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The paradigm of masculinity in the context of morality changes: heterosexual male sponsorship

The high dynamics of moral changes prompts reflection on the need to re-define the classic paradigm of masculinity. The category of masculinity is increasingly present in academic discourse, due to the occurrences of new phenomena connected with interpersonal relationships, which are men's response to social and cultural changes. Sexual sponsorship could serve as an example of such relationships. The aim of this article is to reflect on the materialization of masculinity in the relationships of heterosexual male sponsorship, with reference to existent sociological theories. The text includes a qualitative analysis of advertisements posted on the internet by men being potential sponsors who seek partners for a sponsored relationship.

Masculinity in the context of moral changes

Great attention is paid nowadays to sexualisation in the media and the public space and the tabloidization of sexuality. The approach to human sexuality has been liberalized, and sexuality in various contexts is present virtually in every area of life. We are witnessing the democratization of desire and the specific "striptease culture" (McNair 2004, p. 5). The mass media co-create the current culture in which public nudity and sexually oriented gazes are allowed as never before in history and are often encouraged because of their high marketing value.

Due to various civilization changes, traditionally perceived gender duality and the resulting division of social roles are also evolving. The gender binarism, particularly evident in the existing stereotypes regarding the proper attributes of sexual affiliation, is now being debated. Sexual stereotypes – simplified images with

a cognitive value and a role of defining the surrounding reality – are becoming less relevant. In the collective consciousness, women are usually attributed expressive or pro-social features (e.g. care for the welfare of others), while men are associated with instrumental or efficient qualities (e.g. assertiveness or control) (Deaux, Kite 2002, p. 360). Currently, these differences are becoming blurred.

The social sciences devote more space to studies related to the transformation of femininity, and the feminist thought has been quoted as *an evergreen* of gender paradigm changes for years now. Masculinity, however, is usually recognized in the context of a crisis and pejorative transformations in response to the growing dominance of women. The literature distinguishes various strategies that men adapt towards subjectively endangered masculinity, e.g. the male types characterized by Zbyszko Melosik (2002, pp. 116–164): a man of success, a Rambo, a macho, a playboy and mixed types. In the face of change, a male who had held power and exhibited the characteristics of a cultural dominator ultimately turned out to be a victim of the system and a reduced human. The response to change is bipolar: on the one hand, it is androgyny (a de-gendering concept) (Butler 2008), which embraces the harmonious combination of traits considered male and female, or complete resignation from sexuality imperatives. On the other hand, the response may involve hyper-sexualization, including the promotion of promiscuous behaviours (Kurzępa 2005, p. 177) and the excessive presentation of traits attributed stereotypically or by cultural imperatives to a particular sex. The above descriptions are paired respectively to two dominating masculinity paradigms. The first of them is the traditional model, derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition, which presents a man as a dominant figure, combining the features of physical strength and mental resilience. The second model perceives masculinity rather from an androgynous and not the androcentric perspective. In this context, the partnership of the sexes as well as the pursuit of broadly understood self-realization hold a high value (Arcimowicz 2008, p. 22). Transformations of masculinity (particularly in Western Europe) have been recognized as a continuous process, so dynamic and complex that studies of masculinity (*men's studies*) are becoming more and more popular among the academic community.

The approach to sexuality has changed as well. People began to appreciate the sex of a ludic and Dionysian character (defined by fun, freedom and pleasure) more than sex in the Apollonian aspect, cherishing harmony and beauty (Lew-Starowicz 1986, p. 74). John Bancroft claims that as a society we have handled the tabooing of pre-marital sex (moving from the model of a restrictive society to a permissive society), while extramarital sexuality is still not accepted, and perception of this type of activity in women and men is unequal (Bancroft 2011, p. 223). While women are faced with social stigma and ostracism, extramarital sexual activity of men is undeniably treated more gently. It may be one of the factors that influences men's decisions to enter into relationships based on sexual sponsorship. Sexual sponsorship is understood here as an intimate relationship between the sponsor and the sponsored person, functioning according to specific (agreed upon) prin-

ciples, and based on financial or material support of a person who the sponsor is sexually attracted to. The commercial value in a sponsored relationship is the fulfilment of the sponsor's specific expectations (social and sexual) by a sponsored person. Discretion (often anonymity) kept by people maintaining a sponsored relationship, is also an important feature. Sponsorship can be divided according to the sexual orientation of the people involved in the relationship. According to this criterion, we can distinguish heterosexual sponsorship, with the most common configuration of partners being: a man-sponsor and a younger woman as a sponsored person. A reverse relationship is less frequent. The second type is homosexual sponsorship, in which the sponsor is either a woman or a man, and a sponsored person is of the same sex as the sponsor.

A man as a sponsor in a male heterosexual sponsorship

Transformations of the male habitus, associated also with the high dynamics in sexual morality, may be reflected in men's decisions regarding relationships with women and sexual relations, e.g. in the context of sexual sponsorship. Pierre Bourdieu, referring to sociobiology, points out that a man is designed to dominate by evolution. The masculinization of a male body (and feminization of a female body) facilitates taking particular roles in the social and gender belief system. A human being engages in various types of "social games", which enable the reinforcement of masculinity in the case of a man, for example through politics, business or science (Bourdieu 2004, p. 71). A man enjoys informal social consent for the dominant position of a guardian who oversees and protects, but also looks down on an object. A man's look at a woman conveys symbolic violence. A woman, on the other hand, is assigned the position of a "symbolic object" whose core of existence is "to be seen". Therefore a woman falls into a mode of constant uncertainty, and her attributes should be: femininity, submission, mindfulness, discretion and withdrawal (Bourdieu 2004, p. 82).

Referring to Bourdieu we may wonder whether a man being in a relationship of sexual sponsorship that he controls (a relationship that is fundamentally different than a socially sanctioned marriage or increasingly sanctioned co-habitation) (Slany 2010, pp. 94–104) can consciously fulfil his domination through his superior position in the sponsorship duo. Or perhaps, rather on the contrary, if we confront Bourdieu's view, a man-sponsor can be understood not only as the symbolic violator, but as a human being trying to adapt or find his way in the contemporary reality. It is justifiable to ask whether the superior position of a man-sponsor is a strategy for the realization of male domination.

Men's involvement in sexual sponsorship may be interpreted through sociological theories regarding coping strategies in the face of social and moral changes. Sexual sponsorship can be explained by Giddens' "theory of pure relationship" (Giddens 2010, pp. 124–137), in which participants are tied only to such an extent

and for as long as the contract that they agreed upon clearly defines. According to another concept, the men's involvement in sponsored relationships may be a kind of a "mollification of risk" (Szlendak 2005, p. 250). Being the dominant person in a sponsored relationship (acting as a client for the offered services), a man spares himself the necessity to take the risk associated with a standard search for a woman (basically protecting himself against any emotional risk). The category of a 'tourist' introduced by Bauman, may be relevant with regard to sexual sponsorship (Bauman 2000, pp. 133–153). According to Bauman's concept, a man may be perceived as a collector of sensations and non-material experiences.

What do the sponsors themselves say about their choices? In order to obtain answers about men involved in sexual sponsorships, we analysed internet advertisements posted by men on the website www.sponsorazukam.pl (*www.looking-forsponsor.pl*). The analysis covered 417 advertisements posted in February 2014. The general conclusions of this study will be presented below.

An important aspect of the research results analysis was the awareness that the information contained in the ads, due to some kind of their marketing value, may not necessarily be truthful. The advertisers could deliberately publish information incompatible with reality, because the advertisement acted as self-promotion and the success in finding an attractive partner would depend primarily on the way of presenting oneself. Therefore, it is worth noting that the so-called "perfect I" of sponsors may be contrary to their "real I" and that a sense of absolute anonymity in the network may contribute to such a situation. However, this is only a hypothesis, which cannot be conclusively confirmed, and therefore the truthfulness of the statements should not be questioned, and the obtained data shall be considered true.

The advertisements differed in terms of their substantive content, because the men were completely free to post and publish any information. However, some common elements were distinguished, which eventually became the subject of analysis and provided knowledge on the three main components of establishing sex sponsorship by men. The conclusions have been divided into three groups of interrelated aspects of sponsorship:

1. Sponsor's ideas about the relationship.
2. Building of one's own image in advertisements.
3. Sponsor's requirements for the desired woman.

Ad 1. Sponsor's ideas regarding the relationship referred to issues related to the place/city of the meetings with the sponsored person. It turned out that sex sponsorship is present in many Polish cities of various sizes and populations, but it is most popular in the voivodship capital cities, which are industrial and academic centres. Most sponsorship proposals concerned Warsaw. 40% of the advertisements defined the capital as a place for establishing sponsorship relationships. It is noteworthy, however, that many potential sponsors mentioned

a certain degree of flexibility in the advertisements: I want to start a relationship on principles that will be determined by both parties. I think it doesn't have to be limited to bed". "Arrangements will be made directly by email or at a face-to-face meeting".

The issue of names given to this relationship by sponsors is also significant. Advertisers used euphemistic names: relationship, arrangement, relation, friendly arrangement, friendship with benefits, mutually beneficial arrangement, relationship with a financial background, discreet relationship, close relationship, sponsored meetings, intimate meetings, stable sponsored relationship, casual meetings, relationship of a well-known nature, and even coaching. The pay itself was not explicitly mentioned either: financial remuneration, pocket money, monthly scholarship, fixed salary, monthly lump sum, monthly salary, financial assistance. Also, sponsors made declarations: I will reward you, I will help financially.

The question of remuneration concerned its form and amount. In most cases sponsors preferred to pay for each meeting separately, and the amount ranged from 200 to 2000–3000 zlotys. The monthly salary specified in the advertisements ranged from 2,000 to 12,000 zlotys. In some advertisements, though in few only, men offered a "flat in exchange for company" as a form of remuneration. Sponsors specified discretion as a key condition that they strongly demand and which they themselves provide. To remain anonymous (which is connected with discretion), few men dared to post their photo next to their advertisement. Fearing the risk of being recognized, only some men signed their adverts with their first name, and only in few cases added their zodiac sign. Only some men brought up the hygiene issue, and very few sponsors addressed the subject of safe sex and health. Many men also pointed out that they were not looking for crypto-prostitution: they often wrote "professionals are not welcome", which clearly indicates that the sponsors themselves do not identify sponsorship with prostitution. This is probably due to the sponsor's pursuit of friendship, understanding and emotional bonds, and not only mechanical sex.

Ad 2. Creating of one's own image in the advertisements was done through the sponsor's self-portrayal. The basis for the self-presentation was a description of the physical appearance and personality/character traits. Most advertisers did not disclose the type/level of their education, but men with higher or postgraduate education prevailed among the 79 people who decided to do it. Also, only a minority of the sponsors identified their profession (24.5%) and marital status (29%). Those who opted to do it were equally proportioned between married and single, representing the profession of entrepreneur or businessman. Men were reluctant to share information concerning their family situation, and none of them revealed details about their children.

The reasons for seeking partners in sponsored relationships combine elements of the sociological theories mentioned earlier in this article. In many cases, men

explained their reasons to become a sex sponsor, and they were: desire to diversify life experiences and find an adventure; desire to fulfil certain sexual fantasies or unmet sexual needs; monotony in marriage; loneliness; being overworked, lack of time for standard dating; disenchantment with love after a breakup with their partner.

Ad 3. The third component of an advertisement was the sponsor's requirements for the desired woman. In this case, sponsors formulated detailed requirements regarding physical appearance, age and personality traits of the potential partner in a sponsored relationship. It turned out that the actual description of the potential partner took up the least space in an advertisement. Men focused on describing themselves or the rules they wanted to establish in a sponsored relationship. None of the men specified the age of the desired woman. Only general age-frames were given, and they are difficult to compare, due to their vagueness. The collected data, however, allowed to determine an upper age limit of women accepted by the sponsors. One of the sponsors identified the age for sponsored woman at 16–20 years, while the oldest potential partner was to be aged 45–60. Almost 50% of the men described their requirements of the physical appearance of a woman, whilst 60% defined their preferences in terms of personality traits. An important, frequently mentioned feature, that was desired among the women (put right next to physical attractiveness), was intelligence.

Myths about sexual sponsorship

Basing on the analysis of the advertisements, the figure of a sponsor has been demythologized. In the public mind, it is usually a middle-aged man who pays for a much younger woman, and the axis of the relationship is sex. The analysed data showed that the sponsors are usually men between 30 and 40 years old (this age was indicated by almost half of men who determined their age), and although most advertisements concerned women under 30 years of age, in many cases older women were sought, and the highest accepted age was between 45 and 60 years. This research has also allowed to partially expose the social myth that sexual sponsorship predominantly pertains to university students. It turned out that relatively few men: less than 25% ($N = 417$), were looking for students in sponsored relationships.

Sponsorship is a major challenge for research. It is a multidimensional phenomenon, and it is very hard to elaborate on it in a comprehensive and ultimate way. In this research it may be concluded that sponsorship is a clearly defined contract between two fully aware people. In this aspect, an analogy to Giddens' theory of pure relationship is evident. According to this concept, relationships between people take on a loose form and bind partners for as long and only to the extent which is acceptable for all the involved parties. These relationships are maintained whilst close contact is still a source of satisfaction, e.g. in the emotional

aspect. Giddens claims (2010, pp. 124–137) that such a relationship is characterized by a mutual trust that allows for intimacy, and after termination of the relation partners do not hold any obligations to each other, because throughout the functioning of the relationship they achieved their immediate interest.

If sponsored relationships were to be understood in this way, it seems unjustified that they should be a source of moral debate. What appears legitimate, however, is qualifying sex sponsorship as a non-standard sexual relationship or as one of the lifestyles chosen by partners. It can be concluded that sexual sponsorship is a conscious choice and a kind of men's response to the current dynamics of social and moral change.

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Summary

The paradigm of masculinity in the context of morality changes: heterosexual male sponsorship

The author of the article discusses basic assumptions of the dominant version of masculinity in the era of sexualization. The article presents selected research findings illustrating the phenomenon of heterosexual male sponsorship.

Keywords

masculinity, sexuality, sponsorship, identity, sponsor

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