Marriage standard, love standard or fun standard? 
The preferred models of sexual activity in South Korea

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Abstract: The paper presents the preferred models of sexual activity by Korean respondents. Preferred models of sexual activity differ across countries and cultures. Conservative societies (like: Koreans form South Korea), have mostly negative attitude towards sexual activity out of wedlock. In this society intimate relationship is accepted by marriage people or when the couple plan to marry (Hwangbo Y on 31. 01. 2017). In spite of slowly changes in the traditional value system of Koreans (strongly based on Confucianism which focuses on importance of family and institution of marriage) which occur shift to a little bit of more liberal towards premarital sex, especially by young Koreans (www.phys.org; www.koreatimes.co.kr). Premarital sex is connected with living in cohabitation union and also with single motherhood. In this country there is a discrepancy between the actuality that cohabitation has become popular and the negative social views of cohabitation. Nowadays, searching through Internet sources and magazines, we can find articles about cohabitation (living without marriage) and single mothers (in Korea – unwed mothers) (www.phys.org; www.koreatimes.co.kr; HaeRyun Kang 2015). It shows that processes, such as globalization, westernization and Sexual Revolution, have an influence on emerge cohabitation and change attitudes – what means that premarital sex is observed in Korean society, but on a small scale and social attitude toward cohabitation is mostly negative, especially by elder generation. The paper presents the results of a statistical analysis carried out as empirical research concerning students from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, in South Korea which focused on the preferred models of sexual activity. The presented issue is only a small part of the conducted research on family and alternative marriage and family life forms. Independent variables such as: sex, frequency of participation in
religious practices or the lack of such participation differentiate the respondents' statistically significant opinions concerning the models of sexual activity. The analysis of the survey results has been conducted based on the models of sexual activity standards proposed by I.L. Reiss in 1967. Despite the fact that these standards were proposed 50 years ago they still exist and what's more some of them dominate in societies around the world.

Key words: models of sexual activity, sexual initiation, sexuality, premarital sex cohabitation.

1. Introduction

Over the centuries, human sexual needs were considered taboo, a shameful and often socially stigmatized issue. After Sexual Revolution (Pastor 2001) attitudes towards sexuality was changed in many European countries and also in USA (Kiernan 2002; Nazio 2008). At that time there was a detachment of sexual functions from marriage and family (Pacewicz-Biegańska 2013, 109). Nowadays we can observe sexuality and sexual activity not only in the demographic behaviour, such as: increasing of cohabitation union (living without marriage), increasing birth outside of marriage, but also in newspapers, magazines, Internet, TV, etc. It means media also play an indisputably significant role in the transformation of sexuality (Gola 2008, 53 – 55).

Approach to sexuality had changed and people had begun to decide about the number of children, which led to the idea of contraceptives in order to have sex only for pleasure, and meet the sexual and emotional needs, without consequences. In the 19th and the early 20th century, such views were shocking, revolutionary, and unacceptable for the society of that time (Żarnowska and Szwarc 2006, 15).

In many European countries (such as: Sweden, France, Spain, Netherlands) and in USA changes in the sphere of family life have occurred a few decades ago. Premarital sex has been no longer something shameful or socially stigmatized. Many people have started to live in cohabitation union, not only as a type of relationship before marriage (after engagement) but also as in alternative family life form to marriage as well. Many people also have lived in intimate relationship even they have not live together at the same household. In most European countries (like: Sweden, France, Spain, Netherlands) and also in USA
there are possibility to register cohabitation union. The registration of the union give couples the same rights as marriage. These societies are very opened and tolerant towards liberal behaviour like cohabitation unions, births out of wedlock, premarital sex and homosexuals as well. Moreover, governments of these countries adapted the law for cohabiting couples and homosexuals to avoid being discriminated (see: Å. Saldeen 1995; Nazio 2008: Kiernan 2002). In South Korea there is no possibility to register cohabitation union. Moreover, that kind of relationship is not socially desired because of Korean tradition based on marriage as an important socially institution. However, cohabitation phenomenon is observed in South Korea but on a small scale. Cohabiting couples suffer discrimination and lack access to benefits in South Korea (Hwangbo Yon 31. 01. 2017).

A research report from a team led by Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs research fellow Byeon Su-jeong found that more than half of unmarried, cohabiting couples have experienced discrimination because of their cohabiting status, and that less than one in 10 are fully open about their cohabiting status due to social prejudices. Some have proposed that cohabiting be accepted as a new family structure, and that it is necessary to explore ways to support cohabitation through policy by allowing for cohabitation registration. In a survey conducted in 2016 of 253 subjects aged 18-49 who either cohabited at some point after 2000 or are currently cohabiting with a partner, 51 % said that they experienced discrimination in some form, whether through the negative prejudices of others or disapproval. 70 % reported that the disapproval they experienced stemmed from perceptions of cohabiting couples as sexually promiscuous or immoral (Hwangbo Yon 31. 01. 2017).

Based on the above presented results from the report in South Korea is observed premarital sex among especially young people who live in cohabitation union. But in this country there is a discrepancy between the actuality that cohabitation has become popular and the negative social views of cohabitation. This contradiction is revealed in a number of other surveys and statistics. For example, in 2013 the Korean Institution for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA) showed that 46.1 % of its survey respondents said that cohabitation without marriage was acceptable (see: Kim Seungkwon et al. 2013, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015, 18). Also, KOSIS (2014a, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 201, 18) reports that
approximately 62.1 % of Korean adults aged 20 to 39 were in favor of premarital cohabitation. However, another survey shows that 61.22 % of 7,786 respondents were concerned about negative attitudes towards cohabitation, and particularly 9.82 % of them said that the stigma for cohabiting women was too serious to be overcome (Panelnow 2014, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015, 18). These surveys and statistics indicate that whilst young people desire cohabitation, a significant proportion is afraid, or at least aware, of the stigma attached to it.

Despite these negative attitudes to cohabitation, the numbers of people living with their girl/boyfriend without being married are growing in South Korea. Ham Inhee (2002, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015, 18) and many others point out that one of the key reasons for the growing number of (young) cohabiters is the patriarchal structure of the marriage and family in Korea. It can means that women (who decide to cohabit) don’t want to live in the formal family based on marriage because of dominated in Korean culture patriarchal hierarchy. These women decide to live together without marriage and have intimate relationship want to live in the partnership union concentrated on quality of relationship and division of duties, avoiding patriarchal hierarchy.

The analysis presented in the article refers to the four standards concerning sexual activity proposed by I. L. Reiss (1967). The first one is abstinence (motivated by religious reasons, inadequate phase of life, and, most often, by the lack of a partner), the second one is the double standard (over the centuries, sex was allowed only for men), while the main change commenced when the transitional double standard was approved, and women got allowed sexual activity, if they were engaged or having a permanent partner). The third standard is a model based on love, love standard – sexual activity is possible when two people are connected with a strong feeling; such standard is approved for both sexes. On the contrary, the fourth standard is the fun standard – a permission for sex without feelings is granted, regardless of emotional relations between man and woman.

In spite of the fact that proposed sexual activity standards by I. L Reiss can be told to being outdated because of publication of the book which took place more than 50 years ago, but we may notice that the last two models, i.e. love standard and fun standard are dominant in the culture of postmodern societies.
The list of sexual activity standards proposed by I. Reiss, misses the standard that would apply to sexual activity of married couples, the so-called marriage standard that could also have been compared with the surveyed respondents’ answers.

Therefore, a question arises: which of the standards, marriage standard, love standard or fun standard dominates among the surveyed respondents from South Korea? The answer to this question is presented in the analysis of research results in this article.

2. Methodology of the research

The article is based on empirical research in South Korea. The empirical research in South Korea were conducted among students of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul. The coordinator of the studies was the author. The researches were conducted in the framework of Young Scientists granted by the University of Silesia in Katowice in 2015.

The respondents taking part in the survey were diverse in terms of sex, age, year of study, family structure, religious profess and frequency of participation in religious practices. Empirical research was done on a sample of 104 respondents in South Korea, including 47 women and 57 men. The main research tool used in the study was a survey questionnaire (Gruszczyński 1999) containing 47 questions. The questionnaire was translated into Korean language.

The sample group for survey was selected randomly from fields and years of study. In the research there were use a PAPI (Paper and Pencil Interviews) conducted in the classrooms at universities. The collected study material was subjected to statistical analysis conducted in the SPSS program.

3. The analysis of the results of the study on the models of sexual activity

The respondents were asked in the questionnaire about the appropriate moment of the sexual initiation which determine of sexual activity and categorize into a suitable model of sexual activity. The respondents had four answer choices which are connected with models of sexual activity proposed by I. L. Reiss and also with the marriage standard. The connection is describe below.
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1. Sexual initiation after the wedding - marriage standard
2. Sexual initiation after the engagement – love standard - sexual relations are possible when two people share a strong affection;
3. Sexual initiation when partners love each other – love standard
   Sexual initiation at any moment – fun standard – a permission for sex without feelings is granted, regardless of emotional relations between man and woman.

Generally, high percentage of respondents (49.0 %) had opinions that the appropriate moment of the sexual initiation is when partners love each other. This percentage of examined respondents is characterised by the love-based pattern, the so called love standard. Every fifth respondents (23.1 %) had the opinion that sexual relations may begin after the wedding. This percentage of respondents is characterised by the so called marriage standard. The statistical analysis shows also that only 12.5 % of respondents are more spontaneous and they are able to begin sexual life at any moment (see: Table 1.). This percentage of respondents may be indicative of the separation of the physical act of passion from love, only following the desires and satisfying sex drive and the willingness to experience adventures and a fast and brief euphoria. This part of the examined respondents is characterised by the so-called fun standard – what follows is the consent to have sex without emotion, regardless of emotional relations between both sexes.

Table 1. The appropriate moment of the sexual initiation in South Korea

| The appropriate moment of the sexual initiation | Country |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------|
|                                               | South Korea |
| after the wedding                              | N 24     |
|                                               | % 23.1 % |
| after the engagement                           | N 11     |
|                                               | % 10.6 % |
| when partners love each other                  | N 51     |
|                                               | % 49.0 % |
| at any moment                                 | N 13     |
|                                               | % 12.5 % |
The statistical analysis showed that sex in South Korea does not differentiate significantly opinions – $p > 0.05$ (test $\chi^2 = 7.215$; $p = 0.205$; $V = 0.263$). Among the respondents from South Korea occurs a slight percentage difference (but not statistically significant, $p < 0.05$) between men (17.5%) and women (6.4%), who have the opinions that the sexual initiation can be possible at any moment. It can indicate that men are become more spontaneous and this percentage of male separate the physical act of passion from love. This part of the examined men is characterised by the so-called fun standard.

However, 47% of the examined women and 51% of men acknowledged that sexual life may begin when partners are in love or share a strong emotional bond (see: Table 2.). Therefore, a greater percentage of examined respondents is characterised by the love-based pattern, the so called love standard.

Table 2. The appropriate moment of the sexual initiation and gender in Poland and South Korea

| The appropriate moment of the sexual initiation | South Korea | Total |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------|
| | sex | | |
| | female | male | |
| after the wedding | N 11 | 13 | 24 |
| | % 23.4 | 21.1 | 23.1 |
| after the engagement | N 7 | 4 | 11 |
| | % 14.9 | 7.0 | 10.6 |
| when partners love each other | N 22 | 29 | 51 |
| | % 46.8 | 50.9 | 49.0 |
| at any moment | N 3 | 10 | 13 |
| | % 6.4 | 17.5 | 12.5 |
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According to data from a national web-based survey of youth risk behaviors administered annually by the Korean Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 4 percent of kids said they had experienced sexual intercourse among seventh to 12th grades (Doyle 2015). But generally the average person in Korea has their first sexual experience at the age of 22.8. The average age for males is 21.8, while the female average stands a bit older at 23.9, highlighting the early 20’s as a common age for either gender to lose their virginity (Segye Ilbo 2015).

Research results show that the average age of sexual initiation in South Korea is lower than average age of first marriage. According to the data by Statistics Korea the average age of people getting married rising to 32.4 for men and for women rose to 29.8 (Yonhap News 2015).

It indicate that most Koreans begin sexual life before getting marriage. These research indicate and confirm that Koreans most often begin the sexual activity when they love each other. Therefore we can conclude that in South Korea dominate love standard.

Participation in religious practices also does not differentiate statistically significant opinions of respondents from South Korea – p > 0.05 (test $\chi^2 = 38.934; p = 0.007; V = 0.306$) (see: Table 3.)

| The appropriate moment of the sexual initiation | The frequency of participation in religious practices |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| after the wedding                             | several times a week | once a week | 1-2 times a month | several times a year | never | Total |
| N                                             | 0                    | 6           | 2                   | 5                     | 11     | 24     |
| %                                             | 0.0 %                | 35.2 %      | 28.6 %              | 20.0 %                | 20.8 % | 23.1 % |

Source: the author’s own studies.

| difficult to assess | N 4 1 5 |
|---------------------|--------|
|                     | %      |
| difficult to assess | 8.5 % 1.8 % 4.8% |
| Total               | N 47 57 104 |
|                     | % 100.0 % 100.0 % 100.0 % |

Table 3. The appropriate moment of the sexual initiation and the frequency of participation in religious practices in South Korea
Most Korean respondents who participated in religious practices several times a year (64.0 %) and who don’t participate at all (49.1 %) had opinions that sexual life can begin when partners love each other – these respondents characterise love standard. In turn, 43 % of respondents who attend religious practices 1-2 times a month had opinion that it can happen at any moment – these respondents characterise fun standard. In turn, respondents who attend religious practices once a week they are divided into three groups and they have opinions that sexual initiation can begin after wedding, when partners love each other and at any moment (see: Table 3).

**Summary**

Sexuality is a natural and inborn feature that motivates people to create interpersonal bonds and relations. It has many functions in a person’s life, including procreation and hedonistic function. Sexuality is not a constant function of one’s body; it changes mainly with age, but also with the stage of life, personal experience, worldview or personality traits. It is also a significant fact that the value of sexuality is significantly influenced by social changes. Currently, such changes are the secularization and liberalization of sexual life (Pacewicz-Biegańska 2013, 109).

|                          | N   | 0   | 1   | 0   | 1   | 9   | 11  |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| after the engagement     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| %                        | 0.0 %| 5.9 %| 0.0 %| 4.0 %| 17.0 %| 10.6 %|
| when partners love each other | 2   | 5   | 2   | 16  | 26  | 51  |
| %                        | 100 %| 29.4 %| 28.6 %| 64.0 %| 49.1 %| 49.0 %|
| at any moment            |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| %                        | 0.0 %| 23.5 %| 42.9 %| 0.0 %| 11.3 %| 12.5 %|
| difficult to assess      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| %                        | 0.0 %| 5.9 %| 0.0 %| 12.0 %| 1.9 %| 4.8 %|
| Total                    | 2   | 17  | 7   | 25  | 53  | 104 |
| %                        | 100 %| 100 %| 100 %| 100 %| 100 %| 100 %|

*Source:* the author’s own studies.
Western civilization – Western and Central Europe, both Americas as well as Australia and New Zealand – aim at the full autonomy of sexuality which should not be connected to any standards, ethics, or religious confessions (Pacewicz-Biegańska 2013, 109). In the era of globalization and the diffusion of liberal values in South Korea influenced especially by Western European countries and USA, one can predict that each year, social permission for behaviours of moral nature will increase, which in turn will make changes at the attitudes of Koreans towards premarital sex, relationships out of positive or though neutral.

The analysis of the results of the study carried out in South Korea indicates far reaching changes in family life. Increasingly liberal approach to the sexual initiation results in the fact that formalities in the civil registry or in church are not necessary. What counts here is love, affection and even spontaneity without affection – namely the need for satisfying sex drive, sexual adventure, experiencing sensations. Therefore, the moment of the sexual initiation in the opinions of the respondents moves primarily in the direction of liberal morality. It is confirmed by the fact that sex has been separated from marriage. This can probably be the effect of the separation of the respondents of sexuality from marriage and procreation. Respondents from South Korea believe that sexual initiation may begin when partners love each other. However, there are more and more situations when sexual relations can occur without an emotional involvement, outside of marriage and without the aim to procreate, as it can give a sense of pleasure and personal satisfaction. All this contributes to an increase of the dissemination of the cohabitation phenomena and the acceptance of living in informal relationships. The conducted study confirms the separation of sexual functions from marriage and procreation, and indicates the transformations towards liberalization of sexual behaviour, while the sexual relation gives both partners pleasure and satisfaction.

Statistical results show that in mostly cases in South Korea the sexual initiation is separated from marriage. Therefore, the sexual function is separated from marriage and family. Research results are very surprising for opinions of Korean respondents. Korean society is seen as traditional, in which the family based on marriage and procreation is very important. Research result showed that this trend has been changing. Korean society is undergoing the process of westernization (see:
Panelnow 2014; follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015), so in Korean society we can observe more and more liberal behavior, such as premarital sex and living in cohabitation (Josephson 2005, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015, 15).

Research results also indicate that for the surveyed respondents, religious values, which clearly point to the prohibition of sexual initiation before marriage, in this case have no relevance and they are not respected. In the contemporary world more and more people follow towards liberal values which are concentrated on individualism, autonomy, self-fulfilment and satisfaction in life.

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