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QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF THE GENERATIONAL CHANGES AMONG RELATIONSHIP HABITS IN HIGHLY EDUCATED HUNGARIAN POPULATION

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Summary

Introduction. Forming of romantic relationships is part of the maturing process of adolescents. Nowadays the most of the marriages are ending with divorce. It causes the decline of Hungarian population.

Aim. The aim of our study was to see, how dating customs and cultural norms changed during different generations of highly educated Hungarian population in different genders.

Material and methods. We made four generations of highly educated participants fill questioners. All questions were about the age of adolescence of the participant.

Results. We found due to emancipation the dynamics of relationships changed. Physical contact is getting more accepted, and the gap of desired physical connection is getting narrower between genders at the first date. Meanwhile the number of romantic relationships of current teenagers decreased to the 70's adolescents. The most important place to get to know their significant other for a teenager is school, like it was before. Interestingly in the age of internet source of information about relationships is still peers.

Conclusions. The role of educational facilities cannot be overemphasized to bring up adults with ability to form successful relationships. For a healthy marriage we propose to involve peer students to educate the peers about romantic relationships and sexuality. Altogether this can help to form better marriages, less divorce in conclusion more childbirth.

Keywords: adolescent, relationship, generations, sexuality, dating

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s the ratio of singles in the whole Hungarian population has steadily increased (from 17.7 to 32.6%), based on the Hungarian Central Statistical Office data, while the number of divorcees also shows a steady, though slower increase (from 4.7 to 11.6%) (1).

The forming of relationships in the traditional Hungarian society were determined by different rites (2), just like in any other European country. The social interactions between the different genders took place in a controlled fashion, while the social norms (e.g. customs, moral norms) regulating these were basically influenced by social stratification. From the second half of the 20th century the social rules have been changed and loosened gradually, thanks to the radical changes in the Hungarian society after the Word War II. The most influencing changes were the urbanization, the mass-employment of women, the generalization of dual-earner family model, the gradual increase in the education of women etc. One of the consequences of these revolutionary changes was the emergence of mixed education from the sixties (3). All these effects promoted and intensified the inter- and intra-generational mobility.

Based on Hungarian demographic and sociological studies, the changes of relationships have the largest effect on fertility, and the ratio of single-parent families, which in turn lead to the modification of social norms, values and customs (4, 5). These fundamental changes in traditional norms are caused by the fragmentation of traditional communities and augment of individualism. The loosening or lack of norms weakens the adaptation to community standards (6, 7). As a result, today's Hungarian youth tend to merry later, but already 10% of the 15-year-olds have a boyfriend/girlfriend (8).

The first relationships, as a key part of maturation, are formed in adolescence simultaneously with observable physiological changes during puberty (9-11). The number of relationships differs by gender. Boys have more relationships and they form them at an earlier age than girls (8, 12, 13). The normal behavioural patterns essential for a normal relationship are developed during adolescence, which is a preliminary requirement of successful marriage. Nowadays the majority of Hungarian teenagers still seek marriage and search for a partner with whom he/she can live his/her life together (14). The knowledge of dating habits is mainly coming from peers (15). In addition the media has a very important role. Especially the television series are far-reaching source of dating and relationship models (16, 17). Young people still prefer appearance to social status (18). In parallel with changes in social values the supporting character of relationships becomes more important over sexuality (19).

AIM

In our study we were interested to know how the relationship patterns, as well as the related knowledge and attitudes change in successive generations; how the alteration of social norms can be perceived in relationship habits; if we can see the effect of change of traditional society norms in relationship customs; how the dating customs, dating places, frequency of relationships of nowadays teenagers changed compared to their parents or grandparents. Best of our knowledge there is no such study in Hungary which asks different age groups about their teenage dating customs.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

We used both open-ended and closed-ended questions containing self-completed questionnaires for the study. Participants completed the questioners anonymously. The questions were validated with preliminary interviews. The questions in all age group aimed at the participants teenage customs. The questions aimed the dating sites, the source of relationship and sexual knowledge, the preferences, and the relevance of the opinion of parents and friends. Besides these we studied the importance of the first date and sexual behaviour on first date, and we were also interested how the numbers of relationships changed between generations.

We studied four age groups. All four age groups were highly educated. The age groups were the following: age group 1: current teenagers, students of an elite high school from Budaörs between age 14-19 (median: 15, standard deviation 1.25), n = 327; age group 2: university students of Semmelweis University in Budapest between age 20-25 (median: 21, standard deviation: 1.34), n = 328; age group 3: white collar workers between age 25-65 (median: 43, standard deviation: 9.19), n = 350; age group 4: elderly people, retired professionals over 65 (median: 79, standard deviation: 8.03), n = 264. In total we processed 1269 questioners. The study was carried out between November 2014 and January 2015. The non-response rate was less than 5%.

The statistical evaluation of responses was performed by IBM SPSS Statistic Base version 20.0.0. We applied Chi square tests, ANOVA, two sample t-test or Bernoulli test depending on the type of data. Null hypothesis was always that there was no correlation or difference between groups. In case of Bernoulli tests we assumed that in each category the various responses had the same ratio.

RESULTS

Place of contact making

The place of contact highly depended on gender ($p < 0.001$ Chi square test) and age group ($p < 0.001$ Chi square test).

The respondents in all age groups generally met at school. The preference of any other place in all age groups was significantly lower, but the second place depended on age groups. The age group 1 preferred house parties, the age group 3 preferred discos, meanwhile the age group 2 and 4 met at every venue (libraries, ice skating rinks, etc.) as a teenager. If we split the different age groups by genders, the results slightly differ. Women in the age group 4 prefer before their schools other places like libraries, ice-rinks, staircases of houses etc. where boys addressed them. This result is not surprising, since in the teenage years of the elderly population mixed education was not common in Hungary (3). Because of this it is surprising, that the school was a place to make contact for 25% of elderly participants (tab. 1).

Source of relationship knowledge

There is a strong correlation between the gender and the sources of relationship knowledge (Chi square test $p < 0.001$). Women significantly relied more on their friends than men. Interestingly it depended also on age group (tab. 2). The currently elderly or university student men got the knowledge of relationships from friends, but the current adults (age group 3) from their own experiences. Women got their knowledge about relationships from their friends, except in age group 4. We assume, that in their youth the sexuality and relationships were taboo (20), and they did not even talk about it with girlfriends, so their own experience was the only source of information (this hypothesis requires further research).

Behind the gender specific difference can stand evolutionary atavism. Women had to care for each other. The survival and parental care would be the most effective in groups of same gender peers. The source of knowledge would be also these peers. Parents often complain that their children prefer to believe in their friends then their

Table 1. Place of contact making in different age groups and genders.

	Age group											
	1			2			3			4		
	Σ %	#M %	#F %	Σ %	#M %	#F %	Σ %	#M %	#F %	Σ %	#M %	#F %
School	72*	26*	46*	139*	26*	113*	162*	66*	96*	90*	20*	70
	37.1	28.6	44.7	48.9	53.1	48.1	50.9	55.0	48.5	27.7	33.3	26.4
House party	38	17	21	24	10	14	36	18	18	20	5	15
	19.6	18.7	20.4	8.5	20.4	6.0	11.3	15.0	9.1	6.2	8.3	5.7
Discos	23	18	5	18	0	18	42	6	36	50	15	35
	11.9	19.8	4,9	6.3	0.0	7.7	13.2	5.0	18.2	15.4	25.0	13.2
Events	22	9	13	10	0	10	12	0	12	30	0	30
	11.3	9.9	12.6	3.5	0.0	4.3	3.8	0.0	6.1	9.2	0.0	11.3
Trainings	16	9	7	30	0	30	6	0	6	20	0	20
	8.2	9.9	6.8	10.6	0.0	12.8	1.9	0.0	3.0	6.2	0.0	7.5
Pubs	4	3	1	12	2	10	0	0	0	15	15	0
	2.1	3.3	1.0	4.2	4.1	4.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.6	25.0	0.0
Extracurricular activities	1	0	1	2	0	2	6	6	0	5	0	5
	0.5	0.0	1.0	0.7	0.0	0.9	1.9	5.0	0.0	1.5	0.0	1.9
Pop concerts	5	2	3	10	0	10	18	18	0	0	0	0
	2.6	2.2	2.9	3.5	0.0	4.3	5.7	15.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Classical concerts	0	0	0	2	0	2	6	6	0	10	0	10
	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.9	1.9	5.0	0.0	3.1	0.0	3.8
Other (e.g. library, by parents, internet, staircase etc.)	13	7	6	37	11	26	30	0	30	85	5	80*
	6.7	7.7	5.8	13.0	22.4	11.1	9.4	0.0	15.2	26.2	8.3	30.2

Σ – sum of specific age group, #M – number of males, #F – number of females, * – the highest answer of each age group and in each gender. Note the constant importance of school.

parents (21, 22). Man hunted and in the fight for survival interdependence and experience appeared as well.

It seems to be obvious that regardless of generation the most dominant source of information is friends/girlfriens. It would be a strategic innovation that well-prepared students keep sex education to their peers instead of teachers, parents or other media. The same method can be applied in case of drug and crime prevention. This methodology is sucessfully used in Great Britain (23).

The type of the chosen partner

There is a correlation between gender, age group and type of chosen partners ($p < 0.001$). Significantly more men chose stupid-attractive (001 Chi square test $p < 0.001$), while significantly more women chose sweet-ugly ($p < 0.001$). Men preferred the look, but kindness was more important to women (tab. 3).

If we look at, how the choices of “attractive” differed between age groups, we will see the impact of emancipation. The female population of age group 4

Table 2. Source of information about relationships.

Age group	Gender	Source of information about relationships					
		Friends	Own experience	Films/ television	Books/ magazines	Relatives	Other (teachers, internet)
1	Male	48	62*	5	1	11	17
		33.3%	43.1%	3.5%	0.7%	7.6%	11.8%
	Female	73*	41	22	7	13	21
		41.2%	23.2%	12.4%	4.0%	7.3%	11.9%
2	Male	29*	16	1	2	4	0
		55.8%	30.8%	1.9%	3.8%	7.7%	0.0%
	Female	129*	52	24	10	24	8
		52.2%	21.1%	9.7%	4.0%	9.7%	3.2%
3	Male	30	78*	6	0	6	0
		25.0%	65.0%	5.0%	0.0%	5.0%	0.0%
	Female	90*	24	6	48	18	12
		45.5%	12.1%	3.0%	24.2%	9.1%	6.1%
4	Male	30*	10	5	10	5	0
		50.0%	16.7%	8.3%	16.7%	8.3%	0.0%
	Female	70	95*	5	5	70	20
		26.4%	35.8%	1.9%	1.9%	26.4%	7.5%

*The highest percentage of answers in each age group and in each gender

Table 3. The distribution of characteristic-pairs preference of respondents by gender.

Characteristic-pairs	Gender		Total
	Man	Women	
	n = 354	n = 861	n = 1215
Intelligent-ugly	59	181	240
	16.7%	21.0%	19.8%
Stupid-attractive	149*	103	252
	42.1%	12.0%	20.7%
Sweet-ugly	92	336*	428
	26.0%	39.0%	35.2%
Nasty-attractive	54	241	295
	15.3%	28.0%	24.3%

*The difference between genders

preferred inner values like kindness or intelligence compared to other age groups, but the male population always preferred "the pretty women". Due to the effects of emancipation, sexual freedom and media (commercials, films) began to spread among girls the preference of appearance. Interestingly this trend stopped at current teenage girls (age group 1). 70.4% of boys preferred the attractive partners, meanwhile only the 47.6% of girls (fig. 1).

The place of first date

There is no correlation between the gender and the place of first date (Chi square test p = 0.0278). However there is a strong correlation between the age group and the place of date. For all age groups, except for age group 4 the park was the preferred place for a first date, but for age group 4 cinema, home or any other place (library, church, ice-rink) was also an appropriate place for the first date beside parks (tab. 4).

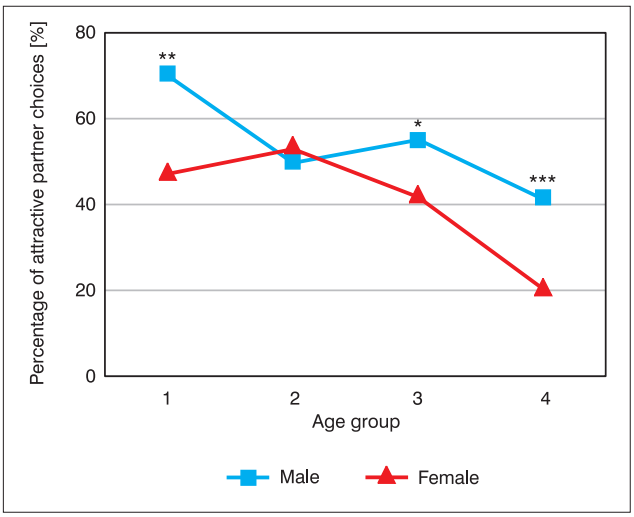

Fig. 1. Percentage of "attractive" choices in age groups. Men: 1. age group n = 122, 2. age group n = 52, 3. age group n = 120, 4. age group n = 60; women: 1. age group n = 151, 2. age group n = 247, 3. age group n = 198, 4. age group n = 265. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001 Chi square test

Table 4. The distribution of preferences of respondents by age groups.

Place	Age group				Total
	1	2	3	4	
	n = 324	n = 299	n = 318	n = 325	n = 1266
Park	141*	156*	126*	65	488
	43.5%	52.2%	39.6%	20.0%	38.5%
Cinema	75	75	90	70*	310
	23.1%	25.1%	28.3%	21.5%	24.5%
Restaurant	23	34	6	20	83
	7.1%	11.4%	1.9%	6.2%	6.6%
Theatre	11	6	6	25	48
	3.4%	2.0%	1.9%	7.7%	3.8%
House party	12	4	12	30	58
	3.7%	1.3%	3.8%	9.2%	4.6%
Any	33	12	42	15	102
	10.2%	4.0%	13.2%	4.6%	8.1%
Other	25	8	18	50	101
	7.7%	2.7%	5.7%	15.4%	8.0%
Disco/pub	4	4	0	0	8
	1.2%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	.6%
Home	0	0	18	50	68
	0.0%	0.0%	5.7%	15.4%	5.4%

*The highest percentage of each age group

Matchmaking

Matchmaking happened in all age groups, but the most common was in age group 2 and 3 (Bernoulli test $p > 0.001$ and $p = 0.003$ respectively), but it was not the case in age group 1 (Bernoulli test $p = 0.868$) or age group 4 (Bernoulli test $p = 0.059$). The matchmakers were generally friends. In age group 4 relatives and parents were as important matchmakers as friends (Bernoulli test $p > 0.05$ against 0.5). Matchmaking was generally not successful its efficiency was less than 50 percent (tab. 5).

Importance of parents' and friends' opinion

Importance of parents' and friends' opinion on a partner depended strongly on gender. For women the opinions of parents were significantly more important than for men in all age groups, expect the second age group in which there was no difference between men and women.

The importance of parents' opinion about the partner increased between age groups in men, but did not change in women ($p < 0.05$, $p > 0.05$ respectively, ANOVA test). The importance of peers' opinion was equally important for men in all age groups ($p > 0.05$ ANOVA test). The importance of opinion of peers about partner was more important for women than men in age groups 2 and 3. We hypothesize the higher importance of parents or peers opinion in age group 2 is the projection of lacking emotional support by family, because the members of age group 2, university students, has just left family and trying to adapt to challenges of adult life (fig. 2).

Importance of first date

There is a significant difference between men and women in the judgement of the severity of first date. Men consider the first date significantly more serious than women ($p < 0.05$ two sample t-test), but the degree of its manifestation differs in the different age groups. Age group 3 deemed the first date the most important. Interestingly in this age group women considered it more important than men. In other age groups men considered the first date more important, but the difference is only significant in the age group 1 and trend-like in age group 4 ($p < 0.05$, $p = 0.096$ respectively two sample t-test) (fig. 3).

How far would you go at the first date?

During the first date more than half of men as teenagers would go at least to kissing, or as far as possible. In case of women "touching hands" was the most frequent answer ($p < 0.001$ Chi square test). The difference between genders is getting narrow. The current teenage girls would go to kissing ($p < 0.001$ Chi square test),

Table 5. Matchmaking.

		Did somebody help matchmaking?					Total
		No	Yes				
			Who helped the matchmaking?			Rate of success	
			Friends	Relatives	Other		
Age group	1	124	144	8	8	36	284
		43.7%	50.7%	2.8%	2.8%	22.5%	
	2	101	180	16	2	58	299
		33.8%	60.2%	5.4%	0.7%	29.3%	
	3	132	174	12	0	90	318
		41.5%	54.7%	3.8%	0.0%	48.4%	
	4	180	65	85	0	30	330
		54.5%	19.7%	25.8%	0.0%	20.0%	
Total		537	563	121	10	214	1231
		43.6%	45.7%	9.8%	0.8%	30.8%	

The percentage of different source of matchmaking in different age groups and their success.

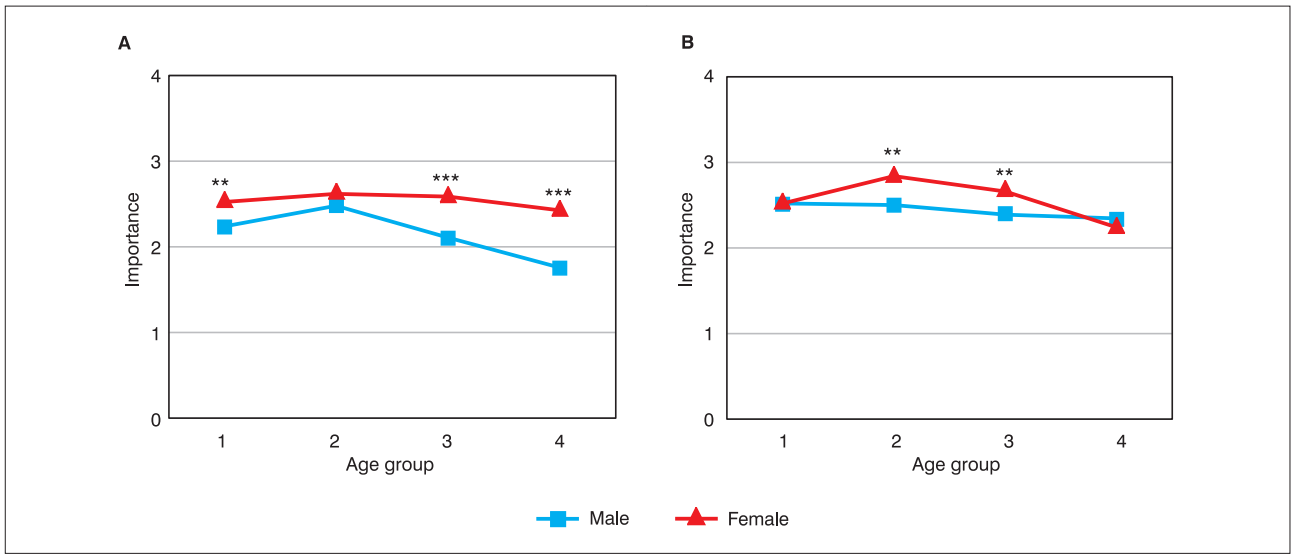

Fig. 2. Importance of parent's and peers' opinion about partner. A. Importance of parents' opinion on the partner B. importance of peers' opinion on the partner.
Women: 1. age group n=170, 2. age group n= 247, 3. age group n=198, 4. age group n=265, total n=880; men: 1. age group n=148, 2. age group n= 52, 3. age group n=120, 4. age group n=60, total n=380.
** p<0,01 *** p<0,001 two sample t-test

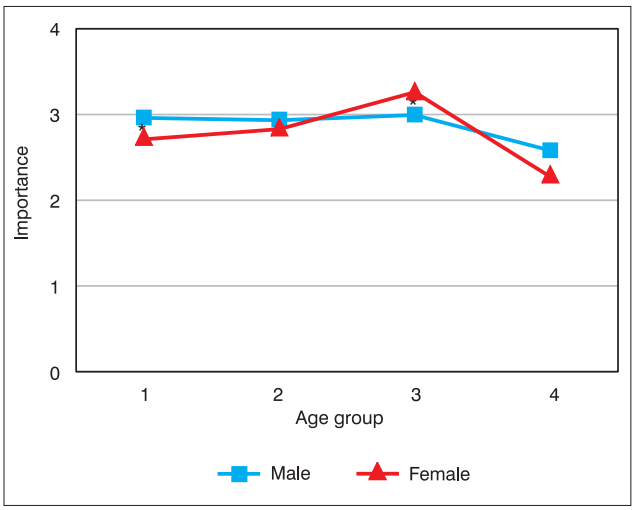

Fig. 3. Importance of first date in different age groups.
Women: 1. age group n = 170, 2. age group n = 247, 3. age group n = 198, 4. age group n = 265, total n = 880; men: 1. age group n = 144, 2. age group n = 52, 3. age group n = 120, 4. age group n = 60, total n = 376.
*p < 0.05 two sample t-test between genders

meanwhile for the current teenage boys and for the university students the "as far as" option is not favourable (p < 0.001 Chi square test) (fig. 4).

It is an evolutionary masculine quality for men to spread their genes as much as possible. That's why men think the first date is more important, and they would start a sexual intercourse. On the contrary women search for a trustworthy, family providing partner, which is not possible to determine at the first date.

Number and length of relationships

There is a correlation between the number of relationships and age group (p < 0.001). Teenagers in age group 1 had much less relationships compared to any other age group. However this can be misleading, because they are not at the end of their teenage years and an increase in the number of relationships is expected. For this reason we used only the 18 and 19-year-old boys' and girls' data to calculate the number of relationships in comparisons. Interestingly age group 3 had most relationships. They are the post adolescents (24), members of the generation, whose musical and clothing taste differed from their parents radically. They started to collect sexual experience earlier and they went out at a younger age than their parents. They lived in the age of student rebellions and freedom of speech. These effects reached Hungary over the Iron Curtain in the form of the Hippy movement and beat music. Besides the cultural difference the usage of oral contraceptives was spreading, causing increased importance of mutual enjoyment of sexual intercourse (25). In Hungary the religious ethics started to be pushed back by proletarian, communist ethics. The latter preferred the equal rights of genders and freedom of sexuality (26) (fig. 5).

After the age of rebellion the current teenagers and university students became more consolidated. They have fewer relationships. Interestingly, members of age group 2 had the highest percentage of long relationships. Nowadays teenagers have shorter relationships mostly less than a month. Only every fifth teenager have long relationships. The media is a possible factor in the decrease in long term relationships among teenagers, because it suggests that relationships are easily disposable (16, 17).

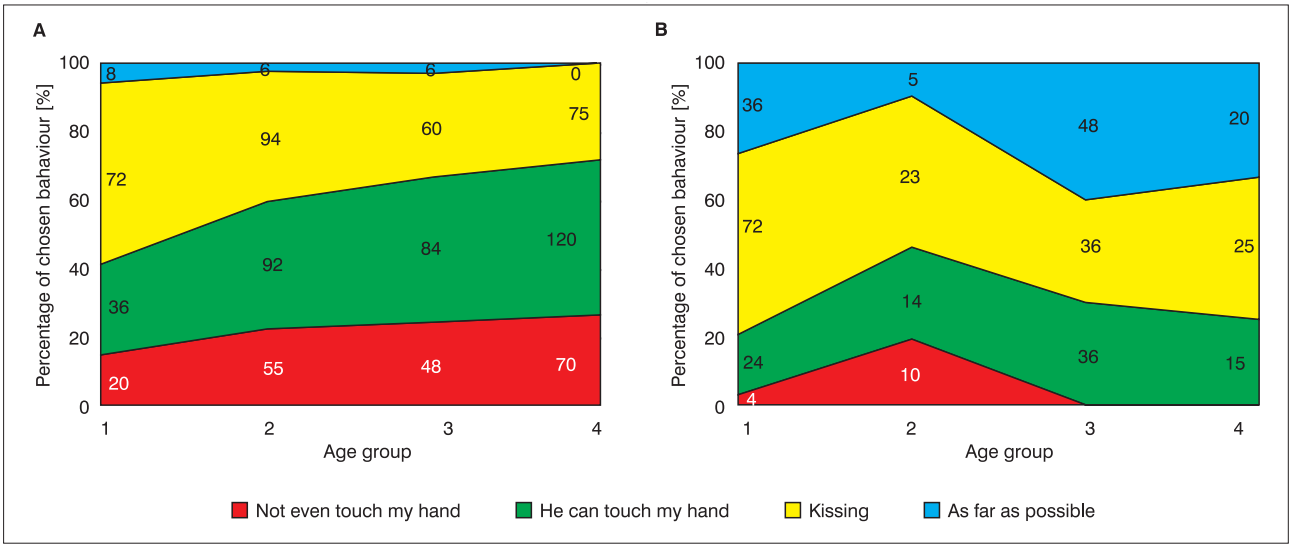

Fig. 4. How far would you go at first date? a) Women as girls, b) men as boys. Note the simillar percentage of kissing between the genders in age group 1.

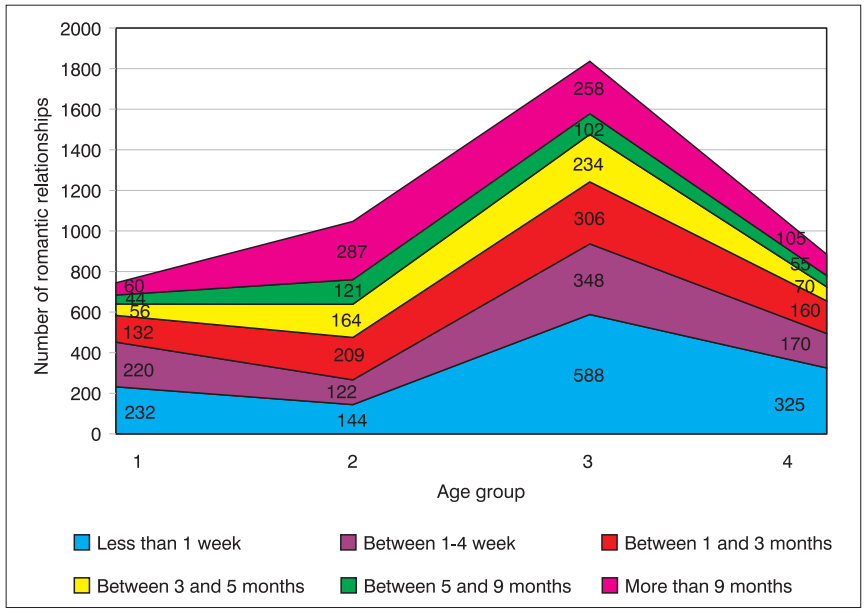

Fig. 5. Number of different types of relationships depending on age group. Long term relationships: brown and shades, short term relationships green and shades. There is a significant difference (Chi square test $p < 0.001$). Note the peak at age group 3 and the decrease of relationships and decreased percentage of long term relationships in age group 1.

The genders differ in the number of relationships. Boys have more relationship than girls in all age groups ($p < 0.05$ two sample t-test).

DISCUSSION

The number of relationships as a teenager has a peak at age group 3, because sexual freedom came through the Iron Contain to Hungary at this time, but since then it has been decreasing. According to our study, boys still have more relationships, than girls. Due to emancipation the dynamics of relationships have changed. Traditional masculine norms have been softened, and roles have changed (27). To find partners now girls have to initiate relationships because of increasing number of unmanly men (28).

We pointed out the importance of schools as the most frequent place to get to know a partner regardless of the age group, so the role of educational institutions in healthy socialization cannot be overemphasized. Giving appropriate framework for dating in schools might increase the number of relationships and ratio of susceptible, successful youngsters. Even in the information technology age, the most important source of knowledge is the peers as it was in the previous generations.

This is still true even with the increasing importance of teenage magazines and the internet (15, 29). We suggest that Hungarian schools should introduce the successful British model: the involvement of trained peers in the sexual education, drug and crime prevention (23), since young people more easily turns to their peers of the same age.

In our study teenage boys preferred attractiveness compared to inner values independently of generation. Boys considered the first date more important than girls. Finally they would go as far as possible, including sexual intercourse. On the contrary girl preferred inner values (intelligence, kindness), even though women in age group 2 preferred look. These internal values are harder to recognize on the first date, so girls would prefer shyer behaviour than boys and they do not considered the first date as important as boys. Previous studies conducted in the US. showed that boys prefer sexuality in a relationship (12, 18) and the socialization suppress the evolutionary atavism in women, that big and strong male's offspring would have greater fitness. Although in the Netherlands a study showed the attractiveness is similarly important for both gender in their teenage years (19).

The acceptance of parents' opinion in women and the acceptance of peers' opinion in men is general and both is age group independent. Among university students emotional projecting can stand behind the increased importance of parents' opinion. Current university students can project backward their current demand of lacking parental support to teenage. But it can be possible that familial values are more important for these youths, as the familialism ideology is spreading (30, 31).

The physical contact is getting more and more accepted and less exalted in younger generations, hence they have physical contact at a younger age. The difference is not so big, current teenagers are still stop at kiss on the first date. This is consonant with international tendencies (2).

The greatest limitation of our study is that we chose highly educated intellectuals. The sample came from Budapest and surroundings, so we could not see any differences between the rural and urban areas. Our cross-sectional pilot study examined a small proportion of Hungarian population, mostly highly educated and youth people from Budapest and surrounding area. The study represents higher society status opinion, but questions about financial circumstances were not asked. Because our study was a cross sectional study, especially the elderly and middle aged participants had to remember their teenage experiences**.** It could have been influenced by a lot of other memories. We think such projection from the present could stand in the background of increased importance of parental opinion for university students. A study in the total Hungarian population would surely show much greater variety. In case of self-completed questionnaires the truthfulness of respondents is unverifiable.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the importance of peers and the school in the formation of adolescent relationships and as a source of knowledge about relationships and sexual information. To educate rebellious teenagers about relationships, they require honest, peers based education system. We have shown that putting young people in touch with each other by teachers or parents is not a successful alternative. We have shown that for boys look is the most important factor in the choice of a partner, but for girls still inner values are more important, but look is getting more and more important during generations. We hope with our study we help to understand the Hungarian teenagers' motivation in relationships and based on our study we can make a better education system to bring up adults with ability to form successful relationships. □

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