

Grzegorz Ignatowski

Problem of Confidence and its Loss : the Role of a Family in Insuring Truthfulness

Pedagogika Rodziny 4/2, 15-22

2014

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, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.



DE GRUYTER
OPEN

Pedagogika Rodziny. Family Pedagogy
nr 4(2)/2014, ss. 15–22
DOI: 10.2478/fampe-2014-0013

Grzegorz Ignatowski

University of Social Sciences

Problem of Confidence and its Loss – the Role of a Family in Instilling Truthfulness

More than twenty years ago we decided to rebuild our economy and create civic society. From the very beginning it was obvious that the process would not be easy. There are many obstacles which slow down or even inhibit the process. In the material sphere of life we should emphasize relatively high unemployment, corruption, nepotism, constantly changing regulations, bureaucracy and bureaucrats' incompetence. In the psychological sphere we should emphasise constant lack of time and confidence, widespread conformity or truthfulness. All these problems are related to each other. The issue of conformity is relatively rarely discussed in scientific articles. Conformists do not believe in their competences and they are not creative in their work or while making strategic decisions for their company [Aronson, Wilson, Akert 2006. p. 231]. In this article we are going to analyse a more important issue – trust and a possibility of losing it after telling lies. Lack of confidence in other person and its effects have a far more negative impact on social and economic life than the mentioned conformity.

If we were to define the word “confidence” we could say that a confident person is diligent, dutiful, honest, reliable and truthful. We can also add that such a person is responsible, loyal, faithful, veracious, definitely – honest. In the most plain way confidence can be identified as believing in good human intentions. John G. Holmes and Justin V. Cavallo [2007, pp. 998–999] claim that confidence is a personal belief that some people are favourable to us. If we trust the person who we keep relationships with, we believe that he or she will be reliable and sensitive to our needs. Confidence does not only refer to relationships of the person with

other people but it can also be interpreted as a personal quality characterizing human tendencies to trust or not other people.

An outstanding French sociologist and historian, Emilie Poulat [2013, pp. 1–2] presents the problem of confidence in a poetic way. He says that confidence is the most important and primary value. It is a driving force for everything that happens in the world. Poulat first firmly states and then describes at length that we trust somebody every day, from early morning. For example, while having a morning bath we are sure that the Earth goes around the sun and it has not fallen in or got lost in the abyss of the universe. Moreover, populations of people would not grow so dynamically if they were not sure that next generations would survive future disasters. Poulat also says that there are various forms of confidence. In economic spheres of life we observe an increase or decrease in the trust in the dollar or euro. We must have at least minimum trust in the person with whom we are going to hold negotiations. If we do not have that feeling of confidence, it is no use wasting time because the talks will be fruitless. Some more examples refer to a baker and supplier of fresh food. We believe the food is really fresh when in the morning we go shopping. We do not patiently wait for a bus if we do not expect that the driver will arrive on time. Parents must feel trust in educational places after they have decided to leave their children in nurseries, send them to schools or holiday camps.

Lack of confidence in everyday life results in very serious consequences. In professional life employees are required to submit more and more papers and a lot of time is spent on more and more controls which are detailed and held more and more frequently. Instead of expanding their business employers waste time and money controlling the work of their employees. We can give a lot of examples of such lack of confidence in our social and economic life. Just after selling a car, the car dealer immediately informs the customer that he does not take responsibility for the quality of fuel the owner will put in the tank. Employers in public transport companies check whether their employees start work under the influence of alcohol. On the other hand a lot of people do not trust their bosses. That is the reason why employees are not creative in their workplaces. They simply do not know if they will still be employed when they come to work.

Not only psychologists deal with the problem of trust. It also lies in the focus of attention of many teachers and sociologists; management specialists have recently got interested in this topic, too. In practice, no company, administration unit or other organization [Krajewska-Nieckarz 2008, p. 93] can operate if their employees do not trust each other. It is widely believed that Polish people are usually distrustful of other people, which is only partly true. Findings of conducted sociological studies show that Poles do not trust mainly strangers. We do not know what we can expect from such people. Our confidence is limited in relationships with people who have different ethic values, come from other cultures and keep

traditions which are unknown to us. It appears that Polish people unconditionally trust only their family [*Zaufanie społeczne* 2012, p. 6].

We can give a few reasons why we lose confidence in others. A famous and respected Polish ethicist, Maria Ossowska [2000, p. 108] points out at lies. However, the problem of telling lies is not as easy as it might seem. To avoid evaluative opinions many people use milder definition of telling lies and say that such a person does not lie but only avoids telling the truth. It is not the only word which we use to say that this or that utterance is a plain and deliberate lie. Our vocabulary and ideas referring to lies is are vast. We often say that someone changed facts, distorted the truth, twisted everything around, promised the earth or abused confidence [Broniarek 2005, p. 127; Dąbrówka, Geller, Turczyn 2005, p. 574; Skoróbka 1985, p. 65]. Thus, we should ask whether telling the truth and telling lies have become so common and ambiguous that we need to use a vivid language to describe them or present their forms. In this article we do not mention the language of politicians. We have already got used to speeches made during political campaigns and it is common that what politicians say is far from being true. We simply know that the speeches are just empty words and idle slogans and nobody is going to believe in them. In everyday life we can hear that a political speech was a form of pre-election agitation, was aimed at gaining voters and justified by methods of electoral campaign. In this context I do not regard advertisements as deceitful. It is obvious that nobody will believe that washing powder will immediately whiten our dirty clothes or that we will recover lost voice after taking one herbal tablet [Ogonowska 2010, pp. 77–80; Barańska 2011, pp. 32–35].

Here we should put two questions. The first one refers to the definition of a lie. The second one is: Can the mentioned synonyms be identified as lies, too? Can we just say that a lie is giving information which does not correspond to the knowledge we have to another person? If it were so, many tough opinions would not be lies because it was lack of knowledge which was the cause of misinformation. Maybe it is better not to express your opinions on issues which you are not familiar with to avoid being blamed for disseminating lies. Undoubtedly, this statement is an insinuation to film celebrities and other publicly known people who do not hesitate to express opinions on current social, ethical or didactic issues. We do not treat such utterances seriously and say that this or that actor made a faux pas. But the practice of telling lies is a much more serious problem than it might seem. Anna Draberek [1999, p. 131] believes that “a lie is a deliberate and conscious act of misinforming somebody in order to mislead them”. According to the definition an act of misinforming somebody is not always treated as a lie. We should consider the intention of the person giving information and wonder whether he or she is aware of disseminating untrue information. The same author says that the practice of telling lies can be justified, or even, recommended. Such a situation is allowed

if someone's privacy is under assault, in order to prevent someone from suffering or to inflict suffering on the person.

A Canadian specialist on social communication, Marie-France Cyr [2004. pp. 13–14] claims that we are all liars. A French social psychologist, Claudine Biland [2014, pp. 1–2], adds that lying is required to fit well in a society. So, would we be made to disseminate lies? If we analyze the last opinion, we will see it is true to great extent. We find it difficult to tell our workmate what we think of his or her outfit or hairstyle. So as not to spoil team spirit, so needed at work, we consciously tell lies. Let us give another example. If our workmate asks us what we think about his or her new coat, we usually answer that it is really smart and we particularly like the modern and hairstyle. Simply we will not tell him or her that we really like neither the coat nor the hairdo. We are not going to clarify that it is not conformity but a premeditated lie [Gerris 2006, p. 569]. Both the above examples deal with conscious and deliberate lying. A question arises: In what ethical and educational categories should we evaluate those minor lies? We make a lot of linguistic tricks in order not to offend a close person. White lies very often make some people feel pleased. Sometimes we also give more hope. A few years ago a doctor and now we face a dilemma: to tell or not our close person that he/she is terminally ill. Should we not say, maybe with a little exaggeration, that such an attitude is honest and altruistic?

There are many kinds of lies. The mentioned Claudine Biland, says there are three egoistic lies. The first group includes utterances in which giving false information helps us to show ourselves in a positive light. Obviously, we much exaggerate while presenting our positive characteristics and concealing our weaknesses in an interview with our potential employer. Job applications with attached work competences are systematically verified or neglected. However, we expect that such practice has always been used and it was not created only in our modern times. The need to make a positive impression is not limited to our professional life. Let us wonder what a boyfriend tells his girlfriend in the first date. He usually tells her imaginary stories about his school achievements, tries to show her how smart and how self-confident he is. What is the second egoistic lie? According to Biland, it helps us to gain personal benefits while selling or getting rid of an old thing. We make such right observations while analyzing our everyday social life. We do not have to enumerate opinions heard on Sunday car sales about reliable cars or other devices. Similarly to the lie in which we present ourselves in the best positive light, again we deal with a well-thought-out, sometimes cynical opinion, which is aimed at misleading the person interested in our shiny product. In this context we can say that all that glitters is not gold. Finally, there is the third egoistic lie. It happens when we want to avoid punishment, prevent a conflict or when a long-lasting relationship finishes. We can give an example of a talk with a policeman who stopped us for speeding or a student deliberately trying to mislead

his/her teacher after being caught for cheating. The mentioned examples show that many problems of our social and professional life interpenetrate here. They include corruption, nepotism, trust and conformity [Sułkowski 2004].

The above mentioned examples of our social life in the aspect of lying make us wonder whether the practice of lying is such an inextricable element of life that we will never get rid of it. Thus, we should recall that in the United States an interesting experiment was made. The authors of the experiment found some volunteers who agreed to note down told lies for a period of a week. It appeared that certain volunteers had misled people twice a day. In fact, the findings were even worse. After conducting a detailed analysis, it also turned out that the participants of the experiment had told lies, too as they wanted their image to be perfect. There is nothing strange in it. Even three-year old children can tell lies. They do it to satisfy their parents, check whether they are able to realize they are deceived or to demonstrate their dominance over them. When they get older they are able to present a false facial image and express emotions which make the children look really reliable and natural.

The above observations and opinions are a ground for drawing a few conclusions. Firstly, an act of giving false information to other person is not necessarily a lie. In this context, what is important is the attitude of the author of the lie or his/her personal beliefs. According to Saint Augustine of Hippo the one who gives false information but believes it is true, is not a liar [Derrida 2005, pp. 11–12; Kołakowski 2009, p. 179]. This mentioned Doctor of the Catholic Church initiated a discussion over lying. He and Immanuel Kant are considered to be strict philosophers as they believed that always and in all circumstances one should tell the truth. Instilling truthfulness is widely practised in monotheist religions where believers are forbidden to give false testimony. The ban of deceiving also refers to lies, fraud and slander. Judaism does not allow for disseminating gossips even if there is a grain of truth in them [Chouraqui 2002, pp. 199–219].

Being always truthful in our complicated reality is not required. Maria Ossowska [2000, pp. 110–111] quoted before, mentions so called “didactic lies”. She tells about keeping elusions which help a man to get over a difficult time. We promise someone who is experiencing difficult moments that the situation will soon improve. However, we know that it will never improve and if it happens, it will be in a distant future only. The author recalls an incident from war times. She also believes that didactic lies include those which are helpful in upbringing. Since we know that children will not understand certain problems of reproduction we give them misleading or evasive replies.

Bearing in mind the above observations we should introduce one more division of lies. The ground for that division is the cause. The first category would include “serious” lies and they would be the ones which are not harmful. They would be all lies which bring people consolation, improve their mood and help to keep positive

atmosphere at work. The second group would include false utterances which are harmful and bring unhappiness. They happen for example when an employer takes on an incompetent employee. By pretending to be a sales representative he misleads elderly people and wangles money out of them. Let us present a situation in which we help to hide a criminal or sell a damaged car.

Before we sum up, we should stress that a family is the best place to bring up children and teach them to avoid lying as well as to initiate a discussion about lies which bring people relief. A family is the most important and primary place where physical and psychological needs are fulfilled. A family, the smallest social unit, is an environment where children are taught empathy and honesty in professional and social life and become sensitive to other people's feelings. The most important features of a family are such that make it a spiritual unity. According to Franciszek Adamski [2006, p. 307] they include intimacy, familiarity, companionship, understanding of mutual interests, plans and expectations. He also adds readiness to sacrifice and complete dedication to other person. Because of this intimacy "serious" lies sound really nasty as confidence in the people who love us becomes undermined. By doing harm to them we lose love and stop realizing our mutual plans and goals which we have been systematically trying to fulfil and achieve. The community which is supposed to provide safety becomes a place where the safety is all of a sudden under threat. Educational features of a family make this environment the best place for shaping truthfulness and confidence. Mikołaj Winiarski [2006, pp. 323–324] points out here at emotional ties between family members. Lies immediately disrupts this emotional balance and make it difficult to keep emotional ties. Other positive features of a family include a variety of situations which are authentic and natural. In such environment a lie brings a lot of harm. It ruins this authenticity and natural character of the family, to which we want to come back and where we want to stay with pleasure. Moreover, a family is characterized with dominating family ties. It is the ties which prevent lies from disrupting our strong personal relationships and introduce the atmosphere in which we do not have confidence in each other.

Abstract: Confidence is one of the most essential elements which no social or professional group can exist without. As feature of character it is required in someone's private, social and professional life. In all our relationships we lose it due to telling lies. Lies accompany our personal life on all its stages. Already three-year old children tell lies to satisfy their parents, check whether they are able to realize they are deceived or to demonstrate their dominance over them. Teachers and ethicists differentiate between useful didactic lies and ruthless and cynical comments harmful to others. Because of emotional ties and close relationships, a family is the best environment where a child should be taught to despise lies and respect trust.

Key-words: confidence, ethics, honesty, lie

Streszczenie: Zaufanie jest jednym z zasadniczych elementów bez których nie może funkcjonować żadna społeczność i grupa zawodowa. Zaufanie, jako cecha charakteru, jest konieczne w życiu prywatnym, społecznym i zawodowym. We wszystkich relacjach tracimy je najczęściej z powodu wypowiedzanego kłamstwa. Towarzyszy ono naszemu życiu osobistemu we wszystkich okresach rozwoju człowieka. Kłamstwa pojawiają się już u trzyletnich dzieci, które popełniają je, aby zabawić rodziców, sprawdzić ich zdolności do demaskowania kłamstw lub dla udowodnienia swojej dominacji. Wychowawcy i etycy rozróżniają pozytywne kłamstwa pedagogiczne od bezwzględnych i cynicznych wypowiedzi krzywdzących innych ludzi. Ze względu na więzy emocjonalne, częste i osobiste kontakty rodzina jest najlepszym środowiskiem, w którym należy uwrażliwiać dziecko na kłamstwo i szacunek dla zaufania.

Słowa kluczowe: zaufanie, etyka, szczerłość, kłamstwo

Bibliography

- Adamski F. (2006), *Rodzina* [in:] E. Różycka (ed.), *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XX wieku*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie „Żak”, Warszawa.
- Aronson E., Wilson T. D., Akert R. M. (2006), *Psychologia społeczna*, Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznań.
- Barańska M. (2011), *Reklama i jej ograniczenia. Standardy europejskie a prawo polskie*, Wydawnictwo Poltex, Warszawa.
- Biland C. (2014), *Tout le monde ment!* [online], <http://www.doctissimo.fr/html/psychologie/dossiers/mensonge/8497-menteurs-claudine-biland-itw.htm>, dostęp: 12 marca 2014.
- Broniarek W. (2005), *Gdy Ci słowa zabraknie. Słownik synonimów*, Haroldson Press, Brwinów.
- Chouraqui A. (2002), *Dziesięć przykazań dzisiaj*, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warszawa.
- Cyr M. –F. (2004), *Prawda o kłamstwie. Jak je rozpoznawać, jak się przed nimi bronić*, Klub dla Ciebie, Warszawa.
- Dąbrówka A., Geller E., Turczyn R. (2005), *Słownik synonimów*, Świat Książki, Warszawa.
- Derrida J. (2005), *Historia kłamstwa. Prolegomena*, Wydawnictwo IFis PAN, Warszawa.
- Draberek A., *Kłamstwo* [in:] J. Dębowski, A. Draberek, L. Gawor i inni (ed.), *Mały słownik etyczny*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Branta, Bydgoszcz.
- Gerris R.J. (2006), *Psychologia i życie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa.
- Kempiński H. (2009), *Psychologiczne i etyczne aspekty kłamstwa* [in:] Z. Kępa, A. Szerauc (red.), *Ku etycznym zasadom służb mundurowych*, Wydawnictwo NOVUM, Płock.
- Kołąkowski L. (2003), *Mini wykłady o maxi sprawach*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków.
- Krajewska-Niekarz M. (2008), *Zaufanie w zarządzaniu przedsiębiorstwem*, „Przedsiębiorczość i Zarządzanie” t. 9, z. 4.
- Holmes J.G., Cavallo J. V. (2007), *Trust* [in:] R.F. Baumeister, K.D. Vohs (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*, SAGE Publications, Los Angeles.
- Ogonowska A. (2011), *Reklama telewizyjna: wybrane strategie „czytania”* [in:] P. Dudek, M. Kusia (ed.) *Zawartość mediów masowych: od kultury popularnej przez studia genderowe*

do języka komunikowania, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń.

Ossowska M. (2000), *Normy moralne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa.

Poulat E. (2013), *Sans confiance, la vie en société est impossible* [online], http://www.le-monde.fr/societe/article/2013/11/15/emile-poulat-sans-confiance-la-vie-en-societe-est-impossible_3514486_3224.html, dostęp: 10 marca 2014.

Sułkowski Ł., *Organizacja a rodzina. Więzi rodzinne w życiu gospodarczym*, Towarzystwo Nauk Organizacji i Kierowania, Dom Organizatora, Toruń 2004.

Skorupka S. (ed.) (1985), *Słownik wyrazów bliskoznacznych*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa.

Winiarski M. (2006), *Rodzina – podstawowe funkcje* [in:] E. Różycka (ed.), *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XX wieku*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie „Żak”, Warszawa.

Zaufanie społeczne, CBOS, BS/33/2012 [online], http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K_033_12.PDF, dostęp: 17 lutego 2014.