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The Neglected Playground

Childhood Parenting Styles and Educational Inequalities

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EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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How so many absurd rules of conduct ... have originated, we do not know, nor how it is that they have become, in all quarters of the world, so deeply impressed on the minds of men, but it is worthy of remark that a belief constantly inculcated in the early years of life, while the brain is impressionable, appears to acquire almost the nature of an instinct, and the very essence of an instinct is that it is followed independently of reason.

- **Charles Darwin**

In childrearing, it is the effects of a poor education rather than the benefits of a good education that strike the eye.

- **Adolf Dygasiński**

Foreword

What little Jack does not learn, big John will not master

We seldom stop to think about the implications of this proverb even though it deserves more than a passing thought – after all, it tells us that our learning experiences are irrevocable. What we have learnt from our parents is bound to stay with us and with our children. Popular wisdom seems to have known all along what science has only recently started to discover.

One in every three Poles believes that young children should stay at home with their non-working mothers until the age of three, and more than 20 per cent of those surveyed ‘think it beneficial to extend that period until the child goes to school’.

Research shows that the first six years of life are of critical importance for human development. In their early years, children acquire new competences and dispositions, building a solid foundation for all their later achievement. They pick up verbal and social skills. They learn to communicate their emotions and to form meaningful relationships with adults and other children.

Statistics tell us that the majority of young children in Poland have to learn all these skills and dispositions at home because childcare centres for toddlers are practically non-existent, and pre-school attendance is a mere 34 per cent in the 3-5 age range (in rural areas the figure is as low as 13 per cent).

This is why we need good educational programmes to support parents in the process of childrearing.

The Neglected Playground

The Neglected Playground describes the findings of a survey that might be the starting point for developing education-oriented parent support programmes. Programmes like that must be designed promptly or, to quote Tomasz Szlendak, ‘this **neglected playground** (meaning the early childhood home and pre-school environments) will, in the future, create a multitude of problems, including social tensions, poverty, marginalisation and a lack of the cultural competence that is necessary in the post-market age.’

The survey of Polish families was designed to identify common parenting styles and concerns. The result is more than 500 pages of documentation that can now be used for various analyses of Polish family situations and needs.

The report focuses on the impact of different parenting styles on children’s progress in life. It reviews major problems faced by parents at the extreme ends of the social spectrum, where different family care models exist. One model involves well-educated parents in high-income households; the other one involves poorly educated parents in low-income households.

This report is aimed at those who are responsible for the standards of living and the quality of education services available to Polish families. In other words, it is aimed at government officials and people in various institutions and organisations who are in charge of developing and implementing social capital programmes. We hope that the findings presented below will inspire social policymakers, local governments and non-governmental organisations to design new equal educational opportunity programmes for disadvantaged children – programmes that will also involve parental participation.

The Polish survey of parenting styles, described in this report, was designed by a team of experts: academics, NGO leaders and leaders of child-serving institutions. Its members were: Prof. Maria Deptuła, Prof. Barbara Weigl, Dr Ewa Widel, Dr Tomasz Szlendak, Danuta Daszkiewicz, Agnieszka Tkaczyńska and Monika Werwicka. The project co-ordinator was Paweł Mózdzyski.

Letters to Parents

Our survey of Polish parenting styles was inspired by *Letters to Parents*, a German project implemented by **Arbeitskreis Neue Erziehung e. V.** (ANE). ANE is a non-governmental parent-helping organisation that provides assistance to support child development processes. The project dates back to the 1950s – the period of de-nazification in Germany – when efforts were being made to eradicate the effects of so-called ‘black pedagogy’ on Germany’s children. It was then that *Pelican Letters*, an American parent education programme, was translated into German. The project promoted new parenting styles by providing information in the form of educational booklets and radio programmes. In 1976, following a survey of parents, a new German edition of *Letters* was brought out with the help of German academics to promote humanist education. The new project consists of simple educational booklets (written as letters) that are posted to the parents of newborn babies. In the first year a letter is sent every month, but the frequency decreases over time. The last letter is sent when the child turns seven. Thus the project follows the child development process, discussing issues that are characteristic of the various developmental stages, and recommending the best strategies for

parents to cope with potential problems. In 1998, following another survey, a special edition of *Letters* came out to address the needs of Turkish families in Germany.

In 1999, at the invitation of ANE, the Polish Children and Youth Foundation (PCYF) took part in a European effort to create educational materials for parents to help them protect their children against child abuse. As part of the effort, we translated, adapted to Polish contexts and distributed a letterform booklet called *How to Develop Children's Self-esteem*. The feedback we received from parents, including those living in rural communities, was remarkably positive. They found the letter interesting, and thought it was an excellent idea to provide useful information and education.

This positive feedback inspired us to start working on a broader parent support programme. Its initial phase involved a survey of parenting styles. The survey was conducted in 2002. Its results are discussed below. We hope that a Polish edition of *Letters to Parents* will be available in the not-too-distant future.

We wish to thank the Bernard van Leer Foundation for making that survey possible.

We also wish to thank all those who helped us at the various stages of our research work. In particular, thanks are due to Dr Dudu Sönmençiçek, who worked with us on behalf of ANE; to the leaders of non-governmental organisations who helped us select those to be surveyed; to all the mothers, fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers who agreed to take part in the individual and focus group interviews; and also to Prof. Ryszard Borowicz and Arkadiusz Karwacki, who were the first to read this report.

Teresa Ogrodzińska
Polish Children and Youth Foundation

Introduction

In Poland, Children's Day is celebrated in a big way. Every year, on June 1, a great majority (81 per cent) of Polish parents give presents to their children – and sometimes to other children, too (see *Dzień dziecka*, 1998). Shops that sell soft toys, a wide variety of plastic building blocks and sophisticated collections of Barbie doll accessories are packed with young customers and their compliant caregivers, who are only too happy to foot the bill, recession notwithstanding. Polish parents spare no money in providing for their children – if they have money to spare. In Poland, children are cherished and loved. Without them, life would be dull, miserable and depressing. And, as the old saying goes, children are the nation's future.

Polish parents are willing to make sacrifices, despite the numerous media reports that carry the same message: today's youth of the capitalist age ought to realise that their 'new' and busy parents, caught up in a whirl of competition for income, employment and status, have their own lives to live, in a world of their own, and are not prepared to make concessions. As many as 76 per cent of the Poles surveyed by CBOS in October 1998 said that parents should do whatever they possibly could for their children, sacrificing their own happiness if necessary (see *Wychowanie dzieci*, 1998). Needless to say, this 'policy of self-sacrifice' applies in particular to Polish women. One in every three respondents believes that young children should stay at home with their non-working mothers until the age of three. More than 20 per cent of those surveyed 'think it beneficial to extend that period until the child goes to school' (see *Wychowanie dzieci*, 1998). Interestingly, male and female respondents share this view in equal proportions, irrespective of whether they have children or not. All the evidence seems to point to a single conclusion: after over a decade of living under capitalism, Polish people's approach to parenting remains largely conservative. Does this mean that nothing has changed at all? Quite the contrary.

At children's clinics, parents' evenings or school events, one can easily notice that children are as much a source of great pride as a cause for great concern to their adult caregivers. This concern is remarkably widespread today – more than ten years after the political and socio-economic transformation began in Poland. With its market economy and with the government no longer having total control of the labour market, cash flows or childcare provisions, today's Poland seems to be a danger zone for youngsters. The conventional wisdom about childrearing is that capitalism is extremely child-unfriendly. (Whether conventional wisdom corresponds to reality is quite another matter.) Many people believe that childrearing was much easier under so-called 'real socialism' – even though others say, sarcastically, that the previous system was just a long and winding road that led from capitalism to capitalism. One reason for this belief is probably the popular opinion that, all those years ago, the size of a family had no direct impact on the family's economic situation, and having more children did not aggravate that situation the way it does today. The State at least *pretended* to provide some kind of childcare – now it does not even bother to pretend. Sociologists are agreed: our collective memory of the old days tends to be selective. We remember that children were the only hope for the future in a country with no political freedom and no prospects for economic growth. They were one of the few joys to cherish in a drab and cheerless social environment.

Moreover, yesterday's children seemed slightly different, too. Adult Poles have no doubt that young people today create more problems for their parents. Most of them (69 per cent) believe that the bringing up of children is more difficult now than it was when they were children (see *Polacy o sobie*, 1998). But adults also realise that, to a certain extent, they are the 'guilty ones'. Most of the adult Poles believe that children should not be spoiled, but they are. Most of the adult Poles believe that parents should not be overprotective, but they are. Polish parents admit that they do not spend enough time with their children, do not pay enough attention to them and, on top of that, tend to be unreasonably demanding. What is curious, but also terrifying, is that more than a half (52 per cent) of those surveyed said that parents should administer corporal punishment more often as a sign of parental care (see *Wychowanie dzieci*, 1998).

In short, a plethora of popular myths about parenthood and parenting are perpetuated in Poland. Many of them are extremely harmful. They do particular harm to young children. Even though secondary socialisation, which takes place at school, is beyond parental control, children aged one month to six years spend almost all of their time with adults who lend an ear to those harmful myths (including the old fiction that a good parent should give a good whipping or – at the other extreme – the myth that children should be permitted to do anything they wanted). For years scholars have been studying the 'class mythology' of the Polish educational system, its impact on children and on social segregation processes (Borowicz 1983; Kwieciński 2002). Yet the early education that takes place at home and pre-school does not seem to have attracted much of their attention, even though all social sciences are unanimous in acknowledging the importance of the early years for the child's later achievement (Goodman 1997: 83-95; Mühlfeld 1994; Harris 1998; Izdebska 2000; Sztompka 2002).

In capitalist Poland, children's prospects are defined in the early years. Childhood parenting styles, which depend on the family's income and social position, are the make-or-break factors. The child's future in the social arena is conditioned by the kind of early education provided at home and

pre-school – if parents can afford to enrol their child in a pre-school programme. In effect, parenting styles are responsible for the intergenerational inheritance of economic status and social position.

Yet the parenting styles adopted by parents of toddlers and pre-schoolers appear to be a question of secondary importance to Polish scholars and educational institutions. As a result, social policymakers at the national and local levels are moving pre-school and family education issues to the bottom of their agenda, with a blatant disregard of the fact that what a child learns at home and within the wider community (the peer group) in the early years is a major factor, if not *the* single most decisive factor, in causing or combating marginalisation and unequal opportunities at the later stages. Ample evidence collected by developmental psychologists and educational sociologists has proved that beyond doubt (Meighan 1993; Harris 1999).

In spite of these findings, Polish parents are, as ever, left to their own devices, even though a casual observer can easily notice what recent studies have also confirmed: many parents do not have the necessary parenting skills (Obuchowska 2001; Pietrzyk 2001). Needless to say, Polish parents make a lot of commonly sanctioned mistakes that are spawned by the family care models prevalent in their social milieu. On top of that they are unable to solve their economic problems, especially if they live in small towns, rural communities or areas of growing poverty. The net result is educational inequality, which begins in early childhood and becomes painfully obvious on comparing the results of the aptitude tests done by the seven-year-olds in the first year of primary school (Szymański and Walasek 1997; Arciszewska 2001; Kapica 2001).

This **neglected playground** (meaning the early childhood home and pre-school environments) will, in the future, create a multitude of problems, including social tensions, poverty, marginalisation and a lack of the cultural competence that is necessary in the post-market age. Therefore, every effort must be made to change the shape of the playground in order to avoid reproducing educational patterns that condemn some social groups to cultural marginalisation. The question is: Who should take care of the neglected playground? Who should provide proper education for children of pre-school age if – apparently – many parents are incompetent to do the job? What is the best way to improve the neglected playground? And where does one begin?

James Samuel Coleman (d.1995), the renowned American sociologist and author of the famous report *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966, see Świstak 1998), who had set trends and opened up new horizons in educational sociology for years to come, was convinced that modern-day families were losing their ability to provide proper childhood socialisation. In his presidential address at an annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (Coleman 1993), he said that sociologists were making a critical error of judgement by ignoring one basic fact: the type of social capital that had been at the centre of primordial social organisations, such as the traditional family, was gone – it no longer existed. According to Coleman, it did not make sense to bring back what belonged to the past or to patch up what was beyond repair. There was no point in reconstructing the old-fashioned family with all its former characteristics because the technological advances, computerisation, social mobility and the resultant social changes had already eroded the traditional communities that had used to provide the primary learning environments. The traditional communities had socialised their children to a world that did not exist any more, having been swept away by the wind of social change. Therefore, Coleman says, in providing education for children we should focus on planning future structures and **purposely constructed institutions**.

Coleman was a proponent of so-called 'rational choice theory' (see Lissowski 2002). He thought that those institutions would serve the purpose of **maximising a child's value to society**. This maximisation would be achieved by creating optimal and purposeful educational structures. Coleman's proposition may sound somewhat totalitarian, but it is difficult to deny that something is wrong with the family today, and Poland is no exception in this respect. Moreover, it is the State rather than parents that should be interested in 'maximising a child's value to society'. After all, it is the State that has to cope with the blowing wind of change. Parents can only be swept off their feet – and many of them are. It is therefore necessary, Coleman says, to teach what the family does not teach today but society will need tomorrow.

Children should be taught self-reliance, responsibility for others, and co-operation in the achievement of a common goal. Children should be taught whatever is necessary for them to develop into responsible adults in the post-market age. If the family cannot do the job, other institutions – schools and day-care centres – need to step in. Primary schools have already come to that conclusion – or rather, the general public and the more enlightened politicians have prompted them to do that. Pre-school education providers are slowly getting the message. Parents, Coleman says, will never reach that point. Or will they? Could parents also change their ways? Could they take matters into their own hands, taking charge of the playground themselves? Could the State educate parents and define the goals to achieve in early childhood education?

The Purpose of the Report

Leaders of non-governmental organisations have answered these questions in the affirmative. They are ahead of the State and local authorities in tidying up the playground and, remarkably, they are doing it with parental help. This report is testimony to their commitment. It describes a survey of Polish families that was designed to identify common parenting styles – styles that can enhance or jeopardise children's prospects for future achievement. The report reviews major problems faced by parents at the extreme ends of the social spectrum, where different patterns of childcare exist. One pattern involves well-educated parents in high-income households; the other one involves underprivileged families with low levels of cultural competence. In other words, this report presents different family care models, focusing, in particular, on the differences that result from the parents' social status. It also allows the reader to compare the parenting styles presented in the media with the vision of parenthood shared by young childless people, and with the actual parenting styles adopted by mothers and fathers of pre-school children in widely different social environments.

The childcare-related problems identified in the course of the survey were similar to those which had made Coleman write parents off. This, however, should not be done – not in Poland, at any rate. The purpose of this report is to help social policymakers, social workers and family-serving institutions to equalise educational opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and to develop support programmes for parents.

Probably every reader of this report is, or will be, a parent. Probably every reader is, or will be, beset by common parental worries, such as 'Will I be able to furnish my child with a good start in life?' We believe – and we intend to prove – that the answer to this question depends mainly on the family's social position and parenting style, and that these two factors are correlated. Parenting styles have a profound effect on children's achievement in later life. This alone makes them well worth studying.

The Survey Methods

It is not that parental headaches turn up out of the blue. They have many causes, including the specifically Polish parenting mythology whereby children who are not beaten may become unruly and end up as criminals. Deeply rooted in Polish traditions and strengthened by the dramatic socio-economic changes, this mythology is replete with parental 'peccadilloes,' if not cardinal sins (see Głogosz 1994; Kutiak 1999; Marzec 1999 and 2001; Poławski 1999; Izdebska 2000; Obuchowski 2001; Piszczek 2001).

Letters to Parents is a programme that supports childrearing processes. The Polish programme draws on the experience of ANE, a German parent-helping organisation. The Polish programme organisers decided that their first step would be to identify parental needs and concerns. Therefore, the initial phase of the programme involved research work. The research findings would then dictate what kind of assistance should be provided to parents.

The first task was to translate the questionnaires used for interviewing German and Turkish families in Germany (see *Foreword*). The German *Letters* table of contents was also translated. The next step was to develop the tools to be used in the Polish survey.

The Polish survey involved the following:

- **Individual in-depth interviews** based on a list of information to be sought. The interviewees were mothers, all carefully selected (see Przybyłowska 1978; Lutyńska 1993; Gremy 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1997; Dukaczewska-Nałęcz 1999).
- **Focus group interviews** with several groups, each consisting of twelve carefully selected participants (see Nicińska 2000; Worek 2001).
- **Press reviews** of childcare and childhood education issues (see Ogryzko-Wiewórkowski 1986; Podemski 1989; Dzienniak 1997).
- **Essays** on Polish parenting styles and concerns, written by experts selected by the Polish Children and Youth Foundation.

Individual In-depth Interviews

Twelve casual interviews were carried out with deliberately selected female participants. The interviewers had a detailed list of information to be sought, but they allowed the interviewees to talk freely. A casual interview is a perfect tool for collecting data, as it is a social event at which the interviewer (and the interviewee) is a participant observer (Hammersley and Atkinson 2000). The interviewee understands that she is an expert on the subject, whereas the interviewer has the added opportunity of gaining more information about the interviewee's living conditions (for example, where she lives and what her home looks like).

All the interviewees were mothers because in Polish households they are the best source of information about childcare issues. Every woman was also asked to comment on her husband's involvement in childcare. Thus the sample was based on participants' expertise. In this case, the ideal interviewees were mothers of young children from different social backgrounds. The interviewee selection procedure involved two variables: (1) location (major city, small town, rural community), and (2) income and social status relative to education. The interviewees were divided into two groups: 'the helpless' (unemployed, labourers, former collective farm workers) and 'the busy' (successful white-collar workers, business people and other members of the middle class).

The table shows interviewee selection details.

	Type of Location	Suggested Location	Suggested Type of Interviewee
1	Major city	Poznań	'Helpless' single mother dependent on her parents
2	Major city	Łódź	'Helpless' family with an unemployed parent (father)
3	Major city	Kraków	'Busy' family of white-collar workers, middle class
4	Major city	Warsaw	'Busy' family of a professional, upper middle class
5	Small town	Świdnica	'Helpless' family with an unemployed parent (father)
6	Small town	Łomża	'Helpless' hired workers (e.g. a shop assistant)
7	Small town	Świdnica	Small-town lower middle class (e.g. a policeman and a teacher)
8	Small town	Leżajsk/ Brodnica/ Darłowo	Self-employed, owner of a small business
9	Rural community	Kujawsko-pomorskie Province	'Helpless' family of a former collective farm worker
10	Rural community	Warmińsko-mazurskie Province	'Helpless' family of a former collective farm worker
11	Rural community	Kujawsko-pomorskie Province	Rural family
12	Rural community	Warmińsko-mazurskie Province	Rural family

Below are details of the interviewees and their location:¹

Individual In-depth Interview #1 [IDI.1]

Warsaw, major city; 'busy' family of a professional; upper middle class

Mother: aged 25, a computer graphic designer and a fourth-year art student. Father: aged 29, education level:² college degree. He has a job as a computer specialist, working eight hours a day, five days a week. The couple have been married for five years. They have a two-year-old

¹ As part of the pilot scheme, three individual interviews were also conducted in three different environments. In a town with a population of 200,000, two mothers of pre-school girls were interviewed. One of them was a translator and teacher of English married to a university teacher – this interview is identified as PIL.1. The other woman was a pharmacist from a smaller town (her husband was working for a privately-owned company and was also providing educational services on a self-employment basis) – this interview is identified as PIL.3. The third pilot interview, identified as PIL.2, was carried out in a rural community. The interviewee was an unemployed mother of two: a pre-school girl and a pre-school boy. She had a primary education, and her husband had a vocational level of secondary education; the man was a woodworker and was receiving sickness benefit.

² Translator's Note: Prior to the school reform of 1998, the Polish school system consisted of the following levels (age-groups in brackets): *Early childhood education, non-compulsory*: toddler groups (0-2); pre-school (3-5/6), and primary school reception classes (6). *Primary education, compulsory*: primary school (7-14). *Post-primary vocational education, non-compulsory*: vocational training (15-16/17). *Secondary education, non-compulsory*: high schools for more academically-minded children (15-18) or specialist secondary schools – vocational or technical, (15-18/19). *Post-secondary education*, offering no degrees: colleges of further education (19+). *College/university education*, offering degrees (19+). In 1998 the school system was re-organised. As a result, compulsory education has been extended by one year and divided into smaller units: primary school (7-12) and middle school (13-15), and secondary education has been shortened to three years (16-18). All the interviewees in this group went to school under the old system.

son. Their income and living conditions are very good. They have a three-room flat (the boy has his own bedroom) and two cars.

Individual In-depth Interview #2 [IDI.2]

Rural community, Warmińsko-mazurskie Province; farmers

Mother: aged 36, education level: post-primary vocational training (school of dressmaking).
Father: aged 40, education level: technical secondary (school of industrial engineering). They are pig farmers with a 34-hectare farm. They have a six-year-old son. (He was staying at home at the time of the interview, preparing to go to a primary school reception class in September 2002.) The house they live in is in two parts – for two separate households. The man's parents occupy the other part. The couple have been married for 14 years. Their income is average, as are their living conditions. Their part of the house consists of a tiny kitchen, a living room (about 15 square metres) with a television set, and a bedroom, where a bookcase is used as a partition to ensure some privacy for the boy.

Individual In-depth Interview #3 [IDI.3]

Rural community, Warmińsko-mazurskie Province; 'helpless' family of a former collective farm worker

Mother: aged 27, education level: post-primary vocational training (school of dressmaking). She has a full-time job as a dressmaker at a dress firm. She travels 30 kilometres to work six days a week – she works in Kętrzyn, where the nearest clothes making firms are located.
Father: aged 32, education level: post-primary vocational training, currently unemployed. From time to time he works as a seasonal labourer on a State-owned farm. They have a six-year-old daughter. The couple have been married for seven years. They live frugally, but their income is enough to buy toys for the daughter and cigarettes for the mother. They live in a one-room flat in a dilapidated building owned by the State farm. The flat is very clean and tidy, decorated with knick-knacks such as plastic flowers and pictures. It consists of a tiny hall, a kitchen with a table and chairs, and a medium-sized room that serves as living room and bedroom for the parents and their daughter.

Individual In-depth Interview #4 [IDI.4]

Poznań, major city; 'helpless' single mother dependent on her parents

Single mother: aged 32, education level: post-primary vocational training (chemical process operator). She is not doing the kind of job she trained for. For a while she worked as a bartender. Now she works on the tills in a cafeteria. It is a full-time job, and she goes to work every day. Father: aged 32, education level: post-primary vocational training, unemployed. They have one child, a little girl. The couple are divorced. The woman is raising her daughter in a one-parent family. The marriage lasted eighteen months. They filed a petition for divorce when their daughter was five months old. They live with the woman's mother and brother. The woman and her daughter occupy one room and share the kitchen and bathroom with the other members of the household. The woman and her daughter have no prospects of finding anywhere else to live. The woman's income is very low.

Individual In-depth Interview #5 [IDI.5]

Kraków, major city; 'busy' family of white-collar workers; middle class

Mother: aged 28, education level: college degree. Father: aged 32, education level: college degree. Both have full-time jobs as research workers. Both are doing a doctor's degree, so they have no time to earn extra money. They have one son aged two-and-a-half. The couple have been married for four years. According to the woman, their income is average. Their housing conditions are fairly good: the boy has his own bedroom and plenty of toys.

Individual In-depth Interview #6 [IDI.6]

Rural community, Kujawsko-pomorskie Province; 'helpless' family of a former collective farm worker

Mother: aged 44, education level: vocational secondary. She has a part-time job as childminder at a rural day-care centre (she is required to work 10 hours a week, but her working hours are actually longer). She has been looking for an extra job in or outside the area where she lives, but has been unable to find one. Father: aged 48, education level: post-primary vocational training, unemployed (and going to lose his unemployment benefit in two months' time). They have five children: a four-year-old boy, a 16-year-old daughter, a 19-year-old son, a 22-year-old daughter and a 23-year-old son. The couple have been married for 24 years. They own a 52-square-metre, two-room flat with a kitchen and bathroom (the flat needs renovating).

Individual In-depth Interview #7 [IDI.7]

Leżajsk, small town; self-employed owners of a small business

Mother: aged 31, education level: post-secondary (college of nursing and midwifery). Self-employed, she runs a travel agency, working 40 hours a week at a minimum. Father: aged 32, education level: secondary school. He has a job with a wholesale company, doing computer work, 'making out invoices and confirming goods receipts'. They do not earn extra money. They have a five-year-old son. The couple have been married for seven years. Their income and living conditions are fairly good, or rather very good for Polish standards, as they say themselves. They have a spacious three-room flat and a car.

Individual In-depth Interview #8 [IDI.8]

Rural community, Kujawsko-pomorskie Province; farmers

Mother: aged 39, education level: primary school. Father: aged 46, education level: primary school. They are crop growers and pig farmers. Neither of them intends to take on additional work, and they are not planning to move jobs. They have an infant son aged over a year, and an eleven-year-old son by the woman's first husband (who died ten years ago). The woman's teenage son lives with his grandmother (the woman's mother) on a farm at Lutów, 20 kilometres away from Orzełek. The woman's mother-in-law, who is 80, lives with the family. The couple have been married for two years. Their income is average. They own a large six-room house and farm buildings. The infant sleeps in a cot in his parents' bedroom. He can move freely over the entire ground floor of the house, where he is learning to walk with the aid of a baby walker.

Individual In-depth Interview #9 [IDI.9]

Łódź, major city; 'helpless' family with an unemployed parent (father)

Mother: aged 34, education level: secondary school. She is unemployed but eligible for unemployment benefit. She intends to look for a job when her youngest child goes to school. Father: aged 43, education level: college degree. He is unemployed but ineligible for unemployment benefit. He does seasonal work, mostly moonlighting on building sites, but all the time he is looking for a regular job. They have three children: a ten-year-old girl, a two-year-old son, and a baby boy aged ten months. The couple have been married for twelve years. The family's income is very low. They rely on social aid, but at times they have no money for food. Their housing conditions are very poor. They all have to share a large room. The two eldest children have to share a bed. Their greatest wish is to have a more comfortable place to live.

Individual In-depth Interview #10 [IDI.10]

Tarnów, small town; 'helpless' family with an unemployed parent (father)

Mother: aged 29, education level: secondary (school of economics). She moved on to higher education, but dropped out. She used to work part-time as a bookkeeper. At the time of the interview she was on maternity leave. Father: aged 33, education level: technical secondary, unemployed at the time of the interview. He does seasonal jobs as a construction worker. The couple have been married for five years. They have two sons (aged three and a half, and eighteen months). Their income is low, but their housing conditions are not so bad: they own a 30-square-metre, two-room flat they bought with their savings. The father and the elder son sleep in the larger, connecting room. The mother and the infant son (still being breastfed) sleep in the smaller room.

Individual In-depth Interview #11 [IDI.11]

Tarnów, small town; small-town lower middle class

Mother: aged 44, education level: secondary (school of economics), unemployed at the time of the interview. She is planning to set up a family crisis intervention centre. Formerly employed full-time as a bookkeeper (she had already had children), and then part-time as a community nurse and a shop assistant. She also worked abroad for a while. Father: aged 47, education level: technical secondary school. He is a full-time glassworks employee, working in shifts and earning extra money by doing renovation jobs. He spends 'very little time, generally' with his children and family. They have five children: three daughters, aged 24, 22 and 15, and two sons, one aged 20 and the other aged three years and four months. The two eldest girls are at university in Kraków and only come to visit when they are free. Their parents are still supporting them financially. The couple have been married for 25 years. Their income is average, enough to buy the necessities, such as food, but not enough to pay for dental treatment. The family lives in a fifty-square-metre, two-room flat. The parents and the youngest boy occupy the larger room. The larger room is also where the eldest daughters

sleep when they come to visit at weekends. The family are going to move to the country (their country home is being renovated).

Individual In-depth Interview #12 [IDI.12]

Stalowa Wola,³ small town; small-town working class

Mother: aged 33, education level: post-primary vocational training (school of horticulture). She has a job as a cleaner. Father: aged 28, education level: primary school. He works on and off as a construction worker. They have a five-year-old boy. The couple have been married for five years. Their income is low. They rent a one-room flat.

Focus Group Interviews

As planned, five focus group interviews were conducted. The sample was based on participants' expertise.

According to Magdalena Nicińska (2000: 47), there are 'research areas where a context becomes not only desirable, but also necessary. The advantage of focus group interviews is what we usually call "group dynamics" – a process whereby members of a group interact and influence one another. The underlying assumption is that people do not hold strong personal opinions on many issues, but rather, their opinions are shaped and modified in the course of interaction with others'. Then she adds: 'Focus group interviews provide contexts in which interviewees have the opportunity to articulate their feelings and to listen to what others have to say. Group interaction also provides them with the opportunity to change their minds or "adjust" their opinions to accommodate new aspects. This is possible because participants in a discussion are able to respond directly to what the previous speaker said.'

We kept those guidelines in mind while arranging focus group interviews for our survey of parenting styles. An individual tête-à-tête interview with a female participant might encourage her to concentrate only on her own problems – including fancy problems that did not exist – and the interviewer would be unable to stop her. A group setting might prevent that. Moreover, focus group interviews are known to have a therapeutic effect by allowing group members to learn how to solve problems. We were also curious to see whether the group interviews could supply us with information that the individual interviews were unable to provide.

The focus group interviews were conducted in Opole, Warsaw and Sępólno Krajeńskie, and involved the following groups:

Focus Group Interviews		
	Type of Group	Location
1	Mixed: parents and grandparents	Opole
2	Fathers	Opole
3	Mothers	Sępólno Krajeńskie
4	Young and childless	Warsaw
5	Mixed: parents and grandparents	Warsaw

Below are details of the interviewees, dates, and venues:

1. Focus group interview with a mixed group of parents and grandparents, conducted in Opole on March 21, 2002. Participants:

- A.** Pre-school teacher; her son, Kuba, is five years old
- B.** Parent of three sons: Kamil aged nine, Krzyś aged six, and Wojtek aged four
- C.** School caretaker, mother of four; her youngest son, Marcin, is six years old
- D.** Librarian, grandmother of two girls: one of them, Weronika, is a pre-schooler, the other girl is a toddler
- E.** Lawyer, father of two girls: one of them, Weronika, is a pre-schooler, the other girl is a toddler
- F.** Secretary; her son, Bartek, is six years old
- G.** Company employee; her son is a schoolboy and her daughter, Ola, is a pre-schooler
- H.** School teacher, mother of two girls: her elder daughter, Kasia, is four-and-a-half years old, the younger girl is eleven months old

□ For logistic reasons, the researchers were unable to conduct interviews in Świdnica and Łomża. Instead, interviews were conducted in Stalowa Wola and Tarnów.

2. Focus group interview with a group of fathers, conducted in Opole on March 26, 2002. Participants:

- F.1 Employee at a privately-owned company; he has two daughters aged three and four
- F.2 White-collar worker with two children: a five-year-old girl and a two-year-old boy
- F.3 Self-employed manual worker; his three sons are nine, six and three years old
- F.4 University and school teacher; his son is six years old
- F.5 Computer specialist; his two daughters are seven and five years old
- F.6 Self-employed veterinary surgeon with two daughters: one is five years old and the other one is sixteen months old
- F.7 Computer specialist with two children: a six-year old daughter and a younger son
- F.8 School teacher with four children: two sons, aged twelve and four, and two daughters, aged eleven and one

3. Focus group interview with a group of mothers, conducted in Sępólno Krajeńskie on April 11, 2002. There were ten participants. They provided the following information about themselves (the interviewer did not write down their names):

- A. Mother of two; her daughter is 22 years old and her son is 17
- B. Mother of three; she has a 23-year-old son, a 22-year-old daughter and a 17-year-old son
- C. Mother of three daughters aged twenty-one, twenty, and twelve
- D. Mother of four; she has three daughters aged fifteen, twelve and ten; her son is six years old
- E. Mother of a ten-month-old baby boy
- F. Mother of three; her two sons are twenty and ten, and her daughter is twelve
- G. Mother of two daughters aged 24 and 11
- H. Mother of an eleven-year-old girl
- I. Single mother of three: a nineteen-year-old son, an eighteen-year-old daughter and a ten-year old daughter
- J. Mother of an eleven-year-old girl

3. Focus group interview with a group of young, childless people (college and high-school students), conducted in Warsaw on April 5, 2002. This interview plays a special role in this report, so its participants will be presented in the next chapter.

4. Focus group interview with a mixed group consisting of eight mothers, one father and one grandfather, conducted in Warsaw on May 22, 2002. Participants (M stands for 'mother', F stands for 'father' and G stands for 'grandfather'):

- M.1 Mother of two; her daughter is six and her son is three years old
- M.2 Mother of four boys aged 15, 13, 11 and 6
- M.3 Mother of three (expecting another baby); her two sons are six and four, and her daughter is three years old
- M.4 Mother of two girls aged nine and seven
- M.5 Mother of three (aged 9, 6 and 3)
- M.6 Mother of five
- M.7 Mother of several children ages 10 to 23
- G. Grandfather of twenty, father of five
- F. The only father in this group did not introduce himself and did not say how many children he had.

Press Reviews

Apart from to the individual and group interviews, the team of experts appointed by the Polish Children and Youth Foundation had also decided to do press reviews to find out what parental concerns and, in particular, what parenting styles were described in the following newspapers and periodicals:

- A major national daily. **Gazeta Wyborcza** was selected for analysis as Poland's largest and most widely read newspaper, popular with opinion-makers and intellectuals. The reviewers examined the national issues, published in the year 2000, of the daily and its supplements: the magazine supplement, **Magazyn**, and the supplement for women, **Wysokie Obcasy**.
- A major local daily. **Dziennik Bałtycki** was selected as one of the most widely read local newspapers in Poland. The reviewers examined the issues published in the year 2001.

- A women's monthly. ***Claudia*** was selected as a very popular women's magazine and Poland's most widely read monthly with a strong interest in child development and parenting. To have a broader perspective, the reviewers examined the 2000 and 2001 editions.

We were interested to find out **how these newspapers and magazines actually depicted young children and the process of child development and education**. Our analysis centred on the following key areas: young children; early childhood education and care (parenting styles, roles, concerns and patterns); preparation for parenthood; pregnancy; labour; birth; postpartum; developmental phases; childhood memories; and early childhood education and care institutions. In short, our research ranged over a wide field with the young children as the pivot of attention.

Apart from that, no other detailed review guidelines were set out. The researchers were to examine everything relating to young children and childcare in Poland. Behind this strategy lay the concern that we might unintentionally leave out some essential data if we narrowed down the scope of our research. As a result, various types of printed material were investigated: long features, columns, notices, letters from readers, film reviews, photographs and advertisements. The only restriction was the upper age limit of ten years for the children depicted in the articles and photographs. Understandably, this restriction presented occasional problems: for example, it was sometimes difficult to guess accurately the age of a child in a picture without a caption.

Chapter One

Child Operating Instructions: Childhood and Childcare in the Press and in the Eyes of Young People

The horrifying thing was that our baby was delivered to us without any operating instructions. We had to learn everything from scratch... [IDI.1]

Before turning to examine the most common parenting styles adopted by Polish families, let us have a closer look at some 'child operating instructions': those offered by young childless people who intend – or do not intend – to start a family, and those offered by the leading newspapers and magazines that often write about childhood issues. Opinions expressed by these young people, who have a natural tendency to take a slightly idealised view of the 'world of nappies', and those expressed by the press, which usually makes excursions into that world for strictly commercial reasons, will be an excellent prelude to a report on the state of early childhood education and care in Poland.

The Young and Childless on Parenthood

One of the focus groups interviewed as part of the project deserves special attention: the young, childless and unmarried people between the ages of nineteen and thirty. In the context of parenting, they are particularly interesting for two reasons. Firstly, as many sociologists point out (Szafranec 1999; Świda-Ziembra 2000), they hold quite distinctive views of family roles in the advanced modern world. Secondly, they may give us a 'preview' of the socialisation processes that are likely to take place in Poland in the near future. In other words, they may be 'harbingers of things to come' – obviously, to a certain extent only.

Apart from the interviewer, the group consisted of nine people: Agata, 28, journalist (**AB**); Ola, 25, computer graphic designer (**AO**); Anna, 22, college student (**AP**); Joanna, 22, college student (**JJ**); Krzysztof, 24, photographer (**KK**); Katarzyna, 30, make-up artist (**KB**); Magdalena, 25, unemployed (**MD**); Maciej, 24, college student (**MT**); and Piotr, 19, high-school student, the youngest participant (**PP**). The interview took place in Warsaw, where all the participants lived. Obviously, the group was in no way representative of young Poles – indeed, it was not even representative of Polish students. Nevertheless, their views on childhood socialisation are well worth a closer look to help us form a mental picture of the future socialisation institutions (if, of course, the young interviewees stick to their present convictions).

Yes, There Is a Problem

It is worth noting that young people who have no children are aware of the special status of early childhood education and care. *'One day we'll have children of our own, and we should have a vision of how to raise them,'* AB says. They should 'have a vision' because they are eyewitnesses to major changes in their social milieu. But they are not just concerned observers. They have developed their own theories to explain the 'crisis' that has affected the primary socialising agency: the family. Says AB: *'My theory is that the family and the media are in crisis. The media is omnipotent, creating dubious role models to copy. There are no parenting models to follow. These days anything goes, and everybody is trying to come up with something that suits them – or they don't think at all about how children should be raised.'*

So it is not necessarily the parents – or, rather, not only the parents – that are responsible for a child's behaviour. Says JJ: *'I don't think that parents only are responsible for childhood socialisation. There are other agencies, like schools, educational books and the media, too. I don't think the whole responsibility can be laid at anybody's door ... I mean, our parents are our first role models, aren't they? They teach us to read and write, and we watch them closely because they are probably the ones who influence us most. But schools should also feel responsible. You can't have a teacher who spots some youths having a fistfight and says, "For heaven's sake, they've been sending ruffraff to this school", and throws up his hands in despair. Schools, too, should have special programmes. And teachers should feel responsible for those children.'*

Despite accentuating the role of teachers, the young, childless people are aware of the crucial role of parents, and often blame them for unsuccessful socialisation. According to MT, the problem is that most parents *'are simply helpless because ... I mean, let me give you an example ... I know a couple. They don't let their children watch TV, except sometimes, when they think there's a good programme to watch. And they don't read magazines, these two girls – I don't remember how old they are, around twelve, maybe... They don't read girl's magazines like Bravo or others; they don't read that sort of thing because, well, they don't. Anyway, their mother is a teacher, and their parents make sure*

that they don't. So I think it can be done. This is just one example that parents can monitor their children's access to the media. I think most of the parents ... Let me give you another example of another couple I know. They're raising their child on television. And they actually do nothing else, they just put the kid in front of the TV, and it's the only way the kid can be fed, dressed or whatever, because it's the only way to distract the kid's attention. This shows the extent of the problem, because if teachers say they aren't supposed to step into parents' shoes and parents are helpless, who is then responsible for bringing up children?'

Clearly, it is not easy to point at one agency, blaming it for the lack of successful socialisation in Poland today. Some young people are trying to excuse their parents. How should they know anything about parenting, if – as AB says – *'they weren't taught how to raise children, and, anyway, the parenting styles we learn from our own family are usually the least attractive?'* Young people have never received any parenting lessons from anybody, least of all their own parents. Besides, parents are not very good role models to emulate in this respect, or in any other respect for that matter. *'Parents are only human,'* says MD. *'They aren't perfect. And while on the subject of role models, we are often disappointed with them when we take a closer look at their decisions.'* But the lack of role models in Polish families was not the only problem the young participants mentioned in their discussion.

When asked what kind of parental worries were most common in Polish households, the young interviewees replied, almost in unison: 'financial'. Money is a major concern even for the educated young city dwellers. Financial difficulties are caused by many factors, such as unemployment. MT says (breaking off in mid-sentence): *'Unemployment in those [poor rural] areas has reached staggering proportions. Take, for example, communities where whole families earn their living in autumn, picking berries and mushrooms in the forest. Whole families go to the forest and sell these things at the roadside. And, naturally, where there is unemployment, there are also drinking problems. These people just don't give a toss ... Even if they find a job, say, some simple construction work to do, all they want is to go to the shops and buy a bottle ... At this point, talking about parenting is a little –'* Well, a little out of place? Perhaps it is. Situations like that often give rise to family dysfunction. JJ cites an example of *'a seven-year-old boy looking after his baby sister... This kid knows how to change a nappy and when it needs changing ... He knows all that stuff at such a tender age ... In a way, he's becoming an adult, someone who knows how to look after his younger siblings. It's something that will make him grow up faster than the rest of his peers'*.

Apart from financial worries, there are other issues, which are not – or, at any rate, do not seem to be – related to money. One of them is that parents have no time for their children. Another problem – as one interviewee put it – is *'a house that's not a home. More often than not, it's a man and woman living together and having children, but there's no family attachment. There aren't any role models ... When you're a child, your father is your first male role model, your mother is your first female role model, and your parents' relationship is your first model of the man-woman relationship. But the models we've been provided with, and the ones that the younger generation has been provided with, are simply disastrous. Most of the people I know are sceptical about this sort of relationship. We're looking for something completely different from what we saw at home. There's a problem, though: there aren't any models of family life.'* So, what is the end result of having no models to emulate? A whole generation of young people cannot picture themselves as parents.

We Are Incredibly Selfish

'One day, when we are parents,' says AB, *'we are bound to make mistakes, too – they can't be avoided.'* This pessimistic thinking is typical of the young interviewees, who are, by and large, reluctant to have children. Children are a nuisance, a lot of hard work, and a responsibility that is difficult to take on and carry out. Many interviewees subscribe to that point of view.

In general, the young people at the turn of the century are not cut out for parenthood. They are horribly selfish – in the words of the young interviewees – and it shows in the way they treat their own children. One interviewee, AB, cites an example of a friend of hers: *'He got married six years ago. Sixteen months later his wife was killed in a road accident. He was left with his sixteen-month-old son. He comes from somewhere outside Warsaw. The kid moved in there with the man's mother. He thought, when his son was seven, he'd take the boy back to live with him, his son would start a new school, et cetera. I was talking to him the other day, and he came up with a dozen reasons why he was absolutely unable to take the kid back, no way. Find a nanny? Forget it. He wouldn't change his mind. The man's so incredibly selfish. He'd have to stop drinking beer with his mates, going to parties, and he'd have to start looking after his son, and so on. So he wants the kid to stay with a grandmother. I'm afraid, we are a generation of egomaniacs.'* KB concurs: *'Each of us is an egomaniac.'*

The young and childless believe that they are not ready for parenthood. KB, a woman of thirty, says: *'I'm just not ready ... It's so difficult, I've got so many problems with myself, it'd be difficult for me to mother a baby and [accept] all this responsibility, the fact that I'd have to be an authority*

figure, I'd have to stop being selfish, I'd have to give up so many things. There are plenty of questions to consider. This is very difficult.' 'This' is also very difficult for the young men, whom – apparently – even the older generation does not consider reliable in this respect. MT points out: *'My future mother-in-law says that, generally, a man shouldn't be a father until he is thirty-five, and that's too early for him, anyway. And talking of selfishness, it just isn't true that you grow out of it – you can never grow out of being selfish.'*

If one cannot grow out of being selfish, a decision to start a family must be extremely tough indeed. In a manner of speaking, having children is like having a lesson in maturity. Says JJ: *'I can't picture myself as a mother. I'm twenty years old and, at this point, I can't see myself starting a family in the future. I wouldn't be able to accept this kind of responsibility.'* In the eyes of the young people, parenthood is not only a matter of responsibility – it involves some other unpleasant things, like self-sacrifice. *'Motherhood is equated with perfect happiness, but little is said about the sacrifices you have to make,'* MD says. *'We know a thing or two, so we can't say that the first three years aren't important. They are important, so you need to adjust your ways to spend as much time as possible with your child.'*

AB holds a similar view: ***'I'm not going to get married, no way. I'm twenty-eight. I think I want to have a baby before I'm thirty-five. I'm glad that science and medicine ... and other things are beginning to make it possible because I know I'm past the best childbearing age. But I think the real problem with Polish families is that plenty of people get married at twenty or twenty-one, when they are emotionally totally immature. They get married because they 'got themselves into trouble'. At the age of twenty or twenty-one, you aren't a fully mature person. Surely there are exceptions but, I'm afraid, most people just aren't mature enough to protect a small baby, to help the baby make sense of the world, because they don't really know what it's all about.'***

Paradoxically, those who choose to remain childless – because they are aware of the problems ahead and because they realise that they are selfish – turn out to be quite responsible. Says MD: *'I think there is another tendency: [some people] make a conscious decision not to start a family ... I mean, if you know that you're unable to make sacrifices, you know that you're selfish ... Many people are aware of that.'* JJ adds: *'I think it's more selfish to start a family without taking it seriously.'* However, too many parents do not seem 'to take it seriously'.

Parents Have No Time

When the interviewer asked them about the most powerful child mentors, all the interviewees agreed with MT, who replied: 'the peer group.' Says PP: *'By and large, parents usurp the role of mentors. They have a lot of problems, but they won't talk about it with each other or with their children. They can't be helped, they won't let anybody else help them, and they are unable to help themselves. My mother is like that. To begin with, she's so helpless that she can't be my mentor. I really wish she were, but she isn't. She's too weak. And my father, he just ignores certain things and he can't help my mother either. So, I think, the problem is that everybody in my family feels alone. Ours is a family of four ... it isn't a family, really, it's just four people who can communicate on some levels only.'*

JJ has a similar point to make: *'I can tell you what my parents did. It doesn't matter if they're good or bad as parents ... My parents came to the conclusion that I shouldn't rely on anybody, that my teachers were just a bunch of morons and my friends had their own interests in mind. I was supposed to rely on myself. They always made sure that I was learning new things, that I was getting better and better, and all that was destructive because I had very low self-esteem. I always thought I wasn't smart enough. For example, my parents never said, "Why don't you learn this or that?" They said, "You've got to be the best. We want you to be the best" ... I remember I always struggled at primary school and at high school. And it wasn't because I wanted to please them. They were always absent from the home; they didn't bother to ask what I had learnt. When they came back, they just said, "Have you learnt your lessons? Do you know how to do it? Are you sure you know the answers? Are you strong enough? Great!" – and out they went again.'* JJ does yoga, but she does not expect her parents to *'sit down and practice all these things with me because I've got a yoga trainer and I think he's fantastic, but it'd be nice if they sat down and asked why I was doing it and what it meant to me. They don't have to understand it, they don't have to read the same books, but I wish they were interested enough to notice something new in my life'*. Parents, however, are not interested because – as the young interviewees say – they have other things to do. They have a different list of priorities.

Today's parents go out to work. Times have changed: the new circumstances mean a lot of hard work and little time for family life. Says JJ: ***'Let me tell you, my parents are so wonderful and they love me so much that they work twelve hours a day and I see very little of them because they love me so much that they last saw me eight years ago.'*** Today's parents are 'utterly pragmatic'. Says MT: *'What I find really annoying about my parents is that they are utterly pragmatic: "Come on, who needs that sort of thing? Why don't you get a good job, study economics, be a banker and get rich quick." It really drives me up the wall.'*

According to the young interviewees, parental pragmatism and lack of time have a detrimental effect on the child's psyche. JJ explains: *'At my school everybody complained that their parents went out a lot instead of looking after the kids ... I felt abandoned because [parents] are supposed to give you a sense of safety. All this can be traumatic ... leading to depression, nervous breakdowns or even serious mental disorders. We had sessions with guidance counsellors, and many people complained that they didn't really know their parents at all. **Parents have no time for their children. They buy them cars or mobiles instead, or give them money, but there comes a time when you simply lose your sense of identity. You've got plenty of gadgets but you feel empty inside** ... If you ask me, they feel that nothing makes sense anymore, nothing seems to matter, and it takes its toll on the family. They don't listen to each other, they don't have time for each other...'* AB agrees: *'It has come to that ... First, everything in this country turned topsy-turvy a few years ago because of all these changes, and the old set of values [had to change] ... It's difficult to come up with a new set of values when things are happening so fast ... **And third, everybody has a mania about consumerism, it's way over the top, really** ... A typical family day looks like this: everybody gets back home in the afternoon, they flick the telly on and the whole family sit down to watch it, paying more or less attention, or the kids sit at the computer, but that's the exception rather than the rule, and at weekends, when they aren't so busy, they go down to a shopping centre and spend all day there, shopping, watching a film at the cinema or hanging round whatever else is there, and everybody's happy because they've spent such a perfect day together. **We have no time to talk to one another, we're living too fast, we're running faster and faster, flicking on our personal stereos, TVs and computers, and meeting friends, and we have no time at all to communicate, and we don't know where we're going, we don't know what we really want. And the same applies to families. Parents have no time to stop and think just because life's so hectic.** Basically, the trouble is, we have no time, and parents have no time for their children or for themselves.'*

The young interviewees agree that materialism, consumerism and a mania for gadgets are major problems in Poland today. MT gives some of the reasons: *'One thing must be said about this kind of materialist lifestyle. I mean, after the fall of communism, people wanted to give their children what they hadn't had themselves.'* So they *'have turned to material possessions ... And [children] can see that. I was born, thank God, I lived under communism for ten years only, but I understood that my parents wanted to give me all things they'd lacked themselves – a TV, a PC, lots of books, they'd never had too many clothes or other things. This is why they've turned this way, losing sight of all the rest...'* In the end, parents – and, consequently, their children – seek refuge in material possessions. AB explains: *'I think we tend to seek refuge in material possessions. It's easy to find refuge in things. Paradoxically, it's easier to buy your kid a new pair of jeans or a new sweater, or whatever else is in at the moment, than to sit down and ask him why he's got an F in maths, what's too difficult for him to understand and what kind of help he needs. **It's easier to give presents than to give yourself emotionally.** And this applies not only to children, actually.'*

Still, few parents can afford to buy gadgets to fill that emotional void. Most of them cannot give their children anything. The young and childless have taken heed of that, seeing it as one of the factors that underline social inequality. Says AB: *'I'm afraid there are too many gadgets and toys around ... What a child can see at home is one thing, and what they bring to school is quite another matter ... **If your place in the pecking order at school depends on the kind of backpack you've got, on the kind of shoes you've got, on brand names and toys, it's brainwashing the kids...**'* The young interviewees are critical of that brainwashing. They would prefer a different world and a different educational environment, without indoctrination and with parents having plenty of time for their children. Says AP: *'My parents are divorced. I know a lot of people who are divorced. The idea of a lifelong commitment "till death do us part" seemed unrealistic to me. And then I met these people who had a fantastic family, and they spent every Sunday together, and that wasn't artificial at all – they really enjoyed being together. And I realised that it was possible. I know that these are just patterns we learn at home and, to put it simply, where there's a will there's a way.'*

But parents are unwilling. Worse still, they do not want to know. AB recalls: *'I remember this scene: my mother's just come back home – she was always the first to come back – and she's cooking dinner in the kitchen, and I'm trying to tell her about my school day and I keep saying, "Mum, you aren't listening. You aren't listening, Mum". And she repeats my last words to prove that she is. I say, "No, Mum, you aren't, you just have a good memory". All the time I had a feeling that nobody cared a damn about me. Whenever I wanted to talk to my father, he was always busy reading the paper or watching TV.'*

In general, *'the family is in crisis, and the question is: what next?'* AB says. Perhaps one day, KB muses, *'there'll be no couples at all. I have a theory ... I think that **children will be brought up by groups of people who are, sort of, together... Three women and two men, or women only, or men only... There'll be no such thing as the family**'*. This may not be such a bad idea – considering how Polish families sort out their problems.

Sorting Out Domestic Problems

How do Polish families sort out their domestic problems? The young interviewees are agreed. *'By and large, they don't,'* says MT. But certain response patterns do exist, for example, *'shouting, door slamming, and also slapping, where children are involved ... It's the law of the jungle, basically,'* says AB. Apart from that, the repertoire of strategies includes *'stonewalling, long periods of sulking,'* says MD, or *'ostentatious behaviour, something like, "I won't budge, I'll show you",'* says MT. However, *'nobody really resolves conflicts – they just die down. I mean, they don't go away; they simply lie dormant for a while – until next time. We don't know how to solve them,'* says AB.

Problems and conflicts are quite common. 'Good families' are not spared from domestic difficulties either. Happy families are not necessarily perfect. *'My home,'* KK says, *'seems sort of different, sort of perfect. Everything is okay there ... Conflicts aren't solved by fighting ... They never were ... My parents have always been ... My mother and I get on very well, my father's a bit more difficult to get along with, but I'm not perfect ... I had a happy home, so peaceful, just fantastic, but I'm not perfect. Actually I've had a pretty stormy life ... So it isn't just a question of your parents or your home environment. We can't really blame them.'*

A good home environment, however, should provide the children with 'the basics' to fall back on in times of trouble. Says AB: *'Definitely, it's the family's task to give the children a sense of safety and a sense of ... If you don't receive it, everything is damn hard for you. You have no backbone. And there's one more thing. Psychologists say that parental love is a one-way affection and a one-way responsibility because a child can't do anything to be loved or to get loved in any way. Psychotherapists say that one of the major problems with their patients [is] that they feel unworthy of parental love. They think they were wicked and stupid, and that's why their mum and dad didn't love them. It's just not true. Parental love is a parent's duty, but lots of children haven't a clue. This is why so many adults believe that they didn't live up to parental expectations. But it isn't really the child's fault. It's the parents who are responsible. **If we don't get something we need, it's because our parents have failed to provide it, because right from the start every child should be provided with the basics: love, unconditional love, a sense of safety and support. If you don't get it right from the start, you have problems in later life.'*** The young and childless realise that the provision of these 'basics' – also known as parenting – is an extremely complex task.

Television: A Story of (In)Consistency and Punishment

Young parents need to do a balancing act. On the one hand, they know – or, at least, intuition tells them – what should be avoided, but, on the other hand, they are rarely consistent in their parental resolutions. Probably the best example of this ambivalent attitude is the question of television watching. Most young parents are aware of the need for selective programme viewing and of the need to accompany children in front of the television. Says AB: *'Children can't make informed choices. They will watch anything, especially young children at a certain age, I don't remember the exact age group, they confuse reality with fiction, and so they take a cat and a hammer, and hit the cat with the hammer, not to worry, the cat will come back to life, they've seen this cartoon on TV, or they hit a playmate with the hammer, the playmate, too, will come back to life, they've seen this cartoon on TV, it must have been a Japanese production ... And that's the problem, as I watch my friends and their children, [it is a problem for them] to arrange other kinds of activities for the kids, something that isn't television and is educational, say, drawing pictures with the child, or painting, or reading ... Just being with the child. Children need to spend time with their parents, they need parental attention more than anything else.'* Parents might be aware of that, but their awareness never, or hardly ever, translates into practice. Why? Because they are inconsistent.

KB has a younger sister: *'I'm thirty and my sister is a few years younger than me. Her son is seven years old. I thought she'd be clever and all ... she is a clever woman ... but she gets impatient and starts shouting at Patryk, and in the end she turns the TV on, well, there we are ... But on the other hand, she tries to spend a lot of time with him, takes care to make him interested in many things ... She has to do a balancing act all the time ... and she's not the only one, some other girls in my family who are mothers, they do, too ... Everything changes when you have a baby. You probably won't understand it until you have a baby. You may say to yourself, I'll be a great mother, I won't put the telly on – but then everything takes a different turn.'*

Young parents believe in *'a stress-free childhood – until one day they fly off the handle and give their kid a good spanking,'* says MD. *'Or we are permissive. At first we're permissive and then we have no time or patience – my friends are like that. Or we start off by saying that the broadcast media is horrible, so we won't have a TV at home. But this kind of attitude is harmful, because children should be free to choose, perhaps they should find it out for themselves. I'm not saying that children should be allowed to watch every programme, but you shouldn't spurn television on principle. **We must remember that [a child] is an independent person, who needs freedom to develop with our help. Yes, we should create opportunities, striking a balance between permissiveness and***

restrictions. I've noticed two extremes here: too many restrictions or total freedom. Actually, it never goes too far, but it's only because parents don't have enough patience.'

Not only do children watch television indiscriminately, but they enjoy much more freedom. As a matter of fact, lack of parental control is quite characteristic of family life in present-day Poland. 'I'll give you an example,' AO says. 'My friends' children shut themselves in their bedroom, and they're free to do what they will. Actually, their parents are at home, but the kids, behind their bedroom door, are practically out of control.' However, when left alone in the privacy of their own bedroom, children cannot be trusted to behave in ways that their parents will consider healthy or appropriate. 'When children are asked to choose between crisps and carrots, they'll go for the crisps. Similarly, when they are asked to choose between television and a book, they'll go for television. It's less demanding...'

At this point, ambivalence enters the picture again because it is difficult to decide whether children should enjoy the same rights as their parents do. Says JJ: 'The question is: do you treat your child as an independent person, do you make suggestions to see how your child responds to various things?' Most of the young interviewees believe that children should, for example, have the right to enjoy the benefits of mass communication. Television and the Internet are, according to AP, 'natural things in the modern world, and you can't put a veto on television because in the end your child may find it difficult to relate to other kids at school. Other kids will be talking about a TV programme, and your child will be clueless. And the child may feel inferior, sort of ... resentful, seething with revolt. No, you definitely shouldn't put a veto.' In fact, according to PP, a better solution is more parental control. Says PP: 'You can, sort of, be present when your kid is watching TV instead of leaving the kid alone in front of the telly. Television shouldn't be a parent but an additional tool. Parents should have some control over what their child watches, perhaps by watching TV together, helping the child to make sense of it all. I think it's the best way out, because **sooner or later your child will understand that carrots are better than crisps, and will be able to select programmes to watch. This is probably the best approach – the middle position. Actually, I was brought up this way and it meant quite a lot to me, watching TV with my family, and it still does, because we always have something to talk about. You can't reject everything that's on TV. Almost a hundred per cent of it is rubbish, but several per cent of programmes are worth watching.'**

To be able to identify that several per cent in order to teach the child to make proper choices, one needs to be absolutely consistent. MT explains: '**Parental inconsistency is worse than anything else. One thing is good today and quite another thing is good tomorrow.**' AB adds: 'Mum says yes and dad says no.' MT concurs: 'It isn't sensible parenting.' Consistency also matters when it comes to punishing. JJ makes the following observation: 'To begin with, children need to know exactly why they are being punished. **If there must be a punishment, it should be predefined and fitting ... It should be immediate, not wholesale, you know, the kid told a lie yesterday, was grouchy today and didn't want to eat her lunch two days ago, so she won't go out to play. Parents need to be consistent ... Otherwise, in the end you have no self-respect. You think: Am I wicked? Have I done something wrong by not eating my lunch or not doing this or that? And you don't have much respect for your parents either. Are they your parents or friends? Are they caring or ratty? This is very hard indeed.'**

The question of punishment seems to strike a chord. All the young interviewees feel very strongly about it. In particular, it is corporal punishment that they unanimously reject. 'Physical punishment should never be used. It won't get you anywhere, that's what I think. It's just a way of venting parental anger, and it may prove damaging for the child. You know, I got a slap on occasion, because I'd broken a precious vinyl record imported from Sweden ... I was playing with them and broke probably seven of them ... Naturally, I got a slap, but it wasn't physical punishment, I wasn't really punished. I just lay down, tossing the broken pieces around. This was my first reaction. But I don't think [a slap] is okay, it's just a way of venting parental anger,' JJ says.

One interviewee says: 'I'm a real expert at corporal punishment, and I don't think I'll ever slap my kid ... Definitely not ... **But the thing is that I can't think of an alternative punishment. I've had no experience of that sort of thing. I don't know how to talk to children to show them that I'm strong, and that my decision stands ... What I can think of is putting a ban on a child's personal favourite as a punishment ... If she likes [the television programme] "Maya the Bee" and she's done this or that, sorry, that's life, if you misbehave, you have to pay for it ... But I don't know ... This way, you may ... It doesn't have to be "Maya the Bee", I don't know, perhaps a family outing, or something else that's important to the child, it doesn't have to be physical ...'**

Exactly. But are there any non-physical – and effective – ways of punishing children? How can you show parental displeasure? Can you punish your child and if so, how do you do it? Is there anything more effective than punishment? 'Putting a ban,' says MT, 'saying, "No, you can't because I say no" is the worst option. I think it only works where you respect your parent, who says, "Listen to me ... because I tell you".' AB believes that 'you must first tell your child what is acceptable and what isn't, because children haven't a clue'. MD has a friend who says that '**the worst punishment for her as a young girl was when she was sent away to her room to think about what she'd done. It was the worst punishment. Well, she wasn't actually such a little kid. So, you see, it's as simple as**

that. And then she was expected to talk about it with her mother, to explain why what she'd done was wrong'. Indeed, it is as simple as that. It is enough to show parental love. But how do you do it?

'What really matters is physical contact, body contact,' says AB. [It matters] especially to the younger children,' MT adds. 'What do you mean by physical contact?' asks the interviewer. 'Embracing. Sitting on a parent's lap. Talking to a child, basically,' replies MT. 'Plus listening and opinion-giving,' AB adds. 'Just listening to children, praising them for whatever progress they make to help them build up self-esteem and confidence. Talking to children all the time.' 'Having fun together,' MT takes up. 'People are in a hurry and, for example, they have no time to help their children to get dressed, they expect them to dress themselves. It's so simple. You can say, "Let's go out together, let's do something together" rather than "You go and play, I'll do it faster because it'll be faster if I do it. I'll do it faster, so you just sit down". The net result is that I can't do anything, so I'd better sit down and read. And then everybody comes down on me for not sharing the housework.' MD picks up the point: 'I think it's important to tell your children that you'll always love them even if they make a mistake or get a poor school report. "I'll always love you, no matter what. You have a right to make mistakes, you don't have to be the best".'

Without a doubt, anger and spanking are not the best expressions of parental love. One interviewee shares the story of how she was traumatised by her father: 'I can remember only twice my father said he loved me. Basically, he just used to beat me up... I can tell you, the last time I took a whipping, I was twenty-four. But ... I've just realised – if he'd grabbed a stick that last time, he would have killed me. He beat me with an extension lead, and I was black and blue all over ... Come to think of it, that was the best expression of parental love I'd ever had from him in my life. It's so terribly difficult for him to express his emotions. Nobody taught him how to do it ... He was unable to tell me he loved me, so he beat me up instead – to show me how much he cared.' Hers was by no means an isolated story. Other young interviewees shared their own unpleasant experiences with the group. Some of those experiences had taken place outside the home.

House of Horror: Childhood Education and Care Institutions

Parents – the young interviewees say – are not the only weak link in the long chain of caregivers and educators. Other institutions, such as pre-school centres, are not any better. At one point during the interview, KK, a photographer, said, 'Let me tell you about my pre-school. **It was a house of horror. There was a bookcase there, two meters high, and they put me on top of it when I misbehaved. Not just me, though, other children, too... There was a girl named Patrycja. I think I remember – or is this just my imagination? Anyway, I think I remember, she used to throw up food onto her plate, and they made her eat it up...**' The pre-school 'house of horror' had plenty of thrills to offer. 'Does anybody remember spinach?' KB asks. 'They gave us spinach in my pre-school.'

Primary school can be a 'house of horror', too. AP recalls: 'I can tell you about my primary school. When I was ten or eleven, I spent three months in England. I went to school there, an ordinary school. It was an incredible experience. For example, the classroom set-up was completely different, and the programme was different, too. It was more like what they're trying to do here now, doing a theme or unit throughout the day. We had lots of experiments. There were lots of children's products in the classroom, and a book centre for quiet reading. I simply ran to school every morning, I just couldn't believe it myself. You stayed there until four or five p.m., but it was just fantastic. They organised fetes and visits, for example, police officers came to the school to talk about road safety. It was so exciting. And then, I remember, I came back to Warsaw, and my primary school seemed so dull. We just sat in the classroom: lesson, break, lesson, break; and zero interest. And ... school should be interesting.' Indeed, it should – but it is not.

Worse still, Polish state schools find it difficult to accept those who are different. They also have difficulty employing modern, more open-minded teaching approaches. JJ tells the story of his brother, who 'is dyslexic, and suffers from dysgraphia, and he had all kinds of trouble at pre-school and primary school. He wanted to write left-handed only, but they made him use his right hand instead... In the end he was unable to hold the pen in either hand, because at school he got a slap on the wrist every time he grabbed the pen with his left hand. When he finally started to write, he wrote right-handed, but his pen strokes were all wobbly ... It was an ordinary school, where the word "dyslexia" made everybody laugh ... He had a teacher ... She made him the laughing stock of the class. His essays were put on display ... He felt terribly inadequate. He was unable to ... because of his spelling problems, he was unable to memorise a rhyme he was supposed to learn by heart as homework. He was so scared of that teacher. School, to him, meant humiliation, and nobody could help him, not even the school guidance counsellor ... When my brother started a new school, he got a new lease of life. It's a charter school, and he's doing fine, he's learning languages, he's captain of the sports team, et cetera. **I think the main problem is the school system.** Those people should understand children, arrange activities, give support...'

Luckily, some schools are like that. More importantly, some pre-school centres are like that. The interviewees agree. Says JJ: 'A woman who has a baby wants to go back to work as soon as

possible. Few families are so comfortable that one parent [goes out to work]. And it's not possible for one parent to take parental leave and for the other parent to earn the money. Both parents need to go back to work as soon as possible, so I think they need institutions like pre-school centres.' AB presents a similar view: *'I know there are women who can't stay at home with their children, but from the point of view of child development, during the first three years the attachment between mother and child is particularly strong. I believe that children should definitely stay at home with their mothers until the age of three, because it's good for their development. After that, they should start to socialise with their peers, and if there's a good pre-school – no problem, as long as they feel safe and secure there. But toddler groups can be a nightmare, especially in Poland, sad to say.'* Other, typically Polish nightmares include a lack of tolerance and a lack of understanding towards those who are different.

Parental Rights and Wrongs

'A friend of mine,' says AP, *'is thirty-five. She has a six-year-old son. She's a Buddhist, an art school graduate and an artist. It's her philosophy ... It's funny because she, sort of, goes beyond the bounds of convention – also in the way she's raising her son. For example, sometimes she dresses him in ... clothes that are very cool, very stylish, that's what we think, but when you see him with his peers, the kid looks as if he'd pulled his duds out of a dustbin. And his bedroom looks the same way, too. I don't really know, but I think the boy ... it must have an influence on the way he behaves and he surely must be asking some questions in his head because he's so different from other children.'*

According to MD, what Polish children need is *'security – they want straight parents, a straight home, dinner at the same time every day.'* Not everybody agrees with her. AB cites an example of a friend of hers, who is a *'vegan and has this thing about a natural lifestyle. Her daughter is thirteen or fourteen. All these ideas like Reiki, ear candling, holistic medicine, not seeing a doctor because the body can heal itself ... And this young girl's one of the best kids I know, very independent thinking ... She wants to be a film director, wants to make movies, she reads a lot, books like Crime and Punishment and other ... She's different from other children her age. She often lands in hot water at school: [once] a teacher told her to eat up her mushrooms, it must have been on a school trip, and she is ... I don't know if she's allergic or something was wrong with those mushrooms ... She spent three hours sitting in the canteen, but she didn't eat the mushrooms. She was sent to the head teacher. And Zu is a little rebel, she's different and she's proud of it. Her friends think her mother is terrific, their home is terrific because all kinds of quirky people come to visit, one time it was a shaman, and then somebody else ... and everything's phenomenal there and ... I think it's a matter of your personal choice, because, on the one hand, you need the support of a group but, on the other hand, individualism does bloody matter.'* Individualism needs to be encouraged, and it is the parents' job, JJ believes. *'Now,'* she says, *'a lot of possibilities have opened up in Poland. If a group of parents get together and decide that they'd rather not send their kids to a school where children play with Pokemons and use bad language, and smoke cigarettes in the loo as their favourite pastime ... they can set up a school themselves – it isn't terribly expensive – or they can send their children to a school, there are schools like that, where parents have a say in what the children watch, what places they visit and what kind of activities they are offered. My brother's school is like that. If someone wants to put an idea into practice, they can. **These families aren't weird. They just want to raise their children in their own way.**'*

Polish parents, however, are simply reluctant to part with some stereotypes, including the conventional family roles of men and women, despite the dramatic and patently obvious changes that have taken place within Polish society. *'In my family,'* PP says, *'there's a conflict between the stereotyped role of mother and the stereotyped role of father. My parents work freelance, so sometimes my father's away from home for a long time, and sometimes my mother is. **The thing is, when my mother's away, my father does the housework, and when my father's away, my mother does it, but when they are both at home, only my mother does it.** It's supposed to be fantastic, it's the twenty-first century ... Even my father says that's the way it should be, but when you look around, men don't do any housework, so he has no qualms about lolling around watching football results on teletext...'* This kind of parental conduct in a changing social environment can have a detrimental effect on a child. MT explains: *'My girlfriend's half-sister's parents, I mean, her father, the way he was brought up, he's a typical male. When he gets back home, his dinner must be on the table, and the house must be spick-and-span ... His mother brought him up that way ... He never does any cooking or cleaning, no way. He's never done a thing like that in his life. And characteristically, she won't do it either. She won't do it just to show him that she won't. In the end, nobody does it. And it's the child who suffers...'*

Young Children and the Press

It is interesting to confront the young people's attitudes and ideas with the 'child operating instructions' published and promulgated by the leading newspapers and magazines. We chose three widely read publications: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Claudia*, and *Dziennik Bałtycki*.⁴ All of them use images of children to advertise a wide range of products and services for children (medicines, toiletries, baby care products, film productions and clothes) and for the adult population (banking, insurance policies, cosmetics, cars and telephones). To put it bluntly, young children generate huge profits for newspapers and magazines, and for other media in our commercialised world, in two ways. Firstly, manufacturers of children's products pay a lot to get their advertisements printed. Secondly, images of children are placed in adult product ads because of their strong 'universal appeal'. Young children are an excellent 'instrument' for the media to manipulate the readers by playing on their emotions, especially as adults – because of their natural psychological makeup – find images of children irresistible. A child depicted in a product advertisement conjures up visions of innocence, kindness, safety and happiness (Doliński 2001: 135-141). In general, the media seems to be torn apart between using images of children for purely commercial purposes and carrying out its educational mission in the early childhood field (if it has a mission). Let us begin with *Gazeta Wyborcza*, a newspaper with a mission.

Children and Childhood in *Gazeta Wyborcza*

Items of interest (written material, photographs and advertisements) appeared in various, if not all, sections of *Gazeta Wyborcza* and its supplements: *Wysokie Obcasy*, a supplement for women, and *Magazyn*, a colour magazine supplement. It is worth noting that *Wysokie Obcasy* runs regular features, called 'Childcare', 'Childhood Memories' and 'My Upbringing'. This alone is proof enough that childhood and child education issues are of paramount importance to the newspaper.

Gazeta Wyborcza sees childhood as a critical period of human development. 'Childhood abounds with experiences that are primordial and – therefore – unsurpassed and unique,' writes Jarosław Kurski. 'Memories of childhood leave an indelible mark that stays with us for the rest of our lives.' *Gazeta Wyborcza* often stresses the formative aspect of childhood and its central role in character building. Therefore, the newspaper and its supplements give prominence to childhood memories and personal profiles that focus on the early years. Among those who have shared recollections of their childhood days were actors, politicians and writers. Some of them grew up in educated families with strong patriotic and Catholic traditions. One politician said that his high moral principles were a legacy of his upbringing. Many others spoke about principles and values such as patriotism, integrity, truthfulness, caring and sharing, loyalty, tradition and tolerance. One person recalled: 'My parents made me aware of my roots without clipping my wings in the process. They allowed me to do what I was interested in ... These are principles that you don't compromise because, in the end, it doesn't pay.' Many celebrities recalled how they had discovered their special talents and passions (for art, music, comics or dancing) in the early years. There were also wartime childhood memories, including recollections of excruciating events (parents' death and escaping from the ghetto), and memories of destructive post-war political persecutions.

Gazeta Wyborcza believes that children are very special, and drives the point home on many occasions and in many different contexts. When their relatives leave for good, the rural women in a Bosnian village 'will miss their nearest and dearest, most of all the youngest ones, the nappies on the washing-line and the dummies that get dropped onto the floor.' And 'the happiest day of your life is when your child is born. All the rest just happens along the way'. Children help the family – and the family clan – to survive. (All family stories in *Gazeta Wyborcza* are amply illustrated with photographs showing children in the foreground.) According to the newspaper, children have some responsibilities, too. They should develop into mentally mature and tolerant adults, determined to make the world a better place.

According to articles published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the family is the first "critical environment", an environment where liberal democratic values and virtues are instilled. Helping your child to become self-reliant, self-controlled, friendly, loyal, tolerant, truthful and enterprising is the most important task of parenthood. Children can learn this if they are provided with a sense of emotional security and openness. By talking to their parents and challenging parental authority, children receive their first lessons in good citizenship' (Gesine Schwan, author of *Politics and Guilt*). Learning – and benefiting from learning experiences – can occur in families as well as other childhood settings, even if a child comes from a disadvantaged background. Some of the personality profiles published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* depict precisely such backgrounds. A case in point is the story of Agata Wróbel, world weightlifting champion. She comes from a rural (read: low-income)

⁴ See *Introduction* for a detailed description of the research procedures and selection criteria. To facilitate reading, all references to the original sources – issues or pages – have been omitted.

family. The article portrays her as a persevering person ('she was only six but she knew she had to be tough').

By contrast, the actress Nina Andrycz had a different set of childhood experiences. She recalls: 'I learnt to swallow my pride, to tell lies, to make excuses and to be manipulative. But I also learnt to love, to forgive, to keep fighting to the end and never to give up. We survived. Love conquered all.'

Some of the stories shared by well-known personalities involved a notable lack of mutual understanding – the children did not understand the adult world and the adult caregivers did not understand the children's needs. Many adults tried to shield the children from the realities of adult life. The actor Michał Żebrowski recalls: 'As a child I often wept with despair: I used to talk a lot, but nobody would listen.'

Painful childhood memories, however, involve not only a lack of understanding on the part of adults or a lack of communication. In her review of Anne Lamott's *Crooked Little Heart*, Kinga Dunin, writer and columnist, calls the book a good illustration of a parenting style where a child is not shielded from an imperfect world for too long. 'Everybody is needed for the young girl to come into her own: her depressive mother, her egotistic stepfather, the dying old man and the disturbing tramp. They are, in a manner of speaking, an extended family, a family that has nothing in common with the claustrophobic idea of a self-contained household.'

That said, it must be added that Poles do have a tendency to 'smooth over' their early memories. Many of them paint a picture of a carefree childhood with no initiation into adult affairs. 'My mother's childhood was a paradise. And even though the good-luck fairy's magic did not last long, even though difficult and troubled times lay ahead of her, perhaps those happy days, filled with love and a sense of safety, equipped her with the optimism and the ability to enjoy life that always outlived all her personal tragedies' (memoirs written by a member of the Morkowicz family, the pre-war publishers).

Each of these stories is an invitation to the readers – an invitation to compare and, perhaps, to avoid making the same mistakes, the same parenting errors. Childhood is a hard time for children and adult caregivers alike. In one issue *Gazeta Wyborcza* published an article by Wojciech Eichelberger, a psychotherapist. Entitled 'Short Memory: The Myth of Sweet Childhood Days', the article was a debunker: 'Contrary to our beliefs, childhood and adolescence are difficult and painful stages of life for many of us.' The author goes on to say that children are sensitive and open-minded but vulnerable. 'It is so easy then to abuse our endless love and trust.'

Perhaps it is with the precise aim to debunk that the gender-related family roles are depicted in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, where, perversely, the traditional characteristics of boys and girls are often swapped round. An older sister who is training to be a weightlifter teaches her little brother how to lift weights properly. Tomasz Lis, a journalist, recalls the panic he felt when he was going to school on the first day, and his father said to him with authority: 'You've got to be a man, son'. According to one article, 'Mummy's Boys', sons find it more difficult than daughters to leave home because, as clinical psychologists assert, mothers tend to spoil their boys to a much greater degree.

Gazeta Wyborcza often writes about the roles of men and women in childhood education processes. Many educators, psychologists and psychotherapists have shared their views in the newspaper. Andrzej Jaczewski, a childhood education expert, points out that primary socialisation is marked by the absence of men: 'Boys seem to be provided with female role models only. After all, most of the teachers are women.' Andrzej Samson, a psychologist, says that 'only mother and father together can create optimum conditions for the child to develop'. In his opinion, children whose parents are always absent grow up into normal adults, but they find it more difficult to sort out their problems. 'Unlike maternal love, paternal love is more conditional. The child is expected to conform to certain standards of behaviour. The mother's role is to provide unconditional love and acceptance. The father's role is to express his approval as a reward for the child's efforts aimed at exploring the world and learning the rules of life ... Father stands for restraint and reason. Mother stands for affinity and affection. All these contrasting qualities are necessary to ensure harmonious development ... Without the father, a child's world is incomplete and lopsided.'

Not every woman, though – according to *Gazeta Wyborcza* – develops a maternal instinct. In her interview for *Wysokie Obcasy*, Nina Andrycz confesses: 'I wasn't born to be a mother and I always knew that. I had no maternal instinct whatsoever. What if my child were backward – or slow-witted? Just thinking about it made me scared. For me, pregnancy was disgusting. But, as an actress, I was reproducing myself all the time – mentally.' The actress also admits to having had a few abortions.

Apart from publishing material that 'refutes' the traditional vision of motherhood, *Gazeta Wyborcza* also presents stories to show alternative roles for mothers and fathers. One of these stories – reproduced from the *Wall Street Journal Europe* – depicts an American family who has moved to Caracas, Venezuela. The wife is a manager. She works twelve hours a day, often away from home. Her husband has given up his career to look after their children. In his spare time he is writing a book 'for the househusbands'. Other stories portray Polish parents in unconventional parental roles. For example, Iwona Guzowska, the reigning world boxing champion, was an adopted child. As a young

girl, she loved horses. Now she is into martial arts. Pregnancy did not stop her from practising taekwondo – with the result that she earned her taekwondo belt only two months after her son was born. She used to arrive at the gym wheeling a pram. ‘Wojtek slept on the mat next to her as Iwona practised her kicks.’ Three months after her son was born, Iwona won the Polish kickboxing championship. She is the current world female boxing champion.

The newspaper’s efforts to debunk the role of mother may be very expressive at times, but *Gazeta Wyborcza* does believe in equal opportunities for men and women who want to pursue a professional career. From time to time, however, the newspaper runs articles about the low birth rates, criticising the young women who postpone having a baby. But the very same articles are not critical of the young men who postpone starting a family because of their career. The author of a feature called ‘Career or Family? – I’ll think about it tomorrow’ makes the following assertion: the reason why women postpone having a baby is that they are afraid of giving up their jobs or hampering their career progress. They do not want to lose their source of income; they refuse to grow up and to sacrifice their pleasures. In other words, the author concludes, the reason is selfishness. Interestingly, *Gazeta Wyborcza* seems to suggest a remedy: the government should arrange the provision of efficient and effective childcare services. The newspaper cites Germany, where the government is working on an equal opportunities employment bill. According to German employers, the reason why many single mothers are facing financial difficulties, and only 27 per cent of women managers have children, is that there are not enough places in the toddler groups and the kindergartens close at midday.

Another issue that is often presented in *Gazeta Wyborcza* is the changing role of father in the modern world. Many letters from female readers describe ‘new fathers’, who are involved in childcare and develop close emotional attachments to their stepchildren. One article tells the story of a stepfather who has given up a career in journalism to work for the financial consultancy run by his wife. Some stories and photographs show fathers as providers of thrilling childhood experiences such as sporting activities. Many scenes of domestic life show a caring stepfather who gives the child a piggyback, laughs and tells jokes, whereas the mother is matter-of-fact and quite unsentimental, a stickler for order and good manners. Fathers are often depicted as children’s ‘first idols’, those from whom children pick up a love of music or other interests. According to experts who have spoken on the subject in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, fathers have a particular obligation to their sons: they have to tell the boys that their mothers do not belong to them, and have to help them to become independent. ‘If a pre-school boy is suffering from night terror, a good father talks to him at bedtime instead of putting him to bed next to his mother.’ *Gazeta Wyborcza* has also published news – bordering on the sensational – about the ‘recent research findings’ whereby fathers-to-be allegedly become more sensitive to the baby’s needs and enter the role of father more easily.

Interestingly, *Gazeta Wyborcza* is not a stronghold of militant feminism – contrary to what many people believe – or, at any rate, it is not a stronghold of militant feminism in the early childhood field. For example, Wojciech Eichelberger, a frequent contributor to the newspaper, challenges the popular view, held by some feminist groups, that fathers’ behaviour has a detrimental effect on girls’ emotional stability. ‘Women and girls often suffer at the hands of other women: overprotective mothers, hard-hearted childminders or tyrannical teachers,’ he says.

There are also some legal aspects pertinent to the changing roles of men and women, for example, the issue of parental leave for fathers. One article makes the following recommendation: ‘The question of who takes parental leave should be left for the mother and father to decide.’

Gazeta Wyborcza is apparently arguing the case against the traditional parenting styles that preserve conservative gender roles. The newspaper not only writes about various parenting styles – it often criticises typical Polish ways of bringing up children. One article speaks openly of the need to change the attitudes of the public and the attitudes of the civil servants: ‘Attitudes must change – among judges, among government officials, even among parents. In Polish tradition, children “belong” to their parents and are second-class citizens who do not deserve the same attention as adults do. On top of that, one should not meddle in others’ family affairs. These attitudes are so deeply entrenched that, while signing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Poland reserved the right to waiver its provisions, citing “the traditional position of children within the Polish family”.’

The newspaper also disapproves of physical punishment, an extremely ‘popular’ form of punishment in Poland. Much has been said about its ineffectiveness and the role it plays in venting parental frustration. *Gazeta Wyborcza* has cited opinion polls on physical punishment and also quoted Monika Sajkowska, an expert of Nobody’s Children, a child-advocacy foundation, and the Institute of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Warsaw, who said: ‘Those who were abused as children are more likely to use violence against their own children. The abused become abusers ... Parents must realise that the way they treat their children today will have an impact on the way these children behave in the future.’

In her interview for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the children’s author Wanda Chotomska points to some beneficial changes in children’s behaviour and dispositions: ‘Some time ago, when I met my young readers, they were all very shy and timid. These days children aren’t afraid to ask questions, there is no difference between rural and urban children.’ Hanna Świda-Ziemia, a sociologist, stresses the

need for daily parent-child communication. Parents, she says, should not quarrel in front of their children. They can 'go their separate ways but they shouldn't fight'. Divorce is better than staying together for the sake of the child. Children should be expected to do some housework, but not too much. They can be punished and rewarded, but parents need to be consistent.

After the terrorist attack on New York City, the press published some advice on how to talk to children about traumatic incidents: Children should have the opportunity to express their emotions freely in order to experience that they are not left to cope with the situation on their own. Children, including youngsters, should be talked to seriously. It may be hard, but one needs to do it cautiously without spreading panic or denying the obvious. Next to the article in question was a drawing by an eight-year-old boy, showing towers on an island in a flurry of big snowflakes, with a burning candle on top of each tower.

Leisure time is a separate issue in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, often brought up in the context of public holidays and weekends. Admittedly, families are not always happy about the prospect of spending their spare time together. Anna Dodziuk, a psychotherapist, thinks it beneficial to involve every member of the household in Christmas or Easter preparations. Another columnist, however, insists that adults and children have the right to pursue their own leisure interests. In this case, *Gazeta Wyborcza* does not seem to hold particularly consistent views.

Another, quite controversial issue is the role of computers in childhood education. Wojciech Orliński argues that computer games are not necessarily evil *per se*. Children, he says, have always been exposed to 'cultural violence' – witness the children's war games inspired by television. It is necessary, however, to make the right choices – and this is something for the parents to do. Orliński sees some benefits of playing computer games. Children refine their computer skills. Strategy games encourage an interest in history. They are also excellent civic-education tools. 'To my mind, setting a good example – as opposed to putting an arbitrary ban – goes a long way towards providing proper childhood learning,' he writes. Says a parent: 'Now Marysia, who is nine, and I are competing in a car rally, learning to win and to lose.' *Gazeta Wyborcza* has also published an interview with a therapist who is critical of the role of computers. The computer, he argues, might 'replace everything else, including interaction with parents and peers. A child who just sits before a computer screen will end up living in a virtual-reality world. Incessant game playing means the child is receiving a positively enormous amount of stimulation and his brain just can't cope with it'. Worse still, computer games do not teach children to take the consequences. 'Obviously a shoot-'em-up isn't good if it's the only game the child plays ... It's important to make sure that it isn't the only reality the child knows, and that aggression and dominance aren't the only emotions the child feels.'

Gazeta Wyborcza does not avoid discussing the 'challenges of the modern world', and this also applies to its articles about childhood issues. One author makes the following statement: 'Parents who wish to teach their kids how to save, should find out more about bank savings accounts for young customers.' A debate was also published on the need to install Web cameras in a private pre-school to make it possible for the parents to keep an eye on their children. Entitled 'Cameras on Trial' the debate presented two fundamentally opposed views. The parents and teachers spoke about the natural need to ensure proper care in a world fraught with danger and child drug abuse. The sociologists and therapists spoke about spying, excessive control and depersonalisation. Hanna Świda-Ziemia criticised the parents: 'My peers and I grew up – let me put it this way – beyond the bounds of constant parental anxiety, beyond the bounds of constant parental attention ... A person with a strong sense of privacy and individuality feels much safer, no matter how unsafe the outside world may be. Those who grow up under constant parental surveillance feel uncertain and threatened, and are always looking for an appreciative audience.' According to her, the Web cameras had, in fact, been installed to put the parents at ease: 'It is the parents who are benefiting by reducing their anxiety,' she said.

The readers of *Gazeta Wyborcza* have also had the opportunity to learn some favourable and unfavourable opinions about toys called Pokemons (the pocket monsters of the well-known Japanese television series). In the context of the Pokemon craze, questions were raised about the (detrimental) effects of some children's films and cartoons, and about the parental inability to say no to children's demands. To illustrate the problem, an example from the United States was cited: 'When *101 Dalmatians* was released, children pleaded with their parents to buy them a Dalmatian. These dogs were later sent back or simply thrown out into the street. It is not a good idea to buy a dog because of a movie,' *Gazeta Wyborcza* concludes. This kind of inappropriate conduct can be found in well-to-do families. *Gazeta Wyborcza* also writes about other pathologies that are typical of high-income households, such as the love of money and the absence of parents, who are always too busy to pay attention. Obviously, these are not the only parenting problems discussed in the newspaper. Other problems include low levels of parental awareness, emotional unpreparedness, helplessness in the face of present-day challenges, poverty, inadequate legislation, lack of mutual support in resolving difficulties, and children's health problems.

Gazeta Wyborcza often writes about children at risk in the context of crimes, accidents and disasters. The newspaper reports on accidents, including road accidents with child victims, and on sex

crimes and cases of sexual abuse with child victims. In the review period a lot of material was published about a priest who was molesting children in his parish. Another article was about a nun, the director of a children's home, who was mistreating underage minors in her care. The newspaper cited some of her shameful practices: an incontinent girl was made to lick off her urine from the carpet, a boy was made to lick the faeces off a soiled towel, children were often deprived of food and whipped across the legs with a belt.

According to *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the majority of children at risk live in rural communities, especially in areas where State-owned collective farms used to operate under the previous political system. The main problems there are unemployment, poverty, alcohol abuse, poor educational opportunities, teenage pregnancies, malnutrition, diseases and the absence of men from family life. Rural parents have many children because 'a child is a gift from God'. Many articles in *Gazeta Wyborcza* deal with – or mention – alcohol abuse. The children of drinking parents have nobody to look after them. One of the stories depicts a gang of under-tens, who broke into a car while their mother was intoxicated. Alcohol abuse goes hand in hand with domestic violence. These social problems are closely tied together, and children are shown as victims. For example, *Gazeta Wyborcza* related at length the story of Michałek, a young boy from Warsaw killed by his stepfather, who had thrown the boy into the river, and the boy's mother had acted as an accomplice. The newspaper painted a grim picture of the woman's traumatic childhood and her severe emotional problems, thus giving a Freudian interpretation of insanity, Hollywood style.

Most of the stories about children at risk feature underprivileged families. *Gazeta Wyborcza* writes about women from alcoholic homes. When they get married, they tend to copy their parents' patterns of behaviour. Shockingly, one alarming story involved drinking children. To pacify their crying baby, a poor couple from Nowa Huta used to dip the baby's dummy in beer and sugar. When the boy was seven, his father gave him alcohol to drink because 'one won't be a problem drinker if one learns to drink at an early age'. The same article, however, described also a five-year-old girl from a respectable family in Kraków. The girl drank alcohol when her parents were out and her nanny was inattentive. She had to be detoxified in hospital. Now she is receiving psychotherapy. In line with the newspaper's 'search and rescue' mission, the article listed the addresses and telephone numbers of alcohol information and therapy centres.

Gazeta Wyborcza often provides information about child abuse, including sexual abuse by family members, pointing out that the problem is a taboo subject in Poland. Mirosława Kaźna, head of the Children's Rights Committee, offers the following comment: 'Women often say, "I just couldn't bring myself to admit I did suspect something wrong was going on". Some relatives take the side of the perpetrator, putting all the blame on the child.' According to the newspaper, sexual molestation is also a taboo for the courts of law, especially where the sex offender is the child's relative. The inability of the general public to deal with the problem, coupled with intellectual and emotional immaturity, leads to dramatic situations where, ironically, it is the victims that are ostracised, not the culprits. *Gazeta Wyborcza* publishes letters from readers – mothers and adult victims of child abuse – who write about sexual molestation of children. Contrary to popular belief, the newspaper says, instances of child abuse are not exclusive to problem families. Andrzej Zoll, quoted by *Gazeta Wyborcza* as an expert, stresses the fact that domestic violence takes place in all kinds of family environments, not only in dysfunctional homes: 'It happens because many parents misinterpret "parental authority" as "absolute power". Sadly, the courts of law also treat children as objects.'

One article published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* says that children from broken homes dream of 'their mum and dad getting together again so that things are back to some kind of mythical normalcy.' At the same time, other articles offer advice to divorcing parents. Needless to say, the best protection for a child against all problems and difficulties is a 'healthy family'. 'The family is the best safeguard against the possibility of drug abuse by children. What really matters is mutual love, understanding, support and attachment – in other words, parental attentiveness and acceptance,' writes one author. Other authors admonish: 'Make sure that you spend enough time with your child.'

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In summary, *Gazeta Wyborcza* promotes a secular and modern approach to parenting that breaks with the time-honoured – but not necessarily honourable – tradition. The newspaper is quick to note, and brand as unacceptable, various pathologies that are part of traditional domestic life, especially in impoverished rural areas and small-town communities, where most people conform to the mores upheld by the Catholic Church. *Gazeta Wyborcza* suggests changing the traditional family care model with its stereotyped male-female division of responsibilities and its ignorance of children's needs. It does not, however, show any signs of approval for gay marriages or gay adoptions, citing legal and moral grounds. Józefa Henelowa wrote: '[Homosexual couples] with the right to raise adopted children or children born as a result of in vitro fertilisation – that would spell total disaster.'

Thus *Gazeta Wyborcza* is rather selective in its attempts to transform the traditional family lifestyles. Some ideas – like divorce – seem to be endorsed, so parents are given advice on how to

carry on as parents when their marriage is over. Other ideas – like gay families – are rejected. *Gazeta Wyborcza* calls for closeness and understanding in parent-child relationships, but these are not relationships between equal partners. 'It is a fallacy that these relationships can be built on partnership. A daughter can't be her mother's friend.' 'I want to be my daughter's friend, but, clearly, there must be a distinct line drawn between friendship and maternal care.'

Gazeta Wyborcza is actively involved in institutional efforts to provide assistance to children in general, and to disadvantaged and neglected children in particular. For example, the newspaper joined in a campaign to help flood survivors by collecting cash donations. Parents whose sons and daughters were on holiday at summer camps in flood-struck areas were advised where to look for information about their children. *Gazeta Wyborcza* has also taken cognisance of other alarming facts, for example, children's disappearances. The newspaper has taken part in a search campaign launched by the Ithaca Foundation, and printed computer-aged images of some of the missing children. The underlying aim of the campaign was to warn parents to be more vigilant. It should be noted that *Gazeta Wyborcza* focuses on social aspects of childcare and on social childhood settings. Apparently, its mission is to initiate a change in attitudes within Polish society. The area of reality that the newspaper seeks to change is the early childhood field. *Gazeta Wyborcza* is fighting a war against intolerance and hypocrisy in this field.

In subtle ways, *Gazeta Wyborcza* promotes a vision of fatherhood where fathers are actively involved in childcare and do not hesitate to perform functions that used to be reserved for mothers. The newspaper presents various parenting styles and methods, including traditional approaches (by publishing childhood memories) and approaches based on deep emotional attachment and respect for the individual child. Many authors writing for *Gazeta Wyborcza* are critical of conservative parenting, which – they say – does a lot of harm to children. The newspaper's message is: children are vulnerable and corporal punishment is wrong.

It is worth noting that the position on parenthood adopted by *Gazeta Wyborcza* is almost absolutely identical with the position taken by the young students of Warsaw during their focus group interview. Without a doubt, *Gazeta Wyborcza* has an influence on the way young, childless and educated people see parenting and childhood. For this reason, it should be interesting to have a look at other publications, not so highbrow as *Gazeta Wyborcza* and aimed at a wider audience with a different social status. Let us then consider the vision of childhood as presented by *Dziennik Bałtycki*.

Children and Childhood in *Dziennik Bałtycki*

Dziennik Bałtycki is a local paper and most of its articles cover local issues. National and international news stories are also present there, but their coverage is distinctly different. Compared to *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Dziennik Bałtycki* gives more space to other topics and often represents a different point of view. On the whole, most readers of *Dziennik Bałtycki* do not seem to agonise over domestic events or world affairs, and the content of the newspaper's front page reflects their attitudes. Local events and issues are much more important and given a far greater prominence – at the expense of home and foreign news. Obviously, there are more newspapers like *Dziennik Bałtycki* around the country. We decided to choose *Dziennik Bałtycki* to represent them.

With regard to childhood and childcare, the difference between the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* and the local *Dziennik Bałtycki* becomes strikingly apparent almost at first glance. In general, *Dziennik Bałtycki* paints a highly conventional picture of family life and nurturing in precisely the kind of tradition that *Gazeta Wyborcza* is striving to replace. The paper quotes the Child Ombudsman as saying that, in certain situations, parents 'need to use some kind of force with their children' (naturally, in the best interest of the child). Stories written by children are also published that clearly depict an adult world with a traditional division of family and childrearing duties.

This does not mean, however, that the picture of childhood in *Dziennik Bałtycki* is always conventional or conservative. The paper informed its readers about a four-day conference on 'Education for the Future', which addressed issues such as children's rights – a concept that is definitely at odds with the traditional vision of the family. Parents were also warned to watch out for some 'modern toys' that 'wreak havoc on children's creativity and imagination'. Questions about children's military toys and violence in children's cartoons were raised in this context. The newspaper's position was: there is no need to give children sophisticated or military toys because 'kids in the 3-5 age range can practically turn any old thing into a plaything.'

The articles about parenting and parenthood printed in *Dziennik Bałtycki* hardly ever have a modern ring about them and hardly ever show signs of the liberal thought that is so characteristic of *Gazeta Wyborcza*. A case in point is the newspaper's attitude to motherhood. Being a mother is often portrayed as a woman's chief purpose in life. Consider the following passage: 'The mother of the Gdańsk-born quintuplets doesn't regret a single minute spent at her sons' and daughters' beds ... Her life has been a success: her children are kind and clever ... She accepted the five as a great blessing.' In another story, a woman artist speaks about her daughter: 'Ewa was a wanted child. Motherhood is a beautiful thing. A woman who isn't a mother may be missing a lot.'

Dziennik Bałtycki is very emphatic about the deep attachment between mother and child: 'Scientists say that mothers should choose names for their babies because they start to interact with them at the early stage of foetal development. Every name carries its own energy and vibes.' Mothering and nursing advice is also offered: 'A mother should be given a hand in bathing her newborn baby ... Accidents do happen, and infants need special attention.' It should be noted that during the period in question *Dziennik Bałtycki* did run one article showing women who had returned to work soon after childbirth and were successfully combining professional careers with maternal responsibilities. Stories like that, however, so rarely get into print that they are probably meant to be amusing exceptions.

Dziennik Bałtycki often depicts men as fathers, but the usual place for them is in the photographs. Few articles show men in their family roles. One story portrays a widowed father 'raising four kids, two of them suffering from cerebral palsy.' He regularly takes his children to therapy sessions and, once a year, he takes them to a holiday-cum-therapy programme with the money donated by sponsors. Interestingly, *Dziennik Bałtycki* informed its readers about the stormy parliamentary debate on parental leave for fathers. The newspaper quoted a female MP, who had called the arrangement 'a false model of family care'. Not only fathers are cast in traditional family roles – grandparents, too, are treated in a similar way. *Dziennik Bałtycki* shows them as good-hearted, affectionate and protective childminders: 'Granny makes the best dumplings in the world and calls me sweetheart.' 'Granny tells me stories, never shouts at me and buys me chewing-gum.' One article, 'Magdalena's 66 Grandchildren', depicted a woman who had 66 grandchildren and 22 great-grandchildren. The newspaper also cited a CBOS survey of the role of grandmothers in Polish families. Not surprisingly, the findings confirmed the traditional image of a good granny.

Dziennik Bałtycki also wrote about art and literary productions for the young audience, mainly about books and films by English-speaking writers and directors. These included classics (*Anne of Green Gables* was voted the nation's favourite children's book) and new releases. Needless to say, Harry Potter was the focus of attention. 'Is Potter mania a reflection of globalisation processes?' one article asked. 'What makes a book a blockbuster – a vogue, publicity, the publishers' enterprising skills or another unknown factor?' The author of the article somehow failed to notice a handful of other obvious reasons (the book may simply be good or interesting). The success of the animated feature film *Shrek* was also much debated, but nobody complained.

Many notices and articles about arts events and leisure activities for children were meant to provide information for parents on where, when and how they could organise some extra activities for their kids, and how much they would be expected to pay. (The choices included: a children's song contest; a family festival; an art competition on Easter and Easter Egg themes; Mother's Day celebrations; Children's Day celebrations; and a winter holiday fun-and-games programme at King Cross Play Centre.)

Naturally, *Dziennik Bałtycki* devotes much space to schools and education. Its September issues were packed with information about new school facilities and their functional efficiency, including facilities for disabled pupils and general safety arrangements. At one school a camera system had been installed, but 'the head teachers would very much like to put up a wall to separate the primary unit from the middle school so that the youngsters at playtime wouldn't learn undesirable patters of behaviour from the older teenagers'. Apparently, many parents wrote to *Dziennik Bałtycki*, asking whether it was obligatory for the six-year-olds to attend school (the newspaper explained that compulsory education began at seven) and inquiring about state pre-school centres becoming private educational establishments (the education authorities had agreed to the privatisation of pre-school services on condition that the fees remained the same).

Dziennik Bałtycki does not seem to be particularly concerned with pregnancy, childbirth or children's health. Once a week, photographs of new-borns are published. In early 2001 the newspaper ran a story about the first babies born in the new millennium. The local authorities presented the 'millennium children' with toys and endowment policies. The newspaper joined in the 'Good Birth' campaign aimed at improving the conditions at maternity units throughout the country by informing the public about the kind of care the women should receive there. The best maternity units, obstetricians, midwives and nurses were selected and awarded. One of the winners – a midwife – described a model midwife as someone who 'likes working with people and has strong people skills; someone who is sensitive, responsible and always willing to learn'.

Dziennik Bałtycki also printed articles about children's health problems. Again, most of them bordered on the sensational and dealt with rare viral infections, scarlet fever, chickenpox, dysplasia, diabetes and poor body posture. Advice was offered to parents whose children were suffering from colic and coryza. Tips were given on the vitamins that a child needs to develop well. A few articles focused on breastfeeding (pointing out, not surprisingly, that dried milk was a poor substitute for breast milk) and on dietary regimens for breastfeeding mothers. In the context of the apparently radical shift in the Polish standards of baby care, it is interesting to note that one feature in *Dziennik Bałtycki* warned parents against using disposable nappies and extolled the benefits of cloth.

The newspaper may have taken a dyed-in-the-wool traditionalist approach to nappies, but its approach to children with disabilities is by no means conservative. Two articles, published in the second half of 2001, pictured disabled children as those who needed inclusion and understanding, and emphasised their strong points. (The newspaper recommended a book called *Disability Is Not A Life Sentence* as a source of helpful guidance on how to make the best use of disabled children's potential.)

Dziennik Bałtycki wrote about children left abandoned in maternity units and public places. 'Motherhood is not necessarily a biological need. There are many unwanted children waiting to be received into caring and loving families.' The newspaper also raised some issues affecting foster parents, including late payment of childcare benefits, and other legal and daily household management problems. Information was published about the New Home programme aimed at those who intended to become foster parents. The programme taught the candidates to 'tell [the children] the truth about their situation gently and gradually without lying to them' because every child had the right to contact his or her natural parents and only the child could decide to break that contact off.

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Most of the material published in *Dziennik Bałtycki* covers local affairs and issues of local interest. The content is meant to inform the reader rather than advocate any particular set of beliefs. Apparently, the newspaper's ambitions are not as high as those of *Gazeta Wyborcza*. *Dziennik Bałtycki* is not trying to change dubious social mores or time-honoured parenting styles. The newspaper gives a lot of space to charity efforts benefiting children. Images of children are often exploited commercially with the clear aim to attract the readers' attention. Children who are kidnapped, abused or killed should attract enough of that attention to make an adult buy the paper. Children who are happy and smiling should make an adult buy the advertised product or service. To the extent that *Dziennik Bałtycki* is representative of the local press, local newspapers can be said to exploit children as bait by showing them in certain contexts and in certain, often outrageous, circumstances that are presented as sensational news. Obviously, local dailies are aimed at men as well as women. The question is: Are children depicted in the same way in colour magazines aimed at a specifically female audience? To answer this question, let us have a closer look at *Claudia*, a very popular magazine for women.

Children and Childhood in *Claudia*

An illustrated women's monthly, *Claudia* is low-priced but bulky (every issue contains between 120 and 160 pages). Printed on good quality paper and in clear, easy-to-read print, the magazine has an intelligible page layout and a positively enormous amount of pictorial material.

Items of interest – written material and photographs – appeared in many different sections ('Our Children', 'Essential Medicine', 'Psychology', 'Special Report', 'Top Story', 'Law', 'Finance', 'Walks of Life', 'My Story', 'You Should Know', 'Star Life', 'Letters', 'Travel', 'Pets and Us', 'Boutique', 'Good Ideas', 'Books' and 'Videos'). Apart from that, plenty of features were published on young children, childhood and parenting.

One thing is striking about *Claudia*: the magazine prints a great deal of advice on early childhood parenting. Parents, the magazine says, should sing songs to their children, recite simple nursery rhymes, talk a lot, and listen patiently. They should discuss problems calmly and matter-of-factly in order to inspire children's confidence. In no circumstances should a parent yield to a hysterical child. Children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) should be encouraged to follow their daily routine, reminded of what they are supposed to do, provided with a comforting environment, rewarded for good behaviour and punished for acts of violence. They should not be given excessively complex tasks to perform. Parents would be well advised to provide special activities for them, but these activities should not last longer than thirty minutes. Every parent should remember to 'stay calm and patient' during the child's potty training. Bedtime rituals should be phased out rather than cut out because they provide children with a sense of safety. Parents should support the development of their child's intellectual dispositions and emotional intelligence. Children need to be taught how to 'express their emotions'. In order to keep up the pace of the learning process, the adult caregivers should remember to praise the child's every achievement, however modest it might be. At the same time, they should remember not to overload the child with too much work. For example, it is not advisable for children with poor literacy skills to start learning a foreign language. In particular, parental ambitions must not be a burden on the child. 'Tenderness, consistency, firmness and clear rules are the best policy for parents.' Children should be allowed a substantial degree of independence to strengthen their creativity, self-confidence and self-esteem. 'Show them that you care, and take them seriously.' 'Praise, praise, praise!' 'Make their dreams come true ... but not all the time.' Children have a right to behave like children: 'Don't make your child work too hard, don't tell them off for making a stupid blunder, allow them to misbehave on occasion – by stepping into a puddle, getting dirty in the sandpit or splashing themselves with water.' Apart from practical tips for

parents, *Claudia* offers helpful legal advice on the rights of working mothers, childcare institutions, legal abortion, child maintenance payments, travelling with children, parental leave, social aid, employee assistance funds, name selection procedures, legal parental attribution procedures, paternal rights, health insurance, etc.

Claudia's articles feature, in equal proportions, families with one child and families with two children. Where a family photograph shows one parent only, it is usually the mother. If, however, the father is shown, he seems to be actively involved in the children's leisure and nursing. Grandparents are a rare sight, and other adults are hardly ever present. Thus the families in the photographs are nuclear, two-parent families with one or two children and little social life. Interestingly, dogs are nowhere to be seen (pets are seldom captured in the pictures, even though they are often mentioned in text) and no photograph shows a family of two parents, one son and one daughter.

Children, *Claudia* says, must be allowed to behave like children. They should laugh a lot and run around. They should be seen everywhere, bringing vitality to the family. Children should spend a lot of time at play – preferably with both of their parents. 'The most precious moments are those spent at play, together with mum and dad.' Childhood is a very special, trouble-free time to cherish. *Claudia*'s style of writing about children and childhood is often informal, with many diminutive words and expressions. Children are often called 'kids', 'tots', 'nippers', 'little folks' or 'little darlings'.

The magazine's counselling efforts culminated with a list of the top ten parental sins. Translated into 'don'ts', the list looks as follows: (1) Don't expect your child to yield to your authority in every situation; (2) Don't forget to spend enough time with your child; (3) Don't believe the old myth that praise can only spoil children; (4) Don't keep changing your mind; (5) Don't hand out harsh punishment, especially when feeling angry; (6) Don't be too critical or judgmental; (7) Don't shield you child from problems; (8) Don't do your child's work for him; (9) Don't make your love conditional; and (10) Don't try to make your child happy at all cost.

Apart from plentiful tips and tactfully phrased dos and don'ts, *Claudia* gives a lot of space to family leisure time, especially at Christmas and Easter, and on special days. Parents should remember to celebrate Children's Day, so mothers are offered the following advice: 'Make your kid's favourite cake, go to the circus together or have a day of fun.' At Christmas time, parents should make every effort to 'put their child in a festive mood'. 'Spare some fifteen minutes every night to read one of those fabulous Christmas stories to your child.' 'Have your kid write a letter to Santa.' 'Find some time to make decorations for the Christmas tree together.' 'Kids should be encouraged to help in the kitchen.' Children can also be encouraged to make some presents for their relatives. Most of the photographs in *Claudia* show children and parents in outdoor settings. The magazine promotes active leisure pursuits: visits to water-sport centres, swimming lessons, summer camps, holidays under canvas ('holidays under canvas are a great idea and a lot of fun for kids') and after-school programmes (in this case, children are not free to choose, but they should 'have a say').

Like *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Dziennik Bałtycki*, *Claudia* is also interested in gadgets, toys and computers. Computers can be a risk, but – as one editorial admits – they 'enhance [children's] learning, so parents shouldn't deny their kids access to the computer at home. They should, however, make sure that the computer is used in moderation.' Military toys are also discussed. According to a feature published in *Claudia*, parents should not recommend military toys, but if the child really insists, they should buy them. 'Even if your kid hasn't got a toy gun, he's more than likely to see one sooner or later. He may then develop a fascination that will make it difficult for him to resist gun-play.' War games, however, should be closely monitored. They are not necessarily bad, says *Claudia*, if there is a clear distinction between the 'good guys' and the 'bad guys', and children are not always cast in the same roles. Games like that may encourage them to be loyal 'fighters for a noble cause'.

Claudia recommends keeping pets at home to teach children responsibility and care, and to introduce them to the natural world. Interestingly, cats are excellent teachers of tolerance, open-mindedness and respect. Dogs are also wonderful companions. 'A child and a dog are the most loyal of friends and the best companions. When the cuddly puppy grows into a big dog, he'll be a perfect childminder, too ... Especially a shy kid or an only child can benefit from keeping a dog at home – they'll find it easier to relate to their peers, who tend to think that pet owners are interesting and worthy of attention.' Teaching a parrot to speak can be a good 'therapy for a kid with a stutter or a lisp'. Children, however, should not treat domestic animals as playthings. 'Even pre-schoolers should have some animal care responsibilities.' Moreover, 'pets strengthen the family bonds by providing topics for discussion'.

Claudia repeatedly and relentlessly reminds parents of the need to talk to their children, even though they may find it difficult to tackle some controversial or sensitive issues. 'Psychologists warn: any question that is left unanswered will re-emerge later, again and again ... so it's better to confront the issue head-on.' Parents should avoid fobbing their children off by giving evasive responses such as 'that's just the way it is'. They should not pretend to be know-alls. They should talk about sex in a natural tone. They should encourage children to look for answers (in encyclopaedias or other reference sources) and they should use examples related to the child's immediate environment. Death is a topic that requires careful handling. 'Show your son some pictures of his late grandmother and

point out that she will live on in your minds. Explain to him that, to move forward to this new way of life, people need to leave their bodies behind – like old clothes.'

Like *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Claudia* often writes about rewarding and punishing children. The magazine is against harsh punishment, preferring positive reinforcement instead. 'Rigid discipline and beating are the least successful of parental strategies. The best strategy is to praise your child for every good effort and punish him in moderation.' Parents should not contradict each other when telling their child what kind of behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable. Children should be aware of the rules of conduct and punishment. The punishment should fit the offence and it should be age-appropriate. Parents need to remember this advice: 'Never punish your child when they do something unintentionally – when they break a cup or misplace a thing.'

Unlike *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Claudia* stresses the differences in the raising of boys and girls, whose emotional bonds with their mothers are of a different nature. Consider the following passage: 'Games that boys play with their fathers introduce them to the male world and enhance the development of specifically male dispositions like self-control and co-operation.' The magazine also emphasises the different roles of mother and father as determined by cultural traditions. In fact, *Claudia*'s concept of fatherhood and motherhood can hardly be more traditional. A woman's value as mother in the childrearing process is incalculable: 'The mother is the most important person in a child's life, but girls see her in a different way than the boys. To a son, his mother is the epitome of maternal love ... whereas daughters, by watching their mothers, learn practically everything: how to be happy, how to show concern and how to run a household.' Another author writes about the special relationship between mothers and sons. 'The mother-son attachment is of paramount significance for the adult man's happiness. He learns from her how to love a woman. His mother brings feminine tenderness and composure into his life.' 'The father-son attachment is also important, but boys learn quite different things from their fathers. By wrestling playfully with his father, a little boy learns how to fight and win. And when he inevitably loses, he runs to his mother for help.' 'It's only natural for a mother to provide her son with a pattern of the man-woman relationship to follow in adult life.'

According to *Claudia*, maternity is 'an exciting journey' and 'the ultimate manifestation of womanhood'. The magazine challenges the assumption that it is impossible for a woman to juggle professional work and childcare. 'A woman with a successful career has more to offer to her children in terms of material possessions and intellectual development. If she likes her career, her job satisfaction translates into a more satisfying relationship with her kids.' Mothers are also depicted as storytellers and teachers of good manners. They know their children better than anyone else, so they should decide what is best for their 'little darlings'. ('You know your kid better than anybody else, so *you* decide what kind of pet is ideal for her.') A single mother should make sure that her son has some male role models to emulate (grandfathers, uncles and other friendly adult males). She must not be overprotective.

The woman's prominent role in the childrearing process makes her responsible for keeping a proper balance in the life of her family. Here are some tips: 'Some men may subconsciously see the baby as a threat' so the woman 'mustn't shut herself and the baby in her private world'. Another article says: 'As a result, she becomes a permanently weary mother and unhappy wife. To change this, she needs to understand that order and neatness aren't the most important things in the world, and that her family want a happy, loving mother and wife, not a tired housecleaner drooping with fatigue'; 'Don't waste the afternoon cleaning the clean floor – take your child for a walk.' Another tip says: 'Have your husband and your eldest children help you with the housework.'

The man's role is equally important. He should help his wife: 'A new mum can be tired. The man should help her and the baby.' Boys may see their fathers as rivals. A demanding father can teach his son many things. Fathers have a special role to play in raising their sons, who will soon become young men. This is why the father-son attachment should be close. It is the father who ought to tell his son about sex.

The monthly often prints stories of estranged wives. (Some of these stories seem rather involved, for example: a pregnant woman found out that her husband was having an affair, he denied at first, then he said the affair was over, and when the woman he was having an affair with got pregnant, he came back to his wife.) Many photographs show the trauma of a broken home. (One depicts a sad-looking woman breastfeeding a baby in her lap and three sad-looking children sitting at a table.)

Nonetheless, *Claudia*'s readers will not find too many stories about the dark sides of life or parenthood. Most articles paint a sunny picture of the adult world, childhood experiences and domestic life. *Claudia*'s vision of childhood is simply idyllic. *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Dziennik Bałtycki* contained a greater proportion of articles concerned with children at risk and dysfunctional homes. The magazine rarely provides information about accidents. One story dealt with child discrimination in China. An interview was also published with a priest who was helping people with drink problems and domestic violence records. Equally unusual was the letter from a female reader saying that her husband's relatives were in the habit of giving beer to her four-year-old son. *Claudia*'s reply was: say a definite no to this kind of practice.

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To recap, an abundantly illustrated monthly aimed at a female audience, *Claudia* has a strong interest in parenting and childcare issues. Its vision of childhood is quite different from the vision presented by *Gazeta Wyborcza* or *Dziennik Bałtycki*. According to *Claudia*, children are a great gift and a woman's chief purpose in life, and childhood is a place that looks very much like Arcadia. The informal style of writing and the colour photographs of idyllic scenes create the image of an innocent but cheerful and vigorous child. In contrast with *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Dziennik Bałtycki*, the women's monthly hardly ever shows the dark sides of parenthood. The child education process is portrayed as an eternal source of joy and delight for parents and children alike. *Claudia* paints a decidedly pleasant picture of family life. Even if difficulties such as marital quarrels are mentioned, each story has a happy if rather mawkish ending.

Chapter Two

Baby in a Business Plan: Young Children in High-income Families

The Polish media is very fond of running stories of wealthy parents worrying themselves sick about the future of their offspring. Rumour has it that the rich map out their children's lives in minute detail, cramming their daily schedules with every kind of mind-enhancing activity. Rumour also has it – and this is slowly becoming the stuff of legend in Poland – that some affluent families enrol their children in high-priced, top-class pre-school programmes for business tycoons well before the child is born. These programmes allegedly offer curricula that involve learning four foreign languages, eurythmics classes, classical music and piano lessons, art workshops taught by artists, and a basic course in free-market economics. Granted, some extreme situations can be found to support the media-hyped legend – at least to a certain extent. But is there really something wrong with wealthy parents trying to plan their children's future by furnishing them with a good start in life or by providing proper stimuli and education just because they can afford it?

Actually, all the parents interviewed for our survey whose income was above average (that is to say, above the national average for Poland, where the genuinely wealthy are not in abundance and the middle class bears little resemblance to its West European equivalent) were making every effort to provide their children with everything they needed, and were investing heavily in the children's future. These interviewees openly admitted that their income and living conditions were very good and – as the researchers found out – they did possess some of the 'Polish status symbols': they owned a flat with no fewer than three rooms, they owned a car or two cars (the smaller one for the woman and the larger one for the man – see IID.1⁵) and they had well-paid jobs. The only exception was the couple identified as individual in-depth interview #5 – research workers doing doctor's degrees while working at research institutes – who said that their income was average ('enough for food, the bills and daily necessities, but not enough to buy anything extra; we have to stretch our budget then'). In spite of that, we have decided to include them in the 'childhood education planning' group described in this chapter. Why?

Our research has revealed that parenting styles are not directly related to the family's financial position. Rather, it is the parents' education level and location that play a more prominent role in creating enhanced learning environments – **with the aid of financial resources**. There is a notable difference in childrearing approaches between wealthy parents without college degrees in small-town communities and wealthy parents with college degrees working as professionals in major cities, where plenty of opportunities exist to pay for proper (read: parent-planned) child socialisation. Educated parents with moderate incomes try to provide their children with more or less the same 'stimuli' as those provided by well-educated and well-to-do families. Contrary to popular myths and beliefs (the rich can afford to send their kids to excellent schools, they have enough time to read books and enough money to buy them), parental involvement and investment in childhood learning depend less on the parents' income than on a combination of three factors: economic, educational and environmental.

Interestingly, our research has confirmed (obviously, to some extent only, as the sample was not representative) the findings of many studies conducted by sociologists, for example by Henryk Domański (2000), who wrote about the economic advancement of professional workers after 1989. In particular, according to Domański, it is the hired specialists in executive or managerial positions with large companies who have made the greatest gains in terms of social and economic status. A similar advancement has occurred for those who earn their income from many different sources by providing specialist or expert services (in other words, intellectual workers), for example researchers employed at two institutes, who translate books as an extra job. Domański (2000: 63-64) says that one's 'origins are much less relevant than one's education; nevertheless, at every education level, the father's job does have a bearing on his children's occupational status. Characteristically, vestiges of this intergenerational status transmission are particularly noticeable in the case of white-collar workers and business owners. People who come from this type of background are slightly more successful in their professions than those who come from the lower social groups. Apparently, white-collar workers and

⁵ The interviewees are identified as follows: IDI stands for 'individual in-depth interview' and the number after the dot is the number assigned to that interview. PIL stands for 'pilot interview' and the number after the dot is the number assigned to that interview. For details of the interviewees see *Introduction*. Three of our interviewees had high incomes and college degrees, one interviewee had a high income but no college degree, and one interviewee had a college degree but an average income. Information about the parenting styles in wealthy families also comes from focus group interview # 5, where all participants (fathers) had jobs, and most of them earned very good salaries.

intellectuals have developed a healthy survival instinct to avoid degradation to the lower classes, and have acquired a good understanding of failure-avoidance tactics at school'.

Therefore it is safe to assume that parents in this particular group will be the most generous and thoughtful in investing in their children to prevent their social degradation in the future. When we look at the status transmission mechanisms described in social analyses, it becomes apparent that by investing considerable financial and intellectual resources in the development of a child's mental, artistic and social skills and dispositions – in other words, by investing in a child's cultural capital – parents may ensure that the child will at least reproduce, if not rise above, their own lifestyle and social station. Actually, the family's status is the most powerful social segregation factor in the area of educational opportunities – and a good education is the gateway to success in a rising society like ours (Kwieciński 2002). The children of parents who occupy a high position in society are more than likely to be achievers.

But is this picture absolutely flawless? Are there no parenting problems at all in families of high social station? Are these children really a part of an intricate family business plan? What parenting styles are favoured in educated, wealthy homes? Let us have a look.

All in a Day's Work

The young, busy and wealthy parents who work from early morning until late at night seldom have enough time for themselves or for their children. This pattern emerged in practically every interview we did. Often, it is the husband who comes home late: *'When Piotrek, my husband, comes back home, about five p.m., we have dinner and then we relax together ... It's about ten when Mateusz [son] goes to bed. Then we usually do some work ... I get ready for college, for example ... We go to bed around midnight'* [IDI.1]. Sometimes it is the mother who comes home late. One female interviewee who was asked whether hers was a full-time job provided the following reply: *'It depends on what you mean by full-time. I start at ten, no, wait, nine-thirty, and I stay in the office till four p.m., and then there's usually something to do, some more business work to do, so it's actually longer than full-time. I get back home quite late at night'* [IDI.7]. The interviewee runs her own company and practically has no time for anything else. She has very little time left for maternal responsibilities.

The interviews made one thing quite clear: there are more and more career women who are too busy to look after children. *'My husband is a computer specialist and programmer,'* one interviewee says, *'he has a regular job. I'm still at college and I take on some freelance work. I'm a computer graphic designer, so sometimes people ask me to do design projects for them. As I say, sometimes I have some freelance work to do and when I have it, it's Piotrek who looks after Mateusz, and I sit at the computer. Or Mateusz just hangs around when I'm busy with my projects'* [IDI.1]. The interviewee's husband is a manager and he *'has one cardinal rule: he does his work in the workplace and rarely brings his work home. He prefers staying at work half an hour longer to finish a project, to wrap it up rather than sitting down and opening his laptop at home ... He likes to keep work and family life apart'* [IDI.1].

In two other families we interviewed during the pilot phase, the father and the mother work, on average, more than 40 hours a week, so they have delegated most of their child socialisation responsibilities to other 'agencies': grandmothers, nannies and pre-schools. What is striking and unusual about these families is that the women are less patient than their husbands, who appear to be more caring, responsible and reasonable as parents.

Women on Edge and Family Men

Apparently, working mothers are more concerned with their career progress than their husbands are. If this had an adverse effect on their children's upbringing, it would be grist to the mill for the advocates of conservative parenting. The women's professional involvement, however, does not seem to have a particularly negative impact on their children's socialisation processes – perhaps because that impact is cushioned by grandmothers, nannies or pre-school environments. Having said that, in a high-income household the woman's working life does seem to affect the atmosphere at home to a certain degree.

Says one mother: *'I can get really tense when I'm working ... I often get nervous about college, for example, or ... not about my freelance work, though, it's less challenging. But my college assignments – when I'm finishing off an end-of-term assignment, it usually takes me a week and I get the jitters trying to turn it in on time. I get upset when I'm running out of time, and I need a lot of time for this kind of work because, well, I always try to do my best. This is the worst time of the year – when my assignments are due. I can be really nasty then. Piotrek wants to help me, but there comes a point when he just snaps, because it's unbearable. I know I can be a real monster at times like that, because I can't keep my cool. I lose my cool when my computer crashes, and it seems to be happening all the time. I worry about losing my files and I get hysterical. I'm the sort of person who gets upset very easily about things like that'* [IDI.1]. Another nervy mother, who was interviewed

during the pilot project, pointed out that she was satisfied with her marriage: *'I can't complain, can't say that I'm not getting enough tolerance or understanding. My husband helps a lot because he spends more time with our child and he makes every effort ... reading ... spending a lot, even more [time] than I do with Ola as a parent. He gets on with her better than I do. I think he ... he's more, more patient, more understanding. I think I ... I can get really upset, I can be very, very ... sometimes I have to stop myself from saying nasty things. Then Krzysiek gives me a kick under the table [laughs] or a prod or a little pinch, and then it's [a truce]'* [IDI.3].

It is a woman's working life that makes her upset more than anything else. *'Work's important,'* says the owner of a travel agency, *'I wouldn't be able to stay at home. It'd be nightmarish because I'm not very domesticated. Even on Saturdays, I don't have to, but I like to drop by [the office], sit down for a while and do a little work'* [IDI.7]. It is a woman's career that prevents her from spending as much time with her children as she would like to: *'I don't think I spend enough [time with my child]. My husband spends a little more [time] but that's because he has to pick him up from school – well, I can't. I work long hours, and if he hasn't got anything important to do, he looks after our son until I get back home from work'* [IDI.7].

Apparently, in high-income households, it is the father who has much more time for the children. Fathers get on with their children *'much better. More often, it's my husband who gets a hug [from our daughter]'* [PIL.3]. Fathers are the chief security providers. *'Every morning, we wake up to a feeling of peace and warmth. I feel so secure in this marriage. I don't think I'm doing the same for my husband. He's the anchor of our family. What I've found in him is that he'll always be there for me, he'll always help me, he'll always listen to me, he'll always love me, there's no question about that. He knows everything about me and I know everything about him. I don't think we can expect any surprises here, which is just as well because it means peace, security, lots of love and affection. It's a nice, good way of life'* [IDI.1].

Another interviewee says: *'I think it's my husband who spends more time with [our son] because I have no time – for that. But when it comes to getting things done, it's usually my responsibility. It looks like this: they're together, but Marcin is playing in his bedroom, or watching TV, or sitting in front of the computer. This is how they spend time together'* [IDI.7]. The interviewee was then asked whether her husband was the one who played more often with their son Marcin, and whether father and son were buddies. Her reply was: *'You bet. They're best buddies early in the morning, after they wake up. They have lots of fun together while I sleep. I feel dead in the morning, so Paweł [husband] looks after our son before I get up'* [IDI.7].

But grandmothers and nannies do not find it difficult to get up early. Without them, life in general, and childrearing in particular, would be virtually impossible for wealthy families.

Childminders: Nannies, Grannies and Pre-schools

A high-income household where both parents go out to work cannot do without a nanny. This much was obvious when the interviewees were asked to describe their ordinary day. *'We get dressed,'* says one interviewee, *'there's no hurry at all. Then I leave for college and the nanny comes. So, actually, we always spend mornings together. I leave about ten or ten-thirty, and go to college. The nanny comes who's been looking after Mateusz ever since he was seven months old, so they know each other very well'* [IDI.1]. Another family has *'a nanny, a college girl, she's very nice; she's doing an early childhood education programme at college, so she knows how to look after Ola. She knows how to play with [Ola], teaches her to count, to write alphabet letters, I'm really pleased with her'* [PIL.3]. Ola, the interviewee's daughter, is very fond of her nanny, perhaps because her parents have been *'very lucky with nannies from the start. Ola has always had to have a nanny because of my work schedule.'*⁶ *First there was this elderly lady, who had her own children, and that was great because they got on very well with Ola. Everything [looked] very different. And then there were these two young women, who put in quite a lot of time and effort. I can't see anything wrong with this kind of childcare'* [PIL.3].

When there is no nanny (a rare situation when both parents work outside the home and their child needs a childminder in the morning) grandmothers run to the rescue. Sometimes grandmothers are there even though the child has a nanny – they come not as childminders but as providers of learning opportunities and adventures. Grannies mean a lot of fun: *'It's much more fun with [my husband's] parents because Mateusz [son] can go wild, jumping up and down with his granny ... My mother doesn't particularly enjoy jumping, but [my husband's] mother does, she gives him a piggyback and they love fooling around'* [IDI.1]. Another child likes it very much when her grandmother *'reads to her, most often stories and rhymes. She knows how to get her interested in rhymes. And she learns a lot. Ola has quite a good memory; she's good at memorising things, especially rhymes. She runs back and reels off all the lines to us. And we are very proud'* [PIL.3]. Another child, a small-town boy, was – for the first four years – looked after by *'his grandmother. Let me tell you, his granny used to be a*

⁶ As a pharmacist, the interviewee works in shifts.

junior school teacher, she taught young children, so she knows what's good for them ... and this is why he's so well-behaved, he knows what's proper and why' [IDI.7]. The boy has developed a close attachment to his grandmother: *'Even if he sees her in the morning, when he comes back home he calls her up and they spend fifteen minutes chatting on the phone. And when he suddenly remembers something, he comes up and says, "Can I call Granny?" even if he talked to her just a few minutes earlier. But he forgot to tell her something. He's much more attached to his granny than to me, to be honest'* [IDI.7].

One grandmother is a confidante of her three-year-old granddaughter. She is *'her adored granny, the cure-all, I mean ... she's her beloved granny; Małgosia's favourite granny'*. Grandmothers know how to talk to their grandchild *'so that she understands because they know all the programmes she watches and they know everything about the child's world'* [PIL.1]. Grandmothers are responsible for creating some of the primary socialisation settings for the young children in high-income households. But other socialisation settings are also necessary. One of them is a good pre-school education programme.

Initially, it is grandmothers who look after children. Then children go to pre-school: *'As I say, he's at pre-school now; his grandmother looked after him for the first four years'* [IDI.7]. What, then, made the boy's parents send him to pre-school? *'He didn't interact much with other children, so I sent him to pre-school to avoid problems at primary school'* [IDI.7]. Other families are also concerned about lack of peer interaction. *'We live in an old house, in the city centre. It's one of the older urban areas, with lots of old people around. Frankly, there are no children for Mateusz to interact with. His only opportunity for peer interaction is when he goes out for a walk. There are some children who are regulars there. I don't go out much with him because I'm usually at college in the mornings. But his nanny tells me there are a few regulars ... there's a young girl, Ola, I know her, too, and another boy, and [Mateusz] often meets them and he knows them. But this just isn't enough, I'm afraid. I don't know if Mateusz, at his age, I'm not absolutely certain, but I think, when he's three, if I don't send him to a regular pre-school, I'll try and find a pre-school programme he can attend with his nanny and play with other children, a privately-run pre-school centre ... somewhere he can go and play with his peers. Our friends don't have children his age'* [IDI.1].

Parents who are worried about their children lacking peer interaction send them to top-notch pre-school programmes if they can afford to pay the fees. *'We've sent her to a private pre-school centre. We thought she'd need some after-school activities like dancing or drawing lessons, or a drama club, but she has all this at the pre-school. The children are learning English, and memorisation techniques, and dance. We make sure we have the money for all the extra activities she can possibly enjoy, anything Ola may benefit from'* [PIL.3]. Apparently, the child's pre-school centre offers appropriate (read: many) activities and learning opportunities. Well-educated and well-to-do-parents who like to plan ahead find this kind of curriculum absolutely essential, knowing that enriched childhood learning environments translate into the child's success in later life. Even if not every parent is fully aware of that correlation, almost all of them without exception will make every effort to provide their children (or, rather, their only child) with a 'rich supply of stimuli'.

The Stimuli and How to Provide Them

The parents in the affluent group read to their children, watch children's programmes with them, go to the theatre and to the cinema together, and take their children out to concerts. They arrange sporting activities and leisure trips to various locations. In short, they provide a wide variety of stimuli to enhance their children's development. In their eyes, these efforts are nothing special – they are routine, necessary and obvious. Needless to say, efforts like that are not routine at all for other Polish parents. Says one interviewee: *'We spend some time drawing pictures together at weekends, and we go to the theatre with Ola, but there are no rules, really, we like to keep it spontaneous'* [PIL.3].

The quality of these stimuli depends on the child's learning environment. Regrettably, the child's learning environment depends mostly on the family budget – the parents' college degrees alone are no guarantee of access to the necessary educational resources. The wife of a man who holds a high-salaried position describes their personal interests: *'We both love books, we actually venerate them. I, for example, love paper. I guess that's why I chose to do the graphic arts at college, art objects, and the like. I love things that look great on paper. Piotrek is just like me, he hates to see a book that's smudged or messy. We share a passion for books. And we try to teach Mateusz. He's never torn up a book, even though he's just a little kid and he likes to flip through things. I give him my books, not cardboard pages, just ordinary books ... He's never torn them up ... Mateusz is ... I think I should say that ... he's so balanced and calm. He can be a bit wild at times, running around, pretending to be a dog, fooling about, but he can be very serious, he can stop and take a closer look at a thing without damaging it. He's never broken a toy, never, you know, thumped a thing on the floor, or torn up a book or paper to shreds ... He's never done that kind of thing'* [IDI.1]. But a passion for beautiful things, books or art objects is not enough to ensure that the child can see a lot of mind-expanding artefacts in the house. They need to be bought first, and that means having the money to

buy them. If parents have the money, the child's learning environment becomes truly enriched: *'Perhaps it's because I'm an art student, I like visiting art galleries. I often take [my family] to see art shows. For example, we go to see new exhibitions at the Zachęta Art Gallery, and we go to the National Museum sometimes. We don't take Mateusz with us very often, perhaps just once a month because, to be honest, it's not so terribly attractive to him. We just go there to let him feel ... the atmosphere of those quite places that put you in a contemplative mood, that sort of thing. We can talk about it, we can point out what we like. But in the end, I usually go and see the exhibition again, alone, when I have some time, because I'm more interested and want to take a closer look. Yesterday we went to the Railway Museum – the boys loved it'* [IDI.1]. The Railway Museum is just one of the many interesting places that parents visit with their children. Other parents prefer *'trips to wild country. We love woodlands, so in the summertime we make trips to the countryside'* [PIL.3].

Television and computers can also be educational tools. Children in well-to-do families start using computers at a very early age. One small-town child developed an interest in computers when he was 'four or so'. The researchers want to know more about the process. Did Marcin show interest spontaneously? *'I guess so. We encouraged him, actually. We had a computer at home, and I showed him what he could do with it. Now I don't, not anymore. He knows how to close an application, how to run it, how to put in a disk ... He's got some educational software, but he isn't really – I mean, he just plays. He's got software programs with alphabet letters and planets, and he finds letters or words that begin with those letters ... But we let him play all kinds of games, too'* [IDI.7]. The boy's parents, however, monitor the computer games, and the boy himself seems to be very sensitive to the scenes of abuse and violence on the screen. *'Some games, I don't let him play. He can't play games where a rabbit or a kangaroo gets hurt. In the end, he breaks down in tears, because the kangaroo has a few lives to live and when there are no more lives left, he breaks down and cries.'* 'Is he upset when he loses?' the researchers ask. *'No, it's not that. He just feels sorry for the kangaroo. He goes red in the face and bursts into tears. He's very emotional about it'* [IDI.7]

And what do children watch on television? *'Children's Bedtime TV, oh, yes, we watch Children's Bedtime TV together, but not much TV on the whole, because I try to do without it, even though they show blockbusters from time to time. We make sure ... well ... we want to keep certain traditions alive. There are some lovable characters, so we sit down with Mateusz to show him that this is important and that his parents know about Winnie-the-Pooh and others...'* [IDI.1]. Other children watch similar programmes. *'Usually, when we get back home, [my daughter] wants to watch some children's cartoons, and then, let me see, she draws pictures or makes cut-outs. She puts up a tent in the middle of the room and plays there, and wants us to join in ... Krzysiek [husband] loves reading newspapers, I love books, and Ola loves watching children's cartoons [laughs]. She likes drawing, too, likes it when we join her to play octopuses or dwarfs'* [PIL.3]. Another child, too, *'loves Children's Bedtime TV. We've got cable TV, we've got Wizja [satellite television], so she watches all these cartoons – for example, in the morning'*.

Parents keep an eye on cartoon television. *'I don't really choose things to watch for him, but he doesn't watch Cartoon Network. They showed cartoons that were really over the top, so we put a ban on it. These cartoons were just stupid'* [IDI.7]. Another child *'doesn't watch TV after the evening news. Apart from that, let me see, we've arranged to have an extended TV package, with more channels, because of the cartoons – to give her more choice, more than just beat-'em-up stuff. We want Ola to have more choice'* [PIL.3].

Cartoon television watching and computer games are not the only ways to enhance children's intellectual development. Parents are in the habit of reading to their sons and daughters. Some do it quite often, others only on occasion, but reading is something of a ritual in most of the wealthy homes. One interviewee, a teacher and translator, was asked to describe her three-year-old daughter's favourite pastimes. Without hesitation, she said: *'Book reading. This is Małgosia's passion, I'm positive. I think Małgosia can often see us reading and she probably thinks it's a natural thing. Everywhere she goes, she takes a book with her ... I don't think other children her age read books like the ones she "reads". Sometimes she just pulls a book off the shelf and flips through it, but we often read to her, and she remembers a lot of words, so later she sits down and "reads" herself'* [PIL.1].

Other affluent families regard book reading as a parental responsibility rather than a pastime, because even those children who can read do not always want to read. Parents need to make sure that their child develops an interest in reading. *'He's too impatient to sit down with a book. He reads a few words and loses all interest. So I read to him, or his grandmother does.'* How often do they do it? Do they do it regularly? *'Oh, no, just sometimes. But I do lots of other things with him. I play games, slapjack, pick-a-mushroom, categories, and sometimes I just have an idea, and I say, "Go and get this or that, I'll read to you"'* [IDI.7]. Bedtime reading is another ritual. *'Oh, yes,'* one mother suddenly remembers, *'there's one more ritual I forgot to tell you about, it's about showing love and affection, and that's putting Mateusz to bed. It's a crucial moment. Children often find it difficult to go to sleep, to unwind after a hectic day, so Piotrek reads to him ... They've read three books already ... Mateusz likes this kind of soft whispering when somebody's reading to him ... It's a ritual for us, putting him to*

bed, for both of us, or one of us if the other one's away, or if I've got other things to do, or Piotrek's got things to do, then one of us reads to and, sort of, comforts [our son]' [IDI.1].

The children of well-to-do parents also acquire other cultural competences that their wealthy families consider vital and useful. They take part in extra activities at pre-school. They learn to have perfect table manners. They even have their own money to spend. For example, the son of a wealthy couple from a small town is learning English. *'I pay for his lessons, and he's learning English. He really enjoys it. He's learning English even though there aren't any courses for young children in the area. It's one of those things that depend on where you live. Our neighbourhood has only one community centre' [IDI.7].* This boy is often taken out to restaurants. *'Our kid is used to it – when we have no time, we eat out, at a restaurant, for example. He learnt to use a knife and fork when he was four' [IDI.7].* He also knows how to talk to waiters, his mother points out. His parents provide him with some money to spend, but the boy is not extravagant. *'The last time he spent his money was on the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity [a fund-raising campaign to benefit sick children]. He gave all the money he had in his piggy bank – about two hundred zlotys. He gave it to my niece, who was collecting cash donations. We explained to him where the money went, so he was glad to contribute because he didn't need the money' [IDI.7].*

The young children of wealthy Poles (or not-so-wealthy but well-educated Poles) usually know the 'facts of life', so the question of where babies come from is not a taboo subject. These children are not fed stories about the stork. While interviewing one of the women, the researchers wanted to know whether her child asked her questions about babies. Her reply was: *'Yes, quite often. Yes, we explained to her that they're born out of love. She knows that she was inside my belly, she knows she wasn't found under a gooseberry bush or on the doorstep' [PIL.3].* Another woman believes that *'it shouldn't be a taboo thing because it'll hurt more when ... She should know everything. Actually, Małgosia [daughter] knows absolutely everything about reproduction. I think she should. Actually, she once went through a phase when she pretended to be "pregnant". Our friends were quite shocked when she came up and said, "Mummy's got a baby in her belly and me, too, I've got a baby fox in my belly" ' [PIL.1].*

Providing information about human sexuality is easier in a loving and caring environment – an environment where parents express their feelings openly and spontaneously. *'We love cuddling! It's a physical expression of our affection. Besides, I think we're "with her" this way; we play and often go out together. It's because we play together, try to solve her problems, and talk a lot to her... ' [PIL.3].* Another interviewee says: *'The best way [to show affection] is to cuddle. Mateusz, at his age, he's such a cute boy, he loves to give us a kiss and a cuddle, to rub his nose against ours, to snuggle up ... He's a little cuddly boy... ' [IDI.1].*

Instead of punishing their children, parents praise them to build up their confidence. *'We tell Ola very often that she's made a remarkable effort, has drawn a lovely picture or, say, she has a rhyme word-perfect. Or, say, she's been very tidy, or she's made a cake and put in a lot of effort.' [PIL.3].* Another woman says: *'When he does a clean job, for example, pouring the water from one glass into another without spilling a drop, we clap our hands to applaud that he made it. He's so proud then. Sometimes we give him a hug when he does something well. There are lots of situations. Piotrek has his ways and I have mine. Very often, if something like that happens during the day, we both give him a clap. He loves ... this kind of applause. Just like any other child, I guess. When he plays a nice tune, we give him a clap, and when he sings a nice song, we give him a clap, or when he makes a special effort, say, he eats up his food without fussing ... Sometimes he eats up all his food without fussing, and we give him a pat on the back, or a kiss, or a cuddle, "That's a good boy" ' [IDI.1].*

Most of the well-to-do parents are genuinely interested in their children's progress and development. *'Generally, when something happens at school, the teachers tell us. And when we're worried about something, we go and talk to her teacher. It's because Ola doesn't give us all details. Or we talk to Asia [nanny] when something happens at home' [PIL.3].* Parental involvement can also be found in the carefully structured socialisation efforts that involve parental consistency.

Consistent After All

Inconsistency is one of the worst parental mistakes – at least so the young interviewees said during their focus group discussion (see Chapter One). In particular, it is inconsistency in providing reward and punishment that does a lot of harm. It is especially harmful when mother and father differ in their opinion. However, many well-educated and well-to-do parents try to do their best to be consistent in spite of the fact that it is no easy task and in spite of their own – not quite encouraging – 'family tradition'. Says one interviewee: *'I'm trying to break with my own family tradition. My parents quarrelled more often ... **There actually was a kind of split – I mean, mum was good and dad wasn't. My parents just looked at things in different ways. My mother would let me do something but then my father would say no. We were pretty confused.** The best tactic was to ask my mother. My father was stricter. So if I wanted anything, I'd ask my mother, without my father knowing. That wasn't okay. Piotrek and I make sure we speak with one voice. When I rebuke Mateusz, Piotrek says,*

“Mum’s right”. Piotrek saw this in his own family. It’s his family tradition. When Piotrek allows him to do something, I do, too, that’s automatic. We might talk about it later, if necessary, when Mateusz goes to sleep or when he can’t hear us. **But we never contradict each other in front of him**. It’s automatic: if one of us says something, the other one sticks to it. We make sure we don’t create this kind of confusion where Mateusz would prefer to ask one of us, Piotrek or me’ [IDI.7]. Laudable resolve, there is no question about it. But is it really so iron-like? ‘I often say no, that’s enough, no more cartoons, let’s go out and play. And Piotrek says no, let’s just sit and watch for a while ... Then I say, okay, let’s ... And a little later we start again: perhaps that’s enough, maybe we should try and turn the telly off earlier or take Mateusz out of the room and then turn it off so that he won’t cry and complain that he can’t watch his cartoon, that sort of thing...’ [IDI.1].

Other wealthy parents seem to take a similar position on parental consistency. Says one interviewee: ‘We make sure we avoid disagreement in front of Ola, for example, we don’t settle our differences when she’s around – if there are differences, of course. When Krzysiek tells her to do something, I never contradict him ... When he thinks something shouldn’t be done, we can talk about it later, in private. Or we can talk about it earlier, before telling Ola to do it’ [PIL.3]. Consistency also marks another area where less consistency would seem advisable. That area is the interviewees’ social life, which appears to be rather dull.

Grasshoppers in a Cage

Young parents have worryingly little social life. The young and wealthy explain that they simply have no time for social interaction. They are too busy and too focused on their children’s needs, and most of their friends are unmarried and have no families. For every woman in the group, starting a family meant reducing or even destroying her social life. This may be one reason why the well-off female interviewees did not seem to have fond memories of pregnancy and childbirth. Another striking finding was that they spoke with aversion about the ‘messy’ and ‘laborious’ side of motherhood. Many of them complained that they had not expected maternity to be ‘so difficult’.

Almost every female interviewee pointed out that the idealised image of childbirth and childhood did not correspond to reality. Childbirth and baby care were truly traumatic experiences for the new mothers. ‘Nobody had told me it was going to be so tough. It was the worst moment ... Or rather, the worst moment was yet to come, when I realised how much effort I had to put into baby care ... That first year, my whole world turned upside down ... Let me tell you, looking after a baby for the first six months is wonderful, but not particularly rewarding because you can’t really communicate with a baby, so I think I understand women who feel lonely sitting at home. Sometimes I felt lonely, too, sitting at home with my baby, but it didn’t happen very often...’ [IDI.1].

One interviewee from a small town had particularly painful recollections. When she was asked how she had felt during pregnancy, she said: ‘Awful. That was the worst experience I’d ever had ... There were problems right from the start. Mine was a high-risk pregnancy, so I took some pills for the first three months and then I spent six months in a hospital bed’ [IDI.7]. When she was asked whether the couple had planned to start a family, the woman replied: ‘No, we hadn’t. We’d been together for a long time, eight years, but we hadn’t planned to start a family. **I’d been busy, getting my business going, and so on**. At that time I wasn’t thinking of having a baby. It just happened’ [IDI.7]. To put it mildly, the antenatal care she received was not of the best quality. ‘You know, it’s a small town, and the quality of local hospital care leaves a lot to be desired, so to speak. It’s the hospital attendant who is the boss ... The atmosphere was very unpleasant. The hospital attendant would tell me to get up and get my lunch; she said I was too lazy to move my ass off the bed, even though I wasn’t allowed to get up, doctor’s orders. I had that kind of care’ [IDI.7].

Leaving the childbirth circumstances aside, having a baby was a major factor that contributed to the termination of the interviewees’ social life. When asked how the arrival of her baby had changed her marital life, one woman replied: ‘We’ve become much closer to each other. We used to be so carefree, we had plenty of friends, and we went out a lot ... We had no responsibilities, apart from college. And suddenly something brought us closer together. There’s one more thing that keeps us together – we have a child’ [PIL.3]. Others find the lack of communication with their friends more frustrating. Says one woman: ‘We haven’t been going out much [to parties] recently. I don’t know if it’s because of Mateusz – we have to look after him – but I don’t think so. Piotrek is so busy, and I’m so busy with my college work, and there’s Mateusz, of course. It’s only natural to see your friends less often. At the moment, we have only occasional contact. That’s the way it is, I know ... We go out three times a year to see our friends. And if we want to see them more often, we take Mateusz with us’ [IDI.1]. The trouble is, there are not many places to visit with Mateusz. Why? ‘It’s also because most of our friends have no families. I’m twenty-five now and my husband’s twenty-nine. I think it’s the right time to have a family. I got married quite early, I was twenty-one. I was the only one who was married in my first year at college. But our friends aren’t thinking of getting married, so there is this feeling of isolation. My school and college friends have no families. One is married, but she has no children. We

don't seem to have much in common, we haven't got too many topics to share.' The result is, 'we've got lots of friends we communicate with on the phone or via e-mail only' [IDI.1].

Other couples have similar problems. One woman explains: 'Quite a lot has changed. When we were engaged, and shortly after we got married, we had a pretty busy social life. Now it's kind of less busy. We used to see our friends a few times a week; we went out a lot. Now it happens much less often' [PIL.1]. Another woman, who was asked whether the arrival of her daughter had changed her social life, replied: 'Well, it has – quite a lot. When Ola was born, I was in my final year at college, and all our friends looked after her until she was one year old. And then everybody went their own way, moved out, and ... we're practically the only ones who are still here ... We haven't got too many friends. And we're practically – actually, Ola has no choice, and neither have we, because there's nobody else to look after her, and this is why it's impossible for us to socialise much, even though we'd like to have some more social life, but ... I guess it's also because our friends have no children. If they did, things would probably look slightly different, too' [PIL.3].

One small-town couple have particularly little social life. 'We really have no time to see friends. I have no time. My husband does go out from time to time, but I don't ... My social life came to an end when I got pregnant. It was all over then. And Marcin was a cry-baby. When I was going to the shops, he'd always ask what time I'd be back, how long I'd take, and he'd start weeping [IDI.7]. By cutting off the outside world, however, the couple seem to have developed a strong bond of affection that keeps the family together.

Together and Apart

Most of these families enjoy being together whenever they can, and usually have a hard time if one of the partners has to work long hours outside the home. One woman explains: 'We spend a lot of time away from each other during the day, because Piotrek spends a lot of time, the best part of the day, at work, so when we come back home, we're usually very tired. Actually, we're too tired to play with Mateusz. We're more energetic at weekends. But the kind of life we live, with Piotrek working so hard, and with me trying to work, too, at college and taking on some freelance work – it takes up so much energy. And our family life – even though I always make a point of doing things together because it's extremely important – it means a lot of hard work. **We'd love to do everything together and spend a lot of time together but, the fact is, when we finally get together, we have very little energy left, we're just tired,** and we don't really feel like building towers with blocks. We'd rather slump down, sit down, and do nothing. That's the trouble, we're too tired because we have to work hard, but that's life, if you want something better, you have to find yourself a job or go to school...' [IDI.1].

Even though it is difficult, young parents at least try to spend activity weekends and holidays with their children. But their 'days off are ... few and far between, so we always have a lie in, in the first place. Our Sunday breakfast looks like this: my husband gets it ready on the Saturday; it's his responsibility. After breakfast I go back to bed, and Marcin plays in his room. I usually promise him some fun later, for example, in-line skating or ... Anyway, we usually go out to let him have some fun, for example, going cycling in the playground' [IDI.7]. At some point the interviewee had resolved to go skiing with her son, something she 'had never done before. We'd been to Slovakia for New Year's Eve, and there I saw these little kids skiing and I thought: "Why not my son?" So I bought a pair of skis for him, and another one for me, and we went skiing for a week ... We spent a week on the slopes, and now we go skiing, for example, at weekends' [IDI.7]. The woman's husband is their driver then. But the family's summer holidays look quite different: 'Last year we went to Cannes and took Marcin with us. We flew there. We had rented accommodation for us, et cetera. Just regular summer holidays, you know, sun, sea and sand' [IDI.7].

However, only some parents, for example university teachers (IDI.5 and PIL.1) have longer holidays. Others have much less free time, so they need to make the most of it. One interviewee explains: 'For the past two years we've spent our holidays at the seaside. Two weeks, always. **Piotrek can't take any more days off because he's got a high-powered job, so they won't let him have too many days off at a stretch, he can't take a month off work.** He'd have to plan for it well in advance, or he'd have to spend hours on the phone. And what's the use of that kind of holiday? It's better to take two weeks off and go to a totally secluded place, to get away from it all ... So we go, and it's pretty ordinary, just as our ordinary days here. We make breakfast, we never go anywhere with full board; we cook our meals, go to the beach and for walks, we just get bored together' [IDI.1].

Both partners grow very close to each other when their baby is born. In almost all the cases, the interviewees' husbands were present at the birth and had the opportunity to experience this emotional event. (Only one small-town couple did not have a family birth for reasons beyond their control.) Says one interviewee: 'I was lucky to have found a pretty good hospital. Krzysiek was present at the birth. We wanted to have a family birth. Actually, it wasn't quite as we'd hoped it would be. I'd had antenatal classes, and Krzysiek had attended, too, a couple of times, so he kind of knew what to expect. I think he acquitted himself well. I was actually quite surprised – he looked after me so well, and I guess that's why he took very good care of Ola later on. Because he saw her being born. He

saw I was in pain ... Well, it was very painful indeed' [PIL.3]. Another interviewee says: *'Piotrek [husband] was with me [at the birth] and helped me a lot, even though I wasn't sure I wanted him to be there, I didn't want him to be there, but when the pains started, I felt awful and I was happy to have him near me'* [IDI.1].

This kind of shared experience inspires mutual trust, allowing the partners to take some time away from each other – even if their greatest wish is to be inseparable. *'Ever since Mateusz was born, Piotrek has always made sure that I don't turn into an overworked housewife. He often tells me to go out, for example, to the cinema with my friends. We do that from time to time. We say, "Why don't you go out, see your friends?" Piotrek is not very fond of going out, but we make sure that he goes out alone from time to time and that I go out to see my friends. **Instead of hanging around together all the time** ... And at least once a month we leave Mateusz with our parents and go to the cinema together, or to a restaurant, just to relax, the two of us, or to the theatre. And sometimes Piotrek tells me to go to a beauty salon, he says, "Go", on Saturdays, too, he says, "Go and give yourself a treat. We'll stay here and take care of ourselves". They stay and do something together, for example, they make lunch together to surprise me'* [IDI.1].

Sometimes father and son go to the car wash together to let the woman spend some time on her own: *'Sometimes they go there together when I just want to stay at home or do something on my own. The boys go and I stay. I love it'* [IDI.1]. In the eyes of the female interviewees, this kind of attitude is necessary to ensure that the couple feel comfortable with each other. Despite these deliberate 'acts of separation', mutual love is constantly cherished and fanned: *'We often, when Mateusz goes to sleep, we often do ... at least once a month one of us pops down to the shops and buys some wine, red wine, blue cheese, you know, things that turn your stomach if you eat too much, some deli food like olives, and we make a salad or just eat them straight from the bag, drinking wine ... We just sit down, drinking wine. Or we order some pizza, but it's ... only when the shops are closed...'* [IDI.1]. Another interviewee was asked to describe the bond that linked her, her husband and her child together. She replied: *'Love, first and foremost. I guess it's the most important thing and the best foundation to build on ... So I think ... this may sound a bit corny or bookish, but it's love and friendship, not necessarily in that order, perhaps in equal proportions'* [PIL.1].

Investment Efforts and Effects

Let us now have a look at some of the effects of parental 'investment efforts' aimed at enhancing children's skills and dispositions. Apparently, the children of well-educated and wealthy parents – who can afford to provide a rich variety of developmental stimuli – are quicker to acquire certain skills, such as reading and writing. Says one woman: *'He was four when he started to read, but he doesn't brag about it. I asked him the other day if his pre-school teacher knew he could read, but he said she didn't. He just reads when he wants to read'* [IDI.7]. A good pre-school programme definitely helps to develop literacy skills. Another interviewee explains: *'Pre-school helps a lot ... There's a tremendous difference in [the daughter's] verbal behaviour and play patterns. And, to give credit where credit is due, I must say it's because of the pre-school'* [PIL.3]. That particular pre-school charges slightly higher fees than the State-run pre-school centres, but the effect of its socialisation processes – and, obviously, other learning processes, too – is that the girl's mother is *'happy about [the girl's] linguistic ability, even though she's only five, she can make up very nice sentences'* [PIL.3].

Pre-school is not the only setting that enhances children's development. The family must also provide a wide range of proper stimuli if the mother of a three-year-old girl is *'proud because she's very smart, that's what I think. I'm proud because she's very curious about the world. And she's a good girl, too. She's a good girl, a good person. I don't mean she's well behaved, because she isn't, but she's good-hearted. When she spots someone in the street, someone who needs help, she walks over to talk to them. I like this attitude. And she has a talent for music ... Now I'm trying to get her interested in music, the better kind of music. I take her to concerts quite often, but we usually leave halfway through them – I'm afraid it can't be helped. This is what she has, I mean, an interest in music, and I want her to keep it that way'* [PIL.1].

Music education is not the only example of how wealthy parents map out their children's future. Other areas include learning a foreign language, experiencing art, getting into college and developing valuable intellectual dispositions. One wealthy parent from a small town is particularly uncertain about her son's future. She says: *'I think that Mateusz should be free to choose. I can make suggestions; buy him a synthesiser to plonk away on, or crayons to dabble with. If he likes it, great, if not, that's fine by me ... If he wants to study medicine, that's okay. If he wants to be something else, that's okay, too ... but I'm not sure what it'll look like in practice. Will we be able to stay away, avoid interfering? I hope we will because, frankly, it wouldn't make sense. I know this from experience: if a child doesn't enjoy something, they just won't do it'* [IDI.7]. The interviewee is aware that her son may have limited opportunities to learn various skills: *'I don't think we can press him. Anyway, there aren't many opportunities in a small town like ours. [If we lived] in a bigger town, we might enrol him [in*

educational programmes] *to find out what he really enjoys, to give him some direction. There are more opportunities in the bigger towns'* [IDI.7].

Other educated parents, who live in larger towns, are less uncertain, but they, too, stress the fact that their children should be free to choose. *'I really want her to learn foreign languages – it's essential. I hope she'll be able to travel and learn. I hope that our financial situation gets a bit better, and we'll be able to give her a better education, in a better school and then maybe at college ... We want to find her a good school. We want Ola to develop intellectually as well as physically. Maybe she should take up a sport ... We want ... most of all we want her to learn a lot – I mean, to learn what she may need in the future and what she enjoys. We don't want to twist her arm'* [PIL.3].

Not only do wealthy parents want to provide education for their children – they also want to protect them. From what? *'Obviously, [from] drugs, alcohol, et cetera ... We'll have to choose a primary school for him. Actually, we've already started looking for a school where we'll have some control over these things ... Frankly ... I believe he'll be reasonable ... but life's full of surprises, so I'd better take steps to ensure that his environment won't have a negative impact on him ... I don't know how to do that ... You can't keep your child wrapped in cotton wool, I'm not going to stop him from spending holidays at youth camps. I'm not going to keep him at home. I think the best way is to talk about it, just as my parents did, luckily'* [IDI.1]. Another couple want to protect their daughter from many things, including television and watching *'the evening news, sometimes, and those Pokemons, they're horrible'* [PIL.3]. They hope that, in effect, their daughter will grow up to be a decent person. Says the girl's mother: *'I hope [my daughter] will be honest. I hope she'll be aware that she isn't the only one in the world – there are others out there who also need help. I hope she's a loyal friend and daughter, a clever, thinking person'* [PIL.3]. Women in low-income households have similar hopes, even though they are slightly less articulate, and their parenting styles are dramatically different from those described above. These families are presented in the next chapter.

*

This chapter presents a picture that some of the readers may find distorted, sugary or idealised. After all, the wealthy families' child education programmes may not be as enriched, structured or marked with affection as the female interviewees purport them to be. Nor is it likely that the affluent environments are free of parenting problems that may affect the children's achievement at school and in later life. Granted, wealthy parents do face certain difficulties, but these difficulties do not seem to have a major impact on their children's progress. Why? Let us compare the results of our survey, designed to identify common childhood parenting styles in Polish families, with research findings that describe the effects of these efforts: the actual levels of achievement found in Polish people from different social backgrounds. These levels of achievement appear to be directly related to the educational and developmental processes in the early childhood years.

Hanna Pakulska (2002) has conducted a study of lifestyles in high-income and low-income households. In her study, the lifestyles in the low-income group (families with incomes below subsistence level) and those in the high-income group (families with incomes over 3,000 zlotys a month per household member) are seen as the end product of a variety of investment efforts – those made by the interviewees, and those made by the interviewees' parents in their children's early childhood and adolescent years. Today these people earn very good salaries, are educated and have the social capital characteristic of the middle class. Most of them had a 'rosy' childhood. Precisely the same picture emerged from our survey, which also involved parents and their 'side of the story'. Palska writes: *'The great majority of the interviewees described their childhood years as happy, safe and trouble-free. Many of them used somewhat idyllic-sounding ... metaphors to describe a caring home, where everything was in the right place, and the children were important and loved'* (2002: 88). In Palska's study, the interviewees' homes overflowed with love, tenderness, books and bric-a-brac, and the parents never divorced. If such idyllic scenes are painted by adults who grew up in affluent environments, and by affluent parents of young children today, the conclusion is inevitable. First, the picture must correspond to reality. Second, the parenting styles preferred by wealthy parents must produce identical effects, described by Palska and other researchers of affluent lifestyles (see Domański 2000). For the children of wealthy parents, the effects are: high levels of education, highly paid jobs and high social status.

Granted, this conclusion does not necessarily apply to all Polish high-income households. Some parents may spend extremely little time with their children, causing irreparable damage to them in the long run. But the sociological picture of high-income households in major urban areas where parents have college degrees points to the conclusion that children of affluence are cared for really well.

Parental care, parental investment efforts, the middle-class lifestyles with relatively stable marriages, and the caring and relatively trouble-free family environments produce well-educated, creative and able children who develop into successful adults with marketable skills. Clearly, our survey presents a picture that runs counter to popular intuitions or, at any rate, counter to popular

media reports that describe affluent households in the context of high divorce rates, lack of time for family life and a lot of stress-related tensions that presumably make it impossible for a child of wealthy parents to have a happy childhood. These reports – published, for example, in *Gazeta Wyborcza* – probably affect the way in which the young, educated and childless people look at family life today. Reality, however, is different. Paradoxically, problems such as divorce, single parenthood, marital quarrels and a lack of time for children are much more acute in low-income households.

Chapter Three

The Murky Corners of the Playground: Young Children in Underprivileged Families

The Wrong Sort of Capital: Quizzes, Soaps and Crosswords

In Britain, typical working-class fare is fish and chips. In Poland, the lower classes have their own habits and tastes that opinion polls and more detailed qualitative research surveys like ours can identify. Children, who imitate their parents' lifestyles, copy these habits and tastes. They also inherit parental tastes and behaviours in the field of culture. These behaviours are apparently at odds with what the interviewees ambitiously declare, but their inconsistent statements and the way their homes look like give away the true nature of things. The female interviewees talk at length about book reading, but there are practically no books in their homes. They talk about visiting libraries with their children, but the nearest book-lending institution is probably twenty kilometres away. The interviewees seem to be perfectly aware of what the intruders from a different world (the researchers) consider important, so they adjust their statements accordingly. But the researchers are very observant and ask many crosschecking questions.

A female interviewee from a poor rural community, who was asked about her favourite pastime, said: *'Books. My husband likes fantasy and thrillers most. Me, I like stories that make me cry'*. Then she added: *'I like TV programmes that make me cry. They show programmes like that on Thursdays, real-life stuff. My husband likes fantasy and thrillers only. So we make a deal: today I'm watching this, and you're watching that. When I'm watching a weepie, he goes out of the room, takes a book and reads'* [IDI.3]. Interestingly, book reading is not a passion for one urban couple where – according to the unemployed female interviewee's words – she has a secondary education and her unemployed husband has a college degree. Her husband *'trained as a teacher, but he's a skilled construction worker ... He's with the Samoobrona [Self-defence] Party'* [IDI.9]. The husband has some other favourite pastimes that are quite peculiar for a man with a college degree, namely he is interested in *'football and aircraft – I think Patryk [son] got it from him. And cars and history.'* Then the interviewee added quickly: *'I haven't got any hobbies now, practically no hobbies, because I've no time for them, I just have no time, 'cos I go to bed at midnight, so I can't, but I love doing crosswords, for example'* [IDI.9]. Doing crossword puzzles is a very common intellectual amusement in this group: A cleaning lady from Stalowa Wola says: *'When I was pregnant, I loved doing crosswords. I did all of them. My husband gets bugged sometimes 'cos I only do crosswords, nothing else'* [IDI.12].

Participation in the arts is quite rare in the underprivileged group. It is, generally speaking, difficult for financial reasons. For example, meagre financial resources are not enough to provide big screen entertainment. An unemployed couple from a major city, who were asked whether they often went to the cinema, replied: *'No, we don't. But we take our daughter, sure we do. My husband took our daughter to see Harry Potter. And later we wanted to see The Lord of the Rings, but we had no money, so we didn't. We try to take the kids, but we don't really go to see movies on our own. Our personal pleasures take second place'* [IDI.9]. Similarly, it has been a long time since another small-town family last went to the cinema because *'we'd have to leave Mateusz with someone, with my mother. And he'd cry, I don't know why. I guess it's because [the woman's mother] rarely comes to visit'* [IDI.12]. There is, however, some time for other amusements: *'We've been to the funfair lately, riding on a merry-go-round. Of course, my husband and son went for a ride on the roller coaster and then for a car ride'* [IDI.12].

In the circumstances, the best amusement is television – probably the only cultural medium these families can afford. Television accompanies these children from the cradle, being as much a time-killer as a major source of entertainment. The son of a cleaning lady *'goes to bed after watching some quiz show. He loves shows like "Millionaires" and "The Lyrics Board"'* [IDI.12]. Another child, the son of an unemployed couple from Łódź, plays with *'toy cars, teddy bears, he's started to draw, watches cartoons, but not every kind ... The telly must be on all the time so he can switch over to a cartoon he likes in an instant'* [IDI.9]. The interviewees are aware that television is not about the good news only and that some programmes are not particularly recommendable. For example, a farmer couple say that they do not watch *'too much TV because ... we don't want Michalek to watch, you know, stuff like those horrible cartoons, because they're scary. Scary to a young kid. He may ... some cartoons ... they're just ugly'* [IDI.8]. The same couple like watching *'the news, news stories, information, and the like, you know. And these long-running TV dramas, you know, with lots of episodes, what do you call them, we watch them. And that's all we watch, we don't watch TV at night or late at night'* [IDI.8].

Clearly, television is not only a source of entertainment but a source of news as well, especially as the underprivileged families do not read much. At one point the interviewers ask the

women to describe the period before the arrival of their child. Did they read anything then? One rural mother says: *'No, not really, I didn't read much. I mean, I do read, you know, them papers, like, some books, but not really, no. You know what I mean, generally, I'm not much into reading, not really. You know what I mean, I need to rest a bit, and ... You know, it can't be all work, you have to take good care of yourself, don't you?'* [IDI.8] The interviewee has no personal interests either: *'Me? My own interests?'* she asks the interviewers in amazement. *'Well, I guess, farming, that's what I'm interested in. Animals, too ... and, you know, crop growing, just like my husband. Just farming, you know. As a farmer ... you have to take care of these things'* [IDI.8] Obviously, their child is not read to. When asked whether she read to her children, the woman, characteristically, gave an evasive answer: *'Yeah, stories, like, books, you know, sure you have to teach them, show pictures, and outdoors, when you go outdoors, you have to show them wildlife, trees, animals, this and that ... You just have to show that and ... talk to the kids a lot'* [IDI.8].

In France, the lower classes are dumbfounded when asked to name two classical composers (Pierre Bourdieu; see Domański 2000: 148). Their Polish counterparts – farmers and labourers – would find the task equally daunting. Polish farmers say they never go to the opera or to the theatre, and never listen to classical music. Skilled workers, however, do declare some interest in classical music. According to polls based on carefully selected representative samples, almost 30 per cent of skilled workers listen to classical music a few times a year (Domański 2000: 149-150). However, detailed qualitative surveys, which are more accurate in measuring the actual interest level, reveal the truth about this 'listening'. In our survey, the interviewees were asked what kind of music they preferred and whether the other family members liked the same kind of music. One interviewee, an unemployed mother, said: *'Yeah, [the pop band] Ich Troje. We love them, and Karolinka [daughter], too. After all, Jacek [probably a member of the band] lives in the same house. Who else? Well, Ich Troje, [the pop band] Budka Suflera, some of the classical musics [sic]'* [IDI.9]. Farmers are not even skilful at deceiving the interviewers. When asked about the kind of music they listened to, one farmer replied: *'All kinds. Me, I listen to pop music, for example, some pop, but not too much. Not that Polish disco stuff, mind you, but some older tracks, oldies, you know what I mean'* [IDI.8].

Most of the low-income families, who struggle hard to make ends meet, are unable to provide enriched educational environments with plenty of social interaction. Unlike the wealthy families, grandparents in low-income homes cannot participate in childcare responsibilities because they are old and infirm, or – more often than not – they have their own children to look after. Children from underprivileged backgrounds are rarely sent to pre-school because their parents cannot afford it or because there are no pre-school programmes in the neighbourhood. (*'If I could, I would [send my sons to pre-school], but I can't. Kids grow up better with their peers around. I know what Karolinka [daughter] was like before she went to pre-school. She learnt a lot at pre-school, learnt to take care of herself and to play'* [IDI.9].) Children rarely play out of doors because there are no suitable playgrounds for them. (*'Look at that playground out there. More cars than kids, no sandpit, no trees'* [IDI.9].) Children do not spend holidays at youth camps for financial reasons. (*'We just can't afford ... can't afford to send Karolinka to a youth camp, you see, because it costs seven hundred zlotys'* [IDI.9].)

The underprivileged parents are aware that their children can benefit by learning in many different settings and from many different people. Says one rural mother: *'Kids learn [sic] ... with other kids, like, at school, and in the neighbourhood, you know, from other people. You know, they listen to their parents, sure, but they can see others, too, they do their own thinking and ask, "He can do it, so why can't I?" you know what I mean. So I want to bring them up to be... decent, you know, 'cos life's full of ups and downs'* [IDI.8].

The family's meagre financial resources limit the children's opportunities for interaction to their parents and siblings only. This kind of interaction, however, can be harmful, mainly because of parental inconsistency. The interviewees in the underprivileged group often point out that husbands and wives should not undermine each other's parental authority in front of their child. The truth is, their childrearing and discipline-teaching efforts often show a lack of symmetry, as is clear from their replies to other, unrelated questions. Mothers reprimand while fathers praise, and vice versa. *'Dad is for cuddling and Mum is for shouting'* [IDI.3].

The House at Pooh Corner or Exceptions to the Rule

Clearly, poor educational stimuli and the wrong sort of cultural capital are not characteristic of every family where poverty is the result of unemployment. It is the parents' educational background that seems to play a more prominent role in stimulating their children's development, and in stimulating parental involvement, too. The unemployed couple from Łódź, where the man has a college degree and the woman has a secondary education, and the unemployed couple from Tarnów, where both parents have a secondary education, show a high level of parental involvement and a high level of parental investment, even though their limited financial resources do not make the educational processes any easier.

'Our children aren't enrolled in a toddler group or pre-school at the moment,' says one woman, 'but I'm thinking of doing it because of our elder son. He's got a speech problem; he has trouble speaking, more trouble than his peers. He's improved lately, but he's behind other kids his age, even behind some younger kids, because his speech is slurred. I've consulted a speech therapist about it because I'm really worried. We're spending a lot of time doing all kinds of pronunciation practice, just as the therapist said. So I'm thinking of sending him to pre-school in September, to give him more opportunity to be with other people and talk to his peers' [IDI.10]. This family is an exception in that the parents read to their children. 'We read a lot of books and stories to him. We've started drawing, too. He likes drawing heads, faces, eyes, human shapes, that sort of thing. I was watching him the other day, and asked him about the squares he'd drawn. He said he'd drawn a monster. I'm afraid that's because of watching all these cartoons – they're all about "nukes" and monsters' [IDI.10].

This picture is very coherent: the parents' personal interests match their parenting style, and the interviewee's language is dramatically different from the awkward phraseology the other women use. *'My husband is interested in politics, he [spends] a lot of time in front of the TV, watching all kinds of current affairs programmes, and he reads the papers. He's also interested in computer games. Well, I have no favourite pastimes; it's not easy with two kids in the house. I spend a lot of time arranging things for the children, so I have no time to take care of myself. I like reading the papers. Now I'm interested in childcare, so I'm reading books on childcare – those I can get hold of. Talking of our shared interests – my husband and I are interested in current affairs, generally speaking. Now, the TV programmes – as I say, my husband watches those about current affairs, and I watch those about childcare and education, some quiz shows. I rarely watch films. Music, well, we listen to it sometimes, we like [the pop singer] Urszula and [the pop band] Bajm' [IDI.10].*

The child of the unemployed couple from Tarnów is one of the few youngsters in this group who attend family day-care centres. The woman says: *'I take him to Pooh Corner because I want him to interact with his peers. This is a centre for children of pre-school age. There are toys there, and the children play with them. Parents can also stay to play with the kids, but they don't have to. I stay because of my younger son. My elder son doesn't need me to play with his peers. We usually go there when the weather's bad. I want them to have some interesting activities instead of sitting at home with me all the time. At Pooh Corner they have eurythmics classes and other activities, some of these are for the older kids, for example, art workshops. They have moulding clay, some paper for cutting; they can make collages and paintings. The atmosphere's very nice. You can share ideas with other parents, too. I really like it there' [IDI.10].*

In this particular household, the division of responsibilities is very different from the traditional system (to be discussed later) adopted by other underprivileged families. *'When my husband's not working, we share the jobs round the house to make sure that neither of us has to do all the chores. We help and complement each other ... We definitely avoid undermining each other's parental authority in front of the kids, you know, if my husband allowed them to do something and I told him off in front of the kids – that never happens. It's because I don't want them to have respect for me only. If we look at something differently, we can talk about it later, when our children aren't around' [IDI.10].*

This family, however, is an exception. Most of the female interviewees have to struggle hard to meet the challenges of parenting all alone.

The Heroic Mother Syndrome

Most women in the underprivileged group believe that they should sacrifice everything for their children or, at any rate, that children are the most important things in their lives. Says a dressmaker: *'Children are the most important. But I'm not sure if everything [should be sacrificed for them], hard to say. Me, if I'd given up everything for her, I'd be sitting at home with her all the time, and I can't. Someone has to work. That's sacrifice, too' [IDI.3].* Another interviewee was asked the following questions: *'What you're saying means you live for your children. Does it make you happy? Do you think that's the way it should be?' The reply was: 'It's my duty. We have children to look after them. In time, there'll be more spare moments for us to go out together. It's hard, but not too hard. My husband says he'd go crazy if he stayed at home with them all day long – you see, they cry and cry all the time. When one stops, the other one begins. You just can't take it anymore. It happens every day' [IDI.9].*

This kind of thinking grows out of poor schooling. The better education a woman has, the less likely she is to build her life around her children. Says one mother with a secondary education: *'Even if my husband earned enough to support the family, I'd still want to have a job, but it must be a job that makes me feel needed, something I enjoy doing, something I like' [IDI.10].*

The women in the underprivileged group often spoke about the miserable life of a mother and housewife. Clearly, these roles are difficult and boring, and there are many challenges along the way. Worse still, the world seems to be bent on piling up the pressure: innocent husbands are put in prison, women are condemned to living alone, children are delivered by dead-drunk obstetricians, family members become addicted to alcohol, and poverty comes knocking at the door.

A thirty-year-old cleaning lady says: *'Around this time last year we had it really tough. My husband was in jail. No, he hadn't done anything wrong, but if you have no money, you have it tough. If you have no money, you can't – even if someone says that white is white and black is black, but they're all a greedy bunch, money-wise...'* 'Was he under arrest or sentenced?' the interviewers want to know. *'Sentenced, to two years, but they let him out on parole. But he did one year, and I had a really hard time without him. I was all alone'* [IDI.12]. The interviewee's next words make it clear that she is affected by the 'heroic mother syndrome': *'It was tough for me, being all alone, but I knew I had to be strong, not only for my own sake, but for the sake of my son and my husband. I had to stick it out. It was really, really hard. I had only two months left on the dole, but the dole's a pittance when you have to rent a flat and pay the bills'* [IDI.12].

The Polish heroic mother needs to be strong to fit the traditional stereotype in a male-dominated culture, where a woman who has been raped has to cope with the trauma all by herself. Says the same interviewee: *'I can manage all right. I've been through a worse thing before. I wasn't seventeen yet when I was raped by a boy sent by a girl I knew well. But I did learn a lot from that ... So I made up my mind. Never to let anyone treat me like a doormat again ... I won't let a man, in particular. One had made it, but only because I was a silly young girl. And it doesn't matter how hard they try to tell me they're sorry – I won't wipe the slate clean'* [IDI.12].

Other heroic mothers have been through equally traumatic experiences they had to cope with on their own. One woman who lives in a rural community recalls the day she gave birth to her daughter: *'My husband ran to get his mother, and she told me to call an ambulance. Things got a bit dicey 'cos the paramedic was drunk. They both were. On top of that, they shouted at me, said at my age I should've known better to make an early call. They used words that weren't quite right. They were hopping mad 'cos I'd ruined their partying. But they did get me to hospital, and it went fast ... My husband wasn't with me at the birth. Earlier, at home he said he'd go outside to keep an eye on the ambulance, 'cos he couldn't bear to listen. And later I found out that he and the [baby's] great-grandmother had a ball wetting the occasion. 'Cos grandpa's always drunk, he says, and a granny is a granny'* [IDI.3].

Many heroic mothers have problems with alcoholic family members. Says one interviewee: *'My father, well I'm not sure if he was an alcoholic, I was too small to remember. But I said to myself, it wouldn't be like that with me. No more family rows, never. When I met my husband, he, too, was drunk, but ... I never thought he'd remember – I told him to come again when he wasn't drunk. And he did. Cold sober. And so it started – so much for drinking. And we're teetotalers, all of us.'* 'You mean, alcohol is never served in your house?' the interviewers ask. 'No, never,' the woman replies. 'And what about the family get-togethers?' *'It is [served], but [my husband] isn't much into it now. He has two drinks, and that's it for him'* [IDI.3]. Even though the interviewees do not like it, their husbands do drink alcohol on occasion. For example, when a baby is born, tradition demands that the baby's father should 'wet the baby's head'. This tradition is part of the magic rites surrounding the arrival of a child.

Childbirth Magic and Other Rudiments of Traditional Culture

It is interesting to have a look at the rudimentary magic beliefs surrounding pregnancy, childbirth and parenting – beliefs held mostly by rural families and former collective farm workers, even though some better educated city dwellers show just as poor an understanding of postnatal baby care. Says one interviewee from Łódź: *'For the first three months, a baby just eats and sleeps. And moves a little. It's like a doll'* [IDI.9].

Magical thinking, however, is more characteristic of poorly educated women (those with vocational or primary schooling only) in the smaller communities. They believe that a would-be mother's attitude can shape her child's character in the future. *'Think positive when you're pregnant, and your kid will be happy. Cry, and your kid will be weepy'* [IDI.12]. This must be homeopathic magic, based on the 'like causes like' principle (Nowicka 1997: 442). Other comments made by the interviewee clearly indicate that homeopathic magic pervades every aspect of her life. *'When I was pregnant, I stroked this place here [pointing] all the time and my son's really got, on his head here [pointing to one side of her forehead], he's got a hollow, a kind of bruise from that stroking. I stroked my belly and ... that's why he was born early'* [IDI.12].

In the underprivileged group, magical thinking can be found in mothers as well as fathers, who also perform certain magic rituals pertinent to childbirth. The same interviewee was asked about her husband's reaction to the news of her being pregnant. She said: *'When he'd found out, he went out to wet the baby's head.'* 'At once?' the interviewers asked. *'Yeah. Our baby hadn't been born yet when he went out to wet his head'* [IDI.12]. Her husband was not present at the birth because traditional communities keep the female world separated from the male world. *'I said: my husband should be ... on the phone, not with me. This is a woman's thing. I'm afraid they may find their women disgusting 'cos it isn't pleasant to look at a baby being born, what with all that blood and the like. I think it's a personal thing. I don't want my husband to be at my side when I'm in labour'* [IDI.12].

In traditional Polish culture, a pregnant woman is a supernatural creature who belongs to the sacred world. This holy creature is free to have her whims, but her husband should always treat her with reverence and respect. *'My husband handled me with kid gloves. He wouldn't even let me lace up my shoes'* [IDI.12]. However, after the baby is born, husbands tend to lose sight of the sanctity of womanhood, turning their wives into submissive servants.

Apart from magical thinking, these families have something else in common: they are all based on a patriarchal power structure and stick to a rigid division of gender-related roles. (Ironically, related to this division is the feminisation of poverty.) Patriarchal family organisation has at least three distinctive features: (1) it relies heavily on physical punishment and discipline in childrearing, (2) it lays a lot of stress on verbal declarations of reverence towards the elderly, and (3) wives have secrets to keep from their husbands. (*'When I want to buy something expensive for Karolinka, some of the money comes out of my secret fund. I tell my husband that it cost much less than it actually did. That's what women do, don't they? I don't talk to him about it, I mean, I do, but I don't tell him the whole truth'* [IDI.9].) Another thing that women do is to educate their sons to be macho, as befits men: *'A boy mustn't be a wimp. I always say to my child, "If they don't hit you, don't hit them. But when they hit you, hit back". I give him food to eat so he's strong enough to hit back. He mustn't stand and stare like a sissy'* [IDI.12].

Another interviewee says: *'Dad is the authority figure. Mum is for everyday things. Like I said, [the son] comes to me when he's sad and crying. When daddy gives him a spanking, he runs to me. But he doesn't hold a grudge for too long. Maybe it's his age or his character, 'cos five minutes later he runs back to his dad'* [IDI.9]. The occasional 'spanking' is considered an effective – perhaps the only effective – disciplinary measure. *'At his age the only punishment is a slap. He is told not to do something, but he goes and does it just the same. The only punishment is a slap. He goes away, crying. When he stops, he comes back and says he's sorry. It's the only punishment, 'cos we don't put a ban on watching cartoons, we don't do that kind of thing'* [IDI.9]. Another interviewee recalls: *'I've slapped him a few times, I admit. But it was because I just couldn't stick it ... really ... Well, it was my fault, I just got mad, flipped out and slapped him, but after that I did tell him I was sorry. I said, "I'm sorry, mummy just got upset, forgive me"'* [IDI.12].

Men exercise total control over their wives – for example, they decided how long the interviews should take. At some point, one interviewee said: *'I'm sorry, but it's half past eight already. My husband will say, "Are you crazy, woman?"'* [IDI.12]. Earlier she said: *'My husband never goes out to see his mates. Me, if I ask him to let me go out for a while to see a friend of mine, he says yes. He won't throw a fit, you know, but I always ask him if I can. I never leave without a word; I always do what I'm supposed to do, and then, **if my husband says yes** ... I think you should ask your partner. If you just do what you will, you know how you'll end up'* [IDI.12].

Another distinctive feature of this traditional Polish culture is the verbal declarations of respect towards the elderly. Parents want to foster this kind of respect in their children, seeing it as a necessary part of childhood socialisation. Instead of going out to see her same-age friends, one interviewee prefers visiting her *'neighbour, an elderly lady. We call her Granny Stefcia. I go to visit her, sit for a while and have a chat. I like spending time with elderly people. I like listening to their stories; their words of wisdom are often so beautiful, so true. You just look at the world with a new eye. Life can be hard, and you can feel sad and blue. I like to visit these people then. I can learn a lot off them'* [IDI.12]. According to this interviewee, the booklets published by the Polish Children and Youth Foundation under the *Letters to Parents* programme ought to *'say that parents should teach their children to respect the elderly, not just because we have something to gain, but because it's right to share...'* [IDI.12].

Thou Shalt Be Tidy

According to sociologists, the working classes and, in general, the lower classes are particularly fond of keeping their homes neat. This observation was first made in Britain. Henryk Domański has made a similar observation in Poland. 'In 1998, we asked members of different social classes the following question: "Some families are very strict about keeping their homes tidy. Other families do not think it really matters. Do you think it is important to keep things in order?" ... Most of the affirmative replies came from labourers (cleaners, caretakers and farm workers) ... Strict adherence to rigid rules is the labourers' way of preserving their dignity. Some categories of labourers impose a semblance of rigour as the only way to convince themselves that they have gained respect and prestige. To do that, they need symbols' (Domański 2000: 147).

Our survey of childhood parenting styles has clearly revealed this tendency. Even very young children are taught to be tidy and to keep all their things where they belong. The interviewees' educational backgrounds do not matter in this respect. Rather, the phenomenon appears to be linked with their social-class background (if by 'class' we understand a group of people who have an economic status in common and a similar type of employment). Interestingly, the lower one's economic status, the stronger one's passion for order. An unemployed couple from Łódź (where the

man has a college degree) are very strict about teaching their children to be tidy: *'My husband believes that every thing has its place. When [the son] stops playing, he must put his toys away. Me ... I'm not so strict about it. After I've told him a dozen times to put away his toys, I put them away myself. But my husband's not like me, he's stricter. When he tells him to tidy up, Patryk will cry, but he will do as told'* [IDI.9]. 'Does he ever sulk?' the interviewers ask. *'Sometimes, but he's soon back, smiling, to finish clearing up. He sulks when he gets a slap. He cries. When I get angry and shout at him, he runs to his bedroom and cries. Kids can cry themselves sick in a fit of hysteria. He gets a slap then, 'cos I won't have hysterical crying in the home. But when he stops, he says, "Sorry, mum" and goes back again'* [IDI.9].

In a small-town working-class family (where the woman is a cleaner and the man is a seasonal construction worker) the woman taught the couple's fifteen-month-old son *'to tidy up his things. First his blocks – they were lying all around the house. So I said, "Mateusz, these are your toys, please put them away. Mum's not going to clear up after you". He burst into tears, wouldn't play for two days, 'cos he was supposed to tidy up. But he got used to it now. He knows that when he makes a mess, he's supposed to tidy up'* [IDI.12]. These parents are very proud of their son's unaided efforts to be tidy. 'What makes you proud of your son?' the interviewers ask. *'He does a lot of things by himself, even though he's very young, he does them by himself, for example, vacuuming. I don't have to do it alone. He does a lot of things by himself, for example, he gets into a bath by himself'* [IDI.12].

Keeping things tidy without being helped is what every underprivileged family in our survey expect their children to do. Children should learn to put away their toys at a very, very early age. When asked at what age her youngest son should start to tidy up, the wife of a farmer replied: *'He's been supposed to be tidy ever since he was a toddler'* [IDI.8]. The family of a former collective farm worker are also teaching their daughter to be neat. 'What can you say about keeping Kasia's toys in order?' the interviewers ask. *'Tough job,'* her mother, a dressmaker, replies. *'Sometimes I have to wait all day for her to tidy up, but we make sure that she clears up in the end. Sometimes the place is a mess all day 'cos she's tired, she must watch her cartoon first, and she keeps putting it off'* [IDI.3].

That a passion for order depends on one's social class rather than one's educational background is also confirmed by the words of a woman with a secondary level of education (her husband, too, has a secondary education, even though he is a seasonal construction worker). When asked what she expected her child to do around the house, the woman replied: *'We don't really expect him to do much because he's very young, you know, but we do want him to learn to be tidy, to put away his toys or clear up a mess. Sometimes we tell him to tidy up or he'll have a ban on telly watching. We want him to learn to be tidy, you know'* [IDI.10].

A spick-and-span house where everything has its place is the perfect setting for the kind of lifestyle preferred by the underprivileged group. In short, their lifestyle involves economising instead of spending the little they have on goods that are not meant for immediate consumption. The interviewees explicitly admit that 'life's for eating'. The wife of a farmer describes how Christmas and Easter are spent in her family: *'This is what life's all about, isn't it? – To eat. Not to get drunk or something, right?'* [IDI.8]

This utterly pragmatic attitude is also reflected in the words of other interviewees. One of them was asked whether she and her husband celebrated their wedding anniversaries. Her reply was quite typical: *'Yes, we do. My husband bought me a bar of chocolate on Women's Day. He says, a flower will die and chocolate you can eat'* [IDI.12].

Many interviewees in this group equate pleasure with eating. Some of them equate eating with a sophisticated cultural experience. To an unemployed couple from Łódź, a visit to a local McDonalds bar is a very special event. The children have their birthday parties there, with *'balloons, cakes and snacks. There's juice and strawberry-flavoured bubbly drinks ... I put on some music. They do what they want to do. Karolinka is too big to be told what to do. If they want to dance, they can. When she was little, we used to go to a McDonalds here in Łódź. It was a great attraction. They gave these toys with the meals'* [IDI.9].

Teachers Don't Get Enough

Low-income families have their dreams, but these dreams – especially those about the children's future – are very much like the parents' lifestyles: they are cut to size. Living in poverty means worrying all the time about where to get the money from. The parents in this group hope their children are spared this kind of experience. What kind of experience do they have in mind? Says an unemployed woman from Łódź: *'We feel comfortable only when we've earned enough not to worry about how to survive. When it's not like it's been so many times before: one week to go till the end of the month and I've got five zlotys left. At times like that you just feel you want to break down and cry, you worry that your kid may have nothing to eat'* [IDI.9]. What are her dreams? *'Well, I think I want to have a house – no, not a house, a bigger flat with a bedroom for every child and some privacy for us. We do have some privacy, but it's in hiding. I want to stop thinking what I can or can't do'* [IDI.9].

Parents wish to provide their children with a good education, but they also worry about the costs. They are not certain whether they *'can afford to pay for [the daughter's] schooling. We're really worried, my husband and I. She's good at art. We'd like to send her to a school with a fine-arts programme, but we're really worried. We'd like to give her some direction, but can we afford it? I don't know'* [IDI.9]. The couple have a son, too, but no definite plans for his future. The boy's mother, however, is certain what she does *not* want for her son: *'I don't want him to be like these two youths I saw in the park today. They were having a fistfight, and one of them pulled out a knife, and some other youths chased him away. I don't want him to be like that. I want him to be sensible'* [IDI.9].

Other parents, a small-town, working-class couple, were asked what they wanted most of all. They replied: *'To be happy, to have a house of our own. That's all we need'* [IDI.12]. Unlike the unemployed couple where the man has a college degree [IDI.9], these parents have no special plans for their son's education. The woman only wants to protect the boy from *'tricksters. It can't be done, I know, but I hope he can tell those who play fair from those who take advantage of him'* [IDI.12]. When their son grows up, he should be *'sensitive to other people's suffering and so on, but confident, too. And he shouldn't let anybody hurt him, shouldn't be a pushover'* [IDI.12].

Apparently, farmers do not believe that their children may rise above their social status. Nor do they believe that parental efforts may change anything for the children. According to one mother, children have some inborn dispositions, and parents' dreams do not matter at all. It is these inborn talents that shape the children's future careers and social roles. *'Actually, parents can't pick a career or anything else, 'cos it depends on what he likes and so on. Now ... if he wants to train as a mechanic, I won't say, "No, you can't do this, you do that". He's got to have this – what do you call it? – This...'* 'Knack,' the interviewer helps the woman to find the word. *'That's right'* [IDI.8]. Children should grow up to be good citizens. They should also grow up to be – ordinary. A farmer couple want their child *'to be decent, just ordinary like ... you know, like ... a decent Pole, you know, a decent person, not a hooligan or anything ... To believe in God, you know, to learn, to have his faith, you know ... just to be cultured, to learn, to have training or whatever, to have a job and...'* [IDI.8]

An unemployed couple from Tarnów do not want to put any pressure on their children either. They do not want to plan their education or career paths. The woman has not yet started to think about what her children might be doing in the future, even though she knows precisely what dispositions and social skills she wants them to acquire. *'I haven't thought that far yet. I'm sure I won't tell them, say, to train as doctors just because. I hope they'll be doing something they like, hope they'll have a secure future. I hope they'll be decent, helpful and caring. I hope my sons won't envy each other, they'll love each other and help each other if they can'* [IDI.10]. The interviewee, however, does not want her sons to copy the parents' way of life: *'I want them to learn to take care of themselves, definitely. I hope they won't rely on us all the time. I hope they find good jobs, interesting jobs, doing useful things for others and with good pay, too, to keep financial trouble away'* [IDI.10].

When asked what she wanted to protect her daughter from, the dressmaker and the wife of a former collective farm worker replied: *'Getting stuck with the wrong kind of guy. I hope she has a good life. I don't mean she should have money to burn, but her partner should be okay'* [IDI.3]. What does she want her daughter to be in the future? *'Not a thug, that's for sure. She should be someone you can trust. I need to know she won't put a foot wrong. My mother knew she could trust me. I didn't have to tell her where I was going or what time I'd be back'* [IDI.3]. These parents are trying to adjust their daughter's career plans at an early stage to prevent her from copying their own existence. *'She told me once she wanted to be a dressmaker like me. I said, no way. She's no idea it's a tough way to earn a living, very tough. Now she wants to be a singer or a teacher. But teachers don't get enough these days. Well, I don't know...'* [IDI.3]. Even though 'teachers don't get enough', the interviewee wants her daughter to complete her education at a good school and then move to a larger town: *'I want Kasia to get a good education. And get into college, if that's what she wants – if we can afford it. And to live in a bigger town, 'cos living in the country is hard. Being a farmer is a tough job, and in town everything's close at hand'* [IDI.3].

To summarise the dreams of the underprivileged, they have a few features in common. Firstly, children should move to a larger town, because living is easier there and more employment opportunities can be found (understandably, this applies only to those who do not live in towns). Secondly, children should go to a good school (which is located in town, anyway) and then get into college, if the family budget is not too tight to afford it. Thirdly – and this is something of a paradox – children should (despite all their education or town-dweller status) inherit their parents' conservative traits of character, namely respect for the elderly, a strong faith in God and a passion for order. To live up to these expectations, however, children need to climb over the very high wall that separates the haves from the have-nots. The trouble is that most of the underprivileged parents do not possess the adequate means or the cultural capital necessary for their children to cross that barrier and enter the 'sunny side of the playground'.

Conclusion

The Polish playground is in a glaringly obvious state of neglect, mainly as a result of the parenting styles that are popular in our country. In general, a parenting style is a way of raising children that is typical of a social group or a social category. Parenting styles involve a variety of unconscious or uncontrollable components as well as components that can be termed an intentional childhood education programme. Apparently every family – whether ‘coping with’ abundance under Polish capitalism or coping with social marginalisation – develops this type of programme (Poławski 1999: 23), but not every intentional childhood education programme can be implemented. In particular, programmes like that are hard to implement in underprivileged communities, where the unconscious component of the parents’ culture comes into play.

A parenting style depends on a variety of culture-related factors, but – first and foremost – it depends on the family’s ‘overall culture’ and ‘parenting culture’. Overall culture involves ‘relationships between husband and wife and other household members, their personal interests, home-making styles and leisure activities. The parenting culture involves childrearing styles, the organisation of family life, the atmosphere in the home and patterns of behaviour’ (Pietrzyk 2001: 29). A parenting style depends not only on the parents but also on the external environments – the country, its culture, various childrearing traditions and – in particular – on the family’s economic situation that has an impact on the children’s development.

Naturally, one’s economic status does not determine one’s future to an absolute degree. Poverty and destitution faced by certain households will not automatically or irreversibly make their children members of the Polish underclass (with its culture of poverty – see Karwacki and Antonowicz 2002). Nor does it mean that these children are destined to copy their parents’ existence. Sensible government policies at the national and local levels, and efforts of non-governmental organisations may break the vicious circle of undesirable social patterns being passed on from generation to generation – and this also applies to dysfunctional families in rural communities with high unemployment (Malecka 2002; Waloszek 2002). This circle can be broken. There is a direct correlation between adult social problems and ills, the country’s social system, and the primary socialisation of the early years. Parenting styles have a profound effect on the shape of society. Parenting styles are inherited – even in ‘formally’ democratic and achievement-orientated societies, whose members hold the belief that everyone can be in control of their own destiny through individual effort. Unfortunately, there is ample evidence to the contrary.

Being passed on together with social status, parenting styles are largely responsible for creating social exclusion and dominance. Very often, children internalise the atmosphere of their family home and their parents’ approaches to childrearing to such an extent that, later on, they raise their own children in the same way they were raised themselves. Agnieszka Pietrzyk writes: ‘It is probable that poor families differ from rich families in that they develop different ways of addressing and shaping their children’s needs, self-esteem and social position, and they prefer different sets of values, patterns and attitudes (2001: 29). Even though this academic-style probabilistic language (‘it is probable that’) is perfectly justifiable, we have every reason to say bluntly that the parenting styles in the poor families are very different from those adopted by the wealthy households. They are definitely very different, especially in Poland. This bipolar world – with its division into haves and have-nots – seems to have gained dominance over the multipolar world of the classic parenting styles (which are, at any rate, present in academic writing). Indeed, Polish society is becoming more and more polarised in a manner that is typical of the post-modern world, where an invisible barrier separates those who have jobs from the unemployed. According to Ralf Dahrendorf (1993), member of the House of Lords and famous sociologist, unemployment leads to social exclusion, where one’s democratic rights – available on paper – cannot be exercised because those who are materially deprived cannot enjoy the benefits of a free-market and democratic society. What good is freely available and compulsory education until the age of eighteen if you cannot pay the train fare to travel to your school? The inability of the dominated classes and other excluded groups to exercise their rights is being transmitted from generation to generation, posing a potential threat to the State. The unemployed produce more unemployed, and this tendency – to drive the point home again – depends on parenting styles. Therefore, the playground should be one of the major targets for the government to take corrective action, and much more attention should be paid to childrearing issues.

According to researchers, who are fond of creating categories and tend to see more styles than there are in reality, a hypothetical multipolar world involves a variety of parenting styles: the **inconsistent** style (sometimes children are given a whipping and, at other times, a sweet); the **liberal** style, also called **permissive** (children can do whatever they want because they are children; they have substantial freedom, but the result is often destructive for their psyche); the **authoritarian** style (children cannot do anything because they are children; all major decisions are taken by their parents, and the child has to obey; parents exercise physical as well as emotional control over their children, and obedience is considered the ultimate criterion of successful child socialisation; according to Irena Obuchowska (2001), this style often produces abused children, emotionally disturbed children and

children who inherit patterns of violent behaviour) and, lastly, the **democratic** style (children and parents are partners; children participate in decision-making and therefore quickly develop emotionally and socially). It is easy to notice that these parenting styles depend to a large extent on the parents' economic and social position (Pielkova 1996; Taranowicz 1999; Graniewska 2001; Pietrzyk 2001; Trepka-Starosta and Roszkowska 2001; Tarkowska 2002). The democratic style is typical of the privileged classes, and the authoritarian style is typical of the unprivileged.

Therefore it seems quite proper to limit our discussion – as we have done – by concentrating on two parenting styles predominant in today's Poland, even though, according to Obuchowska (2001) 'rarely does either of them appear in its purest form, and their specific manifestations can be very different'. In addition, these parenting styles 'combine with two distinctive and conflicting attitudes – namely parental confidence or insecurity'. A parenting style is also a reflection of the adult caregivers' parenting culture, skills, inherited habits and personality characteristics – not to mention the current vogue (the liberal style is nothing other than advocacy of a stress-free childhood).

Obviously, not every expert believes that the family's economic status plays a critical role in adopting a particular parenting style. For example, Irena Obuchowska has identified three childrearing trends in present-day Poland. They depend on 'the parents' motivational and emotional characteristics that mould parental behaviour and have a significant effect on the child's mental development' (2001). These are **indifference**, **sensitivity** and **ambition**. Obuchowska writes: 'Families that can be termed **indifferent** caregivers usually fail to satisfy their children's basic needs in the area of cognitive and emotional growth and sometimes also in the area of healthcare.' Children in those families often become victims of abuse. **Sensitive** caregivers (most often mothers) 'notice the child's every minute response, understand its cause and adjust their own behaviour accordingly'. Sensitivity does not depend on one's level of education, but on empathy. 'Sensitive caregivers, however, can become oversensitive as a result – or rather as an undesirable side effect – of their "sensitivity training". Oversensitive mothers worry about every response that does not correspond to the usual pattern, are too concerned with their children's affairs, and their childcare ideas can be exaggerated and artificial.' Families of **ambitious** caregivers 'can train their children from age three "to make it in a competitive environment" ... These children are loved, but their parents have no time to develop a close attachment ... Children do admit that they "have everything" except for one thing – parental attention'. Obuchowska goes on to say that, apparently, 'each of these trends has its own distinct source: indifferent parenting is largely a reflection of the darker sides of the social world, sensitive parenting seems to be largely a product of better education, and ambitious parenting a product of the growing competition for material success and prestige'.

Clearly, wealthy families can alternate between sensitive parenting (parents are better educated and therefore more aware of what their children need; they often have one child only, so they are sensitive or rather, oversensitive) and ambitious parenting. The indifferent style seems to be a deviation from the norm in affluent households and in low-income homes, where children are well cared for despite their parents' limited resources (Tarkowska 2001). Low-income homes are not short on sensitivity either, even if the adult caregivers have low levels of formal education. In fact, the ambitious style and the sensitive style can be classified as two sub-styles; two variations of the parenting style that is characteristic of wealthy families. These variations are very interesting and worth considering in the context of parenting in present-day Poland.

Helena Marzec is the author of an essay entitled dramatically 'Does Material Wealth Put Childrearing at Risk?' (2001). The title suggests that the content is highly ideological (and ideological it is indeed), describing the collapse of a value system in a wealth-worshipping world. But the question is worth considering even though it should be slightly rephrased: Do affluent families – that is, to echo Dahrendorf's line of argumentation, households where parents have decent jobs – socialise their children to a different pattern than the underprivileged, the unemployed and the underclass? Irena Obuchowska writes: 'Every family is affected ... by an invasion of undesirable phenomena of the modern world such as excessive liberalism, moral relativism or consumerism. A mature person can cope with them by exercising his or her freedom of choice, but this freedom is hard to exercise, and escapes from it are not infrequent. Not every parent understands the effects of these phenomena, for they creep into family life slowly and stealthily, corroding its structure in the end' (2001). Consumerism and moral relativism may turn out to permeate affluent homes much more easily than the low-income households.

But a low-income household is not necessarily a stronghold of traditional – meaning laudable – values. Nor is it the only safeguard for the child against the corrupt world of wealth. Research clearly shows that the parenting styles in the poorer families are far more authoritarian and based on the iron-fist approach than those adopted by well-to-do parents (Pietrzyk 2001). Obuchowska writes: 'More perceptible and, in many families, also more acutely felt are hardships such as unemployment, poverty or cramped living conditions. They affect family relationships: relationships between the parents and between each parent and child. Not only do they cause conflict; they also cast the long shadow of anxiety and helplessness on the way in which members of a particular family see their future' (2000).

This conflict is by no means trivial, and helplessness is the inevitable result of growing up in these social groups.

Parenting Styles and Poverty Inheritance

Research on social mobility indicates that the structure of Polish society is becoming decidedly more rigid. In other words, social status is becoming hereditary in Poland. This process is particularly noticeable in two extreme groups: the affluent, where it correlates closely with high levels of schooling, and the poor, where it correlates closely with a lack of schooling (Domański 2000). Elżbieta Tarkowska writes: 'In households headed by a person with an elementary or a lower elementary education, 10.3 per cent are living below the poverty line (the proportion for the entire population is approximately half that figure, standing at 5.4 per cent), and 63.2 per cent are living below subsistence level (the proportion for the entire population is much lower: 50.4 per cent)' (2002: 163).

In conclusion, poverty is not inherited directly – it is passed on through inherited patterns of educational aspirations. Children of poverty will remain poor for two reasons. First, their families do not equip them with the motivation to learn – and without proper schooling one has no prospects for better-paid employment. Second, poor families cannot afford to pay for their children's education as a way of escaping from the vicious circle of poverty. Apparently, both these factors contribute in equal proportions to poverty being inherited. Some researchers (Szymański and Walasek 1997) have noted a new trend in the area of educational aspirations. Irrespective of their own schooling, a growing number of Polish parents want their children to do better, but parents with primary schooling or post-primary vocational training are more likely to be satisfied with their children receiving the same type of training and finding a job quickly (Szymański and Walasek 1997; Kwieciński 2002: 72ff). Low educational aspirations are particularly common in marginalised communities, especially rural communities with high unemployment (Tarkowska 2002: 181), where hardly anybody has a post-secondary education and practically no one has a college degree. Low levels of education lead to poverty and immobility. Poverty and immobility lead to low levels of education, since few members of marginalised communities can afford to pay for their transport to school, for schoolbooks or dormitories. It is truly a vicious circle...

Uneducated families are responsible for 'infecting' their children's minds with 'the wrong kind of culture'. Poor and uneducated parents pass on 'inadequate cultural capital' in general, and 'inadequate linguistic capital' in particular, to use the terms coined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (d.2002) (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Inadequate cultural and linguistic capital does not help a child to be an achiever. Even if parents want their child to attain a better level of education, their hopes are unlikely to be realised in a school system that promotes 'the right culture' – the culture of the dominant classes. Children from marginalised backgrounds do not stand a chance of achieving academic success because their language does not correspond to the language of the educational machinery. How can they learn the 'right' language or the 'right' culture if they never leave their social environments in the early years? How can they leave those environments if nobody wants to help them out because there are no financial resources and because popular wisdom has it that it is barbaric to disrupt a family in order to save a child from marginalisation? This is why every effort should be welcomed to organise day-care in these communities to ensure that underprivileged children can spend some time in a totally different setting, in the company of childminders, who will read stories, talk to children in a language that is different from the language of their marginalised home environments, and provide them with opportunities to communicate with the 'outside world' (Malecka 2002). But that is not all.

The 'outside world' today requires certain dispositions. These dispositions are very different from the qualities that the poorer parents want their children to develop. According to Iwona Taranowicz, a family sociologist, (1999) the lower the family income is per household member, the less likely it is that the children will be equipped with the requisite skills to achieve success in a post-modern, free-market society. These requisite skills are: independent reasoning, independent decision-making, strong social skills and tolerance towards those who are different. By contrast, the poorer parents want their children to be obedient, to respect the elderly, to believe in God and to have 'good manners'. Their parenting style is often authoritarian, leaving the children very little room – or no room at all – for independence. The eldest children in these permanently deprived households are expected to take care of their younger siblings from a very early age. They are also supposed to show blind obedience to their fathers, who vent their frustration over the lack of prospects and money by turning to alcohol and violence. Instead of engaging in skill-enhancing play, these children have to help their mothers to support the entire family by gathering brushwood or picking mushrooms and berries in the forest.

The term 'marginalised' does not mean that these communities are marginal in size. All research studies, statistics and analyses conducted in the past few years indicate that, in today's Poland, poverty has struck hardest at the young, who have been particularly affected by the economic hardships of the transformation period. Children under 14 account for one-third of the destitute, and

those below age 19 account for nearly half of that population. About six per cent of households – more than half a million families – are destitute, which means that they live below the poverty line, facing the situation where their basic need for food, clothing and shelter may not be satisfied. Especially large families are at risk for becoming impoverished. Single-parent households are also at risk, but there are communities – enclaves of poverty – where all children suffer from poverty and its traumatic effects irrespective of their background. Child poverty is unseen, unspoken and seldom reported. The poverty that attracts most of the media attention is that of the elderly, the retired and the disabled' (Tarkowska 2001). Regrettably, the playground in those communities is in a state of extreme neglect. Worse still, the strategy of non-interference into the childrearing processes in these communities will result in child poverty being reproduced and replicated. In the light of available evidence (for example, evidence on households with unemployed parents), the impact of parenting styles on children's inheritance of major social characteristics – such as exclusion and marginalisation – seems to have been proved beyond doubt and beyond dispute.

This Intolerable Inheritance of Status

Judith Rich Harris, American psychologist and winner of the prestigious George Miller Award, presented by the American Psychological Association for the best specialist article on psychology in 1995, believes that – to put it bluntly – parents are redundant (Harris 1995 and 1999) because they do not shape their children's personality characteristics at all. Children learn on their own by participating in peer-group play. The only thing parents can do for their offspring is to provide them with the best possible genetic endowment. In other words, what a child will become in the future is largely a product of two factors: primary socialisation, which takes place in the peer groups, and the genetic makeup transmitted by the parents, which determines the child's talents and dispositions.

Parental strategies such as providing proper stimulation (rewarding good behaviour and punishing misbehaviour) or showing proper patterns to emulate are all in vain because children realise that their parents are counterexamples of the qualities they preach. They say 'don't smoke', but they do. They say 'don't drink', but they do. No parent is a perfectly consistent caregiver. Therefore, parenting is a myth. In the long history of human social evolution, we had always lived within the wider community. The nuclear family is a product of the post-modern, industrialised world – a product of the past 200 years (Szlendak 2002). Even today, children in hunter-gatherer communities learn from other children rather than their parents, who provide childcare only for the first four or five years, when the child is not ready yet to travel long distances on foot with a group of nomads. After that, children become part of their peer group, and this is where proper socialisation takes place. Hundreds of research studies have demonstrated that children of immigrants will learn the language of their new country better than their parents because the language of the children's peer group is the language of socialisation. They will speak this language without a trace of an accent, whereas their parents will always sound foreign (Pinker 1995). Thus what really matters is a child's peer group. If we take Harris's words on trust, it matters more that the best parental intentions and efforts.

Many researchers, especially humanist psychologists and sociologists, find this radical point of view extremely hard to accept. Children resemble their parents – any educational psychologist will tell you that. Most children inherit their parents' status – any sociologist will say (Firkowska-Mankiewicz 1999; Domański 2000). Most children of academically-minded parents earn college degrees. Most children of labourers receive vocational training only. It is clear at first sight and from research studies that these children's family environments must be responsible for their behaviour. This is why it is so hard to accept the proposition that parents are powerless and unable to shape their children's future.

We may disagree with Harris – it is a question of a paradigm. There are proponents of her approach among social scientists, but her opponents are in the majority. We must admit, however, that many of her observations on status inheritance are extremely astute. For example, Harris points out that the upper-class British children see very little of their parents except in special situations, on special days and at celebratory meals. They spend most of their time in the company of childminders, nannies, governesses and servants, and – most often – in the company of other children, running in the vast parkland that surrounds the manor house in which they live. When the time comes, these young boys and girls are sent to top-notch public boarding schools, where they meet their peers, who are also members of the British upper class. They stay at school and university for many years, seeing even less of their parents. The thing is, when they finally return to their family homes after many years of study, they will turn out exactly like their parents, even though their parents had nothing to do with their upbringing. Why? Because they will have experienced primary socialisation within their peer group, in a homogenous community of their own 'caste', learning the culture of the dominant classes and acquiring adequate cultural capital.

And what about Poles whose social position makes them cultivate the ambitious parenting style? Is ambitious parenting so different from the childrearing practices cultivated by the British upper classes – albeit on a smaller scale? Metaphorically speaking, Polish 'upper-caste' parents – probably like other upper-class parents throughout the capitalist world – have 'minds that are split in half'. One

half holds the conviction that parents shape their children's socialisation processes. The other half holds the conviction that they must send their children to the best pre-school and primary school to stop them from mixing, in the playground, with kids whose inadequate cultural capital may 'pollute' their offspring – and that must be avoided at all cost. For this reason the Polish prime minister in a left-wing government sends his granddaughter to the country's most expensive primary school. For this reason wealthy Poles take care to send their children to the best pre-schools in the capital city, where the youngsters are offered not so much cheerful play as proper stimulation, with eurythmics classes, piano lessons, speech experts, (preferably four) foreign languages, and tuition by an art college graduate, who teaches them how to handle a paintbrush. These children are then enrolled in the best private primary schools and top-notch (read: private and expensive) high schools. When this gruelling and expensive journey finally comes to an end, the child is ready to be a high-flyer in the capitalist 'jungle'.

Recent research on childhood socialisation processes shows that parents have relatively little influence on what patterns of behaviour their child will develop. What really matters is peer-group interaction and secondary socialisation (for example, at school), followed by the child's genetic makeup, followed by parental efforts in third place (Cohen 1999). Apparently, we have fallen victim to a mythology that holds parents responsible for the sad fact that their child is a right little school bully. That is not true, or, at any rate, it is only partly true. Parents can do one thing to prevent juvenile delinquency: they can make sure that their children steer clear of juvenile delinquents. Parents are perfectly aware of that. On the one hand, they believe that parental efforts do count but, on the other, they also know that these efforts will go to waste if they do not send their child to a good school and do not stop him from hanging around with a local youth gang. But it is not easy for the parents to keep an eye on children in a period of economic transformation. Today's parents work too hard, competing for various resources, and have no time for childcare. Parental negligence, however, can lead to trouble. It is by no means a coincidence that many juvenile delinquents come from so-called 'good families', as the media often points out. Trying to cope with the demands of the changing labour market and the changing value system, these good families seldom have an idea of where their children are. This is what we can call indifferent parenting – a parenting that is indifferent to the power of peer-group pressure.

Let us consider another example. In rural communities with high unemployment, children are sent to play in a muddy playground, where they meet other children of the same social class. One does not have to take Judith Harris's words for granted to realise that this type of peer-group socialisation will not equip a child with the cultural capital that is necessary in a post-modern society. It is not a question of indifferent parenting because parents in these communities try hard to provide proper care for their children, unless, of course, they are dysfunctional families (which, incidentally, is often the case – see Softysiak 2000). It is a question of their inability to create a more stimulating childhood environment. These parents are simply unaware that children need enriched environments in order to rise to a higher social position. Another problem is that children of different social backgrounds, where different parenting styles exist, have unequal education and employment opportunities.

To alleviate the situation, it is necessary to launch a variety of sensible community-oriented programmes based on thorough research. Operated by the government and by the third sector, these programmes should provide children in need with proper patterns of behaviour, examples and values. Some non-governmental organisations are already doing it, combining their efforts with research, albeit so far on a modest scale. *Letters to Parents* is a case in point.

*

A dividing wall runs through the Polish playground that separates one child, who is playing in the clean and sunlit sand, from another, who is playing in the grimy mud. The wall is solid and impenetrable, but made of see-through plastic and therefore invisible. The children who play in the dirt can see adults on the other side adding brickwork to reinforce the structure, building iron fencing, and putting in security systems, alarm systems and padlocks. They can also see a stairway. The red-carpeted stairs on the sunny side lead to the top, and parents help their children on the way up. There is another stairway, too, on the murky side. These bare stairs – rickety and mucky, and with no handrail to cling to – go down, and it is easy for a child to trip up and fall over. This side of the playground is cramped but crowded, as most children have nowhere else to play. Their parents, however, are not even thinking of trying to tear down the new brickwork structure that is being raised next to the see-through plastic. Everything is the way it should be. They know there is nothing they can do.

Although perhaps slightly exaggerated and smacking of leftist sympathies, this vision is not proposed by a supporter of the extreme left. The playground is not the place to wave political or ideological banners – it is the place where the children should get off to a good start in life. It is wrong when a handful of children can take the red-carpeted stairs to success whereas others, deprived of assistance, cannot get out of the pit that has been dug for them. Educational inequity is a part of the

divided playground. According to the functionalist approach, the dividing wall is necessary for a capitalist society to keep up its dynamics. The dividing wall will never be torn down, and no one should believe that it could. But there should be a door in it and the children from the murky corners of the playground should be helped to pass through to the sunny side. Cultural capital – created, as we have seen, in the early childhood years – is vital to every country. Indeed, it is so vital that no society can afford to ignore it. Poland will never be a modern, competitive nation if only a small proportion of its people are endowed with the necessary capital to achieve success in the wider European community – a capital that is provided through the right kind of early childhood education and care. Without opening a door in the playground wall, there will be no freedom of choice. It is clear from our research findings that freedom of choice begins with early childhood education. But concerned parents with high levels of awareness and income should not be the only ones who care. All of us should care.

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