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Sabina Zalewska

ORCID 0000-0002-9081-343X

Menedżerska Akademia Nauk Stosowanych w Warszawie

(No) sense of loneliness in the narratives and experiences of marriage in the era of virtual relationships

(Brak) poczucia samotności w narracjach i doświadczeniach małżeńskich w erze wirtualnych związków

Abstract: The article is a reflection on the functioning of relationships in a relationship in the era of new technologies. It also refers to the research on sadness and loneliness in a relationship and marriage. It tries to answer the question of whether it is possible to find meaning in loneliness and if so, what it is.

Keywords: marriage, family, relationship, relationship, loneliness, solitude, new technologies

Abstrakt: Artykuł jest namysłem nad funkcjonowaniem relacji w związku w dobie nowych technologii. Odnosi się także badawczo do samotności i osamotnienia w związku i małżeństwie. Stara się odpowiedzieć na pytanie, czy w samotności można odnaleźć sens i jeśli tak, to jaki on jest.

Słowa kluczowe: małżeństwo, rodzina, relacja, związek, samotność, osamotnienie, nowe technologie

Introduction

Social media has radically changed the way people communicate and nurture relationships with friends, acquaintances, and family members. Through social networks, we transmit a huge amount of information – messages, photos, videos – which, thanks to mutual connections within the network, we share not only with our friends but also with the friends of our friends, and sometimes with people we don't know at all. The global network creates many new opportunities; however, its improper use can carry a number of threats. Although social media makes it easier to establish contacts with other people, it is not a panacea for feelings of social isolation. According to researchers¹, people who frequently use social networking sites often experience a lack of belonging to society and a lack of engagement in valuable interpersonal relationships.

One can also „suffer from loneliness” due to a lack of self-love. Erich Fromm², a psychologist and psychoanalyst, believed that self-love is the foundation of the ability to love another person. Self-love is not selfishness. A person with low self-esteem, dislikes themselves, does not allow themselves the right to make mistakes, prioritizes others' needs over their own, is overly self-critical, and does not enjoy personal successes. How then can they derive joy from a relationship? In such cases, we either identify too much with the partner, leading to emotional dependence, or we

1 M. Madden, A. Lenhart, S. Cortesi, U. Gasser, M. Duggan, A. Smith, M. Beaton, *Teens, Social Media, and Privacy*, PEW Research Center 2013.

2 E. Fromm, *O sztuce miłości*, Poznań 2000.

blame the partner for failures in the relationship. It is worth remembering that even when forming a relationship, one remains an independent, autonomous individual. Everyone has the right to their own space, their passions, interests, their small pleasures, and moments just for themselves. A functional relationship is one where there is an awareness that one can live peacefully without the partner³.

Loneliness is inherent in our lives, however, the intensity with which it is experienced and the circumstances accompanying it are extremely subjective, as are the ways of coping with it. One method is „drowning out” loneliness, which becomes tiring if it lasts longer. The author of „Free from Powerlessness” describes it thus: „Escaping from loneliness, which could give us time and space for serious self-reflection, does not eliminate fear, and we don’t organize our lives when our calendars are bursting with meetings and phone numbers. The presence of another person may reduce tension, but the fear of the moment when that person is finally gone increases. Therefore, a person falls into a whirlwind of hyperactivity. One person is no longer enough; they need people, crowds, and loud noise so as not to hear the silence. They need intoxication so as not to see... their own darkness. They avoid concentration, reflection, solitude, seeing only evil in these states. Meanwhile, it is only through solitude that one can see the evil that afflicts us”⁴.

The narrative material presented in this article was collected during research. The research was conducted at the turn of 2009–2013 and 2022–2023. The research group with whom I had direct contact consisted of individuals who sought help at the Catholic Center for Psychological-Pastoral Assistance Poradnia Dewajtis or participated in marriage workshops I conducted as part of the clinic’s activities. Participants were purposefully selected from all individuals contacting me at the clinic or participating in workshops. People came to the clinic with problems of feeling lonely and isolated (this is how they named their problem upon application) or problems in marital relationships. From the entire group, 92 people were selected for the study. This group consisted of 62% women and 38% men.

Therefore, questions arise about the meaning of loneliness. What purpose is it supposed to serve? Is it necessary for human development?

1. Marital Cooperation

B. Wojciszke, in the interview „Does looking for the other half of the apple make sense?”¹, states: „Compromise in marriage is usually temporary because it satisfies no one. What is lasting is cooperation, that is, finding solutions that fulfill the goals of each partner. But this requires genuine concern for the partner’s well-being, going beyond one’s own limitations, habits, interests”. Many researchers of marital relations, such as M. Plopa and J. Szopiński, confirm Professor B. Wojciszke’s words. The sphere of cooperation is extremely important in building marital relationships and necessary for evaluating the relationship as satisfying. However, in common understanding, there is a different interpretation of cooperation. One of the most common beliefs is the need to „do everything together”. It stems from the romantic fantasy of an ecstatic union of two separate beings. Spouses, like inseparable lovebirds, go everywhere together, do everything together, share everything. They cease to function as individuals⁵.

3 K. Korcz, *Samotność w związku*, <http://zdrowie-psychiczne.pl/samotnosc-w-zwiazku.html> [access 23.03.2025].

4 A. Pelanowski, *Wolni od niemocy*, Częstochowa 2008, p. 202.

5 A. Lazarus, *Mity na temat małżeństwa. Powszechne przekonania, które niszczą związki*, Gdańsk 2008, p. 33.

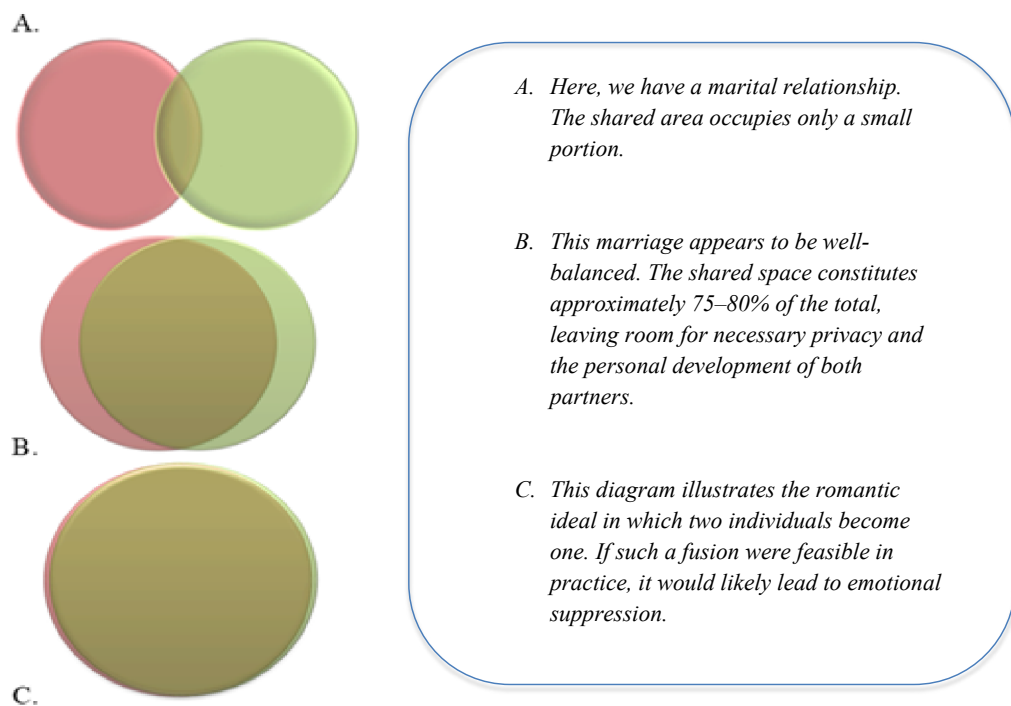


Fig. [Assume Figure shows relationship types] Figure presented by therapist Arnold Lazarus in his work at the marriage counseling center

In a good relationship, the other person must be considered. „Asking” is different from „announcing.” In type C relationships (see figure), there is usually no announcing, only asking: „May I...”, „He/She doesn’t let me...”, „He/She doesn’t agree...”. One completely loses their own living space and becomes entirely dependent on the other party’s opinion. This is most visible in marital narratives. Usually, within such dynamics, one party feels wronged and is dissatisfied with their marital life.

In a type A relationship (see figure), there is a lot of personal space. The shared space constitutes a small percentage. Personal space is often taken up by social media. This creates a sense of separateness and loneliness⁶. The internet has extraordinary power. This applies both to the development of new technologies that affect life in a relationship, and to the lack of relationship building, negative emotions, and brain functioning on an individual level.

It seems interesting to ask whether spouses experience a sense of loneliness here? What shade does loneliness take in such „closeness”? The following narratives depict the described belief.

Man, 23 years old, N80/1: It seems to me that this is what marriage is about. My parents were like that and they were happy. I don’t have much experience. We’ve only been married for a year. I don’t understand what she wants from me. Spouses are together, and that’s to do everything together. That’s probably the normal rule of marriage. Besides, when we were dating, that’s how

6 D. Boyd, *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, Yale University Press 2014.

it was (says angrily). It didn't bother her then. We just lived separately, but we did everything together and talked a lot. We still talk now. But when I want to read her emails or Facebook posts, she gets angry. She says it's her private life. Well, tell me, what private life! We have everything in common now. I don't have a problem with it. She can look at my posts and email. I have nothing to hide. But she probably does, since she gets angry. We talked about it. She says it's like I don't trust her and that's what angers her. Like I'm stalking her. She feels cornered by me. Her, cornered. But I want what's good for our relationship, I want to be close to her, to understand her better. I don't want to hurt her. But because of how she behaves, I feel lonely. She's distancing herself from me. Closing herself off from me. Doesn't want to talk. (...) we didn't get married just to break up right away. People get married to be together. To be even closer than before. To share joys and sorrows together. It's clearly written in the Holy Scriptures that they „leave their father and mother to be one flesh”. I admit, I don't know what she wants from me (says regretfully). Maybe I'm too stupid, maybe we should have waited with the wedding. But I love her so much.

Woman, 24 years old, N13/1: He promised he would carry me in his arms. That with him, I would be happier than with anyone else. And you know, I could have had anyone. Before our son was born, I was slimmer. Guys used to turn their heads on the street. I chose him, and what do I get? He only looks for ways to slip out of the house. He could help me with the child. He's the father, after all. He can change a diaper. But no, just a moment of inattention and he's gone. Disappears for two, three hours. Then he makes excuses about friends, about business. You understand, he runs away. Once when we argued, he yelled that he can't live like this. That I want to possess him completely and keep him like a puppy on the couch. And he can't do that. He needs to go out with friends sometimes, talk nonsense, laugh. Then he comes back and is all ours again. He claims he loves us very much. Doesn't want another family or another wife. Says I still turn him on and it's even better that I'm fuller because it's sexy. So tell me, where does this feeling of loneliness in me come from? When he disappears and I'm alone with our son, I feel like crying. We were supposed to be always together. For better or worse. And he disappears. Claims it's for our own good. I don't understand it. (...) my mother-in-law says my father-in-law was the same. And when she threatened to leave and packed her bags, only then did he calm down and leave his buddies. Since then, as she says, he's like a little rabbit [tame]. But do I want that for us? Should I blackmail him to be with us all the time? Besides, I don't want him to be like my father-in-law. He doesn't even say a word in front of his wife. And if he thinks differently, he whispers it behind her back. He seems afraid of her. If it's going to be like that, I don't want it. I just don't know what to do to get rid of this loneliness. Because marriage is unity, and I feel like that's not the case with us.

Woman, 42 years old, N56/1: He never understood me. He wanted to tie me to him like a slave. So I would only look into his beautiful eyes and breathe his air. Unity of thought, unity of soul. That's just not possible. Every person knows that marriage consists of two people. Different people. They are raised differently, they think differently. Unity is illusions and fairy tales. If they somehow manage to get along, set boundaries, they will survive. Otherwise, they will fall apart. I feel like we are falling apart. I could never afford to have friends. He always interfered between us. Complained that I spent too much time with them. That I should devote more time to the family and him. That I get nothing out of it. That I vowed to him in church and the Church says that spouses are one flesh. At first, I gave in and yielded to him. That way I lost

relationships with many people who were close to me. For the good of the marriage. I thought. Later it started repeating. My superiors appreciated my work. They promoted me. Sent me for training. I started earning better. Even better than him. And it started again. He didn't like the training. Too much time away from home. So many new people, and what for. I wouldn't achieve anything more in this job anyway. It depressed me. This frustration started coming out of every part of him and spilling over. Onto me, onto the children. And he did nothing about himself. He stopped caring about his appearance, his skills, and his job. And really, when I realized this, I felt lonely. So terribly lonely. Do you understand? I dedicated so many years to our relationship. I did what he wanted, and where did it lead us? It didn't strengthen our relationship. I don't think spouses should do everything together. They should have their own passions and separate circles of friends. This will strengthen their relationship, not weaken it. It will enrich them internally. Only they both need to understand this. Because if not, it will just be an eternal problem and conflicts.

Many spouses misunderstand doing everything together. Perhaps because the word „everything” is very imprecise and impossible in married and family life. It is yet another myth about married life. Spouses suffer greatly from implementing this image or from the expectation that it will be implemented. In some narratives, references to Church teachings appeared. At the same time, the respondents denied that the Church allows loneliness in marriage, emphasizing that it speaks of unity, of being one flesh. However, this is a false understanding of Church doctrine. The theological view of loneliness in human life is that it is necessary, even indispensable. It is somehow inherent in it. The tactic of invoking Church doctrine serves the respondents as irrefutable argumentation for their points. In married life, there is a dimension of the spouses' „encounter” that they should absolutely nurture and build upon. However, it is not the only space in marriage. It is often difficult for spouses to understand that no one is perfect, that the partner obviously helps us meet our needs, but is not solely there to fulfill our expectations, heal wounds, and complexes. They have the right to be different from us, to like different things, to have their own friends, their own passions, and time just for themselves. Just as we have the right to it. A relationship flourishes when we can share these differences, enjoy similarities, and bring in our own interests. It is also often forgotten that love and relationships are never the same; they change just like we ourselves and the life around us. Euphoria doesn't last forever; the temperature of the relationship needs to be maintained. Sometimes people are sad that it's not like it used to be. It's not, because it's impossible. It's not the same, it's different, but that doesn't mean it's the end of the relationship and one must seek happiness elsewhere. Some respondents seemed to understand these issues and shape their relationship accordingly. However, the narratives most often showed signs of doubt and resignation.

2. About Personal Space

Solitude by choice (understood not as for a lifetime but rather as time just for oneself) is a constructive awareness, and it conditions human development. It does not stem from a lack of ability or skill to communicate, is not associated with escape and isolation, but arises from the desire to pause in the rush of life, from reflection, contemplation, meditation, or from great suffering. Solitude by choice, described here, is mainly isolation from what creates obstacles to development, introduces existence beyond time and space, as it creates a kind of personal space. Thanks to it,

we enter the very threshold of inner solitude, where spiritual penetration occurs, allowing us to discover timeless values⁷.

Caring for personal space in a relationship is nurturing one's own mental hygiene. Mental hygiene involves actions protecting mental health, striving for the best possible state of mind. These are very broad concepts and include a range of activities that improve the functioning of the psychic sphere. From daily moments of relaxation to caring for spirituality, a sense of meaning in life, and happiness. Mental hygiene is continuous development, striving for inner balance, positive relationships with the environment, and effective problem-solving. Caring for mental hygiene requires effort, time, and skill. Often, this may seem unrealistic in the daily rush and hardships. The contemporary world does not support the idea of mental hygiene. The fast pace of life and the overload of duties do not favor care for comprehensive development, relaxation, or reflection, and working beyond one's strength is often perceived as an advantage. Sometimes lack of sleep is treated almost as an expression of heroism – because he or she sacrifices so much to perform their duties as best as possible. A consumerist lifestyle distracts from reflecting on true, deep needs⁸.

It might seem that caring for personal space in a relationship is an expression of egoism. Meanwhile, the relationship with oneself is the most important in life, as it is inevitable, long-lasting, and inseparable. It affects every aspect of human functioning and relationships with the environment. To help other people, maintain satisfying marital relations, and perform duties, one must first take care of oneself. It is not without reason that during an airplane disaster, one must first put on their own oxygen mask, and only then help the passenger next to them put on theirs. If you can't breathe yourself, you can't support another person. Similarly, by protecting mental health and remembering personal space, you have a chance to care for your surroundings. Therefore, caring for personal space stems not only from concern for oneself but also for the spouse⁹.

It seems interesting whether people understand it this way in their narratives? When (and if at all) does such maturity arise in a person and what causes it? What life experiences? The described reality is illustrated by the following narratives.

Woman, 48 years old, N29/1: I know that being at peace with oneself is extremely important. I know this because for a long time, I wasn't. My parents kept me under a glass dome for a long time. The so-called good girl. I didn't go to summer camps. I didn't go to discos and parties. I did what my parents wanted, until. Until I went away to university. And there, all hell broke loose. What I got up to (laughs loudly). You have no idea what comes into young people's minds. In a word, madness. As if I wanted to blow off steam from what was at home. It was great foolishness and I could have harmed myself then. I almost dropped out of university. I was searching for myself. I searched for so long that I didn't know who I was. I ended up in a group where I had no chance of finding myself. I would have been lost if it weren't for my husband. He wasn't my husband then. He gathered lost souls like me and put wise things into their

7 H. Romanowska-Łakomy, *Przekraczanie murów samotności. Dlaczego i jak należy przekraczać poczucie duchowej samotności*, [in:] P. Domeracki, W. Tyburski (eds.), *Zrozumieć samotność. Studium interdyscyplinarne*, Toruń 2006, p. 296; S.L. Zalewska, *Samotność i osamotnienie – sposobność do dialogu z sobą czy autodestrukcji?*, [in:] E. Dąbrowa, D. Jankowska (eds.), *Pedagogika dialogu. Doświadczenie dialogu w rzeczywistości XXI wieku*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 98–110.

8 *Higiena psychiczna, psychoprofilaktyka*, [in:] S. Pużyński (eds.), *Leksykon psychiatrii*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 380–381; S. Pużyński, *Zaburzenia depresyjne w praktyce*, Warszawa 2000.

9 M. Rozbicka, *Zadbaj o higienę psychiczną*, <http://www.psychorada.pl/news,zadbaj-o-higiene-psychiczna.html>, [access 12.03.2014].

heads. About how they should become themselves and grow up to life. I fell in love immediately. I wanted to seduce him, that's all. It seemed to me that only such a man could protect me from the whole world. But he was wise. He said it only seemed that way to me. That I had to find myself, not hang onto him. He promised that if I found myself and came back, he would wait for me. (...) my path was difficult. It took a long time before I understood who I am and what I want. But he waited. He told me then that if I hadn't done it, we wouldn't have been a good marriage. He was right. I would have hung on him, completely dependent on him. I wouldn't have been happy, and neither would he. I wouldn't have been a partner for him, just a burden he would drag along. Everyone has to find themselves and answer the question: who am I and what do I want. Everyone in a relationship. Everyone in a relationship must have their own space where they answer this question. Otherwise, they won't be a support for their partner in difficult times. And that's probably the most important thing in marriage. To support each other and motivate each other to overcome obstacles. (...) I tell you: the blind cannot lead the blind to the destination. To be a support, you have to take care of yourself. Of your mental strength and resilience. Otherwise, you can't help the other person. My husband taught me that, and he was right. I am grateful to him for that.

Woman, 46 years old, N15/1: I've been fighting for it for many years of our marriage. For this time just for me. For this moment of freedom, solitude. It's as necessary to me as air. But nobody understands me. My in-laws worked together on the farm their whole lives. Although they are old now and don't work, they have nothing to talk about with each other. Their life consists of watching TV and discussing village gossip. That's the only thing that connects them. They don't understand my needs. They even consider it foolishness and city folk whims – as my mother-in-law says. My mother is already a widow. Dad died 5 years ago. When she talks about their marriage, it's like it was an idyll. She's already forgotten all the bad things. And how they argued until the fur flew. And she also doesn't understand what I'm talking about. She says I have a good husband. That he's interested in me and cares, so I should be happy and not look for problems where there are none. And I tell you, this has always been important to me. I always wanted to have my own space. And I had it, one way or another. Only I couldn't tell anyone about it. I always managed to carve out something for myself from this daily life. Friends I didn't specifically mention to my husband. A group at work with whom I went to the theater. The worst part is just that I was alone with this secret. It's hard. Because it's a bit like cheating on my husband. Because I don't tell him the truth. Once I started introducing him to it. A long time ago. And I found out I couldn't. Because he doesn't understand or accept my needs. For him, it's like betrayal that I share time with someone else. He has no friends and doesn't need them. Only acquaintances when he needs something. But not just for the need to be with them. So if he doesn't need it himself, he thinks I don't need it either. And you know, we've been living like this all these years. I don't tell him about this self-realization. I have a life outside of him, as it were. And I'm fine with it, only I feel a little guilty. But I know he won't understand or accept it anyway. I have to remain alone in this.

Man, 29 years old, N64/1: What does she need it for. I keep saying it. Why does she need these part-time studies. I have a good job. I earn great money. I can support all of us. She and the girls won't lack anything. But she's all about studies, studies. That's the cause of all our problems. All these constant arguments. Does everyone have to have a master's degree right away (says angrily)? A decent person is a decent person. Not just studies. (...) When she goes to her weekend

classes, I feel so lonely. You don't even know how much. Before, on weekends, we did shopping together, sat at the table, at dinner. The whole family. She would wash the dishes and we'd sit on the couch. The children played, and she listened to what happened at my work. And we talked about people. And I told her what I thought about what's happening in politics. We were good. We didn't need anything or anyone. Just each other. Now she's not there. She cooks on Friday for Saturday and Sunday. I have to clean up and wash the dishes. I'm alone because the kids run off to their room. And when she comes back from those classes, I have to listen to all this stuff about her lecturers and friends. What happens with me doesn't matter anymore. It doesn't count. Only what happens with her. You see how things have changed. How am I supposed to endure this (says angrily). I tried talking to her about it. But she just laughed and said that when I was the center of attention, I didn't think about her needs. Everything was geared towards me then. And now that she wants to do something for herself, I don't understand it. And I really don't understand it. Were we unhappy? Did she complain about anything? No (angrily)! And suddenly, out of the blue, these studies. Is there any sense in this? I don't understand and I feel so bad about it. And I feel completely lonely.

As is evident from the respondents' narratives above, personal space is very important to them. They nurture it, fight for it, try to organize it for themselves. This is not always met with understanding from the spouse and family who, like many people in common opinion, believe that there is no place for such personal space in marriage. But it is otherwise, as it not only exists within the space of married life but is very important for it. Thanks to it, marital closeness can be better nurtured, and it is a sign of care for the spouse. Narratives often articulate that nurturing this space is a sign of egoism. This is said by spouses who do not agree to the existence of this space for their partner and do not nurture it in their own lives. Paradoxically, however, this space provides a better understanding of the spouse and shapes empathy. It also contributes to the individual development of the spouse. As J. Augustyn¹⁰ writes „One of the fundamental human values, alongside love, is freedom. These two values are closely linked. Freedom is in some necessary way inscribed in love, while love is the deepest meaning of human life”. This also applies to relationships. Marital love without freedom becomes greedy emotional possession, while freedom without love is an existential void, with which one does not know what to do. If anything in interpersonal relationships is done by force, without freedom, it usually does not bear good fruit. It does not deepen or strengthen the relationship. Every human behavior has value only when it is marked by freedom. One of the fundamental dangers in very close emotional relationships, such as marriage, are attempts – mutual or one-sided – to limit freedom in exchange for being gifted with acceptance, kindness, emotional warmth; „great love” at the price of renouncing, at least to some extent, one's own freedom. This is like blackmail, to which respondents sometimes succumb. However, it evokes feelings of abandonment and loneliness in them. In such behaviors, two disordered human needs intertwine: the need to dominate another and the greedy need for affection. Satisfying them does not lead to happiness and contentment. It leads to loneliness or isolation.

A relationship is always a certain compromise between being free and independent, between space for one's own development and dependence on the other, being close to someone. It should be remembered that everyone should take care to be in harmony with themselves and their needs, but also to nurture this community. Common rituals, family traditions that we maintain and cherish, some shared outings, trips, meals eaten together, even dates, help with this. One must

10 J. Augustyn, *O miłości, małżeństwie i rodzinie*, Kraków 2003, p. 83.

care for this quality called a couple; it will not survive left to itself, without help and daily efforts from each partner. Many respondents, especially those with long marital experience, remember these principles of caring for the relationship and nurture them. In their experiences, this involves work and constant transformation of oneself.

3. Community

Treating marriage as a type of community is synonymous with attributing non-institutional, informal attributes to it; it indicates the existence of certain, subtle, unique characteristics developed together during the earlier stage of getting to know each other (dating, being together). The communal character of marriage can mean the unity of two hitherto separate individualities, namely husband and wife, as well as the unity of purposes for which the marriage was contracted. The communal approach means unity of actions, community of existence, joint accumulation of goods, cooperation, joint planning and implementation of tasks, developing strategies for a shared life. Such an understanding of marriage dominates in psychological concepts of marriage, which emphasize the essence of intimacy of experiences, emotional, sexual, and intentional community. Community in this sense means unity of expectations, unity of values, unity of actions, and unity in responsibility for the durability of the relationship. Undoubtedly, relationships well-matched not only in terms of socio-cultural characteristics but primarily in terms of personality traits, characterological traits, and guided by analogous motivation both at the time of contracting the relationship and during its duration, have a communal character. If the concept of community is understood as a natural fusion of people due to a commonly felt goal and similar mutual affection, as well as a natural common aspiration, i.e., convergence of feelings and desires, then a marriage based on such foundations can be treated as a community¹¹.

Maria Braun-Gałkowska proposes defining marriage as a community intended to be permanent, realized in the process of spousal interaction, which is a way of life where its goal is realized jointly by two people. She considers marriage a lifelong union that, through the duration of a multifaceted community of life, aims to realize the common good¹².

She further indicates that a true community is formed from the moment of consciously deciding on a shared life and playing for the „common account”, and it forms slowly, step by step, throughout life. The author quotes an interesting definition of marital community according to Roger Mucchielli, who believes that „marital existence should not be similar to a game for two, where there is a winner and a loser, nor even to a game where there is a certain balance of wins and satisfactions. It is rather a game in which both can win or both can lose depending on the way they play and the type of emotional relationship between the partners”¹³.

M. Braun-Gałkowska also points out the conditions that should be met for marriage to be a community. These conditions include maturity for marriage, feeling the need for aspiration in love, a common search for values, and mutual understanding. She claims that the condition for

11 A. Kotlarska-Michalska, *Małżeństwo jako związek, wspólnota, instytucja, podsystem i rodzaj stosunku społecznego*, „Roczniki Socjologii Rodziny” vol. X (1998), pp. 54–55.

12 M. Braun-Gałkowska, *Miłość aktywna. Psychiczne uwarunkowania powodzenia małżeństwa*, Warszawa 1980, pp. 31–47.

13 M. Braun-Gałkowska, *Rozwój miłości w małżeństwie*, [in:] F. Adamski (ed.), *Miłość, małżeństwo, rodzina*, Kraków 1985, p. 223.

marriage to be a community, and not a partnership of more or less numerous interests, is maintaining full mutual communication throughout the marriage¹⁴.

It seems interesting how the studied spouses understand community in their relationship? What dimension does it have for them? And what does it have in common with loneliness? The narratives quoted below illustrate the discussed issue.

Woman, 22 years old, N16/1: We only got married half a year ago, and my husband has already moved back to his mother's. It's embarrassing that I'm telling you this. I feel ashamed. He said he loved me and wanted to spend his whole life with me. And he couldn't last half a year. He's comfortable. I have an apartment from my grandmother. Nothing extraordinary. A tiny kitchen with a small room. Cramped, but our own. On the first floor of a tall tenement building. Unfortunately, you have to bring coal and wood. There's no central heating. We were supposed to be happy there. Far from parents, starting our life together. At first, it hurt me that he didn't come home after work, but went to his mom's. I waited with dinner, and he ate there and didn't want mine. He said we could eat there together. I have nothing against his mother, but since we got married, this is his home now and we are supposed to live together. When autumn started, we began heating with the stove. He didn't like it. Said it was medieval, that something needed to be done, but he did nothing. I explained to him that we need to earn money for it. And maybe we'll save something up and in the spring get a professional and they'll do it better. For now, it has to be this way. He started complaining and complaining. That it's cold, that he has to tend the fire, that he carries this coal, that there's no proper bathroom. And so on, every day. I love him and somehow I put up with it. I said, slowly. That we'll do everything together, That we should be happy. Others don't have their own place, and we do. I explained that this is the beginning of marriage, that we'll build our life together and make everything nice and proper. He seemed to understand. Seemed to be appeased. Until one day he didn't come back for the night. Didn't answer his phone. I was going out of my mind. Calling his friends like a fool. His boss and mother. I went to the police. They said I should report after 48 hours. I came back after midnight crying and didn't sleep until morning. And he called after eight with a tantrum that I was looking for him. That I called his boss, and he just spent the night at his mom's. And his phone battery died and he didn't notice. You understand. I'm going out of my mind, and he doesn't even call. Since then, things started getting worse between us. (...) spouses, not right away, but they achieve most things in life together. We know that we learn slowly. Maybe slowly, but together. There is this shared part for both. Together we solve problems, together we overcome them. If we love each other and care about each other. But does he love me? Tell me, since he moved in with his mother. I don't have an invitation there. He says he'll come back in the spring. When it's warmer. And what, is he going to move out every autumn and winter (cries)? What should I do? I love him, but after something like this, should I want to take him back? He should have handled it differently. It's childish! And if he didn't want marriage, why did he marry me? I'm so lonely. So unhappy".

Woman, 62 years old, N45/1: Ma'am. I'm older now and I've lived through my share. At the beginning of marriage, you think you can handle anything. That as long as you're together and united, you can conquer fire and hell. And maybe together, it really could be done. There's so

¹⁴ Ibidem, pp. 224–229.

much faith and spirit in youth. My husband and I started with nothing. We lived in someone else's place. We couldn't make love loudly because the old lady banged on the wall. That's how it was! And when my husband wrote an article, we put a towel under the typewriter to make it quieter. Because it bothered the old lady. We didn't have an apartment and money was scarce. But our faith that things would get better was strong. Later, both the apartment and money appeared, but the faith weakened. That's how it is with marital relationships. Time and routine slowly kill and weaken it. We had different periods in life. I often felt that my husband didn't understand me. That I was lonely. Once I even left him for a whole day. I packed a suitcase and left the house. I wandered around the city and bars. I hoped he would worry, start looking for me, fall into despair. When I came back in the evening, it turned out he hadn't even noticed. He was so absorbed in reading that he didn't notice my things were missing. He was only surprised that I wasn't back so late. That was the extent of my lesson. But the lesson taught me something. Nurture your own separate world, but also take care of the shared part. Both parts must exist in a relationship. Otherwise, it won't be successful. You will be unhappy and lonely. You can't just draw from and take from the relationship. The other side won't stand for it. And rightly so! You need to put something into the relationship, from yourself. Selflessly. And your spouse will reciprocate. That's the most important thing I've learned about marriage over the years. Sometimes it's better, sometimes worse. It varies. But never bad enough that I wanted to pack up and leave.

Man, 60 years old, N33/1: With my second wife, the current one, it's different than with the first. We have joint finances. We have a joint apartment. We share everything. With the first one, it was different. She constantly emphasized what was hers or from her parents or relatives. Even when guests came over. This painting was bought by my uncle. This table was given by my daddy. I couldn't stand it. I wanted to buy our table, our bed. But she didn't agree. With my second wife, it was different from the very beginning. She also had bad experiences from her first relationship. Lived with him for 3 years. They weren't married. He hurt her badly. It's amazing she didn't fall into depression. That guy made her completely dependent on him. She even had to ask for money for sanitary pads. He managed everything, even her. It took a long time for us to trust each other. Today's youth say: we dated for a long time. We had bad experiences and were cautious. Later it seemed a bit funny to us, but back then we didn't know each other that well. Being hurt makes it hard to trust a second time. You're afraid it will be the same. At the beginning of our marriage, we were both afraid of that. We reacted strangely to each other sometimes. I didn't understand her reactions. I got offended. Now I know it was because of what she went through. It's hardly surprising. Our experiences, especially the bad ones, leave a mark on us and often remain forever. (...) we immediately established the principle that we work together for our happiness. What we earn, we put into a common pot. We pay for everything, and if anything is left, we decide together what to spend it on or invest in. It quickly turned out to be a good method. We also started talking more with each other. Because we didn't always have the same opinion. We had to prove that this proposal, not another, was better. A small debate with arguments (smiles). We later applied this to the children too. It paid off. My son is a lawyer (laughs). It also turned out that she is better at investing the surplus. The girl has a knack for business. I never stubbornly insisted on my way. As for guiding the children, I argued better. And neither of us regrets it. They finished good studies. They have good jobs. They are doing great. Over the years, we learned to work out what is common. And it paid off. Every marriage should have

this common part and not limit it to shared children. Because that flattens the whole idea. What is common should be worked out together. I tell you this from my own experience.

The common part for spouses is an extremely important space in their lives. Building it unites the spouses and makes them develop, through the process that is the relationship, common educational principles, a hierarchy of values, communication. This, in turn, contributes to a sense of satisfaction with the marital relationship. Loneliness appears here in the spouses' narratives only in connection with a lack of maturity to undertake work on this space. This work is difficult and involves sacrifice, compromise, and being with the spouse in various life situations. Some, however, do not show maturity and readiness to take on new roles related to this space of community. And it is precisely at this moment that negative feelings appear, which expose being alone and the feeling of loneliness. Building this space seems most important and most difficult at the same time. It depends not only on one person and the decisions they make but on both spouses. Harmony and good functioning, however, require accepting the importance of actions for the good of the relationship, perceiving this good similarly, and maturity to undertake these actions. That marriage is a community of life and love is undeniable. The respondents themselves often refer to this fact in their experiences and narratives.

Summary

Analyzing the material contained in this chapter, one concludes that loneliness in a relationship has a deep and significant meaning. Those respondents who assumed from the outset that loneliness would neither be realized in their lives nor contribute to happiness usually arranged their lives in such a way that all these worst predictions came true. And since no one lives solely for themselves, their bitterness poisoned, without even realizing it, their surroundings and their spouse. Unreflected fear of loneliness can cause considerable damage. Fear of loneliness, lack of acceptance of the right to it in life, can push a person to directly harm other people. Those who chose loneliness or understood it have the time and opportunity to reflect on their own behaviors and decisions. Loneliness facilitates reflection on one's own life, its organization, and making decisions about changes. A person who chooses loneliness as a kind of time for self-reflection can begin to live better with their surroundings. Respondents who chose such loneliness are satisfied with this fact. They even defend their right to it. Based on the experiences and narratives of the respondents, one can hypothesize that loneliness as a phenomenon is necessary and essential in marital relationships and guarantees the spouses' living space. This is related to satisfaction with married life. The larger this space, the greater the satisfaction and contentment with the relationship. This is confirmed in research by B. Wojciszke, M. Plopa, W. Majkowski, T. Rostowska, J. Rostowski¹⁵. Spouses in the narratives often referred to personal space and their right to loneliness. They considered it one of their most important life needs. Man by nature is a social being. Friendly, mutual coexistence with other people is his calling, which does not prevent him from tasting loneliness

15 M. Plopa, *Więzi w małżeństwie i rodzinie. Metody badań*, Kraków 2006; M. Plopa, *Małżeństwo w percepcji młodych Polaków. Psychospołeczne aspekty życia*, Kraków 2010; J. Rostowski, *Współczesne przemiany rozumienia związku małżeńskiego*, [in:] T. Rostowska (eds.), *Psychologia rodziny. Małżeństwo i rodzina wobec współczesnych wyzwań*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 12–21; W. Majkowski, *Czynniki dezintegracji współczesnej rodziny polskiej: studium socjologiczne*, Kraków 1997; J. Szopiński, *Więź psychiczna a zadowolenie z małżeństwa*, „Problemy Rodziny” 5 (1981), pp. 17–22.

and isolation in his own time. Human loneliness fosters concentration and reflection on matters concerning the existence of a rational human being, the meaning of his life, and the goal towards which he should strive. There is and always will be a demand for this kind of loneliness. Loneliness has only relative value, not absolute. The assessment of its usefulness should consider the need for effective action so that human existence is more consistent with human nature. Therefore, it should be remembered that only in specific circumstances of human life, when it leads to establishing ever deeper relationships with the world – does loneliness possess its positive value and is worthy of human affirmation. And although the value of loneliness is significant in human life, one must remember not to let it completely consume them. Because as the poet, Father Jan Twardowski wrote: „It may be surprising that in a world where about 7 billion people live, many complain of loneliness. We think we are lonely when people leave us. But the truth is different. We are lonely when we ourselves leave people. Loneliness is often a self-inflicted illness – thinking only of oneself. The worst happens when we complain about the lack of reciprocity”¹⁶.

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16 J. Twardowski, *Elementarz*, Kraków 2006, p. 53.

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