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## **Addressing Controversial Subjects in Sex Education Books for Young People: Example of Discourse about Masturbation**

### **Abstract**

In our article, we discuss the theme of masturbation in sex education books as exemplifying how differently young audiences are told about controversial issues and how the same words are invested with different meanings in discourse. We rely on the basics of the methodology of the French school of discourse analysis. The corpus consists of popular-science sex-education books for young people aged 15 and older published in Poland between 1990 and 2018. The findings of our study imply that masturbation is comprehended as a phenomenon to be clarified and evaluated. Statements on and discussions of masturbation reflect a wide range of attitudes: from utter depreciation to complete acceptance, with multiple axiologically mixed or seemingly neutral opinions stretching between the two extremes. This axiological investment is expressed by lexical means and additional grammatical, stylistic, semiotic, and typographic devices. It is also coupled with the dialogical nature of the discourse on masturbation which manifests in enunciative heterogeneity, polemical negation, and polemical neologisms.

**Keywords:** sex education books, young people, discourse about masturbation, controversies, construction of meaning

## 1. Introduction

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Sex education for children and teenagers aims not only to inform them about emotional, social, and physical aspects of sexuality, but to foster desirable behaviour patterns and promote moral, cultural, and religious norms (e.g., Izdebski 2003: 997). Controversies over it, understood as a “discussion[s] marked especially by the expression of opposing views<sup>1</sup>,” result from the beliefs of the adults involved in the educational process and their urge to educate the young generation in line with the values they profess. Viewpoints on sexuality and its role in human life tend to differ widely, not infrequently to the point of utter contradiction. This is particularly the case with the most sensitive sexuality-related issues, such as sexual initiation, non-normative sexuality (especially homosexuality), contraception, abortion, and, last but not least, masturbation.

## 2. Objective

In our article, we rely on selected elements of the methodology of the French school of discourse analysis (FSDA)<sup>2</sup> to discuss the theme of masturbation in sex education books as exemplifying how differently young audiences are told about controversial issues, and how the same words are invested with different meanings in discourse. We understand discourse in pragmatic terms, taking into account the context of its production, that is, the participants, their intentions, and the communicative situation. Consistently with the FSDA approach, we assume that the meaning of words is constructed by discourse, which is inevitably intentional and axiological, and that the collective (discursive) memory of language users plays a key role in the process.

The meanings constructed in discourse have a social character because they are produced within a given community and for its needs and purposes. Meaning construction is mainly achieved through the operation that FSDA calls *nomination*<sup>3</sup>, which denotes the pragmatic and usually repeated use of a given word to name a given element of reality (Veniard 2013: 17). Any choice of one of the many coexisting names is predicated on the sender’s intentions and inevitably expresses his/her point of view (Siblot 2001: 202). This becomes particularly relevant in the case of discourses on controversial issues, that is issues that are evaluated in disparate ways.

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1 Merriam-Webster, an Encyclopaedia Britannica company, <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/controversy>> (access: 18.04.2025).

2 See e.g.: Mortureux 1993, Siblot 1997, Moirand 2004 and 2007, Veniard 2013; in Poland: Grzmil-Tylutki 2010, Chruściel and Rębkowska 2020, Biardzka 2023, etc.

3 In FSDA, what is referred to as *nomination* (name used), which is pragmatic, isolated, and contextual, should not be confused with *denomination* (name given), which implies an arbitrary and constant link between a linguistic sign and the element of reality it designates (Kleiber 1983: 77–9). Nomination is the result of linguistic practices and names things in conformity to the speaker’s needs (Siblot 1997: 52).

### 3. Corpus

In Poland, stark differences in approaches to sexuality are predominantly expressed in attitudes to sex education at school. Sex education has been part of the curriculum in various forms and with a variable intensity since 1969, and from the very beginning, it has aroused strong controversy and provoked heated debates involving not only sexologists, doctors and educators, but also catechists, ethicists, journalists, and politicians. For years, two major opposing standpoints, the secular and the Catholic, have been in conflict in this field (e.g. Kościańska 2017: 364). Before the end of communism in the democratic transition of 1989, sex education at school was dominated by the secular approach, which was a result of both the official state ideology and the development of the Polish school of sexology. However, since the 1990s, an education clearly inspired by Catholic ideology has been on the rise and gained ascendancy despite objections and opposition from many communities. The permanent conflict between the supporters and opponents of these two models is explicit in Polish sex education textbooks (Kościańska 2017: 6–10, 49–59).

The controversy also concerns popular science books (e.g. Evans 2015, Dymel-Trzebiatowska 2021; Haaland *et al.* 2022; Jamróz-Stolarska *et al.* 2023), that is, leisure reading books that “stand out for their strictly determined cognitive (informational) function as opposed to publications with a predominant aesthetic and/or entertaining function” (Wandel 2019: 15–16). Our research shows that despite strong competition from the new media, the role of books in sex education is not decreasing. Since the 1990s, several new publications on sexuality have been released every year, sometimes in conjunction with concerted information campaigns, such as *#sexed* signed by the well-known model Anja Rubik. Such books are part of popular science (popularisation) discourse, whose most important communication objective is to “make specialized knowledge accessible to non-specialists” (Poprawa 2016: 132). The communication model in popular science discourse addressed to children and young adults unfolds along a doubly unequal transmission-reception trajectory from specialists to non-specialists and from adult authors to young readers.

The corpus compiled for the purposes of our research comprises passages on masturbation from popular-science sex-education books for young people aged 15 and older published in Poland between 1990 and 2018. This period saw a mass influx of translations and a spectacular increase in the number of sex education books, following the liberalization of the publishing market and the abolition of censorship in Poland in the 1990s. The influence of translated books on the Polish discourse on sexuality was undeniable, as the uniform and usually neutral discourse of Polish sexologists was replaced by a motley of points of view spanning the poles of conservatism and liberalism, with all the intermediary positions (Paprocka and Wandel 2022b). Consequently, the 1990–2018 timeframe in Poland, characterised by intensive and varied discursive media production on the subject of sex education, corresponds to what FSDA scholars call a discursive moment (*moment discursif*) (e.g. Moirand 2004: 73). Our choice of publications for the older teenagers results from the fact that they address masturbation much more often than books for younger readers and represent the greatest ideological diversity<sup>4</sup>. This implies that the

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4 Publications for older teenagers have the lowest proportion of neutral texts, and as a consequence, the highest proportion of extreme views (in 1990–2018, the figures stood at 6% and 59%, respectively). In the other age groups, neutral and moderately conservative or liberal books are dominant, while books featuring extreme points of view are rare.

controversial theme of masturbation is approached from different perspectives, and that the practice itself is referred to in different ways.

In total, 29 popular-science sex education books for older teenagers were published in Poland in the period under study. Masturbation is addressed in 27 of them, in most of the cases only briefly, in one to a few paragraphs which are as a rule typographically separated by a subheading. In six books, the issue is discussed in an entire chapter of up to more than ten pages, and in some others, in an entire subchapter. Publications that devote most attention to masturbation are mainly books strongly informed by either conservative or liberal ideology.

Among the 27 analyzed books, as many as 17 are translations from various languages, mainly English (10 books), but also French (3), Swedish (2), German (1) and Italian (1). In translation research, this data makes it possible to determine the directions of import of specific ideas and ideologies and their dissemination in the target culture. In our further analysis, however, we adopt a point of view typical of the FSDA, according to which it is not important for the meaning constructed in the discourse whether the elements constituting it come from the non-translated or translated texts, therefore we did not distinguish such subcategories in the corpus<sup>5</sup>.

#### 4. Method

The FSDA holds that it is possible to grasp the meaning constructed in discourse by identifying the so-called designational paradigm (*paradigme désignationnel*) (Mortureux 1993), that is, the set of expressions used to name the same referent (*i.e.* an element of reality). These are primarily nominal groups introduced by definitional devices (verbs such as “to be,” “to mean,” “to constitute,” and the like, phrases such as “that is,” punctuation marks such as parentheses, syntactic structures such as coordination, *etc.*) and a variety of diaphoric elements (anaphoras and cataphoras).

1. Najprościej **masturbacja** oznacza **dotykane** lub **masowanie** swoich części intymnych dla przyjemności i często – ale nie zawsze – dla orgazmu (010: 40)<sup>6</sup>.  
To put it simply, **masturbation** means **touching** or **massaging** your intimate parts for pleasure, and often – but not always – for orgasm.
2. Teraz już rozumiesz, dlaczego **masturbacja** (...) jest **złem**, „**grzechem**” przeciwko samemu sobie i przeciwko miłości (004: 11).  
Now you understand why **masturbation** ... is therefore **evil**, a “**sin**” against yourself and against love.
3. Niewiele dziewczyn potrafi się jednak otwarcie przyznać do **masturbacji**. (...) A przecież robią **to** prawie wszyscy – mniej lub bardziej regularnie (014: 91).

5 Study on the same corpus taking into account the division into Polish (*i.e.* non-translated) and translated books: see Paprocka and Wandel 2022a.

6 All examples come from the analyzed corpus of Polish books on sex education. Under each example, we include its literal, philological translation into English. The numbers in parentheses refer to the book's place in the corpus annexed before the works cited.

However, very few girls manage to openly admit **masturbation**. ... However, almost everyone does **it** more or less regularly.

In the next stage of the procedure, the way in which the elements of the paradigm function on the semantic, semiotic, syntactic, and utterance levels are examined. For this purpose, we analyse the semantic relations of the elements of our designational paradigm (synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, hypernymy, metonymy, and metaphor), determine their place in the general structure of the message, investigate the syntactic contexts in which they appear, and identify the mechanisms of dialogism and discourse heterogeneity.

## 5. Towards a Discursive Meaning

The word *masturbacja* (masturbation) is undoubtedly the most frequent and most exposed element of the designational paradigm we identified. It appears in almost all the books in our sample (24 out of 27) and is usually in given heightened visibility, for example in typographically marked titles, subheadings, and headers and as an entry in indexes and glossaries. Its total count of 320 occurrences is ten times as much as that of *onanizm* (onanism), its synonym and the second most used word in the list (35 occurrences). Given this, *masturbacja* can be referred to as what FSDA calls the initial vocable (*vocable initial*, Mortureux 1993).

The high frequency of the initial vocable goes together with a considerable number of other coreferential vocables called reformulates (*reformulants*, Mortureux 1993), which have a low frequency of use. Our designational paradigm includes a total of almost 120 lexemes (including their complements), with fewer than half of them (only 45 units) appearing in more than one text.

The most numerous group of reformulates consists of nouns referring to more general concepts (77 out of 117, 232 occurrences out of 685). Some of these nouns are literal and connotatively neutral and are mostly hyperonyms of *mastrubacja*, such as *forma* (*życia erotycznego*) (form [of erotic life]). Others are based on metaphors that have positive connotations (e.g. *zabawa* [game, play, fun]) or negative connotations (e.g. *grzech* [sin]).

A quarter of the paradigm consists of verbal nouns (31 items, 64 occurrences), which indicates that masturbation is described in discourse as an action. Most of them literally point to the physical nature or purpose of masturbation, for example, *dotykane* (touching), *wywoływanie* (*przyjemnych doznań*) (inducing [pleasant sensations]), and *doprowadzenie* (*do zaspokojenia seksualnego*) (causing [sexual satisfaction]). Other gerunds carry a figurative (metaphorical) sense, for example, *odkrywanie* (*własnego ciała, seksualności*) (discovering [one's own body, sexuality]) and *organizowanie* (*prywatnej imprezy*) (holding [one's own private party]). Some of these forms are colloquial (*walenie konia* [wanking]).

The smallest group of reformulates is made up of three pronouns: *to* (it), *ona* (she),<sup>7</sup> and *coś* (something) (35 occurrences in total) and twelve synonyms, including *onanizm* (onanism) and *samogwałt* (self-rape) (42 occurrences) and the corresponding verbal nouns *masturbowanie się* (masturbating) and *onanizowanie się* (performing onanism) (10 occurrences in total). This vocabulary also comprises

<sup>7</sup> The noun *masturbacja* is feminine in Polish.

synonymic and quasi-synonymic neologisms, not to be found in the dictionaries and based on the prefixes *samo-* and *auto-* (self, auto-) (e.g. *autoerotyzm* [auto-eroticism]).

## 6. Axiological Characteristics

As their most typical feature, the lexical elements of the paradigm carry a widely varying axiological load. This axiological investment is expressed by an array means, such as (1) nouns (as central elements of nominal groups) whose meanings are unequivocally associated with either positive or negative values; (2) subjectively coloured modifiers attached to nouns; and (3) additional grammatical, stylistic, semiotic, and typographic devices.

### 6.1. Nouns with Explicit Connotations

In our corpus, the word *masturbacja* is predominantly accompanied by nouns that convey a direct negative assessment of the practice. They form 25 expressions that appear 63 times in total. This set of phrases contains expressions that are associated with a deviation from ethical principles (*grzech* [sin], *zło* [evil], and *występek* [misdeed]) or norms (*wynaturzenie* [degeneration] and *zboczenie* [perversion]), a body dysfunction (*choroba* [disease] and *ułomność* [defect]), a character flaw (*ślabość* [weakness]), an obstacle that needs to be overcome (*problem* [problem] and *kryzys* [crisis]), or a psychological dysfunction (*nałóg* [addiction], *obsesja* [obsession], and *przymus* [compulsion]). Some pejorative metaphorical terms (*ciężar* [burden]) also appear, and masturbation is occasionally described as an act of violence (*wyrządzanie krzywdy* [doing harm]).

The paradigm also contains positive expressions, but they are twice fewer (13) and rarer (27 occurrences) in the corpus. These expressions encompass a group of reformulates associated with pleasure (*zabawa* [play, game, fun] and *rozrywka* [entertainment]) and related feelings (*zadowolenie* [contentment/satisfaction] and *zaspokojenie* [satisfaction/gratification]). Masturbation is also depicted as a means of improvement (*trening* [training]) or experiencing something new (*odkrywanie* [discovery]). Finally, there also are highly charged expressions that evoke universally respected values, such as *miłość* (love) and *dar* (gift) (in the meaning of a gift received).

### 6.2. Subjective Modifiers

The axiological variability of meanings constructed in discourse is also connected with the choice of modifiers to go with nouns. Subjective viewpoint is usually expressed by subjective adjectives, including affective and evaluative lexemes situated on a good-bad axis (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1980: 84). They can either strengthen (examples 4 and 5) or soften (example 6) the value-loaded nouns they modify, and they can also give varying axiological slants to neutral nouns (examples 7 and 8).

4. Ale ksiądz powiedział, że to **straszliwy grzech** (011: 127).  
But the priest said it was a **dreadful sin**.
5. Przez całe wieki poważni uczeni uważali masturbację za **okropny występpek** (024: 124).

For centuries, serious scholars have considered masturbation a **terrible crime**.

6. Masturbacja (...) jest zawsze **pewnym zranieniem emocjonalnym**, który może rzutować na dalszy rozwój psycho-seksualny (002: 128).

Masturbation ... is always a **certain emotional injury** that can affect one's further psycho-sexual development.

7. (...) jeśli nic albo niewiele wiesz o swojej lechtaczce, to właśnie masturbacja **jest znakomitym, zdrowym i uznanym sposobem** poznania własnego ciała (026: 179).

... if you know nothing or little about your clitoris, masturbation is an **excellent, healthy, and recognized way** of discovering your body.

8. Czasem dziewczynom wydaje się, że masturbacja, gdy nie jest się w związku, to **przykry sposób** na wypełnienie samotności (014: 95).

Girls sometimes have the impression that when you are not in a relationship, masturbation is a **gloomy way** to fill your loneliness.

In the discourse on masturbation, the adjective *naturalny* (natural) receives a positive meaning, and *niedojrzały* (immature), a negative one. They usually modify neutral nouns, providing them with an axiological colouring:

9. Rozumiem, że pytanie dotyczy masturbacji. Dziś już wiadomo, że zachowania takie są **naturalnym etapem** dojrzewania seksualnego (005: 125).

I understand that the question is about masturbation. It is now known that this behavior is a **natural stage** towards sexual maturity.

10. Nie jest prawdą, że onanizm jest **niedojrzałą formą** seksu (...) (027: 145).

It is not true that onanism is an **immature form** of sexuality ...

### 6.3. Other Linguistic and Non-linguistic Means

The axiological tenor of reformulates may also be strengthened by grammatical, stylistic, semiotic, typographic, and graphic devices. Example 11 relies on both grammatical (the superlative form of the adjectives) and stylistic operations (the hyperbole constructed by accumulating three adjectival superlatives):

11. Dla nastolatków **masturbacja** jest ponadto jedną z **najtańszych, najbezpieczniejszych i najskuteczniejszych** metod rozładowywania napięcia (012: 47).

For teenagers, **masturbation** is also one of the **cheapest, safest, and most effective** ways of relieving stress.

Linguistic means are sometimes accompanied by non-linguistic means, related to the multimodality of the books. Example 12 combines operations that are lexical (the strong lexeme *miłość* [love]), grammatical (the superlative adjective), stylistic (the hyperbole: *największa ze wszystkich* [the greatest of all]), semiotic (a reformulate in the chapter title), graphic (the top position on the page), and

typographic (the font size). The reception of the message is also influenced by the coarse illustration of copulating animals, on the page adjacent to the text.

12. Masturbacja. Największa ze wszystkich miłości (012: 47).

Masturbation. The greatest of all loves.

Graphic design is also employed to strengthen the message in example 13. The approbatory verbal message about auto-eroticism is rendered in large characters against the background of a realistic photo in assorted colors on a double-page spread.

13. Masturbacja to sposób na poznanie swojego ciała, pomału i bez stresu. Własny dotyk pozwala nam określić, co sprawia nam największą przyjemność... (021: 75).

Masturbation is a way to get to know your body slowly and without stress. Touching yourself helps you find out what gives you the most pleasure... .

## 7. Dialogism

The axiological bipolarity of the designational paradigm of the word *masturbacja* is coupled with the clearly dialogical nature of the discourse on masturbation. Dialogism is an inherent feature of any discourse, since discourse, as observed by Mikhail Bakhtin ([1975] 1978: 102), is never isolated, given that it is constructed in relation to earlier statements and, at the same time, leaves its own traces in later discursive productions. Therefore, the words one utters are always the words of others. In the discourse on masturbation, dialogism is emphatically present and manifests in (1) enunciative heterogeneity, (2) polemical negation, and (3) polemical neologisms.

### 7.1. Enunciative Heterogeneity

The enunciative heterogeneity (*hétérogénéité énonciative*) of discourse stems from the involvement of multiple speakers or “enunciators” (Moirand 2007: 10–12). When naming the practice of masturbation, the authors of popular science books on sexuality not only articulate their own points of view, but also cite the opinions of others and take a position on these appraisals. In doing so, they either refer to individuals they consider relevant experts and identify them by name (examples 14 and 15) or reference them in general terms (examples 15 and 16) or marshal other authorities, moral (example 17) and even “superhuman” (example 18) ones.

14. Z jednej strony **David Wilkerson w swej książce „This Is Loving?” („Czy to jest miłość?”)** stwierdza: „Masturbacja nie jest Bożym sposobem rozładowania popędu seksualnego. Nie jest ona zachowaniem moralnym i nie jest w Piśmie dozwolona (...). Masturbacja nie jest niewinną zabawą”. Z drugiej strony **Charlie Shed, bardzo szanowany autor chrześcijański w dziedzinie seksu i chodzenia ze sobą**, nazywa masturbację „darem Boga”. Twierdzi, że „może być ona pozytywnym czynnikiem w twoim całościowym rozwoju” i idzie dalej,



mówiąc, że „masturbacja nastolatków jest lepsza niż ich współzycie (...)”. Mój pogląd znajduje się gdzieś pomiędzy tymi dwoma skrajnościami.

On the one hand, **in his book “This Is Loving?” David Wilkerson writes:** “Masturbation is not a gift of God for sex drives. Masturbation is not moral behavior and is not condoned in the Scriptures. (...) Masturbation is not harmless fun.” On the other hand, **Charlie Shed, a long-respected Christian author on sex and dating**, calls masturbation a “gift of God.” He says that it “can be a positive factor in your total development,” and further, that “teenage masturbation is preferable to teenage intercourse (...)”. My own view is somewhere between these two extremes.

15. **Według Raportu Kinseya** – napisanego w czasach, gdy onanizowali się twoi dziadkowie, ale aktualizowanego co jakiś czas – do onanizmu przyznaje się 98 procent studentów i 44 procent studentek. **Wielu innych badaczy** próbowało przedstawić dokładniejsze liczby, ale tylko tracili cenny czas, który mogliby przeznaczyć na masturbację (012: 48).

**According to the Kinsey Report** – written when your grandparents were masturbating, but updated from time to time – 98% of male students and 44% of female students admit they masturbate. **Many other researchers** have tried to present more accurate numbers, but they have only wasted valuable time they could have spent masturbating.

16. **Niektórzy „specjaliści”** nawet optują za autostymulację (026: 179).

**Some “specialists”** even recommend auto-stimulation.

17. **Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego** stwierdza, iż: „**Magisterium Kościoła**, zgodnie ze stałą tradycją, jak i **wyzucie moralne wiernych** potwierdziły bez najmniejszej wątpliwości, że masturbacja jest aktem w sposób istotny i poważny nieuporządkowanym (...)” (002: 133).

**The Catechism of the Catholic Church** states that: “**The Magisterium of the Church**, following a constant tradition, as well as **the moral sense of the faithful** have confirmed without the slightest doubt that masturbation is an intrinsically and seriously disordered act...”

18. Gdy masturbacja prowadzi do niekontrolowanego fantazjowania, **Bóg** nazywa ją grzechem (003: 111).

When masturbation leads a guy or girl to have uncontrolled fantasies, **God** calls it sin.

The dialogic nature of discourse is also linked to its variability. Specifically, because discourse is constructed in relation to earlier enunciations, later enunciations bear the mark of earlier discursive productions. This variability is clearly identifiable in the discourse on masturbation. Authors of sex education books often refer to views endorsed in the past, outline their evolution, and position themselves in relation to them. This is particularly the case when authors want to portray masturbation as a beneficial (or, at least, harmless) practice and take issue with deprecatory opinions<sup>8</sup> widespread in society and older literature (examples 19 and 20).

<sup>8</sup> The first popular science publications devoted (in their entirety, to boot) to masturbation appeared in Europe and North America in the eighteenth century and only targeted adult readers. Their authors deplored masturbation as a scourge, a suicidal act, the source of sundry diseases (e.g. Kościańska 2017: 65–72). When the discourse on masturbation addressed to young people developed at the beginning of the twentieth century, the censorious attitudes did not really change. Depending

19. **Przez całe wieki poważni uczeni** uważali masturbację za okropny występki. **Mówiło się**, że jest przyczyną gruźlicy, pomieszania zmysłów czy paraliżu.

**For centuries, serious scholars** have considered masturbation a terrible crime. **It was said** to be the cause of tuberculosis, confusion of the senses, and paralysis (024: 124).

20. Na temat szkodliwości masturbacji **wypisano hektolitry atramentu (najczarniejszego zresztą)**. Czytając **pisma naukowe z przełomu XIX i XX wieku**, można odnieść wrażenie, że masturbacja – biorąc pod uwagę jej powszechność – doprowadzi ludzkość na skraj przepaści, o osobistych dramatach nie wspominając (017: 44–5).

**Hectolitres of ink (the blackest one, of course)** were spilled on the harmfulness of masturbation. Reading **scientific works from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century**, we can have the impression that masturbation – given its universality – will lead humanity to the edge of the abyss, not to mention personal dramas.

## 7.2. Polemical Negation

The intrinsic dialogism of the discourse on masturbation is also evinced by the very frequent incidence of negation in the definitions it uses. It is the kind of negation that Oswald Ducrot calls “polemical,” that is, one “intended to refute the opposite opinion,” where “the positive attitude to which the speaker is opposed is internal to the discourse in which it is contested” (Ducrot 1987: 218). Ducrot notes that “most of the negative utterances... frame their statements as a clash of two antagonistic attitudes: one positive, attributed to Enunciator E1, [and] the other, rejecting the former, attributed to [Enunciator] E2” (Ducrot 1987: 215). In a negative utterance, the place of the former enunciator is already marked in the sentence.

In the discourse on masturbation, writers deliberately cite various both past and present points of view commonly upheld in society so as to rebut them and highlight their own understanding of the concept. Enunciator (E2), whose point of view is negated, can either be referred to in the text (example 21) or remain implicit (example 22).

21. Masturbacja jest praktycznie czymś powszechnym. **Nie jest ona grzechem ciężkim, jak sądzą niektórzy ludzie**, czasami jednak może mieć złe strony (003: 110).

Masturbation is practically universal. **It isn't the gross sin some think it is**, yet at times it can have a negative side to it.

22. Masturbacja **nie jest niewinną zabawą** (003: 110).

Masturbation **is not harmless fun**.

## 7.3. Polemical Neologisms

Countering some points of view in the discourse on masturbation also entails questioning certain words used to name it. The most frequent criticism concerns the term *samogwałt* (self-rape), which was

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on respective authors' beliefs, masturbation was presented as a source of serious diseases or a sin. After the Second World War, books devoted exclusively to masturbation gave way to more general popular books on sexuality, where – with the development of sexology and gradual change in morality – the discourse on masturbation became more varied and less one-sidedly condemnatory.

widespread in the 19<sup>th</sup> and up to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries because one of its elements (rape) directly refers to violence. Some writers consider its use “illogical” and “meaningless” (example 23) or “ugly” (example 24). Such critiques sometimes result in inventing neologisms, with *samomiłość* (self-love) being an excellent case in point as a coinage constructed in direct opposition to the repudiated lexeme *samogwałt*. Morphologically, the two words have the same structure, and semantically, they are antonymic. In this way, the axiological opposition has been achieved, and the neologism can be treated as a manifesto of the liberal approach to masturbation (example 24).

23. Niektórzy czynność tę nazywają **samogwałtem**, lecz określenie to jest nielogiczne i zupełnie pozbawione sensu (011: 126).

Some people call this practice **self-rape**, but the term is illogical and completely meaningless.

24. Kiedyś o autoerotyzmie mówiło się brzydko „**samogwałt**”. Wolę określenie „**samomiłość**”, bo oddaje ono skupienie uwagi na sobie i poczucie się ze sobą dobrze (021: 121).

In the past, when talking about auto-eroticism, people used the ugly word “**self-rape**.” I prefer the term “**self-love**,” because it reflects focusing on oneself and feeling good about oneself.

## 8. Conclusion

A popular Polish dictionary definition holds that masturbation denotes “satisfying sex drive without the participation of a partner” (*Słownik* s.a.). This simple and neutral definition, which conveys both the purpose and the physical nature of masturbation, stands in stark contrast to the discursive meanings of the word constructed in popular science books for teenagers. Based on selected FSDA tools, the findings of our study imply that masturbation is comprehended less as a practice and more as a phenomenon to be clarified and evaluated. Statements on and discussions of masturbation indeed reflect a wide range of attitudes: from utter depreciation to complete acceptance, with multiple axiologically mixed or seemingly neutral opinions stretching between the two poles.

The construction of the axiological aspect of the meaning begins on the lexical level. The simplest and most explicit messages rely on lexical choices where *masturbacja* is replaced with words evoking clearly positive or negative connotations. Sometimes, the message is reinforced by deliberately selected typographic and graphic devices. More nuanced images of masturbation are produced when it is depicted in basically neutral words and/or expressions enhanced by value-loaded modifiers. Various – sometimes conflicting – viewpoints can be identified in such an ostensibly impartial discourse, which professes merely to communicate information.

However, on the utterance level, the evaluation takes place through the heterogeneity of the discourse, as embodied in the constant dialogue with and assessments of past and/or present views. This heterogeneity manifests itself in frequent and direct references to authorities, in the dismissal of stereotypical connotations and old-fashioned or contemporaneous beliefs, and in neologisms minted in opposition to the unaccepted expressions circulating in the Polish language.

The different means harnessed to express personal convictions in sex education books indicate their writers’ more or less conscious intentions to construct their own social meaning of masturbation.

The axiological differentiation, which is a typical feature of discourses on controversial topics, is triggered both by old beliefs and by the coexistence in contemporary society of several different value systems that inform the authors' efforts to educate their young audiences.

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