

*Bogusława Piasecka, Krzysztof Gerc, Iwona Sikorska*

Jagiellonian University

Institute of Applied Psychology

## SIBLINGS – A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF DEIDENTIFICATION PROCESSES

### Abstract

The article presents the analysis of interviews with adults who recall their relations with siblings. Differentiation processes are taken into consideration with a particular concern. Deidentification processes determine how siblings, especially of the same gender, develop individual characteristics, sense of identity in interests, views and manner. The theoretical background to the conducted study is F.F. Schachter's (1976, 1978) concept and W. Toman's (1961) theory of family constellations considering the connections between birth order and personality traits. F.F. Schachter's deidentification concept concerns which sibling pairs differ the strongest and presents developmental function of this process.

**Key words:** siblings, family constellations, deidentification processes, identification, rivalry

### Introduction

Cain and Abel, Antigone and Polynices, Hansel and Gretel, Kai and Gerda are sibling archetypes which have placed in world culture and survived in people's consciousness. They are examples of emotionally multicoloured relations between siblings, there can be found care, love, devotion, conflict, jealousy and so extreme envy that might be fatal. They let us become familiar with these emotions in real brother-sister relations. Research on family usually considers pairs parents-children or parents. Siblings have been neglected, the influence of relations between brothers and sisters on their later friendship and intimate relationship was undervalued. Psychoanalysts make much of a contribution to conceptualize brother-sister relationships (Walewska, 2011). The First International

Conference of Two Section of the European Federation for Psychoanalytic Psychology with the title “Siblings, Rivalry and Envy – Coexistence and Concern” took place in Kraków in 2011. The presented papers<sup>1</sup>, mainly based on clinical research, raised the most important aspects of siblings relations and coincided with other research, not only psychoanalytic paradigm. The most common subjects described in the psychology literature are the reaction of the older sibling to the appearance of the younger one, impairment, sibling incest (Bank, Kahn, 1997), the loss of sibling (Pantke, Slade, 2006) and the moderating role of parents and other adults in creating relations between sibling (Piotrowski, 2011; Schachter et al., 1976, 1978). The problems and conflicts in families are coherent with the issues reported by psychological practitioners. Among theories concerning developmental regularities of sibling relation, the A. Goetting’s (1986) theory describing developmental tasks at successive stages of family development and frequently quoted W. Toman’s (1961) theory of family constellations are noteworthy. A. Goetting determines sibling tasks, which changes with the family development. A sister is a playmate and brother may give the emotional support in childhood and in adolescence children solidarity facilitates restructuring of the family system, thereby it creates favourable conditions for the family development. Sibling relationships constitute the training for cooperation, sharing, loyalty and separation.

In adulthood siblings may help each other, give advice in their parenthood and later share the care of ageing parents. W. Toman’s conception assumes that children are trained specific standards of behaviour on the basis of their birth order. The older siblings are demanded to be protective towards their younger brother or sisters and more responsible and mature. While the younger siblings develop adaptive skills and tendency to carefree behaviour. In 1976 F.F. Schachter with team published their findings of the survey interviews on sibling similarities and differences. The respondents were undergraduates from two- or three-child families. The questionnaire, consisted of four parts, concerned the assessment of the level of identification and diversification between respondents and their siblings. One part of the questionnaire examined the retrospective evaluation of parents’ attitude towards respondents’ siblings. The research results prove that in two-child families the level of deidentification – differentiation is high regardless of children gender, but in three-child families the highest level of deidentification was between the first and the second child of the same sex, the second-highest level was observed between the first and the third child. The intermediate level of deidentification was between the second and the third child. Deidentification facilitates taking up different activities, enables the development of separate interests and predestinates to individuation. Interpreting the general findings, the authors referred to psychoanalytic theories and proposed a thesis,

---

<sup>1</sup> Conference materials, EFPP, PTPP Conference, Kraków 2011.

that deidentification is a mechanism that simplifies solving sibling rivalry and consequently Cain complex.

Similar conclusions were reached by the team of researchers under F.F. Schachter's direction (1978). The study in which mothers gave their opinion about their children, enriched the conception of parental contribution in weakening or strengthening the deidentification process. Parents through delegation processes (Stierlin, 1998) or parental projection (Bowen, after Goldenberg, Goldenberg, 2006) influence relations between sibling intensifying or calming rivalry. Gabbard's (2010) theory suggests taking into consideration complementarity and temperamental symmetricalness in family relation between a parent and child. The above conclusions let us debunk the myth of treating all children in family equally. The 'misfit' or 'unselected' child feels less loved by parents what is very often reinforced by another important people from outside the nuclear family (cf. Joyce, 2011). Not only parents 'choose' children, siblings do the same, in large families siblings pair up. S.P. Bank and M.D. Kahn (1997) describe it in a thorough analysis of sibling relations based on the psychotherapeutic work experience with individuals and families. Pairing up expressed by more frequent shared games or activities and greater loyalty is not connected with gender and age similarity but developing personality traits. Mostly the first and the third child pair up, these pairs have lower level of rivalry than between the first and the second child.

Since the dawn of time rivalry is a part of relations between brothers and sisters. J. Mittchel (Walewska, 2011) considers that appearance of an infant, which takes older sibling's place and becomes a rival, as a threat to complete loss of parents' love and rejection of the older child for the new one. Similarly, the second and every next child in family have no access to the blissful times of parents and the first-born triangle, hence they may feel isolated and excluded from family.

Children continuously compete for attention, favour and parent's recognition and they cope with the frustration of not being just one.

Parents may neutralize anxiety and frustration through containing, thereby they soothe rivalry, jealousy and envy. On the other hand, sibling means having mutual care, identification object, and structuralizing inner child's word and supportive development influence (Cole, 2011; Whitman et al., 2007). Sibling relations facilitate the process of forming interpsychological and intrapsychological personality, the relations enable them to experience the mutuality and exchange, the fight and forgiveness.

Siblings make important objects of reference in psycho-sexual development (Bank, Kahn, 1997). Brother or sister is the first alike/different person in the face of whom the sexual identity develops. The first naked person that a child gets to know is usually its sibling, then the body is compared and the child learns the differences and similarities. Siblings may be the source of initial erotic experience for each other during sexual plays. Bank and Kahn describe the cases

of crossing the bounds of sexual play between sibling and analyse the results of incest on the further psychosexual development of the children and their partnership in adulthood. Incest occurred when children felt neglected by parents.

The relations with sibling also influence the development of children's resilience. The model of internal and external resources shaping the resilience of individuals (Constantine et al., 1999) indicates that the value and course of the sibling relationship may make so-called external assets which form the internal assets, that is high self-esteem, autonomy, sense of meaning and purpose in actions. Enriching the internal assets enhance the ability of an individual to regain the balance after hard and sometimes traumatic experiences and its competence to protect, self-appease and repair.

It can be established that sibling relations are the base for partnership, friendship and the position in a group. Thanks to relations with a brother or sister the child has a chance to acquire the ability to tolerate other people and their dissimilarity. In everyday sibling relations the need for assimilation and differentiation forms at the same time.

## Method

This study concerns the sibling relations from the perspective of adults. The aim of the research is to describe and understand the processes of deidentification – separation from brother or sister and development of individual characteristic.

There were constructed two research questions at the stage of planning:

1. How are sibling relations shaped within the space of successive developmental stages.
2. How does deidentification process proceed between siblings.

The subjects were people from different positions in family constellations to obtain the point of view of the relation of older sister, older brother and younger sister and younger brother. The authors selected people recommended by their acquaintances, who agreed to take part in the research and gave their phone numbers. The research was conducted in April and May 2011, in the form of free form tape-recorded interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes. The subjects were informed about the topic of the conversation, that is *We're going to ask you about relations with your siblings*. The duration of interviews was dependent on the openness and candidness of each subject. After the fieldwork, the transcription of the interviews was accomplished. The transcribed material was read to select the main topics, then the material from all interviews was collected with reference to the main topics. The selected topics were entitled: main characters, the earliest memory, deidentification, rivalry, care and play, psychosexual development.

## The interviews analysis

The following analysis contains numerous quotations from the subjects. The quotations are written in italics. The anonymity of subjects is remained in order to prevent from their identification. Four people were interviewed, they are marked with capital letters MM1, MD2, KE1, KN2 in this paper.

### Main characters

The subjects, their sibling and parents are presented below. MM1 is a 36-year-old man, having higher education in arts. He is married with no children and he is an older brother in his family of origin. His sister is 32, she is married with three children. She does not work, she is a housewife. She has secondary education.

MM1's father is 63, he has higher education. He was a teacher but he took early retirement. MM1's mother is 60, she has secondary education and still works. The subject has a good relationship with his family of origin. When he meets his sister they *always have a lot to talk about*. MM1 found the proposal for an interview on relations with sister interesting, and he span the tale spontaneously just after the introductory question.

The next subject is MD2, a 31-year-old man with higher technical education but he does not work in his field. He is in the service sector. He is married with no children. His wife graduated in psychology and work as an educational psychologist. MD2 is the middle child in his family of origin, he has 32-year-old brother and 22-year-old sister. His brother is married and he has a small child. The brother, as the only one in the family, has secondary education and *never applied himself to his studies and did not want to enter university*. The MD2's sister is an undergraduate and lives with parents. MD2's parents have secondary education and are in the service sector. His father is 57 and mother is 62. MD2 describes the relations with his brother as conflictive, similarly to relations with his father. They do not meet very often. Family parties usually ends with a row. He has very good relations with his sister and mother. The subject described his family of origin spontaneously and freely.

KE1 is a 25-year-old woman with higher pedagogic education but she works off and on as a waitress or receptionist. She is the youngest child in her family of origin. She did not start a family and she is not in a matrimonially oriented relationship either. Her older sister is 31, she has a partner and a small son. She has secondary education. Another sister is 29, she has university education. She is married with two daughters. She said her father is *unknown*. Their mother died when KE1 was five. The three girls were brought up by their grandparents, their mother's parents. The subject spoke about her parents perfunctorily and reluctantly, whereas she talked a lot about her sisters, especially the oldest one,

who she has very close relations with. More detailed questions had to be asked during the interview because KE1's statements were laconic. KE1's non-verbal signals signified her emotional agitation, thus the interviewer talked over KE1's state. KE1 said she was fine and wanted to continue the conversation.

KN2 is a 83-year-old woman, a sister of a deceased brother. She has not completed higher medical education. When she was 70 she stopped working. She has been a widow for ten years. She has a son and daughter, two grandsons, two granddaughters and two great-granddaughters. Her brother was two years older, he had higher education. He was married with a son. Their parents had vocational secondary education, their father died at the age of 80 and mother at the age of 77. At the beginning KN2 was doubtful whether the interview with her will be useful. With the unfolding conversation, she become more spontaneous and it was visible that evoking her memories pleased her (she smiled and she went into detail). At the end, she thanked for *the trip to her childhood*.

### The earliest memory

Every interview was started with a question about the earliest memory connected with brother or sister and it was the invitation to bring the childhood back at the same time. The older brothers remember the moment when their parents told them that they were expecting a baby. MM1 and Md2 could describe the situation in detail.

MM1 was four when his parents told them that there would be another baby in the family. He did not remember his emotional answer but the thought of having sibling was with him *always*.

MD1: *When my sister was born, I grew accustomed to her, I took care of her.* MM1 remembers his sister as *a powerhouse of energy*. She was full of ideas and always ready for experimentation.

MD2 remembers the conversation with his mother and father about the expected sister. Parents told him, an 11-year-old boy, and his a year older brother about their sister just before labour. Both brothers were astonished and they said: *we're so old and there will be a baby? When parents brought her home I kissed her feet and hands, we were pleased. We were taking care of her, my brother even could replace the nappy of her. I was afraid of hurting her but he wasn't.* MD1 remembers his brother as a boy who is afraid of nothing, *a daredevil, and a pugnacious boy who always achieved what he wanted*. They still have the picture of the sister as a little girl demanding care and help.

KE1 evoked the childhood memories with difficulty. *I've never thought about it, I remember it indistinctly*. After a few minutes of silence she recalled about a happening during breakfast when she was five or six and her middle sister *poured chocolate over her head. I couldn't wash it in the shower*. The subject talked very little about her early childhood, she remembers better her past from

adolescence. She remembers her middle sister as a swaggering tomboy who had her own life and the oldest sister as a candid girl and remembering about others.

The first KN2 memory is when she was three or four: *mum was looking for us, she was calling and spread her arms so that we were running to her and hugged.* She also remembers a visit at her family's when she was five or six and together with her two-year-older brother teased their younger cousin, who provoked them, *he hit and pushed us because he was jealous so we integrated against him.* KN2 was interested in everything what her brother did: *I was stalking and imitating him.* What she remembers very well from her childhood was the constant conflict between her father and brother which was present for all their lives.

## Care and play

Two interviews were conducted with the representatives of two children families, and another two with the representatives of three children families.

MM1 is an older brother, KN2 is a younger sister. In MM1's family there is a four year gap between sibling, between KN2 and her deceased brother was two years difference. The older brother describing the relations with her sister when she was an infant emphasized the role of his parents who directed his behaviour towards his sister:

MM1: *parents gave such a space so I could feed my little sister or drive her pram and play with her in the way I could. They taught me not to hurt her.*

When MM1 was of primary school age she watched TV with her sister: *At first it was a black-and-white TV set, then colour. I was sitting on the sofa bed and my sister, the powerhouse of energy, was watching the TV upside down. She had her legs on the wall and she even provoked me, it was charming and pleasant.*

Their bonds loosened when MM1 reached his adolescence. He remember keeping distance, but when his sister reached her adolescence their relation strengthened again. Their parents delegated him to talk with sister about contacts with boys. The subject described these conversations *as a turning point in our relation, these talks bound us, we had our secrets.* He finds the currents relations with sister very close and full of positive emotions. They give mutual support to each other:

*When I have some difficulties in relations with my wife, I text to my sister and when she is at the party and doesn't want to get back on her own she doesn't call either her husband or our father but she calls me. She's dear to my heart. I have the sister with the same blood type and eyes colour. When our parents are not here, I'll have her.*

KN2 remembers from her and her two-year-old brother childhood reading of books and listening to family stories told by their mother. They attended primary

school and their free time they spent at home. KN2 evoked the memory of playing chess with her brother and a scene of going with him to a teacher who they borrowed books from.

*The lady had a beautiful edition of Rodziewiczówna and Kraszewski collection. We're running to her holding each other by the hand. She lent us two books every time and we gave them back.*

KN2 told their parents attached importance to their schooling what her brother disregarded. Her brother *got poor marks so their father engaged private tutors, one went in and another went out. My brother couldn't stand it, he left the house for a moment and ran around it, then he knocked at my window and broke the window. He pleaded not guilty.*

The subject told that parent wanted her to quiz him on Latin vocabulary. They were trained to study and work. KN2 helped her mother with housework. *Father kept her brother on the go, either he had to study or do even ridiculous things as nails straightening.*

KN2's and her brother adolescence coincided with World War II. She talked about the flight from the war at the very first days and about bombing raids and the danger and anxiety which were present all the time: *the anxiety brought us closer together.* According to the occupying force law children were forced to work from the age of 14. KN2 worked in a shoe shop and her brother in a chemical laboratory. After the war they joined the scouts, they had mutual friends and the first love affairs. After school-leaving examinations her brother went to college and she was interested in his studies: *I attended the lectures with him. He asked me to be quiet and not to look at the lecturer in order to be unnoticed.*

In adulthood their relations were diversified, the phases of closeness alternated with loosening of their bonds and isolation. At the end of his life they brought closer. KN2 emphasized that she took care of him from their childhood.

The two following interviews were conducted with the younger sister (KE1) of three sisters and the middle brother (MD2) of the siblings of two brothers and a sister.

There is one year age difference between MD2 and his older brother.

MD2: *Parents treated us as twins. Although we didn't go to school together, we made our First Communion in the same time. They enrolled us on the same extra classes, we kept close together. We were naughty children, we had risky ideas so we were punished in the same way. We played together in the courtyard and we had the same friends.*

By his accounts, peer and similarly their parents did not differentiate them: when one quarrelled with somebody, the other got a beating as well.

They enhanced their inseparability through loyalty and mutual help: *we were at one with each other at trainings. Arguments and fights broke out between them at the same time: we were always fighting but I don't remember why, probably because of bullshit. When the sister was born they tried to be gentle with her what their parents kept an eye on.* The subject remember being angry with



her: *I punched her doll. When she was 16, I was taking her to parties. I treated her seriously, but our brother – patronizingly. She has better contact with me now, than with our brother. She helps at my company, she substitutes me. She's reliable.* Current relations between the brothers are conflictual, they tried to run a company but they split up after a raw and ruck.

KE1 told us several times that she remembers very little about her children. Her family situation is special, after she was born her parents split up and her mother died when KE1 was five. Her mother's parents brought up her and her two sisters. There is a two year age gap between the older sisters and they *stuck together, separately from me. They didn't look after me, only my grandma did it. They went out together and I stayed with my grandma.* The subject said: *as the youngest one I was protected by my grandparents, their favourite, they were overprotective.* When she was a teenager the sisters took her to the swimming pool, cycling or roller-skating, but she had to be self-reliant. When they reached their adolescence: *they avoided me.* In adulthood KE1 brought closer to her sisters, especially the oldest one, *we're very close now, although she lives abroad, we're very much alike and we differ from our middle sister.* KE1 describes the oldest sister as protective and loving person and KE1 responds her in the same way. She worries about her sister: *whether she doesn't work too much, she should have some time only for herself.* The middle sister *lives her own life,* the subject emphasized her dissimilarity and the distance she keeps, although they live close to each other.

## Rivalry

Jealousy in sibling relations was mentioned in all interviews. There was jealousy of presents, own room (MM1), toys, *who's got a better bike, who's got more money* (KE1), availability of education (KN2). In all cases of sibling rivalry, an important role was played by adults from family and social environment. MM1 quoted the example of comparing him to his sister at school by teachers. He had indeed been given to her as the example of more diligent student, but he remembers: *she does nothing, she doesn't study at home but she knows more.* He had the feeling of being burdened more with housework: *I was beating dust out of carpets, and vacuuming, but she did nothing.* There was a division in MM1's family: *mother's son and father's daughter. When I was 15 and she was 12 we fight and she smashed his lip, she was punished by our mother.* It was obvious for him and their parents that he as the older one should have had his own room. His sister had a connecting room what was the cause of countless quarrels. She felt she was treated unfairly.

KN2 remembers that her parents blatantly favoured her brother, *he was always put first, his son is the eighth wonder of the world to our mother.* The subject implied that education was very important in her family of origin. Parents,

especially her father, motivated her brother to study: *our father really wanted my brother to play the violin, he event bought him a violin but he wasn't successful in convincing him.* KN2 remembers a conversation with her father after she passed the secondary school-leaving examinations: *it was very hard, my brother was studying, my father told me "you've already passed your exams, think what you've achieved."* She begun work: *my mother fixed me up with the office job.* When KN2 was asked about her emotions connected with the happenings she told about sadness and envy. She thinks that envy appears later, when she was adult or when she started her family and had children. In KN2's family of origin it was obvious that her brother had a privileged position: *they showed leniency towards him, and he expected the same from me. He used my help, he borrowed from me, being precisely, he took my things. My mother was lenient towards him and she helped him more than me.*

KE1 describing the rivalry between sisters told that they were competing for everything, *we were quarrelling, there wasn't such a thing as sharing. We were quarrelling about money, they were given notes but I was given coins and I was pleased that it was more than they had.* The older sisters did not let her enter their society: *they had secrets from me, I felt hurt.* Grandmother and grandfather, who brought the girls up after their parents' death, repeated over and over again that *everything must be justly and shared evenly.* KE1 thinks that they favoured her as the youngest of the three sisters. They protected her excessively and forgave everything to compensate for the loss of her mother. The subject envied her sisters the freedom and similar rights but she only heard: *when you're at their age, we'll let you do that.*

MD2 emphasized the closeness with his brother at the beginning of the conversation, then he was requested to present their psychological characteristics. He described his brother a truculent, reckless boy who is open-minded and sociable. While he presented himself as a prudent, cautious and introverted person. He finds his brother used him: *his motorbike was always broken so he was taking mine.* They practiced judo from their early childhood and they fought at home as well: *we beat each other continuously,* but he added immediately: *we stuck together.* The subject mentioned about the intergenerational approach, which was cultivated by his grandmother and maintained by his parents: *I was left out, the first-born is the most important.* Therefore, the family business was made over to his older brother who did not turn out to be a good businessman and misspent money: *he had four laptops and bought another one. Then, they acknowledged me.* The brothers ran the family business together for a while but then a conflict arose and the company collapsed.

## Psychosexual development

MM1 remembers having baths with his sister in his early childhood and his discovery that their anatomies are different. The discovery was astonishing and fascinating.

MM1: *I think I was 8 when I decided not to bathe together with my sister. He also remembered his admiration for the photo of his sister, she wore a white dress with blue flounces. MM1 did not want to talk about his matters with sister, but she tried to overstep the boundaries of intimacy. He satisfied his curiosity connected with sexuality by having conversations with his school friends: I was curious what they feel during menstruation, but I talked about it with girls, my peers. When MM1's sister became interested in boys: I was jealous of her. I couldn't believe she formed a relationship with a guy. After she got married we started talking about men and women, it was a turning point.*

MD2 shared a room with his brother. Until we reached our adolescence, we were fighting everyday just before we got into bed but when we were older we were talking about girls. The subject talked about his involvement in intimate relationships of his sister: *I always wanted to get to know her boyfriends. When she said that a boy is proper, he probably was, but I wanted to check if he wasn't a cheat. During her teenage rebellion period she met a drug addict, I told her that he wasn't right for her. Parents didn't have to intervene.*

KE1 remembers the feeling of jealousy and the admiration for her sisters when they were getting ready for parties. She sat in the bathroom and watched how they put on their make-up or style their hair, at that time she wanted to join them. She dissociate herself from their choices now. KE1 does not talk with her sisters about *women's topics, I have a friend for that.*

When KE1's brother was 12 or 13 he had a friend, she was a head taller than he. She was from our neighbourhood. He waited for her at the gate and they went to school together. *I remember my surprise that such a beautiful, grown-up girl wanted to be friends with such a little grammar school pupil. When he fell in love with his wife-to-be, he wrote a memoir. He described there his feelings to Basia and I used to pilfer it and read. Her brother was also interested in her life: he didn't like when he saw me at school in boys' company. When a boy walked me home, he told our parents about it. KN2 talked about a happening, which evoked an emotional stir: my fiancé bought a book, it was the latest publication in Poland – "Ideal Marriage" by Van de Velde. When my brother saw it, he was furious and burnt the book. He fuelled a fire with the book. I was indignant with him, I wondered how he could butt in my affairs. We argued. At first he tore the pages out of the book and then he burnt it. I was somewhat under his influence and he was under the influence of the clergy so the book was sinful to him.*

## Deidentification

The need for being different from brother or sister was described by all subjects, especially the subjects of the same-sex siblings emphasized their dissimilarity.

MD2 mentioned that his father put an accent on their physical fitness. They watched films with Bruce Lee and at the age of six they started practising judo. When they were 12 they had a fight during a workout: *it was a fist fight, I wiped the floor with him so I was expelled from the club. Then I started playing basketball.* The subject presented also the personality differences: *my brother forgets quickly but I feel bitter towards him. He's capable of getting mad but also easy to get appeased. I'm more conscientious. I was a good student. He dropped out of college. He bought a motorbike and had an accident. He embezzled money. He got married quickly and divorced after a year. I finished college. I have a wife. We live modestly. I'm a reliable person but my brother is a good-for-nothing. He is wasteful, I'm economical. He had short-term relationships but I'm in a long-term relationship.* MD2 described his feelings connected with the differences he mentioned above: *I envy him a little and perhaps I admire him for his lifestyle. He's always been carefree but I can't and I don't want to be like that.* When KE1 was asked about the similarities and differences between the three sisters she said she remembers little from her childhood. She brought the time back when her older sisters *started dying their hair and make themselves up, then I wanted to be like them.* At that time they separated from KE1, they had secrets and they went out together. Then the sisters started misbehaving, *I didn't want to distress my grandma, I didn't behaved badly. I used to put school first and now work is the most important thing for me.* The subject described also the differences between sisters in their adult lives: *we have different attitude to life. Unlike my sisters I always wanted to get an education first and then start a family. We have different friends, different clothes and likings.*

MD1 and KE1 also stressed the different approach to education of their siblings. Regardless of the birth order the subject showed themselves at their best. They saw themselves more submitted to parents or teachers and their brothers or sisters were shown as wayward rebels. MM1 found that *my sister rebelled for two of us. When she was 13 she didn't read required readings but "In Search of Lost Time."* *She was brave for me and showed me that there's another way of doing things. I was well-behaved and I helped with housework but she went out when she wanted. When she was given a trashing she said that she didn't give a monkey's about it and did what she wanted again. She was sociable but I was alone. She had fascination for people, I had fascination for music.* MM1 recalled that he was given more trust but less attention.

KN2 presented her brother similarly as *neglecting his school duties.* She sees herself as a submissive and reliable person. The subject said that her brother *wanted to influence my life. At that time men were more important, they were always right and parents also agreed with it. I wasn't the kind of a slave and I had*

*my own conception of life. She also described searching for the outlook on life by her brother: the age of puberty was a fight, he started working in a laboratory and brought home the communist reasoning. My mother and me were horrified at what he was thinking. He rather provoked our father who was a great patriot being enamoured of Pilsudski.*

## Discussion

The research was inspired by the questions about the shape and dynamics of sibling relations within the space of successive stages of development and the questions about the course of deidentification process.

The concept of deidentification and family constellations are the theoretical background. The concept of deidentification implies the existence of differentiation processes which are necessary for self-creation, while the family constellations theory describes how children are trained to behave according to definite patterns depending on the birth order. The interviews with adults and children and their retrospective stories revealed that a brother or sister are important people in their past and at present in each case. The sibling relations changed with the developmental changes of adolescent participants of the relations (Goetting, 1986). In many cases the quality and dynamics of the sibling relations were created by people from family and social environment. The analysis of the interviews shows that older brothers remember very well the moment when they found out about the births of a new family member. On the basis of the described reactions, it can be assumed that the information about the future sister and the birth of her aroused strong emotions, positive e.g. tenderness towards the sister as well as negative – anger at parents (Walewska, 2011). By the subjects' accounts it can be stated that children were creators of the relations and the developing personalities were the moderating factors. The background to the relations were parents, grandparents and teachers – their values, beliefs and stereotypes concerning the rights and duties of gender or seniority and the social roles. A pattern of closeness and emotional distance between sibling is observed in most of the analysed cases. In the early childhood, especially when the age difference is insignificant, the closeness is expressed by mutual play, care and loyalty. The loosening of the bonds occurs when the older sibling reach their adolescence. Then the sibling bond strengthen again at puberty of the younger sibling. The loosening of the bonds helps to enter the close emotional relationships with people from outside family and prevents sibling incest (Bank, Kahn, 1997).

Siblings make a mutual potential for tension relief, including sexual tension and they also give each other the possibility to experience the relief resulting from the confirmation and recognition their desires. From what the subjects reported,

it appears that siblings were interested in developmental changes and intimate life of their brothers or sisters. The observation and control were conducted secretly or openly. Older brothers were more active, they probably because of the cultural model took over the responsibility and right to interference in sisters' lives. The interference was expected to stop the development of relationship with people from outside the family but paradoxically, it could tighten contacts with these people and facilitate the sisters' separation in consequence. In all presented cases siblings were important points of reference in individuation and building autonomy processes. Referring to the subjects descriptions, it became clear that a brother or sister is the first and successive source of observations connected with the sameness and difference in appearance, temperament and personality. Siblings perform an important role in sexual identity formation, the sexual self. Mutual games and daily routines satisfy children's curiosity about thinking, feeling and behaving alike/different in comparison with their sibling. The sibling relationship help to obtain the reciprocal information on themselves. The psychological portraits of a brother or sister presented by the subjects are resultants of their feelings towards described sibling. If admiration, friendship and loyalty are present in the relationship, positive characteristics dominate in the sibling description. Similarly, if envy and regret are present, negative features are emphasized illustrated by examples. Ambivalent feelings also appears, e.g. jealousy or admiration for a taking risk brother or independent sister. It proves that the involvement in sibling relations is present in spite of the death or separation. Most of the subjects had vivid memories from very early ages except for a young woman who experienced trauma, she was abandoned by father and her mother died.

The background to sibling relations is family context. The regularity connected with roles assignment is observed, the roles are following: a responsible child and good-for-nothing, more or less dependent on parents' opinion obedient, and dutiful and a rebellious good-for-nothing. These roles are ascribed regardless of the age or gender what partly prove correct Toman's (1961) theory of training and reinforcing children in specific characteristics and consequently of behaviour patterns. The interviews show that ascription of roles to children is not connected with the birth order and gender but probably with personality predisposition of individual, parental projection and intergenerational transmission (Goldenberg, Goldenberg, 2006). Siblings paired up in the subjects' families of three children, what confirm Khan and Bank's research. The pairs may change throughout their childhood and adolescence and the choice is determined by age closeness in childhood and then by subjective similarity regardless of gender and age.

Irrespective of intensive rivalry between siblings, in this case – between brothers, the bonds with people from outside their family tighten and the loyalty to social context increased. The need for individuality is sometimes connected with opposition to cultural stereotypes. Identification processes alternate with rivalry that facilitates differentiation and consequently it shapes defining themselves.

## Conclusions and implications

The study confirmed the importance of relations between sibling and their influence on development and functioning of children and then adults. The need for differentiation and identity emphasis is very strong, it motivates to rebel against family and cultural rules. The quality of sibling relations is moderated by the quality of the family relation, so it indicates the intensity of tension and conflicts, which can be reached by the relations between children. The findings might be applied in practice by family therapists and specialists in social security. Taking into consideration the above data it is recommended in therapy or other forms of help to give more attention to diagnose the sibling relationship. Directing attention to relations between children might help to understand the complexity of family problems and might make the prevention of such problems.

The relations between brothers and sisters might enrich internal resources of an individual and might also shape and increase the resilience of children, then adults. Drawing on the above conclusions, extensive literature and empirical experiences it is worth constructing a questionnaire diagnosing the relations between children in family. The questionnaire would complement the existing research methods.

## References

- Bank, S.P., Kahn, M.D. (1997). *The Sibling Bond*. New York: Basic Books.
- Constantine, N., Benard, B., Diaz, M. (1999). Measuring protective factors and resilience traits in youth: The Healthy Kids Resilience Assessment. *American Psychologist*, 55, 647–654.
- Gabbard, G.O. (2010). *Psychiatria psychodynamiczna w praktyce klinicznej*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Goetting, A. (1986). The developmental tasks of siblings over the life cycle. *J. Mar. Fam.*, 48, 703–714.
- Goldenberg, H., Goldenberg, I. (2006). *Terapia rodzin*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Pantke, R., Slade, P. (2006). Remembered parenting style and psychological well-being in young adults whose parents had experienced early child loss. *The British Psychological Society, Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 79, 69–81.
- Piotrowski, C.C. (2011). Patterns of Adjustment Among Siblings Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence, American Psychological Association. *Journal of Family Psychology*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 19–28.
- Toman, W. (1961). *Family Constellation: Theory and Practice of a Psychological Game*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, INC.

- Walewska, K. (2011). *Progi narodzin. Rola teorii w pracy psychoanalitycznej. Doświadczenia własne*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Whiteman, S.D., McHale, S.M., Crouter, A.C. (2007). The Pennsylvania State University Competing Processes of Sibling Influence: Observational Learning and Sibling Deidentification. *Blackwell Publishing Ltd. Social Development*, 16, 4, 642–661.