

QUARTERLY JOURNAL
FIDES ET RATIO

ISSUE 66(2)2026

DIALOGUE, COMMUNICATION:
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

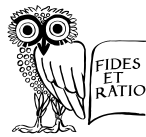


QUARTERLY JOURNAL

FIDES ET RATIO

ISSUE 66(2)2026

DIALOGUE, COMMUNICATION:
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH



Quarterly Journal Fides et Ratio

fidesetratio.com.pl

ul. Franciszkańska 3/47
00-233 Warszawa

Principal Contact

Professor Maria Ryś,
Editor in Chief,
VIZJA University in Warsaw, Poland

kwartalnik@fidesetratio.com.pl

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Professor **Maria Ryś**, PhD,
VIZJA University in Warsaw, Poland

DEPUTY EDITOR

Associate Professor
Urszula Tataj-Puzyna, PhD,
Department of Midwifery, Centre of
Postgraduate Medical Education, Poland

Irena Grochowska, PhD,
Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw
(UKSW), Poland

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATE

Paweł Kwas, PhD,
Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw
(UKSW), Poland

THEMATIC EDITORS OF:

MEDICAL SCIENCE AND HEALTH SCIENCES

Professor **Anna Doboszyńska**, MD, PhD,
University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn
(UWM), Poland

Professor **Katarzyna Kucharska**, MD, PhD,
Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw
(UKSW), Poland

Associate Professor **Urszula Ołdakowska
Jedynak** MD, PhD, Medical University
of Warsaw Poland

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Associate Professor **Zbigniew Gaś**, PhD,
University of Economics and Innovation
in Lublin (WSEI), Poland

Professor Maria Ryś, PhD,
VIZJA University in Warsaw, Poland

ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Associate Professor **Andrzej Kobyliński**, PhD,
Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw
(UKSW), Poland

Associate Professor **Małgorzata Wrześniak**, PhD,
Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw
(UKSW), Poland

THEOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Professor em. **Roman Bartnicki**, PhD,
The Catholic Academy in Warsaw, Poland

Professor em. **Adam Skreczko**, PhD,
Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw
(UKSW), Poland

LANGUAGE EDITORS

Zofia Kończewska-Murdzek, MSc

Krzysztof Kraśniewski, PhD

Małgorzata Walaszczyk, MSc

STATISTICAL EDITOR

Karol Kwas, MSc

EDYTORIAL BOARD

Beata Szlendak, PhD,
Centre of Postgraduate Medical Education,
Poland

SCIENTIFIC BOARD

Professor **Tadeusz Biesaga**, PhD,
Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow,
Poland

Professor **Anna Doboszyńska**, MD, PhD,
Colegium Medicum, The University of Warmia
and Mazury in Olsztyn (UWM), Poland

Associate Professor **Zbigniew Gaś**, PhD,
University of Economics and Innovation
in Lublin (WSEI), Poland

Professor **Nana Iashvili**,
Tbilisi State Academy of Arts, Georgia

Professor **Katarzyna Kucharska**, MD, PhD,
Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw
(UKSW), Poland

Associate Professor **Urszula Otdakowska-
Jedynak**, MD, PhD, Poland

Professor **Jakub Pawlikowski**, MD, PhD,
Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw
(UKSW), Poland

Professor **Paolo Puma**,
University of Florence, Italy

Oxana Remeniaka, PhD,
National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy"
(NaUKMA), Ukraine

Professor emer. **Adam Skreczko**, PhD,
Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw
(UKSW), Poland

Mária Slivková, PhD,
OZ Felix Familia, Slovakia

REVIEWERS:

Felicity Agwu Kalu, PhD,
Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland

Associate Professor **Barbara Baranowska**,
MD, PhD, Centre of Postgraduate Medical
Education, Poland

Professor **Roman Bartnicki**, PhD,
The Catholic Academy in Warsaw, Poland

Grażyna Bączek, PhD, Medical University
of Warsaw, Poland

Associate Professor **Agnieszka Bender**, PhD,
The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin,
Poland

Associate Professor emer., Rev. **Jan Bielecki**,
PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw
(UKSW), Poland

Rev. **Matteo Campagnaro**, PhD, The Catholic
Academy in Warsaw, Collegium Joanneum

Denise Côté-Arsenault, PhD, RN, CPCLC,
FNAP, FAAN, Saint Louis University

Professor **Ladislav Csontos**, SJ, PhD, Trnava
University in Trnava, Slovakia

Professor **Krzysztof Czajkowski**, MD, PhD,
Medical University of Warsaw, Poland

Agata Czarnecka, PhD, The Nicolaus
Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland

Professor **Anna Doboszyńska**, MD, PhD,
The University of Warmia and Mazury in
Olsztyn (UWM), Poland

Associate Professor **Urszula Dudziak**, PhD,
The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin,
Poland

Professor **René Ecochard**, MD,
Université Claude Bernard Lyon, France

Professor **Marian Gabryś**, MD, PhD,
Wroclaw Medical University, Poland

Professor **Janusz Gadzinowski**, MD, PhD,
Poznan University of Medical Sciences, Poland

Agnieszka Hennel-Brzozowska, PhD,
Pedagogical University of Krakow, Poland

Professor **Olgierd Hryniewicz**, PhD,
Polish Academy of Science, Poland

Maria Jankowska, PhD,
The Maria Grzegorzewska University, Poland

Aleksandra Kimball, MSc,
Warner Brothers Studios, USA

Iwona Kiersnowska, MSc,
Medical University of Warsaw, Poland

Associate Professor **Andrzej Kobylński**, PhD,
Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw
(UKSW), Poland

Professor **Tomasz Kaźmierski**, PUNO, London, Great Britain

Marta Komorowska-Pudło, PhD, hab., University of Szczecin, Poland

Associate Professor **Dorota Kornas-Biela**, PhD, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Monika Kornaszewska-Polak, PhD, University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

Jolanta Kraśniewska, PhD, The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Poland

Grażyna Koszałka, PhD, Polish Pastoral Council of Western Europe, Germany

Associate Professor **Teresa Krasowska**, PhD, Academy of Music in Poznan, Poland

Professor emer., Rev. **Jan Krokos**, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Professor emer., Rev. **Henryk Krzysteczko**, PhD, University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

Paweł Kwas, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Associate Professor **Paweł Mazanka**, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Professor emer. **Alina T. Midro**, PhD, Medical University of Białystok, Poland

Professor emer. **Katarzyna Olbrycht**, PhD, University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

Professor **Elżbieta Osewska**, PhD, University of Applied Sciences in Tarnow, Poland

Marta Osuchowska, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Associate Professor **Tadeusz Pietras**, MD, PhD, The University of Łódź, Poland

Professor Rev. **Jan Przybyłowski**, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Wojciech Puzyna, MD, PhD, St. Sophia's Specialist Hospital in Warsaw, Poland

Associate Professor **Michał Rabijewski**, MD, PhD, Centre of Postgraduate Medical Education, Poland

Katerina Ratislavova, PhD, University of West Bohemia in Plzeň, Czech Republic

Professor **Maria Ryś**, PhD, VIZJA University in Warsaw, Poland

Professor emer., Rev. **Adam Skreczko**, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Associate Professor Rev. **Borys Soiński**, PhD, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland

Associate Professor emer. **Witold Starnawski**, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Associate Professor **Małgorzata Starzomska**, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Justyna Stępkowska, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Dorota Sys, PhD, Centre of Postgraduate Medical Education, Poland

Associate Professor **Jacek Śliwak**, PhD, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Elżbieta Tracewicz, PhD, Life Adjustment Center, USA

Associate Professor **Urszula Tataj-Puzyna**, PhD, Centre of Postgraduate Medical Education, Poland

Associate Professor emer. **Elżbieta Trzęsowska-Greszta**, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Joeri Vermeulen, MSc, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Belgium

Paulina Wesolowska, PhD, Medical University of Vienna, Austria

Associate Professor **Krzysztof Wojcieszek**, PhD, University of Criminology and Penitentiary Studies in Warsaw, Poland

Associate Professor **Edyta Wolter**, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Juliet Wood, PhD, Bournemouth University, Great Britain

Associate Professor **Małgorzata Wrześniak**, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Professor Rev. **Dominik Zamiatała**, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Associate Professor **Dominika Żukowska-Gardzińska**, PhD, Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), Poland

Contents

<i>Krzysztof Euszczyk,</i> Smartphones as a determinant of adolescent developmental crisis and a reinterpretation of the role of educational television. The American experience perspective	9
<i>Mariusz G. Karbowski,</i> Ressentiment as a distortion and revaluation of the value system in the psychosocial experience of an individual	22
<i>Monika Topór-Pamula, Wanda Zagórska,</i> Ludic behavior in adulthood: Specificity and psychological functions	36
<i>Angelika Szczepanik-Paśnik, Eliza Gorzelak,</i> Marital satisfaction and parenting styles in One's Own Family in relation to Occupational Burnout	53
<i>Anna Dąbrowska,</i> Dialogue in crisis intervention: A pragmatic-linguistic analysis of communication mechanisms. A comparative case study	68
<i>Tadeusz Pietras, Grzegorz Opielak, Kasper Sipowicz,</i> Special pedagogy of individuals with intellectual disabilities and contemporary psychiatry – paths of development, interdependencies and contradictions	82
<i>Erika Vavreková,</i> Attitudes toward difficulties, problems, and emotional wounds a nd the sense of loneliness among women in religious communities	95



Smartphones as a determinant of adolescent developmental crisis and a reinterpretation of the role of educational television. The American experience perspective¹

<https://doi.org/10.34766/r2kjqh34>

© Authors (copyright) • Quarterly Journal Fides et Ratio (publishing rights) • Open Access CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Krzysztof Łuszczek^a ✉

^a Krzysztof Łuszczek, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1862-5028>, Institute of Pedagogy, University of Szczecin, Poland

✉ Corresponding author: krzysztof.luszczek@usz.edu.pl

Abstract: This article is an analysis of the evolution of the American education ecosystem in the face of the rapid diffusion of mobile technology and the COVID-19 pandemic. The main aim of the paper is to explore the dichotomy between the destructive impact of smartphones on adolescent wellbeing and the revitalisation of educational television as an inclusive teaching tool. The first part of the text analyses the phenomenon of a “smartphone-based childhood”. Citing a number of post-pandemic studies, the author points to a correlation between unrestricted access to social media and a growing mental health crisis, atrophy of social relationships and cognitive fragmentation of students. Smartphones, defined as powerful vectors of distraction, have forced US lawmakers to impose strict restrictions on their use in schools in order to restore the effectiveness of learning processes. They have clearly failed as educational tools. The second part of the article focuses on the post-pandemic redefinition of the role of technology in education. The experience of lockdown in the field of education, alongside the crisis in the achievement of educational goals, has been a catalyst for innovation. The author analyses the process of moving from ad-hoc e-learning towards advanced hybrid models that integrate artificial intelligence (AI) to personalise teaching and change the role of teachers. Special attention was given to the renaissance of educational television. Thanks to its high inclusivity (97% coverage) and the implementation of new technological standards (ATSC 3.0, EduCast), television has become a key instrument to stop digital exclusion, offering stability in regions with poor network infrastructure. The author also refers to the landmark structural changes in 2025-2026, including the abolition of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). This process, ending the era of centralised public media in the USA, has forced a shift towards regional models and strategic public sector partnerships with streaming platforms (e.g. NASA and Netflix). The article argues that contemporary educational television, while evolving into an AI-enhanced interactive tool, remains a necessary, albeit evolving, foundation of the American educational infrastructure.

Keywords: COVID 19 pandemic, educational television, media education, smartphone, USA

Introduction

The contemporary educational paradigm is being reshaped by general-purpose technologies whose rapid spread into everyday home life challenges established patterns of human adaptation. For the younger generation of the second decade of the twenty-first century, smartphone use has become a defining experience.

On the one hand, smartphones function as powerful cognitive tools that broaden access to information and educational resources. On the other hand, according to the perspectives advanced by Haidt

(2024) and Turkle (2015), it has become a vector of “continuous partial attention” and the disintegration of social structures. The transition from the traditional model of childhood centered on free play to a model of “smartphone-based childhood” has been associated with a growing mental health crisis manifested in sleep deprivation, anxiety, and body dysmorphic disorder, among other conditions.

These developments have been further compounded by the post-pandemic implications of information and communication technologies (ICT)

¹ Article in Polish language: https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/66p_Lusz.pdf

in education. In the United States, the rapid acceleration of educational digitalization driven by the COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep infrastructural inequalities and contributed to a decline in cognitive competencies across multiple age groups. In this context, the resurgence of educational television, particularly through the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and the implementation of new digital broadcasting standards deserve special attention.

One of the key challenges facing contemporary education is balancing technological innovation with students' emotional well-being and preserving schools as spaces for meaningful social interaction.

1. The significance of smartphones for educational effectiveness and students' psychological well-being

Contemporary processes of technological diffusion are characterized by unprecedented speed and intensity. Haidt (2024) argues that whereas the adoption of radio and television in households took decades, modern technologies become integrated into domestic environments within only a few months. This perspective aligns with Suleyman's concept of general-purpose technologies. According to Suleyman and Bhaskar (2023), twenty-four such technologies can be identified throughout human history, ranging from fire and the wheel to artificial intelligence. The crucial distinction, however, lies in the pace of their diffusion. Historically, the adoption of transformative technologies unfolded over centuries; today, it occurs within remarkably short timeframes. As a result, a single generation may experience several major technological revolutions during its lifetime, raising important questions about the adaptive capacities of the human mind and body (*ibidem*).

This transformation can be illustrated by the technological leap that occurred between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when a single lifetime witnessed the transition from horse-drawn transportation to air travel, as well as from traditional correspondence to electronic communication. Nevertheless, the most profound changes in social

organization have occurred over the past two decades. In 2016, only ten years after the commercial launch of the iPhone, smartphone penetration among American teenagers reached 80 percent. By 2022, nearly half of this population (46%) reported being online almost constantly (Vogels, Gelles-Watnick, & Massarat, 2022). Turkle (2015) describes this phenomenon as a state of "continuous partial attention," signaling a fundamental shift in human consciousness and interpersonal relationships.

The development of mobile technologies has effectively blurred the traditional boundaries between students' social lives and educational environments. Data from the Common Sense Census indicate that the age at which children enter the mobile ecosystem continues to decline. Currently, 51% of American children aged 0–8 own a personal mobile device, most commonly a tablet, though increasingly a smartphone. As children enter adolescence, these devices become constant companions. By the end of 2024, 46% of teenagers reported being online "almost constantly," nearly double the 24% recorded in 2015 (Mann, Calvin, Lenhart, & Robb, 2025). These devices have both clear advantages and significant drawbacks. While they provide powerful opportunities for interactive learning, personalized instruction, and emergency communication, they also serve as major sources of distraction in educational settings, contribute to cognitive fragmentation, and are increasingly associated with the growing mental health crisis among young people.

Haidt (2024) identifies the years 2010–2015 as a critical turning point, describing them as the "birth of the smartphone-based childhood," which gradually displaced the traditional model of childhood centered on free play. This transformation coincided with the consolidation of the social media ecosystem, most notably through Facebook's acquisition of Instagram in 2012. The emergence of a social environment shaped by mobile technology and a culture of self-presentation fueled an explosive expansion of Instagram's user base, which grew from 10 million to 90 million users within just a few months.

Research on social media use suggests that Instagram may have a particularly negative effect on the well-being of adolescent girls. The correlation between

exposure to idealized images of peers and increased levels of frustration and depressive symptoms is well documented and is often linked to body dysmorphic concerns and diminished self-esteem (Twenge et al., 2018). At the same time, among adolescent boys, a dominant trend has been the migration of social and leisure activities into virtual environments through online gaming, platforms such as Reddit, and the consumption of pornography (Haidt, 2024). These developments contribute to a diminished capacity for forming deep interpersonal relationships in the real world and undermine the ability to be fully present in social interactions (Turkle, 2015).

It is particularly noteworthy that social media platforms have evolved into channels for the transmission not so much of information as of powerful emotions, fostering anxiety about the future and a pervasive sense of existential uncertainty among young people. Statistical evidence reveals a striking paradox: despite improvements in key macroeconomic indicators in the United States between 2010 and 2015, rates of depression and anxiety among adolescents rose sharply during the same period (Twenge, 2017; Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, & Martin, 2018). This suggests that technological factors and shifts in patterns of socialization may exert a greater influence on mental health than traditional economic determinants.

Findings from British correlational studies confirm a significant association between extensive mobile device use among children and adolescents and the prevalence of depressive symptoms, anxiety disorders, and sleep deprivation. This relationship is particularly pronounced among individuals reporting the highest levels of screen time. The scale of the problem is further reflected in respondents' own attitudes, as a substantial proportion of those surveyed expressed a desire to reduce the amount of time they spend using smartphones. A particularly important indicator is the finding that one in eight participants reported needing external support to regulate their digital habits. Failure to address this issue may contribute to the progression of serious mental health problems among younger generations (Carter, Ahmed, Cassidy, Pearson, Calcia, Mackie, Kalk, 2024; Carter, Payne, Rees, Sohn, Brown, Kalk, 2024).

Children's growing dependence on smartphones has led to significant disruptions in cognitive functioning. Teachers increasingly find themselves competing with mobile devices for students' attention—a contest in which the educational system is at a distinct disadvantage. When launching its 2024 initiative to remove mobile phones from school environments, the Los Angeles school board emphasized that these devices distract students from learning, contribute to anxiety, and facilitate cyberbullying. Moreover, smartphones are not only highly effective at capturing the attention of children; they are equally successful in diverting the attention of adults (Blume & Karabatur, 2024).

The presence of smartphones in schools is far from passive. Research data indicate that teenagers spend an average of 66 to 72 minutes per school day actively using their phones during class time, primarily for social media, messaging platforms, and entertainment applications (Mann, Calvin, Lenhart, & Robb, 2025). Effective teaching fundamentally depends on a teacher's ability to capture and sustain students' attention. Smartphones make it more difficult for teachers to maintain students' attention because notifications, vibrations, and screen activity frequently interrupt concentration. Studies conducted in 2025 further suggest that the mere presence of a smartphone—whether on a desk or even in a student's pocket—can impair cognitive performance, as the brain must devote mental resources to attentional inhibition in order to resist the device's potential distractions (Chen, 2025; Twenge, 2025).

The impact of smartphones extends beyond students' learning experiences and increasingly affects teachers' professional effectiveness. Educators frequently report having to compete with mobile devices for students' attention, a challenge that contributes significantly to occupational stress and burnout. Survey findings indicate that 76% of teachers support policies prohibiting phone use during instructional time, citing constant disruptions and the burden of monitoring device use as major obstacles to effective teaching. Evidence further suggests that such restrictions lead to a marked increase in student engagement and participation during lessons (Mecom & Lehtinen-Vela, 2024).

The debate over the presence of communication devices in American schools has been ongoing for several decades. Initial efforts to introduce regulatory measures emerged during the 1980s. However, concerns arising from the rapid expansion of the Internet in the 1990s ultimately led to the enactment of the Children’s Internet Protection Act in 2000. The legislation requires educational institutions receiving public funding to implement appropriate filtering technologies on school computers and to block access to obscene and pornographic content (Children’s Internet Protection Act, 2026).

The debate over the presence of smartphones in American schools has evolved through several distinct phases, often shaped by tragic events that captured national attention. The shooting at Columbine High School in 1999 served as a catalyst for a narrative emphasizing the utilitarian value of mobile phones. At the time, proponents highlighted their role as critical tools for emergency communication, enabling the rapid transmission of distress signals and facilitating contact with first responders. At the same time, however, growing smartphone use among students sparked concerns about cyberbullying, which becomes significantly easier to perpetrate when children have constant access to mobile devices during the school day (Faguy, Blasey, & Morris, 2024). Addressing the issue of children’s and adolescents’ mental health at the Center for Digital Thriving at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy identified social media as one of the most significant threats to healthy psychological development. He described the issue as a “pivotal issue in public health,” underscoring its importance as a major societal and educational challenge (Mineo, 2023).

Findings from a 2023 study conducted by the Pew Research Center provide empirical evidence of a negative relationship between the presence of smartphones in school environments and the effectiveness of educational processes. As many as 71% of surveyed educators reported that mobile technologies create a persistent source of student distraction. The study highlighted the substantial cognitive resources consumed by these devices, which significantly reduce students’ ability to concentrate

on instructional content. This challenge is further reflected in classroom management, with 33% of high school teachers reporting difficulties enforcing restrictions on smartphone use. Such policies vary considerably across states and even among individual school districts. Florida became the first state to introduce a statewide ban or significant restrictions on student phone use in schools in 2023 (Pew Research Center, 2024). According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, some form of limitation on smartphone use was already in place in 76% of American schools during the 2021–2022 academic year (Burr, Kemp, & Wang, 2024).

Transitioning to phone-free school environments presents substantial logistical and operational challenges. One of the primary obstacles remains parental concern about communication during emergencies. Parental opinions on the issue are far from uniform. Many argue that they should be able to contact their children during the school day, whereas school safety experts contend that personal mobile phones may actually hinder effective responses in emergency situations (Citizen Portal, 2025). Students, too, often show little understanding of the rationale behind such restrictions. School administrators across the United States report that students frequently attempt to circumvent phone-use policies through a variety of strategies. In Phoenix and surrounding areas, for example, principals reported that students surrendered “burner phones”—inexpensive prepaid devices—while concealing their smartphones. Others used school-issued laptops to access cloud-based versions of social media platforms (Warnock, 2025). These examples demonstrate that smartphone bans cannot operate in isolation. To be effective, they must be accompanied by a school culture that prioritizes social connection and provides meaningful alternatives to digital stimulation.

In response to mounting evidence of the educational and psychological harms associated with excessive smartphone use, policymakers across the United States have increasingly embraced stricter regulatory measures. By October 2025, at least 34 states and the District of Columbia had either required or encouraged school districts to adopt policies restricting or prohibiting smartphone use in K–12 classrooms

(Prothero, 2025). These measures are intended to restore conditions conducive to effective teaching and learning. When combined with comprehensive digital citizenship education and the provision of well-designed educational technology (EdTech) tools, such policies offer a pathway toward a more balanced and sustainable educational ecosystem. Within this emerging framework, the role of the smartphone in students' lives is being fundamentally redefined. Rather than functioning as a constant social companion, it is increasingly viewed as a specialized tool to be used purposefully and under the guidance of qualified educators. The long-term success of these initiatives will depend on their capacity to reduce socio-economic inequalities, ensure operational safety, and restore the school environment as a secure space for deep, student-centered learning.

Evidence published between 2024 and 2026 suggests that unrestricted smartphone use in schools may negatively affect both educational outcomes and American students' psychological well-being. Although these devices possess certain potential as instructional tools—particularly in STEM education and special education—their widespread presence in schools currently contributes to attentional disruption and the erosion of learners' emotional balance.

2. Post-pandemic implications of technology use in education

The COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to introduce rapid organizational and structural changes. Educational institutions were compelled to introduce large-scale modifications to the organization of teaching and learning with little delay. Many of the emergency measures adopted during this period subsequently evolved into permanent components of educational policy and instructional practice.

One of the central challenges involved the reorientation of educational models toward the elimination of direct interpersonal interactions within school environments. Under crisis conditions, information and communication technologies (ICT) were widely perceived as the optimal means of maintaining the continuity of educational processes. Although the

concept of distance learning (e-learning) evolved alongside the expansion of the global Internet, it is important to recognize the earlier experiences accumulated by the American educational system over several decades in this field. Educational television had long been employed as a response to the postwar demographic boom and the need to democratize access to knowledge. The implementation of these solutions was driven primarily by infrastructural and communication barriers affecting regions characterized by lower levels of urbanization and less developed telecommunications networks.

Over time, however, educators and policymakers began to experiment with innovative instructional solutions whose implementation required substantial financial investment. A representative example was the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction (MPATI), developed by the Westinghouse Corporation, which had previously acquired experience in designing comparable systems. Educational content was transmitted through specially modified aircraft. MPATI constituted a unique experiment in educational broadcasting aimed at overcoming the limitations of terrestrial signal coverage. The pilot program was launched in the state of Indiana in 1959 and was subsequently expanded to include Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The use of a fleet of Douglas DC-6 aircraft provided a broadcasting radius of approximately 220 miles, enabling the transmission of an average of twenty instructional lessons per day (Tracey & Stefaniak, 2014).

Projects of this kind, developed long before the emergence of the global Internet, highlighted two fundamental challenges that must be addressed in distance education: the need for appropriately designed pedagogical strategies and the technical difficulties associated with content transmission.

The implementation of the distance-learning paradigm and the necessity of adapting to large-scale online education during the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for the principal stakeholders of the educational process: students, their parents or guardians, and teachers. Educators, in particular, were required to reconfigure instructional strategies, create new spaces for social interaction, and facilitate educational experiences within digital

environments. At the same time, they expressed legitimate concerns regarding the effectiveness of these efforts and the extent to which educational objectives could be successfully achieved under such conditions (Moser, Wei, Brenner, 2021).

During the pandemic, the Internet ceased to be merely a supplementary educational resource and became an essential part of educational infrastructure. However, recognizing the importance of digital connectivity did not automatically translate into a widespread ability to use digital technologies effectively for educational purposes. The crisis exposed the persistence of digital exclusion in ways that many had assumed were no longer relevant. More than half of lower-income households struggled to afford broadband Internet access. This obstacle, combined with inadequate access to appropriate devices, constituted the first major infrastructural barrier to effective distance learning. Research conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed that, one year after the onset of the crisis, 10% of American adults felt overwhelmed when using computers and smartphones for educational purposes, while 26% reported needing assistance in setting up new devices and adapting them to educational tasks (Tyson, Lipka, & Deane, 2025).

Research indicates a correlation between the introduction of lockdown measures, the transition to distance learning, and a decline in students' academic performance across a range of competency areas. Although some studies suggest that no substantial deterioration in learning outcomes occurred, the evidence as a whole points to a very different conclusion (Domingue, Dell, Lang, Silverman, Yeatman, & Hough, 2022). According to data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), fourth-grade students in 2022 were, on average, twenty-four weeks behind in mathematics and nine weeks behind in reading achievement. Numerous efforts have been undertaken to mitigate these learning losses; however, the outcomes of such initiatives have varied considerably. Some scholars and educational practitioners argue that the educational system may require many years to fully recover from the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (NAEP, 2022).

The implementation of distance-learning models contributed to the widening of existing educational disparities. This phenomenon was particularly evident among students with special educational needs, who, under conditions of social isolation and limited access to direct specialist support, faced greater obstacles in both knowledge acquisition and the achievement of therapeutic and educational objectives (Averett, 2021).

The closure of school buildings resulted in more than a mere interruption of classroom instruction. It also severed essential social networks for millions of children and adolescents, contributing to a documented increase in mental health crises among young people (GAO, 2022). Consequently, the implementation of systematic psychological support was widely recognized as necessary in order to reduce the risk of the behavioral and emotional consequences associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Such measures were considered essential for facilitating students' readjustment to in-person learning and optimizing their functioning within school environments following a prolonged period of social isolation (Kuhfeld, Soland, Lewis, Ruzek, Johnson, 2022). The numerous tensions and challenges experienced during this period led many teachers, students, and parents to express a strong desire for the restoration of traditional face-to-face schooling as soon as the public health emergency had subsided (Arnett, 2021).

Despite such declarations, the pandemic permanently transformed the educational system. In the post-pandemic era, hybrid and flexible models of instruction have become increasingly common. The most significant trend in educational technology has been the rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into the everyday teaching and learning process. What initially functioned as a supplementary tool has evolved into a sophisticated solution for personalized learning and administrative efficiency. Survey data indicate that the use of AI in classroom environments has increased sixfold since 2023. This growth is largely driven by the belief that artificial intelligence can substantially reduce teachers' administrative workload. Approximately 68% of American educators report that these tools save them up to five hours of work per week. In practice, AI applications in education are concentrated in four principal areas: self-directed

learning, the automation of teachers' routine tasks, the development of literacy skills, and educational guidance and counseling. By 2025, approximately twenty-eight states had issued detailed guidelines governing the use of artificial intelligence in K–12 education, with particular emphasis on student data protection and the ethical use of AI technologies (Iasevoli, 2025).

AI-powered platforms identify students' specific strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles, enabling curriculum content and instructional strategies to be tailored to individual needs. This shift toward adaptive learning represents a departure from the traditional "one-size-fits-all" model and instead emphasizes real-time intervention designed to ensure continuous student engagement and support. One of the most significant practical consequences of these technologies is the transformation of the teacher's role. Rather than serving primarily as a source of information, teachers increasingly function as facilitators and mentors of the learning process. By delegating repetitive tasks—such as lesson planning, grading assistance, or drafting routine emails—to AI-driven software, educators can devote more attention to higher-order educational activities, including moderating classroom discussions and providing targeted individual support to students with special educational needs (Hamilton & Swanston, 2024).

The growing integration of AI systems into educational policy in the United States may contribute to the wider adoption of the flipped classroom model, which has traditionally been used primarily in higher education. Within this approach, students engage with instructional materials online before class and subsequently work with those materials collaboratively during classroom sessions. Research suggests that AI-supported flipped classrooms enhance student motivation, improve learners' AI literacy and competency, and foster more personalized educational experiences (Kaur, 2025).

However, the growing integration of artificial intelligence into children's educational environments also generates significant challenges and tensions that require proactive policy responses. Failure to address these issues at an early stage may lead to unintended consequences comparable to those as-

sociated with the expansion of the Internet at the turn of the twenty-first century, albeit potentially on a much larger scale. The rapid deployment of AI-powered educational technologies has outpaced existing regulatory frameworks, creating an urgent need to modernize legal provisions governing the collection, processing, and protection of student data. These reforms are intended to safeguard children from the commercialization of personal information while strengthening parental oversight. The updated provisions of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, commonly referred to as COPPA 2.0, represent the most substantial revision of children's online privacy regulations since 2013. The final rule entered into force in 2025, establishing stricter requirements for data minimization, parental consent, and limitations on the use of children's personal information for commercial purposes (Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule, 2025).

The growing dependence on technology has also raised concerns about mental health and the effectiveness of the teaching–learning process. Teachers report signs of stress, fatigue, and declining academic performance associated with prolonged screen exposure and the constant stream of notifications. Approximately 72% of parents of K–12 students state that their children spend more time in front of screens than they did before the outbreak of the pandemic, while 39% of parents no longer enforce screen-time limits as strictly as they once did (Tyson, Lipka, & Deane, 2025). In response, schools have introduced "technology-free hours" and digital citizenship lessons to help students achieve a balance between digital life and face-to-face interaction as well as physical activity (Northwest Council for Computer Education, 2025).

The experiences associated with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic provide an excellent example of the risks involved in a crisis-driven transition to digital technology within a system characterized by deep inequalities. The challenges that emerged—from digital exclusion to the psychological effects of social isolation—were not isolated incidents but rather interconnected manifestations of the fragility of the American educational infrastructure. The pandemic has permanently changed

both educational practice and perceptions of how learning should be organized. Teachers have become more proficient in the use of digital technologies, and the infrastructure supporting them is more robust than at any previous point in history. However, the persistent and widening achievement gaps between affluent and low-income school districts underscore the system's continuing vulnerabilities. This situation highlights the need for greater systemic coordination and the maintenance of hybrid educational solutions.

3. The revitalization of educational television in the pandemic era

According to Rauf (2020), amid the multitude of technological solutions that emerged at the onset of the pandemic, a seemingly outdated medium played a crucial role—television. Broadcasters affiliated with the PBS network reconfigured their programming schedules in cooperation with administrators of local educational institutions. This process involved auditing archival resources for their alignment with existing educational standards and adapting content to curricular requirements. An initiative that initially emerged in seven states quickly expanded to all fifty. PBS viewed its role not only as a distributor of educational content but also as a provider of security and stability for children and families.

Apart from its role during the public health emergency, television also proved to be a dependable channel for delivering educational content. A key argument in favor of its use was the existence of technological barriers: during the initial phase of the pandemic, approximately 14% of households with children lacked access to broadband Internet (Maciag, 2020). In contrast to network infrastructure, television broadcasting reached 97% of the population of the United States, making it an inherently inclusive tool. This was especially important for low-income families, for whom television helped mitigate the effects of digital exclusion. Empirical data confirm the effectiveness of this form of content delivery: 57% of respondents from low-income groups described educational television programs as “very helpful.” The medium played a significant role in maintaining

the continuity of cognitive processes and supporting children's intellectual development during periods of social isolation (Katz & Rideout, 2021).

Analysis of the activities undertaken by public television broadcasters reveals a plurality of strategies designed to support educational processes, shaped by the legislative and curricular specificities of individual states. California adopted a model based on the rigorous alignment of content with official state educational standards. A key feature of content production was the strict age-based segmentation of audiences, intended to ensure that educational materials were appropriately matched to students' cognitive abilities (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2020). In Virginia, the strategy focused on the pedagogical dimension of broadcasting. Programs were designed with particular attention to the teacher's role as a facilitator and moderator of the learning process. Kansas implemented a participatory model by directly involving practicing teachers in the development of programming schedules. This team created an integrated educational offering tailored to three key age groups. Ohio distinguished itself through the effectiveness of its initiatives, leading to their institutionalization after the end of the pandemic. One example of the lasting impact of these efforts is the “Camp in a Box” project, a system of educational resources based on PBS materials. An unintended consequence of educational broadcasting during the pandemic was the shift in emphasis from the production of new content toward the use of archival materials (Negera, 2022). Although national frameworks provided general educational standards, the actual implementation of curricula was frequently adapted at the state and local levels through collaboration with departments of education. This cooperation resulted in the creation of original educational content featuring local teachers, thereby providing students with familiar educational contexts during a period of extreme social isolation.

Sesame Workshop, a pioneer in educational television and producer of Sesame Street, launched the “Caring for Each Other” initiative as a form of direct support for children. In hour-long special episodes, medical experts and beloved characters answered questions posed directly by children and

parents. The program conveyed scientific information about the virus in language accessible to children, reducing fear associated with abstract concepts such as “pandemic” or “infection.” More importantly, it affirmed children’s right to experience difficult emotions. Well-known Sesame Street characters, such as Elmo, expressed their own frustration with prolonged periods of staying at home. As a result, families gained a shared language for discussing mental health (Mills, 2024).

PBS created an online repository of educational materials, PBS LearningMedia. Within a few weeks of the announcement of lockdowns, the number of users increased fourfold. The commercial sector also responded to the educational challenges associated with the pandemic. Discovery Channel made its Discovery Education Experience service freely available to schools (3BL Media, 2020).

Pandemic-era experiences highlighted the continuing educational potential of television and the need for ongoing development of this medium. The ATSC 3.0 standard uses High Efficiency Video Coding (HEVC), which provides 25–50% better compression compared to the previous ATSC 1.0 standard. This efficiency enables broadcasters to deliver 4K Ultra High Definition video and immersive audio formats such as Dolby Atmos. A robust signal allows reception of ATSC 3.0 even in challenging environmental conditions, thereby reducing the risk of digital exclusion (Shilov, 2025). A key structural innovation that significantly strengthened the system and made it more suitable for educational contexts is EduCast technology. It enables the transmission of digital files—such as videos, PDFs, and software updates—via broadcast spectrum without requiring a traditional internet connection. This capability is particularly important for students in rural areas who lack broadband access but are within range of a transmission tower (Newman, 2025; SpectraRep, 2025).

The implementation of ATSC 3.0 accelerated in 2025–2026, with significant pilot projects conducted in the states of Michigan and New Mexico. Northern Michigan University maintains an upgraded infrastructure that integrates its educational access network with ATSC 3.0 broadcast transmission. In this way, it delivers educational content to resi-

dents of the region as well as K–12 schools (Leach, Richards, Thams, & Franti, 2025). Similarly, New Mexico PBS (KNME) became the first PBS station to fully implement ATSC 3.0 broadcasting for both educational and public-safety purposes, becoming the first station in the network to fully deploy ATSC 3.0 broadcasting (Clark, 2022). In January 2026, the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas showcased new devices intended for market release in 2026, designed to enable an easy and cost-effective transition to next-generation television without creating further hardware gaps or “digital exclusion spaces” among low-income populations (ATSC, 2026).

The technological pressure on educational television has fostered the development of new educational solutions and significantly expanded distribution capabilities. An example of such initiatives is the PBS Kids animated children’s series *Lyla in the Loop*. The protagonist is a seven-year-old Jamaican American girl and her family. In addition to traditional episodes, the digital package includes interactive videos in which the character Lyla asks viewers questions (Zahed, 2024). This illustrates a broader trend that has become firmly established in post-pandemic educational media. It reflects a broader shift from passive viewing toward more interactive forms of educational engagement, increasingly supported by digital technologies and AI tools. This transition is rooted in the concept of “co-viewing,” which assumes that children learn more from media when they engage in conversation about its content.

Financial stability has been an inherent element in the development of American educational television since the emergence of its earliest productions in the 1950s. The lack of systemic budgeting solutions forced broadcasters to adopt strategies of revenue diversification as the only effective mechanism for managing operational risk. Although the pandemic period brought temporary improvements to the sector’s financial condition through targeted funding programs supporting remote education, the expiration of relief funds led to a renewed deterioration in financial stability.

In July 2025, legislation was amended to eliminate approximately 1.1 billion dollars from previously approved federal funding, specifically rescinding

advance appropriations allocated to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). This decision was linked to the beginning of the Trump administration's efforts to dismantle the CPB. On January 5, 2026, the organization's board of directors voted in favor of full dissolution of the entity, signaling the end of a centralized federal model of public media (Nebraska Public Media, 2025). In the absence of a centralized broadcasting authority, responsibility for fulfilling the educational mission of television was transferred to local stations and regional networks. These entities are being transformed into community-based leaders, combining local content—such as school sports programming and local public events—with global educational channels (Bethune, 2025).

This created a fundamentally new situation in the educational television market. The elimination of the CPB forced local stations to confront a “financial gap.” In Nebraska, where CPB funds had supported state-level early childhood initiatives, the loss of funding required the search for private financial sources and greater reliance on local community responsibility. In rural areas, the consequences were even more severe, leading to station closures or the termination of partnerships with PBS, as exemplified by Arkansas TV and WBGU-TV in Ohio (Butts, 2026). Despite the dissolution of the CPB, funding for key educational programs was maintained in fiscal year 2026, including a \$31 million allocation for the “Ready To Learn” program (Wyllie, 2025). Alongside the decline in federal support for traditional public media platforms, a strategic shift toward commercial streaming platforms has emerged. This transition enables educational content providers to reach a vast audience while offering high-quality, family-friendly streaming programming. In July 2025, NASA and Netflix announced a partnership aimed at providing Netflix's 700 million subscribers with access to live space-related content. This collaboration integrates NASA+ live streams, including rocket launches, astronaut spacewalks, and views from the International Space Station, directly into the Netflix interface. NASA+ Director R. Sirmons noted that the partnership fulfills the agency's mission, established in 1958, of making space exploration accessible to the widest possible audience (Buglass, 2025).

Despite these successes, educational television during the pandemic was a product of emergency remote learning, which differed significantly from well-designed digital or hybrid curricula (Huck, Zhang, 2021). Research also showed that it was difficult for children to maintain the same level of attention without interaction with a teacher. As for teachers, the pandemic caused high levels of stress and an intensification of burnout-related problems, but it did not lead to increased turnover or subsequent teacher shortages (Zamarro, Camp, 2026). The implementation of television as an educational tool, although necessary, led to a dramatic increase in screen exposure, which according to research resulted, among other things, in sleep disturbances and lower mood among students. This situation created a kind of functional dichotomy for broadcasters: their educational mission relied on the use of digital channels, which at the same time constituted a major source of anxiety and fatigue resulting from excessive screen exposure (Capra, Stanyevic, Giudice, Monopoli, Decarolis, Esposito, Biasucci, 2023).

Regardless of the numerous psychosocial challenges caused by intensive exposure to media in the student's home environment, the role of American educational television during the COVID-19 pandemic deserves a clearly positive assessment from the perspective of ensuring continuity of instructional processes. The educational infrastructure underwent a lasting structural transformation. The teaching experiences developed during the period of remote instruction became the foundation for the hybridization of education, within which teachers systematically implement digital tools and video materials into everyday school practice.

As school districts continue to use high-quality instructional materials to mitigate pandemic-related learning loss, the value of television today also lies in its ability to provide training content that supports cognitive development. Increasingly, artificial intelligence and advanced data transmission technologies are being used in this context. The migration of organizations such as NASA to global streaming platforms ensures that mission-based educational content reaches the widest possible audience, even as local stations struggle to survive. The post-pandemic

period has expanded the educational possibilities of television, transforming it from a largely passive medium into a platform that increasingly supports interactive and long-term learning. The challenge in the coming years will likely be ensuring the socially equitable implementation of these advanced technologies, so as to prevent the emergence of a new form of digital exclusion that could leave the most vulnerable social groups behind.

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact on students, families, and teachers. Public schools in the United States closed in the spring of 2020, and most of them shifted to remote learning modes. Despite school districts' efforts to ensure continuity of education and to manage the technology required for distance learning, pandemic experiences varied significantly among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic constituted a historical stress test for the American education system, revealing both its deep inequalities and its capacity for rapid innovation. The revitalization of television as an instructional tool was arguably the most important achievement of this

period. The primary value of television proved to be its ability to reduce digital exclusion by providing a shared instructional baseline.

The significant reappraisal of television as an educational medium was not solely a consequence of institutional assumptions but was objectively confirmed in two key areas. First, a substantial reorientation of viewing habits was observed, which translated into a measurable shift in the structure and dynamics of media consumption. Second, the pedagogical value of television in crisis conditions was validated by research confirming its high instructional effectiveness in remote learning contexts. This phenomenon suggests that in emergency situations television regains the status of a key instrument for knowledge transmission, combining broad reach with high effectiveness in supporting cognitive processes.

The landscape of American educational television in 2026 differs markedly from that of the pre-pandemic period. The era of passive, linear broadcasting has been replaced by an integrated model that is interactive, personalized, and independent of traditional internet connectivity. The dissolution of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) represents a painful but definitive end to the centralized model of public media in the United States, giving way to a more fragmented yet technologically advanced ecosystem.

References

- 3BL Media. (2020, March 20). *Discovery Education expands coronavirus response to help educators transition to virtual learning*. Retrieved February 10, 2026, from <https://www.3blmedia.com/news/discovery-education-expands-coronavirus-response-help-educators-transition-virtual-learning>
- Arnett, T. (2021). *Breaking the mold: How a global pandemic unlocks innovation in K-12 instruction*. Christensen Institute. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://www.christenseninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/BL-Survey-1.07.21.pdf>
- Advanced Television Systems Committee. (2026). *ATSC highlighting benefits of next-generation broadcasting with new solutions for consumers and broadcasters*. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://www.atsc.org/news/atsc-highlighting-benefits-of-next-generation-broadcasting-with-new-solutions-for-consumers-and-broadcasters/>
- Averett, K. (2021). Remote learning, COVID-19, and children with disabilities. *AERA Open*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211058471>
- Bethune, N. (2025, July 8). *How public media cuts hurt kids*. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://prospect.org/2025/07/08/2025-07-08-public-media-cuts-pbs-npr-education/>
- Blume, H., & Karabatur, D. (2024, June 18). LAUSD approves cellphone ban as Newsom calls for statewide action. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved January 24, 2026, from <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-06-18/lausd-board-approved-strict-cell-phone-ban>
- Buglass, L. (2025, July 1). Netflix will start streaming NASA content soon—and the results look out of this world. *TechRadar*. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://www.techradar.com/streaming/netflix/netflix-will-start-streaming-nasa-content-soon-and-the-results-look-out-of-this-world>
- Burr, R., Kemp, J., & Wang, K. (2024, January 17). *Crime, violence, discipline, and safety in U.S. public schools: Findings from the School Survey on Crime and Safety: 2021-22* (NCES 2024-043). National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved January 24, 2026, from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2024043>

- Butts, T. (2026, January 23). Congress approves funding for public broadcasting emergency, educational programs. *TV Technology*. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://www.tvtechnology.com/regulatory-legal/legislation/congress-approves-funding-for-public-broadcasting-emergency-educational-programs>
- Capra, M. E., Stanyevic, B., Giudice, A., Monopoli, D., Decarolis, N. M., Esposito, S., & Biasucci, G. (2023). The effects of COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown on pediatric nutritional and metabolic diseases: A narrative review. *Nutrients*, *15*(1), 88. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu15010088>
- Carter, B., Ahmed, N., Cassidy, O., Pearson, O., Calcia, M., Mackie, C., & Kalk, N. J. (2024). 'There's more to life than staring at a small screen': A mixed methods cohort study of problematic smartphone use and the relationship to anxiety, depression and sleep in students aged 13–16 years old in the UK. *BMJ Mental Health*, *27*. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjment-2024-301115>
- Carter, B., Payne, M., Rees, P., Sohn, S. Y., Brown, J., & Kalk, N. J. (2024). A multi-school study in England, to assess problematic smartphone usage and anxiety and depression. *Acta Paediatrica*, *113*(10), 2240–2248. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apa.17317>
- Chen, X. (2025). Influence of mobile phone on school performance by distracting attention and impairing memory. *SHS Web of Conferences*, *222*, 02013. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202522202013>
- Children's Internet Protection Act. (2026). Retrieved January 24, 2026, from <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-47/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-54/subpart-F/section-54.520>
- Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule. (2025). Retrieved February 12, 2026, from <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/22/2025-05904/childrens-online-privacy-protection-rule>
- Citizen Portal. (2025, June 11). *Witnesses: Limiting personal devices during instructional time improves focus, discipline and classroom climate*. Retrieved February 11, 2026, from <https://citizenportal.ai/articles/6548107/federal/legislative/congressional-hearings-compilation/standing-committees-house-senate/education-and-labor-house-committee/Federal/Legislative/Congressional-Hearings-Compilation/Standing-Committees-House-and-Senate/Education-and-Labor-House-Committee/Witnesses-Limiting-personal-devices-during-instructional-time-improves-focus-discipline-and-classroom-climate>
- Clark, C. A. (2022, November 2). New Mexico PBS CEO Joachim elected to national board. *Daily Post*. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://ladailypost.com/new-mexico-pbs-ceo-joachim-elected-to-national-board/>
- Domingue, B. W., Dell, M., Lang, D., Silverman, R., Yeatman, J., & Hough, H. (2022). The effect of COVID on oral reading fluency during the 2020–2021 academic year. *AERA Open*, *8*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221120254>
- Faguy, A., Blasey, L., & Morris, R. (2024, June 22). US states want to ban phones in schools. It might be a challenge. *BBC News*. Retrieved January 24, 2026, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce99443qweno>
- Government Accountability Office. (2022). *Pandemic learning: Less academic progress overall, student and teacher strain and implications for the future* (GAO-22-105816). Retrieved February 5, 2026, from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-105816.pdf>
- Haelermans, C., Korthals, R., Jacobs, M., de Leeuw, S., Vermeulen, S., van Vugt, L., Aarts, B., Prokic-Breuer, T., van der Velden, R., van Wetten, S., & de Wolf, I. (2022). Sharp increase in inequality in education in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. *PLoS ONE*, *17*(2): e0261114. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0261114>
- Haidt, J. (2024). *The anxious generation: How the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness*. Penguin Press.
- Hamilton, I., & Swanston, B. (2024, June 6). Artificial intelligence in education: Teachers' opinions on AI in the classroom. *Forbes Advisor*. Retrieved February 12, 2026, from <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/education/it-and-tech/artificial-intelligence-in-school/>
- Huck, C., & Zhang, J. (2021). Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on K–12 education: A systematic literature review. *Educational Research and Development Journal*, *24*(1), 53–84.
- Iasevoli, B. (2025, October 27). Latest trends in educational technology for 2025. *Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*. Retrieved February 12, 2026, from <https://www.hmhc.com/blog/latest-trends-in-educational-technology-for-2025>
- Katz, V., & Rideout, V. (2021, Jun 24). Learning at home while under-connected: Lower-income families during the COVID-19 pandemic. *New America*. Retrieved February 6, 2026, from <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/learning-at-home-while-underconnected/>
- Kaur A. (2025). Flipping the classroom with AI: A new pedagogical paradigm. *Journal of Marketing & Social Research*, *2*(7), 265–270. Retrieved February 4, 2026, from <https://jmsr-online.com/article/flipping-the-classroom-with-ai-a-new-pedagogical-paradigm-384/>
- Kuhfeld, M., Soland, J., Lewis, K., Ruzek, E., & Johnson, A. (2022). The COVID-19 school year: Learning and recovery across 2020–2021. *AERA Open*, *8*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221099306>
- Leach, R. G., Richards, K. A., Thams, J. S., & Franti, M. (2025). *Five-year facilities master plan*. Northern Michigan University. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://nmu.edu/finance/sites/finance/files/2025-10/Five-Year-Facilities-Master-Plan-Final-October-31-2025.pdf>
- Los Angeles Unified School District. (2020, March 30). *Los Angeles Unified "At-Home Learning" partnership with California PBS stations now has over 30 states with local stations using the model*. Retrieved January 7, 2026, from <https://www.lausd.org/apps/news/article/2087588?categoryId=23516>
- Maciag, E. (2020, November 24). *How public media stations increase remote learning accessibility*. Protect My Public Media. Retrieved February 6, 2026, from <https://protectmypublicmedia.org/blog/2020/11/24/how-public-media-stations-increase-remote-learning-accessibility/>
- Mann, S., Calvin, A., Lenhart, A., & Robb, M. B. (2025). *The Common Sense census: Media use by kids zero to eight, 2025*. Common Sense Media. Retrieved February 13, 2026, <https://www.common Sense Media.org/sites/default/files/research/report/2025-common-sense-census-web-2.pdf>
- Mecom, K., & Lehtinen-Vela, A. (2024). *Teacher survey: Cell phone bans lead to safer environment and more learning time*. Study.com. Retrieved February 11, 2026, from <https://teachinglicense.study.com/featured-insights/mobile-bans-increase-engagement-and-learning-time.html>
- Mills, K. (2024). *Speaking of psychology: How Sesame Street teaches kids about emotional well-being, with Rosemarie Truglio, PhD* [Podcast episode 285]. American Psychological Association. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/sesame-street>
- Mineo, L. (2023, October 31). Murthy says social media hurting kids, time for government, tech firms to help. *Harvard Gazette*. Retrieved January 24, 2026, from <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2023/10/murthy-says-social-media-hurting-kids-time-for-government-tech-firms-to-help>

- Moser, K. M., Wei, T., & Brenner, D. (2021). Remote teaching during COVID-19: Implications from a national survey of language educators. *System*, 97, Article 102431. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102431>
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). (2022). *Key Findings of Mathematics and Reading - Grade 4 and 8*. Retrieved February 4, 2026, from https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/mathematics/supportive_files/2022_rm_infographic.pdf
- Nebraska Public Media. (2025). *Public media: Our mission continues*. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://nebraskapublicmedia.org/en/about/public-media-federal-funding/>
- Negera, S. (2022, June 28). Public TV stations adapt strategies for supporting out-of-school learning. *Current*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from <https://current.org/2022/06/public-tv-stations-adapt-strategies-for-supporting-out-of-school-learning/>
- Newman, J. (2025, November 19). FCC's ATSC 3.0 rules would slow transition to Next Gen TV broadcasting. *Current*. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://current.org/2025/11/fccs-atsc-3-0-rules-would-slow-transition-to-next-gen-tv-broadcasting/>
- Northwest Council for Computer Education. (2025). *The impact of technology on student mental health*. Retrieved February 12, 2026, from <https://nccce.org/the-impact-of-technology-on-student-mental-health/>
- Pew Research Center. (2024, June 12). *72% of U.S. high school teachers say cellphone distraction is a major problem in the classroom*. Retrieved January 24, 2026, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/12/72-percent-of-us-high-school-teachers-say-cellphone-distraction-is-a-major-problem-in-the-classroom>
- Prothero, A. (2025, October 24). Do school cellphone bans work? What early findings tell us. *Education Week*. Retrieved January 13, 2026, from <https://www.edweek.org/technology/do-school-cellphone-bans-work-what-early-findings-tell-us/2025/10>
- Rauf, D. S. (2020, April 14). An unexpected tool for remote learning during coronavirus: Public TV stations. *Education Week*. Retrieved February 5, 2026, from <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/an-unexpected-tool-for-remote-learning-during-coronavirus-public-tv-stations/2020/04>
- Saettler, P. (1990). *The evolution of American educational technology*. Libraries Unlimited.
- Shilov, V. (2025, January 16). *Broadcast better: The ultimate guide to ATSC 3.0 technology*. Promwad — Software and Hardware Product Development. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://promwad.com/news/guide-atsc>
- SpectraRep (2025). *EduCast*. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://www.spectrarep.com/educast/>
- Suleyman, M., & Bhaskar, M. (2023). *The coming wave: Technology, power, and the twenty-first century's greatest dilemma*. Crown.
- Tracey, M. W., & Stefaniak, J. E. (2014). MPATI: The Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction (1959–1971). *International Journal of Designs for Learning*, 5(2), 29–33.
- Turkle, S. (2015). *Reclaiming conversation: The power of talk in a digital age*. Penguin Press.
- Twenge, J. M. (2017). *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy—and completely unprepared for adulthood—and what that means for the rest of us*. Atria Books.
- Twenge, J. M. (2025, June 10). *The consequences of smartphones in schools* [Written testimony]. Retrieved February 10, 2026, from <https://www.congress.gov/119/meeting/house/118355/witnesses/HHRG-119-ED14-Wstate-TwengeJ-20250610.pdf>
- Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2018). Increases in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among U.S. adolescents after 2010 and no substitution between cyber and in-person interaction. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 6(1), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702617723376>
- Tyson, A., Lipka, M., & Deane, C. (2025, February 12). *5 years later: America looks back at the impact of COVID-19*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved February 12, 2026, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2025/02/12/5-years-later-america-looks-back-at-the-impact-of-covid-19/>
- Tyson, A., Lipka, M., & Deane, C. (2025, February 12). *How COVID-19 impacted Americans' relationship with technology*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved February 5, 2026, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2025/02/12/how-covid-19-impacted-americans-relationship-with-technology/>
- Vogels, E. A., Gelles-Watnick, R., & Massarat, N. (2022, August 10). *Teens, social media and technology 2022*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved February 14, 2026, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/>
- Warnock, C. (2025, December). Beyond Cellphone Bans: How K-12 Schools Are Teaching Digital Citizenship and Creativity. *EdTech Magazine*. Retrieved February 11, 2026, from <https://edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2025/12/beyond-cellphone-bans-how-k-12-schools-are-teaching-digital-citizenship-and-creativity>
- Wyllie, J. (2025). Federal budget outlook: Public media secures key funding for Ready To Learn and emergency alerting. *Current*. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://current.org/2026/01/house-approves-minibus-package-with-ngws-rtl-funding-but-not-broader-support/>
- Zahed, R. (2024, February). 'Lyla in the Loop' creator and head writer introduce us to PBS Kids' new problem-solver star. *Animation Magazine*. Retrieved February 13, 2026, from <https://www.animationmagazine.net/2024/02/lyla-in-the-loop-creator-and-head-writer-introduce-us-to-pbs-kids-new-problem-solver-star/>
- Zamarro, G., & Camp, A. (2026). The COVID-19 pandemic and schools. *Live Handbook*. Retrieved February 10, 2026, from <https://livehandbook.org/k-12-education/miscellaneous/covid-and-schools/>



Ressentiment as a distortion and revaluation of the value system in the psychosocial experience of an individual¹

<https://doi.org/10.34766/xwzwrn71>

© Authors (copyright) • Quarterly Journal Fides et Ratio (publishing rights) • Open Access CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Mariusz G. Karbowski^a ✉

^a Mariusz G. Karbowski, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9806-6133>,

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland

✉ Corresponding author: mkarbowski@ujk.edu.pl

Abstract: Ressentiment is a complex psychological phenomenon, manifesting as a relatively permanent emotional and cognitive attitude, arising under conditions of frustration, a sense of injustice, and the individual's experienced powerlessness. Its essence is not limited to the negative experience of emotions but also includes the systematic distortion of the perception of axiological reality and the secondary revaluation of the value system. In the article, resentment is analysed as a compensatory regulatory mechanism that allows an individual to maintain a subjective sense of meaning and coherence at the expense of deforming relational and existential evaluations. Referring to the philosophical approaches of Friedrich Nietzsche *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift* from 1887 and Max Scheler *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* from 1912 and to James's contemporary models of emotion regulation Gross (1998, 2003); Gross and Thompson (2023); Roskam, Gross, and Mikolajczak (2023) The article shows resentment as a phenomenon that intensifies in psychosocial conditions, where an excess of stimuli, comparative pressure and chronic exposure are conducive to the perpetuation of negative evaluations and succumbing to recursive loops of affect (Haidt, 2024). Particular emphasis is placed on the role of resentment in the reorganisation of the hierarchy of values: values that were originally unattainable are depreciated, and substitute values are raised to normative status. The article argues that resentment limits the ability to reflectively evaluate, engage in dialogue, and act responsibly because it stabilises non-adaptive forms of emotion and affect regulation over the long term (Gross, 2015; Strakosch, Schulze, Miano, Pruessner, & Barnow, 2024; Westen & Blagov, 2007).

Keywords: psychosocial experience, regulation of emotions, resentment, values

Introduction

The contemporary psychosocial experience of an individual is shaped by the dynamics of acceleration, information overload, constant comparison, and the pressure of exposure. Under such conditions, difficulties with stable valuation, maintaining a coherent identity, and emotional regulation are increasingly observed. One of the key, yet insufficiently conceptualised, phenomena that organises these difficulties is resentment.

Ressentiment is not just a transient emotional state, but a relatively permanent experiential structure in which negative emotions – such as envy, grief, feelings of harm or jealousy – are internalised

and cognitively rationalised. As Max Scheler notes in the book *Ressentiment in the structure of moral systems* (1912/2022), resentment occurs when an individual does not have the opportunity to directly express or discharge emotions, and at the same time experiences systematic frustration with the values that are important to him. As a result, there is a revaluation – not of reality, but of its evaluation. This “falsification does not occur in consciousness, as in a simple lie, but during the path of experience to consciousness, and therefore in the sphere of the way of forming images and feeling values” (Scheler, 1912/2022, p. 76).

¹ Article in Polish language: https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/66p_Karb.pdf

To capture the psychological specificity of resentment, it is necessary to take into account contemporary approaches to emotions and their regulation. Emotions – understood functionally – prepare for action, direct attention, organise behaviour and communicate the needs and intentions of the individual to others. However, they can become inadequate, excessively intense, or too long-lasting, thereby hindering functioning and fostering the emergence of entrenched, costly regulatory strategies (Campbell-Sills & Barlow, 2007; Gross, 1998; Linehan, Bohus, & Lynch, 2007). Typically, attempts to regulate emotions focus on reducing negative emotions, such as sadness and reinforcing positive emotions like happiness. Difficulties in regulating emotions are one of the most important factors contributing to the development of psychopathology (Gross & Jazaieri, 2014), which may make people unable to modify their emotions effectively or try to regulate them at inappropriate times (Preece et al., 2025). The assessment of emotion regulation is therefore of broad societal interest in the clinical and research context. In this sense, resentment can be understood as a particular form of long-term regulatory “setting” in which negative affective states – rather than being extinguished – are perpetuated and embedded in interpretive schemes.

The starting point for such an analysis is the distinction between affect and emotion. Referring to the basic explanation by Klaus Scherer (1984), affect can be treated as a superior category encompassing various states related to quick “good-bad” distinctions, i.e., common attentional processes and valence evaluation. In this view, affect includes both stress reactions, emotions (e.g., aversion, hatred, envy, jealousy), moods (e.g., depression, euphoria), and motivational impulses (e.g., hunger, aggression, pain) (Lazarus, 1993; Parkinson et al., 1996). Resentment is located precisely at the junction of emotions, mood, and cognitive evaluation, and therefore requires the perspective of affect regulation rather than the description of a single emotion (Westen, 1994).

The aim of this article is to show resentment as a mechanism that distorts the individual’s value system and, at the same time, as a specific adaptation strategy with high psychological and social costs.

The analysis will be embedded first in an axiological and then in a psychological perspective, taking into account process models of emotion regulation that capture emotions as a dynamic transaction between person and situation, developing over time and subject to feedback (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Gross, 2007). Such an approach is the starting point for the conceptualisation of resentment as a multidimensional system of emotional and cognitive processes, and finds its operationalisation in the original model of the KRe-Psy Resentment Questionnaire, which includes the following dimensions: temporal, spatial, energetic, and informational.

1. Distorting and revaluating the value system as a regulatory mechanism of resentment

Distortion and revaluation of the value system are key mechanisms enabling the maintenance of subjective coherence in situations of existential tension, frustration, or powerlessness. From an axiological perspective, it is not only a matter of changing the hierarchy of preferences, but of a profound transformation of the meanings attributed to good, evil, justice or dignity. Analysis of Anna Drabarek’s book, *The Subject of Axiology. Discussions about the nature of moral values*, shows that values are not simple objects of choice, but meaning-making structures that constitute “the identity of the subject is not only based on normative reasons, but also contains acts of will that generate proper decision-making” (2019, p. 138). Richard Moń, in his review of this book, wrote, citing the views of Alain Badiou, “that it is very difficult and difficult to liberate names from the prostitutive ways of using them [...] I think that this sharp statement could be perfectly related to the name/concept *Value*” (2019, p. 205). In this context, their distortion is not only cognitive but also includes emotional and normative dimensions.

For the first time, Friedrich Nietzsche described this process as “a revaluation of all values” (*Umwertung aller Werte*), pointing out that in conditions of weakness, subordination and inability to act directly, the original axiological assessments are

reversed (Schnädelbach, 1992, p. 249). What was an expression of strength, expansion, and creativity is considered morally suspect, while the qualities of powerlessness – such as submission, patience or resignation – are elevated to the rank of virtues. Frederick Nietzsche writes that “a man of resentment is neither sincere nor naïve, nor honest or straightforward. His soul *strabismus*; His ghost loves hiding places, little-known roads, and back doors. Everything that is hidden seems to him to be his world, his safety, his comfort” (Nietzsche, 1887/2022, p. 26). Resentment has a compensatory function here: it allows the individual to maintain a sense of moral superiority and maybe “escape into oneself” with a simultaneous lack of real agency. Revaluation does not consist in the creative establishment of new values, but in the reactive transformation of existing meanings. In the classical view, resentment is a reaction of the weak to the inability to realise their own will to power, “not to take their enemies seriously, their accidents, even their evil deeds – this is a sign of strong, full natures” (Nietzsche, 1887/2022, p. 27). In the psychological dimension, it can be interpreted as a regulatory mechanism that reduces the dissonance between the individual’s aspirations and his real possibilities of action. In a situation of chronic ineffectiveness or agency blockage, the individual does not give up on their values but redefines them in a way that allows them to maintain a positive self-image.

In the context of resentment, this process takes the form of a relatively permanent cognitive-axiological distortion, in which values originally desired but subjectively unavailable (such as success, social recognition, or autonomy) are systematically devalued, while secondary values – related to suffering, withdrawal, criticism, or moral superiority – are overvalued. This approach corresponds to John Dewey’s pragmatic, relational and objectivist concept of values, according to which values are revealed in action and are inextricably linked to the goals set in a specific life situation (Dewey, 1939). In this sense, the objectives are *conditio sine qua non* values – values without goals do not exist, because only the goal gives them practical meaning. At the same time, however, a change in the goal entails a change in the value system, which leads to its functional

relativisation. Dewey assumes that goals are not the result of an autonomous, free decision of the subject, but emerge from the situation and are determined by the current conditions of the body’s operation. As a consequence, there are no overarching or immutable goals, and the values are subject to constant reconfiguration as the context of the action changes (*ibid.*). This perspective is in tension with the axiological realism of Nicolai Hartmann, who argues that values are primary to goals and set the horizon of possible action (1988). However, it is precisely in the light of Dewey’s pragmatic conception that the mechanism of resentment becomes particularly clear: in a situation of chronic ineffectiveness or permanent blockage of agency, the individual does not abandon values as such, but redefines goals, and with them, the system of values, adapting it to the current possibilities of action.

In this sense, resentment, according to Nietzsche’s intuition, can be interpreted as a regulatory mechanism that reduces the dissonance between an individual’s aspirations and his real possibilities of action. The philosopher in question frames this process as a special form of revaluation, in which causative impotence is replaced by a moral judgment and a reinterpretation of the value system. This perspective can be clearly read in the work *Twilight of idols, or how to philosophize with a hammer* (*Götzen-Dämmerung oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*) in *Sentences and arrowheads* (*Sprüche und Pfeile*), where the well-known phrase “What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger” expresses the belief that the experience of adversity and suffering can lead to the development of values such as mental resilience and strength of character (1889/2025, p. 8). At the same time, Nietzsche points out that in the absence of a real possibility of action, this process can take on a reactive form, in which the will to revenge is hidden under the concept of justice. This is evocatively expressed by the statement that “a little revenge is more human than none”, present in the *Thus says Zarathustra* (*Götzen-Dämmerung, oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*) part II. I, *About the bite of the viper* (1883-1885/2022b, p. 66). Revaluation of values does not mean their disappearance but rather an adaptive transformation,

enabling the individual to maintain the coherence of the Self and a positive self-image under conditions of long-term frustration and a sense of unfulfillment.

From the perspective of emotional psychology, resentment serves as a form of long-term affective regulation. Primary emotions are not discharged but are fixed in the cognitive structure, leading to their chronic presence. As indicated by research on the regulation of emotions (Büyüköksüz & Kayaalp-pehlivan, 2025; Haag, Bagrodia, & Bonanno, 2024), this way of processing emotions promotes cognitive rigidity, reduced mental flexibility and loss of the ability to self-reflect.

Max Scheler, in the book *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* [Ressentiment in the structure of systems], (1912/2022), moral, deepens this analysis, showing resentment as a permanent emotional-cognitive attitude that leads to the systematic falsification of the perception of values (2022). In his view, resentment is not a temporary affect, but a long-term psychological and moral process, in which the subject, unable to realise the valued goods, reduces their value or assigns them a negative meaning. He writes that “resentiment is spiritual self-poisoning with fully defined causes and effects. It is a permanent psychic attitude arising as a result of systematic repression, the discharge of certain mind-stirrings and effects which are in themselves normal and fundamental to human nature, and which result in certain permanent attitudes to a certain type of axiological illusions and corresponding judgments about values” (Scheler, 1912/2022, pp. 16–17). By describing this mechanism as false valuation, he emphasises that it does not result from authentic axiological discernment but serves a defensive function for the threatened Self, protecting the individual from the experience of failure, powerlessness or humiliation. This distortion consists in breaking the adequate relationship between the emotional experience of values and their objective order. As a result, the hierarchy of values is subordinated to the need to reduce suffering and tension rather than to axiological truth.

Anna Drabarek’s approach quoted above allows us to place these concepts in the broader context of contemporary axiology. The author points out that axiological chaos, normative confusion and deval-

uation of the concept of “values” are conducive to the processes of their instrumentalisation and relativisation, and that the “lack of filtration gives rise to chaos and danger” (Drabarek, 2019, p. 158). In such conditions, resentment can become the dominant mechanism regulating the moral orientation of an individual and social groups. Revaluation *Values* It is then not reflective or dialogical, but takes the form of a defensive reinterpretation of the world, in which meaning is subordinated to the emotional need for compensation.

From a psychological and axiological perspective, resentment thus reveals itself as a process of distorting the relationship between value and meaning. Values cease to serve as an orientation towards the good, and begin to serve as a justification for passivity, entitlement or a sense of moral superiority over others. Both Nietzsche and Scheler show that such a process leads to the degradation of the moral life, because it eliminates the creative tension between duty and the possibility of its realisation. It can be noted that regaining the meaning of values requires re-rooting them in a coherent axiological order, which does not reduce goodness and justice to usefulness or emotional relief but treats them as real dimensions of human existence (Bombaerts et al., 2023). In a situation of chronic ineffectiveness or agency blockage, the individual does not give up on values – but redefines them in a way that allows them to maintain a positive self-image.

This process becomes clearer when we embed it in the modal model of emotion, in which emotion results from a sequence: “Situation → Attention → Evaluation → Reaction” (Gross, 2024, p. 5). The key here is to understand that emotions arise when an individual assigns a meaning to a situation relevant to their goals and then makes a cognitive assessment that includes, e.g., valence and the situation’s value (Scherer et al., 2022). Resentiment can therefore be seen as a fixed pattern of evaluation, in which the “value meaning” of the social world becomes systematically distorted: situations, persons and institutions are interpreted through the filter of harm, deprivation and comparison, thereby sustaining a certain type of affective reaction and reinforcing long-term axiological reorganisations.

The recursive nature of emotions is also an important element: emotional reactions not only result from a situation but also transform it, triggering successive cycles of evaluation and reaction (Gross, 1998). In resentment, this feedback loop takes the form of a self-reinforcing mechanism: a negative reaction (e.g., hostility, withdrawal, irony) alters social relations, creating new situations that confirm previous evaluations (“the world is hostile”, “others humiliate”) and thus perpetuate the reevaluation.

The process of reevaluation is a form of cognitive distortion: values originally desirable but inaccessible (e.g., success, recognition, autonomy) are devalued, while secondary values (e.g., moral superiority, suffering, criticism, withdrawal) are overvalued. Scheler describes this process as “blindness, and secondly – and this is the main effect of resentment – the result of illusion and falsification of the very *Values*, thanks to which the existence and validity of the possible objects of comparison in general have a positive character of high value”, in which the evaluation does not result from authentic axiological discernment, but from the need to protect the Self from the experience of failure (Scheler, 1912/2022, p. 40).

At this point, the perspective of emotion regulation as a heterogeneous set of processes that can operate at different stages of emotion generation – from situation selection to “reaction modulation” – turns out to be particularly useful (Gross, 2024, p. 15). In this sense, the analysed approach retains high cognitive value, in which resentment can be understood as an attitude formed on the basis of a distorted and generalised perception of reality, leading to an internal, repressed emotional and cognitive reaction directed towards people, situations, or oneself. It ranges from negative affective components such as aversion, jealousy, hatred, and envy to the desire for revenge. These emotions can serve a compensatory function against feelings of powerlessness, injustice or humiliation. Going further, it can also be considered a relatively permanent configuration of strategies, especially those oriented towards antecedents (e.g., selective attention, cognitive change consisting in reinterpreting the world as unfair) and reactionary strategies (e.g., suppression of expression, interpersonal coldness), which in the long run stabilise the negative axiology in the individual’s experience.

1.1. Replacing pro-social values with defensive values

The value system has a regulatory function in the human psyche – it organises goals, directs motivation and gives meaning to life experiences (Smallenbroek, Leijen, Stanciu, Van Herk, & Bardi, 2025). In conditions of relative emotional balance, values serve as stable reference points, enabling an individual’s adaptive functioning in the social world while maintaining certain norms.

Values, defined and psychologically framed by Shalom Schwartz in 1994, as basic motivational cognitive structures, guide life goals, transcend contexts and influence individuals by setting directions of action in different ways, depending on their preferred goals (Elizarov et al., 2024). And in emotional situations, e.g., long-term stress, deprivation, or the experience of injustice, they are disturbed and transformed. Therefore, emotions are complex processes involving a subjective experience component, physiological responses, and a behavioural component, expressed through emotional expression (Frijda, 1988; Mauss & Robinson, 2009). Emotional norms can refer to each of these dimensions, regulating both the way emotions are expressed (e.g., the social expectation to show joy at a wedding or sadness at a funeral) and the experience of them, as well as the belief that in certain situations one “should” feel happiness or sadness. In this sense, emotional norms are different from behavioural norms, such as the principles of reciprocity or cooperation in social interactions, which are primarily concerned with observable acts of action and not necessarily with the inner intentions or affective states of the individual (Kuang & Bicchieri, 2024).

Thus, resentment not only accompanies the violation of important values, gradually leading to their reevaluation, but also negatively affects norms. In this process, pro-social values such as trust, justice, and cooperation can be replaced by defensive and compensatory values, such as domination, control, emotional distance or devaluation of others. This mechanism allows the individual to maintain a subjective sense of mental coherence, but at the expense of deteriorating interpersonal relationships and decreased mental well-being.

At the same time, the regulation of emotions – in accordance with the developmental and cultural approach – is shaped by context, including social norms and values that determine which emotions “should” be shown and how they should be modulated (Vishkin & Tamir, 2023). This means that resentment, as an axiological phenomenon, cannot be explained solely intrapsychically: it is co-constructed within a social matrix in which emotional values and rules are intertwined with norms that are not always congruent or readily read.

1.2. Emotional-cognitive mechanisms of overvaluation

From the perspective of emotion regulation, resentment serves as a “black box placed between the situation and the reaction” as a long-term regulator of affect, in which repressed negative emotions do not find a direct outlet, but are internalised and transformed into permanent interpretive schemes (Gross, 2024, p. 5). This leads to the registration and selective perception of reality, which is conducive to the generalisation of harm and the perpetuation of beliefs about the hostile nature of the social world. Of particular importance here is the focus of attention and cognitive change.

Firstly, focusing attention can take the form of focusing on the emotional features of the situation, and in the extreme variant – rumination – repeated recollection of negative thoughts, emotions and memories, which is a risk factor for the intensification of automatic processes controlled by emotional stimuli (Singh et al., 2025).

In resentment, attention often returns to experiences of harm, comparison, and humiliation, which prolong affect and reinforce generalising conclusions about the social world. This mechanism is consistent with the findings that rumination promotes the persistence and severity of depressive symptoms (Hoebeke et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2025).

Secondly, cognitive change is crucial, understood as modifying the assessment of a situation to change its emotional meaning, including cognitive reinterpretation, as shown in studies (Meyers et al., 2025), which indicate that cognitive reassessment is one of the most

commonly used and effective strategies for regulating emotions. In the adaptive variant, reinterpretation can reduce the intensity of negative emotions and negative emotional reactions (Stover et al., 2024). In resentment, however, cognitive change takes the form not so much of a “revaluation towards healing” as of a “revaluation towards defence”: the individual gives situations a meaning that affirms his own harm and moral superiority, thereby stabilising negative emotions and perpetuating axiological distortion (ibid.).

Finally, when the revaluation is consolidated, the individual can resort to reaction modulation, including expression suppression. Modern research on emotion regulation confirms (Trentini & Dan-Glauser, 2024) that the suppression of emotional expression (*expressive suppression*), although it may reduce the external symptoms of affect, is associated with adaptive costs – including lower experience of positive emotions and adaptive functioning, and an increase in sympathetic activation and stress reactivity (Carmanica et al., 2023). Although the classic research of James Gross and Robert Levenson (1997), recent studies show that suppression does not reduce negative affective states in an adaptive way and is correlated with higher levels of stress and reduced mental well-being. The above considerations lead the author of the article to the conclusion that negative affect – resentment (resentment, grief, anger, resentment, envy, contempt) is not only a single “emotion”, but a regulatory configuration describable by the time parameters of the affective reaction – including, e.g., latency/rise-time, build-up and amplitude, duration and rate of extinction and return to the baseline level, i.e., affective chronometry. This position is consistent with the concept of Puccetti et al. (2023), as well as by the degree of persistence of emotions over time, such as emotional inertia, which is consistent with the views of Mitchell et al. (2024).

The discussed approach allows us to better understand that resentment, as a revaluation of values, is not a fully conscious process, but is the result of the accumulation of emotional experiences in which the original ideals are replaced by their negative counterparts. Justice gives way to a sense of harm, meaning to existential disappointment, and agency to learned helplessness or passive hostility. This is shown by re-

search Weigelt and Kizilhan (2024), which indicates that the “perceived injustice” trait is associated with various negative affective reactions, such as feelings of helplessness, sadness, or social withdrawal, often occurring in situations in which the individual feels disadvantaged and unfairly treated.

1.3. Socio-cultural determinants of resentment

Contemporary culture – described by Han Byung-Chul and Daniel Stauer in the book *Non-things: Upheaval in the Lifeworld* Hannah (2022) as a society of fatigue, exposure and control – it creates conditions conducive to the perpetuation of resentment. Permanent comparability, algorithmic content selection, and visibility pressure reinforce the experience of deficit and relative deprivation. The individual functions in a space where values are constantly subject to evaluation, but the possibilities for their realisation remain unevenly distributed; the pressure of visibility reinforces the experience of deficit and relative deprivation.

From the point of view of emotion regulation, it is important that it is the social and cultural context that determines which forms of expression are considered “adaptive response alternatives” and what response modulation strategies are reinforced in socialisation practices, social rules, cultural scenarios, cultural values, and cultural differences that these concepts point to (Aka, 2023). In modernity, these strategies often reward quick “image management”, self-control, and suppression of weaknesses, which can promote the transition from adaptive affective responses to chronic, internalised resentment attitudes.

Jonathan Haidt (2024) and Jean Twenge (2019) indicate that the young generation is increasingly internalising comparative narratives, which is conducive to the growing sense of injustice and harm. In such a context, resentment becomes a form of adaptation to a world in which meaning and value are measured by external indicators. The individual, unable to meet the norms of success, defensively reconstructs the value system. Resentment becomes a form of “regulation of meaning”: it allows the world to be interpreted as morally bankrupt or hostile, which paradoxically protects the coherence of the Self.

At the same time, however, in accordance with the logic of emotional feedback, such an interpretation increases the likelihood of subsequent emotional cycles based on hostility and harm, thereby reinforcing the axiological deformity. Mikko Salmela and Tereza Capelos in *Ressentiment: A Complex Emotion or an Emotional Mechanism of Psychic Defences?* (2021) presents *ressentiment* as an emotional defence mechanism in society, which transforms the original negative emotions of shame and powerlessness into long-lasting, other-oriented emotions such as resentment, hatred, anger, envy or revenge.

1.4. The impact of resentment on the formation of an individual’s identity

Ressentiment significantly shapes an individual’s identity. Instead of the dynamic narrative of the Self, there is a reactive identity, based on opposition, comparison and moral judgment of others. This mechanism can be described as a fixed “organisation of evaluations” in which the processes of emotion and emotion regulation co-occur and mutually sustain one another (Frijda, 1988). As a consequence, the individual experiences emotions less often as transient signals and more often as “proof” of a permanent structure of the world. People with difficult experiences formulate more complex identity narratives that structure their emotions and self-understanding over time, a process that is crucial for the experience and regulation of emotions in shaping the Self (Carlsson et al., 2025). Therefore, empirical studies indicate that emotion regulation is intrinsically related to identity style: less adaptive regulation is associated with an avoidant style, which corresponds to reactive and negative configurations (Daleandro et al., 2025).

In social relationships, resentment fosters projection, attribution of blame, and perpetuation of hostile cognitive patterns. Other people are not experienced as partners but as a threat to their self-worth. Ann Masten’s research on mental resilience indicates that these types of attitudes significantly reduce adaptability and promote isolation (2018).

Other research on interpersonal development and regulation shows that the quality of bonds and how the environment responds to emotional expressions

affect long-term depressive responses and promote a reactive, rigid attitude (Hofmann et al., 2016). In this light, resentment can be understood as the effect of long-term, unfavourable feedback: lack of validation, humiliation, the devaluation of emotions, and a lack of space for expression, all of which are conducive to the transition from emotion to attitude. This process weakens the capacity for dialogue, empathy, and authentic relationality, as Peter Fonag and Chloe Campbell show in their analysis (2023). They state that when the mechanisms of mentalization and epistemic trust function properly, the individual is able to understand others' intentions, engage in empathic dialogue, and flexibly update beliefs about himself and the world. On the other hand, their disorder promotes the growth of cognitive-emotional rigidity, as a result of which social reality begins to be interpreted as hostile, unpredictable or unreliable.

From a socio-cultural perspective, resentment fosters a gradual erosion of the hierarchy of values, leading to their instrumentalisation. Contemporary psychological research indicates (Park, 2022; Russo et al., 2022) that in an environment of chronic frustration, social comparisons and weakened agency, values increasingly play a regulatory and defensive role, rather than being a stable reference point for action and meaning. In such an arrangement, values do not disappear, but they are subordinated to the protection of the Self and the reduction of emotional tension, which, in the long run, limits the ability to reflectively value and makes it difficult to rebuild a sense of meaning and agency.

This phenomenon is reinforced by the contemporary cultural context, in which, as Han (2022) notes, the deficit of reflection and experiences of in-depth attention is conducive to a declarative, rather than an experiential, attitude to values. Psychological analyses of culture show (Haidt, 2024; Twenge, 2019) that the pressures of exposure, acceleration, and permanent reactivity are conducive to transforming values into elements of defensive narratives rather than into internally integrated axiological orientations. In this sense, resentment can be understood as

a negative socially reinforced emotional-cognitive configuration (Karbowski, 2026), in which values lose their meaning-making character and become a tool for maintaining the coherence of the Self in conditions of cultural disappointment and the experience of meaning.

2. Ressentiment as a multidimensional system – in the original model of the KRe–Psy Sentiment Questionnaire: time, spatial, energetic, and informational perspectives

In the social sciences and psychology, many concepts have different semantic ranges, arising from different theoretical traditions and levels of analysis. For this reason, it is reasonable to seek systematic methods of description and conceptualisation that enable the organisation of complex constructs and their analysis at different levels of description, adequate to the functions performed by the phenomena under study. This is especially true for phenomena such as resentment, which includes emotional, cognitive, axiological, and regulatory components simultaneously.

In this presentation, in the construction of the author's KRe–Psy Resentiment Questionnaire (Karbowski, 2025), a method of systemic description of objects referred to as pentabase (pentabazis; pentada), understood as a five-dimensional analytical structure, was used. This scheme was developed within the framework of the St. Petersburg School of Psychology by a team of researchers from the University of St. Petersburg under the direction of Volodymyr A. Ganzen (1999; Ronginskaya, 2022). According to this approach, the analysis of objects of diverse character allows us to conclude that their basic properties include temporal (time), spatial (space), information and energy dimensions, all of which are embedded in the substrate of the object, which acts as an integrator and a condition for their coherence (Karbowski, 2025, pp. 94–97)².

2 The questionnaire is available with the method of interpretation in the book Karbowski, M. G. (2025). *Odsłanianie resentymentu. Analiza psychologiczna w wymiarze indywidualnym i społecznym*, Warsaw: ELIPSA Publishing House.

This approach is consistent with the processual understanding of emotions and their regulation, in which regulation can act at multiple stages of emotion generation and co-occur at multiple points in the cycle (Gross, 1998; Gross, 2024). The model assumes four dimensions: temporal, spatial, energetic and informational, which can be treated as different “axes” of the fixed regulation of affect and emotions (Westen, 1994), with a clear link to cognitive assessment and the value of the situation (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Scherer, 1984; Scherer et al., 2022). Each of them describes a different yet complementary aspect of regulating the individual’s experience.

2.1. Resentiment time dimension (constancy – variability)

From a temporal perspective, resentment manifests as a disturbance of temporal elasticity, characterised by the dominance of the tendency toward constancy at the expense of variability. The dichotomy adopted in the KRe–Psy model, *constancy – variability*, reflects the degree of repetition and rigidity in the entity’s functioning over time. This mechanism can be explained through the dynamics of emotions: their duration and the processes that influence how they appear, when they appear, how long they last, and how they are experienced (Thompson, 1988). On the other hand, in neuropsychological terms, emotions are described as internal states that vary over time, whose activation, maintenance, and extinction are conditioned by both situational assessments and mechanisms of neuropsychiatric adaptation (Reitsemá et al., 2023).

The individual remains psychologically anchored in past events, which are not subject to narrative integration, but function as affective engrams, i.e., certain memory traces anchored in time, which cause, as Scheler writes, “falsification of value tables, reinterpretation, and revaluation should not be understood as a conscious lie” (Scheler, 1912/2022, p. 76). As a result, there is a retrospective fixation and a weakening of the prospective orientation – the future ceases to be a space of change, and becomes an extension of the loss suffered.

Time perspective research shows that flexible transitions among the past, present, and future are key adaptive and protective factors (Jonason et al., 2018; Stolarski et al., 2020). Temporal resentment significantly limits this ability, leading to psychological stagnation. So it can be described as a weakening of emotional dynamics, consisting of excessive constancy and repetition of inadequate affective reactions, which is conducive to the consolidation of experiences of harm and the limitation of adaptive variability, and in accordance with the idea of recursion, makes each emotional reaction become an antecedent to subsequent evaluations and emotional cycles.

2.2. Spatial dimension of resentment (proximity – distance)

The spatial dimension refers to the regulation of an individual’s relationship with the social environment, described in terms of a tendency towards proximity or distance. This dichotomy is not evaluative but functional – it reflects how the Self is balanced against others. In the context of resentment, relational ambivalence, alternating between striving for control and social withdrawal, and difficulties in maintaining stable trust-based relationships can be observed.

Contemporary research on interpersonal regulation of emotions (*Interpersonal Emotion Regulation (IER)*) confirms that emotional expressions and their social consequences initiate social processes that can both support and weaken the development of an individual’s regulatory competences. Review studies show that emotion regulation often takes place in the context of relationships with others, not just within the individual (Niven & López-Pérez, 2025). Empirical results indicate that interpersonal strategies correlate with perceived social support and mental health (Seong et al., 2024), and daily social interactions regulate emotions in natural living conditions (Tran et al., 2023). The spatial dimension of resentment can take the form of instrumental entering into relationships, serving to compensate for the feeling of harm or to take control of the environment. Distance, on the other hand, can result not only from fear or caution, but also from

the need for autonomy, independence or reflective withdrawal. In resentment, however, distance often has a defensive function, leading to social isolation.

From the perspective of attachment theory and interpersonal regulation, it is emphasised that different attachment patterns shape the ability to adjust emotions in relationships adaptively: both anxious and avoidant styles are associated with difficulties in balancing closeness and autonomy, which favours the perpetuation of negative relational patterns and strategic emotional maladjustments (Bowlby, 2022/1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018; Morris et al., 2025). Resentment can therefore be understood as the stabilisation of the unfavourable relational architecture of proximity – distance, in which the environment’s responses perpetuate a hostile style of evaluation in the individual.

2.3. The energetic dimension of resentment (receiving – giving)

The energy dimension describes the processes of exchange between the individual and the environment, including the *receiving – giving* dichotomy. It refers to how psychic energy is allocated and used in relationships and actions. Resentment is characterised by high affective tension, low agency, and the dominance of reactive over proactive energy. Psychic energy is trapped in rumination, projection, or self-aggression instead of being directed toward creative adaptation. The individual is more likely to expect regulation from the outside (*receiving*) than to engage in active co-creation of reality (*giving*).

This phenomenon remains consistent with the classical concepts of self-regulation and ego exhaustion (Baumeister et al., 2007), which are currently being developed towards processual and motivational models of regulation (Inzlicht et al., 2021; Koole, 2009), and with analyses of the culture of excessive pressure, self-exploitation and chronic mental fatigue characteristic of modernity (Han, 2022).

In the energetic dimension, resentment can be understood as a permanent shift in the regulatory balance towards the consumption of mental energy, while reducing its ability to transform and transmit in action (*receiving – giving*). What is new in this

approach is the treatment of resentment not as a simple deficit of energy, but as a low efficiency in its conversion – emotional energy is available, but it circulates in closed rumination and reactive loops, rather than powering the causative processes. From the perspective of modern models of self-regulation, this means a state of chronic regulatory cost (Inzlicht et al., 2021), in which emotional effort does not lead to a change in the state or meaning of the action, thereby reinforcing dependence on external regulation and perpetuating resentment.

2.4. The informational dimension of resentment (differentiation – generalisation)

The informational dimension refers to the style of information processing and perception of reality, captured in the *differentiation – generalisation* dichotomy. It reflects the degree of commensurability among cognitive objects and the way the world’s complexity is reduced. Resentment is dominated by selective perception of information, a tendency to generalise and polarise assessments, and the strengthening of narratives of harm and injustice.

Referring to the classical theory of Robert White (1959), which in its research proved that individuals differ in their basic cognitive and motivational orientation towards the world, related to the sense of competence and agency, it can be indicated that resentment fosters a global, synthetic style of processing, in which differences are eliminated, and reality is assessed in dichotomous categories (*differentiation – generalisation*). Although the analytical style – based on differentiation – is conducive to adaptation and flexibility, in resentment it is limited by affective cognitive filters. Information orientation affects the way we process experiences, react to frustration, and regulate emotions.

Research on Information Stress and Cognitive Overload (Ledzińska, 2022; Ledzińska & Postek, 2017) indicates that under conditions of excess stimuli and information, individuals more often rely on simplified interpretive schemes, which weakens the ability to differentiate meanings and promotes the consolidation of rigid affective assessments.

This mechanism promotes the stabilisation of attitudes based on feelings of harm, resentment and envy, characteristic of resentment, which becomes the dominant interpretative framework of reality.

From the perspective of processes (unintentional, habitual), this mechanism remains consistent with the dynamics of concentration and rumination, which reinforce selective information processing and entrenched negative conclusions about the world and other people (Wegner & Bargh, 1998). In the informational dimension of resentment, generalisation has a regulatory function: it simplifies the image of reality in a way that protects the coherence of the Self, but at the same time leads to cognitive impoverishment and the perpetuation of axiological distortions. As a consequence, the individual loses the ability to flexibly differentiate meanings, and resentment becomes the dominant interpretative framework of reality.

2.5. Integration of four dimensions in the KRe–Psy model

The presented theoretical model of the KRe–Psy Model Responsiveness Questionnaire assumes that resentment is revealed as a synergistic arrangement of four regulatory dimensions, and not the sum of independent components:

- the time dimension perpetuates the permanence of the harm,
- the spatial dimension disorganises relationships with others,
- the energy dimension blocks agency,
- The information dimension distorts the perception of reality (Karbowski, 2025).

As a consequence, resentment becomes a relatively (negative) regulatory structure, which – as in the process model of emotion regulation – can involve many strategies at the same time (Gross, 1998; Gross & Levenson, 1997).

The capture of resentment in the four-dimensional model of KRe–Psy creates a solid basis for its precise psychometric operationalisation. The model allows you to:

- construction of test positions for each dimension,
- verification of the tool's structure in analyses,
- testing of path models (SEM),
- research on the relationship between resentment and well-being, stress, meaning in life, social functioning, attachment styles, or self-esteem.

Ressentiment, understood in this approach, becomes an indicator of the quality of an individual's adaptation to the conditions of the modern world, rather than merely a descriptive emotional label.

Conclusion

Ressentiment is one of the key distortions of an individual's psychosocial experience. As a regulatory mechanism, it can protect the coherence of the Self for some time, but in the long run it leads to the deformation of the hitherto recognized value system, weakening of relationality and loss of meaning. Incorporating process models of emotions and emotion regulation allows us to more precisely capture how resentment arises and perpetuates: through selective attention, cognitive alteration, recursive feedbacks, and configurations of regulatory strategies operating at different stages of the emotional cycle (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Gross, 1998; Roskam et al., 2023). In social conditions, resentment is not a marginal phenomenon, but a structural one – inscribed in the logic of comparison and exposure. From a psychological perspective, the key challenge is to create conditions for the awareness, symbolisation and transformation of resentment, i.e., the restoration of the ability to reflectively value and more adaptive forms of emotion regulation, in accordance with the context and long-term goals of the individual (Linehan et al., 2007; Ross, Thompson, 1994; Thompson, 1988).

Ressentiment should therefore be seen not only as an emotional phenomenon, but as a process of deep reorganisation of the value system, which, although it has an adaptive function in the short term, leads to the disorganisation of mental functioning in the long run. Its recognition and analysis can be an important starting point, both for empirical

research and for psychoprophylactic and therapeutic impacts, aimed at rebuilding meaning, agency and a more balanced system of values. It should be clearly emphasised that such an approach to resentment deserves special attention due to the persistence of the accompanying emotional states. Resentment is not reactive or short-term, but takes the form of a long-term emotional-cognitive system, fixed over time and resistant to current experiential corrections. In this context, the temporal dimension of resentment becomes crucial, giving it an antisocial character – these emotions do not fade away with the cessation of the stimulus, but accumulate, maintaining attitudes of distance, hostility, and moral delegitimation of others. Long-term functioning in *resentiment structure* is associated with the risk of mood and adaptation disorders and deterioration of social relationships. What is additionally conducive to psychological solipsism (Wilson & Tsang, 2026), which can act as a cognitive mediating mechanism

by narrowing the perspective and egocentric interpretation of events, is the promotion of both the emergence and consolidation of resentment as a compensatory form of emotion regulation. In the light of the presented research on the regulation of emotions and the foundations of theoretical assumptions resentment includes such affective states as aversion, hatred, envy, vindictiveness, desire for revenge, impoliteness, contempt, jealousy or regret, which do not appear all at once, but tend to support each other, creating Recursive Loops of Affect, in which each subsequent emotional reaction reinforces the distorted assessment of the situation and perpetuates the negative interpretation of experiences. As a result, resentment takes the form of a self-perpetuating emotional-cognitive mechanism, a silent destructor of relationships, limiting mental flexibility and the ability to self-reflect, and thus causing distortion and overvaluation of the individual's value system.

References

- Aka, B. T. (2023). Cultural Dimensions of Emotion Regulation. *Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar*, 15(3), 441–450. <https://doi.org/10.18863/pgy.1103621>
- Baumeister, R. F., Zell, A. L., & Tice, D. M. (2007). How emotions facilitate and impair self-regulation. In J. J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of Emotion Regulation* (pp. 408–426). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Bombaerts, G., Spahn, A., & Laes, E. (2023). Structuring values and normative frameworks using Schwartz's value theory to map the three tenets of energy justice. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2023.103244>
- Bowlby, J. (2022). *Przywiązanie* [Attachment]. (M. Polaszek-Nicke, Trans.). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN. (Original work published 1969).
- Büyükköksüz, E., & Kayaalp-pehlivan, R. (2025). Psychological Inflexibility, Mindfulness, Emotion Regulation, Self-compassion, and Anxiety in Adults: A Serial Mediation Model. *Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 12(1), 107–134. <https://doi.org/10.21666/muefd.1643883>
- Campbell-Sills, L., & Barlow, D. H. (2007). Incorporating emotion regulation into conceptualizations and treatments of anxiety and mood disorders. In J. J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion regulation* (pp. 542–559). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Caramanica, R., Williams, Z., & Rice, S. (2023). Expressive suppression as an emotion regulation technique and its potential impact on perceived stress. *Management Science Letters*, 13(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2022.11.002>
- Carlsson, J., Eriksson, P. L., & Azad, A. (2025). Mixed Lessons: Narrative Identity Development Among Youths in Secure Care. *Identity*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2025.2485146>
- Daleandro, K., Branch, R., & Berman, S. L. (2025). Attachment, Identity Processing Style, and Emotion Regulation among Emerging Adults. *Trends in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-025-00492-6>
- Dewey, J. (1939). *Theory of valuation*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Drabarek, A. (2019). *The subject of axiology. Discussions on the Nature of Moral Values*: Publishing House of the Academy of Special Education.
- Elizarov, E., Ziv, Y., & Benish-Weisman, M. (2024). Personal values and social behavior in early childhood: Understanding the contribution of social information processing and attitudes. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 39(4), 3511–3536. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-024-00841-6>
- Ellsworth, P. C., & Scherer, K. R. (2003). Appraisal processes in emotion. In R. J. Davidson, K. R. Scherer, & H. H. Goldsmith (Eds.), *Handbook of affective sciences* (pp. 572–595). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Fonagy, P., & Allison, E. (2023). Beyond Mentalizing: Epistemic Trust and the Transmission of Culture. *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 92(4), 599–640. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332828.2023.2290023>
- Frijda, N. H. (1988). The laws of emotion. *American Psychologist*, 43(5), 349–358. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.43.5.349>
- Janzen, V. A., & Ronginskaya, T. I. (1999). Systematic description of human needs. *Journal of Saint Petersburg University*, 6(4), 90–94.
- Gross, J. J. (1998). The emerging field of emotion regulation: An integrative review. *Review of General Psychology*, 2(3), 271–299. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.3.271>
- Gross, J. J. (2003). Emotion regulation: Affective, cognitive, and social consequences. *Psychophysiology*, 39(3), 281–291. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0048577201393198>

- Gross, J. J. (2007). Emotion regulation: Conceptual and empirical foundations. In J. J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion regulation* (pp. 3-22). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Gross, J. J. (2015). Emotion Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects. *Psychological Inquiry*, 26(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840x.2014.940781>
- Gross, J. J., (2024). Conceptual Foundations of Emotion Regulation. In J. J. Gross and B. Q. Ford (Eds.) *Handbook of Emotion Regulation* (3rd ed., pp. 3-24). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Gross, J. J., & Jazaieri, H. (2014). Emotion, Emotion Regulation, and Psychopathology. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 2(4), 387-401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702614536164>
- Gross, J. J., & Levenson, R. W. (1997). Hiding feelings: The acute effects of inhibiting negative and positive emotion. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 106(1), 95-103. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843x.106.1.95>
- Haag, A. C., Bagrodia, R., & Bonanno, G. A. (2024). Emotion Regulation Flexibility in Adolescents: A Systematic Review from Conceptualization to Methodology. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 27(3), 697-713. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-024-00483-6>
- Haidt, J. (2024). *The anxious generation : how the great rewireing of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Han, B.-C., (2022). *Non-things : upheaval in the lifeworld* (D. Steuer Trans.). Medford, MA: Polity Press.
- Hartmann, N. (1988). Metafizyczny problem wartości [The metaphysical problem of values]. In W. Galewicz (Ed. & Trans.), *Z fenomenologii wartości*. Kraków: Papieska Akademia Teologiczna.
- Hoebeke, Y., Blanchard, M. A., Bernstein, E. E., McNally, R. J., & Heeren, A. (2023). Negativity is Key for Understanding the Interplay Between Rumination's Features, Attention Control, and Their Dynamic Nature: A Temporal Network Approach. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 48(4), 774-780. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-023-10432-2>
- Hofmann, S. G., Carpenter, J. K., & Curtiss, J. (2016). Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (IERQ): Scale Development and Psychometric Characteristics. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 40(3), 341-356. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-016-9756-2>
- Inzlicht, M., Werner, K. M., Briskin, J. L., & Roberts, B. W. (2021). Integrating models of self-regulation. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 72, 319-345. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-061020-105721>
- Jonason, P. K., Foster, J. D., Csathó, Á., & Gouveia, V. (2018). Expectancy biases underneath the Dark Triad traits: Associations with optimism, pessimism, and hopelessness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 134, 190-194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.06.020>
- Karbowski, M. G. (2025). *Odsłanianie resentmentu. Analiza psychologiczna w wymiarze indywidualnym i społecznym* [Exposing resentment. Psychological analysis in the individual and social dimension]. Warszawa: ELIPSA Dom Wydawniczy.
- Karbowski, M. G. (2026). Resentment as a silent destroyer of romantic relationships: The importance of attachment styles and life satisfaction in the context of relationship duration. *Quarterly Journal Fides et Ratio*, 65(1), 39-54. <https://doi.org/10.34766/2czvt27>
- Koole, S. L. (2009). The psychology of emotion regulation: An integrative review. *Cognition & Emotion*, 23(1), 4-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930802619031>
- Kuang, J., & Bicchieri, C. (2024). Language matters: how normative expressions shape norm perception and affect norm compliance. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 379(1897). <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2023.0037>
- Lazarus, R. S. (1993). From Psychological Stress to the Emotions: A History of Changing Outlooks. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 44(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-ps.44.020193.000245>
- Ledzińska, M. (2022). Stres informacyjny jako zagrożenie dla rozwoju [Information stress as a threat to development]. *Roczniki Psychologiczne*, 5(1), 77-97.
- Ledzińska, M., & Postek, S. (2017). From metaphorical information overflow and overload to real stress: Theoretical background, empirical findings, and applications. *European Management Journal*, 35(6), 785-793. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2017.07.002>
- Linehan, M. M., Bohus, M., & Lynch, T. R. (2007). Dialectical behavior therapy for pervasive emotion dysregulation: Theoretical and practical underpinnings. In J. J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion regulation* (pp. 581-605). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Masten, A. S. (2018). Resilience Theory and Research on Children and Families: Past, Present, and Promise. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 10(1), 12-31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12255>
- Mauss, I. B., & Robinson, M. D. (2009). Measures of emotion: A review. *Cognition & Emotion*, 23(2), 209-237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930802204677>
- Meyers, S., Hu, D., & Tamir, M. (2025). Cognitive reappraisal is more effective for regulating emotions than moods. *Affective Science*, 6(3), 477-488. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-025-00310-3>
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2018). Attachment theory as a framework for studying relationship dynamics and functioning. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships* (2nd ed.) (pp. 175-185). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitchell, B. J., Baugher, B., Gawlik, E., Richmond, J., Sidney, P. G., Taber, J. M., ... Coifman, K. G. (2024). How are you feeling today? Dynamic and static indices of daily affect predict psychological adjustment one year later in a multi-cohort, longitudinal investigation. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 48(4), 610-627. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-024-10484-y>
- Morris, A. M., Freeberg-Powell, E., Verma, S., Di Giuseppe, M., Crespo, H., Hoffman, L., & Rice, T. (2025). Attachment classification, emotion regulation, and defense mechanisms: An integrative narrative review. *Healthcare*, 13(23). <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare13233105>
- Nietzsche, F. (2022). *Z genealogii moralności* [From the genealogy of morality] (E. Kireszura-Wojciechowska & J. Dudek, Trans.). Kraków: vis-a-vis Etiuda. (Original work published 1887)
- Nietzsche, F. (2022b). *Tako rzecze Zaratustra* [Thus saith Zarathustra] (W. Berent, Trans.). Kraków: vis-à-vis / Etiuda. (Original work published 1883-1885)
- Nietzsche, F. (2025). *Zmierzch bożyszcz, czyli jak filozofuje się młotem* [Twilight of idols, or how to philosophize with a hammer] (S. Wyrzykowski, Trans.). Kraków: vis-à-vis / Etiuda. (Original work published 1889)
- Niven, K., & López-Pérez, B. (2025). Interpersonal emotion regulation: Reflecting on progress and charting the path forward. *Emotion*, 25(2), 277-286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0001472>
- Park, C. L. (2022). Meaning making following trauma. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.844891>
- Parkinson, B., Totterdell, P., Briner, R. B., & Reynolds, S. (1996). *Changing moods: The psychology of mood and mood regulation*. London: Longman.
- Preece, D. A., Ditzer, J., & Gross, J. J. (2025). Emotion Regulation. In F. C. Worrell (Ed.) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.923>

- Puccetti, N. A., Villano, W. J., Fadok, J. P., & Heller, A. S. (2023). Temporal dynamics of affect in the brain: Evidence from human imaging and animal models. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 133, 104491. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2021.12.014>
- Reitsema, A. M., Jeronimus, B. F., van Dijk, M., Ceulemans, E., van Roekel, E., Kuppens, P., & de Jonge, P. (2023). Distinguishing dimensions of emotion dynamics across 12 emotions in adolescents' daily lives. *Emotion*, 23(6), 1549–1561. <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0001173>
- Ronginskaya, T. I. (2022). System approach to psychological concepts analysis: Contribution of Professor V. A. Ganzen to Russian psychology development. *Journal of Saint Petersburg University. Psychology*, 12(1), 55–70. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu16.2022.105>
- Roskam, I., Gross, J. J., & Mikolajczak, M. (Eds.). (2023). *Emotion regulation and parenting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009304368>
- Russo, C., Danioni, F., Zagrean, I., & Barni, D. (2022). Changing personal values through value-manipulation tasks: A systematic literature review based on Schwartz's theory of basic human values. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 12(7), 692–715. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe12070052>
- Salmela, M., & Capelos, T. (2021). Ressentiment: A complex emotion or an emotional mechanism of psychic defences? *Politics and Governance*, 9(3), 191–203. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i3.4251>
- Scheler, M. (2022). *Ressentyment w strukturze systemów moralnych* [Resentment in the structure of moral systems] (B. Baran, Trans.). Warszawa: Aletheia. (Original work published 1912)
- Scherer, K. R. (1984). On the nature and function of emotion: A component process approach. In K. R. Scherer & P. E. Ekman (Eds.), *Approaches to emotion* (pp. 293–317). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Scherer, K. R., Costa, M., Ricci-Bitti, P., & Ryser, V.-A. (2022). Appraisal Bias and Emotion Dispositions are Risk Factors for Depression and Generalized Anxiety: Empirical Evidence. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 857419. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.857419>
- Schnädelbach, H. (1992). *Filozofia w Niemczech 1831–1933* [Philosophy in Germany 1831–1933] (K. Krzemieniowa, Trans.). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Seong, H., Lim, H., Jang, G.-E., Park, G., Kang, J., & Lee, S. M. (2024). Relationship between interpersonal emotion regulation and social support and their effects on depressive symptoms in Korean emerging adults. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 48(4), 661–675. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-024-10470-4>
- Singh, S., Li, B., Gerhard, S., Nunes, A., & Becker, S. (2025). Emotional modulation of inhibitory control in rumination from empirical and computational perspectives. *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience*. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13415-025-01360-7>
- Smallenbroek, O., Leijen, I., Stanciu, A., van Herk, H., & Bardi, A. (2025). Constructing Schwartz values framework using the Rokeach values survey: Human value measurement in the longitudinal internet survey for social sciences. *PLoS one*, 20(8), e0329179. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0329179>
- Stolarski, M., Zajenkowski, M., Jankowski, K. S., & Szymaniak, K. (2020). Deviation from the balanced time perspective: A systematic review of empirical relationships with psychological variables. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 156. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.109772>
- Stover, A. D., Shulkin, J., Lac, A., & Rapp, T. (2024). A meta-analysis of cognitive reappraisal and personal resilience. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2024.102428>
- Strakosch, A.-M., Schulze, K., Miano, A., Pruessner, L., & Barnow, S. (2024). Winter is coming: Deciphering the longitudinal associations between everyday emotion regulation and depressive symptoms across the seasons. *Current Psychology*, 43(30), 25108–25123. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-024-06114-1>
- Thompson, R. A. (1988). Emotion and self-regulation. *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, 36, 367–467. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/3078937>
- Thompson, R. A. (1994). Emotion Regulation: A Theme in Search of Definition. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 59(2/3). <https://doi.org/10.2307/1166137>
- Tran, A., Greenaway, K. H., Kostopoulos, J., O'Brien, S. T., & Kaloerinos, E. K. (2023). Mapping interpersonal emotion regulation in everyday life. *Affective Science*, 4(4), 672–683. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-023-00223-z>
- Trentini, E., & Dan-Glauser, E. (2024). Which emotion regulation strategy is efficient for whom? Reappraisal and suppression efficiency for adaptive and maladaptive personality profiles. *Journal of Personality*, 93(2), 463–488. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12948>
- Twenge, J. M. (2019). *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy – and completely unprepared for adulthood*. New York, NY: Atria Books.
- Vishkin, A., & Tamir, M. (2023). Emotion norms are unique. *Affective Science*, 4(3), 453–457. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-023-00188-z>
- Wegner, D. M., & Bargh, J. A. (1998). Control and automaticity in social life. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4 ed., Vol. 1, pp. 446–496). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Weigelt, A., & Kizilhan, J. I. (2024). The Ukrainian version of the Perceived Injustice Questionnaire: A psychometric evaluation. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1446724>
- Westen, D. (1994). Toward an integrative model of affect regulation: Applications to social-psychological research. *Journal of Personality*, 62(4), 641–667. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1994.tb00312.x>
- Westen, D., & Blagov, P. S. (2007). Clinical-empirical model of emotion regulation: From defense and motivated reasoning to emotional constraint satisfaction. In J. J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion regulation*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- White, R. W. (1959). Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence. *Psychological Review*, 66(5), 297–333. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0040934>
- Wilson, T. D., & Tsang, S. (2026). Is there anyone else out there? A measure of psychological solipsism. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 248. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2025.113463>



Ludic behavior in adulthood: Specificity and psychological functions¹

<https://doi.org/10.34766/ypbn3s09>

© Authors (copyright) • Quarterly Journal Fides et Ratio (publishing rights) • Open Access CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Monika Topór-Pamuła^a, Wanda Zagórska^b✉

^a Monika Topór-Pamuła, <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8483-0297>,
Faculty of Psychology, Warsaw University, Poland

^b Wanda Zagórska, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2615-9565>,
Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Christian Philosophy, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland

✉ Corresponding author: w.zagorska@uksw.edu.pl

Abstract. Ludic behavior has accompanied humankind throughout history, suggesting that it fulfils an important adaptive function. While children's play has been exhaustively analyzed by numerous researchers, relatively few studies have attempted to systematize knowledge concerning adult ludic behavior. This article seeks to synthesize existing scholarship on the topic. Drawing on a review of the extensive literature, it may be concluded that adult ludic behavior fulfills not only the functions traditionally attributed to children's play—such as supporting cognitive and social development or exerting therapeutic effects—but also acquires distinctive characteristics specific to adulthood. It contributes to identity formation and enhances psychological well-being. Furthermore, it may be associated with creativity and spiritual development, as it fosters a mode of thinking rarely employed in other forms of activity, namely *mythos*-type thinking.
Keywords: digital activity, ludic behavior in adulthood, *mythos*-type thinking, play, psychological well-being

Introduction

Certain concepts in psychology, although intuitively recognizable, resist precise formal definition. One of them is *ludic behavior*. Etymologically, the word *ludus* originated in ancient Rome, where it denoted all activities undertaken during festivals and holidays—unproductive, not directly associated with work. They stood in opposition to what was official, socially prescribed, and accessible only to elites (Szczęsna, 2002).

In contemporary discourse, the concept of the ludic is understood primarily in cultural terms. According to Huizinga (2022), it signifies creative participation across diverse cultural domains. Zadrożyńska (1992) defines ludicity as a form of extraordinariness that stands in opposition to the realism of everyday life. According to this approach, ludic elements can be found in sports, intellectual

pursuits, engagement in the arts, even in political and religious life. In contemporary analyses of ludic behavior, it is impossible to ignore the technological context. Video games are no longer merely a form of children's entertainment, but one of the key media of contemporary culture, in which adults also satisfy a range of psychological and social needs (Petrowicz, 2016; Sikorska, 2023).

In psychology, the concept of *ludus* has not been adequately conceptualized. Among the sources identified by the authors, only Reber's dictionary (1985, p. 410) provides definition of *ludic*: 'From the Latin *ludere*, meaning *play*. Pertaining to behaviors that are seemingly primary in that essentially all display them yet they have no obvious biological basis. Generally included as ludic activities are exploration, curiosity, intellectual games, humor and the like.'

¹ Article in Polish language: https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/66p_Topo.pdf

The conceptual ambiguity surrounding ludic behavior is partially offset by the existence of several related concepts. For example, in the literature the term *entertainment* is used, denoting spontaneous forms of participation in various fields of culture, during time remaining after the fulfilment of everyday obligations (Grad, 1997).

In English-language literature, the term *leisure* is commonly used. Neulinger (1979, cited in: Dowd, 2010) defines it as activity that brings the individual into a state of psychological tranquility. It arises from a sense of freedom associated with intrinsic motivation and voluntary choice of activity. Iso-Ahola (1974, cited in: Dowd, 2010) adds to these criteria the assumption that *leisure* activities are pursued as ends in themselves (as opposed to an instrumental goal) and its occurrence during free time. It should also strengthen the individual's sense of competence². However, the terms play and game are most frequently used in reference to the ludic sphere. Both concepts have received considerable scholarly attention and have been exhaustively characterized.

1. Characteristics of ludic behavior

A fundamental characteristic of play is the pleasure it provides (Lubbers, Cadwallader, Lin, Clifford, Frazier, 2023). The eminent French sociologist and philosopher, Roger Caillois (1973, 1997), argues that it arises from uncertainty, when individuals themselves do not fully know how their actions will unfold or conclude. Play is undertaken voluntarily under the influence of a strong innate drive (the *play drive*). Huizinga (2022) and Tyszkowa (2022) emphasize the non-instrumental nature play, lack of orientation toward material goals, and Caillois (1997) defines this type of activity as fundamentally unproductive. Admittedly, no new material products are created through it, but individual participants often achieve material gain (as in games of chance, for example).

Another characteristic of play, as claimed by Caillois (1973, 1997), Piaget and Inhelder (2000), or Vygotsky (Wygotski, 2002), a fictional or imagined situation. To describe this subjective world constructed through play, Okoń (1995) used the concept of *secondary reality*. Concentration of attention, intensity of experiences, imaginative transformation of situations foster creative self-transcendence. Consequently, many sources recognize its developmental and educational significance as a defining feature of play. Okoń (1995), Piaget and Inhelder (2000), and Vygotsky (Wygotski, 2002) also strongly emphasize the presence in this type of activity of voluntarily accepted rules and norms. These emerge from the role assumed by the participant. Attention is also drawn to the social conditioning of play (Sutton-Smith, 2000; Dobroczyński, 2005).

Within the broader category of play, games constitute a narrower subgroup. In them, the significance of the activity's outcome itself increases, becoming the dominant objective of the activity. Games are governed by explicit and clearly defined rules. Games are essentially social in character. While play, in the narrow sense, can proceed in solitude, a game requires interaction with others. As a rule, it involves competition, rivalry with opponents or, in games of chance, with fate itself. The sphere of playful illusion is substantially reduced in games. From the "make-believe world", what primarily remains is a particular mental attitude: the awareness of playing (Okoń, 1995). In the case of contemporary video games, especially online ones, both the social element and the significance of the outcome seem particularly developed: players cooperate, compete, communicate in real time, and create lasting, highly cohesive online communities (Sikorska, 2023).

The literature suggests that ludic behavior consists of games, play, and other entertainment. The differences between individual forms lie in the presence or absence of certain established rules. It seems, therefore, that a concentric model of ludic behavior can be adopted. At the center are those activities in which adherence to rules is greatest, namely games.

2 Nevertheless, some scholars oppose defining this type of activity in terms of freedom or intrinsic motivation. They regard such definition as reflecting the limited influence of contemporary Western culture, whereas the behaviors in question have appeared across different cultures and historical periods (Sutton-Smith, 2000).

Further from the center appear other forms of play, in which the role of norms gradually weakens. On the very periphery are spontaneous free-time behaviors not subordinated to strict rules. The entire circle thus constitutes the sphere of ludic behavior.

It seems that a similar classification scheme could also be applied to ludic behavior occurring not in the material world but within digital environments. At the center of the model would then be cooperative and team online games, narrative-driven games and cRPGs with elaborate rule systems, strategy games, and competitive games used in e-sports. They are united by a large number of rules, a clearly defined goals and rules, and the necessity of operating within complex rule systems (Sikorska, 2023). On the periphery of this spectrum would be spontaneous forms of online play: interactions on social media, internet humor, participation in thematic communities, or fan-created content.

2. Forms of ludic behavior in adulthood

The concept of ludic behavior is rarely used in psychology; the concept of play predominates. In seeking the range of referents associated with ludic activity, it is worth examining various classifications of play, because they extend beyond narrow definitions of the phenomenon.

Bühler (1933, cited in: Dziewiątkowska-Kozłowska, 2022), who introduced the concept of functional pleasure into play theory, classifies limb movement: jumping, sliding (functional play); pretending to be other people or enacting fictional situations (fiction play); looking at pictures, observing the activities of others, going to the cinema or theater (receptive play); storytelling, singing, building (constructive play). Although her division refers mainly to children's activity, the types of behavior distinguished above can also be observed in adults. It is also possible to find equivalents of these forms in the digital world. Forms of fiction play are manifested in narrative games and role-playing through the use of avatars, receptive play corresponds to watching streams and fan-created content, while constructive play is reflect-

ed in activities such as *modding*, creating fan art, or building complex structures in *sandbox* games such as Minecraft (Sikorska, 2023).

The concept of play is also systematically conceptualized by Caillois (1997)—the author of a four-part classification based on the participant's dominant mode of engagement in play. Sports and intellectual games, such as chess or checkers, constitute what he terms the category of *agon*, based on competition. Games of chance (roulette, lottery, betting) constitute the *alea* type, when a person adopts a passive attitude toward fate. Activities involving masks, disguises, or role enactment are classified as *mimicry* play. Also all kinds of vicarious participation (identification with a character, which a reader or viewer experiences in the cinema or during sports competitions) constitutes an example of this category, though "degraded, 'diluted'" (Caillois, 1997, p. 105). The occasional idolization of celebrities or public figures also constitutes this form of participation. Finally, the author considers ludic behaviors bringing pleasurable panic, a trance-like state of exhilaration. Activities producing physical vertigo (all kinds of carousels, swings), intoxication, dances, and exhilaration induced by speed he calls *ilinx*-type play. In contemporary popular culture, Dobroczyński (2005) offered valuable reflections on these categories.

Interestingly, the categories defined by Caillois fit very well with the world of contemporary video games: competitive online games exemplify the *agon* model, chance-based games in digital environments—*alea*, numerous RPG or simulation games—*mimicry*, and dynamic action games, producing intense emotional arousal, may correspond to the *ilinx* category.

Also types of activity deliberately designed by educators and intended to develop attention, memory, and enrichment of knowledge are forms of play. They are called educational play. This type of play can also be found in cyberspace and constitutes an important component of systemic educational change. Within contemporary "Education 4.0" and initiatives such as the "Grydaktyka" project of the Ministry of Education and Science from 2022, online games are becoming full-fledged learning environments. Thanks to this, online games function today as part of educational infrastructure, supporting both educational processes and key competencies in digital

culture (Sikorska, 2023). Currently, when the idea of lifelong learning is promoted, this category also includes adult behavior. In professional contexts, adults increasingly acquire knowledge and develop skills through online environments.

The sphere of ludic behavior is finally complemented by Day's taxonomy (2010) based on different mechanisms underlying the initiation and purposes of play. He considers playful activities directed toward novel or complex objects (e.g., solving crosswords or manipulating a Rubik's Cube) and spontaneous activity during periods of boredom (e.g., "jumping" from one television channel to another). Also activities performing a therapeutic function may also possess a ludic character. The exploratory play, oriented toward variety, and cathartic play distinguished in this way occur alongside creative and mimetic play known from earlier classifications.

Day's taxonomy finds natural reflection today in adult behavior on the internet. Jumping between television channels has been replaced by "jumping" between digital content, and manipulation of objects—by interaction with game or application elements. Many forms of contemporary online activity perform a cathartic function: players regulate emotional tension through gameplay, immersion in fiction, or communication with other users (Lubbers et al., 2023; Sikorska, 2023).

The above selected typologies show how diverse forms of behavior are termed ludic. Adult play compared to children's play is characterized by greater complexity. A child needs the simplest rules, the most ordinary objects, to derive pleasure from this type of activity. Children create ludic space themselves and therefore relies mainly on its own imagination. An adult in play usually only temporarily enters an alternative reality, parallel to everyday life. To be able to immerse themselves in it, they need a greater number of props, a more attractive scenario. In this sense, contemporary video games constitute a natural response to adult needs: they offer rich worlds, narratives, roles, tasks, and opportunities for personalization.

Although adulthood is characterized by less free time, there is an expansion of the ludic sphere with new forms of activity not found in children's play.

At each stage of life, a person adapts play to their requirements. Therefore, when new needs appear, it also changes to fulfill them. An adult participates in social life (visits friends), engages in conversation for its own sake, engages in physical recreation and various types of practical activity (e.g., cultivates a garden plot). They engage in intellectual pursuits or various types of hobbies (collecting, amateur artistic activity, tinkering). Shopping for pleasure, communication via mobile phones and the internet has become a common form of leisure activity.

Unfortunately, in adulthood we also find cruel forms of play, whose purpose is to inflict suffering or death on the victim (its varieties include bullfighting, as well as the phenomenon of so-called hazing occurring in the military or gang activity). Similar manifestations of cruel ludicity are also observed in online environments, where forms such as *trolling*, *griefing*, or *flaming* involve deliberately causing harm or suffering to other players and are perceived by their perpetrators as a specific variety of play (Sikorska, 2023).

Currently, therefore, the technological context does not replace traditional forms of play so much as extend them naturally. In cyberspace, analogies to forms of play taking place in the material world can easily be discerned.

3. The significance of ludic behavior in ontogenetic development

As already mentioned, there is a lack of systematized research about the psychological functions of ludic behavior in adulthood. Individual authors often only suggest certain relationships, formulate views that refer only indirectly to play. We therefore attempt to summarize various concepts, find similarities between them, and develop a synthetic interpretation of them, which is so lacking in psychology. Based on available literature, we try to create a model consisting of two levels. The first level concerns the psychological functions of ludic behavior as an extension of its developmental role in early life. The second, more advanced level encompasses the specific effects of ludic behavior on adult development.

To be able to reasonably meaningfully assess the significance of ludic behavior in adulthood, one must first examine children's play from the same angle. Many researchers representing different psychological schools have dealt with this issue. Their multifaceted views on children's play continue to shape contemporary thinking about this phenomenon today.

3.1. Cognitive-developmental approach

Piaget and Inhelder (2000), in their work on cognitive development, recognized play as one of the most important forms of child activity. Initially, cognition is action-based and occurs as a result of object manipulation. Over time, it becomes possible through logical and mathematical operations. It turns out that both forms of cognition are refined through play. Play contributes particularly strongly to the development of higher-order cognition. It fosters the development of the semiotic (symbolic) function in children. The child discovers that a symbol implies the representation of some absent object. Gradually it also begins to perceive the multiplicity of symbolic meanings, which makes it capable of communication by means of signs (i.e., symbolic gesture). Play thus mediates between pre-representation in action and internal representation in thought, promoting the development of speech and higher mental functions.

Play also enables continuous adaptation to the environment. Piaget considered it as a form of assimilative activity, through which new stimuli or objects from the environment are assimilated and incorporated into existing cognitive schemas. In this way, the child expands its mental structures, which allow it to achieve an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the surrounding world (Piaget, Inhelder, 2000).

Piaget's views were developed by Tyszkowa (1988). She believed that play promotes the structuring and restructuring of individual experience. Thanks to this psychomotor activity, the content of experiences gained in the real world can be processed more deeply and on a new cognitive level, and then incorporated in symbolic form into mental structures (this process is mediated by an action-based

symbolic-imaginative code). A developed symbolic system in turn allows for constant transformation of incoming information and restructuring of experience according to the logic of this symbolic system. Thanks to this, a person is able to adapt to changes in the environment.

Cognitive concepts emphasize the developmental function of children's play. It creates an opportunity for the development of operational and cognitive schemas concerning various domains of surrounding reality. These in turn create an operational network that serves as a tool for orienting oneself within the environment (Tyszkowa, 2022). Playful activity facilitates the emergence of higher mental functions, enables the child's passage through successive stages of cognitive development.

In adulthood, ludic behavior no longer plays as central a role, because the adult cognitive system is already largely developed. Nevertheless, this activity still seems to support the learning process. The possibility of learning new things ranks highly among the motivations for adults' engagement in ludic activity. Analysis results confirm that the acquisition of declarative knowledge (facts, information) and procedural knowledge (new skills) occurs faster in playful learning environments than in others. Programs based on active, play-oriented learning, active performance bring very good results, an example of which may be scout organizations, which in playful form teach the use of a compass, navigation skills, etc.

Engaging excursions, exhibitions organized for educational purposes are more conducive to development than passive transmission of information. However, it is important to take into account the variable of novelty and complexity of the educational situation. The best results are obtained in an environment with a moderate level of novelty. This prevents a feeling of boredom while directing participants' attention toward a focused area of interest (Roggenbuck, Loomis, Dagostino, 1991). Ludic activity enriches not only semantic memory but also visual memory. Direct access to certain images (a walk) causes them to be encoded more deeply in memory compared to the situation of experiencing them indirectly, for example, viewing photographs (Hammit, 1987, cited in: Roggenbuck et al., 1991).

Thanks to ludic behavior, a person can not only acquire knowledge but also refine the existing organizational structure of the mind. Various forms of recreation (e.g., categorizing objects according to shared features into categories) stimulate conceptual development. Information acquired during play promotes the expansion, differentiation, and formation of new conceptual categories. This is expressed in the ability to analyze, synthesize, and compare phenomena. It leads to better understanding of processes and their mutual relations. Ludic behavior also contributes to the formation of mental schemas—organized knowledge structures determining the way of interpreting newly acquired information. They influence the effectiveness of their operation, expressed in undistorted perception of the world (Hammit, 1987, cited in: Roggenbuck et al., 1991). Finally, ludic activity can organize metacognition, which determines a person's orientation in a given space and influences perceived competencies in a specific domain. Research has revealed that it promotes the building of mental cognitive maps containing information about the location of elements in a particular environment. The formation of such maps is in turn a necessary condition for effective learning (Roggenbuck et al., 1991).

The cognitive function of ludic behavior can be particularly clearly seen in the video game environment, which engages players in tasks requiring rapid learning, logical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, and analyzing complex systems (Petrowicz, 2016). Digital games require information processing, cognitive flexibility, and manipulating symbolic representations in an interactive environment, which promotes the development of the symbolic function. The player constantly confronts their existing action schemas with new stimuli and challenges, and then modifies them to navigate more effectively in the dynamic digital environment.

The positive effects of ludic behavior most likely result from the cognitive openness experienced by participants. They adopt an active attitude toward their experiences, analyze and organize them. These experiences develop intellectually and stimulate thinking. Sometimes they can even induce a certain trance, rapture. Then mental processes are characterized by clarity, vivid imagery, brilliance, and order (Mączyńska, 2001).

Contemporary video games are particularly conducive to this form of cognitive openness because they require the player to constantly analyze situations and continuously revise their strategies. Additionally, the intensity of experiences, immersion, and high concentration characteristic of the digital environment intensify the effect of cognitive stimulation, thanks to which games become for adults an environment conducive to creative and reflective cognitive activity (Petrowicz, 2016; Sikorska, 2023).

3.2. The sociocultural perspective

The approach examining the historical and social determinants of the human psyche was developed in psychology by Vygotsky (Wygotski, 2002). This new perspective on the human mind also allowed him to create an original theory of play. He defined this form of activity as the imaginative realization of wishes and desires that cannot be fulfilled in reality, understood very broadly, ranging from basic drives to complex interests. The action itself then recedes into the background, while its meaning becomes central. In play, the child acts on the basis of internal motives, independently of immediate perceptual stimuli. A transition thus occurs from direct interaction with the environment to symbolic mental activity. Objects that previously motivated only certain practical actions acquire symbolic meaning for the child. A meaning that society has given them, which the child gradually discovers.

Thanks to this, it can operate with meanings independent of concrete objects though not yet fully detached from concrete action and physical objects. It acquires the ability to incorporate objects into purposeful and goal-directed activity. This occurs on the basis of patterns of using these objects in its social environment. Play thus serves a mediating symbolic function. It teaches regulating one's own behavior and solving problems in goal-oriented situations in a way observed in others.

Vygotsky (Wygotski, 2002) also draws attention to the moral and social development that occurs through play. In a "make-believe" situation, the child establishes its own rules, the observance of which brings greater pleasure than immediate gratification

of impulses. In this way it exercises self-control, so as not to give in to the first desire, and develops moral self-regulation. Play allows the child to gain deeper knowledge of the environment in which it functions. As a result of transforming real experiences within imaginative space, it intuitively identifies with the world. Thanks to this, it acquires so-called social intelligence and gains deep insight into the roles and situations being recreated³.

Mead (1975) emphasizes even more clearly that taking the role of another person promotes the formation of the perspective of the “generalized other.” The child adopts socially recognized norms of conduct representing abstract attitudes toward shared social values. It thus becomes a member of a given society.

Ludic behavior contributes to the development of social perspective-taking also in adulthood. It helps achieve the advanced stages of interpersonal understanding related to the ability to adopt the perspective of a third person and sophisticated socio-symbolic understanding of social interactions (Selman, 1980, cited in: Schaffer, 2006). The significance of ludic behavior in social development results from the distinctive features of playful situations. In adulthood, it requires assuming a wide range of differentiated social roles (also those whose realization is not possible in real life). This is accompanied by heightened sensitivity to and reflection on one’s own experiences. Thanks to this, a person learns to understand an increasingly wide range of human behaviors, recognizing a shared psychological basis underlying them. It is the general model of social group behavior reflected in the personality structure of each individual members.

Contemporary video games based on team cooperation strengthen these processes because they require taking the perspectives of others, predicting the intentions of other players, and functioning in a group structure, often more complex than in everyday life. Players organize themselves into communities such as guilds, clans, or teams, in which specific

roles, hierarchies, and norms governing cooperation are established (Sikorska, 2023). This promotes perspective-taking in social interaction.

Considerations on the ethical aspect of the cathartic-compensatory effect of art also lead to the conclusion that art, engaging us in the affairs of other people, frees individuals from excessive egocentrism and excessive self-absorption. Through this, it helps to look more objectively at one’s own relations with others. It encourages ethical sensitivity, which can cause positive moral development and encourage prosocial behaviors (Dziemidok, 1974). In video games, similar phenomena can be observed in situations that require the player to help others, cooperate, or make responsible decisions within social relations, which constitutes an important element of communication and interaction between players (Sikorska, 2023).

Empirical research results are consistent with theoretical assumptions. Berg, Trost, and Schneider (2001) proved that satisfaction from joint recreational activity influences marital satisfaction and relationship stability. On the other hand, parallel activities, consisting only of spending time together without mutual communication (e.g., watching television), yield fewer benefits. Playful activities create a chance for open communication between spouses. Spending free time together also improves family bonds (Orthner, Mancini, 1991). Playful activity creates opportunities for developing new patterns of interpersonal interaction that normally do not appear. Experiences acquired in such contexts teach flexibility and transfer to everyday life.

Some studies show that ludic activity even contributes to greater racial tolerance and fostering bonds between members of different cultural or national groups (Wankel & Berger, 1991). Research on playing together in digital space shows a similar mechanism. Gałuszka (2017) indicates that video games serve a bonding function within families, promote conversation and improvement of relations, and shared gameplay can become an opportunity for exchanging experiences and building closeness.

3 Similar views are also found among other psychologists. According to Tyszkowa (1988), through autocommunication, children acquire personal competencies important for orienting themselves in their own and others’ experiences. Piaget also emphasized that play supports assimilation to group requirements, resulting in an understanding of the conventional nature of social norms and leading to moral autonomy (Piaget, Inhelder, 2000).

It seems that thanks to participation in various play-oriented social groups, an individual can build a broader social perspective. This creates a chance for better understanding of another person. Of course, not everyone takes advantage of it, and not all forms of ludic activity enable this to an equal degree. It seems that this function is fulfilled primarily by games, also online, which require participation with others. Cruel play, which also appears in digital space, certainly does not promote the development of social perspective (Sikorska, 2023).

3.3. Psychoanalytic perspectives: The cathartic experience

The beginnings of the psychoanalytic view of play are associated with Freud (1976). He claimed that this activity provides an outlet for aggressive drives without exposing the individual to the consequences that impulsive behavior in real situations would bring. In play, one can work through experiences that have made a strong emotional impression on us, this time gaining symbolic control over the situation and discharging unpleasant emotion onto others. The cathartic function of this activity is important. According to Freud, the repetition of playful activities (e.g., punishing teddy bears and dolls) takes on the symbolism of revenge, and the child thus symbolically relieves itself of experienced distress. Playful actions allow the child to understand distressing situations and lead to acceptance of the circumstances that have occurred. Using its power over inanimate objects, the child has the possibility of transforming passivity into activity. Play thus becomes a form of assimilation of unpleasant experiences, a means of mastering difficult reality (Okoń, 1995)⁴.

The cathartic function of children's play then transfers to the ludic behavior of adults. This concerns above all those forms of activity that are related to art. Aristotle recognized the aesthetic and emotional function of tragedy. It arouses in the viewer intense feelings of pity and fear, allowing viewers to achieve

emotional release and achieve inner peace. He referred to this phenomenon as *katharsis* (Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN, 2004, p. 373).

This type of artistic influence is also called in psychology the cathartic-compensatory effect. It is assumed that it means a form of influence on the recipient that helps them regain psychological balance. Art employs specific combinations of words, sounds, colors, shapes, and compels personal engagement on the part of the recipient. Thanks to this, it satisfies the need for recreation and psychologically active recreation (ludic context of art reception), enriches and complements everyday life (Huizinga, 2022). It allows compensating for the limitations of everyday life through symbolic evocation of the experiences of people from other cultures (Gałuszka and Kowalewicz, 1982). Identifying with a fictional or literary character, we can expand our own experiential world through the experiences of others (Sujak, 1998). Art also creates conditions for the full expression of the individual's personality, release of emotional tension in a way that is safe for society—through emotional expression such as crying or screaming. Providing diverse sensory impressions, from the most harmonious to the most intense, it influences the psychological integration. It helps individuals identify and articulate their own experiences, also very subtle ones, thanks to which they can be subjected to reflection. When one recognizes oneself in a symbolic substitute, it becomes possible to resolve various internal conflicts generated by reality. As a result of *katharsis*, a person becomes inclined toward reflection and overcomes ontological anxieties.

Emotions play an important role in the cathartic experience. Thomson claimed that the mere experience of emotions may itself have therapeutic value (1956, cited in: Mączyńska, 2001). The fact that we experience *quasi*-emotions⁵ grounded in fiction seems not to matter (Currie, 2008). We do not feel real emotions in the sense that we do not believe in their source. Instead of actual belief in events, there is

4 Other psychologists also attributed similar functions to play. Tyszkowa (1988) argued that play provides a field for emotional expression and helps reduce emotional tension. Piaget and Inhelder (2000) claimed that ludic symbolism, which functions in the child as a form of internal speech, serves primarily to resolve emotional conflicts, including unconscious ones.

5 *Quasi*-emotions are very similar to emotions experienced in ordinary life. They differ depending on the content of the beliefs involved: *quasi*-compassion for an orphan is a different emotion from *quasi*-compassion for a widow. Like real emotions, they may also be justified or unjustified.

simulated belief. However, the feelings themselves in both cases may differ primarily in intensity. Therefore, art can be a cathartic experience. Video games can also serve a similar function, providing the possibility of experiencing strong emotions, which Sikorska (2023) terms emotional immersion.

However, it should be remembered that a work of art can also evoke negative emotional responses in the recipient. In the emotional aspect, this concerns fear, humiliation, even hatred; on the ethical level—aggression, contempt for life and other anti-humanistic values, and in the aesthetic—disharmony and ugliness. They promote the formation of a distorted worldview and a distorted perception of reality. Promoting anti-values, art performs an anti-cathartic function.

4. Functions of ludic behavior in adulthood

Ludic behavior serves the fulfilment of human needs and evolves together with them. Therefore, the functions it performs in adulthood are not merely a continuation of its role in the early stages of life. Adults face new developmental tasks that previously either did not emerge at all or appeared only in minimal form. Ludic activity thus acquires new significance. The question then arises: what new role does it play? Our review of various theoretical perspectives suggests that it performs exceptionally important functions.

4.1. A path toward defining and expanding the self

Erikson's theory (1995) supports the claim that play promotes identity formation. Its role is already evident during the first crisis in identity development, when the need to establish basic trust emerges. Through this form of activity, the child attempts to create a simplified image of the world in order to integrate experience and secure a sense of continuity in time and space.

Winnicott (2000) described this first crisis more extensively. He argued that play constitutes a space of interaction between personal, subjective psychic reality and what is perceived objectively. The child seeks to overcome the uncertainty arising from this interaction. To this end, the child introduces objects or phenomena from external reality into the sphere of play and uses them according to a pattern derived from internal reality. The child invests them with meanings and feelings originating in fantasy⁶. When the child becomes capable of playing in "potential space," they experience a sense of "magical control" and omnipotence. Intrapsychic processes are thus linked with control over actual reality. This makes possible the proper internalization of the surrounding world, based on the objective perception of individual objects. Play helps the child develop trust in both the self and others.

At subsequent stages of life, ludic behavior also enables the individual to resolve emerging crises of psychosocial development. Each time, such behavior evokes a sense of control over the situation, which supports emotional regeneration undermined after the strain of social interactions (Erikson, 2000). Every conflict faced by the individual is first worked through in the imaginative sphere. The sphere of play thus becomes a kind of fulcrum through which the person rises to increasingly higher stages of development.

Play reaches a particular culmination of significance during adolescence, when the adolescent faces the task of forming the core of their identity. They develop a sense of uniqueness and separateness from others. Accordingly, they must create a system of self-knowledge, based on comparison, and develop a concept of the self from information that is especially meaningful and self-defining (Erikson, 1995). They try out various social roles in order to find their place in society. They integrate the past with the present and with a concept of the future, and on this basis choose among personally significant alternatives and lifelong commitments.

6 Throughout this process, the child's mother plays an important role. She should oscillate between reflecting what the child is capable of discovering (a representation of the child's internal world) and remaining herself, that is, something external to the child) (Winnicott, 2000).

Ludic behavior plays a fundamental role in this process. It helps the individual form the most mature form of identity, referred to as a *freely organizing wholeness*. This is expressed through the principle of “peaceful coexistence” between what constitutes the essence of the Self and what is external to it (Erikson, 1995). A stable value system and a clear sense of integrity do not exclude openness to novelty or creative adaptation to changing conditions.

The same themes can be observed throughout a person’s play across the life span. Play therefore ensures continuity of existence, which is necessary for the formation of a coherent identity. Within the sphere of play, the individual’s most important experiences are integrated, and the effects of previous conflicts become concentrated. It is here that one can discern the history of one’s own development. Play enables self-knowledge and provides a “point of reflection” for developing a further concept of the self.

The ludic sphere also creates an opportunity to try out various roles that a person wishes to assume. It enables the selection of situations that help express and define the self as a distinct individual. Play allows for experimentation without negative consequences. It supports the selection of the most fitting role, which may later result in a sense of self-satisfaction. In video games, this phenomenon takes the form of choosing an avatar, a team role, or a mode of participating in the game world. This makes it possible to test different versions of the self and observe their consequences for social functioning (Sikorska, 2023).

Research by Haggard and Williams (1991) showed that a specific set of participant characteristics becomes associated with ludic behavior. For example, a chess player is perceived as intelligent, capable of strategic thinking, and skilled in problem-solving. By undertaking a given form of activity, we automatically attribute to ourselves the qualities symbolized by that activity. In this way, we test whether we are as we imagine ourselves to be.

The individual also tries out new roles by testing reality not directly on the self, but through an external object. Benson’s concept of aesthetic absorption (1993) and Morin’s theory of the identification-projection complex (1975) explain how a person not only enters but also participates in

a secondary reality created by the media. The need for active participation is here replaced by emotional participation. The individual assumes the personality of the character and, for a brief moment, becoming the character.

Role experimentation takes place within the version of reality that the individual learns in their own community. In this way, the individual simultaneously adapts to the conditions of culture. At this stage, they undertake commitments and ideals that situate them within the broader social structure. Even in video game player communities, clearly defined norms of cooperation and rules of communication operate, while destructive behavior is subject to sanctions such as blocking or reporting. These mechanisms regulate community life and help maintain specific standards of action in digital culture (Petrowicz, 2016; Sikorska, 2023). In this way, ludic behavior can transmit universal human values and perform an educational function. This is evidenced by its role in traditional communities (Gałdowa, 2000). In such communities ludic behavior served certain initiatory scenarios through which the individual became a member of the group. The individual learned to recognize themselves in the mythical pattern of the tribal hero, thereby discovering the sacredness of the world and human beings.

It seems that the role of ludic behavior in identity formation does not end with the conclusion of the psychosocial moratorium. At every stage of life, it raises self-esteem and strengthens the sense of coherence of the Self. Moreover, it enables continuous updating of the ego. The courage to cross the boundaries established around one’s own belief system, developed through ludic activity, transfers to various “serious” areas of existence. Play gives rise to the desire to “renew oneself” under the influence of other people, or more broadly other objects, to integrate them with one’s own Self, and to support continuous personal development (Erikson, 1995). A true sense of identity is, in fact, nothing other than going beyond the roles imposed on us and maintaining a constant readiness to play.

Unfortunately, contemporary ludic behavior is often distorted. One possible cause is the disappearance of intergenerational interaction (Erikson, 1995).

Adults no longer assume the role of initiatory guides and do not accompany young people in their “play,” which therefore lacks grounding in tradition. As a result, young people engage in ludic behavior aimed at creating their own vision of reality. In this way, they create a culture that challenges the existing order and produces its own type of hero, one that stands in opposition to the older generation (Galdowa, 2000). Ludic behavior may take distorted pseudo-initiatory forms, such as rock culture or gang activity. A lack of perceived control and destructive effects leading to the internal disintegration of the individual result mainly of *ilinx*-type play and so-called cruel play. By cutting themselves off from the adult world and from ordinary life, young people seek to mark their separateness. Unconsciously, however, they fall into yet another pattern. Their pose of freedom and independence is, in fact, another rigid role. It prevents the continuous updating and development of mature identity. It is also worth noting that the lack of intergenerational guidance increasingly applies to the digital world, where young people spend time without adult support, making it more difficult to transmit models and values (Gałuszka, 2017).

4.2. Enhancing life satisfaction and psychological well-being

Ludic behavior seems to enable a person to experience a state of *optimal functioning* — so-called *flow*. Csikszentmihalyi (2022) used this term to describe a state of extraordinary satisfaction. It is obtained through deep concentration on the performed activity and maintaining a state of psychological order. The individual is able to direct their attention voluntarily so that task-irrelevant information does not distract them (also problems of everyday life). This generates a sense of efficacy in achieving one’s goals. People then feel strong, overcome personal insecurities and emotional problems.

Conditions for experiencing this can be created by setting appropriately challenging tasks—tasks optimally matched to one’s level of skill (Csikszentmihalyi, 2022). They must enable continual extension of one’s abilities, so that a feeling of boredom does not arise. Such a state can be produced by various

team games, art, various types of hobbies, as well as cognitively engaging forms of entertainment, that is, a wide range of activities belonging to the ludic sphere. They often possess rules that facilitate focused attention in a satisfying way. Rituals that separate individuals from everyday life evoke a sense of transfer to another reality, which motivates individuals to exert effort and produces altered states of consciousness. However, to what extent we utilize these specific properties of ludic behavior depends on us, on our ability to set goals, engage fully in the activity.

Computer games are a particularly conducive environment for experiencing *flow*. This is because they require active engagement on the part of the player, are based on clear goals, provide immediate feedback, and dynamically adjust the level of difficulty to the player’s abilities. Additionally, the audiovisual quality of the game environment and the immersive nature of the game environment favor this (Sikorska, 2023).

The experienced satisfaction intensifies the experience of life, brings peace and happiness. A person derives joy from life and from their achievements. Anxiety diminishes, sense of self-worth increases. It becomes easier to cope with problems. When adversities of fate take away strength, engagement in seemingly trivial activities reinforces the sense of personal control.

The foregoing discussion suggests that ludic behavior can become a source of psychological well-being. Its components are the predominance of positive affect over negative affect and life satisfaction, understood as achievement of personally valued goals (Mączyńska, 2001). This hypothesis has been tested in many empirical studies. They revealed that engagement in ludic activity is associated with positive emotional states (Hull, Michael, 1995; Lubbers et al., 2023). This results from the fact that it reduces stress levels. As a result of recreational activities, concentration improves, while anxiety and fatigue are reduced. Players declare that video games enable them to temporarily disconnect from the pressure of everyday life and enter a mode of emotional recovery (Sikorska, 2023). Playing video games together can also strengthen family bonds and promote positive emotions, which improves the quality of relationships (Gałuszka, 2017). It even seems that some forms

of ludic activity (in this case physical exercise was involved) contribute to improvements in individuals suffering from depression (Greist, 1987, cited in: Wankel, Berger, 1991).

Positive mood has significant consequences. It enhances the quality of task performance, willingness to undertake more difficult tasks associated with delayed gratification. In addition, it strengthens the sense of self-worth and agency and increases the ability to cope with difficult life situations (Lubbers et al., 2023). The effect of these processes is an increase in life satisfaction.

Not every form of ludic behavior fulfills such functions. Many forms of entertainment provide access to information that does not require cognitive effort. The lowest level of concentration, and thus minimal cognitive engagement, occurs while watching television (although at the same time it is the most popular form of spending free time). Moreover, this way of spending free time may induce physical passivity and depressive moods (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

5. One step further: toward a deeper reflection

There are also studies in which the functions of ludic behavior in adulthood are analyzed at deeper levels. Although not all the opinions cited below have been confirmed in research, they are worthy of attention.

5.1. Development of creativity and spirituality

According to the representative of humanistic psychology, Abraham Maslow (2004), ludic behavior can lead to so-called *peak experiences*. Their simplest form is absorption in a film, a book, or a particular activity. These experiences foster a new mode of cognition, called B-cognition. The subject “loses” their ego, the observing self and the experiencing self become unified. Self-forgetfulness allows discovering the deepest core of the self. It emerges as a result of integrating primary, suppressed drives with conscious goals. The individual no longer expends energy defending themselves against their

own impulses. They become strong, brave, experience a sense of confidence in the legitimacy of their actions. Perception devoid of a priori expectations, skepticism, preconceived schemas regarding what is considered correct, regains its “freshness.” A person experiences “secondary naivety,” spontaneously opens to novelty. They free themselves from dependence on the environment. They cease to perform socially imposed roles and become authentically themselves. Thanks to this, full expression of individuality and creative action occur.

The thesis that ludic behavior promotes the development of creative abilities was already formulated by psychologists dealing with children’s play. According to some of them, the development of creative potential constitutes a defining feature of play. It expands imagination, constitutes a form of self-expansion. As Vygotsky (Wygotzki, 2002) emphasized, combining experiences into new configurations, symbolic recreation of experiences, using substitute objects compels the creation of one’s own symbolic world of fiction. This develops the child’s creative potential.

This potential is most fully utilized in adulthood. It seems that ludic behavior serves a disinhibiting function in relation to it. They involve a return to modes of thinking different from those employed in everyday activity. Tyszkowa (1988) already drew attention to this phenomenon. It is related to the polysymbolism of play, which, promoting the use of various symbols, stimulates diverse forms of mental activity. Similarly, art, generating intense aesthetic engagement, requires associating images or facts with each other. The creative attitude liberated in this way can also manifest in other fields (see e.g., Gafuszka and Kowalewicz, 1982). Contemporary video games have become a special field of creative expression—players not only interact with ready-made worlds but also create fan content such as mods, *gameplay videos*, or *fanfiction*, thus co-creating the cultural environment of the game (Petrowicz, 2016; Sikorska, 2023).

Another consequence of peak experience, to which Maslow (2004) drew attention, is full focus on the current situation. This enables viewing an object without the necessity of abstracting and comparing.

One adopts an aesthetic attitude toward it, which leads to understanding its uniqueness and perfection. This leads to the conclusion that Being itself is ultimately good, only sometimes a person cannot perceive this. At higher levels of maturity, many dichotomies are removed. This results in full acceptance of reality, thanks to which the enduring problem of good and evil can be reconciled. A person begins to feel that good, beauty, and truth exist, and through this can appreciate the value of life⁷. The emotional reaction to this type of experience is fear caused by bewilderment and surrender to the experience as something that surpasses us. Feelings of gratitude and awe emerge. They can be expressed through prayer, adoration, and other forms of mystical expression.

Thus Maslow postulates that ludic behavior develops spirituality and even religiosity. This hypothesis is difficult to verify. It seems probable insofar as ludic behavior in traditional communities referred directly to the sphere of *sacred* (Eliade, 1994, 2022). Certain justifications for this thesis can also be sought in the results of research conducted for the purpose of standardizing Thalbourne's Transliminality Scale.

This is a tool measuring the individual's ability to cross the boundary between conscious experience and unconscious impulses. Based on conducted research, it was found that this ability constitutes the basis for, among others, magical thinking, absorption (susceptibility to attentional absorption by incidental stimuli), and proneness to fantasize, that is, certain processes engaged during ludic activity. On the other hand, what is very important in the context of the dependencies discussed here, it leads to mystical experience. Shared underlying mechanisms of religiosity and ludic activity support the intuitive hypothesis about a positive relationship between these phenomena⁸.

Generally, these are issues considered only speculatively, not confirmed in empirical research. Inferring a relationship of ludic behavior with the development of religiosity would be too far-reaching a conclu-

sion. More justified is the thesis linking this type of activity with the development of spirituality—but spirituality understood in a reductionist sense as, for example, immaterial and irrational elements of human consciousness forcing the individual to search for intangible elements of reality on which the visible world and human life are based (James, 2023).

Godbey (1991, cited in: McDonald, Schreier, 1991) claims that ludic behavior can influence the development of spirituality because it is unrestrained by the limitations of everyday life, non-rational and meaning-laden. A person opens their mind to other experiences, experiences both the self and reality more deeply. They can perceive the complexity of the world, which encourages them to search for deeper meaning. Researchers suggest that the spheres of ludic and spiritual activity are based on similar processes and states of consciousness (McDonald, Schreier, 1991). Contemplation, participation in a certain ritual, the use of symbols and imagination can lead in both cases to a sense of immortality, mystery, "out-of-body experiences"⁹.

The increase in spirituality may be caused by the very environment in which ludic activity takes place. If it occurs in a certain religiously sanctified space (such as wilderness landscapes or natural phenomena evoking awe and fear), it can cause an increase in religious consciousness. Later, when given ludic behaviors also occur in other conditions, they each time evoke spiritual connotations.

From Maslow's (2004) considerations on creativity and spirituality also emerges the suggestion that ludic activity promotes self-actualization. He understands by this the full realization of an individual's talents and potential leading to the discovery of one's own Self. Csikszentmihalyi (1991) claims that this is indeed the case. Those forms of ludic behavior that require deep, sustained, and sustained and goal-oriented engagement, creates the possibility of transcending previous experiences. Self-knowledge plays a role in this process. When we grant ourselves the right to

7 It seems that Maslow attributes to peak experiences functions analogous to *katharsis*, encompassing ethical, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions.

8 Youth religious camps also frequently combine spiritual development with ludic activity.

9 It seems that such states are particularly likely to occur in contact with art, which provides extraordinary aesthetic experiences. The occurrence of such states has also been observed among individuals engaged in sports (McDonald & Schreier, 1991).

make mistakes, we undertake ever new challenges. Then we can learn the most about ourselves. As a result, the process of individuation progresses while simultaneously integrating with people and ideas that transcend the individual (Csikszentmihalyi, 2022).

5.2. A way to enrich the structures of formal thinking

Combining psychological, anthropological, philosophical, and cultural studies perspectives, adult ludic behavior can be understood as a contemporary form of *quasi*-mythical behavior (Zagórska, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2020). Such behavior develops *mythos*-type thinking. This mode of thinking is based on subjective, emotionally colored representations. It is non-conceptual and rooted in personal experience. It encompasses what is intuitive and is expressed through metaphors and fantasies. According to Epstein's Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory or Labouvie-Vief's theory of postformal thinking (2015), it coexists in the human mind with *logos*-type thinking (cited in: Kolańczyk, 1999; Zagórska, 2004, 2020). This latter modality is based on purely rational concepts, employs philosophical discourse, and operates with analytical precision. *Logos* leads to an objectifying relation to the world, an I-It relation, whereas *mythos* assumes direct participation in the world, an I-Thou dialogue.

Optimal functioning is achieved through harmonious cooperation between these two systems. In traditional communities, this was supported by the domain of *mythos*, filled with living myth¹⁰ and ritual performances, such as Greek Dionysian choruses, belonging to the sphere of *sacrum*. Contemporary culture, by contrast, mainly supports the development of *logos*-type thinking, while devaluing the *mythos* system based on poetry, faith, and experience. Nevertheless, human beings still need to use this modality. In childhood, this need is satisfied through play, which transports the child into an imaginative space referred to as *secondary reality* (Okoń, 1995). An adult guided by the "*mythos* imperative" likewise

needs a transreal reality in which they can transcend the limitations imposed by everyday life and develop a modality of thinking different from that ordinarily used. This need is served by the worlds created by the media of symbolic culture: film, theater, music, literature, painting, and, today, video games as well. The psychological crossing of the distance between the real and the unreal—a phenomenon that may be called *symbolic transfer into secondary reality*—becomes possible precisely through ludic behavior (Zagórska, 2004). Participation in culturally created reality satisfies the deepest, and usually unconscious, needs of the human psyche.

First, it is associated with escape from gray everyday life and ordinary existential toil, the "terror of Time and History." In this respect, ludic behavior performs an escapist and compensatory function, as it makes it possible to compensate for the limitations of real life (Zagórska, 2004).

Second, ludic activity creates the possibility of presence in Great Time, which offers intense experiences necessary for maintaining psychological balance and is connected with the experience of *katharsis*. The individual can attain a new existential experience: not merely being present in a culturally created world, but living within in.

Ludic activity is also a manifestation of the eternal "longing for Paradise," that is, for an ideal world as it was at the beginning: beautiful, harmonious, and safe. *Quasi*-mythical behavior enables transfer into such a desired reality, offering relaxation, entertainment, and contact with beauty (Zagórska, 2004, 2008).

Because the created reality is external to the individual, the person can find the self in what lies beyond the self and yet is somehow similar to it. This is connected with the need for reference to a paradigm. Universal patterns allow individuals to discover their situation and place in the world and, and through this, to free themselves from loneliness. By directing the individual toward clearly defined values, culturally created reality may therefore perform a modeling and personality-forming function.

¹⁰ Myth was understood as sacred history—a narrative describing events that took place in the time of "beginnings." It provided models of behavior and endowed human existence with meaning and value, while also ensuring, among other things, a sense of security.

Through participation in a reality that transcends the self, the individual can, in a substitutive, affective-imaginative way, transcend the human condition. The symbolism, expressiveness, and mimetic character of *mythos* satisfy the need to be someone else, someone more, even an *impossible self*, that is, as self that cannot be realized in actual reality (Zagórska, 2004). Thus, ludic behavior performs transgressive and developmental functions¹¹, although in a diminished form. Through its saturation with ritual elements, it also performs a *quasi*-initiatory role, increasing the sense of adulthood and self-worth.

An additional function of ludic behavior is often “integration with the whole,” that is, identification with a group of similar others. Shared participation in another world and coming to know it through experience satisfy the need for fellowship and spontaneous bonds. The affiliative function seems particularly important in the period of young adulthood (Zagórska, 2004).

The specific functions of *quasi*-mythical behavior listed above serve to satisfy a more general human need: the need for *mythos*-type thinking and behavior. The mental demands fulfilled by ludic activity appear to reflect a striving not only to explain reality, but also to express it. Human beings seek to know through experience and participation; they wish to satisfy their need for subjective apprehension of the world.

The specific functions of *quasi*-mythical behavior resemble the functions of ludic activity discussed in earlier sections of this article. This suggests that the need for *mythos* may provide the framework within which the entire sphere of ludicity should be analyzed. The observed convergence encourages the search for mythical elements even in those ludic forms that do not rely on the mediation of contemporary symbolic culture.

From the most general perspective, ludic behavior may be viewed as a result of the human psyche’s need for self-organization and of the desire for harmonious cooperation between *logos*-type and *mythos*-type modalities. Through such behavior, dialectical thinking may develop. A person becomes able to accept contradictions and synthesize them. Finally,

the individual acquires a relativistic perspective, expressed in a departure from dualistic modes of evaluation and in the recognition that many valid solutions may exist for any given dilemma.

Because of their narrative and interactive character, contemporary video games create spaces especially conducive to activating the *mythos*-type modality. Virtual worlds are environments of intense participation, role-playing, and cooperation within player communities. They create an imaginative reality with a high emotional and symbolic charge, enabling temporary detachment from everyday life. At the same time, activity in games requires constant decision-making, planning, and interpretation of complex messages, that is, processes characteristic of the *logos* modality. As a result, video games become a contemporary space in which *mythos* and *logos* can cooperate, leading to the integration of experience, reflection, and action. This may help explain the growing popularity of video games, which can function as substitutes for lost myths. Virtual player communities, in turn, operate like contemporary ritual groups: they offer a sense of belonging, loyalty, and fellowship, as well as access to a shared system of meanings.

Conclusion

Ludic behavior in adulthood fulfils a number of psychologically adaptive functions of considerable importance. Nevertheless, it seems doubtful that any single form of ludic activity could fulfill all of them simultaneously. The model presented here therefore describes only the maximum range of benefits that may arise from such activities. The discussion has been drawn upon literature referring, more or less directly, to ludic behavior, and constitutes an attempt to integrate and describe the various dimensions of the positive influence of play on human functioning.

At the same time, some contemporary forms of ludic activity fail to fulfil any psychological functions and may even inhibit human development. The English-language term *anti-leisure* has been coined to describe such maladaptive forms of ludic behavior.

¹¹ This concerns not so much personal development as transcendence of one’s own symbolic boundaries.

They do not contribute to the enrichment of the individual and do not fulfil recreational functions. Instead, they are undertaken compulsively and are accompanied by elevated levels of anxiety. They are also based on externally imposed constraints, which diminish the individual's sense of autonomy and authenticity (World Leisure..., 2001).

Some of these dangers were discussed earlier in relation to phenomena such as *katharsis*, pseudo-initiatory behavior, and optimal experience. A similarly inhibiting role may be played by various forms of addiction to media that transport individuals into culturally created realities, such as video games, gambling, or the internet, as well as by *alea*-type forms of play.

References

- Benson, C. (1993). *The absorbed self: Pragmatism, psychology and aesthetic experience*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Berg, E., Trost, M., Schneider, I. (2001). Dyadic exploration of the relationship of leisure satisfaction, leisure time, and gender to relationship satisfaction. *Leisure Sciences*, 23, 35-46.
- Caillois, R. (1973). *Żywioł i ład* [The elemental and the order] (A. Tatkiewicz, Trans.). Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Caillois, R. (1997). *Gry i ludzie* [Man, Play and Games] (A. Tatkiewicz & M. Żurowska, Trans.). Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen. (Original work published 1958 as *Les Jeux et les hommes: le masque et le vertige*).
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., Kleiber, D.A. (1991). Leisure and self-actualization. In B.L. Driver, P.J. Brown, G.L. Peterson (Eds.), *Benefits of leisure* (91-102). Pennsylvania: Venture Publishing.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2022). *Flow. Stan przepływu* [Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience] (A. Haduła, Trans.). Łódź: Wydawnictwo Feeria. (Original work published 1990).
- Currie, G. (2008). *The nature of fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Day, H. I. (2010). Play. In J. Corsini (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of psychology*, vol. 3. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Dobroczyński, B. (2005). Gry i zabawy człowieka dorosłego w świecie popkultury: Poglądy Rogera Caillois – pół wieku później [Games and play of adults in the world of popular culture: Roger Caillois' views half a century later]. In A. Gałdowa (Ed.), *Psychologiczne i egzystencjalne problemy człowieka dorosłego* (pp. 145-169). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Dowd, E. (2010). Leisure counseling. In J. Corsini (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of psychology*, vol. 2. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Dziemidok, B. (1974). Katartyczno-kompensacyjny efekt sztuki a przeżycie estetyczne [The Cathartic-Compensatory Effect of Art and Aesthetic Experience]. *Studia Estetyczne*, vol. IX, pp.13-17.
- Dziwiątkowska-Kozłowska, K. (2022). Problematyka zabawy w rozwoju dzieci przedszkolnych w świetle literatury przedmiotu [The issue of play in the development of pre-school children in the light of the literature]. *Pedagogika Przedszkolna i Wczesnoszkolna*, 10(1/19), 111-122.
- Eliade, M. (1994). *Mity, sny i misteria* [Myths, dreams and mysteries] (K. Kocjan, Trans.). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR. (Original work published 1957).
- Eliade, M. (2022). *Sacrum a profanum. O istocie sfery religijnej* [The sacred and the profane: On the nature of religion] (B. Baran, Trans.). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Aletheia. (Original work published 1957).
- Erikson, E.H. (1995). Zabawa i aktualność [Play and actuality]. In A. Brzezińska, T. Czub, G. Lutomski, B. Smykowski (Eds.), *Dziecko w zabawie i świecie języka* (pp. 232-269). Poznań: Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo.
- Erikson, E.H. (2000). *Dzieciństwo i społeczeństwo* [Childhood and society] (P. Hejmej, Trans.). Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis. (Original work published 1950).
- Freud, Z. (2012). *Poza zasadą przyjemności* [Beyond pleasure principle] (J. Prokopiuk, Trans.). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN. (Original work published 1920).
- Gałdowa, A. (2000). *Tożsamość człowieka* [Human identity]. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Gałużka, D. (2017). *Gry wideo w środowisku rodzinnym. Diagnoza i rekomendacje* [Video games in the family environment: Diagnosis and recommendations]. Kraków: Wydawnictwo LIBRON.
- Gałużka, M., Kowalewicz, K. (1982). Muzyka z perspektywy odbiorcy [Music from the recipient's perspective]. *Muzyka*, 3/4, 65-91.
- Grad, J. (1997). Zabawa jako zjawisko kulturowe [Play as a cultural phenomenon]. In K. Zamiara (Ed.), *Szkice o partycypacji kulturowej* (pp. 13-48). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora.
- Haggard, L., Williams, D. (1991). Self-identity benefits of leisure. In B.L. Driver, P.J. Brown, G. L. Peterson (Eds.), *Benefits of leisure* (pp. 103-119). Pennsylvania: Venture Publishing.
- Huizinga, J. (2022). *Homo ludens: zabawa jako źródło kultury* [Homo ludens: Play as the source of culture] (M. Kurecka & W. Wirpsza, Trans.). Warszawa: Aletheia. (Original work published 1938).
- Hull, R.B., Michael, S.E. (1995). Nature-based recreation, mood change and stress restoration. *Leisure Sciences*, 17, 1-14.
- James, W. (2023). *Odmiany doświadczenia religijnego* [The varieties of religious experience] (J. Hempel, Trans.). Warszawa: Aletheia.

- Katharsis. (2004). In *Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN* (vol. 4, p. 373). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Kolańczyk, A. (1999). *Czuję, myślę, jestem: świadomość i procesy psychologiczne w ujęciu poznawczym* [I feel, I think, I am: Consciousness and psychological processes in the cognitive approach]. Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Labouvie-Vief, G. (2015). *Integrating emotions and cognition throughout the lifespan*. New York: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-09822-7>
- Lubbers, K., Cadwallader, J., Lin, Q., Clifford, C., Frazier, L. D., (2023) Adult play and playfulness: A qualitative exploration of its meanings and importance, *The Journal of Play in Adulthood* 5(2), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.5920/jpa.1258>
- Maslow, A. (1982). Postawa twórcza [The creative attitude] (J. Prokopiuk., Trans.). *Literatura na świecie*, 3/4, 176-201. (Original work published 1959 as Creativity in Self-Actualizing People).
- Maslow, A. (2004). *W stronę psychologii istnienia* [Toward a psychology of being] (I. Wyrzykowska, Trans.). Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis. (Original work published 1962).
- Mączyńska, A. (2001). *Doświadczenie teatralne oraz wybrane właściwości intrapsychiczne widza „aktywnego” we wczesnej dorosłości* [Theatrical experience and selected intrapsychic characteristics of the “active” viewer in early adulthood]. Unpublished master’s thesis supervised by W. Zagórska. Uniwersytet Warszawski. Międzyuczelniane Indywidualne Studia Humanistyczne.
- McDonald, B.L., Schreyer, R. (1991). Spiritual benefits of leisure participation and leisure settings. In B.L. Driver, P.J. Brown, G.L. Peterson (Eds.), *Benefits of leisure* (pp.179-194). Pennsylvania: Venture Publishing.
- Mead, G.H. (1975). *Umysł, osobowość, społeczeństwo* [Mind, self, and society] (Z. Wolińska, Trans.). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN. (Original work published 1934).
- Morin, E. (1975). *Kino i wyobraźnia* [The cinema or the imaginary man] (K. Eberhardt, Trans.). Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Okoń, W. (1995). *Zabawa a rzeczywistość* [Play and reality]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne.
- Orthner, D., Mancini, J. (1991). Benefits of leisure for family bonding. In B.L. Driver, P.J. Brown, G.L. Peterson (Eds.), *Benefits of leisure* (pp. 289-302). Pennsylvania: Venture Publishing.
- Petrowicz, M. (2016). Gry wideo – medium XXI wieku [Video games: A medium of the twenty-first century]. In D. Gałuszka, G. Ptaszek, D. Zuchowska-Skiba (Eds.), *Technokultura: transhumanizm i sztuka cyfrowa* (pp. 155-171). Kraków: Libron.
- Piaget, J., Inhelder, B. (2000). *The psychology of the child*. New York: Basic Books. (Original work published 1966 as La psychologie de l'enfant).
- Reber, A.S. (1985). Ludic. In *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* (p. 410). Penguin Books.
- Roggenbuck, J., Loomis, R., Dagostino, J. (1991). The learning benefits of leisure. In B.L. Driver, P.J. Brown, G.L. Peterson (Eds.), *Benefits of leisure* (pp. 195-211). Pennsylvania: Venture Publishing.
- Schaffer, H.R. (2006). *Rozwój społeczny. Dzieciństwo i młodość* [Social development: Childhood and adolescence] (M. Białecka-Pikul & K. Sikora, Trans.). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. (Original work published 1996 as Social Development: An Introduction).
- Sikorska, J. (2023). *Gry wideo jako medium komunikacji. Wymiary interpersonalnej i intrapersonalnej komunikacji graczy* [Video games as a medium of communication: Interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of player communication]. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza.
- Sujak, E. (1998). *Rozważania o ludzkim rozwoju* [Reflections on human development]. Kraków: Znak.
- Sutton-Smith, B. (2000). Play. In A. E. Kazdin (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of psychology* (vol. 6 , pp. 16-20). Oxford: American Psychological Association and Oxford University Press.
- Szczęsna, E. (Ed.) (2002). *Słownik pojęć i tekstów kultury* [Dictionary of cultural concepts and texts] (p. 164). Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne.
- Szewczuk, W. (Ed.) (1985). *Słownik psychologiczny* [Dictionary of Psychology]. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.
- Tyszkowa, M. (1988). Zabawa dziecka: symbolizacja, poznanie autokomunikacja [The child's play: symbolization, cognition, and autocommunication]. *Kwartalnik Psychologiczny*, 3/4, 47-62.
- Tyszkowa, M. (2022). Rola kultury w rozwoju psychicznym jednostki [The role of culture in individual psychological development]. In M. Przetacznik-Gierowska, M. Tyszkowa (Eds.), *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*, (vol. 1, pp. 102-123). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Wankel, L., Berger, B. (1991). The personal and social benefits of sport and physical activity. In B.L. Driver, P.J. Brown, G.L. Peterson (Eds.), *Benefits of leisure* (pp. 121-138). Pennsylvania: Venture Publishing.
- Winnicott, D.W. (2000). Bawienie się. Rozważania teoretyczne [Playing: Theoretical considerations] (T. Czub, A. Brzezińska & W. Rudniewski, Trans.). In A. Brzezińska, T. Czub, G. Lutomski, B. Smykowski (Eds.), *Dziecko w zabawie i świecie języka* (pp. 215-231). Poznań: Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo.
- World Leisure and Recreation Association International Position Statement on Leisure Education and Youth at Risk. (2001). *Leisure Sciences*, 23(3), 201–207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/014904001316896882>
- Wygotski, L.S. (2002). Zabawa i jej rola w rozwoju psychicznym dziecka [Play and its role in a child’s psychological development]. In A. Brzezińska, M. Marchow (Eds.), *Lech S. Wygotski. Wybrane prace psychologiczne II: Dzieciństwo i dorastanie* (pp. 141-164). Poznań: Zysk i S-ka. (Original work first published 1966 as 'Igra i ee rol' v psikhicheskom razvitii rebenka, after stenogram from 1933).
- Zadrożyńska, A. (1983). *Homo faber i homo ludens* [Homo faber and homo ludens]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Zagórska, W. (2000). Symboliczne przeniesienie i uczestnictwo człowieka dorosłego w rzeczywistości wykreowanej kulturowo [Symbolic transfer and adult participation in culturally created reality]. *Psychologia Rozwojowa*, 3-4, 343-357.
- Zagórska, W. (2004). *Uczestnictwo młodych dorosłych w rzeczywistości wykreowanej kulturowo. Doświadczenie, funkcje psychologiczne* [Young adults’ participation in culturally created reality: Experience and psychological functions]. Kraków: Universitas.
- Zagórska, W. (2008). *Homo ludens – homo mythicus*. Nowe podejście do aktywności ludycznej w dorosłości [Homo ludens – homo mythicus: A new approach to ludic activity in adulthood]. *Psychologia Rozwojowa*, 1, 69-83.
- Zagórska, W. (2010). Integration of *logos* and *mythos* as a developmental necessity. In E. Rydz, D. Musiał (Eds.), *The psychology of human development – selected issues* (pp. 13-26). Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
- Zagórska, W. (2020). Niezbywalna potrzeba mythosu [The inalienable need for mythos]. In M. Obrębska, A. Pankalla (Eds.), *Mity kultury współczesnej. Perspektywa psychoantropologiczna* (pp. 139-158). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauk Społecznych i Humanistycznych Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza.



Marital satisfaction and parenting styles in One's Own Family in relation to Occupational Burnout¹

<https://doi.org/10.34766/16n95065>

© Authors (copyright) • Quarterly Journal Fides et Ratio (publishing rights) • Open Access CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Angelika Szczepanik-Paśnik^a, Eliza Gorzelak^b ✉

^a Angelika Szczepanik-Paśnik¹, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1943-0444>

^b Eliza Gorzelak¹, <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4006-2242>

✉ Corresponding author: angelikaszczepanik@gmail.com

¹ Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, Department of Psychology, Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland

Abstract: *Objective:* The aim of the present study was to examine the relationships between parenting styles adopted by parents toward their children, marital well-being, and the level of occupational burnout. Three hypotheses were formulated: (H1) democratic and liberal-affectionate parenting styles are associated with lower levels of occupational burnout; (H2) autocratic and liberal-non-affectionate parenting styles are associated with higher levels of burnout; and (H3) higher marital well-being co-occurs with lower intensity of occupational burnout. *Methods:* The study involved 417 married individuals with at least one child (266 women and 151 men), aged between 21 and 63 years ($M = 41$). The following research instruments were administered: the Marital Quality Questionnaire (KDM-2; M. Płopa & J. Rostowski), the Parenting Styles Analysis – Own Family Questionnaire (M. Rys), and the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI; E. Demerouti et al.; Polish adaptation by T. Chirkowska-Smolak). In the present sample, Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated high internal consistency of the applied measures (e.g., intimacy $\alpha = 0,88$; marital satisfaction $\alpha = 0,94$; overall OLBI $\alpha = 0,83$). Although the distribution of the data slightly deviated from normality, as indicated by the Shapiro–Wilk and Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests, skewness and kurtosis values remained within the acceptable ± 2 range, which justified the use of Pearson's r correlation coefficients in the hypothesis testing procedure. *Results:* All three hypotheses were supported empirically. Higher levels of democratic and liberal-affectionate parenting styles were associated with lower levels of occupational burnout, whereas autocratic and liberal-non-affectionate styles showed positive correlations with burnout, with moderate effect sizes observed for the latter relationships. Furthermore, higher marital well-being—reflected in greater intimacy, self-fulfilment, and similarity between partners, alongside lower levels of disappointment—was associated with lower levels of exhaustion and disengagement at work. *Conclusions:* The findings confirm the interrelationship between family-role functioning and occupational burnout. Parenting styles based on dialogue, empathy, and emotional support, combined with high marital well-being, may constitute protective factors against the negative consequences of chronic occupational stress. From a practical perspective, burnout prevention programmes should incorporate family-related dimensions, including the quality of partner communication, parenting competencies, and mutual emotional support.

Keywords: marital satisfaction, occupational burnout, parenting styles

1. Introduction

Human functioning within family and professional roles has attracted considerable attention in contemporary psychology, particularly in relation to maintaining work-life balance. Interactions between these domains may serve as sources of support or psychological strain. The quality of the marital relationship and the way individuals engage in parenting responsibilities may influence life satisfaction, psychological well-being, occupational effectiveness and job satisfaction.

Increasingly, the literature suggests that occupational burnout is shaped not only by organisational and individual factors, but also by family and relational contexts.

Occupational burnout, understood as the outcome of chronic occupational stress, is characterised by lack of energy, engagement and self-efficacy. Although it has traditionally been examined within an organisational context, an increasing body of evidence indicates that its origins are

¹ Article in Polish language: https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/66p_Szcz.pdf

multidimensional and include non-work factors such as family relations, emotional support, and domestic responsibilities.

Including these three areas (marital well-being, parenting styles, and occupational burnout) enables a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying work-family balance. Examining the interrelationships between them may contribute to identifying protective factors against burnout and provides a basis for developing effective preventative and interventive strategies in the area of employees' mental health.

1.1. Marital well-being

Marital well-being constitutes an important component of an individual's overall functioning within the family system and is a significant determinant of quality of life and adults' mental health. In the literature, the term *marital well-being* is often identified with marital satisfaction or the quality of the marital relationship, encompassing emotional, cognitive and behavioural dimensions. According to Plopa (2006), marital well-being arises from a balance between the satisfaction of individual and relational needs, mutual understanding between partners, and the ability to maintain positive emotional bonds despite recurring difficulties.

From the perspective of close relationships' psychology, high marital quality is associated with greater resilience to stress, improved emotion regulation, and more adaptive coping with everyday demands, including occupational challenges (Tavakol et al., 2017; Wojciszke, 2021). The framework of the *Marital Quality Questionnaire* (KDM-2), developed by M. Plopa and J. Rostowski (2005) conceptualises marital well-being as a multidimensional construct consisting of four components: intimacy, self-fulfilment, similarity and disappointment. Each of these dimensions reflects different aspects of the partner relationship, and their interplay allows for an assessment of relational harmony and overall relationship fulfilment.

Intimacy reflects a high level of spousal satisfaction with the close relationship with one's partner. It is expressed in the need of building a relationship

based on openness, trust, and closeness. Such individual is motivated to work on the relationship and to foster both their own and their partner's sense of happiness. Both partners are deeply connected to each other and are convinced that they share a genuine love for one another.

According to research, intimacy composes of several elements, including the desire to care for one's partner's well-being, experiencing happiness in the partner's presence and as a result of the relationship, respect for the partner, the belief that they can be relied upon in times of need, mutual understanding, sharing experiences and both emotional and material possessions, giving and receiving emotional support, exchanging intimate information, and perceiving the partner as an important part of one's life (Wojciszke, 2021).

Self-fulfilment through the relationship, understood as the opportunity to realise one's own potential, value system, and life goals, contributes to a high level of marital satisfaction. The performance of marital and family roles provides an individual with a sense of fulfilment derived from becoming the person they aspire to be (Plopa, 2005).

Similarity refers to a high level of consistency between spouses regarding the achievement of important marital and family goals. Both partners share similar views on relationship development, leisure time activities, organisation of family life. They also hold common approaches to setting boundaries between the family and the external environment, maintaining family traditions, and child-rearing practices. When spouses' expectations are aligned, there is a greater likelihood of experiencing satisfaction with one's partner and the relationship as a whole (Plopa, 2005).

Disappointment is experienced by a spouse who perceives entering into marriage as a life failure. Such an individual views the relationship as a constraint on their sense of independence and autonomy and may frequently consider ending the relationship and making significant life changes. Spending time with the partner does not bring enjoyment, emotional closeness is reduced, and in dealing with everyday problems the dominant tendency becomes avoidance, accompanied by a decreased sense of responsibility (Plopa, 2005).

The term *marital satisfaction* is used to describe the happiness and stability of a marital relationship. Marital satisfaction is one of the most significant determinants of overall life satisfaction. Marriage constitutes a primary source of social support; consequently, marital satisfaction is associated with both mental and physical health, overall life satisfaction, occupational achievements, and social relationships (Tavakol et al., 2017).

Research has established that marital satisfaction is influenced by a range of factors, including length of marriage, spouses' psychological maturity, life expectations, intimacy, financial situation, parenting styles or stress (Tavakol et al., 2017). Higher levels of marital satisfaction are reported by couples who spend a significant amount of their free time together, share common hobbies, and engage in communication, which plays a crucial role in maintaining intimacy. This involves, in particular, the expression of feelings and emotions, as well as acceptance and understanding of the partner. (Tavakol et al., 2017).

In summary, the theoretical description of the factors examined by the KDM-2 questionnaire suggests that intimacy, self-fulfilment, and similarity between partners are positively associated with marital satisfaction, whereas disappointment is linked to a lack of satisfaction in the relationship. This conclusion is supported by the findings from a study conducted to validate the factor structure of the KDM-2. The study involved 2,279 married individuals and employed factor analysis (Plopa, 2005). It examined the relationship between marital satisfaction and several factors, including intimacy, self-fulfilment, disappointment and similarity. The results indicate that husbands reported higher levels of marital satisfaction than their wives. Wives generally experienced lower levels of intimacy and similarity within marriage and, consequently, higher levels of disappointment. This pattern was particularly evident in the early years of marriage and may be related to women's challenges in defining their identity in relation to roles such as mother, wife, and homemaker, as well as their professional career development (Plopa, 2005). With age, the perception of self-fulfilment within marriage increases, a trend observed in both husbands and wives (Plopa, 2005).

Research examining the relationship between marital satisfaction and educational level showed that wives with primary education reported higher levels of marital satisfaction, particularly in the dimension of self-fulfilment, compared with wives holding higher education degrees (Plopa, 2005).

The number of children appears to influence marital satisfaction only among husbands and fathers. Husbands with one child reported higher levels of intimacy compared with fathers of three. Fathers of only children also perceived greater similarity with their wives in adopting shared strategies related to *shaping marital life*, compared with fathers of two or more children (Plopa, 2005).

Research on marriages indicates that level of relationship satisfaction is associated with preferences for particular stress-coping styles (Plopa, 2004, za: Plopa, 2005). An emotion-focused coping style, characterised by concentration on one's own emotional experiences in problematic situations and a tendency toward wishful thinking, is more frequently observed among wives dissatisfied with their marriage (Plopa, 2005). Husbands who are satisfied with their relationship more often demonstrate a task-oriented coping style, involving efforts aimed at resolving problems or conflicts through constructive cognitive and behavioural actions. They are also less likely to respond in an emotion-focused manner, which is more characteristic of dissatisfied spouses. In conflict situations, they tend to seek social contact not only as a way of relieving emotional tension, but also to obtain advice and support (Plopa, 2005).

Marital well-being constitutes a key context in which parental attitudes are shaped. The quality of the partner relationship influences the way individuals regulate emotions, deal with stress, and engage in interactions with their child. Research indicates that emotion regulation plays an important role in preventing marital burnout, particularly in the context of parenthood (Kocyigit, 2025). High levels of marital satisfaction are associated with greater emotional stability, openness, and empathy, which in turn promote parenting styles based on dialogue, trust, and cooperation, particularly democratic and permissive-indulgent styles.

Conversely, difficulties within the marital relationship, such as lack of emotional support, conflicts, or feelings of being misunderstood, may contribute to increased negative emotions, tension, and frustration, thereby increasing the likelihood of adopting more autocratic or emotionally detached parenting practices. In this regard, marital well-being may be regarded as an important factor influencing the way individuals fulfil their parental role.

1.2. Parenting styles

Parenting style is understood as a relatively stable way in which parents influence their child, expressed through specific attitudes, methods of control, communication patterns, and the expression of affection. Terminological analyses emphasize that parenting style should be viewed as a complex, processual, and intentional system of parental influences, which affect both child's development and parents' functioning in other areas of life (Bakiera, 2019). In psychological literature, parenting style is treated as an integrated system of parental behaviours shaping the child's emotional, social, and cognitive development (Przetacznik-Gierowska i Włodarski, 2014). According to M. Ryś (2001), parenting style is the resultant of parents' emotional attitude toward the child and the level of control and demands they place on the child.

Classical theories developed by Baumrind, as well as their extensions in Polish research, distinguish several parenting styles, including the autocratic style (characterised by high control and low emotional support), the democratic style (combining clear expectations with dialogue and empathy), the liberal-affectionate style (characterised by freedom alongside acceptance), and the liberal-non-affectionate style (marked by a lack of consistency and emotional involvement). Each of these styles has a different impact on the emotional functioning of the family, and in the longer term, on the quality of adults' romantic and occupational relationships.

Research suggests that parenting style which promotes mutual respect, trust and communication foster the development of stable emotional bounds and inner balance, which may serve as a protective factor against occupational stress. In contrast, styles

characterised by excessive control or emotional detachment are more often associated with tension and conflict, potentially increasing the risk of psychological strain and burnout (Bakiera, 2019; Ryś, 2001).

Upbringing can be understood both in the broad sense as all influences exerted on a person that shape their behaviour, attitudes, and values, and in a more specific sense as intentional forms of influence applied by the person providing upbringing (Harwas, 1999, za; Bakiera, 2019). Several parenting styles are distinguished. A parenting style is defined either as the selection and use of educational methods (Ziemska, 1973; Ryś, 2001) or as a resultant of the ways and methods of influencing the child within the family (Kuczkowski, 1991; Ryś, 2001). The most commonly distinguished are three basic styles: democratic, autocratic, and liberal. Ryś (2001) proposed distinguishing the liberal-affectionate style and liberal-non-affectionate style, on the grounds that the liberal style may take two extreme forms.

The democratic parenting style is characterised by respect for the rights and feelings of each family member. It is also marked by mutual affection, trust, and concern for the development of each family member. Parental control is flexible, with no rigidly imposed rules, or strict discipline. Instead, family members rely on persuasion and reasoning, plan activities, and solve problems together (Ryś, 2001). Learning to consider others' perspectives, cooperate with parents and siblings, and engage in decision-making processes allows the child to develop initiative and fosters pro-social attitudes. Flexible rules that allow the child to take initiative in choosing tasks, along with the absence of non-punitive approach in the cases of neglecting responsibilities and the use of persuasion and argumentation, contribute to the early development of self-control and discipline based on internalised norms and values. In this parenting style, a strong emotional bond connects children and parents.

The autocratic parenting style, which was prevalent in patriarchal families, is characterised by a conservative orientation and is based on parental control and authority, including the use of coercion (Przetacznik-Gierowska i Włodarski, 2014). Parents provide explanations to children only when they consider it appropriate. The child is aware of the level of

control they are subject to and that any misbehaviour will not go unnoticed by parents (*ibidem*). The child clearly knows their rights and responsibilities, yet their achievements are taken for granted and not rewarded, while punishment and criticism of mistakes play a dominant role in upbringing. Strict parental control also extends to the child's relationships outside the family (Ryś, 2001).

Within the autocratic parenting style, different variants can be distinguished, ranging from strict, repressive supervision associated with demands that sometimes exceed from child's capabilities, to a more rational limitation of the child's autonomy combined with tasks adjusted to their individual and developmental characteristics. The first extreme variant is based on punishments, fear and one-sided communication, and is characterised by emotional distance between parents and the child. The second variant, although still maintaining a certain level of distance, does not exclude warmth and the expression of affection. Communication in this case may be two-way, and the child may receive explanations for punishments as well as answers to their questions; however, parents remain convinced of the need for constant guidance and control over the child (Przetacznik-Gierowska i Włodarski, 2014).

The liberal parenting style assumes full freedom for the child's development; parents are expected to provide appropriate conditions, and intervene only when the child severely violates social norms. The liberal-affectionate variant involves surrounding the child with affection while allowing freedom of action and choice of attitudes, with parental believing that the child possesses the skills necessary to cope with independent life. In the liberal-non-affectionate variant, parents display indifference and emotional coldness, showing little interest in the child's life (Ryś, 2001).

The democratic and liberal-affectionate parenting styles require openness, empathy, and reflexiveness, which simultaneously serve as protective factors in the context of occupational burnout. In contrast, the autocratic and liberal-non-affectionate styles, characterised by control and emotional distance, are associated with higher levels of tension and psychological exhaustion, which may hinder adaptation to occupational demands and the ability to balance work and private life.

1.3. Occupational burnout

Occupational burnout is a complex psychological syndrome that develops in response to prolonged occupational stress, particularly in people-oriented professions. Initially described by Freudenberger and Maslach (Freudenberger, 1974, as cited in Mańkowska, 2016, Maslach, 2011, as cited in Mańkowska, 2016) and later expanded in energy models (e.g. Demerouti et al.). This phenomenon encompasses two core dimensions: emotional and physical exhaustion, and reduced work engagement. Contemporary perspectives conceptualise occupational burnout not only as an individual problem but also as an organisational phenomenon with significant social consequences (Mańkowska, 2016, 2025).

According to the *Oldenburg Burnout Inventory* (OLBI) (Chirkowska-Smolak, 2018) model used in this study, burnout is understood as a process of loss of energy and motivation in response to chronic occupational demands combined with limited social support. Reduced work engagement may result not only from workload overload but also from tensions in the family domain and a lack of work-life balance. In this context, marital well-being and family functioning styles become particularly important, as they may serve as a buffer protecting against the effects of prolonged occupational stress (Strzelecki, 2023).

Occupational burnout has not been unambiguously defined in psychological literature. However, there is a general consensus among researchers regarding its primary basis and necessary condition, which is the experience of prolonged stress. (Mańkowska, 2016). The consequences of chronic stress can be both psychological and physiological. In the physical aspect, prolonged stress may lead to, among others, elevated blood pressure, weakened immune functioning, dysregulation of the endocrine system, and gastric ulcers. Psychological symptoms of stress include anxiety, insomnia, impairment social functioning, irritability, and aggression.

In Maslach's classical approach, occupational burnout is understood as a psychological response to chronic occupational stress and is manifested as a three-dimensional syndrome consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, as cited in: Mańkowska, 2016).

Emotional exhaustion results from psychological overload or compassion fatigue, as well as from sustained involvement in professional interactions with individuals experiencing multiple problems and attempts to resolve these difficulties on their behalf. It is manifested, among others, by a general sense of fatigue. Psychosomatic symptoms may include, for example: headaches and insomnia (Mańkowska, 2016).

Depersonalisation is considered to serve a defensive function against excessive emotional burden. Interpersonal relations experienced by the individuals become impersonal. The person shows indifference towards others' problems and develops strategies aimed at resolving issues as quickly as possible and minimising the duration of contact with other individuals. Depersonalisation contributes to the formation of stereotypes. Over time, it may be expressed not only towards clients, but also towards subordinates, co-workers and even supervisors (*ibidem*).

Reduced personal accomplishment, according to Maslach, refers to a decline in self-efficacy and effectiveness of one's actions, as well as dissatisfaction with one's achievements resulting from difficulties in coping with occupational stress (Maslach and Jackson, 1981, as cited in: Mańkowska, 2016).

The updated version of this concept, developed by Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, identifies three components of occupational burnout: exhaustion (replacing emotional exhaustion), which includes not only a reduction in energy but also a loss of physical strength and diminished cognitive resources: cynicism (replacing depersonalisation) understood as psychological distancing not only from people but also from the entire work-related environment; and reduced professional efficacy, which represents a narrower, construct to reduced personal accomplishment (Baka and Basińska, 2016).

The authors of the modified concept assume that occupational burnout results from dysfunctional relations between the individual and the organisational environment. According to these authors, such an incompatibility is promoted by excessive workload, lack of control, insufficient reward, lack of social support, absence of fairness, and value conflicts (*ibidem*).

Another approach to occupational burnout is presented in the *Job Demands – Resources* model. According to this model, occupational burnout

consists of two components: exhaustion (physical, emotional, and cognitive) and disengagement from work. Occupational burnout is understood as the result of insufficient resources in relation to excessive demands (Demerouti, 2001, as cited in: Mańkowska, 2025).

The two presented models compete with one another, and the current state of knowledge on occupational burnout still allows for a wide range of perspectives. The lack of consensus regarding the definition of occupational burnout is particularly problematic given the increasing prevalence of occupational burnout and the complexity of its underlying mechanisms. Reaching agreement in this area is essential for accurate diagnosis as well as for the development and implementation of effective prevention strategies (Mańkowska, 2025).

Apart from systemic solutions, individuals may also undertake specific actions aimed at preventing occupational burnout. The strategies most frequently mentioned in the burnout literature include setting achievable goals, ensuring adequate rest, engaging in physical activity, maintaining emotional distance from external stressors, undertaking activities that support mental and physical health, and preserving boundaries between work and home life (Mańkowska, 2016).

The social environment and an individual's interactions with other people play an important role in preventing occupational burnout. Among the personal factors associated with an increased risk of burnout are the lack of partner relationships, and social support systems, as well as neglect of intimacy (Skłodowski, 2010).

Partnership relationships, trust, support, intimacy, opportunities for mutual self-realisation, and similarity between partners contribute to high levels of marital satisfaction. The fact that the absence of factors underlying a satisfying marriage may increase the likelihood of occupational burnout suggests a possible association between marital well-being and the risk of burnout. Accordingly, lower marital satisfaction may be associated with a higher risk of occupational burnout.

Marital well-being, parenting style, and occupational burnout form an interconnected system in which functioning within one domain may influence

the others. High levels of marital satisfaction promote emotional balance, which is reflected in more supportive and empathic parental attitudes. At the same time, constructive parenting styles based on openness, trust, and dialogue facilitate more effective stress management, which may protect individuals from excessive strain and occupational burnout.

Conversely, reduced marital well-being may contribute to increased emotional tension, which can extend to both parenting relationships and occupational functioning. Conflicts, lack of support, or feeling of being misunderstood within the relationship may result in greater impulsivity and emotional distance in interactions with children, as well as a reduced ability to cope with occupational pressure. Therefore, it may be assumed that the quality of the marital relationship and the parenting style employed remain in a reciprocal relationship with the level of occupational burnout, either supporting one another or intensifying difficulties in the emotional and social functioning of the individual.

In consequence, all three analysed variables are closely interrelated and form a system of dependencies in which well-being in one life domain influences functioning in the others. This perspective highlights the importance of integrating family and occupational perspectives in research on adult functioning.

2. Method

The aim of the present study is to address the following research question: Does marital well-being and parenting styles in one's family of origin influence the level of occupational burnout? Based on the research question and the relevant literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1. The democratic and liberal-affectionate styles are associated with lower levels of burnout.
- H2. The autocratic and liberal-non-affectionate styles are associated with higher levels of burnout.
- H3. Higher marital well-being co-occurs with lower intensity of occupational burnout.

2.1. Participants

The study sample consisted of 417 married individuals with at least one child, including 266 women and 151 men, aged between 21 to 63 years. The average age of the participants was $M = 41$ years. The majority of participants had higher education (54.28%), followed by secondary education (20.54%), vocational education (14.43%), incomplete higher education (9.54%), and primary education (1.22%). Most respondents lived in the countryside (36.63%), followed by cities with 51,000 inhabitants and more (32.05%), cities with 21,000–50,000 inhabitants (18.07%), and cities with 6,000–20,000 inhabitants (13.25%). The average length of employment was 13 years. The sample included 63.18% white-collar workers and 36.82% blue-collar workers.

2.2. Research tools

Three measures and a sociodemographic questionnaire consisting of nine items assessing sociodemographic variables were used in the study. Marital well-being was assessed using the *Marital Quality Questionnaire* (KDM-2) developed by M. Plopa and J. Rostowski (2005). The instrument measures the quality of marital relationship across four dimensions: intimacy, self-fulfilment, similarity, and disappointment. The questionnaire consists of 32 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale: 5 – strongly agree, 4 – rather agree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 2 – rather disagree, 1 – strongly disagree. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained in the present study were as follows: intimacy $\alpha = 0.881$, disappointment $\alpha = 0.862$, self-realisation $\alpha = 0.810$, similarity $\alpha = 0.776$, and overall marital satisfaction $\alpha = 0.938$. Parenting style was assessed using the *Parenting Styles Analysis – Own Family Questionnaire* (M. Ryś, 2001). The instrument consists of 33 items, and respondents answer using a five-point scale: 3 – definitely yes, 2 – rather yes, 1 – rather no, 0 – definitely no, x – cannot determine. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients in the present sample were: democratic style – 0.793; autocratic style – 0.805; permissive-indulgent – 0.428; neglectful-permissive – 0.820. Occupational burnout was measured

using the *Oldenburg Burnout Inventory* (OLBI) developed by E. Demerouti, A.B. Bakker, I. Vardakou, and A. Kantas, in the Polish adaptation by T. Chirkowska-Smolak (2018). The instrument consists of 16 items rated on a four-point scale: 1 – strongly agree, 2 – agree, 3 – disagree, 4 – strongly disagree. The OLBI conceptualises occupational burnout as a two-factor construct comprising exhaustion and disengagement from work (Chirkowska-Smolak, 2018). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients in the present study were: overall occupational burnout $\alpha = 0.833$; exhaustion $\alpha = 0.739$; disengagement $\alpha = 0.714$ (ibidem).

3. Results

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the distributions of studied variables differed from a normal distribution. However, analysis of the skewness and kurtosis values showed that for most variables (with the exception of similarity and marital well-being) the coefficients fell within the range of ± 2 , suggesting that the distribution of variables can be considered approximately normal.

To verify the proposed hypotheses, Pearson’s *r* correlation analysis was conducted.

Hypothesis 1, which assumed that democratic and liberal-affectionate parenting styles reduce risk of occupational burnout, was confirmed. The correlation results indicated that higher levels of these parenting styles (i.e., more frequent use) were associated with higher OLBI scores, which in this study reflects lower levels of burnout and its components. Although these relationships were weak, their direction was consistent with the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2, which stated that the use of autocratic and liberal-non-affectionate parenting styles increases the risk of occupational burnout, was also supported. Higher levels of these parenting styles were associated with lower OLBI scores, indicating higher levels of burnout and its components. This relationship was particularly pronounced for the liberal-non-affectionate style, for which correlations of moderate strength were observed.

To test Hypothesis 3, Pearson’s *r* correlation analysis was conducted. The results indicate that Hypothesis 3, which assumed that marital well-being reduces the risk of occupational burnout, was supported with regard to selected components of

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of variables with results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Sk</i>	<i>Kurt</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Maks</i>	<i>KS</i>	<i>p</i>
Parenting styles in one’s own family								
Democratic style	24.21	4.02	-0.746	0.891	7.5	30.0	0.08	<0.001
Autocratic style	11.24	5.56	0.578	0.324	0.0	30.0	0.08	<0.001
Liberal-affectionate style	20.02	3.27	-0.510	0.802	8.0	27.0	0.07	<0.001
Liberal-non-affectionate style	8.64	5.22	0.682	0.082	0.0	25.0	0.09	<0.001
Marital well-being (KDM-2)								
Intimacy	30.60	6.08	-1.096	1.610	4.0	40.0	0.15	<0.001
Self-fulfilment	26.95	4.87	-0.807	1.721	3.0	35.0	0.09	<0.001
Similarity	27.19	4.90	-1.152	2.290	4.0	35.0	0.12	<0.001
Disappointment	37.54	7.86	-0.822	0.605	4.0	50.0	0.09	<0.001
Marital well-being	84.75	14.60	-1.165	2.632	11.0	110.0	0.11	<0.001
Occupational burnout (OLBI)								
Lack of engagement for work	22.02	4.24	-0.177	0.182	7.0	32.0	0.07	<0.001
Occupational exhaustion	21.60	3.98	-0.069	0.629	9.0	32.0	0.08	<0.001
Occupational burnout	43.62	7.47	-0.122	0.458	18.0	64.0	0.05	0.008

Legend: n-number of observation, M-mean, SD-standard deviation, Sk-skewness, Kurt-kurtosis, Min-minimal value, Maks-maximal value, KS - Kolmogorow-Smirnov test statistic, p - significance for normality test

Table 2. Relationships between occupational burnout, and democratic, autocratic, liberal-affectionate, liberal-non-affectionate parenting styles

Variable	Lack of engagement in work	Occupational exhaustion	Occupational burnout
Democratic style	0.159**	0.181***	0.187***
Autocratic style	-0.112*	-0.200***	-0.170***
Liberal-affectionate style	0.105*	0.070	0.097*
Liberal-non-affectionate style	-0.179***	-0.307***	-0.265***

***p<0,001, **p<0,01, *p<0,05

Table 3. Relationship between occupational burnout and marital well-being

Variable	Lack of engagement in work	Occupational exhaustion	Occupational burnout
Intimacy	0.106*	0.200***	0.167***
Self-fulfillment	0.097*	0.148**	0.134**
Similarity	0.122*	0.186***	0.168***
Disappointment	0.108*	0.199***	0.167***
Marital well-being	0.117*	0.195***	0.171***

***p<0,001, **p<0,01, *p<0,05

marital well-being, such as intimacy, self-realisation, and similarity. These variables were negatively correlated with occupational burnout and its components (work disengagement and exhaustion), indicating that higher levels of marital well-being are associated with lower levels of burnout.

3.1. Additional analyses

To examine intergroup differences in the studies variables, Student's t-test for independent samples and Kruskal-Wallis test were used. The first set of analyses concerned gender differences. Student's t-test revealed statistically significant differences in three dimensions of parenting styles in one's own family. Women showed significantly higher levels of

the democratic parenting style compared to men, $t(415) = 2.22$; $p = 0.027$; $d = 0.23$, indicating a small effect size. At the same time, women obtained significantly lower scores in the autocratic style, $t(415) = -2.27$; $p = 0.024$; $d = 0.23$. A similar pattern was observed for the liberal-non-affectionate style, where women also achieved significantly lower results compared to men, $t(415) = -2.24$; $p = 0.026$; $d = 0.23$. No significant gender differences were found for the liberal-affectionate style for the remaining variables related to marital well-being and occupational burnout ($p > 0.05$).

The next set of analysis examined intergroup differences connected to respondents' age. The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare three age groups: up to 25 years old, 26–40 years old, and over 40 years old. Regarding parenting styles in one's own family, a significant difference was found only for the liberal-non-affectionate style, $H(2) = 6.29$; $p = 0.043$; $\epsilon^2 = 0.02$, indicating a small effect size. The highest scores in this dimension were observed in the group of people up to 25 years of age, while the lowest were found in the 26–40 age group. With respect to marital well-being, the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed significant age-group differences in four dimensions. For intimacy, the result was $H(2) = 8.05$; $p = 0.018$; $\epsilon^2 = 0.02$, with the highest scores observed in the 26–40 age group. Similarity also differed significantly between groups, $H(2) = 8.75$; $p = 0.013$; $\epsilon^2 = 0.02$, again with the highest values in the 26–40 age group. For disappointment, the result was $H(2) = 7.84$; $p = 0.020$; $\epsilon^2 = 0.02$, with the highest scores observed in the 26–40 age group. The overall marital well-being index also differed significantly across age groups, $H(2) = 6.57$, $p = 0.037$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.02$, with the highest scores in the 26–40 age group and the lowest in the up-to-25 group. Regarding occupational burnout, a significant age-related difference was found only for exhaustion, $H(2) = 10.04$, $p = 0.007$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.02$. According to the interpretation of the OLBI scale, lower scores indicate higher levels of exhaustion; therefore, the lowest scores (reflecting the highest exhaustion) were observed by participants over 40 years of age, whereas the highest scores (indicating the lowest exhaustion), were found in the up-to-25 age. group.

Table 4. Analysis of gender-related differences in parenting styles of one's own family, marital well-being and occupational burnout

Dependent variable	Woman (n=266)		Man (n=151)		t	df	p	95% CI		d
	M	SD	M	SD				LL	UL	
Democratic	24.5	4.0	23.6	4.0	2.22	415	0.027	0.1	1.7	0.23
Autocratic	10.8	5.6	12.1	5.4	-2.27	415	0.024	-2.4	-0.2	0.23
Liberal-affectionate	20.2	3.3	19.7	3.2	1.75	415	0.081	-0.1	1.2	0.18
Liberal-non-affectionate	8.2	5.3	9.4	5.0	-2.24	415	0.026	-2.2	-0.1	0.23
Intimacy	30.5	6.3	30.8	5.7	-0.53	415	0.594	-1.6	0.9	0.05
Self-fulfilment	26.9	4.8	27.0	5.0	-0.19	415	0.853	-1.1	0.9	0.02
Similarity	27.2	5.0	27.1	4.8	0.30	415	0.766	-0.8	1.1	0.03
Disappointment	37.2	8.0	38.1	7.6	-1.04	415	0.299	-2.4	0.7	0.11
Marital well-being	84.6	14.8	84.9	14.3	-0.18	415	0.854	-3.2	2.6	0.02
Lack of engagement	22.2	4.3	21.8	4.2	0.85	415	0.394	-0.5	1.2	0.09
Occupational burnout	43.6	7.6	43.6	7.3	0.04	415	0.970	-1.5	1.5	0.00
Occupational exhaustion	21.5	4.1	21.8	3.8	-0.84	415	0.402	-1.1	0.5	0.09

Legend: t- statistic of t Studenta test, *- statistic of Welch test, df -degrees of freedom; p-the level of test's pertinance, d- the size of d Cohena effect, M- mean, SD- standard deviation, 95% CI- 95% confidence interval, LL- lower line of confidence interval, UL- utter line of confidence interval

Table 5. Analysis of age-related differences in parenting styles in one's own family, marital well-being, occupational burnout

Dependent variable	25 years old and younger (n=8)		26-40 years old (n=197)		over 40 years old (n=210)		H	df	p	ε ²
	M	Me	M	Me	M	Me				
Democratic	23.8	24.0	24.5	25.0	23.9	24.0	2.46	2	0.292	0.01
Autocratic	12.2	11.2	10.6	10.0	11.8	11.0	5.67	2	0.059	0.01
Liberal-affectionate	19.4	20.0	20.1	20.0	20.0	20.0	0.27	2	0.874	0.00
Liberal-non-affectionate	9.9	9.5	8.1	7.0	9.2	8.5	6.29	2	0.043	0.02
Intimacy	29.2	30.5	31.5	32.0	29.9	31.0	8.05	2	0.018	0.02
Self-fulfilment	25.4	26.0	27.3	27.0	26.7	27.0	1.75	2	0.418	0.00
Similarity	25.4	28.0	27.9	29.0	26.6	28.0	8.75	2	0.013	0.02
Disappointment	32.1	34.0	38.5	40.0	36.9	38.0	7.84	2	0.020	0.02
Marital well-being	80.0	84.0	86.6	88.0	83.2	86.0	6.57	2	0.037	0.02
Lack of engagement	22.1	22.5	22.1	22.0	21.9	22.0	0.31	2	0.858	0.00
Occupational burnout	44.9	45.5	44.2	44.0	43.0	43.0	3.72	2	0.156	0.01
Occupational exhaustion	22.8	23.0	22.1	22.0	21.1	21.0	10.04	2	0.007	0.02

Legend: H- statistics of Kruskal-Wallis test, df -degrees of freedom, p- the level of test's pertinence, ε²- measure of the size of the effect for Kruskal-Wallis test, M- mean, Me- median

Table 6. Analysis of differences according to work experience in parenting style in one's own family, marital well-being, occupational burnout

Dependent variable	under 1 year (n=23)		1-5 years (n=106)		6-10 years (n=92)		11-20 years (n=112)		over 20 years (n=84)		H	df	p	ε ²
	M	Me	M	Me	M	Me	M	Me	M	Me				
Democratic	24.3	25.0	24.5	25.0	24.0	24.5	24.1	25.0	24.2	24.0	1.99	4	0.738	0.00
Autocratic	11.1	10.0	11.1	10.5	10.6	10.0	11.9	11.0	11.3	11.0	2.12	4	0.713	0.01
Liberal-affectionate	19.4	19.5	20.3	20.5	20.0	20.0	19.6	20.0	20.5	20.0	5.11	4	0.276	0.01
Liberal-non-affectionate	8.4	7.0	8.7	8.0	8.5	8.0	8.8	8.0	8.5	7.2	0.28	4	0.991	0.00
Intimacy	29.3	30.0	31.2	32.0	31.5	32.0	30.2	31.0	29.8	31.0	5.07	4	0.281	0.01
Self-fulfillment	26.4	27.0	27.1	28.0	27.1	27.0	26.8	27.0	26.9	28.0	0.80	4	0.939	0.00
Similarity	26.5	27.0	27.5	28.0	27.8	28.5	27.1	28.0	26.5	27.0	3.90	4	0.419	0.01
Disappointment	37.2	38.0	37.8	39.5	38.5	40.0	36.9	37.0	37.2	39.5	1.59	4	0.811	0.00
Marital well-being	82.2	82.0	85.8	88.0	86.4	87.0	84.2	87.0	83.2	86.0	2.85	4	0.583	0.01
Lack of engagement	21.0	20.0	22.9	23.5	21.6	22.0	21.2	21.0	22.7	22.0	14.87	4	0.005	0.04
Occupational burnout	42.3	40.0	45.1	46.0	43.4	43.0	42.4	43.0	44.0	44.0	9.16	4	0.057	0.02
Occupational exhaustion	21.3	20.0	22.2	22.0	21.7	21.0	21.2	21.0	21.3	21.0	6.12	4	0.190	0.01

Legend: H-statistics of Kruskal-Wallis test, df- degrees of freedom, p- level of test's pertinence, ε²-measure of the size of the effect for Kruskal-Wallis test, M- mean, Me-median

The final set of analyses examined differences according to respondents' length of employment. The Kruskal-Wallis test compared five groups: individuals with less than 1 year of work experience, 1–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–20 years, and over 20 years. No significant between-group differences were found for family parenting in one's own family or for marital well-being ($p > 0.05$). However, a significant difference was observed for the work disengagement dimension of occupational burnout, $H(4) = 14.87$; $p = 0.005$; $\epsilon^2 = 0.04$. According to the interpretation of the OLBI scale, lower scores indicate the higher levels of work disengagement; therefore, the lowest scores (reflecting the highest level of disengagement) were observed among participants with less than 1 year of work experience.

The highest scores (indicating the lowest level of disengagement) were found in participants with 1–5 years of experience and those with over 20 years of experience. No significant differences related to length of employment were found for the remaining dimensions of occupational burnout.

4. Interpretation of results

The obtained empirical results confirmed all three research hypotheses. In line with the theoretical assumptions, the use of democratic and liberal-affectionate parenting styles was associated with lower levels of occupational burnout. This finding suggests that individuals functioning in family relationships based on trust, empathy, and mutual respect tend to display similar attitudes in other areas of social functioning, including work-related relationships. Parenting style reflects a relatively stable pattern of emotional responding, self-regulation, and interpersonal maturity, which fosters constructive coping with stress and reduces the risk of emotional exhaustion.

Opposite relationships were observed for autocratic and liberal-non-affectionate parenting styles, which were positively correlated with occupational burnout. Excessive control, criticism, or emotional distance expressed by parents may reflect a generally detached and rigid interpersonal functioning pattern, which can be transferred to non-family relationships. Such attitudes contribute to the accumulation of emotional tension and reduce an individual's adap-

tive capacity in the occupational context, while also hindering the maintenance of work–life balance. A particularly strong association with occupational burnout was observed for the liberal-non-affectionate style, characterised by emotional indifference and lack of parental involvement. This pattern may indicate deficits in emotional and cognitive resources as well as signs of general psychological exhaustion.

It was also confirmed that marital well-being plays an important protective role in relation to occupational burnout. Higher levels of intimacy, similarity, and self-fulfillment in the marital relationship co-occurred with lower levels of emotional exhaustion and work disengagement. It can therefore be assumed that a satisfying marital relationship functions as an emotional buffer, as it provides support, understanding, and a sense of stability that mitigate the negative effects of occupational stress. The absence of such support increases vulnerability to burnout, particularly among individuals burdened with parental responsibilities.

Additional analyses also revealed certain differences in the studied variables depending on selected sociodemographic characteristics. Women more often than men reported using the democratic style and less frequently autocratic and liberal-non-affectionate styles, which may indicate a greater tendency toward relational and supportive functioning in family relationships. Age- and work experience-related differences concerned mainly selected aspects of marital well-being and components of occupational burnout, although their effect sizes were small. These findings suggest that demographic factors may to some extent differentiate the levels of analysed variables; however, they do not constitute the main determinants of the observed relationships.

5. Discussion

The obtained results are consistent with previous research findings highlighting the importance of work–family balance and the influence of quality of intimate relationships on individual psychological well-being (Baka and Basińska, 2016). These findings also support earlier observations by Liang and Chen

(2025), who demonstrated that work–family conflict negatively affects parent–child relationships, increases parental burnout, and may consequently reduce the quality of occupational functioning (Liang and Chen, 2025). The identified relationships indicate that the way parents interact with their children reflects not only their parenting attitudes but also their current level of emotional, cognitive, and adaptive resources. Democratic and liberal-affectionate parenting styles, based on trust, dialogue, and acceptance, are associated with higher levels of self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal competence. These characteristics serve as protective factors against occupational burnout, as they facilitate constructive coping with work demands, the maintenance of satisfying workplace relations, and more effective emotional recovery. In contrast, autocratic and liberal-non-affectionate styles, characterised by excessive control, emotional distance, or lack of involvement, may contribute to higher levels of tension, frustration, and psychological exhaustion. Individuals exhibiting such styles are more likely to experience difficulties in adapting to occupational demands and in maintaining work–life balance, which increases the risk of burnout symptoms.

A high level of marital well-being can be interpreted as an important psychological resource that supports more effective emotional self-regulation and more efficient coping with workplace demands. Individuals satisfied with their partner relationship tend to experience a greater sense of security and belonging, which enhances their resilience to occupational stress. In contrast, low marital satisfaction may contribute to feelings of loneliness, overload, and a lack of meaning at work, all of which are factors commonly associated with the process of occupational burnout. Research has shown that work–family role conflict increases the risk of burnout; however, the presence of a stable marital relationship and parental role may mitigate some of these effects by providing emotional support and a sense of meaning (Zheng et al., 2022). Other studies indicate that although marriage may, in certain situations, increase levels of personal burnout – particularly during periods of heightened occupational stress, such as the COVID–19 pandemic – positive family relationships and reduced excessive workload can nevertheless serve a protective function (Chen

et al., 2022). Furthermore, work-family enrichment, understood as the positive transfer of experiences and resources between these domains, has been found to reduce parental burnout by increasing parenting self-efficacy and lowering stress levels (Wang et al., 2024). These findings confirm that the quality of marital and family relationships may constitute an important factor against the negative consequences of occupational overload.

Additionally, the quality of the marital relationship may influence the parenting styles adopted by spouses. Marital well-being constitutes a key context in which parental attitudes are shaped and enacted. The quality of the partner relationship affects how individuals regulate emotions, respond to stress, and engage in interactions with their child. Research indicates that emotional regulation plays an important role in preventing marital burnout, particularly in the context of parenthood (Kocyigit & Uzun, 2025). High levels of marital satisfaction are associated with greater emotional stability, openness, and empathy, which in turn promote parenting styles based on dialogue, trust, and cooperation, namely the democratic and liberal-affectionate styles.

Conversely, deficits in the marital relationship, such as a lack of emotional support, conflicts, or being misunderstood, may lead to intensified negative emotions, tension, and frustration, which in turn increase the likelihood of adopting more autocratic or indifferent forms of parenting. In this sense, marital well-being can be regarded as an important factor regulating the manner in which the parental role is fulfilled.

Recent analyses indicate that higher-quality marital relationships are associated with better indicators of mental health and certain cognitive benefits, suggesting their role as adaptive resources (Haghighi et al., 2024).

Analyses of factors influencing occupational burnout confirm that social resources, including family resources such as the quality of partner support, have a protective effect against the development of burnout symptoms (Wudarczyk, 2023).

It should be emphasized that the study concerned current parenting styles used by parents, rather than styles derived from the family of origin. The obtained

results therefore reflect the contemporary context of parents' functioning, rather than retrospective childhood experiences. Consequently, it can be assumed that occupational burnout, marital well-being, and parenting style form a dynamic system of interrelated factors: the quality of the marital relationship influences the manner in which parental roles are fulfilled, while occupational overload may negatively affect family functioning.

6. Study limitations

Despite obtaining valuable and significant results, the study is not without certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the correlational design of the analyses allows for the identification of associations between the studied variables; however, it does not permit drawing definitive conclusions about causal relationships. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, which would make it possible to capture the dynamics of these relationships over time.

The use of self-report methods, although widely applied in psychological research, may involve a certain risk of cognitive distortions and social desirability bias. Nevertheless, the instruments used in this study demonstrate good psychometric properties, which increases the reliability of the obtained data.

Although the sample size ($N = 417$) allows for drawing reliable conclusions, the demographic composition of the sample, with a predominance of women and individuals with tertiary education, may limit the generalisability of the results to other groups of parents. However, it should be noted that such a profile is consistent with trends observed in studies involving working parents raising children, which makes the obtained data representative for this population.

In summary, despite aforementioned limitations, the obtained results constitute a valuable contribution to the development of knowledge regarding the relationships between parenting style, marital well-being, and occupational burnout, highlighting the need for further research to deepen the understanding of this mechanisms.

7. Theoretical and practical implications

The obtained results constitute an important contribution to the development of knowledge on the links between family functioning and mental health in the occupational context. These findings empirically support the rationale for integrating perspectives from work psychology, family psychology, and health psychology in research on occupational burnout. They indicate that individuals' emotional and motivational resources are deeply embedded within their relational systems, particularly in the quality of marital relationships, parenting styles, and perceived family support. These results further support a systemic and psychological approach to human functioning, according to which work and family life form a dynamic system of interrelated factors in which stress or satisfaction in one domain may significantly influence the other.

In practical terms, this study opens new opportunities for practitioners, including organisational psychologists, family therapists, career counsellors, and HR specialists. The findings suggest that occupational burnout prevention programmes should include not only organisational components (e.g., workload management, improving workplace culture, and developing soft skills), but also elements related to family functioning. In practice, this implies the need to consider factors such as marital communication, work-family balance, mutual partner support and parenting strategies.

A particularly promising direction involves interventions aimed at improving the quality of partner relationships. Research indicates that persistent conflict and dissatisfaction within intimate relationships increase the risk of adverse mental health outcomes, whereas improvements in relationship quality may contribute to enhanced psychological well-being. (Whisman et al., 2021). These results highlight that interventions strengthening relational resources, such as empathy training, emotional understanding, and joint problem-solving skills, may constitute an effective preventative tool for both occupational burnout and emotional difficulties within the family.

In organisational practice, it may be considered to include work-life balance modules in stress management training, as well as to promote cooperation between mental health institutions and employers in order to support the families of individuals exposed to chronic occupational stress (e.g., healthcare professionals, teachers, and social workers). Integrating work and family perspectives into organisational policies may lead to a tangible improvement in employees' psychological well-being, as well as increased work effectiveness and engagement.

In summary, the obtained results indicate that the prevention of occupational burnout should be designed in a holistic manner, taking into account the individual's emotional, relational and family resources. Parenting styles based on empathy and dialogue, high-quality marital relationship, and effective partner communication constitute key protective factors that may effectively counteract the negative effects of occupational stress enhance overall psychological well-being.

8. Future research directions

Future studies should focus on identifying mediating mechanisms between parenting styles and occupational burnout, such as the level of parental stress, satisfaction with the parental role, or coping strategies used in response to stress. Longitudinal research would also be valuable, as it would allow for the examination of changes in marital and parenting relationships over time and their impact on the development or reduction of occupational burnout.

Another promising direction involves comparing occupational groups particularly vulnerable to burnout, such as teachers, healthcare professionals, and individuals working in helping professions. It would also be valuable to include the perspective of both partners; such an approach could reveal how mutual parenting styles and quality of the partner relationship interact in shaping individual well-being and psychological resilience.

References

- Baka, Ł., & Basińska, A. B. (2016). Psychometryczne właściwości polskiej wersji Oldenburskiego Kwestionariusza Wypalenia Zawodowego (OLBI) [Psychometric properties of the Polish version of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI)]. *Medycyna Pracy*, 67(1), 29–41.
- Bakiera, L. (2019). Wychowanie i rodzicielstwo, styl wychowania i styl rodzicielski. Analiza terminologiczna [Upbringing and parenthood, parenting style and parental style: A terminological analysis]. *Psychologia Wychowawcza*, 58(16), 60–72. <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0013.6361>
- Chen, Y.-H., Lou, S.-Z., Yang, C.-w., Tang, H.-M., Lee, C.-H., & Jong, G.-P. (2022). Effect of Marriage on Burnout among Healthcare Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(23), 15811. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192315811>
- Chirkowska-Smolak, T. (2018). Polska adaptacja kwestionariusza do pomiaru wypalenia zawodowego OLBI (The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory) [A Polish Adaptation of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI)]. *Studia Oeconomica Posnaniensia*, 6(3), 24–47. <https://doi.org/10.18559/SOEP.2018.3.2>
- Haghighi, P., Littler, E. A. L., Mauer-Vakil, D., Miller, M., Oremus, M. (2024). Exploring the relationship between marital quality and cognitive function: A systematic review. *Social Science & Medicine* 355, 117120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.117120>
- Kocygigit, M., & Uzun, M. (2025). Emotion regulation and couple burnout in marriage: A moderated moderation model of authenticity, sex of parents and having children. *Current Psychology*, 44, 3564–3578. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-024-07253-1>
- Kuczowski, S. (1991). *Przyjacielskie spotkania wychowawcze* [Friendly educational meetings]. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy.
- Liang, J., & Chen, Z. (2025). Parents' work-family conflict and parent-child relationship: The mediating role of parenting burnout. *PLOS ONE*, 20(6), e0319675. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0319675>
- Mańkowska, B. (2016). *Wypalenie zawodowe: Źródła, mechanizmy, zapobieganie* [Occupational burnout: Sources, mechanisms, prevention]. Gdańsk: Grupa Wydawnicza Harmonia.
- Mańkowska, B. (2025). Burnout phenomenon still unresolved: The current state in theory and implications for public interest. *Frontiers in Organizational Psychology*, 3, 1549253. <https://doi.org/10.3389/forgp.2025.1549253>
- Plopa, M. (2005). *Więzi w małżeństwie i rodzinie: Metody badań* [Bonds in marriage and family: Research methods]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Plopa, M., Rostowski, J. (2005). Kwestionariusz Dobranego Małżeństwa (KDM-2) [Marital Quality Questionnaire]. In M. Plopa (2005). *Więzi w małżeństwie i rodzinie: Metody badań* (pp. 51-108). Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Przetacznik-Gierowska, M., & Włodarski, Z. (2014). *Psychologia wychowawcza* [Educational psychology]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Ryś, M. (2001). *Systemy rodzinne: Metody badań struktury rodziny pochodzenia i rodziny własnej* [Family systems: Methods for studying the structure of the family of origin and the current family]. Warszawa: Centrum Metodyczne Pomocy Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznej.
- Strzelecki, D. D. (2023). Wypalenie akademickie. Właściwości psychometryczne polskiej wersji Oldenburskiego Kwestionariusza Wypalenia – wersja dla studentów (OLBI-S). Badania wstępne [Academic burnout: Psychometric properties of the Polish version of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory – student version (OLBI-S). Preliminary studies]. *Edukacja Dorosłych*, 89(2), 131–150. <https://doi.org/10.12775/ED.2023.018>
- Tavakol, Z., Behboodi Moghadam, Z., Nikbakht Nasrabadi, A., Salehiniya, H., & Rezaei, E. (2017). A review of the factors associated with marital satisfaction. *Galen Medical Journal*, 6(3), e641. <https://doi.org/10.31661/gmj.v6i3.641>
- Wang, W., Song, T., Chen, S., et al. (2024). Work-family enrichment and parental burnout: The mediating effects of parenting sense of competence and parenting stress. *Current Psychology*, 43, 6966–6976. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04874-w>
- Wasilewska, M., & Kuleta, M. (2006). Style wychowania w rodzinie a zadowolenie z siebie młodych kobiet wkraczających w dorosłe życie [Parenting styles in the family and self-satisfaction among young women entering adulthood]. *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, 6(2), 81–92.
- Whisman, M. A., Sbarra, D. A., & Beach, S. R. H. (2021). Intimate relationships and depression: Searching for causation in the sea of association. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 17, 233–258. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-081219-103323>
- Wojciszke, B. (2021). *Psychologia miłości* [Psychology of love]. Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Wudarczyk, B. (2023). *Analiza czynników wpływających na wypalenie zawodowe* [Analysis of factors influencing occupational burnout]. Uniwersytet Medyczny im. Piastów Śląskich. Wrocław, Poland. PhD thesis. <https://ppm.umw.edu.pl/seam/resource/rest/download/inline/UMW77178d6b323f4ce39385ce67f1dd1613>
- Zheng, G., Lyu, X., Pan, L., et al. (2022). The role conflict-burnout-depression link among Chinese female health care and social service providers: The moderating effect of marriage and motherhood. *BMC Public Health*, 22, 230. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-12641-y>
- Ziemska, M. (1973). *Postawy rodzicielskie* [Parenting attitudes]. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.



Dialogue in crisis intervention: A pragmatic-linguistic analysis of communication mechanisms. A comparative case study¹

<https://doi.org/10.34766/n8g7y228>

© Authors (copyright) • Quarterly Journal Fides et Ratio (publishing rights) • Open Access CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Anna Dąbrowska^a ✉

^a Anna Dąbrowska, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7170-4070>,

Department of Applied Linguistics, Institute of Linguistics and Literary Studies, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

✉ Corresponding author: anna.dabrowska@mail.umcs.pl

Abstract: This article examines the role of communication in crisis intervention, focusing on its regulatory, cognitive, and relational functions. The aim of the study is to identify communication mechanisms that contribute to effective intervention and to analyze factors leading to its failure, with particular emphasis on the linguistic and pragmatic dimensions of dialogue. A qualitative research approach was adopted, based on a comparative analysis of two case studies representing dialogic (effective) and directive (ineffective) communication. The analysis indicates that the dialogical nature of communication, understood as co-creation of meanings and adapting the response to the emotional state of the interlocutor, is an important factor contributing to the effectiveness of the intervention. In the effective case, communication was structured and supportive, enabling emotional regulation, cognitive restructuring, and an increased sense of agency. Techniques such as paraphrasing, emotional reflection, and open-ended questioning facilitated the organization of experience and the gradual reduction of emotional tension. In contrast, the ineffective case was characterized by directive communication, involving imposed interpretations and advice-giving, which triggered psychological reactance, reduced trust, and hindered the intervention process. The results suggest that emotional regulation is a prerequisite for cognitive processing, and its absence prevents meaningful reconstruction of experience. Furthermore, effective communication requires flexibility, responsiveness, and sensitivity to the social context of the individual's narrative. The study highlights the role of language as a tool for meaning-making and offers practical implications for developing communicative competence in crisis intervention.

Keywords: cognitive restructuring, crisis communication, dialogue, discourse analysis, emotional regulation

1. Introduction and research objectives

Communication in crisis situations constitutes one of the key mechanisms regulating both the course of intervention and its ultimate outcomes. The literature emphasizes that a crisis is not merely an objective event, but a subjective experience, strongly shaped by the way it is communicatively processed (Kubacka-Jasiecka, 2010; Schneider et al., 2024). This means that language, understood as a tool of dialogue, not only reflects the emotional state of a person in crisis but also actively co-constructs it. In this sense, communication becomes a space for the regulation of emotions, cognition, and interpersonal relationships.

As noted by Shahi, Clausen, and Stieglitz (2022), communication disseminated by influential actors on social media can shape how crisis situations are perceived and interpreted by the public. Such communication may affect behavioural responses and levels of trust in institutions, underscoring its critical role in crisis management and public engagement (ibidem, cf. Kumalasari et al., 2024).

In the context of crisis intervention, dialogue becomes particularly significant as a form of interaction in which meanings are co-constructed and the psychological reality of the individual in crisis is negotiated. Contemporary research on communication stresses that messages do not function in a cognitive vacuum. Schneider et al. (2024) note that in crisis situations, “numbers do not speak for

¹ Article in Polish language: https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/66p_Dabr.pdf

themselves” (p. 3), which aligns with earlier findings in risk communication, namely that meaning is not inherently embedded in the structure of a message but emerges through the process of interpretation by the recipient. In crisis situations, where perception is strongly modulated by emotions, this process becomes particularly susceptible to distortion. The authors also point out that “risk is not just a number, it is a feeling as well” (Schneider et al., 2024, p. 6), indicating an inseparable link between communication and the emotional experience of the individual. From a linguistic perspective, this implies that the analysis of dialogue in crisis intervention should consider both the semantic and pragmatic levels of utterances, as well as their regulatory function.

Research on communication in digital environments is also relevant, as it reveals analogous mechanisms through which language influences communicative effectiveness. He et al. (2022) note that help-seeking requests on social media must attract sufficient public attention and be promptly directed to the appropriate recipients in order to receive timely assistance. The authors further argue that the enormous volume and diversity of crisis-related messages may reduce the visibility and effectiveness of help-seeking communication, leading to what they describe as communicative overwhelm (ibidem). Similar mechanisms may occur in direct intervention settings, where a lack of communicative structure or excessive message complexity can hinder understanding and weaken contact with a person in crisis.

The relational dimension of communication is equally important. Research on team communication indicates that effective dialogue requires psychological safety, understood as a shared belief that individuals can express themselves without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). When people perceive that their perspectives are acknowledged and respected, communication becomes more open and collaborative (Newman et al., 2017). In crisis intervention, this translates into the need to create a dialogic space grounded in empathy and active listening.

There is also a risk that communication errors may generate significant consequences at both the individual and social levels. Su et al. (2022) indicate that inconsistent messages may weaken trust in institutions

and lead to confusion, negatively affecting adherence to safety recommendations. In the context of individual intervention, this can be related to a loss of trust in the intervener (cf. Gollust, Nagler, & Fowler, 2020).

On this basis, the central research problem of this article can be formulated as follows: why do some crisis interventions lead to emotional regulation and improved functioning of the individual, while others result in the intensification of the crisis? Addressing this question requires viewing communication as a dynamic process in which meanings are not merely transmitted but co-constructed in interaction, and where language fulfils regulatory, cognitive, and relational functions.

In this light, the aim of this article is to provide a pragmatic-linguistic analysis of communication mechanisms manifested in two contrasting forms of dialogue: supportive dialogue, which facilitates emotional regulation and the restoration of a sense of agency, and directive dialogue, which leads to increased tension and cognitive disorganization. The analysis is based on two realistically constructed case studies illustrating differences in meaning-making, the organization of experience, and responses to the emotional state of the interlocutor.

The article is structured as follows: the present introductory section outlines the research objectives and introduces the topic of this cognitive case study. The second section presents key definitions related to emotions and communication in crisis, as well as the theoretical framework for dialogue analysis. The third section describes the research methodology and the case studies. The fourth section is devoted to the analysis of findings, while the fifth section concludes the article with final remarks.

2. Theoretical framework: emotions, communication and dialogue in crisis situations

The analysis of communication in crisis intervention requires grounding in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework encompassing the psychology of emotions, pragmatic linguistics, and crisis communication theory (James & Gilliland, 2020). Contemporary

approaches emphasize that communication in crisis situations is not merely the transmission of information but a complex regulatory process involving dynamic interactions between emotions, cognition, and language (World Health Organization, 2011; James & Gilliland, 2020). Psychological support in crisis situations relies on attentive listening, emotional attunement, and communication adapted to the needs and circumstances of affected individuals (World Health Organization, 2011). Within this perspective, dialogue becomes not only a tool for describing reality but also for constructing and transforming it, as confirmed by both constructivist and dialogic approaches. According to these perspectives, language does not passively reflect the world but actively participates in its creation. From a linguistic standpoint, meaning emerges through social interaction, and discourse itself constitutes a form of social practice (“discourse is a form of social practice”; Fairclough, 2010, p. 63; cf. Wodak & Meyer, 2016). From a socio-cognitive perspective, meaning is not solely a property of the text but arises from the interaction between language, social context, and participants’ interpretations (van Dijk, 2016).

One of the key starting points for analysing communication in crisis intervention is the understanding of emotions as factors that directly influence cognitive, attentional, and communicative processes, shaping how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to stressful situations (Gross, 2015). Schneider et al. (2024) emphasize that “humans are not rational machines: our judgments and decisions are shaped by our emotional reactions” (p. 6). In crisis situations, the reception of a message is strongly modulated by the emotional state of the recipient, which necessitates consideration of its affective dimension. According to these authors, “information that evokes emotions can grab and hold our attention” (ibidem). Thus, emotions perform a selective function, influencing which information is noticed and processed. In the context of crisis intervention, this means that the way utterances are formulated, including their emotional valence, can either enhance or reduce communicative effectiveness. At the same time, excessive emotional intensity in communication may produce counterproductive effects, such as cognitive overload or withdrawal.

At this point, the role of communication as a tool for emotional regulation becomes particularly important. Su et al. (2022) indicate that effective crisis communication should be based on “people-centred and empathetic” strategies. From a linguistic perspective, this entails the use of communicative means that facilitate relationship-building and tension reduction, such as paraphrasing, emotional reflection, and open-ended questions.

Dialogue in crisis intervention thus fulfils a regulatory function, enabling the gradual reduction of emotional arousal and the restoration of cognitive capacities. Evidence suggests that supportive interpersonal communication may buffer the negative psychological consequences of crisis-related stress and facilitate emotional regulation (Elliott et al., 2018; Shao et al., 2021). The role of the intervener is therefore not to solve the problem but to assist the individual in regaining access to rational thinking, bodily awareness, and contact with reality.

This process depends not only on the content of communication but also on its form and the quality of the relationship, as interaction, understood as a space for the expression and co-regulation of emotions, enables the reduction of tension and cognitive reorganization. Research indicates that individuals in stressful situations regulate emotions through communication and the sharing of experiences with others, which constitutes a key adaptive mechanism (Wang, 2026, p. 33; Yao et al., 2024). In this sense, language does not serve solely an informational function but becomes a tool of psychological stabilization, supporting the reduction of tension and the restoration of cognitive-emotional balance. This is further confirmed by studies on crisis communication, which demonstrate that appropriately selected communication strategies can effectively reduce negative emotional impact (Cai et al., 2023), underscoring the role of language as a regulatory tool in crisis situations.

From the perspective of crisis communication theory, it is also important to distinguish between informative and persuasive communication. Schneider et al. (2024, p. 5) note that communication may aim either to inform or to persuade, which is particularly significant in crisis intervention. Excessive persua-

siveness may activate resistance mechanisms known as psychological reactance (Steindl et al., 2015; cf. Doliński, 2005), whereas dialogic communication based on empathy and presence facilitates emotional regulation and relationship-building (Elliott et al., 2018; Jagieła, 2004). In practice, this implies the need to limit directive communication in favour of supportive dialogue.

An important component of the theoretical framework is also the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which assumes that the effectiveness of communication depends on the alignment of strategies with the nature of the situation and the perceived level of responsibility for the crisis. As W. Timothy Coombs (2021) states, “crisis managers should match responses to the level of crisis responsibility”, which implies the need for flexible adaptation of communication to situational context. From a dialogic perspective, this translates into the intervener’s ability to respond not according to rigid schemes but in accordance with the current emotional and cognitive state of the interlocutor. Effective crisis communication requires continuous adaptation of communicative strategies to the needs, perceptions, and emotional reactions of the recipient (Schneider et al., 2024). Such responsiveness is consistent with evidence indicating that empathic attunement and sensitivity to the client’s experience facilitate emotional regulation and strengthen the helping relationship (Elliott et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the use of structured communication frameworks and established crisis intervention techniques, such as reflection and paraphrasing, which support emotional regulation, as well as the organization of facts facilitating cognitive restructuring, remains a fundamental mechanism of intervention (Kubacka-Jasiecka, 2010).

An essential element of intervention is enabling the person in crisis to tell their own story. Narrative serves a regulatory function by organizing experience and providing it with cognitive structure, which facilitates more effective understanding and reduces emotional tension (Oleś, 2022; Yao et al., 2024). The concept of dialogicity in communication is also particularly relevant in this context. Research on crisis communication indicates that the process is

inherently co-constructive, i.e. participants jointly assign meaning to the situation (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). This means that dialogue is not a one-way transmission but a process of negotiating meaning in which both the intervener and the individual in crisis co-construct the interpretation of events. Such a model strengthens the sense of agency and supports emotional regulation (Elliott et al., 2018; Oleś, 2022).

The literature also highlights the role of trust as a key component of crisis communication. Studies indicate that dialogic communication based on calmness, transparency, and rational justification can foster a sense of safety and trust, which directly contributes to the effectiveness of intervention efforts (Hyland-Wood, Gardner, Leask, & Ecker, 2021). In the context of individual intervention, this means that the manner of communication—calm, non-judgmental, and grounded in the situation—forms the foundation of the helping relationship.

Trust is closely linked to the social nature of crisis communication. Research shows that in crisis situations, participants engage in processes of shared understanding and mutual support, involving both the exchange of information and the co-construction of meaning and norms of action (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; Tworzydło, 2022). Effective crisis communication relies not only on the transmission of information but also on the development of credibility, trust, and stakeholder relationships, which are essential elements of crisis management (Tworzydło, 2022). In individual intervention, this is reflected in the presence of multiple “voices” within the narrative of the person in crisis, such as relational experiences, social norms, and cultural beliefs, which jointly shape the interpretation of the situation and the response to it.

In summary, the theoretical framework of this study is based on the assumption that communication in crisis situations is a multidimensional process encompassing emotional, cognitive, and social aspects. Dialogue and active presence constitute key regulatory tools in this process, and their effectiveness depends on the quality of the relationship, the structure of communication, and its alignment with the recipient’s state.

3. Methodology and dataset

The aim of this study is to achieve an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of communication in crisis situations and to identify mechanisms that facilitate emotional regulation and the restoration of a helping relationship. A qualitative research approach is adopted, enabling the analysis of complex individual experiences in the context of subjective crisis perception. The study is based on the analysis of two case studies, which allow for capturing the processual and contextual nature of crisis communication, including both effective and less effective communicative practices.

3.1. Methodological approach

For the purpose of the study an exploratory-interpretative case study method was employed. This approach is particularly useful in research on crisis communication, as it allows for the analysis of interactions in their natural context while accounting for both emotional and cognitive dimensions of participants' experiences. The analysis was qualitative in nature and informed by an interpretative perspective, which assumes the co-construction of meaning in communication.

The research material was subjected to thematic analysis, focusing on the identification of key categories such as: the intervener's response strategies, forms of communication (e.g., reflection, paraphrasing), manifestations of emotional regulation, and elements contributing to trust-building and a sense of agency in the person in crisis. Additionally, the analysis included categories of communication errors, such as excessive directiveness, minimization of emotions, and a lack of responsiveness to the interlocutor's state.

Within the adopted methodology, a comparative analysis of two case studies was conducted, aimed at capturing differences in the course and outcomes of crisis intervention depending on the communication strategies employed. The analysis focused on comparing modes of dialogue, including the use of communicative techniques (e.g., reflection, paraphrasing, directive statements), as well as evaluating their potential impact on emotional regulation, participant engagement, and the overall intervention process.

The comparison of cases was qualitative and interpretative, aiming to identify key analytical categories such as dialogicity, adequacy of the intervener's responses, the presence or absence of elements supporting emotional regulation, and potential communication barriers. A detailed analysis of these aspects, with reference to the adopted theoretical framework, is presented in Section 4.

3.2. Characteristics of the case studies

The study includes two realistically constructed cases of students enrolled in Applied Linguistics at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, experiencing psychological crisis. These cases do not represent individual real-life interventions but rather analytical reconstructions of typical crisis situations reported in the academic environment. They were developed based on relevant literature, teaching experience, and recurrent communicative patterns observed in practice, which allows them to be treated as representative models of specific types of interaction. A contrastive selection was applied to enable a comparison between more dialogic and more directive communication styles.

Case 1 – adaptation crisis and academic overload (effective intervention)

The first case concerns a 21-year-old first-year Applied Linguistics student who sought help due to an increasing sense of being overwhelmed by academic demands. She experienced difficulties adapting to a new environment, high academic expectations, and performance pressure. Symptoms included chronic stress, sleep disturbances, low mood, and a sense of losing control over the situation.

During the conversation, she also revealed strong beliefs about the necessity of meeting high standards and a fear of failure. The intervention communication focused on enabling the student to narrate her experience, organize her thoughts, and identify sources of tension. Techniques such as reflection and paraphrasing were applied, which contributed to reducing emotional tension and enhancing cognitive clarity.

Case 2 – relational crisis and social isolation (less effective intervention)

The second case concerns a 24-year-old final-year Applied Linguistics student who experienced a crisis related to the breakup of a long-term relationship and a sense of social isolation. He reported symptoms such as low mood, difficulty concentrating, and decreased motivation for academic work. Additionally, he experienced difficulties in re-establishing social connections after the end of the relationship.

In this case, the intervention process was suboptimal. The intervener adopted a directive communication style, focusing on giving advice and suggesting quick solutions (“you should focus on your studies”, “you need to go out and meet people”), rather than exploring the student’s experiences and emotions. There were also instances of emotional minimization (“it’s normal after a breakup”), which limited the student’s ability to fully express his feelings.

As a result, the communication lacked a dialogic character, rather than co-constructing meaning, it became one-sided. The student responded with withdrawal and reduced verbal engagement, indicating a decline in perceived safety and trust within the interaction. No significant emotional regulation or cognitive restructuring of the experience occurred.

3.3. Data selection and characteristics

The research data are qualitative in nature and include reconstructed transcripts of intervention conversations, the researcher’s notes, and analytical reflections. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the cases were anonymized and modified to protect participants’ privacy while maintaining situational realism.

The cases were selected purposively, based on the presence of a crisis situation and the availability of material suitable for communication analysis. The two cases represent different types of crises, i.e. adaptation-related and relational, as well as different levels of intervention adequacy, enabling meaningful comparison.

3.4. Study limitations

The case study method employed does not allow for generalization of findings to the broader student population. However, the aim of the study is not statistical generalization but an in-depth understanding of communication mechanisms in crisis situations. A further limitation may be the subjective nature of data interpretation; however, this was partially mitigated through systematic analysis and grounding in established theories of communication and crisis intervention. Despite these limitations, the adopted approach enables the identification of recurring communication mechanisms of both theoretical and practical significance.

4. Discussion of the research findings – comparative case analysis

The analysis of the two case studies enables an in-depth identification of the communication mechanisms determining the course of crisis intervention. As indicated in the previous sections of the article, communication in crisis situations does not serve merely an informational function but acts as a regulatory tool that may either stabilize or destabilize an individual’s functioning. The findings reveal a clear tendency, highlighting a significant contrast between dialogic and directive intervention.

The extended analysis makes it possible to distinguish six key dimensions differentiating the two cases: (1) dialogue structure, (2) emotional regulation, (3) cognitive processing, (4) level of trust, (5) the presence of psychological reactance, and (6) the adequacy of the communication strategy to the situation.

4.1. Dialogue structure as the organizing axis of intervention

The structure of dialogue in crisis intervention serves an organizing function at both the cognitive and emotional levels. In crisis situations, individuals often experience internal disorganization, manifested in

chaotic thinking, difficulty identifying problems, and fragmented narratives. In such a context, structured intervention communication becomes a form of “cognitive scaffolding” that enables the gradual restoration of coherence in experience.

In the first case, the presence of such scaffolding was clearly observable. The intervener not only followed the student’s narrative but also structured it through summaries, paraphrasing, and guiding questions. For example, following the student’s statement describing a general sense of being overwhelmed, the intervener might respond in an organizing manner: “I understand that you feel overloaded with responsibilities and that you have the impression of losing control over the situation – is that an accurate way of putting it?” Such paraphrasing not only reflects emotions but also condenses the content of the utterance, enhancing its coherence.

At a later stage of the dialogue, guiding questions appeared that facilitated the differentiation of experience, for example: “Which of these situations feels most burdensome for you right now – time pressure, expectations, or something else?” These questions do not impose interpretation but help the student gradually organize her experience, moving from general feelings to more concrete elements of the situation.

An important role was also played by interim summaries, which structured the course of the conversation, for example: “From what you are saying, it seems that the greatest challenge is combining your studies with the pressure you place on yourself – would you like to focus on that for a moment?” Such utterances perform a metacommunicative function, signalling the structure of the conversation and enabling the collaborative management of meaning-making processes. In Anderson’s (2012) terms, therapist responses are offered “as a way of participating in the conversation” rather than directing it (p. 16).

As a result, the student’s statements became more coherent, and the conversation itself assumed a progressive character – the successive stages of dialogue led to an increasingly structured understanding of experience. The student moved from general, emotionally charged statements (“I can’t cope”, “everything feels overwhelming”) to more differentiated and

cognitively organized reflections (“what is most difficult for me is that I don’t know where to start and I’m afraid I won’t meet expectations”).

From a linguistic perspective, the intervener can be seen as a moderator of discourse who does not impose meanings but supports their emergence in a sequential and logical manner. The intervener’s utterances supported the interpretative process without determining its outcome. This approach aligns with the understanding of discourse as a social practice (Fairclough, 2010), in which meaning is negotiated rather than unilaterally transmitted.

In the second case, the absence of such structure led to a situation in which the dialogue did not fulfil an organizing function. The intervener did not attempt to structure the student’s statements but instead introduced new topics and solutions that were not grounded in the student’s experience. As a result, the communication became incoherent and difficult to process, which may have further contributed to cognitive disorganization.

An important element is also the pace of communication. In the first case, the intervener adjusted the pace of the conversation to the student’s processing capacities, allowing for the gradual integration of content. In the second case, the pace proved too fast for the recipient and was strongly solution-oriented, potentially exceeding the student’s cognitive capacities in a state of crisis.

The structure of dialogue should not imply rigidity but rather a flexible organization of communication. In line with the assumptions of SCCT (Coombs, 2021), effective communication requires adaptation to the situation, meaning that structure should be dynamic and responsive to the interlocutor’s reactions. In the first case, such flexibility was present, whereas in the second case a fixed interactional pattern dominated, inadvertently overlooking the recipient’s state.

In conclusion, the structure of dialogue constitutes a key element of effective intervention, as it enables the organization of experience, the reduction of cognitive chaos, and the building of a sense of safety. Its absence, by contrast, may lead to communicative disorganization and limit the effectiveness of supportive intervention (cf. Claeys & Coombs, 2020).

4.2. Emotional regulation as a central mechanism of intervention

Emotional regulation constitutes one of the fundamental goals of crisis intervention, as a high level of emotional arousal limits an individual's capacity for rational information processing and decision-making. In the analysed cases, a clear relationship was observed between the quality of communication and the possibility of regulating emotions.

In the first case, the intervener consistently employed techniques that supported the identification and labelling of emotions. Reflection ("I can see that you feel overwhelmed") and paraphrasing enabled the student to gain distance from her own experiences. This process can be interpreted as a form of "external emotion regulation", in which another person assists in organizing and integrating emotional states.

According to the literature, labelling emotions reduces their intensity by activating cognitive processes (so-called *affect labelling*). In the analysed case, this was reflected in a gradual shift from emotionally charged statements to more reflective and structured expressions. The intervener did not avoid emotions but treated them as a central element of communication. This approach aligns with the concept of "people-centred" communication (Su et al., 2022), which assumes that addressing the recipient's emotions increases communicative effectiveness. In practice, this was manifested through direct reference to the student's emotional states and their verbal reflection. For example, in response to the statement "I feel like everything is overwhelming", the intervener might say: "I can see that this is really difficult for you and involves a lot of tension." Such an utterance performs a validating function, it not only names emotions but also affirms their legitimacy.

As the conversation progressed, the intervener could deepen the exploration of emotions through open-ended questions, such as "What exactly makes you feel this way?" These questions are not diagnostic in a narrow sense but serve to facilitate a more direct connection with the individual's experience. It is also important that the intervener did not attempt to immediately reduce emotions but allowed them to be expressed within a safe dialogic space.

In the second case, the lack of an adequate emotional response resulted in the persistence of a relatively high level of tension. Minimizing statements ("it's normal", "others go through this too") may have been interpreted by the student as a lack of understanding, which in turn intensified the sense of emotional isolation. In this situation, the intervener responded in a way that effectively closed the dialogue, for example: "You just need to focus on your studies" or "It would be best if you kept yourself busy so you don't think about it." Such statements typically shift attention from experience to action, bypassing the stage of emotional processing.

In response to emotionally charged statements such as "I feel completely alone" or "nothing makes sense", the lack of further exploration led to a disruption of the processing process. Instead of responses such as "That sounds like a very strong sense of loneliness, can you tell me more about where that comes from?", neutralizing or solution-oriented statements were used that did not directly address the experienced emotions. As a result, the student did not receive validation of his experiences, which prevented their integration.

It can therefore be observed that the difference between the analysed cases did not lie solely in the presence or absence of communication, but in the quality of emotional response. In the first case, emotions were treated as a starting point for further cognitive work, whereas in the second case they were partially overlooked and reduced, leading to the interruption of the intervention process at a superficial level.

An important aspect is also emotional attunement, that is, the intervener's ability to "tune in" to the interlocutor's emotional state. In the first case, this was present, i.e. the intervener responded appropriately to changes in the student's emotions. In the second case, the lack of such attunement led to a discrepancy between the message and the recipient's experience. It is worth noting that emotional regulation does not consist in eliminating emotions but in transforming them into a form that can be cognitively processed. This process was evident in the first case but was blocked in the second.

In conclusion, emotional regulation is not only an outcome but also a precondition of effective intervention. Communication that fails to address emotions loses its regulatory function and may contribute to the intensification of the crisis.

4.3. Cognitive reconstruction and the organization of experience

Cognitive reconstruction constitutes one of the key mechanisms enabling individuals to move out of a crisis situation. It involves a change in the interpretation of experience, leading to a reduction in its emotional burden and an increased sense of control.

In the first case, this process unfolded gradually and was closely linked to the quality of communication. The intervener did not impose interpretations but supported the student in developing them independently. As a result, the cognitive change was internal and enduring. The student began to differentiate between facts and interpretations, which is a fundamental element of cognitive reconstruction. For example, instead of perceiving the situation as “I can’t cope”, she started identifying specific difficulties, which allowed for a more realistic assessment of the situation.

A similar process can be observed when the student initially expressed a generalized belief: “I’m failing my studies”, which was gradually transformed through dialogue. Through questions such as “Are there areas where you are actually managing well?”, the student began to differentiate her experiences, arriving at a more nuanced understanding: “I’m struggling with one subject, but I’m doing fine in others.” This shift reflects a transition from a global, negative self-assessment to a more accurate and fact-based interpretation.

At another point in the conversation, the student expressed the belief: “Everyone else is doing better than me”, which had an interpretative and comparative character. Instead of confirming or denying it, the intervener asked: “What is this belief based on?” In response, the student began to recognize that her judgment was based on fragmented observations, leading to the reflection:

“Actually, I don’t know how others are doing, I just see that they seem more confident.” This process enabled the deconstruction of maladaptive beliefs and their replacement with more realistic evaluations.

This process can be related to the concept of sense making (Weick et al., 2005), according to which individuals actively construct the meaning of events in situations of uncertainty. Dialogic functions as a medium that facilitates the organization of experience, while the intervener, through questions and paraphrasing, supports its gradual structuring and reinterpretation.

In the second case, the lack of dialogic communication prevented cognitive reconstruction. The intervener introduced ready-made interpretations that were not grounded in the student’s experience. As a result, no change in thinking occurred, only superficial communicative contact. For example, in response to the statement “I don’t see any point in what I’m doing”, the intervener responded in a directive manner: “You should approach this more rationally.” Such a statement imposes an interpretation (“it’s temporary”, “it’s just a matter of perspective”) that does not emerge from the speaker’s narrative but is externally imposed.

Similarly, when the student said “I feel completely lost”, the intervener replied: “That’s because you lack a plan, you just need to organize your time better.” In this case, a complex emotional experience was reduced to a single, oversimplified explanation. Instead of exploring meaning, the process was prematurely closed, preventing reinterpretation. As a result, no cognitive change occurred, and the interaction remained superficial, with the student positioned as a passive recipient of communication.

In contrast, dialogic communication would involve responses that open space for reflection, such as: “What makes you perceive the situation in this way?” The absence of such questions in the analysed case indicates that the cognitive process was limited already at the level of interaction.

An important component of cognitive reconstruction is also the sense of agency, understood as the individual’s belief in their ability to influence

their own situation. In the first case, the student gradually began to identify areas within her control. For example, after organizing her experience, she could state: "I can see that the main problem is that I postpone studying." Such statements indicate a shift from global negative evaluations to more specific and actionable understandings of the situation.

In the second case, this effect was absent. The student did not formulate his own conclusions or identify possible actions. Instead, he remained in the position of a recipient of the intervener's suggestions, which were not internalized. For example, in response to the statement "you should try to motivate yourself more", he reacted with silence and a brief "maybe", indicating a lack of genuine cognitive engagement. The absence of a sense of agency reinforced his belief that he had no control over the situation, which is characteristic of crisis states.

A high level of emotional tension limits the capacity for reflection and reinterpretation. In the second case, the student functioned under conditions of heightened emotional arousal, as reflected in generalized statements ("I can't cope", "everything feels overwhelming") and difficulty elaborating on them. The intervener, bypassing the stage of emotional processing, attempted to move directly to solutions, which proved ineffective.

For example, instead of a regulating response such as: "It sounds like you are really overwhelmed, let's pause for a moment and stay with that feeling", task-oriented statements were used: "Make a plan and stick to it." Such a sequence of communication bypasses a crucial stage of emotional processing, resulting in a lack of readiness for cognitive work. Consequently, the student remains at the level of emotional experience without the possibility of its reorganization.

In conclusion, this analysis demonstrates that cognitive reconstruction is a multi-stage process requiring dialogic communication, prior emotional regulation, and the development of a sense of agency. The absence of any of these elements limits the effectiveness of intervention and contributes to the persistence of the crisis state.

4.4. Psychological reactance, trust, and safety as interrelated mechanisms of communication effectiveness

The analysis of the second case allows for a deeper understanding of one of the key mechanisms limiting the effectiveness of crisis intervention, namely psychological reactance. This phenomenon, described in the literature as a response to perceived restrictions on individual autonomy, constitutes a significant barrier in supportive communication. According to Steindl et al. (2015), individuals tend to resist messages that are perceived as imposing specific actions or interpretations of reality. In the context of crisis intervention, this mechanism becomes particularly relevant, as individuals in crisis often already experience a diminished sense of control, and additional communicative pressure may intensify resistance.

In the analysed second case, directive statements by the intervener ("you should", "you must") represented a clear example of prescriptive communication. Although such statements are often motivated by a desire to help, they may be perceived as attempts to take control over the situation of the person in crisis. As a result, instead of supporting emotional regulation, they activate defensive mechanisms manifested in withdrawal, reduced expression, and decreased engagement in dialogue.

In this case, psychological reactance manifested in several characteristic ways. First, the student shortened his responses, limiting them to the minimum necessary to sustain the interaction. Second, he avoided elaborating on topics, indicating a lack of readiness to explore his experience. Third, there was a noticeable decline in emotional engagement, which can be interpreted as a protective strategy against further infringement on autonomy. These elements point to a disruption of the fundamental function of communication, namely the co-construction of meaning and the regulation of experience.

In contrast, no signs of reactance were observed in the first case. The intervener employed supportive communication based on open-ended questions, reflection, and paraphrasing, which allowed the student

to maintain a sense of control over the interaction. The absence of directive statements supported the preservation of autonomy, thereby enabling greater engagement in the communicative process.

Psychological reactance is closely linked to the level of trust and perceived safety within the communicative relationship. Trust is a necessary condition for openness and willingness to disclose personal experiences. As Hyland-Wood et al. (2021) indicate, communication characterized by calmness, transparency, and rational justification fosters a sense of safety, which in turn enables effective interaction.

In the first case, trust was gradually built through a series of subtle yet significant communicative elements. The intervener avoided evaluative judgments, allowing the student to express emotions freely without fear of negative assessment. A calm tone of voice and an appropriate pace of interaction contributed to reducing emotional tension. Acknowledging the student's emotions functioned as validation, reinforcing her sense of being understood and accepted.

In the second case, the absence of these elements weakened the communicative relationship. The student did not experience being truly heard, which limited his willingness to continue the interaction. The lack of emotional validation and the presence of evaluative statements were interpreted as a lack

of understanding, further intensifying the sense of isolation. Consequently, communication failed to fulfil its regulatory function, and the helping relationship was not fully established.

An important aspect is the inverse relationship between trust and reactance, the higher the level of trust, the lower the likelihood of reactance. This relationship was clearly visible in the analysed cases. In the first case, a high level of trust facilitated openness and engagement, whereas in the second case, its absence led to resistance and withdrawal.

A key element of the social nature of communication is the presence of multiple "voices" within the narrative of a person in crisis, shaped by relational experiences, social norms, and cultural factors. In the first case, the intervener created a space that allowed these voices to emerge and integrate, leading to a more complex and realistic understanding of the situation. In the second case, the absence of such space limited the narrative to a superficial description of events. In this context, communicative alignment should be understood not only as adjusting the form of the message but also as the ability to actively participate in the co-construction of meaning. The intervener is not merely a sender of messages but a co-participant in dialogue, influencing how the individual in crisis interprets reality.

Table 1. Comparison of communication mechanisms in the analysed cases (own elaboration)

Dimension of analysis	Case 1 – dialogic intervention (effective)	Case 2 – directive intervention (less effective)
Dialogue structure	Structured, progressive; use of paraphrasing, summaries, and guiding questions	Chaotic, lack of structure; introduction of new topics without reference to the narrative
Nature of communication	Dialogic, co-construction of meaning	One-sided, prescriptive
Emotional regulation	Present; reflection and validation of emotions	Absent; minimization and neglect of emotions
Level of emotional tension	Gradually decreasing	Persistent or increasing
Cognitive reconstruction	Gradual, based on self-reflection	Absent; imposed interpretations
Sense of agency	Increased; identification of areas of influence	Absent; maintenance of helplessness
Psychological reactance	Absent	Present; withdrawal and resistance
Trust and safety	High; supportive relationship	Low; lack of feeling heard
Participant engagement	High; elaborated responses	Low; shortened responses
Outcome of intervention	Emotional regulation and cognitive reorganization	No change; persistence of crisis

In conclusion, the effectiveness of intervention communication depends on its flexibility, dialogic nature, and sensitivity to the social context of experience. The absence of these elements limits its regulatory function and hinders the process of overcoming crisis.

5. Conclusion and final remarks

The comparative analysis of the two case studies enabled a deeper understanding of the role of communication in crisis intervention and the identification of key mechanisms determining its effectiveness. The findings indicate that communication fulfils regulatory, organizational, and relational functions, directly influencing the process of recovery from crisis.

To provide a synthetic overview of the most important differences between the analysed cases, the key dimensions of intervention communication are presented in tabular form (see Table 1).

The comparison presented in Table 1 indicates that the effectiveness of intervention results from the interaction of multiple interrelated mechanisms rather than from a single communicative factor. One of the main conclusions is the significant role of dialogicity as a factor facilitating effective intervention. In the first case, communication had a co-constructive character, the intervener did not impose interpretations but supported the student in developing them independently. This made it possible to gradually organize experience, reduce emotional tension, and foster cognitive reflection. Dialogue functioned here as a space in which emotions and cognition were integrated, as well as a means of restoring a sense of control over the situation. In contrast, in the second case communication was one-sided and directive, which prevented the activation of regulatory and cognitive processes.

Another important aspect is the role of dialogue structure as a form of “cognitive scaffolding.” In crisis situations, characterized by disorganized thinking and fragmented narratives, structured communication enables the gradual restoration of coherence in experience. In the first case, the intervener used paraphrasing, summaries, and guiding questions

that supported the organization of the student’s statements. As a result, the communication process was progressive and led to increasing cognitive clarity. In the second case, the absence of such structure resulted in a chaotic dialogue and further cognitive disorganization.

The analysis confirms the importance of emotional regulation as a necessary condition for subsequent cognitive processes. In the first case, the intervener actively engaged with the student’s emotions, using techniques such as reflection and validation, which enabled a reduction in tension and the restoration of reflective capacity. In the second case, emotions were minimized or overlooked, leading to sustained high arousal and blocking cognitive processing. This finding confirms that attempts to move directly to solutions without prior emotional processing are ineffective.

Closely related to emotional regulation is cognitive reconstruction, which constitutes one of the primary mechanisms for overcoming crisis. In the first case, the student gradually moved from global negative evaluations (“I can’t cope”) to more differentiated and realistic interpretations of the situation. This process was enabled by dialogic communication, which allowed for the exploration and gradual reorganization of meaning. In the second case, the lack of dialogicity and the presence of imposed interpretations prevented changes in thinking, highlighting the crucial role of the individual’s active participation in the interpretative process.

Another important conclusion concerns the role of the sense of agency as an outcome of effective communication. In the first case, the student began to identify areas within her control, as reflected in the formulation of concrete conclusions and action plans. In the second case, the absence of this effect indicated the persistence of helplessness and dependence on external suggestions. This suggests that intervention communication should not only reduce tension but also support the restoration of individual agency.

The analysis also demonstrated the significant role of psychological reactance as a mechanism limiting communication effectiveness. Directive messages containing prescriptive language (“you should”, “you must”) led to resistance, withdrawal, and decreased

engagement in dialogue. In contrast, communication based on open-ended questions and reflection supported the maintenance of autonomy and increased willingness to engage. This finding highlights the importance of linguistic forms as factors shaping the course of interaction.

Closely related to this is the role of trust and a sense of safety as foundations of the helping relationship. In the first case, trust was built through communicative consistency, the absence of judgment, and appropriate responses to emotions. In the second case, its absence led to reduced interaction and the interruption of the intervention process. The analysis confirms that without a sense of safety, communication loses its regulatory function and cannot lead to lasting change.

It is also important to emphasize the social nature of crisis communication. The presence of multiple “voices” in the narrative of a person in crisis, arising from relational experiences, social norms, and cultural context, indicates that the process of interpretation is not purely individual but embedded in a broader social framework. In the first case, the intervener enabled their expression and integration, leading to a more complex understanding of the situation. In the second case, the absence of such space limited the narrative to a superficial level.

The findings have important practical implications. First, they highlight the need for training interveners in dialogic communication, including the ability to ask open-ended questions, reflect emotions, and avoid directive language. Second, they emphasize the importance of communicative flexibility and adapting strategies to the emotional state of the interlocutor. Third, they point to the need to consider cognitive and emotional processes as interrelated components of intervention.

However, the limitations of the study should be acknowledged. The case study method does not allow for generalization to a broader population, and the interpretative nature of the analysis involves a degree of subjectivity. Additionally, the data were reconstructed, which may affect their precision. Nevertheless, the findings provide valuable insights into communication mechanisms in crisis situations.

In conclusion, communication in crisis intervention is a multidimensional process in which dialogicity, emotional regulation, message structure, and the relationship between participants play a central role. Effective intervention requires not only theoretical knowledge but, above all, communicative competence that enables the creation of a dialogic space conducive to restoring psychological balance and a sense of agency.

References

- Anderson, H. (2012). Collaborative relationships and dialogic conversations: Ideas for a relationally responsive practice. *Family Process, 51*(1), 8–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2012.01385.x>
- Cai, M., Liu, P. L., Xu, C., & Luo, H. (2023). Editorial: Understanding the impact of social media on public mental health and crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*, 1304586. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1304586>
- Claeys, A.-S., & Coombs, W. T. (2020). Organizational crisis communication: Suboptimal crisis response selection decisions and behavioral economics. *Communication Theory, 30*(3), 290–309. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtz002>
- Coombs, W. T. (2021). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Doliński, D. (2005). *Techniki wpływu społecznego* [Social influence techniques]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 44*(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- Elliott, R., Bohart, A. C., Watson, J. C., & Murphy, D. (2018). Therapist empathy and client outcome: An updated meta-analysis. *Psychotherapy, 55*(4), 399–410. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pst0000175>
- Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315834368>
- Gollust, S. E., Nagler, R. H., & Fowler, E. F. (2020). The emergence of COVID-19 in the US: A public health and political communication crisis. *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law, 45*(6), 967–981. <https://doi.org/10.1215/03616878-8641506>
- Gross, J. J. (2015). Emotion regulation: Current status and future prospects. *Psychological Inquiry, 26*(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2014.940781>
- He, C., Deng, Y., Yang, W., & Li, B. (2022). “Help! Can You Hear Me?”: Understanding how help-seeking posts are overwhelmed on social media during a natural disaster. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 6*, CSCW2, Article 422. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3555147>

- Hyland-Wood, B., Gardner, J., Leask, J., & Ecker, U. K. H. (2021). Toward effective government communication strategies in the era of COVID-19. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8, Article 30. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00701-w>
- Jagięła, J. (2004). *Komunikacja interpersonalna w szkole. Krótki przewodnik psychologiczny*. [Interpersonal communication in School: A brief psychological guide]. Wydawnictwo Rubikon.
- James, R. K., & Gilliland, B. E. (2020). *Crisis intervention strategies* (8th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Kubacka-Jasiecka, D. (2010). *Interwencja kryzysowa: Pomoc w kryzysach psychologicznych* [Crisis intervention: Assistance in psychological crises]. Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne
- Kumalasari, A., Musa, H. G., Garad, A., Emovwodo, S. O., & Aditarsari, K. (2024). How digital communication transparency and public trust shape crisis communication through public engagement. *Komunikator*, 16(2), 182–195. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jkm.24485>
- Liu, W., Zhao, X., Zhan, M., & Hernandez, S. (2024). Streaming disasters on TikTok: Examining social mediated crisis communication, public engagement, and emotional responses during the 2023 Maui wildfire. *Public Relations Review*, 50(5), 102512. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2024.102512>
- Newman, A., Donohue, R., & Eva, N. (2017). Psychological safety: A systematic review of the literature. *Human Resource Management Review*, 27(3), 521–535. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.01.001>
- Oleś, P. (2022). *Psychologia człowieka dorosłego* [Psychology of the adult person]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Schneider, C. R., Kerr, J. R., Dryhurst, S., & Aston, J. A. D. (2024). Communication of statistics and evidence in times of crisis. *Annual Review of Statistics and Its Application*, 11, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-statistics-040722-052011>
- Shahi, G. K., Clausen, S., & Stieglitz, S. (2022). Who shapes crisis communication on Twitter? An analysis of German influencers during the COVID-19 pandemic. In *Proceedings of the 55th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-55)*. <https://doi.org/10.24251/HICSS.2022.369>
- Shao, R., Shi, Z., & Zhang, D. (2021). Social media and emotional burnout regulation during the covid-19 pandemic: Multilevel approach. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 23(3), e27015. <https://doi.org/10.2196/27015>
- Steindl, C., Jonas, E., Sittenthaler, S., Traut-Mattausch, E., & Greenberg, J. (2015). Understanding psychological reactance: New developments and findings. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 223(4), 205–214. <https://doi.org/10.1027/2151-2604/a000222>
- Su, Z., Zhang, H., McDonnell, D., Ahmad, J., Cheshmehzangi, A., & Yuan, C. (2022). Crisis communication strategies for health officials. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10, 796572. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.796572>
- Tworzydło, D. (2022). *Komunikowanie organizacji w kryzysie. Metody i modele ograniczania ryzyka* [Communicating organizations in crisis: Risk mitigation methods and models]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2016). *Discourse and knowledge: A sociocognitive approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wang, S. (2026). Real-time coping: The role of social media self-disclosure in managing travel anxiety. *Tourism and Hospitality*, 7(2), 33. <https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp7020033>
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science*, 16(4), 409–421. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1050.0133>
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd ed.). Sage. First edition published 2001.
- World Health Organization. (2011). *Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers*. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241548205>
- Yao, T., Li, J., Su, W., Li, X., Liu, C. and Chen, M. (2024). The effects of different themes of self-disclosure on health outcomes in cancer patients—A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Psychology*, 59: 267–278. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.13091>



Special pedagogy of individuals with intellectual disabilities and contemporary psychiatry – paths of development, interdependencies and contradictions

<https://doi.org/10.34766/rmz8fz85>

© Authors (copyright) • Quarterly Journal Fides et Ratio (publishing rights) • Open Access CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Tadeusz Pietras^a, Grzegorz Opielak^b✉, Kasper Sipowicz^c

^a Tadeusz Pietras, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1771-3819>, Department of Clinical Pharmacology, Medical University of Łódź, Poland

^b Grzegorz Opielak, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8067-8951>, Department of Human Physiology, Medical University of Lublin, Poland

^c Kasper Sipowicz, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7384-2899>, Department of Interdisciplinary Research on Social Inclusion, Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw, Poland

✉ Corresponding author: ksipowicz@aps.edu.pl

Abstract: *Introduction:* Intellectual disability is an object of interest in both psychiatry and special pedagogy. Both these sciences have evolved from a stigmatizing approach, through a segregating one, towards full social inclusion. However, the path of paradigmatic reconstruction of either science was separate, and therefore it is interesting to compare them. *Aim:* The aim of the study is to compare the approach of special educators and psychiatrists from academic centers in Poland to the phenomenon of intellectual disability. *Methodology:* The comparison was carried out using a narrative method through a review of the key publications on the understanding of the phenomenon of intellectual disability by Polish special educators and psychiatrists. *Results:* In 1989, Poland underwent a political change and a departure from communism. Pedagogy also moved away from dialectical materialism towards a postmodern understanding of the phenomenon of disability. This change has led the formulation of the so-called humanistic paradigm of special education composed of four micro-paradigms. In pedagogy, the emphasis has been shifted from quantitative to qualitative research and the biomedical aspects of disability have been negated. Unfortunately, the research works in the field of pedagogy of people with intellectual disabilities of a qualitative and conceptual nature conducted in Poland have not entered the global circulation of scientific information and are known only in our country. Polish psychiatry has undergone an evolutionary change from biological psychiatry towards social environmental psychiatry. Poland has been included in a pilot program of running mental health centers providing care to the population with mental disorders, including people with intellectual disabilities. Since the times of real socialism, Polish psychiatrists have been publishing papers in English in international journals with an Impact Factor. This change was less radical than in special pedagogy and consisted in broadening the perspective rather than moving away from empirical research. *Conclusion:* Polish special education of individuals with intellectual disabilities and Polish psychiatry have undergone a significant paradigmatic reconstruction during the last few decades. Both sciences have adopted an inclusive model of understanding intellectual disability. The different paths of development of either science are reflected in publications and scientific research, as well as in certain terminological differences.

Keywords: intellectual disability, paradigms, psychiatry, special education

Introduction

Traditional Polish intellectual thought took little account of Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialism. As a culturally Catholic country, Poland has always remained closer to various currents of Christian philosophy than to Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialism. The imposition of the communist system in Poland by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was an attempt to instill dialectical materialism, atheism and collectivism in the Bolshevik sense, which was alien to Polish historiography. An interest-

ing issue of intercultural education is the research on the implementation of the idea of dialectical Marxism in Polish society, as well as on the departure from that materialism in the direction of ideological and methodological pluralism (Chrzanowska, 2015; Dykcik, 2001; Melosik, 2007). It is particularly interesting to see the departure of various disciplines of the social sciences from Marxist ideology and to compare these changes with analogous processes taking place at the same time in the field of other

sciences, e.g. medicine. This comparison can only be precise if it is based on a fairly specifically formulated problem, e.g. the approach to people with intellectual disabilities. It is difficult to compare sciences where the area of interest is different, e.g. musicology with special education (Chrzanowska, 2015; Dykcik, 2001).

In 1989, a political change took place in Poland. Along with it, the approach to people with mental disorders and intellectual disabilities has changed significantly (Pietras et al., 2019). The consequence of these changes was a departure from dialectical Marxism as a binding and only correct doctrine with Bolshevik roots towards ideological and paradigmatic pluralism. This also applied to two scientific subdisciplines dealing with subjects with intellectual disabilities – special pedagogy and psychiatry. A comparison of the changes that have taken place in the understanding of these sciences in relation to the phenomenon of intellectual disability is, on the one hand, an interesting issue in the history of science in Poland, and on the other, a reflection of the different paths of development of these two scientific subdisciplines and two different approaches (Dykcik, 2001; Pużyński, 2015). The common subject and object of interest of psychiatry and special pedagogy of individuals with intellectual disabilities should result in the development of a uniform interdisciplinary and even transdisciplinary approach and common standards of conduct towards the subject and object of research, also taking into account the usually overlooked Christian personalism (Głodkowska, 2015; Granat, 1985; Michalski, Zakrzewska, 2010; Salamucha, Magier, 2013). Meanwhile, these subdisciplines – both psychiatry and special pedagogy – developed in a different paradigmatic environment and in different academic centers. Psychiatry was developed primarily at medical universities and the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology, whereas special education was developed at the pedagogical faculties of universities, at the Institute of Educational Research and, above all, at the Academy of Special Education (Chrzanowska, 2015; Dykcik, 2001; Pużyński, 2015). Psychiatry has always developed with the use of the clinical base of psychiatric wards and clinics close to the patient, while special pedagogy

studied in academic centers is quite loosely related to the social practice of teaching and upbringing people with intellectual disabilities. It is true that researchers dealing with special education of people with intellectual disabilities have always declared their practical credentials and emphasized their own experience as teachers and educators. However, unlike medical universities, neither schools nor care and education centers, which were an integral part of the university, were ever created at the faculties of education. Psychiatric clinics have always worked on the basis of treatment of patients in wards and departments that are an integral part of these clinics constituting medical university facilities (Pużyński, 2015). In the aspect of individuals with intellectual disabilities, psychiatry was mainly focused on the treatment of behavioral disorders in these people, while educators were primarily concerned with teaching and upbringing, i.e. broadly understood education and revalidation (Chrzanowska, 2015; Pużyński, 2015). Thus, the representatives of both scientific subdisciplines rarely worked together in one team dealing with people with intellectual disabilities. The positions developed by representatives of both scientific subdisciplines differ significantly both in terms of conceptual system and methodological basis. It is true that scientific terminology is becoming nowadays more homogeneous than it used to be, and it is universal in character in accordance with the paradigm of the unity of science and the process of globalization of scientific achievements. Nevertheless, some phenomena are still defined and described using different concepts in different sciences, or these concepts differ in their semantic scope and boundaries. Currently, an interesting process of departure of special pedagogy from biomedical aspects towards social constructionism is observed (Chrzanowska, 2015), and in psychiatry, in turn, from a typical biomedical approach towards community psychiatry embedded in the achievements of social sciences (Pużyński, 2015). These two tendencies should result in the convergence of special education of people with intellectual disabilities with psychiatry in a systemic and environmental perspective. The aim of the paper is to discuss the similarities and differences between psychiatrists and special

educators in the conceptualization of intellectual disability in the context of paradigmatic changes that took place in Poland with the change of the socio-political system after 1989.

1. Paradigmatic evolution of Polish special pedagogy and psychology in understanding the phenomenon of intellectual disability

During the years of real communism, scientific research on the pedagogical aspects of teaching and upbringing of people with intellectual disabilities was conducted within the paradigm of dialectical materialism with the use of quantitative methods typical of modernist reasoning (Wyszyńska, 1987). The obtained results of quantitative research were a set of rather disorganized findings of a contributory nature. Soviet special pedagogy was called defectological pedagogy, and the science of damage to the human body and the effects of this damage was called defectology (*ibidem*). According to such understanding, disability was a “defect” that needed to be treated or repaired. This does not mean that among the researchers of that time there were no figures who made a significant contribution to the development of the subdiscipline of special education. There are widely known works of Maria Grzegorzewska – the creator of Polish special pedagogy and of Bohdan Suchodolski have permanently entered the history of pedagogy (Niemierko, 2021). The works of Bolesław Niemierko, who implemented psychometric methods to construct a quantitative measurement to check whether the controversial experiment of Heliodor Muszyński in Poznań, aimed at shaping a collectively and Marxist-minded citizen denying individualism and Christian personalism established in the Polish centuries-old tradition (Kowolik, 2007). It should also be strongly emphasized that in Poland, as the only country remaining under Soviet domination, Christian and personalistic pedagogy developed in such academic centers as the Catholic University of Lublin or the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw (Michalski, Zakrzewska, 2010; Salamucha,

Magier, 2013). This pedagogy was the result of the development of Christian philosophy practiced at these universities in Poland by such famous figures as Idzi Radziszewski, Fr. Jacek Woroniecki, Sr. Zofia Zdybicka, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, Fr. Mieczysław Krąpiec, Fr. Józef Tischner and many others (after: Janaczek, 1999). Unfortunately, Christian pedagogy, despite the significant opinion-forming position of the Catholic Church in Poland and the declared affiliation of the majority of Polish society to this Church or other Christian churches, did not play a major role in shaping contemporary pedagogical thought at Polish secular universities, which is why education in values was forgotten, promoting almost exclusively education for freedom (Michalski, Zakrzewska, 2010; Salamucha, Magier, 2013). The departure from Marxism-Leninism induced a paradigmatic emptiness in Polish special education, which opened the science in question to the modern and generally post-Marxist current of postmodern pedagogy popular at that time in the United States and in secularizing Western Europe (Śliwerski, 2003). Among the pioneers of the postmodern approach in pedagogy in Poland and the “opening” of Polish pedagogy to paradigmatic diversity were Tomasz Szkudlarek (1993), Zbyszko Melosik (2007), Bogusław Śliwerski (Szkudlarek, Śliwerski, 2009). Szkudlarek brought from the USA a “fresh breeze” of postmodern pedagogy, different from the outdated and discredited pedagogy of real socialism and completely incompatible with the Polish tradition of the pedagogy of values. Special pedagogy also adopted postmodern thinking as the basis around which knowledge in the field of “modern” understanding of the phenomenon of disability began to be built anew (Krause, 2017, 2019). As has been mentioned many times, in Poland, in parallel with special pedagogy understood in the spirit of postmodernism, personalistic special pedagogy has been developing since the communist era at the Catholic University of Lublin and at the Academy of Catholic Theology – now the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, referring to the pedagogy of Kazimierz Twardowski (Michalski, Zakrzewska, 2010; Salamucha, Magier, 2013; Traczykowski, 2016). A glorious realization of personalistic pedagogy in Poland is

the development of a typhlopedagogical center in Laski near Warsaw – the Róża Czacka School and Educational Center for Blind Children (Czacka, Stabińska, 1990). Unfortunately, university centers dealing with special education in Poland have not taken advantage of the opportunity to implement these original Polish achievements into the general pedagogical discourse in the university environment. A one-sided, postmodern approach to the phenomenon of disability in Polish special education was introduced in parallel at individual universities where there were scientific centers dealing with disability, including intellectual disability. Postmodern thinking is alien to the Polish tradition just as the philosophy of dialectical materialism in the Soviet distortion. The postmodern paradigmatic shift of Polish special education in university centers was verbalized and systematized by Amadeusz Krause, which allowed Polish postmodern special education to build its “identity” quite far from the social practice of the profession of a special educator. A coherent terminological grid for the understanding of disability based on the conceptual system of postmodernism has been developed (Krause, 2017, 2019). Amadeusz Krause (2010) formulated the so-called humanistic paradigm of special education consisting of four micro-paradigms. These are:

- the social micro-paradigm of disability – which captures the phenomenon of disability as a social construct,
- the micro-paradigm of normalization postulating the normalization of the social environment of a person with disabilities as a goal of special education, opposing the forced normalization of people with disabilities to the able-bodied majority,
- the emancipatory micro-paradigm indicating the need for the emancipation of people with disabilities and a shift from excessive focus on medical and therapeutic procedures in favor of participation in social life,
- the qualitative, i.e. interpretative microparadigm, postulating the departure of special education from quantitative research in favor of qualitative research and in favor of reflection on contexts,

discourses, narratives and paradigms, as well as the relativization of all scientific concepts in the field of pedagogy (Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013; Krause, 2017; Krause, 2019).

From the psychiatrist’s point of view, the departure of special education from medical contexts may raise concerns, especially since significant people in Polish pedagogy, such as Zbyszko Melosik or Amadeusz Krause, sharply criticize undertaking research in the field of special education in any medical context (Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013; Krause, 2017; Krause, 2019; Melosik, 2017; Melosik, Szkudlarek, 2009). These professors often refer to anti-psychiatrists and postmodern thinkers, such as Fritjow Capra (1987), Eric Parens (2013), or Petr Skrabanek (1990, 1994). The latter Irish researcher of Czech origin criticizes the obsessive fixation of modern man on “super health”, the maximum prolongation of life at all costs, the compulsion of all members of society to achieve the ideals of good health. Skrabanek negated the legitimacy of the combat against nicotine addiction, obesity, excessive alcohol and drug consumption, or obsessive health promotion. This controversial researcher and thinker found totalitarian tendencies in the health promotion policy. He noticed excessive interference of the state with the freedom of individuals to choose their preferred lifestyle and care for their own health (Skrabanek, 1990, 1994). Also in Poland, Krause and Melosik, as well as their numerous supporters and imitators (e.g. Ćwirynkało), use a similar narrative of pathological medicalization and pharmacologization of the society. They distance themselves from the modernist, evidence-based Cartesian medical model, proposing and glorifying the postmodern discourse of flickering meanings, lack of the central point, relativism of the norms, and transculturalism (Melosik, 2017; Melosik, Szkudlarek, 2009; Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013; Krause, 2010). Such an understanding of special pedagogy was a significant change at Polish universities dealing with education in the broadest sense at the beginning of the 21st century. Every breakthrough, every scientific revolution becomes sterile over time, if it is not accompanied by critical thinking and verification based on the social practice of the pro-

fession of special education teacher and the results of research. Unfortunately, the postmodern model of understanding the phenomenon of disability has been consolidated thanks to systematic support for like-minded people and a lack of empirical research performed on large groups.

The negation of the biomedical aspects of any type of disability, and intellectual disability in particular, leads to absurdities and aporetic contradictions. An effort has been made not to notice that at the source of every type of disability there is a medical problem and it is always the “center” of that disability. Pedagogy is “special” precisely because it deals with medical problems and their social consequences, such as stigmatization, exclusion, discrimination and many others. The postulated separation of pedagogy from medical problems also negates the need for the existence of special education itself (Krause, 2010; Melosik, 2017; Melosik, Szkudlarek, 2009; Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013). Thus, a paradox arises – the phenomenon defining a particular science is negated by that science at the same time. It should be remembered that the concept of disability originated at the intersection of medical and social sciences, and is understood as a cause-and-effect sequence from biological damage to its social and cultural consequences for the individual suffering from such biological damage (Kołątaj et al., 2023; Linden, 2017). Meanwhile, contemporary special educators, postulating the “de-medicalization” and “de-biologization” of the phenomenon of disability, including intellectual disability, turn only to the social aspects of the existence of this phenomenon (Krause, 2010; Melosik, 2017; Melosik, Szkudlarek, 2009; Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013). These authors emphasize that any type of disability, including intellectual disability, is not a biological aspect, but primarily a social and sociological one. Unfortunately, as practicing educators working with people affected by some type of disability know, the axial problems of these people are always medical problems. An attempt to deny this fact in any way is, unfortunately, a one-sided approach or even a scientific distortion. After all, no one denies the social aspects of the disability construct, but their “forced” separation from the biological aspect is, in our opinion, a dangerous half-truth that blurs what is important and peripheral issues.

In his monograph entitled *Paradigms of Special Education*, Amadeusz Krause (2010) deftly summarized what was happening at the beginning of the 21st century in Polish special pedagogy. It should be remembered that he is neither the creator of the postmodern trend in Polish special pedagogy, nor is he the only author of conceptual publications devoted to disability understood in this way. It should be emphasized here that the work of many researchers with a rich literary output and various orientations of research have contributed to the development of the humanistic paradigm of special pedagogy. In terms of intellectual disability, these were publications by such authors as Beata Cytowska (2012), Iwona Chrzanowska (2015), Katarzyna Ćwirynkało (Ćwirynkało, Kossakowski, Żywanowska, 2013; Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013), Władysław Dykcik (2001), Zenon Gajdzica (2007), Remigiusz Kijak (2013), Czesław Kossakowski (Kossakowski, Krause, Żyta, 2007), Barbara Marcinkowska (2016), Jan Pańczyk (1989), Janina Wyczesany (2009), Agnieszka Żyta (Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013; Kossakowski, Krause, Żyta, 2007), Teresa Żółkowska (2004), Hanna Żuraw (Żuraw, Ploch, 2019) and many others, not mentioned here. Amadeusz Krause skillfully summarized and exposed postmodern tendencies in Polish special pedagogy, formulating the discussed humanistic paradigm of special pedagogy based on analogous summaries concerning special education of the German-speaking area (Parys, Olszewski, 2013; Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013; Krause, 2017). Therefore, he was not their conceptual creator, although he was the only one who formulated and described them in a well-known monograph published by the Impuls Publishing House (Krause, 2010).

The question should be asked how this paradigmatic shift in the context of intellectual disability should be assessed fifteen years after the publication of Amadeusz Krause’s monograph (2010). This change has undoubtedly contributed to the social emancipation of people with intellectual disabilities and their exit from the “ghetto”, from a separate and hermetic reserve of public space aimed at isolation of this group of people from the mainstream of social participation. It has prepared individuals with disabilities for “freedom” but not for education in the context of

values and for values (Frankl, 2023). Postmodern destruction and multi-version narratives will not replace education in values and will not give meaning to the life of a person with a disability. At this point, it is necessary to consider whether this emancipation is only the merit of academic special pedagogy? Probably not only – also the fact of Polish accession to the European Union and grassroots initiatives of the community of people with intellectual disabilities themselves have contributed to the normalization of the social environment of this group. Perhaps Polish academic special pedagogy captured and codified these processes in the form of theoretical dissertations at the right time, but it was not their driving force and the main cause of change (Magier, 2021). An important part in emancipation was also the influence of social teaching of the Catholic Church, the development of modern medicine, including community psychiatry, as well as political activities (Pietras et al., 2025). The problem is open and difficult to resolve, because paradigmatic changes in the thinking of theorists and social initiatives of the third sector have interacted and occurred in parallel, often in a chaotic and unpredictable way. Therefore, the process of crystallization of the humanistic paradigm of special education was more circular than linear in character, more concerned the academic community than the practice of social work with a person with disabilities (ibidem). However, this thesis requires deeper analyses and a certain time distance in order to formulate a well-documented factual assessment and a balanced judgment (ibidem).

The focus of the community of special educators almost exclusively on qualitative research has become a limitation of contemporary special pedagogy in Poland over time. The almost complete lack of quantitative research has marginalized the importance of publications in the field of Polish special pedagogy in the global trend of research on disability, including intellectual disability (Pietras et al., 2025). Polish academic centers dealing with special pedagogy are not visible in the world's leading journals with a high *Impact Factor* (in the field of educational sciences). The publications of Polish researchers are known

only locally, in the community of Polish university teachers. The achievements of Polish special educators are not present in the global circulation of scientific information. There are few Polish authors publishing their works in international journals. This fact strongly marginalizes Polish special pedagogy, including special education for people with intellectual disabilities, giving it a local and peripheral character, far from the mainstream of global research in the field of education (ibidem). There are certainly also a few exceptions. Among special educators dealing with intellectual disabilities, there are only single authors who publish in English-language journals with the *Impact Factor* index: Beata Cytowska – one publication (Cytowska, Zierkiewicz, 2020), Joanna Smogorzewska and Grzegorz Szumski – 11 publications (Smogorzewska et al., 2022; Smogorzewska et al., 2024), Małgorzata Sekułowicz (Sobieski et al., 2022) – 5 papers, including one concerning people with intellectual disabilities¹. There is also a small number of works concerning special education devoted to issues other than special pedagogy of intellectual disability. The papers by Jacek Pyżalski and Piotr Plichta – 16 works devoted to cyberbullying – are also noteworthy. Publications written by educators and published in journals with an impact factor usually contain reliable quantitative analyses, or validation of psychometric tools, which is criticized by the Polish special educators community in accordance with the doctrine of the interpretive microparadigm (Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013). They do not contain quasi-philosophical analyses of paradigms, discourses, contexts, meanings and narratives. Therefore, these works are not from the mainstream of considerations of contemporary special pedagogy in academic centers in Poland. However, there are relatively few such papers compared to the number of works published by psychiatrists. For example, Janusz Rybakowski published (from 2000 to 2025) over 350 papers in journals with an impact factor. The disproportion in the number of works between the pedagogues and psychiatrists is noteworthy and worth considering. It should also be remembered that Janusz Rybakowski, as well as other psychiatrists

¹ The analysis was based on the Pubmed database.

publishing in international scientific journals, also publish, like Polish special educators, in Polish-language periodicals and monographs not included in the Philadelphia list.

It is also puzzling why Polish special educators do not publish joint papers in the field of research on intellectual disability with Polish psychologists and psychiatrists. Both Polish psychiatry and psychology are focused on empirical and psychometric research (Citlak, 2023). Such a position does not fit into the interpretive paradigm of special pedagogy. Special pedagogy focused on qualitative research stands in opposition to psychometric research and the measurement of such constructs as intelligence or adaptability. Quantitative measurement of the intelligence quotient (IQ) and adaptability is a prerequisite for definition and diagnosis of intellectual disability and determination of the degree of its severity, as well as the resources and limitations of the subject. Psychometric methods of measuring intelligence are treated by special educators as a manifestation of population “segregation” and discrimination, which has been emphasized repeatedly by Amadeusz Krause (2010). Meanwhile, psychometric measurement of intelligence is a basic research tool both in clinical psychology and in psychological and pedagogical counselling centers adjudicating on special educational needs for schools and educational centers (Strelau, 2014). In Poland, many different psychometric tools have been adopted to work in psychological and pedagogical counselling centers, including the Wechsler test for adults and children (ibidem). It should be noted that Polish research on temperament is an important achievement of world psychology (ibidem). It does not depend on the measurement process itself, but on the non-substantive intentions of the researchers whether psychometric measurement serves to segregate and discriminate, or to determine the subject’s resources. A metaphor about the use of nuclear energy comes to mind here. Used well, it can serve for environmentally friendly electricity production and isotopic diagnostics of cancer, but in the wrong hands it can contribute to the outbreak of nuclear war and genocide. Likewise, psychometric measurements can also be used for socially unacceptable purposes, such as segregation,

discrimination or stigmatization. This does not mean that psychometrics should not be developed for pro-social purposes, just because these tests can be used to discriminate against a certain group of people. Psychology and pedagogy are to serve the human being, which psychological and pedagogical counselling centers have successfully implemented in Poland (Pietras et al., 2025). They employ practicing psychologists and special educators – at a considerable distance from academic centers dealing with special education, including special pedagogy for people with intellectual disabilities. Meanwhile, in academic education, analyses of discourses, meanings, contexts and paradigms are developed at the expense of practical and methodological knowledge. It is true, as rightly noted by Amadeusz Krause, that textbooks in the field of knowledge and practical skills emphasize the subjectivity and autonomy of people with intellectual disabilities to too little extent, they are of a technical nature, not obligatory (Krause, 2013). The author rightly remarks that students learn in lectures what modern humanistic pedagogy is, taking into account the subjectivity and emancipation of people with intellectual disabilities, while in practical training they get acquainted with working methods that take into account this emancipation and subjectivity to a small extent (ibidem). However, it should be remembered that methodological reflection, otherwise important and necessary, will not replace practical learning of methods of work with a person with intellectual disabilities and will not solve difficult problems that educators encounter in their professional work. They sometimes have to face such difficult problems occurring in their charges as aggression, agitation, epileptic seizures or fecal or urinary incontinence. Learning paradigms, contexts and discourses is no substitute for practical guidance on what to do in a specific situation of working with a person with an intellectual disability. This can be considered as a shallowness and trivialization of theoretical pedagogy, but it is precisely such problems that special educators who work with people with significant and profound intellectual disabilities sometimes encounter in their everyday work. Therefore, it is an important task to construct a study program in the field of special education preparing for the profes-

sion in such a way as to teach the pedagogue special respect for the autonomy of people with intellectual disabilities at every stage of practical work, taking into account their subjectivity and avoiding forced normalization in the spirit of the neoliberal cult of effectiveness and efficiency. Such a corporate attitude towards efficiency and effectiveness is criticized both by postmodern Polish special education and by the currents of personalistic pedagogy (Krause, 2017).

Polish academic psychology of people with intellectual disabilities developed from the Soviet so-called “defectological psychology”, which was then a subdiscipline of general psychology (Vašek, 2003; Wszyńska, 1987). The term “defect”, common in the psychology of post-Soviet countries, raised reservations among Polish psychologists from the beginning, because it is objectifying and stigmatizing when used to refer to a person. Currently, the term “revalidation psychology” is used, avoiding the stigmatizing word “defect” (Kowalik, 2018). Polish contemporary psychology has remained faithful to the tradition of psychological experiments and psychometric research (Strelau, 2014). It is not as radical in the emancipatory context as contemporary Polish special pedagogy. The development of Polish psychology took place rather evolutionarily, without a major paradigmatic revolution. Currently, psychology adopts a biopsychosocial model of understanding the phenomenon of disability, taking into account equally the biological, psychological and social aspects (Sęk, 2001). Polish psychology can boast of a perfectly prepared standardization of the Dawid Wechsler’s intelligence measurement test, in the versions both for adults and children, and the standardization of many psychometric tools necessary in the diagnosis of a child with disabilities, including intellectual disability (Strelau, 2014).

2. Paradigmatic evolution of Polish psychiatry in the understanding of the phenomenon of intellectual disability

Let us consider the evolution that Polish psychiatry has undergone from the times of communism to the present. Unlike social sciences, Polish psychiatry in Soviet times was still present in English-language journals and functioned in the global circulation of scientific information (Pużyński, 2015; Rybakowski, 2004). It also resisted Sovietization and its use for political purposes, as was the case in the USSR and in some Eastern Bloc countries. Although the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology established in Poland was created on the Soviet model, this institution contributed to the development of modern psychiatry with a pro-Western attitude. Already in the 1970s, psychotherapy and humanistic psychiatry, not based on the dialectical materialism in force at that time, developed within the walls of the Institute (Jankowski, 1994). After the political change, more and more Polish psychiatrists published in journals from the JCR list, and the achievements of such scholars as Janusz Rybakowski and Stanisław Pużyński are known and recognized in the world (Kornaj, 2023; Rybakowski, 2004). Two key Polish journals devoted to psychiatry: *Psychiatria Polska* [Polish Psychiatry] edited by Dominika Dudek and *Postępy Psychiatrii i Neurologii* [Advances in Psychiatry and Neurology] edited by Łukasz Mokros currently have an *Impact Factor*, which cannot be said about periodicals in the field of special pedagogy published in Poland. This means that the achievements of Polish psychiatry function in the global circulation of scientific information (Kornaj, 2023; Rybakowski, 2004).

The achievements of Polish special pedagogy, unlike psychiatry, are almost exclusively known locally in Poland and to a small extent in neighboring countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine (Dycht, 2006; Pietras et al., 2025). Polish psychiatry, like special pedagogy, has evolved from biomedical research to social research and environmental psychiatry (Rybakowski, 2004). Unlike pedagogy, the area of interest of psychiatry has been expanded to include social and humanistic aspects

without neglecting biomedical research (Pietras et al., 2025). This process was evolutionary, not revolutionary, as in the case of special pedagogy. Polish psychiatry also changed its attitude towards people with intellectual disabilities in an evolutionary way (Bilikiewicz, 1960; Pietras et al., 2025; Sipowicz et al., 2015). This is evidenced by the terminology used in psychiatry and its evolution. A psychiatry textbook published in 1960, edited by the distinguished researcher and physician Tadeusz Bilikiewicz, used such terms as imbecility, stupidity, idiocy, cretinism and foolishness to describe people with intellectual disabilities (Bilikiewicz, 1960; Pietras et al., 2025; Sipowicz et al., 2015). The terms mentioned have become vulgarisms in modern times, due to their stigmatizing character and the change in the scope of the semantic emotional sign from indifferent to extremely negative. The use of these terms for people with intellectual disabilities is now considered to be offensive to human dignity and vulgar. The image of a person with an intellectual disability in the textbook edited by Bilikiewicz was very negative, the authors warned against the “unpredictability”, “ingratitude”, “aggressiveness” and “sexual debauchery” of people with a low IQ (Bilikiewicz, 1960; Pietras et al., 2025; Sipowicz et al., 2015). They were considered to be “mean”, “debauched”, and “ungrateful” to their caregivers. It was not until the 1970s that the much more neutral term “mental retardation” began to be used, and the understanding of the essence of intellectual disability became more supportive of this group. The term “mental retardation” is also included in the international ICD-10 classification. It is still a term in force in Poland. The term “mental retardation” was initially emotionally neutral as compared to words such as stupidity, idiocy, imbecility, foolishness, and cretinism. Over time, this term also became slightly stigmatizing and unacceptable to the community of people with intellectual disabilities. In the second decade of the 21st century, the term “intellectual disability” began to be used in psychiatry. That was largely due to a monograph on intellectual disability published by the Continuo publishing house, edited by Kinga Bobińska, Tadeusz Pietras and Piotr Gałecki (Bobińska et al., 2012). In this monograph, the chapters devoted to the pedagogy of people with

intellectual disabilities were far from an extremely postmodern understanding of intellectual disability, and also took into account other perspectives of understanding this phenomenon. This was criticized by the pedagogical community (Krause, 2017). Despite the criticism, this monograph is the only comprehensive study of issues related to intellectual disability present on the Polish publishing market in the years 2012-2025 (Bobińska et al., 2012). It should probably be expected that the community of special educators will one day be tempted to write a new monograph in the spirit of glorified postmodern inclusion, with an invitation to Polish psychologists and psychiatrists to cooperate. However, criticism will not replace creative work, and on the Polish publishing market there are currently no significant comprehensive monographs on intellectual disability reflecting “modern” thinking of the educators. Thus, students do not have textbooks for learning special pedagogy for people with intellectual disabilities, with the exception of the textbook by Bobińska, Pietras and Gałecki, criticized by Amadeusz Krause. In the ICD-11 classification, the term “intellectual disability” is to be replaced by the term “intellectual development disorder”, which is considered to be much less stigmatizing than the term intellectual disability. The importance of research on intellectual disability for psychiatry is evidenced by the fact that the Polish Psychiatric Association established the Scientific Section of Mental Disorders in Patients with Intellectual Disabilities.

Polish community psychiatry has developed as a Hegelian synthesis of traditional biological psychiatry with selected postulates of antipsychiatry (Depukat, 2020). The assumption of community psychiatry is the therapy of the patient in his social environment, with as little participation as possible of a total institution in Goffman’s understanding, which is a psychiatric hospital. Isolation in a psychiatric hospital triggers the so-called syndrome of erroneous adaptation to a total institution in the patient (Depukat, 2020; Thornicroft, Tansella, 2010). Treatment of the patient and revalidation of the patient’s social skills in the conditions of hospital isolation is either impossible or not very effective, as it bears little resemblance to the environment in which

the patient will live. According to the assumptions of community psychiatry, the patient should recover in his or her social environment, which facilitates the return from the disease to normal functioning in own environment (Sipowicz, Pietras, 2017). In addition, many non-psychotic mental disorders have begun to be treated not as a disorder, but as a manifestation of the so-called neuroatypicality, understood as a different organization of the structure of the psyche of minorities from the organization of the psyche of the majority (ibidem). The construct of the neuroatypical minority is opposed to the normotypical majority (ibidem). Neuroatypical people include people with intellectual disabilities, general developmental disorders, people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Neuroatypicality is understood as the result of the neural network of the central nervous system that is different from most organizations and associated with it different cognitive, emotional and behavioral functioning. Neuroatypicality includes also such phenomena as left-handedness, sensory hypersensitivity, and special abilities. By including intellectual disability in the set of phenomena considered to be a manifestation of neuroatypicality, the stigma of mental disorder and the stigma of segregation and discrimination in this group of people are partially removed (ibidem).

It is difficult to identify unambiguously the founders of community psychiatry in Poland, which, like the postmodern and personalistic understanding of special pedagogy, contributed to the normalization of the environment of people with mental disorders, including people with intellectual disabilities. Environmental psychiatry has developed in two ways – both on the initiative of people with mental disorders and their families, and by the well-thought-out action of modern-thinking psychiatrists. Foundations, associations and informal groups dealing with people with mental disorders began to develop in Poland already at the end of the communist era. These were often grassroots initiatives, stemming from the social activity of citizens. Among the many names of people who have contributed to the development of community psychiatry, the following should certainly be mentioned: Jacek Wciórka, Andrzej Cechnicki, Joanna Meder, Maria Zahuska, Marek Balicki, Anna Depukat,

Beata Galińska-Skok, Joanna Krzyżanowska-Zbucka, Edwarda Patura, Agnieszka Niedźwiedzka, Bożenna Piotrowicz (Cechniki, Wciórka, 2025). We are aware of the fact that there are many more people of merit for community psychiatry and it is impossible to list all of them in the paper. Among the non-governmental organizations meritorious for the development of community psychiatry, we should mention the Society of Friends of the Disabled in Łódź, the Polish Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities, the eKropka Foundation, the Association for the Development of Psychiatry and Community Care and many others. In contemporary Polish community psychiatry, a conceptual system describing the specific phenomena has developed, quite similar to the conceptual system developed in special pedagogy (Prot-Klinger, 2013). The partially independent development of both scientific subdisciplines – special pedagogy and community psychiatry – is evidenced by certain differences in terminology. For example: the term multiple disability, commonly used in publications in the field of pedagogy is replaced by the term co-morbidity in psychiatric literature.

Special educators rarely participate in conferences organized by psychiatrists. Similarly, at scientific conferences in the field of special pedagogy, there are usually no representatives of the psychiatric community. The exceptions here are psychiatrists such as Tadeusz Pietras, Krzysztof Krysta, Aleksandra Lewandowska, who often participate in conferences organized by educators. This indicates a lack of exchange of ideas between the two discussed communities, despite the fact that cooperation, mutual openness and interdisciplinarity are widely declared.

Conclusions

A comparison of the path from stigmatization and exclusion to the integration and inclusion of Polish special pedagogy and Polish psychiatry allows to draw the following conclusions:

1. Polish special education of subjects with intellectual disabilities has adopted a postmodern model of conceptualization of basic scientific problems

summarized by Amadeusz Krause in the form of a humanistic paradigm of special pedagogy. In this model, qualitative research is preferred, hence the lack of representation of Polish special pedagogy of people with intellectual disabilities in the world literature. The paradigmatic shift that took place at the beginning of the 21st century in special education was creative and revolutionary, but at the moment it has become a factor limiting the development of this subdiscipline of pedagogy due to the lack of openness to other perspectives, such as contemporary community psychiatry or the personalistic trend aimed at educating in the value of the human person.

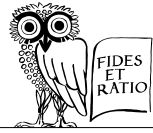
2. Polish psychiatry, like special pedagogy, has also undergone a paradigmatic shift from typically biological psychiatry to humanistic, environmental and social psychiatry. Unlike special education in Poland, psychiatry has not given up either the priority of quantitative over qualitative research, or its reference to the biological aspects of the genesis of mental disorders. The results of empirical research conducted by Polish psychiatrists are noticeable in the international literature, in contrast to the achievements of Polish special pedagogy, known almost exclusively locally at Polish universities.

References

- Billikiewicz, T. (Ed.). (1960). *Psychiatria kliniczna* [Clinical psychiatry] (2nd expanded ed.). Warszawa: Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich.
- Bobińska, K., Pietras, T., & Gałęcki, P. (Eds.). (2012). *Niepełnosprawność intelektualna: Etiopatogeneza, epidemiologia, diagnoza, terapia* [Intellectual disability: Etiopathogenesis, epidemiology, diagnosis, and therapy]. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Continuo.
- Capra, F. (1987). *Punkt zwrotny* [The turning point] (E. Woydyło, Trans.). Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy. (Original work published 1982, as *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*)
- Cechnicki, A., & Wciórka, J. (Eds.). (2025). *Psychiatria środowiskowa* [Community psychiatry]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Lekarskie PZWL.
- Chrzanowska, I. (2015). *Pedagogika specjalna. Od tradycji do współczesności* [Special education: From tradition to modernity]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Citlak, A. (2023). Psychology of the Lvov-Warsaw School and the shape of postcommunist Polish psychology (unfinished dialog with Brentanian tradition). *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 59(1), 20–30. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jhbs.22234>
- Cytowska, B. (2012). *Trudne drogi adaptacji. Wątki emancypacyjne w analizie sytuacji dorosłych osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną we współczesnym społeczeństwie polskim* [Difficult paths of adaptation: Emancipatory themes in the analysis of the situation of adults with intellectual disabilities in contemporary Polish society]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Cytowska, B., & Zierkiewicz, E. (2020). Conversations about health: Sharing the personal experiences of women with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 33(5), 962–975. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12718>
- Czacka, R., & Stabińska, J. (1990). *Matka Elżbieta Róża Czacka. Wybór pism Matki Elżbiety Czackiej* [Mother Elżbieta Róża Czacka: Selected writings of Mother Elżbieta Czacka] (2nd expanded ed.). Łaski: Zgromadzenie Sióstr Franciszkanek Służebnic Krzyża.
- Ćwirynkało, K., Kossakowski, C., & Żywanowska, A. (Eds.). (2013). *Kierunki rozwoju pedagogiki specjalnej* [Directions of development in special education]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Depukat, A. (2020). *Optymalizacja modelu organizacji świadczeń psychiatrycznych dla województwa* [Optimization of the model of organization of psychiatric services for a province] (Doctoral dissertation). Uniwersytet Medyczny im. Piastów Śląskich. Wrocław: Poland.
- Dycht, M. (2006). *Rozwój polskiej pedagogiki specjalnej w świetle dokonań jej twórców* [The development of Polish special education in light of the achievements of its founders]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego.
- Dykcik, W. (2001). Wprowadzenie w przedmiot pedagogiki specjalnej jako nauki [Introduction to special education as a scientific discipline]. In W. Dykcik (Ed.), *Pedagogika specjalna* (pp. 13–62). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza.
- Frankl, V. E. (2023). *Życie z sensem. Autobiografia* [A life worth living: Autobiography] (M. Chojnacki, Trans.). Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM. (Original work published 1995 as *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht. Lebenserinnerungen*)
- Gajdzica, Z. (2007). *Edukacyjne konteksty bezradności społecznej osób z lekkim upośledzeniem umysłowym* [Educational contexts of social helplessness among persons with mild intellectual disability]. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.
- Głodkowska, J. (Ed.). (2015). *Personalistyczne ujęcie fenomenu niepełnosprawności* [A personalist approach to the phenomenon of disability]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej.
- Granat, W. (1985). *Personalizm chrześcijański. Teologia osoby ludzkiej* [Christian personalism: Theology of the human person]. Poznań: Księgarnia Św. Wojciecha.
- Kołątaj, W. P., Kołątaj, B., Cipora, E., Sygit, K., & Karwat, I. D. (2023). Relationship between the components of disability definition and the effectiveness of rehabilitation measures as a process. *Annals of Agricultural and Environmental Medicine*, 30(4), 595–601. <https://doi.org/10.26444/aaem/177341>

- Janaczek, S. (1999). *Filozofia na KUL-u. Nurty. Osoby. Idee* [Philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin: Currents, people, ideas]. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.
- Jankowski, K. (1994). *Od psychiatrii biologicznej do humanistycznej... dwadzieścia lat później* [From biological psychiatry to humanistic psychiatry... twenty years later]. Warszawa: Jacek Santorski & Co Agencja Wydawnicza.
- Kosakowski, C., Krause, A., & Żyta, A. (Eds.). (2007). *Osoba z niepełnosprawnością w systemie rehabilitacji, edukacji i wsparcia społecznego* [A person with disability in the system of rehabilitation, education, and social support]. Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego.
- Kornaj, J. (2023). Approaching Polish madness: Concepts and treatment of psychosis in Polish psychiatry of the inter-war period. *History of Psychiatry*, 34(4), 397–416. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957154X231187118>
- Kowalik, S. (2018). *Stosowana psychologia rehabilitacji* [Applied rehabilitation psychology]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Kowolik, P. (2007). Prof. zw. dr hab. Heliodor Muszyński – pedagog, metodolog i twórca teleologii wychowania [Professor Heliodor Muszyński: Educator, methodologist, and creator of the teleology of education]. *Nauczyciel i Szkoła*, 1-2(34–35), 277–283.
- Krause, A. (2010). *Współczesne paradygmaty pedagogiki specjalnej* [Contemporary paradigms of special education]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Krause, A. (2013). Teoretyczne inspiracje pedagogiki specjalnej – pedagogika emancypacyjna [Theoretical inspirations of special education: Emancipatory pedagogy]. *Studia Edukacyjne*, 28, 7–16.
- Krause, A. (2017). Budowanie wiedzy w pedagogice specjalnej [Building knowledge in special education]. *Niepełnosprawność. Dyskursy Pedagogiki Specjalnej*, 27, 13–23.
- Linden M. (2017). Definition and Assessment of Disability in Mental Disorders under the Perspective of the International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health (ICF). *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 35(2), 124–134. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2283>
- Magier, P. (2021). *Metateoria pedagogiki chrześcijańskiej* [Metatheory of Christian pedagogy]. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
- Marcinkowska, B. (2016). Sprzężona niepełnosprawność – próba analizy fenomenu [Multiple disability: An attempt to analyze the phenomenon]. *Niepełnosprawność. Dyskursy Pedagogiki Specjalnej*, 21, 9–19.
- Melosik, Z. (2007). *Teoria i praktyka edukacji wielokulturowej* [Theory and practice of multicultural education]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Melosik, Z. (2017). Dyskursy medykalizacji i farmakologizacji: Rekonstrukcje tożsamości człowieka [Discourses of medicalization and pharmacologization: Reconstructions of human identity]. *Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych*, 25(2), 123–136.
- Melosik, Z., & Szkudlarek, T. (2009). *Kultura, tożsamość i edukacja – migotanie znaczeń* [Culture, identity, and education: Flickering meanings]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Michalski, J., & Zakrzewska, A. (2010). *Pedagogika chrześcijańska. Tradycja, współczesność, nowe wyzwania* [Christian pedagogy: Tradition, modernity, and new challenges]. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Niemierko, B. (2021). *Diagnostyka edukacyjna* [Educational diagnostics]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Pańczyk, J. (Ed.). (1989). *Pedagogika specjalna – uwarunkowania i tendencje rozwoju: Materiały z konferencji naukowej zorganizowanej w 65. rocznicę działalności Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogiki Specjalnej w Warszawie* [Special education: Conditions and trends of development—Proceedings of the scientific conference organized on the 65th anniversary of the Academy of Special Education in Warsaw]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogiki Specjalnej.
- Parens, E. (2013). On good and bad forms of medicalization. *Bioethics*, 27(1), 28–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8519.2011.01885.x>
- Parys, K., & Olszewski, S. (2013). Przeobrażenia terminologiczne w pedagogice specjalnej. Jaka pedagogika? [Terminological transformations in special education: What kind of pedagogy?]. In A. Ćwirynka, C. Kosakowski, & A. Żywanowska (Eds.), *Kierunki rozwoju pedagogiki specjalnej* (pp. 15–27). Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Pietras, T., Witusik, A., Mokros, Ł., & Sipowicz, K. (2019). The paradigms of contemporary psychiatry. *Polski Merkurusz Lekarski*, 46(272), 94–97.
- Pietras, T., Sipowicz, K., Witusik, A., Mosiołek, A., Batko, K., & Stefanik, A. (2025). Special pedagogy of people with intellectual disability and contemporary psychiatry in Poland – mutual complementarity or lack of understanding? *Polski Merkurusz Lekarski*, 53(2), 277–283. <https://doi.org/10.36740/Merkur202502118>
- Prot-Klinger, K. (2013). Psychiatria środowiskowa między romantyzmem a pozytywizmem: Próba integracji podejść [Community psychiatry between romanticism and positivism: An attempt to integrate approaches]. *Psychiatria*, 10(3–4), 101–108.
- Pużyński, S. (2015). *Dylematy współczesnej psychiatrii. Problemy kliniczne, etyczne, prawne* [Dilemmas of contemporary psychiatry: Clinical, ethical, and legal issues]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Eneteia.
- Rybakowski, J. K. (2004). Academic psychiatry in Adjustment to rapid changes. *Molecular Psychiatry*, 9(9), 813–815. <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.mp.4001569>
- Salamucha, A., & Magier, P. (2013). W obronie pedagogiki chrześcijańskiej [In defense of Christian pedagogy]. *Pedagogika Christiana*, 1(31), 31–32.
- Sęk, H. (2001). *Wprowadzenie do psychologii klinicznej* [Introduction to clinical psychology]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Sipowicz, K., Najbert, E., & Pietras, T. (2015). Ewolucja terminologii określającej niepełnosprawność intelektualną używanej przez autorów wybranych podręczników z zakresu psychiatrii w latach 1960–2015 [The evolution of terminology referring to intellectual disability used by authors of selected psychiatry textbooks between 1960 and 2015]. In J. Głodkowska (Ed.), *Personalistyczne ujęcie fenomenu niepełnosprawności. Osobowość, samorealizacja, odpowiedzialność, bezpieczeństwo, autonomia* (pp. 95–109). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej.
- Sipowicz, K., & Pietras, T. (2017). *Wprowadzenie do pedagogiki inkluzyjnej (włączającej)* [Introduction to inclusive education]. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Continuo.
- Skrabanek, P. (1990). Nonsensus consensus. *Lancet*, 335(8703), 1446–1447. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-6736\(90\)91460-R](https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-6736(90)91460-R)
- Skrabanek, P. (1994). *The death of humane medicine and the rise of coercive healthism*. London: Social Affairs Unit.
- Smogorzewska, J., Szumski, G., Bosacki, S., & Grygiel, P. (2022). Just listen to your mind: Consequences of theory of mind development for deaf or hard-of-hearing children. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 127, 104261. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2022.104261>

- Smogorzewska, J., Szumski, G., Bosacki, S., Grygiel, P., & Osterhaus, C. (2024). Longitudinal relations between theory of mind and academic achievement among deaf and hard-of-hearing school-aged children. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 239, 105806. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2023.105806>
- Sobieski, M., Sobieska, A., Sekułowicz, M., & Bujnowska-Fe-dak, M. (2022). Tools for early screening of autism spectrum disorders in primary health care: A scoping review. *BMC Primary Care*, 23(1), Article 46. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12875-022-01645-7>
- Strelau, J. (2014). *Różnice indywidualne. Historia, determinanty, zastosowania* [Individual differences: History, determinants, and applications]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar & Szkoła Wyższa Psychologii Społecznej.
- Szkudlarek, T. (1993). *Wiedza i wolność w pedagogice amerykańskiego postmodernizmu* [Knowledge and freedom in the pedagogy of American postmodernism]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Szkudlarek, T., & Śliwerski, B. (2009). *Wyzwania pedagogiki krytycznej i antypedagogiki* [Challenges of critical pedagogy and anti-pedagogy]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Thornicroft, G., & Tansella, M. (2010). *W stronę lepszej opieki psychiatrycznej* [Towards better mental health care]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Psychiatrii i Neurologii.
- Traczykowski, D. (2016). Cele nauczania w myśli Kazimierza Twardowskiego. *Roczniki Pedagogiczne*, 8(1), 9–22. [https://doi.org/10.18290/rped.2016.8\(44\).1-2](https://doi.org/10.18290/rped.2016.8(44).1-2)
- Vašek, Š. (2003). Innowacyjne trendy w koncyptowaniu aparatu pojęciowego i kategoryjnego słowackiej pedagogiki specjalnej [Innovative trends in conceptualizing the terminology and categories of Slovak special education]. *Chowanna*, 21(2), 44–53.
- Wyczesany, J. (2009). *Pedagogika upośledzonych umysłowo* [Pedagogy of persons with intellectual disabilities]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Wyszyńska, A. (Ed.). (1987). *Psychologia defektologiczna* [Defectological psychology]. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Żółkowska, T. (2004). *Wyrównanie szans społecznych osób niepełnosprawnych intelektualnie* [Equalizing social opportunities for persons with intellectual disabilities]. Szczecin: Wydawnictwo In Plus.
- Żuraw, H., & Ploch, L. (2019). *Styl życia kobiet z głębszą niepełnosprawnością intelektualną* [Lifestyle of women with more severe intellectual disabilities]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Żyta, A., & Ćwirynkało, K. (2013). Nowe tendencje i kierunki rozwoju pedagogiki osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną – zmiany paradygmatów [New trends and directions in the development of pedagogy for persons with intellectual disabilities: Paradigm shifts]. In K. Ćwirynkało, C. Kossakowski, & A. Żywanowska (Eds.), *Kierunki rozwoju pedagogiki specjalnej* (pp. 29–39). Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.



Attitudes toward difficulties, problems, and emotional wounds and the sense of loneliness among women in religious communities

<https://doi.org/10.34766/mdz25j24>

© Authors (copyright) • Quarterly Journal Fides et Ratio (publishing rights) • Open Access CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Erika Vavreková^a ✉

^a Erika Vavreková, <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8135-0404>, Mazovian Academy in Plock, Poland

✉ Corresponding author: erika.elizabeta@gmail.com

Abstract: The aim of this article is to present the results of research on the relationship between attitudes towards difficulties, problems and wounds and the sense of loneliness among women functioning in religious communities. The study had a quantitative design and was conducted on a group of women belonging to religious communities with varying lengths of membership. The research employed instruments measuring attitudes toward difficulties, self-attitude in challenging situations, emotional and relational functioning, attitudes toward emotional wounds, and the level of loneliness in three dimensions: intellectual, emotional, and behavioral. The results indicated that the participants demonstrated relatively high levels of adaptive attitudes toward difficulties and low levels of loneliness, particularly in the behavioral and intellectual domains. Statistically significant negative correlations were found between attitudes toward difficulties, self-attitude, and attitudes toward emotional wounds and the level of loneliness. This means that the more constructive the attitudes, the lower the level of loneliness experienced. The strongest relationships were observed in the domains of emotional functioning and self-attitude. The findings also suggest that attitudes toward emotional wounds constitute a relatively weaker area of functioning, which may affect psychological well-being and the quality of interpersonal relationships. Additionally, the length of time spent in a religious community was associated with greater stability of the observed relationships. The results highlight the importance of personal resources, social support, and spiritual factors in shaping attitudes toward difficulties and emotional wounds, as well as in reducing loneliness. These findings may serve as a basis for further research and practical interventions aimed at enhancing emotional and relational competencies.

Keywords: difficulties, emotional wounds, loneliness, religious communities, women, coping

Introduction

This article presents analyses concerning attitudes toward difficulties, problems, and emotional wounds, conceptualized within the context of coping with difficult situations. It also discusses the issue of loneliness and presents research findings regarding the relationship between attitudes toward difficulties, problems, and emotional wounds and the sense of loneliness among women living in religious communities.

1. Theoretical foundations of the author's research

1.1. Coping with difficult situations

Coping with difficult situations constitutes one of the key areas of research in contemporary psychology.

Coping is also particularly important in communal environments such as religious communities. In the classical conceptualization proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is defined as a process of cognitive and behavioral efforts undertaken to manage demands appraised as taxing or exceeding an individual's resources. Contemporary approaches emphasize the dynamic nature of this process and its strong relationship with the social and spiritual context of individual functioning (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2023).

One of the key factors influencing attitudes toward difficulties involves personal resources, particularly self-efficacy. According to Bandura's (1997) concept, individuals who believe in their ability to cope with challenges demonstrate greater persistence, greater willingness to undertake action, and more adaptive coping strategies. A similar position is presented by Juczyński (2000), who emphasized that a high sense of efficacy promotes active problem solving and reduces tendencies toward avoidance of difficulties.

Personality traits also constitute important determinants of attitudes toward difficulties. Research indicates that characteristics such as optimism, psychological resilience, and emotional stability foster constructive approaches to problems (Oleś, 2011). Individuals characterized by higher levels of resilience are more likely to interpret difficulties as developmental challenges rather than threats, which contributes to more effective stress management.

Another important factor concerns life experiences, particularly previous experiences in coping with adversity. According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1997), successful experiences in overcoming problems strengthen beliefs regarding one's competencies, whereas repeated failures may contribute to the development of helplessness. In this context, the interpretation of experiences is also important. Individuals who engage in positive reinterpretation of difficulties (reappraisal) demonstrate higher levels of adaptation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Social determinants, including social support and the quality of interpersonal relationships, are also significant. As Cohen and Wills (1985) indicated, social support fulfills a buffering role against stress, promoting more constructive attitudes toward difficulties. Within Polish psychological literature, Sęk and Cieślak (2004) emphasized that the presence of a supportive environment increases the sense of security and motivation to undertake remedial actions.

Cognitive factors, particularly the appraisal of difficult situations, also play a substantial role. According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress, it is not the situation itself but rather its cognitive interpretation that determines an individual's reaction. Individuals who perceive difficulties as controllable

and meaningful are more likely to engage in active coping, whereas perceiving situations as uncontrollable promotes withdrawal and helplessness.

Contemporary approaches indicate that coping is not a stable personality trait but rather an adaptive process that changes depending on the situation and its cognitive interpretation (Compas et al., 2017; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2023). Particular importance is attributed to the so-called goodness-of-fit between coping strategies and situational demands, according to which coping effectiveness depends on the adequacy of the selected strategy in relation to the nature of the stressor. In controllable situations, problem-focused coping strategies are generally more effective, whereas in uncontrollable situations, strategies based on emotion regulation and acceptance prove to be more adaptive (Cheng et al., 2024).

The literature distinguishes a wide range of coping strategies that may be classified as either adaptive or maladaptive. Adaptive strategies primarily include problem-focused coping, which involves actively seeking solutions and undertaking remedial actions. Research indicates that this strategy promotes better psychological functioning and higher levels of well-being (Compas et al., 2017). Seeking social support also plays an important role because – according to the buffering hypothesis of social support – it reduces the negative effects of stress and facilitates adaptation (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

One of the key coping strategies within this group is problem-focused coping, based on active problem solving and undertaking corrective actions. Women functioning within religious communities may additionally benefit from communal resources such as support from other members of the community and the organizational structures of the community itself, which facilitate effective problem solving. Research demonstrates that active coping strategies are associated with higher levels of well-being and better psychological adjustment (Compas et al., 2017).

Contemporary studies also emphasize the importance of emotion regulation as a central coping mechanism. The ability to identify, accept, and modulate emotions enables individuals to reduce

the intensity of negative emotional experiences and enhances their capacity to undertake constructive actions (Gross, 2015). An important element of contemporary approaches is also the emphasis placed on cognitive appraisal processes. According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress, the interpretation of an event – as a threat, loss, or challenge – determines emotional responses and the selection of coping strategies. Contemporary research confirms that perceiving difficulties as challenges promotes greater activity and more favorable adaptive outcomes (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2023).

Particular importance is also attributed to cognitive reappraisal strategies, which involve assigning new meaning to difficult situations, thereby contributing to stress reduction and increased psychological resilience (Troy et al., 2023).

Strategies based on acceptance and mindfulness have also gained increasing attention in the literature. These approaches involve accepting experiences without excessive judgment and maintaining attention on the present moment, which contributes to tension reduction and improved psychological well-being (Hayes et al., 2016; Lindsay & Creswell, 2019). Such strategies are particularly effective in situations in which individuals have limited ability to modify external conditions.

In contrast, maladaptive coping strategies such as avoidance, denial, or escape into substitute behaviors (e.g., substance abuse) may provide temporary relief; however, in the long term, they contribute to the intensification of emotional difficulties and deterioration in psychological functioning (Compas et al., 2017).

Contemporary research also highlights the strong relationship between coping and resilience. Resilience is defined as the capacity to adapt and maintain relative psychological equilibrium despite experiencing adversity (Masten, 2014). Effective coping strategies facilitate the development of resilience, while individuals characterized by higher levels of resilience are more likely to employ adaptive coping strategies (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

Attitudes toward difficulties, problems, and emotional wounds are closely associated with psychological resilience, which constitutes one of the key constructs of contemporary psychology.

In the medical and natural sciences, resilience is defined as a state of the organism enabling effective resistance to harmful environmental influences. In the social sciences – particularly psychology and pedagogy – psychological resilience is most commonly conceptualized as an individual's capacity for positive development and effective psychosocial functioning despite experiencing objectively adverse life conditions (Borucka & Ostaszewski, 2012; Grzegorzewska, 2013; Opora, 2009).

Psychological resilience, which conditions attitudes toward difficulties and problems, is understood as a relatively stable personality trait and psychological resource that enables effective coping with challenges, stress, and pressure regardless of situational adversity. It constitutes a mechanism supporting individual development and adaptation in the face of crisis or traumatic experiences. Resilience influences human attitudes and behaviors and is associated with an individual repertoire of stress-coping strategies (Ryś, 2020).

From a personality perspective, resilience is expressed through an individual's characteristic and differentiated patterns of responding and functioning in stressful or demanding situations, thereby constituting an important element of developmental and adaptive dynamics (Heszen, 2013).

Within the psychological literature, two closely related concepts are distinguished: *resilience* and *resiliency*. The concept of *resilience* was adapted from technical sciences, in which it refers to the properties of materials characterized by flexibility, elasticity, and the capacity to return to their original form following deformation. In psychology, the term refers to psychological hardiness, resistance, and positive adaptation in the face of adversity (Junik, 2011; Grzegorzewska, 2013, p. 43).

Thus, resilience refers to:

- flexibility and adaptive capacities enabling effective functioning and restoration of psychological resources following stress or adversity;
- a set of competencies and strategies that facilitate effective coping with intense emotional burdens and crisis situations;
- the ability to maintain appropriate psychosocial functioning despite adverse living conditions;

- the capacity to overcome adaptive breakdowns and reactivate resources following periods of impaired functioning;
- the ability to confront demanding life events and mobilize and develop available resilience resources (Junik, 2011; Grzegorzewska, 2013).

Within Polish scientific literature, terminological diversity regarding the concept of resilience can be observed. Some researchers use the original English term (Borucka & Ostaszewski, 2008; Borucka, 2011), whereas others propose the adapted Polish term *rezylencja* (Junik, 2011). Scientific literature also includes the concepts of *psychological hardiness* (Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński, 2011) and *psychological elasticity* (Kaczmarek et al., 2011), which refer to theoretically similar constructs.

In the social sciences, the concept of resilience primarily refers to the process of overcoming adverse life experiences, enabling relatively positive adaptation despite exposure to risk factors, difficult experiences, or trauma, including those experienced during childhood (Craig, Bond, & Burns, 2003; Kumpfer & Summerhays, 2006; Luthar & Zelazo, 2003; Sameroff & Rosenblum, 2006).

By contrast, the term *resiliency* is often used to describe personality characteristics – that is, relatively stable individual resources facilitating coping with adversity (Ogińska-Bulik, 2012, p. 196).

Heszen (2013, p. 329), while analyzing the concept of resilience, described it as a relatively stable personality trait manifested through the capacity to regain equilibrium following difficult experiences and adapt to changing life circumstances.

A similar position is presented by Grzegorzewska (2013), who emphasized that resilience should be understood as a multifactorial process of coping with adverse developmental conditions leading to positive adaptation. Within this process, individual, familial, and environmental protective factors reduce or compensate for the effects of risk factors.

Jeanne H. Block and Jack Block (1980, as cited in Ogińska-Bulik, 2012, p. 196), in turn, conceptualized *resiliency* as a relatively stable personality disposition determining the capacity for flexible adaptation to changing life demands. In this sense,

resiliency constitutes a trait facilitating coping both with traumatic experiences and with the challenges of everyday life.

Many researchers conceptualize resilience both as an adaptive process and as a set of individual characteristics enabling flexible and creative coping with life adversities (Turkiewicz-Maligranda, 2014, p. 173). Within this perspective, resiliency refers to the ability to return to effective functioning following periods of adversity, loss, or exposure to stressors, as well as the capacity to cope effectively in demanding and burdensome situations (Iskra, 2011, p. 399).

In recent years, increasing attention has also been devoted to the role of spiritual and existential factors in coping processes. Religiosity and spirituality may constitute important sources of support, enabling individuals to assign meaning to difficult experiences while strengthening hope and the sense of control (Pargament, 2011). Particularly within the context of religious communities, coping strategies may include spiritual practices such as prayer, which support adaptive processes.

Among women functioning within religious communities, coping with difficult situations assumes a specific character resulting from the presence of a shared system of values, norms, and spiritual practices. A religious community constitutes an important social environment that may both strengthen individual resources and shape the interpretation of difficult experiences (*ibid.*).

Religious communities may foster the development of resilience by providing social support, strengthening meaning in life, and promoting values associated with perseverance and hope.

Within the context of attitudes toward difficulties, axiological and spiritual factors are also highly significant. Research indicates that systems of values and religious beliefs may influence the interpretation of suffering and difficult experiences by assigning meaning to them and facilitating acceptance of situations beyond individual control (Heszen, 2013). Particularly within religious environments, difficulties may be perceived as elements of spiritual growth, thereby fostering more constructive attitudes.

Religious values and beliefs also constitute important determinants of attitudes toward difficulties. Religious systems provide interpretative frameworks that enable individuals to assign meaning to suffering and difficult experiences. As Heszen (2013) emphasized, religiosity may fulfill a regulatory function by reducing tension and strengthening hope and the sense of control. In this context, difficulties may be perceived not as threats but rather as elements of personal and spiritual development.

At the same time, it should be noted that attitudes toward difficulties may vary depending on individual experiences and the duration of functioning within a community. Longer membership may facilitate the internalization of communal norms and values as well as the consolidation of specific coping patterns, leading to greater stability of attitudes.

One of the fundamental determinants of attitudes toward emotional wounds involves individual emotional resources, including emotion regulation capacities and psychological resilience. Individuals characterized by higher levels of emotional competence cope more effectively with psychological pain, are less likely to maintain negative emotions, and recover equilibrium more rapidly (Oleś, 2011). In the case of current emotional wounds, this facilitates constructive processing of difficult emotions, whereas regarding past experiences, it enables their integration and attribution of meaning within one's personal biography.

An important role is also played by the cognitive interpretation of experienced emotional wounds. According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress, it is not the event itself but rather its cognitive appraisal that determines the individual's response. In the case of current emotional wounds, individuals may interpret situations as threats, harm, or injustice, thereby intensifying negative emotions, or alternatively as experiences that can be understood and worked through. Regarding past emotional wounds, reinterpretation processes are particularly important because they allow individuals to assign meaning to experiences and limit their destructive impact on functioning.

A key factor conditioning attitudes toward emotional wounds is the capacity for forgiveness. As Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) indicated, forgiveness constitutes a psychological process involving the reduction of negative emotions toward the offender and their gradual replacement with more benevolent or neutral attitudes. Lack of forgiveness may lead to persistent resentment, intensified emotional tension, and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. In the context of past emotional wounds, the ability to forgive both others and oneself is particularly important because it enables closure of difficult experiences and reduces their influence on current functioning.

Among women functioning within religious communities, spiritual factors assume particular importance. Religious value systems often promote attitudes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and acceptance of suffering as an element of spiritual development. As Heszen (2013) emphasized, religiosity may facilitate reinterpretation of difficult experiences by assigning meaning to them and supporting emotional coping processes. Within this framework, both current and past emotional wounds may be perceived as experiences embedded within a broader context of life and personal development.

The role of interpersonal relationships and social support is also highly significant. A religious community may constitute an important source of emotional support by enabling individuals to share difficult experiences and obtain understanding and acceptance. According to the concept of social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Sęk & Cieślak, 2004), the presence of a supportive environment contributes to the reduction of negative emotions and facilitates coping with emotional wounds.

Another important determinant of attitudes toward emotional wounds involves previous relational experiences, including the quality of interpersonal bonds. Repeated experiences of emotional injury may lead to heightened emotional sensitivity and difficulties in developing trust, thereby impeding the process of forgiveness and contributing to the persistence of negative emotions. In contrast, positive relational experiences may serve a protective function by fostering greater openness and readiness for reconciliation.

1.2. Loneliness and the sense of loneliness as the subjective experience of deficient interpersonal relationships

The literature distinguishes between two related concepts: *loneliness* and *solitude* (or *aloneness*) (see, among others, Śliwak, Brzeziński, & Zarosińska, 2019; Śliwak, Zarzycka, & Dzduch, 2001; Śliwak, Reizer, & Partyka, 2015).

Solitude is often perceived as a natural phenomenon inherent in human existence. It is characterized by ambiguity, difficulty in precise definition, and an individualized mode of experience. It constitutes a universal and timeless phenomenon that is highly subjective and differentiated across individuals (see Dubas, 2000).

By contrast, loneliness is conceptualized as an emotionally negative psychological state resulting from a discrepancy between an individual's expectations regarding interpersonal relationships and the actual quantity and quality of these relationships. Loneliness is associated with deficits in social integration and the absence of emotional bonds (Ryś, Agwu Kalu, Seroczyńska, & Tataj-Puzyna, 2023).

Solitude may possess both developmental and destructive dimensions. On the one hand, it may foster reflection, creativity, and authentic identity development; on the other hand, it may lead to feelings of emptiness, boredom, and loss of meaning (Śliwak et al., 2011). Within the context of close interpersonal relationships, loneliness understood as a sense of emotional isolation assumes primarily an emotional dimension – it manifests itself through difficulties in establishing and maintaining satisfying interpersonal bonds, feelings of insufficient closeness and support, and increased sensitivity to signals of rejection (Olearczyk, 2020; Weiss, 1973).

Loneliness is a common phenomenon experienced at various stages of life regardless of age, gender, health status, or socio-occupational situation.

According to Szczepański's (1978) concept, solitude may constitute a conscious individual choice that enables self-reflection, concentration on inner life, and distance from the external world. From this perspective, solitude may fulfill a developmental function by fostering personality maturation and identity formation.

Loneliness, however, assumes a different meaning. It is understood as a state in which an individual experiences neither support from interpersonal relationships nor support derived from personal psychological resources. Loneliness results from a subjective evaluation of the quality of relationships rather than their quantity. This experience is not voluntarily chosen but rather perceived as difficult and psychologically burdensome; it may inhibit development, evoke anxiety, and be experienced as a crisis situation (Dubas, 2000).

The literature emphasizes that solitude may have both positive and negative consequences – it may foster creativity, reflectiveness, and spiritual development, provided that it evokes positive emotions and results from autonomous personal choice (Dołęga, 2003). In contrast, loneliness, as an involuntary, unwanted, and psychologically distressing experience, is regarded as a destructive phenomenon (Ryś et al., 2023).

Both solitude and the sense of loneliness currently constitute important social and psychological challenges and are frequently described as “a dilemma of the contemporary world” (Krupa, 2013).

2. Methodology of the author's research

2.1. Research aim and hypothesis

The aim of the present study, the results of which are presented in this article, was to analyze the relationship between attitudes toward difficulties and emotional wounds and the sense of loneliness among women functioning within religious communities. The selection of women belonging to religious communities as the research group resulted from their specific existential and relational context, in which attitudes toward difficult situations, emotional wounds, and the sense of loneliness acquire particular significance.

Life within a religious community formally provides a sense of belonging, structural support, and opportunities for establishing interpersonal relationships; however, it does not automatically

guarantee an internal sense of rootedness or emotional closeness. Although the community offers support, it does not always satisfy the need for emotional intimacy. Formation within religious communities introduces normative patterns of interpersonal functioning that may facilitate external adaptation, although they do not necessarily prevent the experience of loneliness.

The following hypothesis was formulated prior to conducting the study:

- H. It was assumed that there is a relationship between attitudes toward difficulties, problems, and emotional wounds and the sense of loneliness; specifically, the more adaptive and constructive the attitudes toward oneself in difficult situations, toward difficulties and problems, and toward emotional wounds, the lower the level of loneliness experienced in the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral domains.

Attitudes toward difficult situations constitute an important personal resource conditioned by numerous factors (e.g., Borucka & Ostaszewski, 2008, 2012; Garmezy, 1985; Grzegorzewska, 2013; Ryś, 2016), while simultaneously influencing multiple aspects of human functioning.

The proposed hypothesis was also intended to examine relationships concerning the sense of loneliness. Currently, loneliness affects an increasing number of individuals, not only elderly or chronically ill persons, as emphasized for many years in psychological literature. Today, loneliness also affects middle-aged adults and young people, frequently becoming a source of serious psychological difficulties and, at times, life crises (Dubas, 2000; Olearczyk, 2020).

2.2. Research instruments

2.2.1. Psychological Resilience Scale

Psychological resilience was assessed using the scales included in the *Psychological Resilience Scale (Skala Odporności Psychicznej – SOP)* developed by Maria Ryś and collaborators (2024). The instrument con-

sists of 35 statements describing various aspects of individual functioning in difficult situations. Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale comprising the following categories: 1 – definitely no, 2 – rather no, 3 – difficult to say, 4 – rather yes, and 5 – definitely yes.

The questionnaire includes the following subscales:

- Attitudes toward oneself in difficult situations,
- Emotional functioning and interpersonal relationships,
- Attitudes toward difficulties and problems,
- Attitudes toward emotional wounds.

Participants' responses are calculated separately for each subscale. The reliability of the subscales, assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, ranged from .685 to .862, indicating satisfactory to good internal consistency. The content validity of the instrument was established through expert-judge evaluation (Ryś, 2024).

2.2.2. The Sense of Loneliness Scale – Self Among Others

The *Sense of Loneliness Scale – Self Among Others* developed by Maria Ryś (2020) is a psychometric instrument designed to assess the level of loneliness within the context of interpersonal relationships. The scale measures the subjective sense of social and emotional isolation, that is, the extent to which an individual feels isolated, misunderstood, or deprived of close interpersonal bonds.

The instrument enables assessment of relationships with others across three principal domains:

- I. Intellectual domain;
- II. Emotional domain;
- III. Behavioral domain.

Participants respond to 27 statements using a five-point Likert scale (Ryś, 2024).

The *Self Among Others* questionnaire includes ten norms that allow the classification of results as very low, low, average, high, or very high (ibid.).

2.2.3. Author's demographic questionnaire

An original demographic questionnaire was used to collect information regarding basic demographic variables. The questionnaire included items concerning age, educational level, and childhood experiences of adverse events, such as parental death or addiction within the family, as well as participants' subjective evaluations of the significance of these experiences.

3. Participants

The study included 380 women belonging to various religious communities.

The mean age of the participants was 47.71 years ($Me = 47$), with a standard deviation of $SD = 10.62$. The age range extended from 28 to 78 years, indicating the participation of women representing both early adulthood and later stages of life.

Higher education predominated within the studied population (71.1%). The remaining educational categories occurred considerably less frequently: bachelor's degree – 9.7%, secondary education – 13.2%, and vocational education – 4.2%.

A substantial proportion of the participants originated from large families. Specifically, 41.1% reported having three or more siblings, 23.9% had two siblings, 22.6% had one sibling, whereas 12.4% reported having no siblings.

More than half of the participants (57.9%) declared experiencing at least one difficult event during childhood or adolescence, whereas 42.1% did not report any such experiences.

The most frequently reported difficulties related to the mother included difficult financial conditions (30.0%), addictions (8.9%), and serious physical illness (9.2%). Problems related to fathers occurred considerably more frequently and primarily involved addictions (34.7%), violence perpetrated by the father (22.6%), and financial difficulties (18.9%).

Within the group of surveyed women, three forms of religious community life were distinguished: active religious life (76.1%), secular institutes (13.7%), and contemplative/cloistered life (10.3%). The predominance of active religious life corresponds to the

Table 1. Age of the participants

Age	M	Me	SD	Min.	Max.
Total sample	47.71	47.00	10.62	28.00	78.00

Table 2. Educational level of the participants

Education	N	%
Vocational education	16	4.2
Secondary education	50	13.2
Incomplete higher education	7	1.8
Bachelor's degree	37	9.7
Graduate / Postgraduate	270	71.1

Table 3. Number of siblings among the participants

Number of siblings	N	%
No siblings	47	12.4
One sibling	86	22.6
Two siblings	91	23.9
Three or more siblings	156	41.1

Table 4. Experience of difficult events during childhood and adolescence

Response	N	%
None of these events occurred	160	42.1
At least one of these events occurred	220	57.9

Table 5. Problems related to the mother during childhood and adolescence (up to 18 years of age) within the family or immediate environment of the participants

Mother-related problems	N	%
Alcoholism or other addictions	34	8.9
Violence (verbal, physical, or other)	61	16.1
Serious physical illness	35	9.2
Mental illness	15	3.9
Parental divorce	20	5.3
Difficult financial situation	114	30.0
Parent leaving the family home	19	5.0
Death due to chronic illness	15	3.9
Sudden death	13	3.4
Other difficult event	36	9.5

Table 6. Problems related to the father during childhood and adolescence (up to 18 years of age) within the family or immediate environment of the participants

Father-related problems	N	%
Alcoholism or other addictions	132	34.7
Violence (verbal, physical, or other)	86	22.6
Serious physical illness	23	6.1
Mental illness	12	3.2
Parental divorce	18	4.7
Difficult financial situation	72	18.9
Parent leaving the family home	16	4.2
Death due to chronic illness	18	4.7
Sudden death	25	6.6
Other difficult event	32	8.4

Table 7. Problems related to a significant other during childhood and adolescence (up to 18 years of age) within the family or immediate environment of the participants

Problems related to a significant other	N	%
Alcoholism or other addictions	40	10.5
Violence (verbal, physical, or other)	36	9.5
Serious physical illness	20	5.3
Mental illness	13	3.4
Difficult financial situation	20	5.3
Death due to chronic illness	30	7.9
Sudden death	38	10.0
Other difficult event	37	9.7

Table 8. Forms of community life among the participants

Form of community life	N	%
Secular institute	52	13.7
Active religious life	289	76.1
Contemplative/cloistered life	39	10.3

characteristics of religious communities in which apostolic and social activities are particularly well developed.

4. Results

4.1. Results of the individual measures and correlational analyses

This section presents the results obtained in the individual measures as well as the correlations concerning attitudes toward difficulties and emotional wounds and the sense of loneliness.

Table 9. Results Obtained in the Individual Attitude Scales (Minimum = 5; Maximum = 35)

Scales	Attitudes toward oneself in difficult situations	Emotional functioning and interpersonal relationships	Attitudes toward difficulties and problems	Attitudes toward emotional wounds
Mean scores obtained	23.15	23.39	25.69	21.72

Sense of Loneliness – Intellectual Domain

Mean score obtained : 17.29

Level of Loneliness

Very low	Low	Average	High	Very high
26.2 %	56.1 %	14.8 %	2.9 %	0.0 %

Sense of Loneliness – Emotional Domain

Mean score obtained: 17.52

Level of Loneliness

Very low	Low	Average	High	Very high
42.0 %	36.0 %	12.3 %	6.9 %	2.8 %

Sense of Loneliness – Behavioral Domain

Mean score obtained: 16.15

Level of Loneliness

Very low	Low	Average	High	Very high
38.9	47.4	13.7	0.0	0.0

The mean scores obtained in the three scales measuring the sense of loneliness (intellectual, emotional, and behavioral domains) indicated generally low levels of loneliness. However, due to the importance of the issue, the percentages of women experiencing average, high, and very high levels of loneliness were also calculated.

Within the intellectual domain, 14.8% of the women reported an average level of loneliness, whereas 2.9% reported a high level of loneliness.

The most significant findings concerned the emotional domain of loneliness. In this area, 12.3% of the women reported an average level of loneliness, 6.9% reported a high level, and 2.8% reported a very high level of loneliness. These findings indicate that among the 380 women belonging to religious communities, 37 participants experienced high or very high levels of emotional loneliness.

Within the behavioral domain, 13.7% of the women reported an average level of loneliness, whereas none of the participants reported high or very high levels of loneliness.

Analysis of the results presented in Table 10 revealed no statistically significant differences in the intensity of the individual dimensions of psychological resilience among women from religious communities depending on the form of religious life adopted.

The results of the analysis presented in Table 11 indicate statistically significant negative correlations between attitudes toward difficulties and emotional wounds and the sense of loneliness across all analyzed domains, regardless of the length of time spent within the religious community.

4.2. Psychological analysis and discussion of the research findings

Attitudes toward difficulties and problems constitute an important aspect of psychological functioning, determining the manner in which stressful situations are interpreted as well as the coping strategies adopted by the individual. The development of such attitudes is a complex and multifactorial process encompassing both individual and environmental determinants.

Attitudes toward difficulties and problems among women functioning within religious communities are shaped through a complex interaction of individual, social, and spiritual factors. Due to the specific nature of life within a religious community, values, norms, and religious practices assume particular importance alongside classical psychological determinants.

Coping with difficult situations among women belonging to religious communities is multidimensional in character and is based on the interaction of psychological, social, and spiritual factors. Active coping strategies, communal support, emotion regulation, and religious interpretations of experiences play particularly important roles. These factors may facilitate more adaptive functioning and reduce the negative consequences of difficult situations.

Table 10. Forms of Religious Community Life and Attitudes Toward Difficulties, Problems, and Emotional Wounds Among the Participants

Form of religious life		Attitudes toward difficulties and problems	Attitudes toward oneself in difficult situations	Emotional functioning and interpersonal relationships	Attitudes toward emotional wounds
Secular institute	<i>M</i>	25.87	23.13	23.15	21.56
	<i>Me</i>	26.50	23.00	23.50	20.00
	<i>SD</i>	4.06	4.87	4.29	5.03
Active religious life	<i>M</i>	25.69	23.28	23.56	21.91
	<i>Me</i>	26.00	23.00	24.00	21.00
	<i>SD</i>	4.65	5.67	4.35	5.32
Contemplative/cloistered life	<i>M</i>	25.46	22.18	22.51	20.51
	<i>Me</i>	27.00	21.00	22.00	21.00
	<i>SD</i>	4.29	5.66	4.64	5.57
Test results		$H = 0.16 \setminus$ $\eta^2 = .922$	$H = 1.83 \setminus$ $\eta^2 = .401$	$H = 1.96 \setminus$ $\eta^2 = .376$	$H = 1.60 \setminus$ $\eta^2 = .449$

Table 11. Relationships Between Attitudes Toward Difficulties and Emotional Wounds and the Sense of Loneliness Depending on the Length of Time Spent in the Religious Community

Variable	Intellectual Domain	Emotional Domain	Behavioral Domain
Women belonging to the religious community for less than 20 years (n = 146)			
Attitudes toward difficulties and problems	-0.26**	-0.30**	-0.45**
Attitudes toward life and oneself	-0.26**	-0.53**	-0.48**
Emotional functioning	-0.32**	-0.54**	-0.47**
Attitudes toward emotional wounds	-0.18*	-0.49**	-0.24**
Women belonging to the religious community for more than 20 years (n = 234)			
Attitudes toward difficulties and problems	-0.33**	-0.35**	-0.43**
Attitudes toward life and oneself	-0.35**	-0.47**	-0.40**
Emotional functioning	-0.40**	-0.49**	-0.42**
Attitudes toward emotional wounds	-0.30**	-0.42**	-0.32**

p* < .05; p* < .01; p*** < .001.

Analysis of the obtained findings allows for the identification of a characteristic profile of functioning among the examined women with regard to attitudes toward difficulties and emotional wounds as well as the experienced level of loneliness.

With respect to attitudes toward difficulties and problems, the participants obtained relatively high scores ($M = 25.69$), indicating an adaptive approach to coping with stressful situations. According to the description of the scale, individuals obtaining higher scores tend to perceive difficulties as challenges and undertake active attempts to resolve them. This result may be interpreted in light of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of stress and coping, according to which problem-focused coping strategies promote better psychological adjustment. Similar conclusions were formulated by Heszen (2013), who emphasized that active coping strategies constitute important resources for mental health.

A similarly moderate-to-high level was observed in attitudes toward oneself in difficult situations ($M = 23.15$). This finding suggests a relatively stable sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence, although not yet fully consolidated. It may be interpreted with reference to Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy as well as Juczyński's (2000) perspective emphasizing the importance of beliefs regarding one's own efficacy as a factor facilitating adaptation and coping with adversity.

The results concerning emotional functioning and interpersonal relationships ($M = 23.39$) indicate moderately positive interpersonal functioning. The participants generally demonstrated the ability to maintain relationships and benefit from social support, although not always in an optimal manner. According to the social support theory proposed by Cohen and Wills (1985), interpersonal relationships fulfill a buffering function against stress. Within Polish psychological literature, Sęk and Cieślak (2004) similarly emphasized the protective role of social support for mental health.

The lowest result was observed in the domain of attitudes toward emotional wounds ($M = 21.72$), suggesting relatively greater difficulties in processing experiences of harm and engaging in forgiveness. According to the conceptualization proposed by Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000), a lack of forgiveness may be associated with persistent emotional tension and may negatively affect psychological well-being. Within the context of Polish research, Oleś (2011) emphasized that the integration of difficult life experiences constitutes an important component of personality development and psychological well-being.

Analysis of the sense of loneliness demonstrated that within the intellectual domain the participants obtained a low level of loneliness ($M = 17.29$), with low and very low scores predominating. This indicates that the majority of participants perceived their interpersonal relationships as satisfying and experienced a sense of social belonging. These findings may be interpreted with reference to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory of belongingness, as well as Januszek's (2012) conceptualization emphasizing that the sense of social connectedness constitutes a fundamental factor protecting against loneliness.

Within the emotional domain ($M = 17.52$), an overall low level of loneliness was also observed, although the results were more differentiated than in the intellectual domain. Although most participants experienced close and supportive relationships, some demonstrated elevated levels of emotional loneliness, which may indicate unmet needs for emotional closeness. According to Weiss's (1973) concept, emotional loneliness primarily results from the absence of a deep emotional bond with another person. Similar conclusions were presented by Dołęga (2003), who emphasized the importance of the quality of emotional relationships for the experience of loneliness.

The lowest level of loneliness was observed in the behavioral domain ($M = 16.15$), indicating high levels of social activity and engagement in interpersonal relationships and activities directed toward others. These findings suggest that the examined women function actively and possess protective resources that reduce the risk of social isolation. As emphasized by Czapiński (2004), social activity and engagement constitute important components of psychological well-being.

The study confirmed the proposed hypotheses, indicating that there is a relationship between attitudes toward oneself in difficult situations and the sense of loneliness.

Analysis of the relationships between attitudes and the sense of loneliness revealed statistically significant negative correlations across all examined domains. This means that the more adaptive the attitudes toward difficulties, oneself, and emotional wounds, the lower the level of loneliness experienced by the participants. Particularly strong relationships were observed between emotional functioning and attitudes toward oneself and emotional loneliness. These findings are consistent both with the studies conducted by Cacioppo and Hawkey (2009) and with Kowalik's (2011) analyses, which emphasize the importance of personal and emotional resources in reducing the sense of loneliness.

Comparison of groups of women according to the length of time spent within the religious community demonstrated that among both women with shorter and longer than 20 years of community membership, the relationships between the analyzed

variables were significant and demonstrated similar directions. However, it may be observed that among women with longer community experience, these relationships were more stable, which may indicate the consolidation of specific patterns of psychological and social functioning.

The obtained findings indicate that the examined women are characterized by relatively high levels of coping resources for dealing with difficulties and low levels of loneliness. At the same time, the area requiring particular attention remains attitudes toward emotional wounds and, to a lesser extent, emotional functioning, both of which may influence the quality of interpersonal relationships and psychological well-being.

It is worth emphasizing that the participants demonstrated relatively high levels of adaptive attitudes toward difficulties and problems. The highest scores were obtained in the domain of attitudes toward difficulties and problems, suggesting that the participants tend to cope actively with adversity and perceive difficulties as challenges. This finding is consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress, according to which the cognitive appraisal of difficult situations determines the coping strategies undertaken. It may be assumed that the examined women more frequently appraise difficult situations as manageable, thereby facilitating the use of problem-focused coping strategies.

At the same time, the findings indicate moderately high levels of attitudes toward oneself in difficult situations as well as functioning within the emotional and relational domains. This may reflect a relatively stable sense of self-efficacy and the availability of social support, which – as emphasized by Cohen and Wills (1985) – fulfills a buffering function against stress. Within the context of functioning in a religious community, it may be assumed that this support is both emotional and spiritual in nature, thereby additionally strengthening the capacity to cope with difficulties.

The lowest scores were observed in the domain of attitudes toward emotional wounds, indicating that this area may constitute a relatively weaker aspect of the participants' functioning. This result suggests that despite generally effective coping

with current difficulties, experiences of emotional injury – particularly those originating in the past – may be more difficult to process and integrate. This interpretation is supported by theories of forgiveness (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000), which emphasize that forgiveness is a complex process requiring time and that its absence may contribute to the persistence of negative emotions and psychological tension.

Analysis of the level of loneliness demonstrated that the examined women were generally characterized by low levels of loneliness across all analyzed domains, particularly within the behavioral and intellectual spheres. These findings indicate that the participants function actively within social contexts, maintain interpersonal relationships, and experience a sense of belonging. This may be interpreted in light of Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory of the need to belong, according to which maintaining social relationships constitutes a fundamental condition of psychological well-being.

Slightly more differentiated results were observed within the emotional domain of loneliness, where some participants experienced elevated levels of loneliness. This may indicate that despite the presence of social relationships, not all emotional needs are fully satisfied. This phenomenon is consistent with Weiss's (1973) distinction, according to which emotional loneliness may occur even in the presence of social relationships when a deep emotional bond with another person is lacking.

A key finding of the study concerns the identification of statistically significant negative correlations between attitudes toward difficulties, oneself, and emotional wounds and the sense of loneliness. This means that the more adaptive the attitudes presented by the examined women, the lower the level of loneliness they experienced. Particularly strong relationships were observed within the emotional domain, indicating the central role of emotional functioning in the experience of loneliness. These findings are consistent with the studies conducted by Cacioppo and Hawkley (2009), which emphasize the importance of psychological and cognitive factors in shaping the sense of loneliness.

An important aspect of the analysis also involved comparison of groups of women according to the length of time spent within the religious community. The obtained findings indicate that similar relationships between the analyzed variables occurred both among women with shorter and longer community experience. However, it may be observed that among women functioning within the community for a longer period of time, these relationships were more stable, which may indicate the consolidation of specific coping patterns and ways of interpreting life experiences. Long-term functioning within a religious community may facilitate the internalization of communal norms and values that influence the experience of difficulties and interpersonal relationships.

The findings also draw attention to the particular role of spiritual factors in shaping attitudes toward difficulties and emotional wounds. Religiosity may facilitate the attribution of meaning to difficult experiences and support coping processes through reference to values such as forgiveness, acceptance, and hope (Heszen, 2013). This may partially explain the low levels of loneliness and the relatively high scores observed in the domain of coping with difficulties.

In summary, the obtained findings indicate that the examined women functioning within religious communities possess substantial personal resources that facilitate adaptive coping with difficulties and protect against the experience of loneliness. At the same time, attitudes toward emotional wounds remain an area requiring particular attention, as they may influence the quality of emotional and relational functioning. These findings may provide a basis for further research as well as for interventions aimed at supporting the development of emotional competencies and forgiveness processes within the studied group.

An important role is also played by social support, which in the context of religious communities assumes a particularly strong and multidimensional character. This support encompasses emotional, instrumental, and spiritual dimensions. According to Cohen and Wills's (1985) conceptualization, social support fulfills a buffering function against stress by reducing its negative effects. Within religious

environments, such support may be additionally strengthened by the sense of community, belonging, and shared values.

An important component of coping within this group also involves emotion regulation, including the ability to recognize, accept, and manage emotional experiences. Women functioning within religious communities may utilize spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and religious reflection, which contribute to tension reduction and enhance the sense of inner peace (Gross, 2015; Pargament, 2011).

5. Limitations of the study and directions for future research

When interpreting the obtained findings, several limitations of the conducted study should be taken into consideration.

First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which does not allow for drawing conclusions regarding causal relationships between the analyzed variables. The obtained results only permit the identification of co-occurring phenomena rather than determining their directionality or developmental dynamics.

Second, self-report methods were used, which may involve the risk of response distortions resulting, among other factors, from the tendency to provide socially desirable answers. Particularly within religious community settings, participants may demonstrate a tendency to present themselves in a manner consistent with prevailing norms and values.

Third, the study group was specific and relatively homogeneous, as it included exclusively women functioning within religious communities. This limits the possibility of generalizing the findings to other social groups, including individuals not belonging to religious communities or functioning within different cultural contexts.

Fourth, the study did not include all potential variables that may influence attitudes toward difficulties and emotional wounds as well as the sense of loneliness, such as attachment style, level of individual religiosity, traumatic experiences, or family support.

In light of these limitations, several directions for future research appear justified.

Future studies should include longitudinal research designs that would enable analysis of changes over time and facilitate a better understanding of the mechanisms shaping attitudes toward difficulties and emotional wounds. It would also be valuable to include a broader range of psychological variables, such as emotion regulation, attachment style, and level of spirituality, which would allow for a more in-depth analysis of the investigated phenomena.

Another valuable direction for future research would involve comparing individuals functioning within religious communities with individuals outside such communities, thereby enabling identification of the specific influence of the religious environment on the analyzed variables. Furthermore, qualitative studies would be beneficial because they could provide a deeper understanding of subjective experiences related to emotional wounds and the ways in which such experiences are interpreted.

Finally, the findings may provide a basis for designing practical interventions, such as psychological or spiritual support programs aimed at developing emotional competencies, enhancing the capacity for forgiveness, and fostering satisfying interpersonal relationships.

Undertaking further research in this area may contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying the functioning of women within religious communities and may support the enhancement of their psychological and social well-being.

Conclusion and Final Remarks

The aim of the present study was to determine the relationship between attitudes toward difficulties, problems, and emotional wounds and the sense of loneliness among women functioning within religious communities. The conducted analyses allow several important conclusions to be formulated.

First, the examined women were characterized by relatively high levels of adaptive attitudes toward difficulties and problems, indicating their capacity for active and constructive coping with

stressful situations. Difficulties were more frequently perceived as challenges rather than threats, which facilitates undertaking remedial actions and maintaining relative psychological equilibrium.

Second, the level of loneliness within the studied group was generally low, particularly within the behavioral and intellectual domains. This finding indicates relatively good social functioning among the participants and the presence of interpersonal relationships that constitute important protective resources. At the same time, greater differentiation was observed within the emotional domain, suggesting that not all emotional needs of the participants are fully satisfied.

Third, the obtained findings confirm the existence of statistically significant relationships between the analyzed variables. The more adaptive the attitudes toward difficulties, oneself, and emotional wounds presented by the examined women, the lower the level of loneliness they experienced. Emotional functioning and attitudes toward oneself proved to be particularly important, emerging as key predictors of loneliness.

Fourth, attitudes toward emotional wounds constitute an area requiring particular attention. The obtained findings indicate that processing experiences of harm – both current and past – may represent a greater challenge than coping with ongoing difficulties. This may have significant implications for the quality of interpersonal relationships and the psychological well-being of the participants.

Fifth, the length of functioning within a religious community appears to be associated with the stability of the analyzed relationships. Among women with longer community experience, more consolidated patterns of coping and interpretation of life experiences were observed, which may indicate the internalization of communal norms and values.

In conclusion, the obtained findings suggest that a religious community may constitute an important environment supporting the development of adaptive attitudes toward difficulties and

protecting against the sense of loneliness. At the same time, the results emphasize the importance of addressing emotional wounds and emotional functioning as key factors contributing to more comprehensive psychological well-being

It is worth emphasizing that a religious community may provide support, although it does not always satisfy the need for emotional closeness. Formation within religious communities introduces normative relational patterns that may facilitate external adaptation; however, they do not necessarily promote personal integration. At the outset of the study, an important question was posed: whether the consequences of early attachment experiences may manifest themselves within the context of life in religious communities. The conducted research clearly indicates that this is indeed the case.

The study demonstrated that loneliness – within the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral domains – is not exclusively spiritual in nature but also constitutes an indicator of attitudes toward difficulties and emotional wounds. Therefore, religious communities should remain attentive to signs of loneliness, as it may contribute to spiritual burnout, depression, loss of the sense of vocation, and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. Consequently, it appears important to develop community-building practices that strengthen interpersonal bonds, encourage relationships based on trust, and create opportunities for dialogue within psychologically safe environments.

The findings also suggest the need for a systemic approach to mental health through the implementation of support procedures, consultation services, and referrals for psychotherapy when necessary; the creation of an emotionally safe climate in which the disclosure of difficulties is not stigmatized; the introduction of periodic assessments of well-being at both the individual and community levels; and investment in the development of interpersonal competencies, particularly among individuals serving in leadership roles.

References

- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: W. H. Freeman.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Borucka, A. (2011). Koncepcja resilience. Podstawowe założenia i nurty badań [The concept of resilience: Basic assumptions and research trends]. In W. Junik (Ed.), *Resilience. Teoria – badania – praktyka [Resilience: Theory – research – practice]* (pp. 11–28). Warszawa, Poland: Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne PARNAMEDIA.
- Borucka, A., & Ostaszewski, K. (2008). Koncepcja resilience: Kluczowe pojęcia i wybrane zagadnienia [The concept of resilience: Key concepts and selected issues]. *Medycyna Wieku Rozwojowego*, 12(2), 587–597.
- Borucka, A., & Ostaszewski, K. (2012). Czynniki i procesy resilience wśród dzieci krzywdzonych [Factors and resilience processes among abused children]. *Dziecko Krzywdzone*, 3(40), 7–26.
- Cacioppo, J. T., & Hawkley, L. C. (2009). Perceived social isolation and cognition. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 13(10), 447–454. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2009.06.005>
- Chabursky, S., & Walper, S. (2026). Exploring coping strategies among adolescents during COVID-19 and war displacement: A qualitative analysis comparing two crisis settings. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 36(1), e70150. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.70150>
- Cheng, C., Lau, H. P. B., & Chan, M. P. S. (2024). Coping flexibility and psychological adjustment: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*.
- Choi, H. J., Lu, Y., Le, V. D., & Temple, J. R. (2026). Coping patterns over time and the association with stress, depression and self-efficacy among adolescents: Latent transition analysis. *Children*, 13(1), 118. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children13010118>
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98(2), 310–357. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.98.2.310>
- Compas, B. E., Jaser, S. S., Dunn, M. J., & Rodriguez, E. M. (2017). Coping with chronic illness in childhood and adolescence. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 13, 455–480.
- Czapiński, J. (2004). Psychologiczne teorie szczęścia [Psychological theories of happiness]. In J. Czapiński (Ed.), *Psychologia pozytywna [Positive psychology]* (pp. 51–102). Warszawa, Poland: PWN.
- Dołęga, Z. (2003). *Samotność młodzieży – analiza teoretyczna i studia empiryczne [Loneliness among adolescents: Theoretical analysis and empirical studies]*. Katowice, Poland: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.
- Dubas, E. (2000). *Edukacja dorosłych w sytuacji samotności i osamotnienia [Adult education in situations of loneliness and social isolation]*. Łódź, Poland: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Enright, R. D., & Fitzgibbons, R. P. (2000). *Helping clients forgive: An empirical guide for resolving anger and restoring hope*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Fletcher, D., & Sarkar, M. (2013). Psychological resilience: A review and critique. *European Psychologist*, 18(1), 12–23.
- Garmezy, N. (1985). Stress-resistant children: The search for protective factors. In J. E. Stevenson (Ed.), *Recent research in developmental psychopathology. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry Book Supplement No. 4* (pp. 213–233). Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.
- Gross, J. J. (2015). Emotion regulation: Current status and future prospects. *Psychological Inquiry*, 26(1), 1–26.
- Grzegorzewska, I. (2013). Aktualny stan badań nad zjawiskiem odporności psychicznej w populacji dzieci alkoholików [Current state of research on psychological resilience among children of alcoholics]. *Polskie Forum Psychologiczne*, 18(4), 385–399.
- Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (2016). *Acceptance and commitment therapy*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Heszen, I. (2013). *Psychologia stresu [Psychology of stress]*. Warszawa, Poland: PWN.
- Huo, M., Leger, K. A., Birditt, K. S., & Fingerman, K. L. (2025). Empathy is associated with older adults' social behaviors and verbal emotional expressions throughout the day. *Scientific Reports*, 15(1), 269. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-82550-0>
- Januszek, H. (2012). Poczucie osamotnienia a funkcjonowanie społeczne [Sense of loneliness and social functioning]. *Psychologia Społeczna*, 7(2), 123–134.
- Juczyński, Z. (2000). *Poczucie własnej skuteczności – teoria i pomiar [Self-efficacy: Theory and measurement]*. Warszawa, Poland: Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych PTP.
- Junik, W. (2011). Zjawisko rezylencji – wybrane problemy metodologiczne [The phenomenon of resilience: Selected methodological issues]. In W. Junik (Ed.), *Resilience. Teoria – badania – praktyka [Resilience: Theory – research – practice]* (pp. 47–66). Warszawa, Poland: Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne PARNAMEDIA.
- Kowalik, S. (2011). *Psychologia rehabilitacji [Psychology of rehabilitation]*. Warszawa, Poland: PWN.
- Krupa, B. (2013). Samotność – znak czasu [Loneliness – a sign of the times]. In Z. B. Gaś (Ed.), *Człowiek na rozdrożu. Zrozumieć, aby pomóc [A person at the crossroads: Understanding in order to help]* (pp. 95–112). Lublin, Poland: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Innovatio Press.
- Kyeong, Y., Kürüm, E., Sheffler, P., Ferguson, L., Davis, E. L., Strickland-Hughes, C. M., & Wu, R. (2024). The implications of growth mindset for depression, well-being, and adjustment over 2 years during the COVID-19 pandemic. *PLOS Mental Health*, 1(7), e0000182. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmen.0000182>
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Lindsay, E. K., & Creswell, J. D. (2019). Mindfulness, acceptance, and emotion regulation. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 28, 30–35.
- Masten, A. S. (2014). *Ordinary magic: Resilience in development*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Ogińska-Bulik, N. (2011). Rola prężności psychicznej w przystosowaniu się kobiet do choroby nowotworowej [The role of psychological resilience in women's adaptation to cancer]. *Psychoonkologia*, 15(1), 1–10.
- Ogińska-Bulik, N., & Juczyński, Z. (2008a). *Osobowość, stres a zdrowie [Personality, stress and health]*. Warszawa, Poland: Difin.
- Ogińska-Bulik, N., & Juczyński, Z. (2008b). Skala pomiaru prężności – SPP-25 [Resilience Measurement Scale – SPP-25]. *Nowiny Psychologiczne*, 3, 39–56.
- Ogińska-Bulik, N., & Juczyński, Z. (2011). Prężność u dzieci i młodzieży: Charakterystyka i pomiar – polska skala SPF-18 [Resilience in children and adolescents: Characteristics and measurement – the Polish SPF-18 scale]. *Polskie Forum Psychologiczne*, 16(1), 7–28.
- Olearczyk, T. (2020). Cisza w dialogu rodzinnym [Silence in family dialogue]. *Roczniki Pedagogiczne*, 12(4), 45–61. <https://doi.org/10.18290/rped20124-4>
- Oleś, P. (2011). *Psychologia człowieka dorosłego [Psychology of adulthood]*. Warszawa, Poland: PWN.

- Opora, R. (2009). *Ewolucja niedostosowania społecznego jako rezultat zmian w zakresie odporności psychicznej i zniekształceń poznawczych* [The evolution of social maladjustment as a result of changes in psychological resilience and cognitive distortions]. Gdańsk, Poland: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego.
- Ostaszewski, K. (2008). Czynniki ryzyka i czynniki chroniące w zachowaniach ryzykownych dzieci i młodzieży [Risk and protective factors in risky behaviors among children and adolescents]. In J. Mazur, I. Tabak, A. Małkowska-Szkućnik, K. Ostaszewski, H. Kołoto, A. Dzielska, & A. Kowalewska (Eds.), *Czynniki chroniące młodzież 15-letnią przed podejmowaniem zachowań ryzykownych. Raport z badań HBSC* [Factors protecting 15-year-old adolescents from engaging in risky behaviors: HBSC research report] (pp. 19–45). Warszawa, Poland: Instytut Matki i Dziecka.
- Ostaszewski, K. (2014). *Zachowania ryzykowne młodzieży w perspektywie mechanizmów resilience* [Youth risk behaviors from the perspective of resilience mechanisms]. Warszawa, Poland: Instytut Psychiatrii i Neurologii.
- Pargament, K. I. (2011). *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Pauer, S., Rutjens, B. T., & van Harreveld, F. (2026). The experience of recurring ambivalence and its relation to effortful problem-focused coping. *Scientific Reports*, *16*(1), 2601. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-026-35032-4>
- Riddell, H., Sedikides, C., Sivaramakrishnan, H., Wan, P., Maltagliati, S., Jackson, B., ... Ntoumanis, N. (2026). A meta-analytic review and conceptual model of the antecedents and outcomes of goal adjustment in response to striving difficulties. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *10*(2), 317–332.
- Ryś, M. (2016). *Odporność psychiczna i relacje interpersonalne osób wzrastających w różnych systemach rodzinnych* [Psychological resilience and interpersonal relationships among individuals raised in different family systems]. Warszawa, Poland: Mazowieckie Centrum Polityki Społecznej.
- Ryś, M. (2020). *Poczucie własnej wartości w relacjach interpersonalnych i odporność psychiczna u osób wzrastających w różnych systemach rodzinnych* [Self-esteem in interpersonal relationships and psychological resilience among individuals raised in different family systems]. Warszawa, Poland: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego.
- Ryś, M. (2024). *Psychologiczne uwarunkowania kształtowania relacji w prawidłowych i dysfunkcyjnych systemach rodzinnych. Metody badań* [Psychological determinants of relationship formation in functional and dysfunctional family systems: Research methods]. Warszawa, Poland: Wydawnictwo AEH.
- Ryś, M., Agwu Kalu, F., Seroczyńska, K., & Tataj-Puzyna, U. (2023). Formy okazywania miłości w relacjach z najbliższymi osobami a poczucie samotności u młodych dorosłych [Forms of expressing love in close relationships and the sense of loneliness among young adults]. *Kwartalnik Naukowy Fides et Ratio*, *53*(1), 101–111. <https://doi.org/10.34766/fetr.v53i1.1155>
- Sęk, H., & Cieślak, R. (2004). *Wsparcie społeczne, stres i zdrowie* [Social support, stress and health]. Warszawa, Poland: PWN.
- Shmarina, T., Chernov, N., & Kostyuk, G. (2025). The perceived ability to cope with trauma scale: A Russian-language adaptation. *Consortium Psychiatricum*, *6*(3), 5–22.
- Skinner, E. A., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2023). The development of coping: Stress, neurophysiology, social relationships, and resilience. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *74*, 431–456.
- Swick, D., Lwi, S. J., Larsen, J., & Ashley, V. (2024). Executive functioning in posttraumatic stress disorder. *Neuropsychology*, *38*(6), 516–530.
- Szczepański, J. (1978). *Sprawy ludzkie* [Human matters]. Warszawa, Poland: Wydawnictwo Czytelnik.
- Śliwak, J., Brzeziński, M., & Zarosińska, D. (2019). Religijne zmaganie się a poczucie osamotnienia u podopiecznych hospicjów [Religious coping and the sense of loneliness among hospice patients]. *Kwartalnik Naukowy Fides et Ratio*, *38*(2), 365–394. <https://doi.org/10.34766/fetr.v2i38.86>
- Śliwak, J., Reizer, U., & Partyka, J. (2015). Poczucie osamotnienia a przystosowanie społeczne [Sense of loneliness and social adjustment]. *Studia Socialia Cracoviensia*, *1*(12), 61–78.
- Śliwak, J., Zarzycka, B., & Dziduch, A. (2001). Typ samoświadomości a poczucie osamotnienia [Type of self-awareness and the sense of loneliness]. *Przegląd Psychologiczny*, *54*(3), 245–246.
- Troy, A. S., Shallcross, A. J., & Mauss, I. B. (2023). Emotion regulation flexibility. *Emotion Review*.
- Trudel-Fitzgerald, C., Boucher, G., Morin, C., Mondragon, P., Guimond, A. J., Nishimi, K., ... Denckla, C. (2024). Coping and emotion regulation: A conceptual and measurement scoping review. *Canadian Psychology*, *65*(3), 149–162.
- Wasilewska-Ostrowska, K. (2013). Samotność emocjonalna jako jeden z czynników ryzyka uzależnień wśród młodzieży [Emotional loneliness as one of the risk factors for addictions among adolescents]. *Wychowanie na Co Dzień*, *10-11*(241–242), 17–21.
- Weiss, R. S. (1973). *Loneliness: The experience of emotional and social isolation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.