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Growing up in a Family as a Time of Identity Formation

Abstract: The article presents the problem of the identity formation of an adolescent, in the context of the most socially significant reference group – the family. Adolescence is a time for searching for answers to many questions about the sense of life, goals, values, priorities. The individual identity formation process is a unique developmental opportunity, but at the same time a difficult period for those growing up, as well as their family. The article discusses the main directional changes which accompany identity formation and presents the social context of this process. It is a parental task to create a safe space of living together for their growing children, where there are common beliefs about values, ideals and life priorities. The article especially highlights the meaning of spiritual and world-view questions, which – as a basis of parents' lives - give directions to their children's pursuit of answers to the basic questions accompanying identity formation.

Keywords: growing up, identity formation, teenager in a family

Introduction

Adolescence is an inevitable time in every human's life and usually connected to considerable turmoil, crises and a lack of balance. At the same time, it is a developmental phase leading towards the development of psychological order (harmony) and, as a consequence, to achieving goals related to autonomy, understood as an element of human subjectivity.

The autonomy shaping process begins in the last phase of childhood, when a child gradually achieves emotional independence from their parents. At this stage of life, a young person is often treated like a child, but, at the same time, in many situations he/she experiences adult freedom or demands. Resisting being dependent on a parent, a child increasingly stands up to or rebels against parental demands and bans. The child willingly criticizes all of the previous consequences and resists the imposition of power, which had influenced his or her life until now.

Adolescence is a time of the formation of one's identity, defining the sense and goals for further life. The process of shaping an autonomic identity takes involvement and effort on the part of a teenager as well as the people around him, including, first of all, the immediate family. How can one provide an adolescent with proper support in a process which can be a developmental opportunity, but also a difficult period for a teenager as well as his or her parents?

Directions of Change Connected to a Teenager's Identity Formation Process

The literature on the subject often points to a collision of two visions of the world. Differences between the visions of parents and the adolescents are a consequence of the level of emotional and social maturity, intellectual abilities as well previous personal experiences. Perception and assimilation of social change concerning values, norms, law, attitudes, civilizational achievements can lead to conflict within a family. The parental vision of the world has already been significantly verified with their adult experience, while a teenager is still searching and experimenting. An adolescent is open to novelty, it is easier for him or her to be open to new experiences, by which he or she is often more capable of adjusting to social changes in today's world (Gurba, 2013, p. 210–214).

At this moment it is worth recalling the most important directions of change connected to the process of identity formation. The teenager makes their first efforts to obtain answers to such questions as: Who am I? Who do

I want to be and what am I capable of? What do I want my life to be directed by? How do I want to be perceived by others? Which values are important to me? About what can I make decisions and what can I influence?

These kinds of questions include various fields of the functioning of young people: personal, social, cultural. The sense of one's own individuality is enhanced, an adolescent also gradually gains new competencies, which allow him or her to fulfill social needs. Teenagers get involved in activities which allow them to strive for success and good outcomes.

Discovering one's own identity is related to various experiences from previous developmental stages, but it is during adolescence that a young person's experiences intensify greatly. They also gradually become generalized, ordered, becoming a base of an organizing self-consciousness of a teenager (Obuchowska, 1996, p. 104).

Classic concepts describing the core of the creation of individual identity are based on Erik Erikson's approach, who considered forming a unique, independent Self in adolescence as a basic task and dilemma of this developmental stage. The identity formation process can be disturbed by chaos connected to the many different social roles in which a teenager functions. Thus, for example, the sense of one's own Self in the role of a student is created by internally comparing one's personal achievement with the teenager's dream ideal, as well as with comparing his achievements with those of their co-students.

Erikson treated adolescence as a moratorium between childhood and adulthood. In this developmental stage, the young person has to create an identity characterized by three traits: coherence, consistence and mutuality between one's self-perception and the way he or she is perceived by others (Erikson, 2004).

Contemporary theories of identity formation during adolescence usually recall a description of identity status by J. Marcia, based on Erikson's concept. Marcia assumes that the identity formation process is accompanied by a crisis related to the young person making new decisions, choices, owning values and getting involved in new roles, ideologies and goals. This process can have the form of a violent crisis or be milder and more gradual.

Four of Marcia's identity statuses are: identity achievement, moratorium, identity foreclosure, identity diffusion. To achieve a full identity, an adolescent has to analyze one's goals and values and to achieve stable involvement (Bee, 2008, p. 369).

M. Berzonsky's contemporary identity processing style model referred to Erikson's concept. Berzonsky assumes that identity formation is caused by conscious, intentional factors, but also some indirect ones. Speculations on identity formation are about the question: "Who am I as a person living in the present reality?". Not only predispositions, possibilities, abilities and competencies, but also the processes which indirectly influence identity formation are important. They include: mimicking and modeling parents and peers, school education, trainings and instructions, automatically internalized cultural message, experiences recorded from very early childhood. Different views of identity style in this author's conception assume the relative presence of collective, social and personal content. Informational style is to a large extent based on the personal attributes of Me, such as standards, goals and values directed to the self. In the normative style there is a prevalence of collective aspects of identity related to family, religion, nationality; and in the diffuse-avoidant style, there is a predominance of social attributes such as: reputation, popularity, making impression on others (Oleszkowicz, Senejko, 2013, p. 147).

Discussing Erikson's and Havighurst's attitude, E. Gurba points to seven developmental tasks during adolescence related to identity formation. She sees a direct link to the pursuit of the answer to the question: "Who am I?" in specific tasks:

- forming male or female sex
- accepting one's appearance and body control
- developing value system important for everyday choices
- reaching emotional independence from parents and other adults
- creating new, more mature relationships with peers of both sexes
- preparing to marriage and life in a family
- getting ready for a career and achieving financial independence (Gurba, 2013 p. 173).

Disturbance during the identity formation process can lead to the diffusion of roles, feeling disoriented, uncertainty about who one really is and, as a result, to withdrawal and isolation. I. Obuchowska highlights that adolescents who remain in opposition to society's proposal to get involved and define themselves often begin behaviors and roles which are not socially accepted. This negativistic approach of teenagers is often referred to as a negative identity, characterized by feelings of alienation and depersonalization, disorganization and internal emptiness. This kind of identity, derived from a rebellion against socially accepted values and roles, can often be accompanied by some criminal behavior on the part of adolescents, as well as manifested itself in the form of rejecting canons of correct behavior, appearance etc. Rebellious identity can be a kind of mask, a game, which serves as a way of radical, expressive distinction, attracting attention especially in an immediate environment of family and peers (Obuchowska, 1996, p. 105–109).

The Teenager in a Family and Peer Group

The need to include the social context of identity formation process turns our attention to important reference groups of an adolescent. This role is primarily fulfilled by the family and the peer group.

For a teenager during early adolescence, a peer group becomes the most important reference group, which allows them to create their own value and build a framework of identity. Belonging to a specific group means accepting a particular style of being and functioning accepted by the group members. Strong bonds are created, a young person begins to feel supported and included and gains a source of self-acceptance (Smykowski, 2012; Rutkowska, 2002). Contact with peers allows adolescents to create their image and build self-confidence. Comparison to peers allows them to formulate opinions on one's looks, which unfortunately often leads adolescents to experiencing discontent and frustration. Changes related to physical development are often a source of many problems and disruptions in the area of forming a physical identity (Gurba, 2013, p. 173–177).

Belonging to a peer group increasingly takes the form of contact through social media. It allows one to pass on information very quickly, share thoughts and opinions, gives an (often illusory) sense of belonging, bonding and solidarity with a group. However, it is worth remembering that the forming of an individual identity takes reflection and self-analysis, especially in the area of motivating actions which enhance personal growth.

This is where a need for real, authentic social bonds and educational actions towards teenager arises, especially those provided by the family. A teenager builds their self-worth based on the acceptance of meaningful persons, and in this developmental stage this is mainly their peers. Research shows that adolescents spend four times more time talking to their peers than to adults and it is among peers that social competencies and behaviors are developed. It doesn't mean, however, that the adult world – the one of parents and caregivers – stops counting at all (Zimbardo, Johnson, McCann, 2010, p. 228).

The end of childhood and then an early stage of adolescence starts a gradual process of emotional independence from parents. Some of the typical teenage behaviors in this period include: questioning norms and rules that were present until now in the family, criticizing parents, searching for models outside of the family home. These behaviors are related to an adolescent's search for his or her own way to autonomy (Scabini, Manzi, 2012).

Developmental tasks also include those leading to being independent from one's parents. It is important to increase the teenagers' role in their independent decisions, while at the same time sustaining the parents' right to control those areas of life in which personal experience has a special meaning.

One can often hear about the decreasing meaning of parental authority in teenagers' eyes. Research outcomes point to some regularities in this area. Although this separation process assumes the necessity of loosening the bonds between teenagers and their parents and widening social relationships, it is the influence of the relationship with parents that still plays a very important role in adolescents' functioning. Parents, by

their belonging to a certain social class, usually indirectly influence the choice of a peer group which their child joins, as well as their choice of a specific educational path. Research also shows that teenagers apply the model of their functioning with parents to their relationships within a peer group. Peaceful peer-to-peer relationships usually coexist with warm, supportive and accepting relations between teenagers and their parents (Oleszkowicz, Senejko, 2009, p. 162–163).

A distinction between parental and peers' authority in areas important to young people becomes noticeable. Parents' authority and opinions count when it comes to politics, money spending, and personal problems. Peers are important when a teenager's problems are about clothing, spending time, looks, conflicts with friends. Teenagers are willing to talk to their parents about plans for the future, political views, but rather reluctantly about their feelings towards other people, especially the intimate sides of social relations (Grzankowska, 2002; Łapińska, Żebrowska, 1975).

Adolescence is a time for searching for one's own sense of life and understanding problems and moral dilemmas, including those connected to one's world-view. Young people experience religiousness in its internal feeling. The shaping of the world-view and value system are among the most important development tasks of adolescence and are crucial for one's concept of their own adult life. World-view convictions allow adolescents to identify with the world of values, and the value hierarchy is shaped by various factors.

The emerging identity is also, or even most of all, in its moral aspect an authentic feeling of being a good, worthwhile person. It is important to emphasize the influence of meaningful adults, most of all parents, who in their life and actions commit to the values they cherish.

Each family has its own specific educational sensitivity, which depends on parental personality traits, their attitudes, value system, intellectual, moral and communicational competencies. Other important factors are economic conditions, the way they share obligations, the participation of grandparents and other family members in family's everyday life.

We live in a world which places considerable pressure on us, our families, but especially on our children, a pressure connected to the cult of

material achievement, common competition, beauty standards, slim figure, consumptive lifestyle. Some parents become uncritically influenced, others try to limit the pressure of fashion trends and some media on how to effectively and immediately solve all life and family issues.

In each family raising teenagers there are conflicts between parents and children. Adolescence is characterized by higher frequency and intensity of conflicts within a family than during childhood. They are more frequent in a youngster's interactions with a mother than with a father, which is probably caused by more frequent contacts and the higher level of involvement of mothers in teenagers' behavior. Some direct causes of conflicts are: an expressive protest of a young man against too much involvement of parents in most of areas of his life, using demands and forbidding, criticizing a teenager from a level of parental authority (Gurba, 2013, p. 221–242).

Sources of conflict are divided into three groups:

- Intergenerational conflict, where two different visions of the world collide and the parental vision has already been verified in their adult lives, while the teenager's vision, although often times closer to the contemporary circumstances – is mainly hypothetical. Intergenerational conflict can relate to different attitudes to political, social issues, customs, world-view, value system, degree of identification with one's own generation, lifestyle.
- Conflict about developmental changes during adolescence. Stronger conflicts are characteristic, especially in early adolescence, and address such developmental changes as:
 - higher level of egocentrism of teenagers,
 - excessive criticism and unrealistic vision of the world caused by developmental change in the cognitive area,
 - emotional lability,
 - lack of tolerance and radicalism,
 - teenage tendencies to analyze caused by increased awareness and cognitive abilities,

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- increasing tendency to take risky behaviors, which is often a defense against deterioration of one's until now self-perception,
 - widening social relations, searching for models and authorities outside family,
 - conformism in accepting peer group models,
 - being more interested in relationships with peers and cutting on relations with parents.
- Conflicts connected to individual traits of a teenager (e.g. needs, personality traits, temperament, expectations etc.) (Oleszkowicz, Senejko, 2009, p. 163–165; Bakiera, 2009).

Based on her own research, E. Gurba notices that Polish youths, analogically to their Western counterparts, usually get into conflicts with parents in situations connected with:

- activities towards house and cohabitants cleaning, helping around the house, everyday obligations etc.),
- everyday rituals (time of going to sleep, using TV, internet, way of dressing etc.),
- teenagers' autonomy (going out on their own, time to come back, choice of friends etc.),
- school obligations (doing homework, bad school grades),
- interests (such as spending free time).

Among the causes of boys' conflicts with parents, which are much more frequent than those of girls, are:

- socially unacceptable behaviors,
- school obligations and interests,
- world-view.

Girls, on the other hand, are much more often involved in conflicts about issues concerning school obligations and everyday rituals. Risky

behaviors of teenagers are not indicated as the most frequent conflict areas. It is explained not by the lack of difference between parent's and teenager's point of view but rather by hiding the risky behaviors away from parents and an illusory feeling of parental control over an adolescent. Lack of conflict in this area can also indicate a disturbing fact that risky behaviors are a kind of taboo among teenagers and their parents (Gurba, 2013. p. 210–214).

One should remember that a protest or even a rebellion against parents is usually one of the normative behaviors of adolescence. It is usually a distinctive sign of loosening the until now strong bonds with parents and it serves to help gain independence (Rostowski, 2005). Rebellious behaviors of a teenager can be an important opportunity for parents to recognize the meaningful problems and dilemmas of their child. That is how teenagers may inform us about the way they perceive the surrounding world, other people, their value system etc. In this perspective, information on their child's needs and expectancies become important and can enhance lowering tensions and conflicts between them and their parents.

Research shows that teenagers expect their parents to be consequential and to leave them with moderate freedom. It is important to formulate clear and concrete parental expectations towards children, to explain parent's opinions and grounds, while also stressing their trust in children. Parents should clearly formulate and set boundaries which a teenager is not allowed to cross (Wrzesień, 2005; Bakiera, 2008).

It is also important that parents follow their child's development, which should be shown in a greater degree of flexibility in terms of relations with a teenager, the ability to adjust to changing needs and abilities of an adolescent. These changes should include expectancies and demands from a teenager, ways of communication and cooperation. Among the models of relationships with a teenager which enhance closeness and at the same time are not limiting, but create safety and satisfaction and as a result are a chance to foster the authentic autonomy of a teenager, are ones characterized by:

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- authentic, emotional bond between parents and children, expressed in gestures, words, empathic behaviors, as well as perceiving oneself as an important and meaningful person for the whole family,
 - learning about mutual needs, expectancies, problems and concerns with full openness and trust,
 - readiness to act in the area of learning each other's opinions, attitudes and interests and to involve in dialogue,
 - mutual readiness and willingness to get to know the problems and concerns and giving each other support and help in difficult situations,
 - respecting each other's right to have separate opinions, plans, having another perspective in perceiving surrounding reality and to respect intimate living space,
 - readiness to cooperate while solving conflicts together and to cooperate for the whole family's best interest (Oleszkowicz, Senejko, 2009, p. 177–180).

One should remember there are conflicts and crisis in every family. It is then worth appealing to the authentic resources and power of a family, which are often hidden under a layer of fears, habits, difficulties with revealing one's feelings and emotions.

Misunderstandings and often serious conflicts happen in all families. Parents often then seek support and advice. It is important to remember that there are no instant, universal recipes to solve every problem in every family. A family is an individual, unique system, a specific quality and value. When it comes to children, it is the parents who are usually the best experts. They are the ones to decide what is important to themselves and their children. What kind of values do they want them to gain? What is the most important to them? Is the effectiveness in achieving goals the most important factor? Or is it the social competencies it takes? Or perhaps good manners and being well-behaved?

Let us not assess parental decisions about raising their children and remember that they are an individual outcome of a critical confrontation

of one's value system, hopes and dreams with fears, concerns and parental caring.

Parents can sometimes look for support during more difficult times while raising a child, also a teenager. It often happens that adolescents become involved in risky behaviors which can lead to negative consequences about physical and mental health. A teenager often doesn't notice a connection between his or her actions and dangerous consequences, especially those delayed in time.

C. Climati discusses the problem of the taking of risky actions by teenage peer groups. There is a disturbing fact of a lowering level of influence of educational environment versus the negative influence of the mass media, which praise the counterculture of risk. Fears and feeling lost, which are characteristic for adolescence, are multiplied by unrealistic and doubtful models of looks and lifestyle promoted by mass media. Climati discusses the possibilities of protecting young people from extremities, risks, ambiguity and unrealism. Three forms of actions towards young people are proposed and they are called: the culture of moderation, culture of involvement, culture of holiness.

- Culture of moderation encourages reasonability and respecting one's body, creates attitude of happiness derived from the fact of being unique and the only one. Young people often surrender to the pressure of mass media by creating a cult of possessions and consumption. Willingness to follow other's example often turns into unhealthy competition about material goods. Teenagers want to get desired objects in their will to mimic others, and the will to avoid economic discrimination. Climati stresses the necessity to raise children and youth in a way that allows them to appreciate and discover little things, joys and values of everyday life.
- Culture of involvement encourages responsibility, a willingness to sacrifice. Increasingly often, mass media offer an anti-model of values and attitudes, which propagates a false message about the possibility of being successful in life without the necessity to learn and work hard. Let us remember that diffusing passive attitudes,

an anti-culture of non-involvement, has an extremely negative impact on many aspects of our lives. Telling young people that the only thing important in life is being smart, but not putting in any effort or working hard brings anti-motivation into the areas of education, learning, developing talents and interests. A culture of involvement also reminds us that love brings sense to human existence, although it often needs sacrificing something for the ones we love.

- Culture of holiness assumes encouraging youth to get interested in spirituality by turning towards what is normal, casual and beautiful in its simplicity. Spiritual values sanctify young people's free time. It is looking for authentic joy in learning and work, but also in resting and entertainment, in a way which is not threatening to young people. A culture of holiness doesn't mean isolation from the world, on the contrary, it encourages full participation in life. It stresses the meaning of prayer and turning to the models of holiness which show a way to act right (Climati, 2007, p. 149–163).

It is important to support parents in their individual educational approach, whose aim is to deepen their understanding of themselves as well as of their children, focusing on the most important issues related to internal values and emotional depth, which characterize family relations.

In this place it is worth recalling Pope Francis' words to youth in Brzegi near Krakow during the evening vigil. The Pope highlighted the necessity to live a life which leaves behind a trace. He warned about attitudes paralyzing human behavior and named first of all fear and indolence, which causes a feeling that in our world, our town and communities, there is no more place for growing, dreaming, creating. The Pope warned about confusing happiness with easiness and comfort. The illusion of a happy life understood as vegetation on a cozy couch is a way to a paralyzing attitude, which takes autonomy and freedom away from a human being. From here comes the pope's appeal to youth: "To follow Jesus, you must have some courage, to switch your couch to a pair of shoes, which shall

allow you to walk the paths you have never dreamed about and not even thought of." And he told the young people who had gathered to listen to him: "Today's world wants you to be the active participants of history. Because life is always beautiful when we want to live it to its fullest, when we want to leave a trace. The history demands from us to defend our dignity and not to allow others to decide about our future. No, it is us, who are to decide" (Pope Francis' speech to youth during World Youth Day, Brzegi 30.07.2016).

Conclusions

As many psychological and pedagogical studies but also everyday experiences show, a happy child and a later self-dependent, fully mature, responsible young person is usually raised in a family which fulfills their needs. These are families in which parents and their child are bonded with love, connected with a warm-hearted, indivisible coexistence and selfless care. A close relationship with parents enhances safety, self-trust, ability to love, diligence and gives a moral compass to a child. The one who experienced limitless love will also be able to have basic trust in others and to give love.

The values internalized by a child are also most of all dependent on parents. Moral and spiritual ideals are given not only by moralizing words, but most of all are based on decent rules, mutual contact and the functioning of a family in which a child achieves the moral grounding necessary to be able to live a sensible and socially responsible life.

It is a parental task to create a safe environment to live together with their child, where common beliefs on life priorities are of paramount importance. Parents teach us about what is important in life, what is true and beautiful and what is secondary. Also, the spiritual and world-view questions on which parent's lives are based, should be the basis on which a child is raised. It is important that parents help their children to gain convictions about the sense of life and inevitability of moral obligations (Brezinka, 2007, p. 226–227).

The closeness between parents and children enables interpersonal communication, in which important and unique experiences and feelings are present. It is worth remembering that children learn first of all through example, cooperation and shared responsibility.

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