

Representations of sexuality in the Slovak media – the case of politics and violence

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Abstract

The media form just one of the main discursive arenas in which normative forms of sexuality, including scripts, are constructed. This article reports on the results of an analysis of sexual themes in the Slovak media focusing particularly on the political and violent contexts in which they occur. The research was conducted on electronic media (public service television and *Markíza*, the most popular commercial channel in Slovakia) and also print media (*Nový čas* and *SME*, the most widely-read tabloid and non-tabloid daily newspapers respectively). The period monitored was the years 2005/2006 and 2012/2013. Quantitative and qualitative research was performed on the media items. The results show that discussions of sexuality underwent marked differences in the seven-year gap and that there are differences in the electronic and print media as well. Media type is also important with differences evident in public service vs. commercial and tabloid vs. non-tabloid. The findings are discussed in relation to the potential consequences for quality of intimate and sexual life, sexual health and intimate citizenship.

Key words

Media, Social Norms, Sexuality, Violence, Politics

Introduction

Sexuality is currently undergoing one of the greatest systemic changes in human history. These changes have been described in detail by Jeffrey Weeks in *The World We Have Won* (2007), Ken Plummer in *Intimate Citizenship*

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(2003), Michel Maffesoli in *The Shadow of Dionysus* (1993), and in a recent study we summarised the most important dimensions of these changes, particularly in Slovakia (Bianchi, 2013). In this article we identify the most important aspects of the transformation of sexuality: sexuality remains a dominantly political matter; the internet is shifting sexuality onto an entirely new dimension; sexual violence is occurring between children and young people; contraception – a key issue that has dominated sexuality since the sexual revolution – is now being replaced by its antithesis: conception; and the age of parenthood now occurs almost a whole decade later. Besides these general trends in sexual transformation, there are a number of important factors in Slovakia of a cultural, social and political nature that cannot be dismissed in an exploration of sexuality: Slovakia is one of the most Catholic countries in the EU (along with Croatia), with a populist left-wing government that has distanced itself from any fundamental liberalisation of sexuality and human rights (registered partnerships², gender-sensitive education and compulsory sex education), and has seen constitutional amendments that have ossified conservative values (marriage as a union between a man and a woman, protection of family). We therefore consider it desirable to ascertain which discursive resources on sexuality can be found in the most accessed source – the Slovak media.

This empirical study on items featuring sexuality in the Slovak media is concerned with two sensitive areas – the relationship between the political context of sexuality and the reporting of sexual violence. We broadly explore the current state and evolution of sexual norms along with the principles according to which social norms are created, and the theoretical and empirical knowledge of the mechanisms and effects of the media on behavioural change in sexuality.

Sexual and social norms today

The sexualisation of public space is not an isolated phenomenon. It is one of a number of complex processes affecting sexuality along with the self, relationships, gender, the family, the body, emotional life, the senses, identity and spirituality, all of which come together to form what Ken Plummer (2003) has called public intimacies. Sexualisation comes in two basic forms: authentic sexualisation, in which sexual content is portrayed so that it becomes visible and can be discussed, and instrumental sexualisation, in which sexual content is used as a tool for attracting attention. Instrumental sexualisation is typically found in advertising but elements can also be found in ordinary media communication. The sexualisation of communication can occur through various ways: sexualised terminology, by eliciting sexual associations/analogies in the shape of images, needs, motives etc. (explicitly and implicitly), or through the use of sexually illustrated narratives. All these

² Slovakia, contrary to the majority of states in EU has not acceded to any form of legalisation of the same-sex persons' cohabitation. Due to this fact, the IGLA - International lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex association (see <http://ilga.org/>) has put Slovakia among such countries as Russia, China, Mongolia, Sudan, Egypt, and others. (Fúsková, Kočnerová, 2013)

are, of course, accompanied by a change in what is perceived to be sexually 'normal'. In contrast to centuries of gradual development in Western civilisation, the last few decades have seen rapid changes. As Garcia et al. (2012) phrase it in their literature review, 'Images of a polymorphous sexuality that decenters the reproductive motive and focuses instead on sexual pleasure are consistently appearing in popular media'. These normative changes in sexuality began with the symbolic rehabilitation of the two 'deadly sins' identified by von Kraft-Ebbing (1886) in his *Psychopathia Sexualis*: homosexuality and masturbation. The decriminalisation of homosexuality and, as hormonal contraception became widely available, the symbolic separation of reproduction and sex were the first of what was to become a whole array of emerging alternative forms of sex and human sexual fulfilment. Over the past 60 years, dating for courting purposes has decreased (but certainly not disappeared) and sexual behaviour outside of traditional committed heterosexual romantic pair-bonds has become increasingly typical and socially acceptable (Bogle, 2007, 2008). A large number of forms of uncommitted sexual behaviour e.g. no strings attached (NSA), casual encounters, one-night stands, friends with benefits (FWBs) or hookups can be identified and become culturally normative, all of them having mutually different meaning as refers to their relationship to romantic love, stability or infidelity (Garcia et al.; 2012). The list goes on and on with swingers, ménage à trois, living apart together, pansexual, sexual fluid, open relationship etc.

Hand in hand with sexual pleasure goes sexual violence. In a recent comparative study (Krahé, Berger, Vanwesenbeeck, Bianchi et al., 2015) we assessed that, in a number of EU countries, on average one third of young respondents aged 18-27 years report some kind of sexual victimisation.

Changes in sexual norms are also related to the increasing time-frame within which experimentation with adulthood occurs. The phenomena of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004) and the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe, 2010; van de Kaa, 1999) have led to a dramatic increase in the age at which first marriage and first reproduction occur, while at the same time the age at which puberty begins has dropped dramatically, resulting in a historically unprecedented time gap in which young adults are physiologically, psychologically, socially and culturally stimulated to sexual activity, but, at the same time, are psychologically, socially and culturally driven to explore rather than "settle down" and start a family (Bogle, 2007; Garcia & Reiber, 2008, Maffesoli, 1993, 2004).

Finally, when discussing the dynamics in sexual norms, it should be highlighted that the formal and operational aspects of sexual norms can be grounded on the conceptualisation of social norms which represent shared ways of thinking, desiring, deciding and acting, which can be observed in regularly repeated behaviour and are adopted since it is believed that they will enable certain problems to be resolved (Critto 1999). Or, as Bicchieri (2006) puts it, norms are the embodiment of the values and collective desires of society. Social norms are characterized by (1) a discursive presence in the society, (2) identification of the majority of the population with the norm, (3) people's awareness of the norm, (4) the norm being consciously broken by

some, and (5) societal sanctions being applied against norm violation. Understood in this way, then, norms operating on both conscious and subconscious levels influence our decisions relating to sexuality, partnerships, parenthood and reproduction³.

Which theory can be used to explain the effects of media on behaviour?

Many theories have been advanced to explain the effects of media on behaviour. They are all based on the fundamental notion that greater exposure to the media leads to the adoption of the values, beliefs, and behaviours portrayed within them, particularly when they are shown to be reinforced or are unaccompanied by adverse consequences. Research on exposure to violent content in the media provides some support for these views. However, sexual activity may not be learned by observation and modelling in the same way as aggression or violence (Gruber, 2000).

A number of theoretical models can be used to explain the effects of the media on human behaviour. Rowell Huesmann (2007) divides them into two levels:

- Short-term Effects due to 1) priming processes, 2) arousal processes, and 3) the immediate mimicking of specific behaviours.
- Long-term Effects due to 1) more lasting observational learning of cognitions and behaviours (i.e., imitation of behaviours), 2) desensitisation of emotional processes, and 3) enactive learning (learning by acting in e.g. videogames).

Most of these models rely on the idea that the individual is subjected to some form of learning through the influence of the media. However, since our study deals with the media itself, it seems useful to employ sexual script theory, which seeks to explain behavioural changes in terms of the 'resource'. Brown & L'Engle (2009) state that by 'combining tenets of both social learning theory and script theory, such a model suggests that through observation of relevant and attractive models in both real life and the media, people create and store "scripts" that guide social behavior. Scripts include information about what happens in the world, how people should behave in specific situations, and the likely outcomes of behavior.' Scripts that have become strongly embedded in the media are most likely to be followed when the occasion presents itself.

William Simon (1996) has elaborated on the concept of sexual scripts and his work relies on a broader psycho-socio-cultural understanding of the

³ An advantage of the social norms approach is that these norms may be a better predictor of behaviour than are individual notions, desires and attitudes (Potančoková, 2011). For instance, several studies (cf. Pakosta, 2009) have documented an enormous gap or inconsistency between planned reproduction and actual conceptions. In several European countries there is striking empirical evidence that highly educated women favour new norms concerning the postponement of childbearing to a later age; at the same time, they prefer (in keeping with the traditional norm) to enter into marriage before conceiving a child. Social norms theory can be used to reveal and shed light on apparent conflicts in the context of more complex cultural, historical and political contradictions.

importance of scripts in individual and social behaviour. In his widely-read *Postmodern Sexualities*, Simon states that ‘Many of the uses of gender and sexuality, observable in the context of the rapidly changing present, may in fact be different than any that humanity has previously known’ (Simon, 1996, p. 3). Simon sees an ontology of sexuality in sexual scenarios (1996, p. 40): ‘Scripts are essentially a metaphor for conceptualising the production of behaviour in social life’; they capture the tensions between permanence and change and operate ‘under the guidance of an operating syntax, much as language, as a shared code, becom[ing] a precondition for speech’ on three levels: the cultural, interpersonal and intrapsychic. Crucially, social-cultural syntax is just as important for the production of sexual phenomena as are dyadic negotiation of sex and the intrapsychic syntax of sexual aspiration and self-evaluation. There is good reason to expect that diversification of the phenomenology of sporadic forms of sexual contact seen or read in discussions on sexuality in the public sphere and particularly in the media may directly feed into sexual scenarios and vice versa.

The script approach is founded in the assumption that discourses are a type of social practice that ‘operates more generally and globally as a social and cultural resource to be used in human activities and endeavours’ (W. Stainton Rogers, 2003, p 81). Carla Willig (2003) specifies that in terms of the resources it provides discourse analysis can (1) explain the discursive construction of the objects monitored, (2) identify the wider discourses within which the discursive objects can be appropriately located, (3) explain the action orientation implicit in the discourse, since the action, responsibility causality etc. can be attributed to different actors, contexts and so forth in different discourses on the same theme, (4) identify the subject positioning and deduce from that the nature of its rights and responsibilities, (5) identify the potential for working with the items in practice within the discourse and (6) analyse the consequences of the discourse for constructing subjectivity. If we are interested in modelling the media’s potential to influence society and people in the sexual sphere, then these aspects are all directly relevant.

We cannot silently cross to the ‘other side’, i.e. to evolutionary theoretical approaches that seek to explain extrarelational sex (sexual strategies theory, Buss & Schmitt, 1993) in order to explain the determinants of human sexuality. The mechanisms and resources they wield may not perhaps be as tangible as the communication and media discourses, but at the very least there are scientific grounds for using them to explore subject-media causality: how do consumer preferences for particular media resources emerge? Although this issue is not dealt with in this research it is also worth noting the

ambiguity found on this side of the theoretical spectrum which is undergoing dynamic development.⁴

Relationship between media content and sexual behaviour

E. Gruber and J. Grube (2000) conducted a literature review of research published in the USA that led her to suggest that watching TV can have an influence on acceptance of stereotypical sexual roles: ‘adolescents of both sexes who watch and listen to a lot of media are more likely to accept stereotypes of sex roles on television as realistic than are less frequent viewers.’ Gruber suggested that this media connection might also relate to undesirable sexual behaviours: ‘a recent study of African American girls aged 14 to 18 years found that teens with either multiple sexual partners or a history of sexually transmitted infections reported a higher rate of viewing television shows that depicted women as sexual objects or prizes.’

However, studies of this nature can have complicated research designs in which factors other than the media effect, such as gender differences, parental or peer influence, can also have an effect. Parkes et al. (2013) for example showed (using a US sample of 2,335 teenagers) that there was an association between the media exposure measures and sexual intercourse. There was a linear increase in the percentage reporting sexual intercourse with increasing sexual film content exposure. But parental co-viewing at least weekly was associated with a lower rate of sexual intercourse compared to viewing less often; while more frequent co-viewing with friends, especially mixed-sex friends, was associated with higher rates of sexual intercourse. Parental restrictions on media use, especially restrictions on sexual content, were associated with lower rates of intercourse.

Gruber and Grube (2000) makes three points in her summary of the research findings concerning the relationship between adolescents watching sexual content in the media and their sexual performance:

⁴ The popularity of sex without commitment among men and women is problematic if we wish to approach human sexuality purely from one theoretical position – be that the biological/evolutionary perspective of sexual strategies theory on the one hand or the cultural/language approaches on the other. Garcia et al. (2012) point out that recently a number of evolutionary scholars have even started to question the ability of sexual strategies theory to accurately reflect patterns of short-term sex in a shifting ecological context (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Li & Kenrick, 2006; Garcia & Reiber, 2008; Fisher, 2011; Pedersen, Putcha-Bhagavatula, & Miller, 2011). They have proposed alternative evolutionary approaches e.g. using an evolutionary economic model of tradeoffs to understand sex differences in willingness to engage in short-term sex and sex similarities in prioritising short-term partners, suggesting that a dual reproductive strategy of social monogamy (serial or long-term) and clandestine adultery, involving attachment fertility theory, be used to explain that short-term mating and other forms of mating outside pair-bonds are natural by-products of a suite of attachment and caregiving mechanisms. In a series of studies aimed at clarifying the mutual interaction of evolutionary and cultural-structural influences on sexual conduct, Schmitt et al (2003) confirmed that, along with a consistent dominance of men as compared to women in mate poaching, there is a significant link between mate poaching incidence and variables such as the GDP and gender equity index of a given country/region.

- Adolescents are exposed to many sexual images and messages on television that are almost universally presented in a positive light with little discussion of potential risks and adverse consequences
- Adolescents use the media as sources of information about sex, drugs, AIDS, and violence as well as to learn how to behave in relationships
- Research indicates that adolescent sexuality is associated with media use, but the direction of the relationship is not clear.

The third conclusion has been repeatedly supported by the work of other researchers, e.g. as Bleakley et al (2008) says: 'Sexually active adolescents are more likely to expose themselves to sex in the media and those exposed to sex in the media are more likely to progress in their sexual activity'. Similarly Parkes et al. (2013) note that 'causation ... is more uncertain: teenagers with risky friendships or a romantic partner may be more likely to seek out sexual media content.'

Politics, sexuality and the media

The most frequent metaphors for sexuality and sexual identity are: the emergence of, construction, embodiment, social work, fiction, narratives, roles, scripts, performance; hence, all the concepts that are predicated on shaping the self. Despite the many positives associated with this emerging transformation of sexuality, Weeks (2007, p.127 onwards) criticises the new individualism, since:

(1) The new forms of sexuality are being shaped in relation to the prevailing mentality of the *managerial colonisation of everyday life*, erotica is manipulated through the lens of performance (Fordist sexuality), imaginativeness is suppressed by what the 'market has to offer', the Taylorisation (segmentation) of sexuality is booming thanks to the prevailing consumerism and capitalist values penetrating deep into intimate life and colonising intersubjectivity and inexorably shaping the world of sexuality. Partner relationships are defined contractually (prenuptial agreements) and partners get to know each other through self-advertising and the marketing of relationship values. Intimate life is being thoroughly commercialised. What is particularly notable is that criticism emanates from both the left and (conservative) right of the political spectrum.

(2) Individualism is based on the *dissolution of human relationships*; authentic, reflective subjectivity is being replaced by narcissistic and hedonistic values. Private life is first and foremost a source of convenience and experience; it is a sphere of emotional isolation in which assets/belongings have replaced emotional relationships.

Human relationships also face other threats stemming from the response to individualisation, referred to by Sennett (1986) as the *ideology of intimacy*. He points out the negative consequences of the pressure to share identities which leads to group conformity and anticipates the maximisation of intimacy. Richard Sennett's view of the nature of intimacy is radical. He interprets the transformation that intimacy has undergone in the last hundred years and more in political terms, stating quite openly that the ascending

ideology of intimacy ‘transmutes political categories into psychological categories’ (Sennett, 1986, p. 259). Sennett identifies three principles that govern the concept of intimacy today:

- the belief that close personal relations are a moral good;
- the aspiration to develop one’s personality through experiencing closeness and warmth with others;
- the myth that all that is bad in society can be located in the impersonalisation, estrangement and coldness of interpersonal relations.

Together these three principles form the ideology of intimacy which is epitomised in the political transformation of society: ‘The ideology of intimacy defines the humanitarian spirit of a society without gods: warmth is our god’ (ibid., p. 259).

(3) In the prevailing neoliberal atmosphere of the Western world, Weeks argues, individuals are ‘forced’ to live under the *illusion of freedom*, whereas in fact they are bound by the ‘golden cords’ of early capitalism; the emotional cost of globalisation, neoliberalism and compulsive consumerism is high and our struggle for individuality and autonomy is illusory and somewhat ‘tragically self-defensive’ (Weeks, previous ref.).

The overall political environment is strongly paradoxical – on the one hand political elites ignore issues of sexuality, while on the other sexuality is becoming a political commodity. The normative and legislative spheres are shaped within the sexual and intimate dimensions of individual and social reality – apart from the odd exception – and this is based not on the opinions and interventions of the political elites but on the gradually evolving reality; and it is almost always to this alone that the political elites and legislature respond. As Jeffrey Weeks put it: these changes have not been ‘led by the political elite but by grass roots shifts... Governments, of course, have to respond, but they inevitably do so in a variety of ways, depending on political traditions, the prevailing balance of cultural forces, the nature of political institutions, the day-to-day crises that force some issues to the fore, and the pressure from below, whether from conservative or fundamentalist resistance to change, or from radical social movements.’ Hence, ‘lawmakers prefer to follow public opinion and the changing social geography rather than guide these processes themselves’ (Weeks, 2007, p. 165). What does this tell us about improving sexual and intimate citizenship and sexual health? At the very least it presupposes the need to (1) display maximum sensitivity to what is occurring at the grass roots level and (2) identify the catalysts of productive deliberation among the general public and political elites. Our pursuit of these goals could very well begin by monitoring media content: what political content is to be found within media communication on sexuality?

Present study

The aim of this study reflects the fact that developments in human sexuality are based on a strong interaction with the media, as we have demonstrated above. Generally, empirical research on how these interactions has primarily concentrated on the psychological (behavioural) and public

health research centred on individual and specific cohorts, mainly young people. However, we have chosen to conduct a detailed investigation into media content in relation to this only insofar as it contains within it the political dimension of sexuality whose importance has been highlighted by J. Weeks for instance. In addition we explore one of the most powerful and little analysed but politically important aspects of sexuality: sexual violence. We have therefore posed three overarching research questions:

1. What is the occurrence of sexualised items in the Slovak media – depending on their technical form (televisions vs. newspapers), character (tabloid vs. quality press, public service vs. commercial) and the shift in time?
2. What form does the politicisation of sexuality in the Slovak media take?
3. What form does the sexually presented violence in the Slovak media take?

Method

The theoretical conceptualisations described above (social norms and sexual scripts) are sensitive to public discourses – in our case discourses on sexuality. Both these theories hold that there are social, cultural and media constructions that directly relate to the behaviour of individuals. Social norms theory presupposes that decision-making is governed by norms and that society penalises the violation of these norms. Sexual script theory holds that there are three types of syntax that interact to form the resulting scenarios of our behaviour, i.e. of what is embedded in our socio-cultural guidelines, of what emerges in dyadic interaction and of what individuals themselves ‘compose’ as social agents (intrapsychic syntax). We therefore consider it necessary to ascertain the current discursive image of sexuality as presented by the strongest discourse resources, i.e. the media. The study exploits both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis.

For our survey of Slovak electronic media we chose to look at public service television and the most popular commercial channel (*Markíza*), and for our survey of the Slovak print media we selected the most widely-read daily tabloid newspaper (*Nový čas*) and the most widely-read non-tabloid daily newspaper (*SME*). These were monitored in two time cohorts 2012/2013, and 2005/2006 for the electronic media as well. This enabled us to compare representations of sexuality in the media across a number of dimensions: (1) the cultural level of the media (tabloid vs. quality press media, public service vs. commercial media), (2) television vs. press and (3) time factor (a 7 year interval). The audience share of the four types of media is: *STV/RTVS* 18%, *Markíza* 57%, *Nový čas* 18%, and *SME* 7%. The media items were selected from SITA Monitoring (a database compiled by the Slovak Press Agency) using the following key words: sex, intimacy and erotica. The database software recognises any inflected form of the root word e.g. *erotika*, *erotiky*, *erotike*. Altogether we obtained 965 media items.

In the next stage of the qualitative analysis, the coding of the media items using Atlas-ti software, we excluded 417 items from further analysis; these

were items in which the key word appeared in a non-sexualised sense, as a ‘trendy tag’, particularly fashion and lifestyle items (mainly the word *sexy*). Thus, 548 media items were submitted to the next stage of analysis. The coding method used and other aspects of the analysis are described in greater detail in the results section since the approach used was largely hermeneutic.

We used a correlative approach to quantitatively assess the relationships consisting on the one hand of decision trees (Kass, 1980) enabling us to test the predictive strength of the variables given the large amount of binary data, and on the other, c- coefficient ⁵ (Contreras, 2011; Friese, 2014) to measure co-occurrence patterns.

Results

1. Quantitative overview of sexualised media items

The first analytical step was to undertake a quantitative assessment of the frequency of media items identified using the key words sex, intimacy and erotica. A quick comparison of the number of items in the various media (Tab. 1) shows that sexualised content featured at least three times as often in the tabloid media as it did in public service or quality press media. Moreover, in the case of television, this rose to five times higher in the cohort from seven years’ later.

⁵ Co-occurrence analysis is tool that helps reveal associations between concepts and their role in constructing the phenomenon under study. This tool defines a co-occurrence under the following circumstances: Two codes are either coding exactly the same quotation or they are coding quotations that are touching each other in some way (i.e., within, enclosing, and overlapping). The c-coefficient indicates the strength of the relation between two codes similar to a correlation coefficient. The c-coefficient should vary between 0: codes do not co-occur, and 1: these two codes co-occur wherever they are used. It is calculated as follows:

$$c = n^{12} / (n^1 + n^2) - n^{12}$$

n^{12} = co-occurrence frequency of two codes c^1 and c^2 , whereby n^1 and n^2 are their occurrence frequency.

Table 1: Analysis of media items – number of items by media, and excluded items

analysis of media items - number of items by media, and excluded items	excluded	included	
		2005 – 2006	2012 – 2013
Markíza - commercial TV	69	30	87
STV (RTVS) - public service TV	2	15	23
Nový čas – tabloid daily newspaper	335	-	215
SME – quality press daily newspaper	11	-	178
total	417	45	503
	417	548	

The second quantitative aspect we monitored was the frequency with which sexualised content appeared on television and in the newspapers. Here the difference was even greater: over a one-year period the number of sexualised newspaper items (tabloid compared with public service/quality press media) was four to seven times higher than the number of sexualised television items. This difference between television and newspapers was greater for public service/quality press than for tabloid media.

The third aspect monitored was the time period (this was only monitored for television) and this showed that for the second cohort (after a seven year interval) the number of sexualised items had roughly doubled (slightly more in the case of commercial television).

2. Qualitative analysis

2.1 Coding and aggregation

Qualitative analysis was performed on 548 print and television items. We used an open thematic analysis in which the codes were allocated using an a priori defined five dimensional system set up to identify in greater detail the potential agency contained within the media items. Agency is understood to be the potential for any kind of human activity within a social context, or, in other words, the power/guidance the item can exert as a discursive resource of human behaviour (Willig, 2003). The code dimensions selected are as follows:

- THEMES (type of sexual content found in the media item)
- FOCI (type of social problem addressed in media item)

- ARENAS (sphere of social practice the media item belongs to)
- PEOPLE (any particular group featured in the media item – where relevant to the item)
- REGIONS (any geographical region featuring in the media item – where relevant to the item).

This system was used as follows: we coded the theme in each media item (insofar as one could be identified and it was not just a case of the self-serving use of a key word; items of the latter type were excluded from further analysis) so as to capture the main content and focus of the item (for instance, sexual relationships, pornography and homosexuality). If the focus identified in the media item was a serious social or political issue relevant to sexuality then the item was allocated a further code reflecting that focus (e.g. sex as a political tool, HIV prevention and sex, sexual violence or women's rights). Another aspect that we monitored was the arena of cultural and social life captured within the media item (e.g. sport, film, internet or art). This code was only used where an arena was present or could be identified. The fourth possible code was the people/person concerned. This code was used to identify specific sub-populations that are a specific challenge in issues around sexuality (children, disabled people and Roma). The last possible code was region which was allocated if important to the media item (Slovakia, the Czech Republic, abroad, and international comparison).

Table 2 shows a complete list of the codes and the various sub-dimensions along with figures indicating the frequency with which they occurred. This analysis is the first stage of interpreting the findings. We will therefore now look at the codes that deserve special attention at this stage.

Table 2: Number of codes in media item transcripts

Number of codes in media item transcripts		Media						Total
		Print		Television				
		Tabloid	Quality press	Commercial		Public		
		Nový čas	SME	Markíza	Markíza	STV	STV	
dimension	code	2012-2013	2012-2013	2005-2006	2012-2013	2005-2006	2012-2013	
Themes	erotica in songs and other "non-art"	7	1	1	3	0	0	12
	erotica in art	2	11	0	0	1	2	16
	erotica in general	7	0	0	1	0	0	8
	homosexuality	2	7	1	2	0	0	12
	incest	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
	sexual intimacy	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
	body intimacy	3	3	0	1	0	0	7
	intimacy in general	0	8	1	0	0	0	9
	intimacy of relationship	3	10	0	1	0	2	16

legislation on sexual behaviour	0	3	0	2	1	0	6	
violence as sex	0	2	0	1	0	0	3	
sexual violence and women's rights	3	2	0	2	0	0	7	
sexual violence between minors	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	
sexual violence in general	5	1	1	2	0	1	10	
sexual violence - child abuse	2	3	3	3	0	1	12	
paedophilia, zoophilia etc.	5	1	2	0	1	0	9	
pornography – pornographic crime	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	
pornography in general	7	1	1	2	1	0	12	
prostitution	6	0	0	5	0	0	11	
sex and reproduction	6	7	0	4	0	0	17	
sex as metaphor	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	
sex as violence - SM, BDSM	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	
sex as the title (of work, play, book, etc.)	2	13	0	1	0	1	17	
sex as preference	3	0	3	2	0	0	8	
sex as social dimension (public attitudes to sex)	1	8	0	0	0	0	9	
sex as the theme (of work, play, book etc.)	4	23	1	3	2	1	34	
sex on the internet	1	5	4	6	0	2	18	
sex in cyberspace	0	2	1	1	0	0	4	
sex in the media	4	5	1	1	0	3	14	
sex in arts	5	4	0	0	2	0	11	
animal sex	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	
sex business	0	5	2	3	1	1	12	
Sexy in different meanings	sexy - PR and (mis)use of market	11	6	0	3	0	1	21
	sexy as a personal characteristic	85	12	2	6	0	0	105
	sexy as an idol	16	2	0	5	0	0	23
	sexy as a characteristic of an object	14	9	0	5	0	0	28
sex tourism	0	3	0	1	0	0	4	
sex crimes – child pornography etc.	3	1	2	2	0	8	16	

	sexual harassment	1	3	0	6	1	1	12	
	intimate relationships	22	8	3	15	1	0	49	
	sexual lifestyle	6	4	5	1	5	2	23	
	social services (sexual assistants)	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	
	sex as identity – trans people	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	
	sex related crime	6	2	0	0	0	0	8	
	criminal aspects of sex	5	7	0	6	0	0	18	
Foci	Politics	EU's liberal policies	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
		Islam and attitudes to sex, power of Islam	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
		official Catholic attitudes to sex and power of the Church	2	4	0	1	0	0	7
		internet censorship	1	1	1	0	2	4	9
		cyberspace censorship	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
		media censorship	1	5	0	1	1	2	10
		art censorship	0	4	0	0	1	1	6
		political discourse	1	3	1	0	0	0	5
		controlling prostitution	1	4	2	3	0	2	12
		controlling sexual behaviour	1	6	3	4	1	3	18
		sex as a policy tool	0	2	0	0	1	0	3
		sex as a reproductive policy tool	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
	sex as a human right	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	
	Violence	human trafficking - forced sex work	0	4	0	0	0	2	6
		sexiness as an excuse for violence	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
		sexism	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
		violence against children and the rights of the child	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		sexual violence against men	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
		sexual violence against women and women's rights	5	1	0	5	0	1	12
sex abuse (sex with the underaged)		12	2	1	17	0	0	32	
rape		4	7	1	5	0	2	19	

Unveiling	Unveiling erotica	12	3	0	5	1	1	22
	unveiling homosexuality	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	unveiling homosexual relationships	1	8	0	2	0	1	12
	unveiling sex	13	13	2	7	1	0	36
	public nudity	23	2	1	4	0	0	30
	unveiling intimacy	11	14	1	0	1	2	29
Health	abortion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR): general (law, legislation)	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
	sexual health: prevention, intervention, contraception	4	1	3	3	5	0	16
	HIV a STD prevention	0	1	0	3	0	0	4
	prevention of sexual violence	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
	preventive health (blood donation and other)	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
	reproductive health: prevention, intervention, contraception	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
	unwanted sex and pregnancy	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Market	sex as something that sells	42	4	0	7	0	0	53
	sex as something to be sold	1	0	0	5	0	0	6
Love	love	8	9	0	2	0	0	19
	love as a metaphor	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
	unfaithfulness	3	1	0	1	0	0	5
Discourse	analytical discourse (psycho-socio-anthropo-medical)	4	6	4	6	1	0	21
	economic/goods discourse (e.g. intimate economies)	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
	emotional discourse	4	2	0	0	0	0	6
	moral discourse	1	4	0	0	0	0	5

	Absence	absence of erotica	1	2	0	1	0	0	4
		absence of intimacy	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
		asexuality, celibate	2	0	0	1	0	0	3
	Society	questioning sex, celibacy and Church dogma	3	2	0	0	0	0	5
		sex excluded by „good society“	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
		sex as taboo	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
People	the Church	3	6	0	3	0	0	12	
	children	1	10	6	7	1	3	28	
	disabled people	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	
	non-government organizations	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	
	minors	5	14	5	6	1	2	33	
	men	9	1	0	3	1	0	14	
	paedophiles	2	1	3	3	0	0	9	
	politics	11	13	1	6	1	7	39	
	Roma	1	1	0	3	0	0	5	
	sexual minorities	1	6	1	3	1	1	13	
	sports players	21	3	0	3	0	0	27	
	celebrities	105	9	1	8	0	1	124	
women	64	18	2	25	2	4	115		
Arenas	(non)art – advertising, fashion etc.	25	0	0	8	0	0	33	
	cinema	9	39	2	4	0	1	55	
	music	9	4	1	6	1	0	21	
	internet	6	4	5	6	1	5	27	
	cyberspace	1	11	1	6	0	0	19	
	international policy and law	0	1	0	2	1	0	4	
	media - print	19	3	0	1	1	2	26	
	media - television	28	6	1	1	0	1	37	
	politics	1	11	2	2	0	1	17	
	sport	9	4	0	1	0	0	14	
	art – literature, visual art, theatre	7	43	1	0	4	5	60	
	education	2	2	4	4	1	0	13	
healthcare	2	3	0	5	0	0	10		

Regions	Czech Republic	13	5	6	2	1	2	29
	international comparisons	0	7	5	2	0	0	14
	Slovakia	101	46	16	35	5	6	209
	foreign countries	64	67	4	42	3	9	189

We recorded a wide range of content in terms of the themes identified in the media items. For the sake of clarity and as required for the subsequent predictive analysis, we have aggregated the various codes into groups as can be seen in Table 2. It is evident (1) that *unveiling* is a theme that features large in sexuality and intimacy (N=147). In addition to the general unveiling of sex, there is a wide range of insights into the issues of erotica, the human body, relationships and various aspects that do not only concern sexual intimacy. Other extensive areas that are represented in a large number of items are (2) use of the *concept sexy* in various and frequently figurative senses (N=177). *Political aspects of sexuality* (3) and various considerations of (4) *sexual violence* could be found with a similar frequency (N=80 and 73 respectively). We also found a relatively high number of (5) *discursive/analytical* items (N=39) conveying expert opinion on issues of sexuality. Other areas covered by numerous items were items expressing (6) the *market* value of sexuality (N=59), (7) *health* aspects of sexuality (N=31), (8) linkage of sexuality to *love/relationship* (N=26), and (9) *societal* reflections of some aspects of sexuality (N=8).

Given the high number of media items with themes dealing with the unveiling of sexuality and intimacy that do not directly address social issues, the number of foci/problems we identified is much lower. In Table 2 we can see that the various problem foci appear sporadically rather than constituting a systematic focus on a particular problem associated with sexuality and intimacy. The most interesting foci are a media item analysing a person's right to have sex, an item raising the issue of the social service provision of sex for disabled people and an item dealing with the issue of 'intimate economies'. On the other hand we found that important social issues relating to sexuality were marginalised – there was only one item on each of the following: human rights and sexuality, sexual violence and women's rights, sexual harassment, and committing taboos.

One social practice arena that attracted frequent attention was that of film production and mild erotic fiction. Almost all the items which we categorised as unveiling intimacy and sexuality (see above) were also about mild erotica in film and literature. We recorded relatively few items dealing with the political arena indicating that reporting on sexuality is highly consumerist and commercialised.

Sadly, the range of media items did not reflect those who are at greater risk of or are vulnerable to unwanted sexuality than the general population, that is, children, disabled people, Roma and sexual minorities. It is as if exploring these relevant issues was somehow undesirable – at least in journalism.

2.2 Predictive analysis

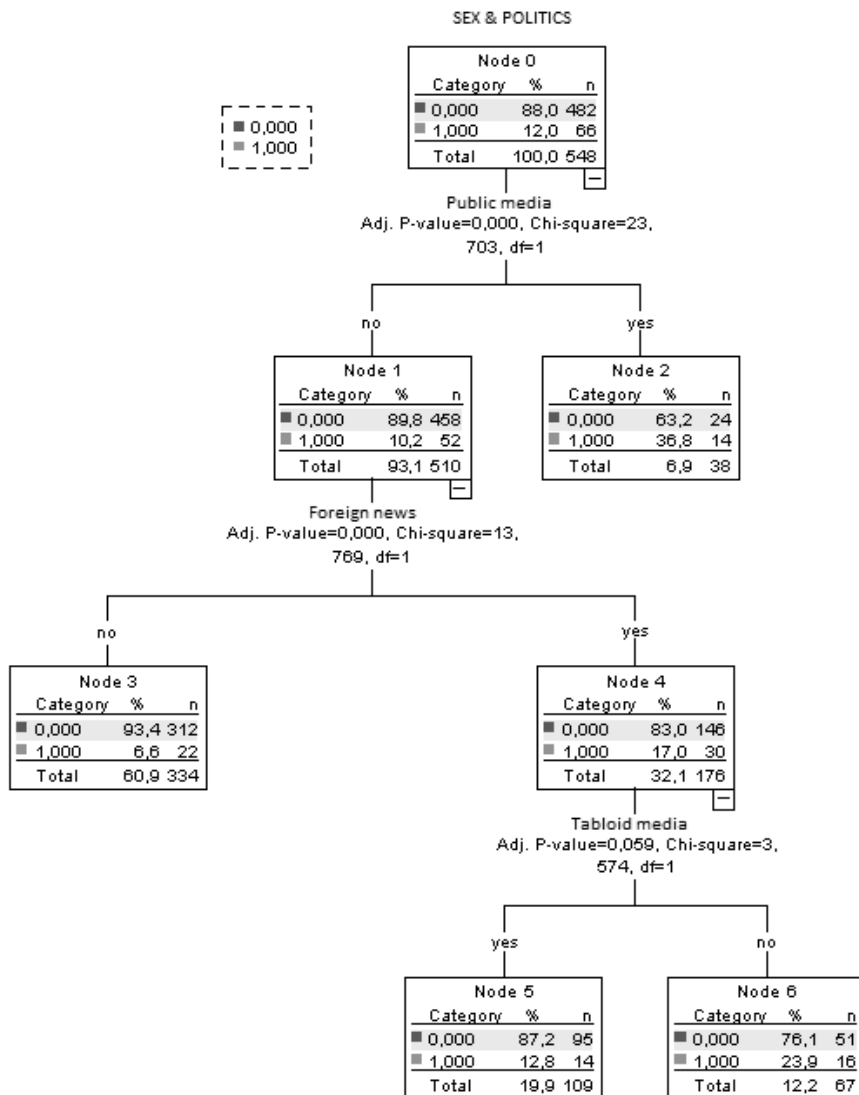
Our main focus in this paper is to identify how sexualised media content is associated with two important areas of social practice – politics and violence. We used a statistical method to explore how they correlate using decision trees. The units entering the analysis were codes (linked to media items). This mathematical-statistical step enables us to assess which variables predict significant occurrences of media item with specific content (code). We conducted this analysis separately for items identified using any of the codes aggregated under SEX & POLITICS, and also for items identified using any of the codes aggregated under VIOLENCE.

2.2.1 Decision Tree for SEX & POLITICS

In the analysis of the predictive values for the occurrence of media items with sexual content and associated political content we explored the following variables: public service vs. commercial media, tabloid vs. quality press media, time cohort 2005-2006 vs. 2012-2013, region of reporting Slovakia and region of reporting abroad.

The analysis (see Figure 1) showed that the strongest predictor of the occurrence of items featuring political aspects of sexuality was public service media, to be precise television (Chi-square=23,703, sig.=0,000), which had the highest relative frequency of political items on sexuality. On the second level the predictor with the highest number of such items was region – association between sexuality and references to events abroad (Chi-square=13,769, sig.=0,000); news items of this type were most often found in the non-tabloid media (this finding is just below the significance level (Chi-square=3,574, sig.=0,059). However, the Slovakia variable did not feature at all as a predictor (mainly due to the extremely small number of items).

Figure 1: Decision Tree for SEX & POLITICS

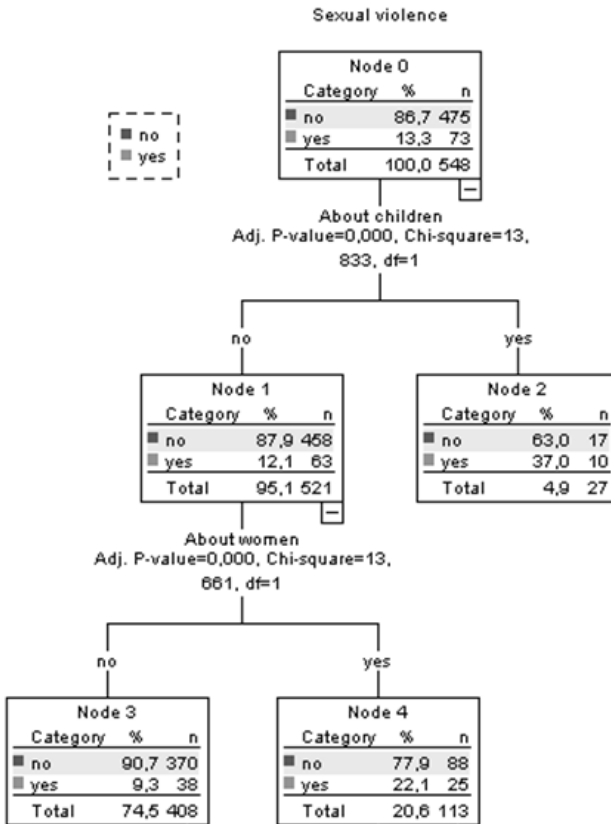


In the next stage of analysis we removed the public service vs. commercial (the strongest) variable from the analysis in order to explore the strength of the tabloid vs. quality press media variable which had been suppressed in the previous analysis by the extremely strong public service vs. commercial variable. This analysis proved to have decisive predictive strength with the probability of politics-related sexuality items featuring in the non-tabloid media being significantly higher (Chi-square=16,199, sig.=0,000).

2.2.2 Decision Tree for VIOLENCE

In the analysis of predictive values for the occurrence of media items with sexual content focusing on violence, we explored the following variables: tabloid vs. quality press media, children as objects of violence, and women as objects of violence.

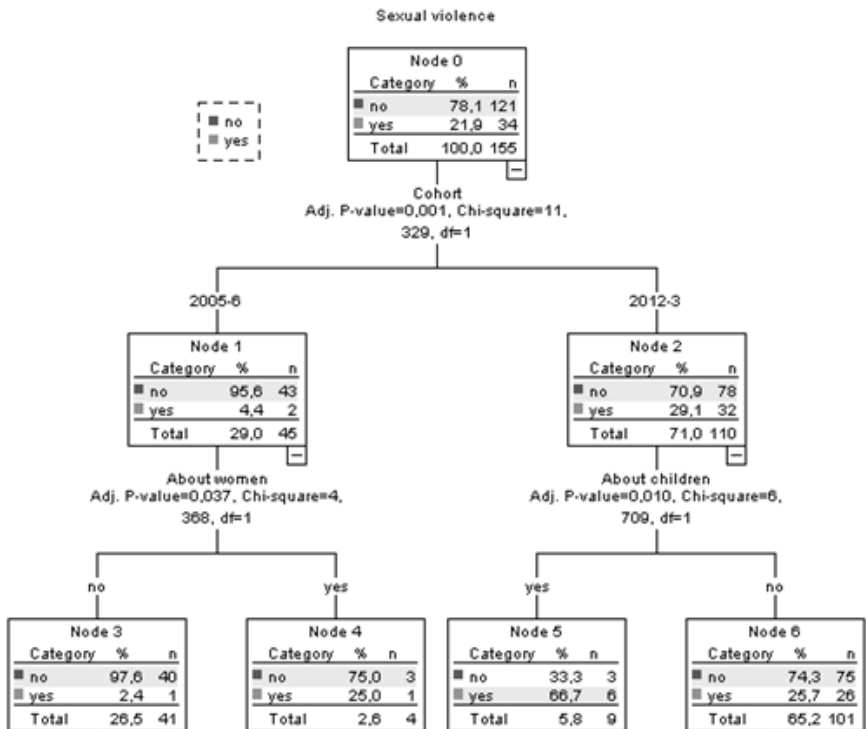
Figure 2: Decision Tree for violence



In the analysis (see Figure 2), the strongest predictor of items featuring sexuality in a violent context was found to be the social object, i.e. children (Chi-square=13,833, sig.=0,000). If there was an item about sexuality in a violent context then it was most likely to concern children. On the second level the strongest predictor was the second social object: women (Chi-square=13,661, sig.=0,000). Thus if the media item on sexuality in a violent context was not about children it was highly likely to be about women. The predictive relationship between the tabloid vs. quality press variable was more problematic on the third level and was present only in the sense that if the media item on sexuality and violence did not concern either children or women but another object/content then it was statistically predictable that it came from the tabloid media (Chi-square=7,096, sig.=0,008); we tested this

trend in the subsequent analysis in which we forced⁶ the tabloid vs. quality press media variable and found that its effect on the first level of prediction was significant (Chi-square=3,999, sig.=0,046). Thus we see that compared with quality press media, tabloid is a significant predictor of the occurrence of more items on sexuality-and-violence. This is despite it not being the strongest predictor of all.

Figure 3: Decision Tree for Sexual Violence (time cohort)



In order to assess more directly the time-difference effect (differences between the cohorts of 2005-2006 and 2012-2013, available only for television items) we conducted a separate analysis including all television entries (N=155). In addition to the time-cohort variable the analysis included the variables of public service vs. commercial media, children as objects of violence and women as objects of violence. Figure 3 clearly shows that time-difference plays a significant role and there is a strong prediction that there is a higher probability of sexuality-violence items featuring in the more recent time cohort (Chi-square=11,329, sig.=0,001). This analysis also highlights the ‘shift’ in focus on violence concerning women (significantly predictive in the

⁶ In decision tree computation a variable can be forced in the sense that a variable labelled as forced is a variable whose strength is computed on the first level despite the possibility that other variables may be stronger predictors; thus the overall strength of this variable can be assessed in relation to the whole data sample.

2005-2006 cohort; Chi-square=4,368, sig.=0,037) to violence concerning children (significantly predictive in the more recent cohort; Chi-square=6,709, sig.=0,01).

Finally, we also conducted additional analysis on the public service vs. commercial media variable which did not show predictive strength in the television items data sample. When this variable was forced, its predictive value was visible (Chi-square=3,827, sig.=0,05). This means that it is significant that sexuality-violence items occurred with higher relative frequency in the commercial media than in the public service media.

2.3 Co-occurrence analysis

In this part of the analysis we explored the kinds of context in which the media portrayed social subjects, the political aspects and violence related to sexuality, erotica and intimacy. In technical terms, we monitored the co-occurrence of codes selected from 'people' and the aggregated codes of politics and violence in relation to codes from other areas: themes, arenas, foci and regions.

2.3.1 Co-occurrence with social subjects

Here we concentrated on the social groups (people) that are becoming more important in the sexual sphere in this politically changing era. We found that the people code men (N=14) co-occurs mainly with the code identifying men as the perpetrators of (sexual) violence (N=74 ; co-occurrence 12 times, c=0,16). The discourse on men is therefore largely reduced to (sexual) violence with men being the perpetrators, while women are discussed in almost all the other themes.

Sexual minorities (N=13) rarely feature in the media as social subjects; they – mainly homosexuals – tend to be portrayed as objects in movies (in films N=55) and in reviews of them (co-occurrence 7 times, c=0,11).

Disabled people (N=2) are a social group that go unnoticed by the media. Disabled people only appear in media content in relation to the sensationalist tabloid item on the demand for sex as a social service and the training of sexual assistants (N=2, co-occurrence 2 times, c=1,0).

2.3.2 Co-occurrence with politics

Of all the items analysed in the aggregated code of politics (N=80) up to 46 per cent are from abroad (co-occurrence 37 times, c=0,16). These most often concern legislative amendments on sexuality (contact, portrayal of nudity etc.) but also important themes relating to the media: internet and media censorship. The most frequent social object in these items was women (co-occurring 16 times, c=0,09, mostly in arenas – censorship of sexually explicit content concerning women in media and controlling of prostitution).

The co-occurrence of sexual violence and politics can be seen in the media items that are tabloid in nature (N=56, co-occurring 17 times, c=0,15), while generally the theme of sexual violence is rarely covered from a political perspective (co-occurring 6 times, c=0,05).

The media portrayal of politicians (N=56), whether in terms of self-promotion (interviews) or as presented by the media (in the news) is limited to restrictive legislative proposals relating to sexuality – restricting nudity in the media, prostitution, homosexual relationships – that contradict liberal EU policies. Foreign politicians feature mainly in news reports of sexual scandals (Berlusconi, Clinton and Ford).

2.3.3 Co-occurrence with violence

In all the media items analysed sexual violence (N=73) most frequently features in relation to the young (children and minors) (N=65, co-occurring 22 times, $c=0,19$) and women (N=115, co-occurring 25 times, $c=0,16$). As mentioned, politicians (N=39) as perpetrators of sexual violence is another theme that appeals to the media (co-occurring 16 times, $c=0,17$). Men are almost exclusively portrayed by the media as perpetrators of sexual violence with the exception of media items (N=3, all 3 was about same incident) about men as the victims of sexual harassment (violence); however, this item was more about tabloid television ‘sensationalism’ than serious investigation. In terms of region, violence featured equally in domestic and international news. Sexual violence is portrayed mainly in terms of criminal responsibility (for the act) and violence in relation to the victim’s rights (children and women).

Discussion and conclusions

If we return to our initial starting point – the theoretical and empirical framework of this study – and attempt to locate the empirical findings within the dimensions, the theme that stands out most is that of unveiling intimacy and sexuality and is one that can be considered to be a reflection of a relatively strong attack on sexual norms in particular. The large number of media items dedicated to unveiling sexuality in all its various forms is, however, also a signal that the norm violation is consensual and thus is more about change, a shift in social norms, than just the sporadic violation of sexual norms in media items. These findings very much resonate not only with the disclosing intimacy thesis highlighted by Ken Plummer (2003) and the transformation vs. transmutation of intimacy challenges (cf. Bianchi, 2010) but also open a need for broader discussion of the dynamics between what it means to be intimate and to be public as was introduced recently by Serge Tisseron, Jacques Lacan, and Georges Teyssot (see Teyssot, 2010).

The sporadic nature with which the foci feature again points to the absence of critical public discussion on intimacy, erotica and sexuality whether that is in relation to the homophobic nature of society or in support of registered partnerships or against sexual violence etc. If we take into account William Simon’s premise that sexual scripts feature three types of complementary syntax, our findings indicate that the basis for a socio-cultural script is extremely weak and that in the sexual sphere, the interactive-dyadic syntax, i.e. the direct negotiation between sexual partners is currently much more important, as is the demand for an intrapsychic syntax, i.e. it is down to each individual to decide what they wish to achieve sexually and under which conditions, with whom, etc.

In a wider context – not just that of psychology informed accounts of normativity and sexual scenarios – we consider the work of Michel Maffesoli to be of interest, particularly his important publications, *The Shadow of Dionysus*, published in 1982, and *Le Rythme de la Vie* [The Rhythm of Life] (2006), setting out a framework of postmodernity. Our findings largely suggest a similar tendency to that highlighted by Maffesoli. For Maffesoli the main trends in postmodernity can be described as:

- a shift in the values paradigm towards ‘radicalism’; by which he means a return to its roots (radix), i.e. a return to emotions, the sensual and empathy.
- the growing importance of the haptic, tactility as a general principle competing alongside the visuality that has hitherto dominated; it is also a tool of an ascending social erotica, where dominant rationality is being superseded by dominant sensuality, and the Promethean ideal by a Dionysian postmodern era characterised as ‘homo eroticus’;
- a new tribalism is on the ascent – sacrificing individualism for a feeling of community spirit; society is created by hedonistic beings submerged in a communal existence;
- postmodern shifts in referential identity can be characterised as the individualistic symbol of the penis being superseded by the symbol of a vaginalised society as the dominant tribal belonging.

There is, one might suggest, a certain correspondence between our findings and Maffesoli’s thesis in the general unveiling of sex, for instance, but also in the variety of insights into erotica, the human body, relationships and various aspects of sexual intimacy and other things. Alongside this we find signs of the hedonisation of society and also the dominance of consumerist culture – film-making and erotic writing. Another symptom is the seeming exclusion of the sections of the population that do not fit easily into the new tribal set up – children, disabled people, Roma, and – in Slovakia – members of sexual minorities. This, of course, may be strongly related to the political ignorance towards human rights approaches in sexuality demonstrated in the long run by various governmental representations in Slovakia. Also, the considerable divergence in presenting men and women in the media – men often as perpetrators and women as objects of sexual violence – matches with the low gender-equity awareness and the strong and rising conservative opposition against it. Only limited attention has been devoted to identifying the real problems confronting society in relation to sexuality and intimacy, such as sexual violence, child abuse, domestic violence, intimacy etc. The analytical media items tend to be expert opinion on issues of sexuality and some of the political aspects of sexuality that are relatively far removed from everyday social practices: for example, people’s right to sex, media items introducing the idea of social service provision of sex for disabled people or exploring ‘intimate economies’. In concert with J. Weeks’s (2007) statement on lawmakers who – in the arena of sexuality - prefer to follow public opinion instead of guiding these processes themselves, all the trends described above indicate that the political elites may have a

preference in masking their ideology and being less articulate in public discourses on sexuality.

In conclusion we would again emphasise the fundamental differences between ‘sexualised’ items in the electronic and print media as well as differences in media type: public service vs. commercial and tabloid vs. non-tabloid. The print media are noticeably more sexualised than television, as are commercial media compared with public service media and tabloid media compared with non-tabloid media. This may be also due to differences between various types of media in legal as well as ethical and value-driven regulations. The political aspects of sexuality, erotica and intimacy feature mainly in public service and non-tabloid media. Violence and sexuality, erotica and intimacy are covered mainly in relation to children and in the case of television at least we can state that in recent years the social focus has shifted from women to children and also that the overall number of items about violence has increased significantly. Thus we could bring strong evidence about a significant divide between on the one hand the public service and quality press commercial media, which “cover” the political aspects of sexuality, and, on the other hand, the tabloid media, which lead the sexuality-violence reporting. Having in mind the power of discourse as social practice (Stainton Rogers, 2003) and the psychological effects of discourse highlighted by Carla Willig, mainly its effect on one’s actions, positioning and subjectivity (Willig, 2003), these findings deserve further attention. Although much of it comes as no surprise it does provide a useful entry point for strategic intervention in the media sector in order to prevent negative phenomena in the spheres of intimacy and sexuality and to discourage discrimination.

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