

**Aleksandra Aszkiełowicz**

The Academy of Humanities and Economics, Brzeg

ORCID: 0000-0001-5414-6652

***Andrzej Ładyżyński's *Życie rodzinne jako szansa rozwoju osobowego z perspektywy pedagogicznej****

**[Family Life as an Opportunity for Personal Development: A Pedagogical Perspective].**

**Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, 2020, 173 pp.**

The title of Andrzej Ładyżyński's book suggests that its subject is family life as a space in which the personal development of each family member takes place. The structure of the book is unusual. The author departs from a strict division into the theoretical, methodological and empirical parts, which is customary in academic practice, and, instead, proposes a dynamic system, focused on the developmental processes families undergo and the problems they experience. The introduction offers reasons for this structural solution. The publication contains a collection of texts written over several years. In its thirteen chapters, Ładyżyński presents articles, reviews, research reports and educational essays that deal with various aspects of family functioning. The order of the chapters suggests that the author was guided by the idea of the development cycle of family life, which becomes clear to readers when they learn that the author is a practitioner of systemic family therapy, which draws on constructivism (Górniak, 2003, pp. 46–51). With reference to it, it is worthwhile to look at the narrative of family life that Ładyżyński constructs in his publication.

He begins the story of the family from the perspective of the personal development of all its members by reflecting on the importance of the family home, which he analyses as a natural and fundamental place where the world is explored and the basic social structure is formed, which provides a model for the structures that the family members will create throughout their lives. For many of us, the home also has a symbolic significance as a place where we experience the feelings of security, permanence and continuity of family histories.

The dynamics of family life are shaped by natural developmental processes, described as cycles of family life. Over years, sociologists, psychologists and

psychiatrists have conducted intensive research leading to the conclusion that the family as a system is not static, but develops, is dynamic and changes towards equilibrium. This quest for homeostasis serves the family to protect the system and maintain its identity. Transition to a subsequent phase of the family life cycle can occur when all the tasks of the previous phase have been completed. Complete families as a rule go through the same phases of development, but every family also has its own unique rhythm. The complexity of events and interactions at any given point in the family life cycle is immense and at the same time family-specific (Os-toja-Zawadzka, 1999, p. 19). The literature usually lists six to eight stages through which a typical nuclear family passes from engagement until the death of the last parent.

The next chapter takes a closer look at the betrothal period, which is the first phase in the development cycle of family life. In this section, the author presents former models of engagement, using sources such as handbooks for brides and guides to good manners published in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the light of these, he attempts to grasp the meaning of engagement in the past and today, concluding that it still has a value. Therefore, it should continue to be systematically explored, researched and included in theoretical reflection. In the author's view, engagement is an important stage in which maturity to take up marital and family roles can (and should) be attained.

Chapter three is devoted to marriage, which the author characterises as a relationship that takes time and effort to build. Modern marriage mostly tends to be based on love. The wedding ceremony is an important event for both the young couple and the two families. The nuptial ritual separates two stages of life, marks the establishment of a young family and makes it publicly visible. Entering the positions of wife and husband requires a transition from complete independence of the people involved to their consensual interdependence. Marriage can be a relationship that affords an opportunity for mutual affirmation, acceptance and appreciation, thus contributing to an increased quality of life both for the individuals themselves and for the couple together. It is not without reason that many researchers—psychologists and educators—study the quality of marital life, often defining it as marital happiness. In modern marriage, there is an opportunity to experience deep partnership. Highlighted in the title of the book, development in marriage requires that the spouses surmount a number of difficulties in the realisation of the phases of the marital and family life cycle and cope with crises that spouses-to-be and newly-weds may not have expected, cherishing, for example, a romantic vision of their life together.

In contemporary societies described as postmodern, postmodernist and information societies, a new pattern of the development of marital and family life is emerging. The ongoing transformation of the family, its structure and forms is best seen when we study it diachronically and link it to the distinctive features of a given social organisation. In a relatively 'young' society, forms of family life appear and

intensive qualitative changes take place that occurred only rarely or were not identified or known at all in the past. These novel developments increasingly encourage claims that a heterogeneous postmodern family is in the making today. Just as in the previous era of family evolution its form and the ways it functioned were determined by industrialisation and urbanisation, the new factors that have emerged in the postmodern age are clearly changing the family model in our time. These factors are related to four spheres:

- ♦ technological and information (associated with knowledge, progress and science);
- ♦ economic (new sectors of the economy: services, science and information, and the mass involvement of women in the labour market);
- ♦ social (new social movements, sexual and feminist revolutions, the weakening of social bonds and social trust, transition from collectivism to individualism); and
- ♦ cultural (new values, norms, tendencies and ideologies, the emergence of postmodern identity, the discovery of sexuality; this plane is closely linked to cultural globalisation).

The variety of types and structural forms of marriage and family that we currently encounter can be astonishing. Many of them depart from the basic family model, which is based on the formalised monogamous relationship of a heterosexual married couple. There is a lively social discussion around all alternative forms worldwide, numerous research studies are being conducted on them, and people living in such families seek social and formal acceptance, along with the granting of certain rights, such as those enjoyed by formal married couples.

Alternative forms of marital and family life, in particular cohabitation, are the object of the theoretical and research inquiries presented by Ładyżyński in the fourth chapter of the volume. In the first part of this chapter, he seeks to identify the reasons why individuals do not get married in order to ponder in the last part how young people can be helped to discover their path to marriage as a lasting and fulfilling relationship. This preoccupation speaks to the complex and dynamic structure of marriage, which the author invites readers to construct.

Marriage, as well as non-formalised close relationships, occasions possibilities of achieving developmental changes. Such transformations require time and a combination of three processes: the development of the woman, of the man and of their relationship (Bakiera, 2009, p. 36). In married couples working to build family life, the division of broadly conceived housekeeping roles occurs either contractually or spontaneously. This is an area where balance and mutual expectations may also be violated. Usually, this happens when one party does not accept the division of family responsibilities or cannot cope with them. As family responsibilities are often meaningfully linked to social roles, the author devotes three chapters to these roles.

In the fifth chapter, he focuses on women who shape their femininity, develop their marital role as a wife and become mothers in the family community. In chapter six, which is composed as an educational essay, he reflects on masculinity. Like femininity, masculinity also takes forming, which mostly happens within the basic social structure that is the family. Masculinity formation is depicted by the author as a long-term process and as a basis for undertaking a variety of social, family and professional roles. One such role is fatherhood, to which chapter seven is devoted.

To return to the analysis of the marriage and family life cycle, a significant portion of the lifespan of couples is taken up by phases related to parenthood. In chapter eight, the author addresses the motives for having children and the advantages of parenthood.

Juxtaposing the author's ideas and the findings of research conducted in this area over years, one can notice an ambiguity in the assessment of the importance of fertility for marital life satisfaction. In a study examining the opinions of spouses on marital success, Barbara Łobodzińska states that 'having children has almost no part in the image of a happy marital life' (Łobodzińska, 1975, p. 192). Similarly, Maria Trawińska and Hanna Malewska have independently found no correlation between having children and the ratings of marital happiness (Trawińska, 1977, p. 196; Malewska, 1972, p. 226). Maria Braun-Gałkowska did not ask her respondents directly about the relevance of children to marital happiness, but she compared the mean marital satisfaction scores of those without children and those with one, two, three and four or more children. The difference in the success rate between the childless respondents and the parent respondents was statistically highly significant, indicating a greater satisfaction for those with children. However, the number of children had no significant effect on the results (Braun-Gałkowska, 1985, pp. 36–7).

Research conducted by Maria Kawińska has shown that one in three Poles does not believe that one can be happy without children and 40.2% of the population strongly agree that one can only feel happy at home amidst one's children today (Kawińska, 2010, p. 26). Having children, besides wealth, is counted among the so-called traditional and objective criteria for a successful marriage. The presence of children in a marriage makes this dyad into a family and should above all be thought of as producing a new and different quality.

Parenthood is naturally and inseparably linked to marriage. Being a mother and a father is preceded by being a wife and a husband. This natural sequence of roles is one of the guarantors of a successful life for all family members, and the proper development and upbringing of a child can best be secured by a well-functioning family.

The family is undoubtedly the primary locus of human life and learning. It is within family that cultural transmission takes place. The child, for whom the family creates a space for socialisation and provides an environment for education, participates in the process of acculturation. In chapter nine, the author takes a closer look

at the family as a site where children form their identities and enter into relations with other members of their broader communities (Ogrodzka-Mazur, 2003, p. 32).

The tenth chapter comprises Ładyżyński's considerations on the upbringing of teenagers. The phase of family life in which parents bring up their teenage children requires parents to adopt new parenting strategies to exercise forms of discipline adequate to adolescence without losing their children's love, respect and acceptance. The author points out that one of the important tasks of parents is to set limits and consistently enforce them. Adolescence is often referred to as a period of turbulence and stress, and for a good reason, too. It is at this stage that teenagers develop their identities and autonomy, often negotiating with their parents and testing the limits they impose. This is part of adolescents' natural attitude, although as such it is often a challenge to parents and educators.

The last three chapters of the volume are related to the final phases in the development of marital and family life. In the eleventh chapter, the author reflects on the process of generational separation, which is associated with adult children leaving the family home and is described as a classic stage known as the empty nest phase. Notably, however, family researchers and practitioners such as family therapists are today confronted with quite a different phenomenon, which is called the cluttered nest in family psychology (Bee, 2014, p. 512).

For all the complications this may involve, adult children leaving home is a socially desirable and developmentally expected phenomenon. If we treat marriage as one of the more important developmental tasks culturally assigned to the period of early adulthood, then we should recognise that it hinges on the effective coping with prior developmental tasks and, in particular, on the development of one's identity in conjunction with becoming independent of parents and other adults. This independence is certainly promoted by young adults' independence in the economic or housing field.

When children start their own families, their parents go through further changes in their lives as they become grandparents. Parents learn how to become good grandparents and develop new patterns of participation in their children's lives, as well as coping with functioning as two. The author devotes chapter twelve to grandparents as members of the oldest family generation.

The book closes with a chapter that offers readers a reflection on the role of in-laws, which the author portrays as an important and unique social role. As parents of a spouse, in-laws can shape the bonds being established with and in the newly forming family, essentially founded on the marriage entered into by the adult children of both parties. Challenges in constructing these roles are often caused by the lack of good role models, a reluctance to learn and perhaps also difficulties in communicating with the younger generation. Certainly, the fostering of positive role models is not helped by jokes about mothers-in-law that proliferate in social humour messages. The author points out that the performance of the father-in-law

and mother-in-law roles represents an opportunity for satisfaction and closeness, not only with the adult child they have been raising, but also with their life companion.

The family is the basic environment in the life of every human being and has an important influence on individuals' education and development; it is a community of persons, being at the same time an institution, a fundamental form of human coexistence and an integral part of every society. The family is a bridge between the individual and society. It is from there that the biography of every human being begins.

Ładyżyński's book encourages reflection on and questions about how marriage and family are changing and what meanings are attributed to them in contemporary societies. It captures the author's belief that relationships based on love and marital ties are the foundation of family life that ensures not only the permanence and security, but also the happiness of the family. I hope that this book will inspire researchers interested in social pedagogy, family pedagogy, marriage research, family studies and other disciplines dedicated to the study of family life. This publication can be an important contribution to the literature used in university coursework. The book can also inspire practitioners working with families to search for positive meanings and construct stories of marriage and family as inalienable values of any society.

## References

- Bakiera, L. (2009). Wartość małżeństwa w rozwoju człowieka dorosłego. [The value of marriage in adult development]. In B. Harwas-Napierała (Ed.), *Rodzina jako wartość w rozwoju człowieka* [Family as a value in human development]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.
- Bee, H. (2014). *Lifespan Development*. [Psychologia rozwoju człowieka]. Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, tł. Aleksander Wojciechowski.
- Braun-Gałkowska, M. (1985). *Miłość aktywna. Psychiczne uwarunkowania powodzenia w małżeństwie* [Active love: Psychological determinants of success in marriage]. Instytut Wydawniczy PAX.
- Górniak, L. (2003). Konstruktywizm a zmiany w praktyce psychoterapeutycznej [Constructivism and change in psychotherapeutic practice]. In L. Górniak & B. Józefik (Eds.), *Ewolucja myślenia systemowego w terapii rodzin. Od metafory cybernetycznej do dialogu i narracji* [The evolution of systems thinking in family therapy: From cybernetic metaphor to dialogue and narratives]. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Kawińska, M. (2010). *Małżeństwo-rodzina w wymiarze społecznym*. [Marriage-family in the social dimension]. In S. Zaręba (Ed.), *Rodzina. Religia. Społeczeństwo. Polacy 2009 w diagnozie socjologicznej* [Family. Religion. Society: Poles 2009 in sociological diagnosis]. Wydawnictwo UKSW.
- Łobodzińska, B. (1975). *Młodość, miłość, małżeństwo* [Youth, love, marriage]. KiW.

- Malewska, H. (1972). *Kulturowe i psychospołeczne determinanty życia seksualnego* [Cultural and psychosocial determinants of sexual life]. PWN.
- Ogrodzka-Mazur, E. (2003). Dziecko w rodzinie 'przy dorosłych,' czyli o dawnych koncepcjach wychowania i ich odniesieniach do współczesności [The child in the family 'at the side of adults': Or, on the past concepts of upbringing and their relevance to the present day]. In: B. Dymara & E. Ogrodzka-Mazur (Eds.), *Dziecko w świecie literatury i życiu współczesnym* [The child in the world of literature and contemporary life]. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Ostoja-Zawadzka, K. (1999). *Cykl życia rodzinnego* [Family life cycle]. In B. de Barbaro (Ed.), *Wprowadzenie do systemowego rozumienia rodziny*. [Introduction to a systems understanding of the family]. Wyd. UJ.
- Trawińska, M. (1977). *Bariery małżeńskiego sukcesu* [Barriers to marital success]. KiW.