



REMINISCENCES OF AN ALIENATED CHILD IN ADULTHOOD

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Abstract: *In this article, I will present an analysis of the educational situation and functioning of a child deprived of appropriate social care and family support. I will also describe the consequences resulting from neglect related to the lack of caregiving functions, of which an adult woman from a dysfunctional family environment fell victim. For this purpose, I will use an individual case, presenting the complexity and relativity of upbringing and the diversity of conditions determining the lack of well-being in an individual's life.*

Keywords: *pedagogy, upbringing, family.*

Introduction

The article presents an analysis of the educational situation, and the functioning of a child deprived of proper social care and family support. It also describes the consequences resulting from neglect related to the lack of caregiving functions, which affected an adult woman from a dysfunctional family environment. The aim of the analysis of the individual case presented in the article is to show the complexity and relativity of upbringing and the variety of conditions determining the lack of well-being in an individual's life. As scientific research proves, childhood is a very important stage in a human's history, forming the foundation of the "palace" that is the child. It also serves as the foundation for the subsequent life periods of the individual. Childhood is a time for preparing the child for adulthood, and it determines the value and quality of adult life (Matyjas 2022). The consequences of a deprived childhood that an adult woman shares in her reminiscences can be found in the article.

Methodology

The article was mainly based on a case study. All the information gathered was used for the qualitative analysis presented in the article. This allowed for determining the complexity of life conditions in adulthood caused by childhood and the lack of parental responsibility.

Results and Discussion

As research shows, the family is the most important educational environment that determines a child's future success or failure. The vast literature on the family contains various approaches to it. Sociologists particularly emphasize its functioning as a social group that has existed since ancient times, composed of people connected by marriage and parental bonds. These are the two main relationships

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that determine the creation and existence of the family: marriage and kinship (Szczepański 1970). Leon Dyczewski classifies the family as a small group characterized by a stable membership and a clear boundary of belonging. It is the primary, fundamental group for its members (Dyczewski 1994). According to Zbigniew Tyszk, a leading representative of the Poznań sociological school of family studies, its specific structure and functioning distinguish it from other small groups (Tyszk 1979).

Being a small social group, the family plays an important role in passing on cultural heritage to its members, especially children. Sociologists treat this aspect of the family's influence on younger generations as its second, fundamental, and extremely important task. Every family creates its own unique cultural environment, its customs, rituals, cultivates specific traditions, and prefers its own, individual lifestyle, characteristic only to it. All these elements of the cultural environment significantly affect the shaping of a child's personality in the process of socialization.

The rich literature on the subject recognizes the family as an institution. Its institutional dimension is defined by the functions it performs. As Stanisław Kawula emphasizes, the family constitutes the institution of natural upbringing. By fulfilling specific educational tasks, it aims to achieve desired educational outcomes through various life activities (Kawula 1998). In Virginia Satir's view, the family is a system with a holistic nature. The elements of this system mutually influence each other and remain in dynamic equilibrium. The relationships within the system determine its structure and specificity. They are defined by roles in the system and the principles that determine how these roles are fulfilled. The phenomenon of emergence is a fundamental value in family systems, which suggests that they are an integral whole comparable to a living organism. To fully understand the system, it is necessary to have a global view of the functioning of the entire family and its system.

As Maria Ryś emphasizes, all members of the family co-create a network of mutual relationships. There are various types of feedback loops between them, influencing the overall functioning of the family system. Although each person in the system has their own individuality, they simultaneously carry the marks of the entire system. Maria Ryś, referring to Namysłowska, points out that a proper family system is characterized not only by flexibility and openness but also by distinctness and uniqueness. A healthy family system creates opportunities for each member of the family, providing the possibility of fulfilling needs, especially emotional ones. It also allows for maintaining a proper balance between autonomy and dependence (Ryś 2011).

An important point emphasized in the theoretical analyses is the presentation of the family in its communal dimension. Marianna Styczyńska, quoting Franciszek Adamski, understands the concept of community as the natural unity of people based on a shared goal. The family, as a community:

- derives from human nature, its foundation is the natural division into two sexes, age differences.
- requires the unification of goals and aspirations from its members.
- gives its members much joy and pleasure.
- socializes the emotions and aspirations of its members, making them feel like a team working toward common goals.
- is governed by love rather than coercion, with law only serving as protection and consequence of love (Styczyńska 2008).

The communal dimension of the family home is an important foundation for meeting the needs, supporting the development of the child, and building its personal resources. It creates the possibility of forming the first emotional bonds between the child and its parents and siblings, contributing to integration. It eliminates loneliness, emptiness, or a sense of meaninglessness in the life of a modern child. Continuous, mutual interaction, direct relationships between family members, maintaining common customs and traditions, adhering to jointly established principles and norms, and recognizing established values give the child a "passport" for the journey ahead. It also leads to harmony in shared efforts characterized by mutual care and responsibility for each other. The concept of community is linked to coexistence, cohabitation, cooperation, a special closeness and bond between people, and between all family members.

The communal impact of the family environment largely determines the future well-being of the child (Rembierz 2010). Properly experienced and organized communal functioning of the family limits

all undesirable actions and educational situations that contribute to any pathology leading to destruction and threats to the child's development.

The "aspects" of the family can serve as the basis for a deeper analysis of the individual case, which constitutes the sad reminiscences of adult woman Marysia regarding her alienated life and experiences in childhood.

Individual Case

My alienation was caused by my mother's alcoholism. She worked in a theater as an assistant. She was a beautiful woman, her looks and personal charm attracted the attention of those around her. You could see that men were very attracted to her. I remember a time when my younger sister Basia and I were running around the playground with other children, whose mothers were there, but ours was never. She usually left us in the care of Mrs. Asia. Once I asked her to stay with us for a while. Annoyed, she replied that she had a lot of work to do and not to bother her. When we returned from the playground to the house, she was sitting happily with a friend, drinking coffee, and didn't even ask us about anything. I helped Basia take off her shoes, made sandwiches for us. We had to be independent from a very young age (I was six, Basia was four). Unlike my mother, my father showed us more affection and interest. But these were only moments, fleeting moments. He worked abroad as a manager of a hotel being built there. He came home very rarely, but when he did, he was with us. My mother could then enjoy her pseudo-freedom. Looking back at my family, I think no one was happy in it.

I think the most lacking thing we felt as children was love, especially me, trying to give Basia more than keep for myself. I don't blame her now for often saying to me, "Marysiu, my mommy, I love you very much, do you love me?" She had big brown eyes and an expectant expression. What was she waiting for? For love, for a hug, to be with her.

As a 45-year-old woman, mature and responsible for my family, I remember that time. Despite holding an important role (I am the director of a large school) and many duties, I care for my growing children (I have two daughters, Hania, 16, and Zosia, 17). My husband and I try to spend as much time with them as possible. There are never situations like the ones I experienced in my childhood family, where one parent would be painted in a bad light. My mother frequently turned us against my father, who was a warm, loving man towards his children. As a mother and wife, I know that my parents' relationship wasn't good.

We saw and felt a lot as children. And I, in the role of the hero, took care of my sister and hid my mother's alcoholism. As a growing girl, I was forced to take on many responsibilities, which I handled without hesitation. My mother didn't notice it, even when she wasn't drinking. She never praised me. She believed that children should have responsibilities because they prepare them for life, such as doing the shopping, paying bills, cooking meals, cleaning, and lovingly taking care of my younger sister. According to her, these were no feats.

It wasn't until I met my husband that the world began to change slowly. I started defining my needs. He helped me break the "chains" I had been walking through life with. He helped me escape the prison of my thoughts, my trauma, and sad reminiscences. And now, thanks to him and my constant work on myself, I can say that I am a happy wife, mother, and adult, despite having an unhappy childhood.

The individual case presented shows the sadness and hopelessness of a child's life due to the absence of both parents, the lack of both physical and psychological presence. They didn't give the child a foundation, they weren't the builders of Marysia's character, didn't give her roots, and didn't equip her with wings.

As Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson emphasize, "One of the factors that best predicts the future happiness, social and emotional development, leadership abilities, important interpersonal relationships, and even academic and professional success of a child is whether they had at least one person who was consistently present, providing a sense of security" (Siegel, Payne, Bryson 2020). During the period when Marysia was forming her self-image, at the most crucial time for her development, she was deprived of the basic pillars determining the well-being of her future adult life:

1. She never felt safe.

2. She was never seen.
3. She was never soothed.

4. She never experienced a sense of certainty because the three above pillars were not a part of her life. The educational influences she experienced lacked the expected care that would have supported the building of healthy relationships in the future. The absence of reference to the four pillars, which she also didn't experience during her childhood, deprived her of a secure attachment style to her parents. Her addicted mother did not care about building a secure bond in the child's life and, consequently, did not ensure her well-being in various areas of life. The constant longing for attention, being noticed, and care left a mark and became a shadow in her life. It seemed that, on numerous occasions, she quietly "cried" in her heart, echoing Agnieszka Kozak's words: "I just want someone to appreciate me, say it's good that I'm here, be happy that I exist. I already see myself, but somehow, I'm not happy, it's as if I still can't be free" (Kozak 2024).

The analyzed individual case not only points to upbringing, emotional neglect, lack of parental presence, and loneliness but also reveals another psychosociological phenomenon in Marysia's family: parentification. In this most important period of life, when a child has no defense mechanisms and is entirely dependent on the parent and open to them, she experiences emotional coldness, poor-quality contact with her mother, and a lack of warm feelings being expressed, which intensifies the feeling of loneliness. No one sees the child's needs. Therefore, it's no surprise that the difficulties we face in adulthood "force us" to delve into ourselves and return to our childhood. In the case presented, there is a clear disturbance in the relationship. Marysia became a parent for her younger sister. Within the family system, her mother expected her to take on a parental role and fulfill parental duties. The child experienced instrumental parentification. As a growing girl, she took on responsibilities that belonged to the parents (shopping, preparing meals, paying bills). She actively participated in running the household. In this case, parentification is pathological. Marysia took on a role for which she was neither prepared nor mature. The tasks she performed allowed her to compensate for the gaps caused by the disruption of basic parental functions by an irresponsible and poorly functioning mother. Everything Marysia went through and got involved in, as rightly pointed out by Katarzyna Schier, is a form of interpersonal trauma (Schier 2022). The dysfunctional family with clear indicators of chaos in the family system forced the girl to take on the role of the hero, which further facilitated the progressing phenomenon of parentification. As Maria Ryś notes, the chaotic family described in this case, deprived of bonds, poorly organized, torn apart, swollen with conflicts, problems, ignoring children, and often exploiting them to satisfy the mother's needs, creates a very unfavorable atmosphere for family life, devoid of patterns and priorities (Ryś 2011). The consequences of these factors in adult life often manifest as psychosomatic problems and issues with closeness.

Conclusion

The theoretical "scenarios" of family life described in the article, the subject of interest for many scientific disciplines, allow us to view the presented individual case from a multidimensional perspective. They reveal the characteristic features of upbringing, including intentionality, interactivity, relativism, complexity, and longevity. These aspects are related both to the broad concept of upbringing and the narrower one. Theoretical analyses can also serve to reflect on the various environmental factors affecting broadly understood educational, socializing, acculturating, and personalizing processes, whether they proceed correctly or incorrectly. The presented individual case and its qualitative interpretation may inspire reflection on one's life history and the history of thousands of children in our country suffering from rejection, exploitation, and humiliation experienced at the hands of adults, often from those closest to them.

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