are early in the mornings and late in the evenings.²⁵⁸ According to Ponton's report in 2016, school principals emphasized that if even a small number of parents refuse their children to participate in the classes, it is taken as an indicator for unfavorable reception of the subject as a whole.²⁵⁹ In Ponton's study from 2014, principals are not interested in organizing the PFFL classes; instead, parents are forced to sign refusals, or the classes are given to someone who cannot correctly conduct the teaching. Students are also discouraged from taking part in the classes as the classes are sometimes placed over another important class.²⁶⁰ Tendencies of the classes' poor organization are similar in all of Ponton's studies, yet two of them are conducted in the aftermath of heated debate about gender. To draw a linkage between children's protection from dangers of sexuality and gender and the PFFL classes in Poland, it is clear that the organization of the classes is troublesome since the atmosphere towards sexuality education that may make children sexual is not favorable.

²⁵⁷ Warat, 2016, p. 112

²⁵⁸ Ponton, 2009, p. 15

²⁵⁹ Ponton, 2016, p. 22

²⁶⁰ Ponton, 2014, p. 5



6.5 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Before moving to the discussion, I will summarize the results shortly. The first research question asked, *Why are gender stereotypes, homophobia, and disinformation promoted in Polish sexuality education?* The results of this question were multilayered. Polish sexuality education is poorly organized due to its character as a secondary subject. The general atmosphere towards sexuality education impacted the classes as they are not seen as favorable, and therefore, the worth of organizing a proper curriculum is considered unnecessary. The classes contain gender stereotypes, negative attitudes towards sexual minorities, and general disinformation in many themes related to sexuality and sexual health due to certain factors: in many cases, teachers are incompetent to teach sexuality education. They may have a background in other subjects, or they are catechists or priests promoting the Catholic worldview to young students.

Negative attitudes towards sexual minorities are often underlined in the classes, hence normalizing homophobia. Sometimes, the classes are based on scientific knowledge and tolerance towards sexual minorities, where young people can discuss freely. Nonetheless, homophobia is common in Poland, and it is not a new phenomenon. Homosexuality is perceived as a threat to the traditional values and Polish identity, specifically when taking into account the parliamentary winner PiS after 2015, whose political rhetoric appeals to the nationalist public with conservative values, promoting homophobia publicly. Therefore, homophobia is endorsed in sexuality education as it is supported by society.

The Catholic Church's influential position in the educational policy is connected to sexuality education and its promotion of gender stereotypes, homophobia, and disinformation. The Church's moral views impact sexuality education as its aim is to maintain existing social order and traditional gender roles. The Catholic Church's constitutional position within the state of Poland ensures its power in many domains of society, which with increasing religious nationalism and government collaboration promotes even more traditional values as part of Polish identity. Poland has never had



a strong women's and LGBTQ+ movement, yet having a robust nationalist movement resisting progressive ideas of gender equality leaving the existing social order somewhat unquestioned and, therefore, sexuality education without applicable organization.

The second research question asked *How the anti-gender campaign affected Polish sexuality education?* The campaign, inaugurated by the Catholic Church, impacted sexuality education in many ways. The campaign was to draw attention from its pedophilia scandal, and it was successful in terms of obtaining the involvement of nationalist groups spreading the possible threat of gender. The analyzed material showed that the campaign accomplished in turning the word gender negative in terms of sexuality education, claiming that children will be ruined and sexualized by unsuitable content. Following media discourse around the issue for and against and later resulting extremists to demand a total ban of sexuality education in schools, children were used as a means to maintain heteronormative social structure where children are considered innocent in need of protection from adults. The fear of children's sexualization is connected to the future, Polish values, and prevailing social structure in which gender is a foreign threat coming from the West.

8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The focus of this thesis was to identify gender stereotypes, homophobia, and disinformation in Polish sexuality education and the impacts of the anti-gender campaign between 2009 and 2016. In light of previous studies, the results were not to say surprising but, on some level, confusing. This kind of study has not been conducted before, at least not in English, and therefore I find the results when considering them with caution noteworthy.

The results for the first research question are evaluated in two levels: firstly, on a practical level, and secondly, on a broader societal level. The findings are complex due to the nature of the question having different themes included. The question addressed *Why are gender stereotypes, homophobia, and disinformation promoted in Polish sexuality education?* Firstly, these themes are promoted in Polish sexuality education



due to the specified key factors: following structural deficiency in educational policy, impacted by the Catholic Church and its moral views on sexuality, the sexuality education classes lack good organizing considering proper teaching, materials, and scientific information. Many of the teachers are priests or catechists whose worldview is impacted by religious views on sexuality, promoting disinformation and traditional gender roles. They also may share intolerant views towards different sexual orientations. The subject itself is treated as a secondary one compared to other subjects at schools, which creates uninterest among school principals to organize the classes in a reasonable manner. Also, parents can withdraw their children from the classes, which impacts the general message of the popularity of the subject. All this is connected to the wider atmosphere in the society where gender stereotypes are promoted, and women's role is narrow, concentrating on family and marriage. Homophobia is connected to the Catholic Church's moral views, political context, and general attitudes towards homosexuality. Promoting disinformation is also connected to the Catholic Church, endorsing religious views on sexuality and teaching young Poles to learn religious values of family and marriage.

Secondly, when considering societal angle, gender stereotypes, homophobia, and disinformation are common in Polish society in general. The Catholic Church has had a significant impact on moral questions throughout Polish history, but especially since the 1990s. The Church has built a strong position not only in educational policy but in many sectors of society. The Catholic Church's moral views emphasize the teaching of marriage and traditional gender roles, and therefore, sexuality education based on existing social order is intended. Moreover, Polish feminist and LGBTQ+ movements have never been that of success in strengthening the idea of gender equality and acceptance of sexual minorities into society, at the same time having a relatively powerful right-wing movement that considers gender equality and untraditional relationships as a threat from West to Polish values. Nonetheless, as the Catholic Church stands as a moral authority among the public and its influence on educational policy is exceptional, sexuality education is considered a secondary subject without having proper guidelines and teachers, leaving the classes to be conducted poorly.



The second research question evaluated the anti-gender campaign and its impacts on sexuality education by asking *How the anti-gender campaign launched by the Catholic Church has impacted Polish sexuality education?* This question is more specific than the first, ending with a more precise and simple answer. The anti-gender campaign was initially launched by the Catholic Church in 2013 to turn attention from its pedophilia scandal and succeeded in turning the word gender negative. The Church achieved remarkable media space and the interest of nationalist groups, which turned the campaign into a “war against gender.” The liberal and conservative media published articles, blogs, TV interviews in favor of and against gender. The case of equality nurseries, presenting a gender equality program where girls and boys can choose their clothing and occupation, received scandalous dimensions terminating the experiment before it even properly started. The campaign succeeded also turning the thought of sexuality education, making children sexual, common. The campaign's supporters demanded to remove sexuality education as a subject from schools, and some, in turn, urged the content of gender to be abolished. The anti-gender campaign caused anxiety among parents, who withdrew their children even with higher numbers out of the sexuality education classes.

The original fear of the war against gender is that gender ideology was considered as an external threat from Western Europe that would ruin traditional Polish values on family and gender roles. Gender was perceived as a danger to children as it leads to children's sexualization, pedophilia, masturbation, and sex mania. The image of gender turned as dreadful, which had to be excluded from the school curriculum, especially from sexuality education. In Ponton's study in 2016, this can be clearly pointed out as the teachers avoid talking about gender in the classes as being a controversial topic comparing to earlier studies of Ponton, which have no mention of gender at all. Overall, Polish sexuality education has been impacted by the anti-gender campaign, making the concept of teaching gender in school the target of the right-wing and the Catholic Church, even dismissing teachers out of employment for teaching gender-related topics. The negative attitude towards sexuality education increased, connecting the concept of gender to the larger whole of Polish identity, which is tied up with traditional gender



roles, conservative values, marriage, and family in which children must be protected from any unsuitable content to ensure the Polish future and its values.

For the second research question, the results were in general unexpected due to the attention the campaign received from the media and the public. The anxiety among parents to draw children out of sexuality education in the cases of children receiving unsuitable content was surprising. In this discourse, fact-based information could not change the course of describing gender as a threat to Polish values and from which children need to be protected in fear of their sexualization. The findings for the first research questions were largely expected, but to the second one, the scope of the campaign and its non-scientific rhetoric, not to forget the transnational context, was up to some point unforeseen. The analysis and the findings support the research framework and theoretical framework. Foucault's theory on biopower offered structure to my analysis, and all the themes that emerged from the material support the theory and vice versa.

As consideration, the promotion of gender stereotypes, LGBTQ+ hostility, and disinformation in Polish sexuality education and the "war on gender ideology" is connected firstly to the struggle of progression in the post-communist period where the values of Western Europe are perceived as an external threat. Secondly, the Catholic Church's infiltration into politics or, at the fewest, impact on Polish authorities with special settlements between the state has strengthened its positions as the determiner of Poles' values. Politicians, fearing of opposing the clergy, have enabled the special arrangement or, so to say, cooperation into politics that controls population in the spheres of family, sexuality, and gender equality. Thirdly, this is a transnational phenomenon in Eastern Europe, a struggle over democracy. The weaknesses of feminist movements and the strong nationalist movement, especially right-wing extremism (the rise of PiS in 2015), have enabled the rise of anti-gender movements opposing gender equality, women's rights, abortion, and sexual freedom. The campaign has successfully mobilized parents against sexuality education where gender might be taught, creating



an image of 'child in danger.'²⁶¹ Within these campaigns, the state is enabled to achieve its aims and control the behavior of its population. Whether the goal is to maintain traditional Polish values and social order or increase the low birth rates, controlling sex and sexuality plays an important role in this play: it confirms the continuum of our species that should be protected and the values important to the state. Sexuality is used as a means to regulate the body and the population.²⁶²

The power strategies of biopower evaluated in my theoretical framework offer an explanation in my analysis that society is interested in reproductive sex through which the fertility of the population is regulated and controlled. To increase the birth rate of the population, family planning, and reproductive sex are in focus.²⁶³ As I have argued in my analysis, biopower supports the purpose of promoting conservative values such as traditional gender roles, natural contraception methods, and sexuality education based on non-scientific teaching. They are not only a part of Polish tradition but a policy towards increasing the birth rate. In this context, the concern for the Polish future is the primary fear behind the hysteria around gender ideology and the sexualization of children. It is a question of maintaining the existing social order where children have an enormous role. By keeping them vulnerable and in need of protection from sexuality education, they are unable to question existing gender roles, nonetheless at the same time having the future of the nation lay on them.²⁶⁴

Within the power of the Catholic Church in Poland has increased the linkage between secular nationalism. Together, they see threats in globalism, refugees, and other possible factors considered a threat to Christian values. In the cultural war between secularism, Islam, and Christianity, Poland's rhetoric appears to use Christianity as the identity claimer to advocate confrontation between "us" and "them." In this discourse, secular politics are incorporated with religious language, values, and rituals to boost its intentions and goals. Despite the Catholic Church's exceptional influence on Polish

²⁶¹ Graff, 2014, p. 434

²⁶² Wehr, 2003, p. 2–3

²⁶³ Foucault, 1978, p. 103–106

²⁶⁴ Warat, 2016, p. 112



society and a substantial section of the pro-nationalist wing in the clergy, there are indications that other progressive side of the clergy may raise their hands on presenting the Church to abstain from political nationalism. Decreasing churchgoers and deepening nationalist collaboration between secular politics may challenge the Church to maintain other than believers on board.²⁶⁵

What new insights has this study demonstrated? First of all, acknowledging the lack of studies concerning Polish sexuality education yet in English but also in Polish, this study brings research information in English to a non-studied topic. Since there are also a lack of data, the most relevant studies of Polish sex educators Group Ponton's reports have not been used to this extent before to research sexuality education classes and their content. It has been known that Polish sexuality education is not scientific-based, and the teaching promotes gender stereotypes and homophobia, but in this scope, the reasons why these themes are promoted have not been studied, also taking into account the anti-gender campaign. Using biopower as the theoretical framework has also provided a new angle to look at these themes as power strategies that the state of Poland and the Catholic Church practices to protect the life of its population and its future. This study's results support previous research results around Polish sexuality education - at least the parts that have been studied. There are no significant contradictions in the results compared to other studies; rather, as it has been said, there are not so many studies that my results can be compared with. The topics such as the Catholic Church's power and the religious-nationalist discourse have been examined more thoroughly, and they support my results non-directly.

The limitations of this study are important to notice. Due to the deficiency of data, my possibility of choosing relevant data that is available also in the defined timeframe is limited. Therefore, the selected data may be biased, which has been acknowledged in the chapter on research data (see chapter 3). I have explored the data in English and Polish, but due to my lack of knowledge in Polish, some relevant data may be unnoticed. Nonetheless, concerning the reliability of this study, the data in the Polish language have

²⁶⁵ Topidi, 2019, p.15



been translated and verified by a native Polish. In this way, I have tried to ensure that all of the Polish data translations are correct.

For conducting further research on Polish sexuality education, an empirical study with interviews would bring information that is not available otherwise. In this way, there are more options to study the topic from different angles. Recommendations for separate further studies relevant to this study would be researching, for example, women's or minorities' experiences of sexuality education in schools on a certain age or school level through interviews. It would also be interesting to research if there are any changes to sexuality education after the rise of PiS in 2015 or how Poland's 2016 school reform has impacted the classes.

To conclude, this study examined discourses in Polish sexuality education and the impact of the anti-gender campaign, which in this scope and angle has not been studied before. The study combined Polish sexuality education with Foucault's theory on biopower and its power strategies to support the analysis ending into a theoretical entity that suits the analysis and its discourse sections. Biopower as a theory has not been used in terms of Polish sexuality education, and therefore, it brought new insights to an unstudied topic. As a cultural study, one must try to understand other cultural phenomena and simultaneously be aware of one's own position, experiences, and cultural environment. I have clarified my research position to follow the post-structuralist research tradition, which acknowledges these issues and is critical when viewing the world.

Polish sexuality education is a topic that needs further research in Polish and English. Sexuality education has a massive impact on young people's lives and the development of sexuality. By providing sexuality education with no competence for meeting the scientifically proved sexuality education that supports students in growing into responsible adults with healthy sexuality, they maintain the existing gender roles and hostile atmosphere to different sexual orientations. Promoting non-scientific information relating to sexuality or contraception can be harmful to young people as they lack proper knowledge of their bodies, sex, and sexuality. The anti-gender campaign has made teaching about gender and gender equality more challenging or



even impossible. As this study has shown, the reasons for promoting conservative values in sexuality education are complex and deep in Polish society, which has not changed in Poland when writing this thesis. As the PiS continues to lead the government of Poland and has simultaneously strengthened the cooperation with the Catholic Church, it remains to be seen how this coalition impacts sexuality education in Polish schools.

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