

A R T I C L E S A N D E S S A Y S

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SINGLE, BUT NOT BY CHOICE—ON DEPRIVATION OF
RELATIONSHIPS AMONG POLISH CORPORATE EMPLOYEES*

INTRODUCTION

The area of social relations is an axial dimension of social reality, permeating both what is called personal life and professional work. Relations and relationships can be perceived as a specific level or unit of social organisation, as by Lofland et al. (2006: 126; “Two parties who interact with some interdependence and who view themselves as ‘connected’ to one another, however briefly, form a social relationship”), or by Florian Znaniecki, who saw a social relation as a basic unit of society—a “dynamic system of social actions” as he called it. Znaniecki (1965) wanted to emphasize reciprocity in relations between people. He analysed social

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* This paper is the result of the research project Poles in the World of Late Capitalism: Changes of Biographical Processes in Terms of Professional Careers, Social Relations and Identity at the Time of System Transformation in Poland. The project was carried out in the Institute of Sociology, University of Lodz, in 2014–2018, and was financed by the Polish National Science Centre (NCN) within the OPUS scheme (grant no.: UMO-2013/11/B/HS6/01473). Members of the research team were as follows: Andrzej Piotrowski (head), Kamila Biały, Marcin Gońda, Karol Haratyk and Anna Rosińska.

relations such as the relation between a mother and a child, or between siblings, friends, or lovers.

“Relations” can be understood in two senses: (1) as a quality or dimension of a bond, that is, strong or weak relations—contractual, autotelic, familial, and so forth, and (2) as a specific permanent relationship (friendly, romantic, etc.) between individuals. This distinction is akin to the one between the English nouns “relations” and “relationships.” In this text we are interested in relationships—how people form permanent or temporary unions, but also in relations—what qualities the ties in such relationships have. We focus on relations in personal life: intimate relationships with significant others, that is, the closest possible way people connect, usually in couples, but also in close friendships. Our reflections refer both to the field of sociology of the family, where the analysis of microsystems between individuals is well established, and to relatively newer approaches such as the sociology of the couple (Schmidt et al. 2018) and personal life changes emphasising the growing biographical significance of friendship (Davies 2011).

We have decided to examine intimate relationships because this kind of relation seems to be the most tangible element of the more profound relational experience of most of our narrators, apart from their relations with their parents and siblings (unlike, e.g., relations in connection with membership in non-governmental organisations, activism, political activity, strong community roots, or even friendly intimacy). On the one hand, such a narrowing of strong ties to the level of micro-relationships is consistent with commonly diagnosed individualisation (Franklin 2009). Starting a family or becoming a couple becomes an element of an individual strategy or lifestyle and is sometimes treated as a project. On the other hand, however, it seems to be a stronghold of “the social” in the life of individuals—intertwining them in a more or less permanent way within micro-systems.

Just as the compatibility of the monogamous family based on gender specialisation with the nineteenth-century capitalist system has been noted, or as family solidarity was a way of adapting to life in the People’s Republic of Poland (cf. Giza-Poleszczuk 2004, 2005), so in this paper we reflect on the relationship between contemporary relational forms and the social system in late capitalism. What form or forms of relationship complement the current market order and are compatible with it? What is the structural position of single people? Is the single life an outcome of contemporary conditions or maybe a strategic adaptation?

In the following sections of the paper we will present—albeit briefly by necessity—a panorama of the changes that have occurred in relations and

relationships in social history, which includes the formation of intimate relationships and their consequences for heterogeneous contemporaneity. We also address the transformation of relationships, in particular, marriage in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Then, having outlined the research methods of our study, we discuss the types of relationships identified among the contemporary corporate employees in Poland, focusing on one in particular—namely, the deprivation of relationships, conceived of as a situation of people deprived of, but strongly seeking, relationships that are normatively important for them.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORANEITY?

In the project *Poles in the World of Late Capitalism...* we looked at how the biographical narratives of post-transformation generations of Poles reveal the dilemmas of their lives, as well as at key existential and social issues. Aiming to reconstruct the varieties and dynamics of Poles' biographical experiences, we have focused not only on the sphere of professional careers and individual identity but also on the dimension of social relations, against the background of heterogeneous late capitalist contemporaneity.

Within the project, we were inspired by the earlier theories of social orders and their transformations (cf., Bauman 2000; Inglehart 1977; Weber 1978). We considered late capitalist contemporaneity (Jameson 1991, cf. the review Dembek 2016) to be a heterogeneous reality formed by the interpenetration of various social orders, conceptualized as premodernity, modernity, and postmodernity, for the sake of simplicity (cf. Kordasiewicz 2016; Haratyk, Biały 2018).

The ideal type of *premodern order*, refers to a variant of social order in which the central role is played by community ties, hierarchical dependencies between incumbents of distinct statuses, and the confluence of various dimensions of the ruling order. What is social intertwines with what is economic, and everything is permeated by the underpinning metaphysical ideas of the world order. In contemporaneity, the premodern order manifests itself, among other things, in the dominant role of the familial community within one's biography or profound, extra-professional hierarchies in workplaces.

In opposition to the premodern community, individualism is a focal point of the paradoxes of the *modern type of social order*. On the one hand, according to Tönnies (1963), ties between all individuals loosen: they become indirect; they lose the ever-present emotional meaning, because they are no longer rooted in the shared experience of everyday life. Importantly,

however, individualism makes it possible for the interpersonal dimension of ties to arise. Social relations in the modern era become the arena of intimacy (Weintraub, Kumar 1997) and the appreciation of privacy (Jamieson 1998). This is possible because work becomes an autonomous social sphere, carried out more and more beyond the household and it results in the separation of private and public life. The nuclear family (parents and children) and a lifelong monogamous marriage become the basic normative models of intimate relationships, congruent with the normative gendered division of the sphere of production, which is the domain of men, and the sphere of reproduction, ascribed to women.

Liquidity and inconsistency are two *postmodern* elements in contemporaneity—at least in comparison to modernity, which is perceived as more coherent and orderly. Postmodernity is no longer structured by *Gemeinschaft*—a community based on personal ties, encompassing the whole subject (all areas of social life and individual personality) and constituting the basis for the unity and cohesion of premodern social life (which was later divided into political, economic, cultural, and relational/private spheres). Nor is postmodernity defined by *Gesellschaft*—an affiliation based on the usually conscious involvement of an individual, who satisfies his or her various needs within different associations and organisations.

The modern or premodern social forms present today lack the aspect of structuring or ordering the social world. Rather, they entail contingency, or are the result of individuals' choices, and at the collective level they create a mosaic of assorted forms of bonding.

The modern separation of public and private life seemed to protect private life from the outer world. However, over time, as the domination of work over other spheres of social reality has intensified, the realm of private life has become more and more deeply colonised by work ('system'), which, unlike the realm of private life, never loses its autonomy (Habermas 1981). Life in the late capitalist era is characterised by the pressure of the realm of work on non-work-related aspects of life. This is evident in the experience of time, which, due to longer hours of work and the faster pace of life (Harvey 1990; Rosa 2013), as well as the compulsion to be "busy," forces individuals to exploit themselves in the performance of professional tasks (Fleming 2014). People in higher and more prestigious positions, like most of the participants in this study, experience a sense of precariousness and time poverty, just as do underprivileged people (cf. Cojocar, Rosińska 2018).

Moreover, not only is it not possible to save even a truncated autonomy of life from the ubiquitous impact of the market but the home is no

longer even a fortress besieged by social influences and expert knowledge—a “haven in a heartless world” (cf. Lasch 1977). According to some researchers, the fortress has already been conquered and paradoxical processes of the private switching place with the public are under way. Integration and community are sought in the workplace, while home has become an arena for conflict and gender role negotiations (cf. Hochschild 1983). According to others, under “emotional capitalism” the world of work is subject to emotionalisation, while the sphere of intimacy has cooled—it is intercepted by market logic and hyper-rationalisation (cf. Ilouz 2007).

It seems, however, that in the realm of work there is more happening than just emotionalisation and search for community. The integration efforts motivating or incentivising employees in highly bureaucratic corporations are often “apparent,” that is, they involve activities that the participants realize are in fact useless and are implemented contrary to the official goals set by the employer¹. It has been stressed that the growing role of social contacts in the realm of work is primarily instrumental and dehumanised. In this context, researchers have analysed intensive networking, instrumentalised emotional labour (cf. Hochschild 1983), or even relational labour (cf. Zelizer 2012). These include contacts with partners external to the organisation—customers, service recipients—and relations in more or less stable teams (Haratyk, Biały, Gońda 2017: 147, 155; cf. Dembek 2013, 2016).

Researchers point out that it is not possible to separate the processes of labour market precarisation—which is determined by the growing precariousness of labour forms, leading to instability and uncertainty of employment—from the secondary precariousness of private life (Andrejczuk, Burski 2017). Discussion of the precarisation of the labour market is important for us because even if it does not directly affect the participants of our research, who remain in the privileged sector of full time employment. It increasingly sets the tone for the realm of work in Poland as such (Karolak, Mrozowski 2017). Because of the existing close links between the two spheres, not only the working environment but also the living environment of the individual become unstable from the perspective of modern social order. In contemporary analyses of social relations, scholars diagnose the breakdown or atrophy of ties (Jamieson 1998), which in the case

¹ Apparent actions (Lutyński 1990), the concept was formulated in reference to the reality of the People’s Republic of Poland, and Piotrowski (1998) suggested transposing it to the transformation era.

of Poland is also the result of the social atomisation of the state-socialist era (Kubiak, Miszalska 2004). While in modernity and premodernity the keystone of a bond was the family, currently all over Europe we can observe an increase in the divorce rate with a simultaneous increase in the diversity of family life forms (or social life in general) (Silverstein, Auerbach 2005). The nuclear family—a monogamous heterosexual couple, usually married, with a child or children, is no longer a universal model.

In Poland, the change occurred after a period of the universality of marriage under state socialism and coincides with a record low fertility rate, which is characteristic of the entire Central and Eastern European region (Fihel et al. 2017).² Poles declare that they want to have children (or a greater number of children), and justify the failure to fulfil such procreative plans by the incompatibility of the market system and women's family roles (cf. structural conflict, McDonald 2000, analysis in Poland, Fihel et al. 2017).

The hypothesis of the crisis of the family, however, seems to refer primarily to a relatively recent family form—the nuclear family (Giza-Poleszczuk 2004, 2005). As regards relationships and family configurations today, they go beyond the nuclear family and the following types have been identified: single parents, cohabitants, visiting families (long-distance), groups of friends, reconstituted families, the multi-family, patchwork families (characterised by elective family ties), or the families of same-sex couples (Beck-Gernsheim 1998; Connolly 1998; Szlendak 2010).

Interestingly enough, some researchers note that the transformations of personal and private life did not relegate social bonds to the background but have in fact caused the autotelic nature of the ties to be emphasised. This is accentuated by Anthony Giddens (1992; cf. Jamieson 1998), who writes about the “pure relation” as being autotelic, based on trust and reciprocity, which does not bring material benefits but gives satisfaction and a sense of happiness through a bond with another human being (realised through sexuality, marriage, or friendship). Examples of such readings of the present day also emphasise the importance of personal life's being broader than private life, which is restricted to the space of a person's home (May 2011), and the concepts of “communities by choice,” or “families of choice” (Ukleja 2011).

² The context of state-socialist rule (the People's Republic of Poland, PRL) is particularly important for us, and it is worth emphasising that in past social history forming couples was not as universal (cf. Slany 2002).

In some studies, ties are considered to be of constitutive importance for biographies, as in the case of Katherine Davies' (2011) concept of friendships, which are said to be constructed as new biographical keystones of identity in the face of the weakening and disintegration of premodern or modern ties and structures (family, class, national), or in the case of urban tribes, as analysed by Michel Maffesoli (1996). The nature of ties is also adapted to the new conditions and requirements of international mobility through the creation of transnational forms (Kordasiewicz, Radziwinowiczówna, Kloc-Nowak 2018; Krzyżowski 2013; Urbańska 2015).

Despite the increasing diversity of existing and gradually accepted forms of relationships, such as cohabitation and same-sex couples, the growing proportion of people who are more or less permanently single is also notable. In the 2011 Polish Census, the percentage of one-person households was 25%, compared to 18% in 1988. And although half of these households are single persons over 60, the percentage of younger people who live in such households is growing. The percentage of single-parent families is also growing—from 19.4% in 2002 to 22.8% in 2011 (GUS 2016).

Among single people there are those who consciously choose and cultivate such a lifestyle, and those for whom it is not a question of identity choice and a way of life. Persons choosing singledom as a way of life have been the subject of many theoretical and empirical analyses (Koropeczyk-Cox 2005; Castel 2000). However, this article is not concerned with such cases; it is worth noting that among our narrators, we did not find a representative of that category.

People who are not single by choice are those who have failed to create lasting relationships despite their willingness and attempts to do so. These people experience loneliness and not just living alone. Psychological and psychiatric literature examines the psychological, social, and health consequences of perceiving oneself as lonely (Hawkey, Cacioppo 2010) and analyses the states of solitude as a profound and destructive experience, hindering everyday life (Fromm-Reichmann 1959). The feeling of loneliness as a phenomenon may also occur in coupled people who, for one reason or another, lack interpersonal satisfaction in their relationship (Tornstam 1992), or as personal alienation in people who live in structural systems unfavourable to ties, such as men migrating seasonally to Germany (Fiałkowska 2019). However, such cases are also outside the scope of this article.

We define those who are single and feel lonely as experiencing deprivation of relationships because they feel, according to their own declarations,

deprived of a fundamental aspect of life, which, moreover, they consider a normative model and which is successfully implemented by most of their social environment.

This corresponds to the remarks of some researchers, who consider pairing to be a fundamental relation-forming move, setting the horizon for both paired and single people (Schmidt et al. 2018). In an article proposing a new paradigm of the sociology of the couple, that is, postulating the autonomy of a couple as a unit of social organisation, unattached persons are also cited as an argument for the key significance of the couple:

“Finally, the importance of the couple as a social institution is indicated by numerous studies on living alone, in which the intimate relationship, its prospect, as well as the positive and negative images of the couple are the basic self-defining tools of those who find themselves at such a time in the intimate biography, and the often ambivalent desires they express” (Schmidt et al. 2018: 25).

For both people who are single by choice and those who are not (the lonely), forming a couple is a point of reference: for singles by choice it is a negative point, a non-preferred way of life, while for the lonely it is a positive reference point, seen as a goal and desired biographical course.

The weakening of social ties is generally considered a threat to social integrity (Riesman, Glazer, Denney 1950; Castel 2000). Similarly, for example, the most recent theories on the undervaluation of care in societies call for re-integrating of what seems to be alienated and unfastened, through the concept of care citizenship, which is entailed within the postulated caring democracy (Tronto 2013). Therefore, how does a person form (or not form) relationships in Poland, the stronghold of neoliberal individualism? What are the consequences of general social disaffiliation at the level of individuals and their most intimate relationships (or lack thereof)? How do individuals experience permanent lack of attachment to any significant other? Taking into account that intimate relationships can be considered as the last remnant of the “social” in individuals, the answers to the above questions will be of great importance not only for diagnosing the condition of intimate life, but also for the state of social integration and the possibility of rebuilding ties in a broader sense.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE STUDY GROUP

The methodological framework for the collection and analysis of research material was rooted in the biographical method developed by Fritz

Schütze (2008)³. The empirical database of the study included 80 autobiographical narrative interviews (with 56 people, in some cases follow-up interviews were carried out) conducted in years 2014–2017 in the largest Polish cities with employees of transnational corporations or people who have contact with corporate practices in their professional life. The study covered three post-transformation generations (understood as cohorts in the demographic sense) which were based on the time they entered the labour market. These were: (1) 12 interviewees born in 1966–75 (who entered the labour market in the 1990s), (2) 32 interviewees born in 1976–85 (who entered the labour market around the time Poland joined the European Union in 2004) and (3) 12 interviewees born in 1986 and later (who entered the labour market in the context of the global financial crisis of 2007). In order to contrast the experiences of Poles from the communist era and the aftermath of the transformation, we also conducted two interviews with people born in 1940s and 1960s. All in all 82 interviews were analysed as that empirical database was also supplemented by two autobiographical interviews from a collection of interviews gathered within the *Euroidentities* project (financed under the EU's 7th Framework Programme in 2008–2011). Among the narrators there were 31 men and 27 women.

Since the structural features of contemporary work organisation mean that corporate standards of a project-based work style are no longer characteristic solely of transnational corporations but have infiltrated the entire institutional field (law, finance, medicine, IT, education, consulting, etc.), the study covered various professional categories, including managers and rank-and-file employees in large and small domestic and foreign companies, professionals (IT specialists, engineers, lawyers), entrepreneurs, and freelancers. With such a diverse yet coherent sample, we attempted to answer a number of research questions. How does the sphere of relations fit into the dilemmas of participants in the corporate field (employees of corporations and institutions that have adopted the corporate model of functioning)? How do Poles establish and maintain relationships when these corporate practices also colonise nonprofessional areas of life? What types of social relations emerge from the narrative material? Although biographical interviews necessarily focus on the narrator's ego as an expression of individually interpreted experiences, it is possible to approach these experiences in terms of collective identities (Miller,

³ See the introductory paper in this volume by Biały et al; see also Haratyk, Biały, Gońda 2017.

Day 2012), or generational or national experiences (Każmierska, Schütze 2013), or as an expression of experiencing social bonds, cf. Gabb 2009).

The extensive empirical material provides insight into the complexity of the narrators' experiences in their social—including relational—contexts. Each narrator was analysed in terms of work, social bonds, and identity, and basic dilemmas and the key issues in a given biography were identified in team discussions. In the narratives gathered within the project, the word “loneliness” and the subject of loneliness was a recurring theme among the basic biographical issues. For some of the respondents, social relations were the axis of their dilemmas, for others their basic dilemmas were generally outside the area of relationships with other people. Working on this paper, we have selected narrators for whom relations were of key importance and were elaborated in depth in their narratives. We identified four types of relational modes—forms of bonding and not bonding with people, with particular emphasis on intimate relationships as the closest and “micro” relational forms. The proposed types are a starting point for further analysis, as they do not exhaust the potential relational configurations. In the following section we briefly introduce outlines of these four types of relations, in order to subsequently focus on the form central in this paper, namely, deprivation of relationships.

A TYPOLOGY OF RELATIONAL MODES BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY POLES

In the collection of interviews, the first empirically identified type of relationship is that of a *modern couple*. This includes people in long-term partnerships or marriages, with or without children, for whom the family is a permanent and fundamental element of their life (cf. Szlendak 2010; heterosexual monogamous marriages are still an important part of the social landscape, Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1995). They are characterised by a clear separation between the professional and the personal realm (work and home, public and private), that was part of the modern social order. Despite increasing flexibility of employment forms and the colonisation of the realm of private life by the realm of work, they maintain a work–life balance (Sennett 1998; Gdula 2014). In some cases, this type occurs in a variant in which work has—paradoxically—an unproblematic primacy in the life of the narrator, and is modernity-like compatible with the secondary role of the work of the other person in the couple, who works less and/or focuses on caring for the household (and children). Possible tensions related to the domination of the realm of work are intra-occu-

pational in nature: they concern the specificity of the profession itself (e.g., stress, performing duties under time pressure, an unsatisfactory salary, etc.) rather than the position and status of work in the life of the respondents, which in general is positively evaluated (as a source of individual development). The roles in such relationships, especially in large city environments, are less and less frequently associated with traditional gender divisions, although the patriarchal family model is still present: the man is active in professional and public spheres, while the woman is the custodian of the “hearth” or plays a secondary economic role (such as, among other examples, in the variant of modernisation found in Poland of the state-socialist era, cf. Fihel et al., 2017). This group consisted of 32 out of the 58 respondents, including 15 married persons with children, 5 married persons without children, and 12 childless persons in partnerships.

The second type of relationships is *cold intimacies*, which are illustrated by an example of childless marriage (2 participants). It refers to a situation where relationships are based neither on Giddens’ “pure relationship” nor on romantic love (cf. Giddens 1992; Illouz 2007). They are “cold”, associative but concurrent, linked by the partners’ same priorities in professional life (that is, they are compatible with professional goals). It is a model of a harmonious “relationship/marriage of singles” who have strong but not very close bonds and who live not so much together as side by side. Persons in such a relationship occupy equal, “partner” positions, and the division of responsibilities is functional, aimed at meeting the individual needs of each person. Such “contactivity” of the relation offers stability in the world of uncertainty. Unlike in the case of modern families, there is a “fusion” of the personal and professional spheres. It is a type of covenant between the couple and the outside world, an “*egoïsme à deux*” (cf. Fromm 2000), aimed at the functional fulfilment of mutual needs by the partners, though often putting them in opposition to the outer world. These are relationships turned inwards, isolated from the society, concentrated on the couple or the couple and their children (cf. Haratyk, Biały, Gońda 2017).

The third type is basically a collection of various variants of bond formation—not necessarily as an intimate couple—that go beyond heteronormative monogamy or other forms of relationships, and we have grouped them under the umbrella of *alternative relational forms* (cf. Slany 2002). In a way, under the lack of common acceptance of homosexuality in Poland, even stable same-sex couples operate under this pressure, hence we included them here, alongside other “families of choice” (Mizieleńska 2017). Another alternative bonding practice are polyamorous unions (Schippers 2016). Alternative relational forms are also developing

outside the field of family and intimate relationships: a flourishing of other forms of bonding with people can be observed—more permanent than random encounters, for example, emphasizing the role of friendship as a typically postmodern relationship (Davies 2011) or the establishment of urban neo-tribes, formed, for example, as a result of activism, membership in organisations, associations, or subcultures (Maffesoli 1996). Among the participants of our study, this category includes people in non-heterosexual and polyamorous relationships, people whose basic and strong relational point of reference was a group of friends, circles related to activism (a trade union, a political party), or to other communities—subcultures and hackers.

The fourth empirically distinguished relational *modus operandi* is *deprivation of relationships*, which pertains to the situation of people deprived of, but strongly seeking, relations that are normatively important for them. Our collection included 16 single people (including one single parent) with no experience of a formal relationship and five divorced persons (all with children). Deprivation of relationships can occur in people of any sexual orientation; however, in our collection they are solely heterosexual individuals. None of the 16 unmarried people declared themselves to be deliberately single and not striving to establish romantic relations. The narrators are people who are not alone by choice but who have not managed to establish lasting relationships, despite their willingness and attempts to do so. It would be an exaggeration to claim that these persons are to be permanently single. However, if the point of reference is a traditionally formalised union, the average age for these persons at the time of the interviews was 33 and one quarter years, that is, on average later than the usual age for first marriage, which is 25–29 years.⁴ As the complexity and surprising frequency of this phenomenon in the collection of interviews is an expression—despite everything—of increasingly dominant relational solutions in late capitalism, it seemed necessary to discuss this type extensively. Inspired by a discussion among researchers and experts during a seminar organised as part of the research project in June 2018,

⁴ Central Statistical Office's data indicate that the number of marriages decreased over the last decade and the age of newlyweds has increased over the last two decades. In 2016, most marriages were concluded in the 25–29 age bracket (40.3%) and 30–34 age bracket (28.3%), with ages 20–24 (12.9%) coming third. The number of divorces has been stable for the past decade (1.7 per 1000 persons), with one fifth of them involving divorces of persons below the age of 35. Statistics also indicate a decline in fertility and a shift in the age of highest fertility from 20–24 to 25–34—the median age of women giving birth is 29 years and the median age for the birth of a first child is 27 years (GUS 2017).

when we presented the first outline of the above-mentioned relational forms, we decided to focus in our further analytical work on precisely this relational form. We discuss two contrasting variants: (1) deprivation of relationships combined with a lack of interaction skills, and (2) deprivation of relationships in persons who are highly interpersonally competent.

The following presentation of each contrasting variant of a deprivation of relationships is constructed around two central narrators, a man and a woman, both representing a given variant. We were inspired by the approach of contrasting cases in biographical research; the approach enables us to present the analytical dimensions discovered in the phenomenon while keeping the details of the biographical material (cf. Schütze 2008). As a general rule, one representative of each contrastive type is selected in such situations, preferably representing the common essential characteristics of the type. However, we decided that in the case of the relational phenomena, as we were investigating in the context of a strongly heteronormative and gendered society, it was crucial to illustrate a given variant using a male and female narrator, because doing so enabled us to see analytical themes across gender divisions, as well as to note the role of gender in the processes we were examining.

DEPRIVATION OF RELATIONSHIPS—SINGLE PERSONS WHO WISH FOR A RELATIONSHIP

In addition to persons forming families or relationships of the modern, intimate, and alternative type, the analysis has brought to our attention people who are not in a relationship, but for whom being in a relationship is desirable and sought after, and for whom the absence of a relationship sometimes becomes the axis of their biography. Sometimes it takes the form of a search for romantic love, or sometimes a “pure relationship”. These aspirations and desires are not satisfied. We decided to define this type of relational situation as “relative deprivation of relationships” by analogy with the concept of “relative deprivation” (cf. Walker, Smith 2002), that is, not so much an absolute state of unmet need as a sense of unmet need in a social environment where others have satisfied that need and where it is a normatively expected life course. The phrase “relative deprivation of relationships” (abbreviated to “deprivation of relationships”), underscores the frustration of trying to function within a social environment where there are other people in a relationship, and where being in a relationship is a accepted and normative frame of reference for a given narrator.

For people experiencing deprivation of relationships, the desire for a relationship is not satisfied; it may take different forms, or a different course in the biography, as we have mentioned, because among the narrators we considered to be representatives of this category there were both those who had never been in a relationship, and those who had divorced or had other relationships, or who had had several years of life alone, not by choice. The basic distinction is between persons who are single and lack interpersonal competency (Variant 1) and single persons who are proficient in social interactions (Variant 2).

Deprivation of relationships combined with low interpersonal skills

The first of the variants discussed is deprivation of relationships combined with lack of interactional and interpersonal skills. It describes the experiences of certain narrators, who live with a sense of a continuous lack of normatively and biographically meaningful relationships (stretching from their schooling years to the present). Therefore, the axis of their actions is the search for “pure” (Giddens 1992) and “strong” ties (cf. Granovetter 1983), especially romantic and/or friendship ties, but also those relating to other areas of life (family of origin, professional, or leisure-related). The search for these vital links is strenuous, but because of the lack of appropriate interaction skills, or insufficient or different from commonly accepted modes of communication, they end in fiasco. Communication deficiencies are also a barrier in the professional field, where instrumentalisation of social contact (long-term and intensive networking) is a basic tool for building an individual’s position in the organisation (cf. variant 2). In spite of the difficulties encountered, the narrators are constantly trying to establish new relationships. Two of the narrators, Paweł and Rozalia, illustrate this well.

Paweł is a 35-year-old computer graphic designer from a large Polish city. From an early age, he showed artistic talents and he planned to be an artist in the future. However, under the pressure of demanding parents, he studied computer science, which was supposed to secure his professional success. In learning computer graphic design, he attempted to combine his childhood passion with a way of making a living. With time, however, the graphic design work ceased to satisfy him. It became more and more mundane and failed to yield the expected high financial profits. Contrary to earlier expectations, he was not able to express himself artistically through it either. As a result, for several years now he has not identified himself with the profession, treating it only as a source of income. Currently he

works for a small family advertising company, where he is the only person not related to the owners.

An analysis of Paweł's narrative shows that although he is strongly career-oriented, according to the formula imparted by his parents, his life focuses primarily on attempts to break the perceived existential isolation. Since primary school, he has not stopped looking for "soul mates"—close and deep friendly or romantic relations. The reflected self, that is, his interpretation of the reaction of the social environment to him, is of great importance for his self-image, hence the importance he attaches to proper outfits and fitness. He also tries to use various other tools (e.g., suggestions from self-help books) to ensure his success at social interactions.

Paweł would like to break his loneliness through deep, not superficial, contact, although he realizes that soft skills, in shallow and initially non-committal contacts, matter more when we establish everyday relations, and later when we maintain them—on the basis of similar social status and mutual acceptance. This applies in particular to relationships between men and women, in his opinion. However, his direct and familiar approach and the "over-intellectualised" issues he raises in conversation with other people are usually perceived by the "average" interlocutor as too intrusive and discouraging. Paweł is oriented towards art, high culture, philosophy, and spirituality, and yet he tries to find relations in an environment that prefers popular culture; this seems to be an expression of class differences in his broad social environment. Interestingly, as a spiritual and self-critical man, he perfectly diagnoses his own interactive deficiencies:

It is possible that such a need for emotional fulfilment at work results from the fact that through, I think, a large part of my life [...] and I am still a bit of an outsider and I do not fully realise myself in relations with people [...] such as colleagues, friends, and closer relations. It is possible that if these needs of mine were fully satisfied in these relations with people, then I would not have such a need for this realistic, this artistic, so to speak [...] fulfilment.

The narrator sums up this idea:

[...] about the need for artistic fulfilment [...] about the need of having some close people, and of friends—at least. In fact I can't complain about the lack of friends, but at most about—maybe about the lack of certain skills to make contacts, but...I also mentioned the lack of this closest person. Well, this is some kind of...framework, which encompasses, let's say, my internal life and goals, aspirations, ambitions, plans, dreams.

Despite being aware of his own shortcomings when it comes to social interactions, he is unable to find an effective solution to these problems.

In various places and circumstances (social gatherings, concerts, dating portals, etc.) he is diligently, but unsuccessfully, searching for friendly and romantic relations. These interactions, although quite numerous, remain shallow and insignificant (cf. Haratyk, Biały, Gońda 2017). He is suspended between the need for belonging, for deep relations, and the superficiality of the external world, which cannot understand him. Interestingly, however, despite his loneliness, he lacks criticism of reality (e.g., the excessive expectations of his parents towards him, the shallow relations on which society is built) and is more inclined to see the source of his problems within himself rather than outside.

Also in subsequent workplaces, which might seem to be a natural source of such contacts, he experiences profound disappointments in contact with people. As a result, he is very affected by repeated “rejections” by an environment that does not understand him. In his narrative, he describes the difficult relationships several times, based on nepotism and exploitation, between the management (owners) and employees in the companies in which he has worked so far. These humiliations have not immunised him against contacts with people, but have even reinforced his conviction that relations with people are an autotelic value that determines human dignity:

By a worthy life I mean a life in which my daily relationships with people are healthy and here I mean relationships...in the family, of course, and relationships at work. Healthy relationships at work for me are those in which I am not—I do not feel—humiliated as an employee. I am not a victim of any kind of psychological violence. I can be appreciated at work...this is too much, but, I would definitely feel bad at work being unappreciated as an employee. There is no need to get some continuous evidence of recognition but, at least to be badly...this is a situation that happened to me some time in the past and it was very stressful mentally and now if such a situation happens, then I always take action to get out of it. A moment to gather my thoughts—okay, I guess that’s it as far as a worthy life is concerned.

What is more, in the summary of his self-analysis, he points to the area of work as the one that, despite the failures to date, in fact remains the only source of potentially important relations available to him. In the argumentation, which is strongly focused on his career, there is a clear feedback between professional and relational success. In his opinion, his lack of passion in performing work and his precarious employment conditions are the cause of his melancholy disposition and, consequently, his failures at relationships:

I mean, no, I don’t think I’m not at all suitable for making friends, or to get to know some kind of a woman and...be with her. I just think I’m a little too sad and not

enough sure of what I'm doing now and too defeatist, but this is due to...this feeling of occupational insecurity. So if I had, you know, achieved better career prospects, then I would just be a more satisfied person and people would be less likely to keep their distance from me, yeah. And I would also gain. It would be easier for me to be with a girl. People would be more willing to hang out with me, because I would have more positive energy, the satisfaction that comes from this sense of professional stability.

Thus, the narrator's relationship fulfilment achieved through work depends on obtaining stability of employment, which at the moment is unattainable, and higher wages. Unfulfilled artistically, professionally, and consequently—he says—in terms of relationships, after several years of work in his hometown, he moved to another city, which might open a new field in his search for profound relations. He feels that the relationship potential (the “market” of romantic relations) of the new city is also slowly being exhausted, so he plans to go abroad. Because they are grounded in external expectations, his work and career seem mere substitutes for deficiencies in other spheres. At the same time, he has a certain, albeit not too high, hope that in the future—beyond the work that does not bring him passion—he will be able to find a way to be fulfilled.

This loneliness of waiting for a change (while blaming himself for his fate) gives him a kind of stability. Paweł's story should therefore be interpreted as a way of searching for a biographical metamorphosis—to refer to the terminology of process structures proposed by Fritz Schütze (cf. 2008)—that would allow him to execute his chosen biographical plans, that is, the professional self-development designed by his parents, and the relationship fulfilment he has dreamed of himself. Despite previous failures in the area of relationships, it is important for him to remain firmly oriented towards a collision-free institutionalized scheme of action (education, working according to his parents' plans for him), because only this path can ensure that he avoids the trajectory of loneliness and a lack of relations.

Similarly, Rozalia, a 33-year-old finance specialist currently employed by an transnational corporation, feels very lonely (her story is further analysed in the paper by Gońda in this volume). The superficially dominant theme in her story is her work, which in fact seems to conceal the main problem, that is, her overwhelming loneliness. Her life is a trajectory of loneliness (cf. Schütze 2008)—making further attempts to search for a “pure relationship” and ways to avoid existential loneliness. In her case as well the work is highly instrumentalised, reduced to a source of income, and the only way to protect her from being alone.

Rozalia grew up in a family that consisted of her mother and grandmother—she has had no contact with her father since she was born.

As in Paweł's case, her educational path was imposed by her family. Thanks to her education attainment and speaking several foreign languages, she found professional internships in large companies in Poland and abroad immediately after graduation. Although she was considering going abroad, she first took up a job in accounting at a public sector institution. Discouraged by the routine of her duties and poor wages, after a few years she returned to her original idea and decided to go abroad.

Unlike Paweł, Rozalia has high self-esteem, though she hides it from those around her. As a result, once she went abroad she was very determined to "spread her wings" in her own profession, and not—as is often the case with Polish post-accession emigrants—to work below her qualifications (cf. Fihel et al., 2009). Her emigration was not just economically motivated and stemming from the desire for professional development, but—as in Paweł's case—it was an expression of her search for a balance between work and an "interesting private life" (cf. Benson, O'Reilly, 2009). She reassessed her own needs and decided that work should be—as she herself puts it—an "addition to life". Interested in art and music, she hoped to find more cultural attractions abroad than in her hometown. Above all, however, it was supposed to be an opportunity to establish a greater number of satisfactory relations in a situation where her life, until now, has not met her expectations, mainly in the relationship sphere.

The narrator, like Paweł, has experienced problems in establishing and maintaining relationships from an early age. This seems compatible with her manner during the interview—she speaks quietly, without much emotion and with resignation. She seems withdrawn. Unlike the first narrator, Rozalia seeks the sources of her relationship problems not so much in herself as in her family of origin and external factors. She has a very close relationship with her mother, but she thinks that her mother isolated and sheltered her too much.

In her account, Rozalia refers twice to the experience of a private primary school, where for the first time she was "blocked" in terms of relations. Rozalia followed the egalitarian values of her family home, while she was ostracized and discriminated against by her peers from wealthy homes. It was only in the public high school—a "return to normality"—that she managed to establish several strong friendships that have survived to this day. Her circle of friends, however, was very narrow, closed to outsiders, and thus not entirely satisfying, because "It was always the same people with whom I did everything—trips, concerts, eating out."

Finally, fascinated by French culture, she chose Paris as her emigration destination. She looked for a job after she had moved there, and she spent

the savings from Poland on improving her language skills in the beginning of her stay. After about two months she found a job as a financial auditor in a prestigious law firm. For a person from Poland the position was — as she puts it—an example of a “rare success story.” Over time, the job, although financially satisfactory, proved to be excessively demanding. Contrary to her original expectations, it no longer was just a way to allow her to lead an “interesting life”, but started to dominate her private sphere. She had health problems caused by too much stress and strain, and as the narrator herself says: “I left to have an interesting life, not to work...”.

Like Paweł, Rozalia concentrated on the need to belong and to have profound relations. Meanwhile, during her stay in France, she did not manage to establish relations that she considered satisfactory and meaningful. This concerned both the Poles living there (“I did not have such 100% contact with anyone...”) and the French, with whom—herself equipped with the baggage of Polish culture—she could not find a common tongue.

As a result, her emigration project failed. All the effort she put into work was not compensated for by better earnings and satisfaction with the tasks entrusted to her. Feeling strongly exploited after a couple of years, “I decided to give up my life once again”, as she metaphorically puts it, and returned to her hometown. Thanks to her proficiency in foreign languages and experience of working abroad, she found a managerial position in a corporation.

At the time of the interview, she had been working there for several months and felt that she was finally “in the right place”. Until then, taught by her previous experience, she treated work only as a measure to secure her existence. Currently, she has an opportunity to identify with her work; it brings her satisfaction and self-fulfilment. In this story, the corporation appears as a stabiliser after bad experiences of working in the Polish public sector (low-paid, highly proceduralised work without any prospects for promotion) and abroad (requiring too much physical and emotional effort). After these adventures, for persons whose involvement is lukewarm, working for a corporation gives financial security, clear rules of promotion, and an opportunity to build stability over many years (see the paper by Gońda in this volume).

The experience of a highly demanding work abroad taught Rozalia how important it is to separate work from personal life. She is now focused on valuing her private life, including the area of interpersonal relations, although, as she claims, this sphere is much more difficult to control:

As far as your friends are concerned, you have to take care of them, you have to have time to devote to them, you have to meet them, you have to be interested in what's going on, you just have to meet and talk, you have to—I mean you want to have influence... So you can influence what these relationships look like. But basically you have no influence on what kind of friends you have, who these people are... You can influence what kind of work you take up, but not what people you meet there... It's impossible to plan it...

She expects full commitment from her friends. During her stay in France, she could not find people capable of such sacrifices, so for fear of insufficient emotional input from the other side, she tries not to engage in such relations too much. This also applies to romantic relationships. Although she did not mention such relationships during the initial, spontaneous part of the interview, prompted by the interviewer in the subsequent part, she explained her difficult relationships with men. The narrator is a single woman, who was raised with feminist and liberal values. She grew up without a father and she keeps a clear distance from men in adult life. She has had several short-term relationships, but they always ended in painful breakups. Currently she is not searching hard but still hopes for a “pure relationship” as an end in itself. In her eyes this type of relationship, which is also of a romantic nature, should be non-instrumental, engaging, reciprocal, based on equality—it does not have to be sexual, but definitely friendly. In her narration, the pure relationship appears as a (yet unfulfilled) source of life satisfaction.

Analysis of the examples illustrating the variant of relationship deprivation of people with low interaction skills indicates their life-long attempts to establish relations from scratch. Paradoxically, due to their lack of greater competence in establishing relations, the narrators analysed are less inclined to limit the field of interactive searches to their closest social milieu and more inclined to extend it to other areas of the country (such as Paweł) or abroad (such as Rozalia, and ultimately Paweł). Spatial mobility is driven not only by economic needs, but also—at a certain biographical stage—by the need to clearly define the balance between the sphere of work and private life, and thus to find close and strong friendly or—especially—romantic relations. Despite the constant lack of fulfilment in this respect, the respondents do not give up and use new ways to find important ties.

The narrators discussed in this section are united by a sense of loneliness and a lack of ability to establish deeper relationships. However, there are differences between them—Rozalia has a circle of people close to her (friends, closest family), even though the circle is limited and insufficient,

while Paweł's relationship landscape seems to be really empty. This may be related to the generally higher social skills of women, who, even when alone, have some points of reference in terms of relationships. Men experience loneliness more profoundly (Franklin 2009).

Relationship deprivation combined with high interpersonal competencies

Among those who at the time of the interview were single, contrary to their preferences, there were also people who, unlike those described in the first variant, have high social competences, which are often directly linked to their working environment. Relationship deprivation combined with high efficiency in interpersonal and social skills is a paradoxical situation of high interaction skills, associated with a dense world of numerous but "weak" ties in professional life (cf. Granovetter 1983), which facilitate integration in the working environment but are not meaningful for the individual. Among the narrators who were single and interpersonally skilled, the majority were about 30 years of age, but there were also two women over 40 who raised children on their own. The people in this group are mostly women, but our intention was to show the common experiences of men and women within each variant, so we have illustrated it, as in the previous variant, with narrators of both genders.

In interviews, we often asked what the work of the narrators actually involved and though it was difficult for us to get into the details of complex processes and algorithms one thing was clear: social interactions have penetrated contemporary workplaces at different levels. Interactional proficiency in the modern realm of work manifested in various ways: intensive networking, sometimes bordering on quasi-social practices (e.g., a sort of professional interest in the private lives of colleagues), managing and interacting within a team, contact with external clients, and interpersonal training sessions—both in the capacity of a participant and an instructor.

Proficiency in these activities underpins success in different workplaces at varying levels: from the simple factor of being a well-liked person through the capacity to design advanced team or group processes, which are sold to clients in the form of 'solutions'. The narrators undertake relational work, which means, in case of economic activity such as work that they engage in the effort of differentiating (categorising) meaningful social relationships. At each stage of the differentiation, they produce negotiated meanings of these relationships (Zelizer 2012). This often involves instrumentalising their contacts with people.

The saturation of the realm of work with interactions causes exhaustion, interaction overload, and interaction burnout, after which there is no room left for deeper personal relations. It seems the corporate environment generates this type of *modus operandi* with no habits to limit the kind of interaction that goes beyond the capabilities of the individual.⁵ The narrators in this category are not only single, they usually have a limited social life outside the workplace. Closer relationships and especially the presence of the significant other or a life partner is for them an object of desire or even dreams.

We will illustrate this variant by referring to two people working in corporations — Iza and Krystian. Iza is a 30-year-old IT specialist working for a multinational corporation and carrying out software training courses for customers all over the world. Her work is characterised by advanced de-territorialisation. Extreme international mobility is required of her and she spends at least 60% of her working time abroad. At first she seemed to have been seduced by the realm of work (“worldliness,” air flights, luxury hotels, fancy restaurants). Over time it has become apparent that this type of work is extremely demanding and the private time of the employee is not respected (when on a business trip, every hour is devoted to work; time-consuming updating of the training programs is required day-by-day, overtime).

Krystian is a 27-year-old team leader who, despite his brief experience, manages a team in a corporation that offers solutions for designing IT processes for external clients, including corporate ones (his story is further analysed in the paper by Gońda in this volume). One special feature of his professional situation involves the adjustment of his working hours to the American time zone, where his main client is based (he works between 2 pm and 10 pm Polish time). Right from his first job at the age of 19 and his internship as a student an important aspect of his professional life has always been his ability to communicate with people, including being fluent in foreign languages. He strives to be well liked. Good contacts with foreign customers can be converted into potential for a job change and moving abroad. His soft skills are constantly developed through professional training and subsequent evaluations (cf. Dembek 2016).

⁵ However, we may also note that this kind of interactional over-saturation goes beyond the managers in multinationals and is also found in many entry-level service jobs, E.G. in retail, or food services, where employees of corporations such as Starbucks are expected to make and maintain human yet standardized contact even with fleeting customers ordering coffee at the counter.

Unlike Rozalia and Paweł, both Iza and Krystian have taken to the field of soft skills like ducks to water. These skills are an important part of their everyday work. Krystian emphasizes how important they are in climbing the successive levels of the organisational hierarchy:

Because within three years, I managed to jump to the position of team leader. So, yeah, I don't know if it's because I'm just...such a communicative person—that I'm open to people. It's cool, because I, for example...maybe it's also some kind of defect of mine, because I'm trying to make sure that, let's say, to some extent every person has a positive opinion about me.

At the same time, Krystian points out that it results from his disposition—he strives to be liked and at the same time makes contacts easily. As far as the mode of Iza's work is concerned, it is conditioned on the one hand by geographical mobility—in order to perform official tasks she has to move constantly—and on the other hand by the nature of these tasks, that is, training:

[...] and it's like the plane's at 7:20, so I have to get up at 5 in the morning, more or less... On Monday, yeah. [amusement] You have to pack your bags beforehand, so on Sunday you're thinking about your job, in fact. Well, yes. In general, all weekend long—you know, I think I'm flying on Monday; I have to get up on Monday morning. So that [amusement]...it's pretty bad [...] I get there about 11–12. It's time for lunch [...] now it's going to be like that, at 1:00 p.m. the training will start, until 5 p.m. And after the training I often have some meetings with someone, because I have to discuss something; processes and training. Or you have to do something else suddenly—suddenly do it. So I finish this by 5 p.m., this training, let's say. But then, you know, you have to clean up the room, collect all the things, talk to people, answer any questions. They might have some. In the meantime, some emails have come during the day, so I reply to these emails, too. Yeah. So I collect my things, I meet somebody else, if necessary, when there is a need. [...] Sometimes I just get ready for the next day and, well, I sit in the hotel room... Sometimes, well, somewhere at dinner usually, I mean, not always, sometimes we go somewhere together. Well, people who—I don't know, want to—who like one another more maybe...but these are outings, some dinners somewhere. Because you have to eat something, you know [amusement].

Travelling means that Iza's Monday's start very early with air travel, and training, which by its nature consists in constant contact with people, and although theoretically it ends at 5 p.m., in fact it extends to informal conversations and quasi-social meetings in the evenings. During and after her work, Iza carries out intensive interactive work (face-to-face and online), which is the core of her job, in addition to the preparation of IT-related contents of the training.

Her success depends on correct recognition of the needs of the people for whom she prepares the training (training is adapted to the processes

taking place in a specific department of the company). Her job requires responsiveness in recognising and meeting the needs of individuals. From other parts of the interview we know that in Iza's case there is a tension between the regime and requirements of her employer and her sense of empowerment—the corporation sets expectations that are difficult to meet, but it is Iza's creativity that largely determines how her task is performed. With time, she has come to lack the feeling that her work is meaningful.

Training and coaching skills themselves require high social and interpersonal competences (working with group processes, one-to-one contact in the case of a given participant's problems, etc.). Individuals working in corporations participate in trainings to learn new skills or standardising practices. Often these trainings concern so-called soft skills. Krystian presents training as an indispensable component of the corporate promotion path:

Before I got 'number four,' I had to go through something like a development centre. And there, there was training, you know. Solely in leadership, I would say, and they were supposed to develop solely leadership skills, you know, in terms of human resources management. [...]

Also, what's cool about this company is the possibility of training, right? People, in order to develop, can—as I said, there is this training camp at the development centre, you know. It's also more like personal skills. Competences, you know, for a team leader, but also some soft skills, possibly...you can go into communication, such things. You see that you have a problem with an email communication...You don't know what an email to the customer should look like, right? And such training is also provided, so it also helps them to develop in such a company, right?

Working in a corporation, people like Krystian learn not only by developing their own talents in interpersonal contacts and management, but also by standardising and professionalising everyday communication practices. The realms of Iza's and Krystian's work, although they differ from each other, are saturated with interpersonal contacts. Their narration shows that professional success results from, among other things, the ability to establish contacts easily and maintain relationships, long-term and intensive networking, and "relational work". They are successful in this field, and at the same time this high capital of social skills does not go beyond superficial business contacts and does not turn into more permanent social bonds.

The extensive working time is a problematic element for both Krystian and Iza. Iza notices that over-intensive work makes it impossible for her and other busy people to establish a relationship ("to form a valuable rela-

tionship with someone”), causes loneliness, makes it impossible to be active in an outside-of-work life (“...and I forget about this normal life. So, seeing [...] friends, I don’t know, maybe family. Following your passions. I don’t know, community involvement”). It turns out that Iza is too busy not only to maintain but also to establish a romantic relationship:

And there was also this situation, some time ago. I was dating this guy. We had a date and we set up a date for the next time, but I never could make it. And I wrote him, okay. [...] [amusement] I mean, he knew what it was like, what my job was like, and so on. I saw him on...August 15, and I told him, I can meet you on September 10. [laughs] Yeah, that guy was a doctor, so he’s also often on call; he’s got limited time. So, to make it possible.

Interviewer: *Yeah, well, he must have some understanding what it’s like. [laughs] But in order to synchronize his schedule with my schedule, it turned out that we could only meet on September 10th. And we didn’t meet; he wrote me that in the meantime he met someone else. [amusement]*

The tightly stretched daily schedule and the exhaustion during her short stays at home means that it is impossible for her to go on a date. Krystian speaks very similarly about the lack of room for relations:

So far, well, unfortunately, because of the fact that I’ve filled up the day...I come back late; I get up at 9:00 a.m.; breakfast, 11:00 a.m.; I’m at the gym; later I’m at work; I’m back late again; so there’s so little time for such, let’s just say, I don’t know—purely social meetings. I don’t know, somewhere, like, go out on a date somewhere or something like that, right?...Or even to meet someone at all. Even, you know, some—some girl. It’s hard. Well, that’s what weekends are for, isn’t it? You can always do something out there, downtown. [amusement] No, I’m laughing, but well, here we are, in that regard, for the time being. It’s hard because I’ve just filled up my day, right? Also, let’s put it this way, well, I won’t go on a date for, I don’t know, dinner, at 10:00 a.m., right?

At the same time, both Krystian and Iza long for deeper relationships. However, even when Iza finally has time to do something outside of work, she has no energy left to do it:

During the weekend, to meet someone...also to talk about what my week was like, just to talk to other people, to share. It’s a little easier then. Sometimes I don’t feel like seeing anyone at all, because of the fact that I was with people all the time and focused on people. [amusement] And now, for example, I am very tired, when it’s the final stage of these training courses. Well, I was somewhere yesterday—well, I was in Warsaw this week, but I also had a lot of work to do. And yesterday I went out somewhere, but also I came home earlier, because I was just tired and I was very sleepy. I feel like I’m overworked in general, at the moment. I didn’t have any longer vacation either; I had—I think I had a week only, during the May weekend.

Iza deals with an overload of professional interactions that do not generate relationships. In this context, the professional realm is seen as a refuge for informal interactions. This is a situation where interaction and communication are separated from the relationships. It could be said that these narrators “*have interactions but not relationships*”.

How is it possible that people who are highly socialised and have such advanced interpersonal skills that those skills are part of the work they successfully sell on the labour market, simultaneously stay alone, contrary to their desires, and do not form valuable relationships outside their working environment? It is certainly physically challenging due to the fact that their working hours—their length and time in the case of Krystian, and extreme mobility in the case of Iza—make it difficult to have regular contacts outside of the workplace. On top of that, there is exhaustion and “lack of space” for relationships. Krystian, who thinks he was influenced by his family and parted with a girlfriend who was deemed not right for him, wonders himself how it is that he is so successful at work while his personal life, as he puts it, is a failure:

I see it this way, that someone who at work—for example, I don't know, there is a person who, let's say, a person, a Mr X or Mr Y, who at work is simply exemplary. A doctor, right, or, I don't know, a dentist, whoever—he is just ideal, but at home, not necessarily. He'll come home and then he can be, you know...a drug addict, an alcoholic, or so on, and, you know, you don't see it, do you? Because at work he is fulfilled—fantastic...Myself, for example. It's okay at work. It's different after work, yeah, it's different...because there are completely different situations...different types of situations—situations that I also have to deal with. You react differently. I don't know...maybe at work I am actually the blacksmith of my own fate, in part. Somewhere there...I manage to achieve something and so on, but after work, I don't know, maybe my personality switches, right?

Krystian offers us an interpretation in the spirit of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde—Dr Jekyll is a professionally fulfilled employee who, outside the realm of work, transforms into Mr Hyde—a lonely loser in the sphere of relationships. But is this really about a “personality-switching” mechanism between successful work relationships and failed private life? Or is it rather the personification of what Illouz (2007) talked about—the communicative *modus* conquers the realm of work, and the sphere of intimacy is not so much over-rationalised and standardised, as in her view on cold intimacies, but simply drained, and there are not enough resources and energy for it?

It is believed that after the time of the modern separation between the private and the public, the realm of life was colonised by techno-

cratic, expert, and rationalisation discourses. In accord with Illouz and Hochschild, this process can be viewed from the opposite angle—changes in the realm of work were inspired by private life. However, Illouz and Hochschild describe symmetrical processes: the spheres affect each other mutually. In the case of people who have high work-related social competences and who are experiencing relationship deprivation, we can say that there is a one-sided process of the drainage of the social and personal from their non-professional life, while their communality, personality, and self are harnessed in the service of work (cf. Fleming 2014). In this way, individuals who are not necessarily workaholics and not necessarily split personalities are “drained” of their human aspects, which, metaphorically speaking, enter the bloodstream of corporations. They have neither time nor strength for social life or for establishing intimate relations. It seems that their relational capacity has been exhausted.

CONCLUSIONS

The variant of loneliness discussed last, involving people who often combine lack of relationship experience with high social competences, which are used or even exploited in professional life and remain unused in life outside work, is symptomatic of our times. Iza and Krystian represent different professions with different responsibilities, but they are united by the fact that interpersonal skills are crucial to their work and are an element of the correct and successful execution of their professional duties. Despite their undoubted brilliance at interacting and their use of interpersonal intuition at work, their lives are devoid of meaningful relationships outside their professional lives—even though such proficiency at interaction should help in establishing those relationships. They feel lonely. The colonisation of their personal dimension through work does not so much affect the non-professional sphere, as it actually leaves no room for the non-professional use of their interactional proficiency, which, after all, was originally, in the social genealogy, associated with the realm of life, autotelic bonds, and creating ties.

Paweł and Rozalia operate within the same labour market but interpersonal skills are not as highly needed in their case and to a certain extent, they even operate professionally despite the lack thereof. Unlike with Iza and Krystian, in the case of Paweł and Rozalia there is a convergence of alienation in their professional and personal lives, which seem more typical through the consistency of problems in both spheres (cf. on loneliness, Hawkey, Cacioppo 2010).

So is single life a result of modern conditions or a strategic adaptation? On the one hand, living alone does seem to be such a product—working conditions in a corporation often leave no room for personal life. This can have negative personal and professional consequences—being in a couple is still seen as desirable by the narrators. On the other hand, being single can be seen as a kind of adaptation. Being single as part of a phase in the life cycle or as a more permanent feature of the biography has functional aspects for organisations because it does not provide individuals with alternative realms of commitment and enables them to “commit to work in full” (long working hours, with a not necessarily effective work model, are the norm in Poland). Thus, single persons can either devote themselves completely to work—either by choice, like the singles not analysed here, or against their preferences—or they can seek a relationship based on a specialisation of roles in which one partner is more involved in the professional life and the other in homemaking.

In both variants of loneliness, most of the narrators were women. Our sample was not representative, of course, but this may indicate a broader pattern, which requires further research on representative samples. On the other hand, due to different patterns of men’s and women’s socialisation, women on average have higher soft skills, e.g. empathy and interpersonal contacts. This would explain why, among singles not by choice working in the corporate environment, interpersonally proficient women are more common than interpersonally skilled men—the high professional involvement of women contributes to their loneliness more significantly than in case of men, despite their high social competences. However, their prevalence also among lonely people with lower interpersonal skills indicates that gender and its operation in the labour market may be important.

At present, men with families are the most likely to be employed and to be paid the most, while having children negatively affects employability and the wages of women (Fuszara 2007). If gender patterns discussed above operated also outside our sample, being single would not have negative professional consequences for women and could even be beneficial to them in the eyes of employers. Perhaps corporations tolerate or even prefer single women to single men? In this vein, not being in a relationship may be not just the result of an exploitative work style, but also a biographical adaptation of women to work under the conditions of late capitalism.⁶

⁶ It seems that people who raise a child on their own are the most disadvantaged: on the one hand, they have to make sacrifices for their work, on the other, they do not have support

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the inspirations of our project colleagues, Kamila Biały, Karol Haratyk, and Andrzej Piotrowski, and to thank participants of the seminar on 18 June 2018 in Lodz, especially Adam Mrozowicki, for prompting us to elaborate on the relative deprivation of relationships category and sharing insightful references. We would like to thank Katarzyna Dębska, Kaja Kaźmierska, Przemysław Sadura, Jarosław Urbański and Katarzyna Waniek. Anna Rosińska is grateful to Agata Dembek for an inspiring discussion on relations in late capitalism at an earlier stage of work.

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in terms of care-taking duties from the other parent. Moreover, they probably find it even more difficult than childless people to save time and energy to establish a new relationship.

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Abstract

In studying contemporary transformations of social relations and family life, researchers and social theorists have been focused on the increased diversity of forms of bonding, coupling and other interpersonal connections. When single people are discussed, either it is to emphasize the disintegration of their ties and the crisis of the family, or their single life is considered as an identity choice. The aim of this text is to look at the experience of singleness not by choice among contemporary corporate employees in Poland and to try to set this experience against the background of a broader social reality, especially the reality of professional work. The text also examines the relationship between relational forms (including being single) and the social system in late capitalism. The experiences of people who are not single by choice are discussed and contrasting variants for people whose single situation is associated with low interpersonal skills and for those with an interactional proficiency are distinguished. In the conclusion, the authors are looking for patterns of connection between being unwillingly single and operating on the late capitalist labour market.

Key words: social relations, deprivation of relationships, late capitalism, Poland, biographical research

SAMOTNI NIE Z WYBORU — O DEPRYWACJI RELACYJNEJ WŚRÓD POLSKICH PRACOWNIKÓW KORPORACJI

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Abstrakt

W badaniach współczesnych przemian relacji społecznych i życia rodzinnego uwaga badaczy i teoretyków koncentruje się na zwiększonej różnorodności form łączenia się w pary i inne układy interpersonalne. Jednocześnie jeśli mówi się o osobach samotnych, to ich sytuację relacyjną opisuje się bądź jako objaw rozpadu więzi i kryzysu rodzinnego, bądź jako wybór tożsamościowy. Celem tego tekstu jest przyjrzenie się doświadczeniu samotności wśród współczesnych pracowników korporacyjnych w Polsce i próba ujęcia tego doświadczenia w szerszym kontekście społecznym, a zwłaszcza w kontekście pracy zawodowej. Analizowany jest również związek między formami relacyjnymi (w tym bycie singlem) a systemem społecznym w późnym kapitalizmie. Przedmiot rozważań stanowią doświadczenia osób, które są singlami nie z wyboru, co pozwala wyróżnić kontrastowe ich warianty, na przykład posiadanie niskich kompetencji interpersonalnych wraz z wysokim poziomem umiejętności interakcyjnych. W podsumowaniu zostają zarysowane

wzory powiązań między byciem singlem nie z wyboru a funkcjonowaniem na późno kapitalistycznym rynku pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: relacje społeczne, deprivacja relacyjna, późny kapitalizm, Polska, badania biograficzne