

# Krystyna Ferenz

---

## Women of two generations in modern family

---

Pedagogika Rodziny 2/2, 65-74

---

2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

---

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Krystyna Ferenz

## **Women of two generations in modern family**

Macrosocial changes can be considered in many dimensions and levels. These dimensions are mainly: economical, structural and mental. Each one of them can be placed in the spotlight, although it remains in the relation with phenomenon prescribed to others. Levels in ongoing changes could also be seen from the most general, reflecting on the entirety of social life through feeling it with different strength and effect for various occupational groups. However, as the effect big changes in shorter or slower time are felt by members of community. The similarity of experiences in described changes periods, enables for treating people as a generation in social considerations.

These analyzes refer to people in two age groups, whose adult life was continued and still goes on after the period of political transformation. It brought changes in every significant life area, that were so meaningful as so to change the attitude towards many public and private values. It ordered to verify opinions or even life orientations. In such way observing fortune of individual people of both generations was possible. However, how they reflect in everyday events between relatives, that mean family, is somehow separate issue, and for sure different view perspective.

Present time, which is the beginning of second decade of XXI century, includes two generations experiencing intensive changes in pace and form of their life. The elder generation, which had to face changes externally imposing new requirements will be considered in these analyzes as elder, in the range between 50 and 70 years old. Younger ones were not yet included in full life-tasks range of an adult person. However the ones who are elder right now, were able at that time to take on the attitude of withdrawal. Professional situations were in lesser extent demanding radical decisions and actions from them. Therefore even they were emotionally involved in these changes, the course of their life was not affected with sharp shock as it was for people in the period of intensive professional work and most active phase of family life. Thus, in this consideration elder generation is recognized as people, who in the 80s, 90s and first decade of new century were professionally

active. Their family life demanded concentrating on the responsibility for two another generations: their own children and parents.

As a consequence the younger generation will be recognized as people from the ones who are in their twenties to forties, and this means children of aforementioned people who experience changes radical for socio-political regime and economy connected with it. This generation spends its whole conscious life already after the turbulent period of transformation. The following changes appearing in proximal and distal surroundings up to recognized in the global dimension are accepted as normal or in the range close to that.

For the continuity of society's duration and integrity of internal bonds the role and power of cultural transmission is essential. It brings the most important values in the attitudes towards people and circumstances, realization of functions derived from roles which were taken over, or even in the behaviour models from habits and customs. All these elements constituting about cultural and social density affect the everyday life of people in natural way, especially among relatives. In this moment many questions emerge, and they apply to agreement between people emotionally close to each other, but with a different perception of experiencing reality: different difficulties, troubles, ways of solving problems. From the view point of sequence of handing cultural heritage down, it may be admitted that every generation needed to face the dilemma of how much should be taken from tradition and experience of elders, and how much and to what extent should their life be changed for their own life orientation was to be built on own, often with different interpretation of social and personal events and emerging life vision. Nevertheless the elements of postfigurative culture were so essential for the young generation, that even these elements were not adopted, they would find acceptance, and this enabled parents to use their experience in councils and advises given children in different age, sometimes till adulthood as well.

Period of turbulent changes in the macroscale and in the own surroundings questioned values of experience capital collected in different conditions. It placed many people in a specific situation of loss, doubt in own life choices and sometimes even doubt in acquired skills when the unemployment became not voluntary choice but rather unexpected and unintelligible situation and also formidable both for the person and his family. It undermined the material being. Many considerations and analyzes about attitudes taken in that period were formed. They indicated especially personal conditioning of skills of coping with changed situations. Such factors like age, gender, professional qualifications and sense of responsibility for yourself and others could be found esential. These attitudes presented the whole spectrum: from misunderstanding inevitable changes and claim character up to active research of chances which were given by new law regulations, emerging hitherto unknown ways of individual organizing of own professional and personal

life (Ferenz 1995). New requirements in professional work, uncertainty of keeping it, existence difficulties of unpredictable character, these created for adult person series of difficult situations, which demanded coping with problems yet not known but already needed to be overcome. The experiences of elder generation were not useful for them, and both sides were aware of it, but also these people as parents-counselors of their children felt lack of competences when they helped choosing educational paths. This phenomenon occurred both in metropolitan milieu<sup>3</sup>, but also in small towns milieu<sup>4</sup>. In such situations autocratic styles naturally vanished in favour of democratic or even liberal. In educationally efficient families, where the emotional bonds were proper, children were gathering various information and parents were just analyzing with children the value of these and they tried to predict consequences of choices and decisions. They fully experienced difficulties of life in sudden or even rapid changes with fear of how correct the suggestions, orders or prohibitions even in the sphere of moral education. This last became the support of family life. Among distinct meanings of cases hitherto accepted as usual, natural in upbringing in family, what was important were the timeless attributes describing dignity of a man: kindness, honesty, truthfulness. Other features were becoming ambiguous: resourcefulness, invention, effectiveness and others. People of this generation regardless of milieu's situation, education or philosophical orientation brought out for the future ages the conviction that as they could not have life like their parents even in general frameworks, so also their children as adults will live in changed conditions, more or lesser imaginable. An interesting question for pedagogue is how will they find themselves towards their adult children. It will be a situation when they will want to share their life wisdom with younger generation. How do they cope when their experience is not valued by children as much to treat it at least as premise of knowledge when making life decisions, choices of lifestyle, accepted hierarchies and values or even life orientations?

The generation of children described here as younger means people, who had their conscious life after the period of breakthrough and its first effects. Time of changing conditions is their normal life time. Perceiving naturalness namely civilizational surrounding evaluation (therein cultural and social) is therefore different. Adapting to changes has signs of adaptation in socialization process. Abilities of noticing the adaptation possibilities is becoming everyday need. The culture of this generation has, first of all, the configurative features. Groups and

---

<sup>3</sup> Students' researches for master degree seminar of faculty of Pedagogy Counseling at University of Wrocław in 80's and 90's.

<sup>4</sup> Students' researches for diploma dissertations in WSHE in Brzeg in 90's.

entities of reference belong to the same generation. Moral authorities may occur as exceptions, although so highly generalized that even if authentic person was indicate, for example Pope John Paul II or Mather Therese, it would not reflect on chosen life orientation or lifestyle (Kozłowska 2010).

In researches about authorities of young women specific axiological emptiness occurred. Apart from aforementioned reference to moral authorities recognized in the world, no other person with whom examined women (the age of 25–35) would have the feeling of emotional bond could be found. Therefore no one from the closest surrounding or better known people was not significant here. Parents were respected, but they were not placed as the life model. Women in cases important for them would not see parents as counselors, although they felt the acceptation and kindness therefore it let them profit from care help, especially for children.

There are systematic researches on the topic of impact of general changes on life of modern family. Researches are conducted by economists, demographers but also researchers of social science and in that especially sociologists and pedagogues. Attention is focused on different family functions, which do not disappear but reform into another shape of realization. Elementary functions not questioned by any of the researchers such as: affiliative, reproductive, economical, socializational and educational or acculturational, determines the essence of family as a natural and elementary group of people. Modifications do not undermine her sense, they eventually emphasize one of these functions as superior for a person or whole family in a specific development phase. Merely, the sketch which can be clearly noticed in the analyses of structure and family functioning it is accepting her in the nuclear dimension. In comparison to this, researches on emotional relations or impacts of people out of this basic group are meager. Extended family disappears from view. However, in our culture it still has important meaning. Although housing conditions caused that people from elder generation less frequently live with children and grandchildren, but in a large part of our society there is a tendency to live in a neighborhood, even if it is not the same city then it is nearest area<sup>5</sup>. Relations within the extended family have here not only celebration character but also spontaneous, deriving from emotional needs or helping needs.

By entering in the area of family actions and behavior, the emotional bonds are explicit in women's line. Grandmothers are expected to serve with help in emergency situations, in abating duties of women-mother of young or growing child, sometimes in a great extent in house keeping.

---

<sup>5</sup> It was confirmed by researches of: A. Zawadzka, K. Ferenz, *Społeczne aspekty wypoczynku młodych kobiet*, Wrocław 1996; A. Zawadzka, *Oddziaływanie dziadków na wypoczynek wnuków*, Wrocław 1999, referring to big city, and in 2010-2011 referring to small cities: K. Ferenz, K. Zajdel, *Dorastanie w małych miastach* (in print).

---

Women of younger generation, even while choosing different life style and subordinating to it all basic social roles, which are culturally imposed, they still have in their life experience the models of functioning in family of origin. They remember from childhood and adolescent years models of solving home difficulties or educational, and either accepting or rejecting these solutions at that time. However, extreme situations evoke their mothers ways to cope and often they use it in such situations. When examining roles of elder people in family, women indicated on reflexive use of experiences and advices given by their mothers, especially in respect to transferring cultural traditions, creating celebrating atmosphere and mutual kindness when solving everyday's problems (Ferenz, 2009). Still, this does not mean that all mother's suggestions were accepted, and that mothers appreciated (not always directly showing it) the proportions of time used for job, children care and other social duties. Nevertheless, this emotional system blurred differences of attitude towards life tasks of this period of young women life and phases of family development. In general view elder women were involved in such life rhythm, which was given by daughters, and often reevaluating previous evaluation of correctness in women's functioning according to standards, or even stereotypes of our culture. The generational differences appear clearly in husbands' mothers statements, who are described as mother-in-law. Interesting results in this area were gathered by M. Zajac while analyzing statements on internet forums in year 2011 (Zajac, 2011). From understandable (technical) reasons she collected much more opinions of daughters-in-law than from mothers of their husbands. In these judging statements it was easy to see the expectations towards ways of fulfilling roles such as: mother, housewife, wife, and further also: involvement in professional work, social, or realization of self-developing in different forms.

Several years of research conducted under problematical seminars referring to changes in fulfilling social roles by women included different age groups: grandmothers of today's university students, mothers, women in all phases of family development and also girls in high schools of different types and cities<sup>6</sup>. Despite great differentiation of milieus, education and age the life activities areas concentrated mainly on family and professional work, and in case of the youngest (age of 18-21) in a perspective seen as such. Traditional roles are therefore not disputed, and their transmission appears to be stronger than any other changes in macro scale. But here, the similarity clearly ends. Fulfilling the content of such roles distinctly differentiates women's attitude towards tradition and modernity understand as models currently popularized, especially by medias. The latter are also not much different from sphere of women's activities according to common

---

<sup>6</sup> Source material from master dissertations of following authors: J. Cichowlas, U. Rembowiecka (2008), M. Zielińska, M. Wołczek, O. Lamparska, M. Mikoda, M. Grzybowska (2010).

opinion. In order these are: family home (set of tasks and duties), professional work shown quite enigmatically, and other marginal activities such as social. On the other hand, they are attentive about their look, health and well-being. Therefore in the peak periods of active life women try to satisfy social expectations, especially milieu's which reach both tradition and desire to see themselves as modern women heading towards high valued life.

Using for this considerations secondary research analysis of such issues it is easy to notice obvious fact, that image of family life depends first of all on women. However, there is a question appearing immediately about what factors have impact on this family image, on long-term choices and activities of everyday life. Tendency to perceive polish families in egalitarian way, what lasted quite long, faded differences between social groups. Analysis of models such as: patriarchal, partnership, mixed showed only proportions of living in certain milieus or places, but not presented acceptation level of these models through women dedication for family. Such signal about falsity of widespread opinion that partnership model is becoming more and more often chosen revealed in researches of young women from Wrocław in second half of 90's (Zawada, Ferenz, op.cit). In working class milieus which were considered to be the ones where husband worked professionally physically (not because of choice but such qualifications) his job was appointing family life rhythm. Comparing salaries for work must accent husband's higher position in family. Wife's education level was in such system of no important meaning even though in big city milieu women had often formally higher education than their partners. In such milieus it was considered as wife's success that "husband helps" what means if he wants, it was not part of sharing duties. Sharing duties appeared as issue only in groups where both spouses had higher education and works of comparable salaries.

In families of women with basic vocational and secondary education social circle is set by husband. Friends of wife who were part of permanent social bonds were rather sporadic. In these families also elder women impacts were clearly different. Position of greater importance was taken by husband's mother rather than wife's. Daughters-in-law received from them many judging messages which rarely helped their wellbeing. This phenomenon in these years seemed to surprise with results but in the same time it showed sources of emotional loss and lack of social encourage groups in case of families. Families were often endangered of it when women involved themselves in further education or training in profession. For their mother-in-law it was evidence of not being prepared for life. Instead of getting offers for help in house or care duties they got advices to change job. Similarly things were going with women secondary educated for whom education bound with professional work was obvious and they could find proper forms of realizations in cities. They could speak about help from mothers, if it was possible.

Mothers even though they also did not see the need of their daughters further education treated it as unpleasant necessity, nuisance of certain time and they waited for the end of studying and rest in home.

Serious generational difference may be noticed in attitudes towards work. Mothers of 30 years old women treated their work different and saw their role in another way. Although this concerned women higher educated, progressively it involved also the ones who were getting education. This opinion was later justified also in researches (year 2010) conducted by students of WSHE in Brzeg about attitudes towards work in two groups of people: workers of long work experience in age over 50 and those who worked from 2 to 5 years. In these groups 35 elder women and 21 younger women were placed. Differences in their relations were clearly seen. Elder people stated that they are dutiful, reliable workers because it gives them feeling of personal dignity. However they talked about work without interest, it had to be done, it was a duty, necessity. The vast majority waited for retirement. Similar image appeared in research on women before retirement, citizens of Wrocław. Beyond single cases of higher educated interviewee who saw possibility to still use their professional qualifications others in vast majority planned to share time between house duties and resting. Trying to seek characteristic sketch in women of both generation attitude towards work could let, with a little risk of error, describe elder generation as treating their work like tasks without feeling of professional identification, while the younger when getting profession tried to clearly describe their value as worker. Mostly severe criticized were young women with higher education, citizens of small cities, who as mothers went back to professional work after short term parental leave (Zabłocka, 2009).

Second area of visible differences in attitudes towards tasks and everyday life duties is a forementioned house keeping. For elder women it is actually the main reference plane in self opinion about fulfilling social expectations, while for younger it is just necessity. Such necessity is not significant criteria of self-esteem, therefore they aim to share duties between household members or simplification of necessary activities. Some of them treat house activities selectively as shift for stress in work and they see including these activities in a form of relax. It is a sphere of frequent collisions of views on specifically identified task. In magazines for women these matters are reduced to characters and attitudes collisions. Elder women are shown as those who wish to retain their significant position in family, fight for wellbeing of their sons, sometimes grandchildren, and for younger ones assertiveness is recommended.

However, mutual miscomprehension appears mostly in the sphere of leisure time. Generation for which leisure time was not a meaningful value in personal systems spent their free time generally on additional works for example on allotments. Realization of activities related to hobbies, amateur actions concerned

small number of people. Therefore such activities of daughter-in-law are not easily accepted, at best they caused astonishment (Zajac, 2011). However, younger women do not want to resign from this, and forcing them with specific emotional blackmail to help on the allotments is felt as a kind of terror. On such background the behavioural problems concerning youngest generation were not on the forefront in any of research. It might happen because of certain reasons. First of all children of young women do not make such troubles or cause visible difficulties which could not be understand and explained by grandmother's kindness. Secondly, parents educational consciousness is clearly increasing what causes that in familial educational system more behaviours of democratic than authoritarian or liberal character are appearing. Thirdly it is area of themes where both generations find place for common care about children's future which is unknown and for sure will bring changes.

However, unquestioned area for good relations in family exist. It is the transmission of celebrating. Knowledge of rites and customs which elder people have creates them as attractive source of wisdom. This elder generation brings atmosphere of cultural continuity, reminds family life, important events, gives color to bare facts or brightness national holidays or family celebrations. Memories and common celebrating strengthen cultural values as well as educational values and the one which integrates group.

Returning to questions which induced reflection about relations of women in Polish, modern family answers of hypothetic character may be formulated. However, avoiding easy explanations only from position of emotional contradictions of people in contact in everyday life situations.

First observation brought by briefly presented images is a fact that changes experienced by both generations were of different character. First ones concerned ideological and material dimension. Difficulties of everyday life focused attention and life activity on being life side and anxiety about that remained in elder people. Second ones primarily experience cultural changes and as a consequence this causes different attitudes towards each other, surroundings and life orientations. Second observation concerns internal family changes. Diffusion of cultural models concerning already greatly diversified family forms weakened relations of young women dependence from their husbands, partners and what is more from families of their origin. Vision of these relation collapse is obviously treated as unfortunate event but also as one of possible solutions. Another change observed in attitudes of young women towards judging behaviours of mothers of their husbands relates to fulfilled professional roles. In large material collected in researches of last years (2009-2011) concerning different social or local environments this phenomenon did substantially not appeared. Changes on the labour market from which the most important for family is a dangerous vision of unemployment and important

---

efforts for keeping every family member's work, evaluating comments in this sphere became unreasonable.

In statements of both elder and younger women interference of grandmothers in bringing up grandchildren significantly decreased. Here statements often reflect changes felt by elder generation. They feel that their grandchildren's world will be different than the one they know. In such not only felt but also expressed conviction, passage from state of common consciousness to a state of understanding surrounding social world by each person is clearly visible. The cultural core of each society resides in families. In them the phase and direction of changes may be seen. Personal relations show important mental changes of modern generations.

## Kobiety dwóch pokoleń we współczesnej rodzinie

### Streszczenie

Rodzina jest tym miejscem, w którym wielkie zmiany społeczne odbijają się w codzienności każdego człowieka. Dwa pokolenia współcześnie aktywnych kobiet doświadczyły innego typu zmian społecznych. Starsze przeżyły czas transformacji ustrojowej. Same musiały określić własne orientacje życiowe, gdyż doświadczenie życiowe ich rodziców odnosiło się do innych warunków. Młodsze kobiety żyją w czasie zmian szybkich, lecz zachodzących w sposób ewolucyjny. W artykule rozważane są pytania o to, w jakich obszarach życia współczesnych kobiet istnieje transmisja kulturowa, a jakie są miejscem istotnych różnic.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zmiany społeczne, pokolenie, współczesna rodzina.

### Summary

Family is the place where great social changes take shape of everyday life for each person. Two modern generations of active women experienced different types of social changes. Elder women experienced time of political transformation. They needed to define their own life orientations by themselves, because life experience of their parents referred to another conditions. Younger women live in the time of quick changes, although happening in evolutionary way. Considerations in this article are about questions in which life spheres of modern women is a cultural transmission existing and which are areas of significant differences.

**Keywords:** social changes, generation, modern family

### Bibliography

Ferenz K. (1995), *Pojęcie sukcesu a aspiracje młodzieży w różnych środowiskach społecznych* [w:] Frąckowiak T., Modrzewski J. (red.), *Socjalizacja a wartości*, Eruditus, Poznań.

Kozłowska M. (2010), *Autorytety moralne młodych kobiet*. Master degree work University of Wrocław.

- Ferenz K. (2009), *Znaczenie rodziny w życiu człowieka z perspektywy osób starszych* [w:] A. Ładyżyński (red.), *Rodzina w początku XXI w.*, Atut, Wrocław.
- Zająć M. (2011), *Świekra i synowa. Relacje kobiet dwóch pokoleń w rodzinie*, Diploma dissertation, WSHE, Brzeg.
- Zabłocka K. (2009), *Macierzyństwo kobiet wykształconych w środowisku małego miasta*. Master work, Uwr.