

# Andrzej Ładyżyński

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## Marriage nurturing : systemic perspective

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Andrzej Ładyżyński

## Marriage nurturing. Systemic perspective

**Abstract:** The article is devoted to the forms of nurturing marriage as an extremely important community having systemic character. It begins with an attempt to characterize this unusual dyad, show everyday activities that might have an influence on a favourable functioning of a married couple. A marital therapy, which not always ends up in a success constitutes a chance of improvement or even a rescue, is regarded as a sign of caring for relationship.

**Key-words:** marriage nurturing, marital therapy , systemic perspective

### Introduction

Over the centuries marriage played a tremendous role in social life. Until present moment it is appreciated by the major part of the society. The weight of the phenomenon is reflected in language, from which there are derived many expressions referring to it. Some events in life can precede it, we can desire it , await it, create it and build it. It can be planned or as it is in the contemporary world, we can aspire to it without actually planning it. But we can also be unfaithful to a spouse, be in separation or get divorced, which eventually spoils marriage. If we get to this point in marriage there raises an important question if there is a chance to fix it and in what way. These questions appear to be valid to every marriage.

‘Systemic’ determines the relationship, which constitutes a connection affecting two sides involved. Marriage is the most widely known alliance, healthy form creating a dyad. There is also – rarely used - expression: ‘wedlock’, having unknown etymology, suggesting a very close bond - directly a binding.

### Marriage - attempts of precise defining concept

Being legally attested marriage ‘becomes a public manifestation of exclusiveness of relations’ [Bakiera 2009, p. 36]. Socially acknowledged pair of people in

a lasting relationship, is not only an institution but also a form of common life based on tradition and reference to the experiences of the past generations. It is built on the family origin supplies and personally attained potentials. It is the result of what we have received and gained on our own. Only apparently married couple form a pair without any bonds and dependences. In reality each of them brings in 'the picture of their parents life, atmosphere of their family home and kind of emotional bonds with people close to them' [Celmer 1989, p. 21]. Systemic thinking breaks through suggesting a bond with the past, former generations as well as with currently living relatives.

Since many centuries marriage is acknowledged, but simultaneously it constitutes full of controversies sphere of social life. Referring to the descriptions of marriage we can notice an emphasis of the sacral character of marriage, superhuman genesis of a relationship, to which an unusual grace is ascribed, but on the other hand there are attempts to reduce it to the role of social institution [Rostowski 2009, p. 16]. Marriage surpasses the sphere of private issues. It is meaningful and depends on the local community, society organized in the national or social structures having an international dimension [Wojaczek 2001, p. 66].

Marriage though, in some degree is incomparable to any other form of social life and it is a communion based on love interpreted as a category of an attitude, bond of exceptional closeness, great intimacy reaching the boundaries of what is attainable in the relationship of two people, their common path and effort. Marriage is difficulty and constant work but also a satisfaction from such an exceptional being, space of happiness, a source of hope. It is regarded as the one of the strongest correlative of happiness and state of well-being. People living in marriage are estimated to be happier than those who live alone, are divorced or widowed. [Bieńko 2012, p. 75]. It is an extraordinary formation. Two people of opposite sexes coming from the different families, frequently from various places, sometimes with different cultural, linguistic or religious background, form a remarkable unity, relationship for life constituting a foundation for future family life.

Marriage is a certainty of a decision that is profoundly thought over and is bearing an element of risk emerging with the process of opening to another person, his desires and needs. It is an experience of pacing together and by the side of another person. Marriage is a confrontation with a person representing different, distinct outlooks on life, requiring activating another person perspective, which can be incomprehensible because not experienced. Marriage is the time spent, planned and arranged together, meals eaten by everyday table, bread parted between two people or their children as well.

Marital relationship is a form of human solidarity consisting in sharing worries, which alleviates the pain and makes it more bearable. It is concerned with solving constantly arising problems, gaining skills indispensable to reach a com-

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promise, discussing vital issues, drawing conclusions from arguments and ending them with a reconciliation. On the grounds of durable character of marriage, there occur some conditions for forming love such as: discipline, concentration, patience and full commitment [Bakiera 2009. p. 35]. Development within marriage is characterized by three synchronized processes: individual development of woman and man and processes of changes of relations between them. In marriage one gets the opportunity to achieve some not abrupt, non-recurrent but long-lasting and requiring devotion of a lot of time, self-developmental alternations. This long existence is ontologically inscribed in marital relations [Bakiera 2009, p. 36, 39].

Marital relationship is the greatest source of cheerfulness and conflict as well. Spouses are strongly bound with each other that is why living in marriage is extremely difficult. There are many trivial as well as significant matters, which should be agreed on not always on the base of compromise. Conflicts in marriage are customary and spouses should learn living with each other in a harmony. Successful marriage gives an unbelievable feeling of elation and self-fulfillment [Argyle 1999, pp. 165 – 168]. However, 'successful marriage requires a lot of hard work and effort as well as commitment for the whole life'- writes Rose Campbell [2003, p. 23]. As Magdalena Samozwaniec used to say: 'Marriage is not a state of being, it is an ability' [Masłowski 2005, p. 401] and it is hard not to agree with her.

Eugenia Mandal claims that 'blood ties between parents and children and spouses are the strongest and the most lasting forms of relationships. Family plays an extremely important role in people's lives- it provides an opportunity to fulfill biological functions connected with having offspring, gives feeling of identity and constitutes a foundation for the feeling of security. Building confidential and harmonious relationship with other person and common upbringing of children has beneficial influence on man, giving him feeling of happiness, a state of well-being and health' [2008, p. 75]. From this perspective there is a small step to a systemic view of marriage. It is a relationship between two people coming from distinct families, systems, which are bound with a durable tie, create a foundation for another subsystem, at first marital, then parental. Nuptial dyad becomes a bridge uniting two systems - married couple with their family of descent.

### **Relationship nurturing**

Verbal communication and conversations are the basic means of tending the relation- it needs to be cared for, made an effort for, nurtured and tended. By the expression of caring, it is meant that we should extract an energy supplies needed to affirm, accept, appreciate and pay compliments to another person everyday.

Caring for a relationship would mean good communication. Conversations should be frequent, eager and lengthy. There should be a ritual of conversation established as a part of marital routine, for which there is always time. Practicing discussion and opening on emotional dialogue, holding opposed views, arguing but searching for a compromise, being open to accept another point of view and

look for a reconciliation after a row should be a part of communication system. In consequence, we can take certain stances that favour solving problems as they arise.

Lack of belief in the existence of ideal relationship favours marriage as it triggers the willingness to make constant attempt to become a sufficiently good dyad.

Crucial factor affecting the satisfaction from marital life is the sphere of intimate contacts, which relieve tension, give chances for procreation and additionally strengthen the bond between husband and wife.

Using family supplies can also have beneficial effect on marriage. Even though loving family, in which we were daughters or sons is not correlated with the necessity of bestowing greater meaning to these relations than our own marriage. Adopting such an attitude does not mean worse treating of our family but only the right in this phase of development to 'shift parents' to the second position in our lives. It does not mean the necessity of breaking up relations with parents or neglecting their needs of help and support. Nevertheless, it suggests not devoting marriage for the sake of family relations.

Spouses have to confront their relations with their children. Loving children in a proper way means placing them before the spouse, who has a central position in our lives. He/ She should be made the most important person, being in the centre of relations.

It has to be thought over how to support marriage and how to save it in the situations of everyday problems. The issue of crises, which inevitably affects each marital dyad and which has to be accepted, experienced and constructively dealt with, is extremely broad. It obviously concerns developmental crises, such as for instance: reception of a child, sending it to nursery school, school, adolescent crisis or phases of it becoming independent. It is worth knowing that it has to come as a result of a natural course of time and also that development occurs in a fluctuating manner, from one crisis to another and that all the marriages have to experience it. There are some similarly unexpected, difficult situations in marriage with which spouses, constituting a family foundation, have to cope with, for instance: death, illness, removal etc. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase of a factor that marriages should resist. Namely, job migration. It is widely known that it is not profitable to leave home without any serious reason, but it is worth opposing to a long-term separation, betraying spouse with work, family, children, friends and excessively abundant social life or hobby.

Support of people surrounding married couple, which is indispensable in presence of civilization changes, appears to be vital for them. It can adopt a cognitive character allowing to discuss issues concerning marriage and family functioning, it can occur in a form of socioeconomic function: temporary help in looking after children, help in illness, chance events, help for old people having no support from the closest members of family; relaxing function within the scope of which valuable forms of leisure and entertainment, having salutary influence on married

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couple and their relation, there would be developed. [Wojaczek 2001, pp. 70-71].

Spending time in the milieu of other married couples, appreciating them, learning from them, sharing experiences brings benefits for the relationship. Contacts and mixing with other couples, having conversations with them and following valuable patterns favours development of marriage.

### **Marital therapy**

Not every situation occurring in the marital dyad depends only on people forming it. They enter the marriage with the best intentions, relevant enthusiasm, strong emotional bonds, but sometimes it is not sufficient. It is caused by the fact that every person has his own personal difficult experiences of pain and trauma, which we bear inside of us.

Probably every marriage functions differently, on distinct standards. Then not everything that looks as if it was functioning badly is actually impaired. Additionally, what we can observe from one side may be considered unsatisfactory for some people, for others it can be a solution to consider. An example is a couple 'living from arguments'. Under this expression it is deemed that reaching no agreement, standing by one's own opposing opinion constitutes a specific poetics of marriage.

If the problem exceeds the possibilities of individual overcoming it, it is important not to close oneself to the assistance of others but to search for external help, metaphorical mirror or light helping to find one's bearing with the situation. It is helpful to use family counseling service, marital or personal therapy. Certainly, an improvement of the state of marriage is a complex, difficult process spreading over a long period of time, even over many years. But it is extremely payable and worth of effort.

Answers for the question: why is it efficient to improve marriage through therapy can be varied but it substantiates because family acts as if it was an individual unit, relations between husband and wife fundamentally affect the family homeostasis, they constitute the main, 'axial' relationship, a couple of architects designing family structure [Satir 2000, pp. 17-18].

Another important thing is what is the subject of improvement. If difficulties are not too enormous to resolve them, psycho-educational assistance and short-term counseling will be sufficient. These forms of support often bring spouses effective help. If problems surpass the capabilities of solving them or the conflict is too profound, there is a possibility to use a family therapy or marital therapy. It is focused on: individualization, restructurization of present relations instead of removing symptoms, reaching emotional maturity, ability to work and love as well as willingness to take on responsibility. In order to achieve it spouses under the guidance of a therapist have to diagnose a conflict uprooted and underlying the relation, be ready to frankly- as it has never been before- discuss it to face the

problem explicitly. In the systemic approaches the therapist's task is to activate lost or misused supplies lying in the family, discovering them where they appear not to exist or where they are unexpected to be found. [Steirlin et al. 1999, pp. 17-19].

In healing the marriage, which is in the state of temperate crisis there are, according to different models of therapy, the importance of sharing with one's reflections and feelings is accentuated. What is also emphasized is the significance of creating safe conditions favouring emotional commitment of dyad, coping with difficult emotions, acceptance of conflicts unfeasible to resolve and directing them on the change in their beliefs and emotional attitudes [Crane 2004, pp. 101-103].

In turn, healing couples in acute crisis requires setting simple, realistic goals, working on the ability to perceive changes in behavior, relations towards each other. It can be achieved if we manage to ascribe present difficulties to other factors than malice or traits of character of the spouse. Such a reformulation can help those people to stop accusing each other and notice more important factors triggering troubles in their mutual life such as: ways of playing certain roles in life, dysfunctions present in a family for a long period of time, factors connected with their work or social environment [Crane 2004, p. 129].

When a couple starts working on their relationship in the stage of initial problems an effort is more beneficial than at the time of taking divorce into consideration, when there are not any conditions, motivations to try some therapeutic treatment. There are undoubtedly always chances for relationship to be saved until there exists an important positive, negative or even ambivalent bond between husband and wife [Steirlin et al. 1999, p. 103]. But frequently spouses are not aware of the opportunity of using help by taking up a therapy and they turn to therapist for help being in severe crisis when chances of helping them are definitely lessened. It also happens that they offer a therapist to take over the responsibility for their relationship.

Duration of the therapy can be differential depending on the needs of family, seriousness of the problem, courage and ambition of the family, level of tension and stress and duration of the crisis. The subject which can contribute to the improvement of marriage is the most crucial matter. Married couple wants their relationship to develop, but when it does not come there emerge some difficulties forcing them to introduce changes into their life. Within the course of the therapy they want to solve the most urgent problems [Napier, Whitaker 2006, p. 375]. Indeed we can consider only and as much as a change. Through therapy there exist some possibilities of metamorphoses in the following spheres: elimination of verbal abuse, psychological or physical violence, change in fixed patterns of behavior, conversational style and exchange of information, emotional attitude.

Even though endeavors to help marriage effectively are made within the whole area of family, therapy do not always end successfully. Sometimes achieving opti-

mal aims is not feasible. In some cases therapists fail to help. There are situations complicated to such an extent that within the process of fixing them it is not easy to change patterns of behavior worked out throughout generations. Owing to the therapeutic work, families familiarize themselves with more creative and effective ways of dealing with problems [Napier, Whitaker 2006, p. 390].

### Conclusion

In contemporary world it is difficult to fix anything that appears to be complex and moreover there exists no eagerness to change it. Sometimes teething hardships threaten to end up in disintegration of a relationship. There is a disconcerting question: how to improve anything in the culture that is ignoring this process as invaluable. XXI century man is so attached to purchasing new things constantly that he can have a tendency to transfer it to his interpersonal relations. Improvement has been recently treated as an extremely costly and in consequence utterly inefficient process. Then, instead of fixing their current problems people are incessantly encouraged to pursue new models of behavior and as well new people they are surrounded with. This change became a factor, for which there is a social consent and it became a part of fashion.

Simultaneously, marriage still remains remarkably precious value that is worth caring for. In the case of difficulties it is worth using support and help of others. Experience of therapist working with married couples suggests a great chance and viability of taking up arduous, sometimes painful effort to change relationship when living in it is a source of discomfort.

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