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FAMILY AND WORK, FAMILY OR WORK – THE DILEMMA OF YOUNG EDUCATED POLES

Abstract. The aim of this article is to analyze the two ways of life that young, educated Poles must choose for themselves – to have children and combine family and work responsibilities; or not to have children. The paper attempts to answer the following three questions: 1) what arguments are advanced by parents in favor of reproduction?; 2) how do parents reconcile family and professional responsibilities?; and 3) why, in the opinion of couples who choose not to be parents, it is worth it to remain childless?

Key words: gender, family, work, equal parenting, voluntary childless

1. Introduction

Family and work, two mainstay areas of human activity, are highly regarded values by Poles. Most young people strive to accomplish both of these values and combine work with parenthood, despite the difficulties. The situation is particularly challenging when both parents wish to pursue a professional career. This involves the need to determine the roles of the mother and the father and the division of parental responsibilities, as well as defining the degree and level of one's activities and priorities in professional and family life. At the same time, more and more young people are deciding not to have children. They put a quality education in first place and thereby seek to secure a well paid and satisfying job. Having children is not a determinant of success in their opinion. Instead they prioritize material values and self-fulfillment, especially in the professional sphere.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the two ways of life that young, educated Poles must choose between – to have children and combine family and work responsibilities, or not to have children. This paper attempts to answer

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the following three questions: 1) what arguments are advanced by parents in favor of reproduction?; 2) How do parents reconcile family and professional responsibilities?; and 3) Why, in the opinion of couples who choose not to be parents, it is worth it to remain childless?

2. Family and having children in Polish society

As shown by the results of international research, Poles - in comparison to other European societies - highly appreciate both family and work (Poleszczuk 2002: 258–259). According to data obtained in a survey by CBOS, their plans and objectives are usually related to finance and work (41% for each category) as well as family (40%). Only one in four respondents declared that they had plans for themselves and did not refer to their material, professional, or family situation; i.e. educational plans, personal development, life satisfaction. (CBOS 2010a). The majority of Poles seek to pursue both of the most important values for themselves and combine family and work responsibilities. In some cases, achieving one of these values may be intentionally delayed by an individual. The analysis of the marriage models preferred by couples with regard to their procreation plans reveals that young people choose between the following relationship patterns: 1) traditional model – where the spouses consider having children as one of the most important things in life and instantly decide to have a baby; 2) rational model, in which the spouses first want to ensure decent financial conditions; 3) self-fulfillment model – which allows for achieving a certain professional position by both a wife and a husband before taking on parental roles; 4) ludic model – in which the decision to have children is postponed so the partners could enjoy each other and lead a leisurely life in the first years of marriage; 5) the “hesitant about having children” model, resting on the belief that couples are not obliged to make family plans straight away and the parenting decision is put off until a few years later, which also allows for the possibility to choose not to have children (Titkow 2007: 199–200).

Those who decide to have children must negotiate the “gender contract” in the family, setting out the division of family and household chores as well as both partners’ share in the outside-home work and their engagement in professional activities. In Poland, among adults under 40 years old, the most common model is the one in which a woman learns to reconcile professional work and the traditional roles of housekeeper, wife and mother culturally attributed to her (CBOS 2010b). Such a model, describing the distribution of family responsibilities (either in a marriage or an informal relationship), was declared by almost one third of respondents (32%). In these families both spouses (partners) work professionally, but the husband devotes more time to his career, while the wife, in addition

to carrying out her professional activity, is involved in running the household and raising children. As a result, we face here the situation of a double burden on females – dual earner model (Kotowska 2009: 48). The second most often declared family model in this age group, as indicated by one-quarter of respondents (26%), is the traditional model, in which only the husband (male partner) is employed, earning the family's living, while the wife (female partner) keeps up the house and raises the children. The partnership model was declared by almost one fifth of Poles under 40 (19%). In this model, both spouses work professionally and both are equally involved in childcare and home duties. Only *every fourteenth respondent* (7%) claimed that they follow the inverted model, i.e. the responsibility distribution within the family is organized the opposite way to the traditional relationship. In these cases the woman is the sole wage earner for the family, or at least investing more time in her career, while the male partner primarily runs the household.

As demonstrated by the results of research, the vast majority of Poles (93%) feel that both parents ought to be equally engaged in raising children (Titkow et al. 2004: 213). However, when asked about the involvement in childcare and upbringing (especially concerning small children, i.e. infants less than three years old and pre-school age kids), the parents admitted that the lion's share of the responsibilities fall on the mother (Titkow et al. 2004). Respondents in a study described in the book "Women's Gratuitous Work" claimed that mothers are responsible for physical caregiving (dressing, bathing), child-minding, medical prevention and healthcare (doctor visits), organizing kids parties, reading aloud to a child, playing and spending free time together, as well as contact with kindergarten staff and school teachers (Titkow et al. 2004: 214). Fathers are generally active (always less so than mothers), but usually in the more pleasant fields of activity such as organization of entertainment – going to cinema or a fair. They also often escort the children to and from kindergarten or school, arrange their free time, take them for a walk, and organize additional entertainment (Titkow et al. 2004: 214). The overwhelming number of Polish citizens (85.4%) have no doubt that a small child (up to 3 years old) should be nurtured and looked after by his or her mother, who suspends or gives up her job for the time being (Titkow, Duch-Krzyszczek 2009: 38). Consequently, more than three quarters (77.8%) of economically inactive women aged 25–34 years old are not looking for work because of family and domestic responsibilities (GUS 2009: 183). Women's professional work is therefore often underestimated and regarded as a "supplement to a family's income, determined by certain stages of family life" (Kotowska et al. 2007: 439). Motherhood is a barrier for women to return to the labor market, because mothers are perceived as less flexible employees, less focused on work, and more costly due to pro-family policy measures.

According to the statistics and the results of sociological research, more and more people postpone the decision to raise a family, limit themselves to one child,

or even intentionally give up parenthood altogether. Since the early 1990s a decrease in birth rates can be observed in Poland, and women's fertility rates have lowered by more than 50% over the last twenty years (Kasprzak 2004). These changes are primarily the result of life choices made by more and more young people, deciding to reach a certain level of education and ensure an economic foundation and stability, and only then, in their thirties, to start a family. A typical element of this trend is also a decrease in the number of people willing to bear various expenses (both economic and psycho-social) associated with having children and combining family roles with professional, out-of-home activities, which involves a number of difficult choices and limitations. Fear of lowering one's socio-economic status carries with it pressure to increase the amount of time and energy invested in work (Elliot 1986, cited in Kwak 2005). People flooded with work and various other professionally-related activities have less opportunity to enjoy family life. Competition in the labor market also demands continuous professional development. A child thus appears as "an obstacle" to one's career path. This applies particularly to women, who are in any case less likely, compared with men, to find rewarding employment, get a promotion (the "glass ceiling" effect), and enjoy higher wages. Moreover, there are often contradictory expectations regarding the roles of a woman and mother and the requirements of employers. This difficulty in reconciling family and professional responsibilities does not encourage young, educated women to bear children. According to D. Mollen, who deals with the phenomenon of voluntary childlessness among women, the decision not to have children is an expression of rebellion against the traditional concept of femininity, which more and more women find limiting (Mollen 2005). Researchers have focused particular attention to the causes and determinants of voluntary childlessness in the context of the transformation of social roles performed by women (e.g. Przybył 2001; Kalus 2002; Slany 2002; Slany, Szczepaniak-Wiecha 2003; Garncarek 2008; Bartosz, Bartak 2011). The increase in educational aspirations and women's participation in the professional sphere often pushes traditional family roles into the background. Professional work and career is becoming more and more important for women, and thus they postpone the decision to get married and have children.

According to various research studies on childlessness by choice conducted in many Western countries, and a few Polish studies as well, having children is associated with a great sacrifice and loss of control over one's life. As stated by U. Beck, a child requires "effort and money, is unpredictable, and . . . disrupts the carefully prepared daily schedule and life projects" (Beck 2004: 181). The most common motives for postponing parenthood, or deciding not to have any children at all, include: freedom from responsibility for a child; greater possibilities for self-realisation (primarily in the professional sphere of life); as well as spontaneous mobility (Agrillo, Nelini 2008: 350). E. Campbell is of the opinion that people choosing to remain childless can be divided into those seeking to avoid

the “penalty” associated with parenthood, and those seeking to take advantage of the “awards” arising from childlessness (Campbell 1983, cited in Agrillo, Nelini 2008: 350). The former resign from procreation as they are afraid both of losing control over their lives and financial deprivation, whereas the latter are focused on achieving alternative life goals (*ibidem*).

Transformation of the family model and the phenomenon of delaying or even resigning altogether from having children is explained by changes in the structure of societal norms and values and the related process of individualisation. Traditional ideals (according to which marriage, family, and having children are the most important goals in and measures of a successful life) are being replaced by secular-rational and materialistic values focusing on “survival” and “free expression”, i.e. on an individual’s autonomy, self-fulfillment, and high quality of life (Inglehart 2009: 20, 178). As noted by K. Slany: „at the new stage of development particular emphasis is placed on: economic values, improving the quality of life, individualism, self-realisation, defining one’s identity referring to the concept of »self«, quality relationships, rational decision-making, and individual’s own life choices in life.” (Slany 2002: 68). More and more often the individual interest is given priority over the ‘common good’. This process has fundamentally changed the importance and focus of small groups, and in particular of families (Żurek 2008; Garncarek 2008, 2012). Researchers who have analyzed the transformation of the modern family with reference to the process of individualisation indicate, above all, qualitative changes concerning behavior, attitudes and expectations towards intimate relationships, family, and children. The life of an individual becomes a „reflexive project” under which one has to choose, out of many possible options, the optimal solution for his or her own self-interest (Giddens 2001). This includes also the decision to have or not to have a child/children.

3. Transformation of gender roles: *traditional vs. modern femininity and masculinity*

Decisions whether and how to fulfill parental roles are also associated with the adoption of a particular concept of femininity and masculinity. Today we are dealing with a clash between two opposite gender models: the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’ (Dzwonkowska-Godula 2012). They vary, among other things, in their way of explaining the differences between men and women (nature versus culture), defining characteristics and gender roles, as well as gender relations. For the purposes of discussion in this paper, the key issues are the traditional and modern approaches to the two parental roles (i.e. mother and father) as biological roles associated with the „nature” of a man and a woman respectively.

In traditional cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity, the parental role is assigned a different place and meaning within the repertoire of social roles assigned to each sex. The “motherhood imperative”, seen as a central, integral, and key element of femininity, is often foisted upon women (Budrowska 2000: 13). Procreation and raising children are considered as their natural primary tasks, duties and even their main purpose in life (Budrowska 2000: 12). The maternal instinct ascribed to women encompasses not merely their desire to have a child, but also an innate and natural ability to care for the offspring (Badinter 1998: 15). These arguments lead to an assumption and a common belief that only a mother can properly take care of a small child, and the father may perform at most a supportive, complementary role. Since women are expected to show full commitment and be a constant presence to the child, their own needs are pushed into the background and even rendered invisible. (Budrowska 2001: 107, 110). According to B. Budrowska, motherhood can be characterised as a ‘total institution’, due to the social obligations and constraints of being a mother and all the responsibilities associated with this role. It becomes even a peculiar enslavement and lack of autonomy, experienced by women whose lives must conform to the duties of child care (Budrowska 1997: 304).

While in the traditional model women are judged through the prism of their roles as a wife, mother and housekeeper, masculinity and fatherhood are identified with performing the role of a father – head of the family, which includes primarily responsibility for providing financial security for the family, and therefore refers indirectly to social roles carried out in the public sphere. The parenthood imperative also applies to men (transfer of genes and passing on a surname) and is reflected in the statement that a true man should “build a house, plant a tree, and have a son”. The script for a traditional role-playing of a father is, as T. Szlendak remarks, “not too complicated” – the father is expected to go to work and earn money to support his family (Szlendak 2009: 64). Furthermore, he enjoys not only the right but the duty to be an authority and a tutor, which includes, *inter alia*, functioning in the world of culture (while women are “closer to nature”). A man is supposed to demonstrate characteristics such as rationality, firmness, and severity (as opposed to female emotionality, sensibility and “softness”) (Fromm 1971: 51, 55; Ortner 1998). For these reasons the traditional model of the relationship between a woman and a man, even in the private sphere, is based on male domination and superiority, and female subordination and submission.

Modern concepts of masculinity and femininity stand in opposition to the traditional gender models, referring to gender equality and partnership in every area of human life. This signifies that women and men have the same rights, duties, and opportunities to take up activities both in the private sphere and in the public, professional domain (Jump, Haas 1987: 98; Johansson, Klinth 2008: 57). Thus a man is expected to be involved in family life and share equally in family

and parental responsibilities. In addition, men's activity is not considered as a support or help for the woman, but as a joint responsibility (Johansson, Klinth 2008: 57), although individuals are of course given some autonomy in the way they intend to perform their parental roles, which are negotiated and established in every family. One may also observe a downward trend in the specialisation of the roles of mother and father, given the similarity of their characteristics, duties and relations with the child (Gębuś 2006: 57–58; Sikorska 2009: 196). Above all, however, the modern gender models relieve individuals from the forced imperatives of 'motherhood' and 'fatherhood', which cease to be regarded as a necessary, integral part of an inborn femininity and masculinity. "What takes place is the negation motherhood/parenthood as a kind of "biological duty," and life plans revolve around higher values: scientific, artistic, literary, etc." (Sobczyńska 1995: 75). This lack of a moral obligation to 'mother' or 'father' is reflected in the growing phenomenon of voluntary childlessness.

4. Characteristics of the studies conducted

Our analysis of life strategies of young educated Poles, including both those who have children and combine family and work responsibilities and those who are voluntarily childless, is based on the results of studies carried out in both social categories.

As far as the first group of respondents is concerned, twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with couples of parents as well as four focus group interviews.¹ All the participants in the research were citizens of Lodz aged 25–35, held a higher education degree, were (biological) parents of small children (under 3 years of age), worked professionally (they could at the time take advantage of maternal or parental leave), with both spouses employed (or on maternal or parental leave). The subject matter of the study included, *inter alia*, the meaning of a child in both women's and men's lives, reconciliation of family and professional roles, and partnership arrangements with respect to parenting.

In an attempt to determine the reasons for *not* taking on parental roles by a young, educated Poles (women and men), another four focus group interviews were carried out. Participants were both men and women, aged 25–35 years old, having a higher or secondary education, working professionally, married (for over 2 years) and with no children, neither biological nor adopted. In addition to the focus group interviews, thirty in-depth interviews were conducted with voluntarily childless men and women aged 28–40, having a higher or secondary education, employed and married (for over 2 years) and not having children

¹ Both parts of the study were carried out in 2007. Focus groups interviews included: one session with 8 women, one session with 8 men, and two mixed sessions with 4 women and 4 men.

by their own choice. Our research issues involved, *inter alia*, the reasons standing behind the decision not to have children, and the life goals and values the respondents pursued.²

5. Family and work – results of a survey conducted among parents

5.1. The importance of having a child

Parents of small children participating in the study pointed out the importance of having descendants as an essential element in the life of every human being. They spoke of a natural (sexual) drive to maintain the procreation of the species, and/or a natural stage of human life: “I think that in general during one’s lifetime everything has its time. There is time to grow up, a time to learn, a time to work, and somewhere between has to be a time for motherhood, fatherhood, and parenting” [F8, FGI_1]; “as if it was one of the human instincts, yes – a family. One is in a relationship long enough that it has to end up with an offspring and this is natural, this is normal.” [M11]. They emphasized that a child gives meaning and a purpose to life: “We live to have kids, yes, bring them up and exist generationally” [M2, FGI_4]. According to some, every individual, without exception, seeks to become a parent, even if he or she is unaware of this need: “I have an impression that it happens somehow subconsciously that everyone strives to have a home, family, children, and pass on their genes. It just is in all of us” [M3, FGI_3]; “I think that even those who do not want children, deep inside wish to have them, because everyone aims at this” [F3, FGI_4]. These respondents expressed the belief that people who make the decision to remain childless “definitely” will regret it later as their lives will become empty, shallow, and sad. They mentioned feeling compassion, even mercy, for those without children, who deprive themselves of the joy and the meaning of life associated with having children: “But then later, how miserable they will be, as there comes a moment when it’s too late” [F6, FGI_1]. Thus it may be seen that the participants of the study quoted here represented the traditional way of understanding femininity and masculinity, based on social demands and expectations to fulfill certain biological roles. Nonetheless, it is worthy of note that some of the respondents preferred modern gender patterns. They stressed that although being a parent was a life goal for them, choosing

² The first research phase included the analysis of statements by Internet users on the issue of ‘childlessness by choice,’ posted on the web portals Gazeta.pl and Interia.pl as well as on the online forum “Childless by choice” The second phase was carried out in Lodz, in 2007 and consisted of 4 FGI (Focus Group Interview) sessions: one with women, onewith men, and two mixed sessions (each with 8 people). In addition to this, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted between September 2008 and December 2009 – 19 with women and 11 with men.

another path of self-realisation is also possible, for example focusing on a professional career: “For me, it is not weird – they just want to fulfill themselves in another sphere. Maybe they really don’t feel like being good mothers. Let them go the way they choose, let them realise themselves.” [F2_FGI_1]; “In order to feel like a woman I needed to be a mother, but I understand women who don’t want to be mothers ...” [F15].

Parents participating in the study considered having children as a natural consequence of creating a family, which is necessary to give meaning to marriage: “What is the value of a marriage without a child?” [M4, FGI_3]; “How much time can you be together on your own, just the two of you? Let’s face it, living as a couple without children makes you at some point fall in some kind of routine, and then a child adds a new pace to this relationship” [M18]. What the birth of an offspring meant to these persons is a confirmation of their mutual affection, complementing the existing relationship between the (husband and wife) parents [M5; M6]; “I mean, the kids keep us together [...] for us they are a common goal. Our children are our fruit, and that’s it” [F3]. According to some, it is only by dint of progeny that a marriage becomes a “real family”. Both male and female respondents admitted that their child encouraged closer emotional intimacy between them, and made their relationship more stable and more serious: “The child cements everything, that’s for sure.” [F7]; “This is something we share, since these are our kids, our common problems” [M3]. Many pointed out that they strive to avoid conflicts and quarrels, because they could negatively affect the child.

Both mothers and fathers who participated in the study stressed that the birth of their baby changed their life “priorities.” The infant has become most important to them and is placed in the spotlight; organisation of the day – indeed of all plans actually - depends on child’s daily routine, wants, and needs. As remarked by those surveyed, questions and issues regarding the child have also come to dominate everyday conversations between the two parents as well as their conversations with other people. In the words of one of the male respondents (and father): “Now it [the child] is on a pedestal, it is in first place” [M2]. This revaluation of life centers around responsibility for the child, a compulsion to meet his or her needs in the first place, and resignation from one’s own needs and plans to some extent, as they become secondary and are pushed into the background – “as if you are doing everything with a view toward the child and for him or her” [F4]; “First, you absolutely rid yourself of egoism, and then there is dedication to the child” [F6]. Moreover, it was pointed out that having a baby brings significantly more changes in women’s lives than men’s, because the mothers are the ones whose involvement in childcare is the greatest. The concept of dedication/devotion more often appeared in the characteristics of motherhood than fatherhood. “The truth is that a mother simply devotes herself more compared to a father. She loses more of this world of hers, the one which was earlier, before motherhood” [M6]. Some participants in the male session observed that a woman agrees to the

child filling up all her life, and organizes other spheres of life in conformity with her offspring's needs. A man, on the other hand, basically tries to incorporate parenting into his past life, so as to maintain his hitherto lifestyle as much as possible. However, women themselves emphasized that it is their own choice and they do not treat it as something negative: "This is an voluntary dedication, an informed choice, I don't suffer and it's not bad" [F6]; "When there comes a baby it is a total commitment to that child. And this commitment does not hurt, because it is so natural, and after all the child returns your love and that is everything" [F19]. It is worth emphasizing that both male and female respondents admitted that it is hard for them to imagine life without a child. Many noticed that, despite the fatigue and the need to rest, they cannot enjoy moments in their lives without the presence of their offspring, as they miss their children and feel somehow empty: "Actually, we truly realised this when for the first time ever we left our little girl to stay overnight with my parents and returned home. And it was hard. Quietness, silence, and an empty home" [M2].

In defining motherhood and fatherhood, some respondents referred to these concepts using such expressions as "fulfillment", "happiness", "satisfaction", "joy", "life changing for the better", or "to give life meaning". It was highlighted that although one is obliged to give up or reduce certain things for the sake of the baby, the child actually compensates for this situation by giving a kind of contentment and delight that a childless person will never know: "Despite the fact that it was a long-awaited, planned baby, sometimes I felt a bit sorry when, for example, my friends were going out and having a party [...] but then again, on the other hand, a child compensates for this loss, because it gives you so much joy, it's just amazing" [F7]; "Well, there is weariness, but there's also a lot of fun" [F10]. Parents in the study also stressed that they derive satisfaction from watching their child's development and the awareness of their own involvement in shaping the child's personality and in teaching him or her new skills. They feel proud to see the achievements of their little daughter or son and to be able to discuss these parental successes with friends and acquaintances. Still, at the same time they emphasized what a great responsibility raising children is: "It means, well, being such a guardian responsible for the life of this little human, for what's going on with him now and for what happens to him later, what will this little human grow up to be, what will his or her life will look like at each of the stages, and generally throughout his or her entire life?" [M10]; "It is up to me who my child will become" [F18].

5.2. Combining parental and professional roles

The appearance of a child in the family requires the partners to adopt certain strategies combining the role of a parent with their respective professional

responsibilities at work. This problem affects women above all. In the families of all the study participants, during the first months of their baby's life it was the mothers who took time out from work in order to stay at home with the newborn, which is in part results of legal regulations and the compulsory maternity leave granted by the Family Policy. There was no instance of a father exercising paternity leave (i.e. a part of maternity leave which may be used by the father).³ However, the respondents declared that usually, immediately after the child's birth, fathers took a 'holiday leave' to support the mother in the care of their newborn.

As revealed by the male participants in the study referring to their life experiences, being a father has little effect on a man's professional work. Some fathers, whose wives were on unpaid parental leave, pointed out that now they had to work more, since the only source of income to provide for the family came from their salaries. Yet this happens at the expense of their involvement in family life. Mostly however, there were opinions that the fathers work faster and more efficiently in order to be back at home as soon as possible, or they work long hours one day so they can come home early the next day, for example, to take their child to a doctor's appointment. Men remarked that in their case parenting is treated by an employer as an asset – a man with a child is considered to be a more reliable and robust employee, and more serious and respectful of his work. A man will try harder to be efficient as he is the breadwinner and responsible for the maintenance of his family. Unfortunately, as demonstrated by the results of social research, women with children experience quite the opposite treatment with respect to their work (Czernecka, Dzwonkowska-Godula, Woszczyk 2009). Motherhood is often seen by employers as a cause for a woman's inflexibility, limited availability at work, and low labour productivity (*Motherhood and professional activity*, 2006).

The period of time when the mother stayed at home with a child differed significantly among the female respondents in the study. Some women returned to work after maternity leave, often prolonged by taking a holiday leave. Others used parental leave, engaging in childcare for a period up to twelve months, a year and a half, or even two years. After that, most often the grandparent were involved in care of an infant; rarely did the parents send their children to a *crèche*. Different partnership solutions were introduced by women who returned to work. Some took turns in looking after the child, arranging it so that one of the parents would work in the morning or early in the day, and the other in the afternoon or evening. However, working opposite shifts has the negative effect that the spouses pass each other at the door and spend little time together. In the case of two families, following maternity leave the women re-entered the labor market, while the

³ At the time of conducting the research there was no specific paternal leave for fathers. This was introduced later, in 2009.

fathers stayed with the children and worked from home. One of them resigned from his previous job and started his own company strictly for the purpose of caring for the child.

Women in the study disclosed that the decision to return to work was indeed hard, yet the vast majority had no doubt that they wanted, even needed, to be professionally active again. They complained about being tired of “sitting at home” with limited contacts with other people, and the monotony of everyday routine duties. A significant number of female respondents also drew attention to harmful stereotypes concerning women who stay home with a child for too long a period of time, who are labeled as “non-working”, idle and lazy, and considered to be unable to engage in other interests and topics of discussion other than raising a child and all the issues connected with childcare and upbringing. Thus they felt that it was not only financial reasons that caused them to resume, continue, or undertake their professional activity, but also their need for social contacts at work, training and career opportunities, as well as self-development opportunities, instead of being ‘only a mother’.

According to the respondents, the crucial components in making the decision who will stay home and take care of the baby concern, above all, economic aspects, i.e. each of the parents’ earnings or earning potential. In cases where the father earned a higher salary, or even where there were no wage disparities, the partners usually decided that the mother would engage in child minding at home. The fathers interviewed claimed that to use a parental leave (part of the maternity leave or childcare leave) would not be a problem for them, although certainly dealing with all the responsibilities might be difficult, and it would be easier for them to manage this with the advent of the second child. Men also pointed out that convincing the mother to leave the baby and return to work for the benefit of the husband, who could go on a paternity leave or use part of the maternity leave left, would appear as a problem. This remark was confirmed by one of the female respondents, who stated that not many women, even with relatively high salaries, would venture to leave the child with the father, because they “simply feel it is better for them and for the children and for the husbands” [F4, FGI_1].

It is worth noting that, although among the respondents there were no men who used parental leave to be the child’s main caregiver (one father stayed at home on parental leave for three months to care for a child together with the mother), the respondents acknowledged that they were acquainted with couples in which a man and a woman “swapped their roles” – she returned to work and maintained the family, while he took care of the child. At the same time, however, their very description – defining this situation as a “role reversal” – discloses the presence of a strong gender role stereotype in the respondents’ minds.

5.3. Partnership in parenting

As shown by the results of the study carried out among the young educated parents, a 'parenting partnership', defined as an equal or comparable distribution of childcare responsibilities between the mother and father, seemed to be an obvious and natural arrangement for the majority of respondents. Young people emphasized though that such a 'partnership' does not mean creating a top-down, rigid division of duties one must strictly adhere to. They rather inclined towards the idea of 'replaceability', meaning that a particular housework activity or action relating to childcare is performed by the person who is currently at home, who is more available or less tired, etc. Others claimed that certain divisions cannot be avoided, because everyone does something better than the other, or prefers to carry out certain tasks etc. Moreover, the parents interviewed underlined that this scheme of distribution of responsibilities in their families was introduced as a result of a mutual agreement, a joint decision, or a solution worked out together. However, some respondents expressed the belief that a true partnership in parenting is not feasible. The most common obstacle cited here was the absorbing character of work and long working hours of one of the parents.

Mothers staying home on a maternity leave or parental leave were more burdened with responsibilities related to childcare. Yet they highlighted their attempts to engage the father as much as possible, not only in order to have the opportunity to take a rest, but also for the sake of the man's contact with his child. In most cases, however, the father's involvement in minding the child was limited to a couple of hours in the evening and on weekends, and consisted in playing with the child, and sometimes bathing.

An important issue would seem to be the fact that it is quite common for women not to allow men to take care of the child "because they (i.e. the woman) will do it better and faster themselves." Interestingly, women themselves more frequently noted this problem than men. Some of them could not imagine a situation where the father was home alone with the child, for while the offspring would be taken care of well, the house would be in disarray. Whereas a mother, according to female respondents, is able to manage both childcare and all other domestic responsibilities at the same time. As these women remarked, while they were gradually taking over all duties concerning the child, their partners quickly "forgot" what parenting is about (how one should perform certain tasks), making it harder later to get them involved in childcare. The fathers admitted that they sometimes took advantage of this women's "overzealousness" as "they do this better and no one can do it like them...". The interviewed mothers also observed also that it is easier for men to be involved in the care of the offspring when the child is older and can walk, talk, and play with other people.

To conclude this examination into modern day parenting in Poland, one may note that for the young and educated parents who participated in the study, having children is considered to be a natural course of life and the main purpose and priority of a marriage. This does not mean, however, complete resignation from other important areas of life such as professional work. The necessity to reduce one's activity in the labor market during the period of early childcare applies mainly to women. This particular trend has clear cultural grounds (mother and father role stereotypes). However, the respondents also pointed to financial matters as the major factor in making the determination who is to stay home with the child. The couples interviewed in the study mostly tried to implement the partnership model of parenting, giving both parents equal rights and obligations to engage in the care of the child, as well as to realize oneself in the professional sphere. According to the research findings however, they were not always successful in their attempts to follow this model and in a few cases women became overwhelmed and had their lives dominated by their family duties, while men devoted themselves to professional work. Still, as some such respondents pointed out, it was their choice and a joint decision. Although both women and men refrained from choosing between family and work *per se*, the simultaneous and equal realization of the two spheres turned out to be very difficult and required compromise and cooperation on behalf of both partners.

6. Family or work – results of the survey conducted among those ‘childless by choice’

Analysis of the collected data allow us to postulate the reasons why young, educated couples resign from having children, as well as to identify alternative life goals pursued by such voluntarily childless couples.

6.1. Reasons for not taking on the role of a parent

Arguments most often raised to justify the choice of childlessness include: 1) self-realisation through one's professional career; 2) women's fear of having to solely „bear the burden” of parenting and childcare responsibilities in case a child is born; 3) fear of a deterioration in the relationship with one's partner/spouse; 4) lack of the need to have children in order to provide for one's security in old age (this can be done through various types of insurance); 5) lack of agreement between the partners/spouses in terms of having children; 6) women's concerns about losing their physical attractiveness (slim figure); 7) feelings of dislike/aversion toward children; 8) fear of change in the quality and frequency

of sexual contacts with the spouse/partner as a result of the child's appearance in family; 9) adultery/entering into a relationship with another person apart from the husband/wife (Garncarek 2008). Reason number 1) was most frequently mentioned by the respondents for choosing to remain childless (regardless of sex/gender and type of childlessness – temporary or permanent). Thus in this article primary focus is put on discussion of this motive for not taking on the role of a parent.

6.2. The importance of having work and the life goals of the voluntarily childless

Respondents who participated in the study generally had clear and definite goals in life. For these people, the choice to remain childless (whether temporary or permanent) was a prerequisite to the realization of particular life plans. Above all, they stressed their desire for self-development in the professional sphere of life, and that taking advantage of their skills and qualifications is more important to them than raising a family: "I have not studied for so many years to get stuck in nappies now. Certainly not yet. I need to reach a certain level, and then we'll see" [F1, 30 years]. According to the respondents, it is easier to focus on one's career without a child: "Everyone wants to develop in business. And there is little time for it; all the more so if a child appears, then there's no time at all" [M1, 28 years, FGI_3]. "I have a great job, thanks to which I am fulfilling my dreams, and I feel wonderful! Children would only disrupt this lifestyle, which I have worked so hard for so many years to attain" [F19, 33 years].

It was chiefly women who admitted that professional activity is of great value to them, in particular insofar as it allows for financial independence. Having said that, however, they seem to work not for economic reasons alone. For them, employment is a source of satisfaction, offers an opportunity to improve their skills and qualifications, and also enables them to participate in social life to a greater extent: "I definitely will not have children. Sometimes, I think I'm kind of strange, but then I decide that it's just my choice and, after all, the most important is to live in harmony with yourself [...] I enjoy many things, achievements, and I think that a child is not obligatory to achieving self-fulfillment. Work gives me maximum satisfaction" [F10, 34 years]. Analysis of the statements made by the female respondents indicates that they reject the traditional model of femininity. Most of these women know their value and are financially independent. Most of those who declared complete resignation from being a mother and having children strive for independence and the pursuit of individual goals: "I've always loved languages. I know English, Spanish, and Turkish a little bit. I want to get more certificates, this is my passion, my purpose in life" [F1, 30 years]. "I have so many classes every day, and at the university – I'm studying for my PhD, then work, sometimes

we manage to go out with friends and have a beer [...] we put off the decision about a child for the sake of a career” [F19, 33 years].

The respondents’ focus on the professional activity was nonetheless also connected with a desire to achieve a higher financial status, as well as to maintain the present, satisfactory standard of living. Both women and men who decided to postpone parenthood pointed to economic factors affecting their choice not to have a child. According to these childless persons, the lack of sufficient financial resources is one of the major and significant causes of their reluctance and delay to start and raise a family. First of all, as the respondents pointed out, one needs to secure economic stability, which is achieved by maximum involvement in one’s career, and only then can one reflect on whether and how many children to have. Men in particular stressed the importance of this factor: “It seems to me that a certain material status is more important than having children, and if you really want kids, you must be able to afford them. The times are such that everything is expensive, nappies, wipes and stuff... you have to have a lot of money for all this” [M4, 35 years, FGI_2]. Some respondents were concerned that they would be forced to lower their standard of living when a baby is born, which they believe generates additional costs and changes the economic status of the family. Arguments such as the uncertainty of future financial conditions and the price one “pays” for having a child appeared very often in the statements by those study participants who’ve postponed their decision to become parents: “A child is a bottomless pit. I don’t even try to imagine how much it costs to maintain it. As of now, we’re not saying no. Maybe one day. We don’t know yet. But first we must have it made in the shade, work some time, see something. Actually, my wife has just started to work. She has to settle herself there first, and then maybe we’ll think about a child” [M1, 32 years].

The respondents underlined that childless people have much more time for themselves, not only to develop their careers, but also for each other, or pursuing their interests and hobbies. For some of those interviewed travelling and relaxation after work were also important, and especially the latter a person with children may not be able to afford. Moreover, they mentioned the ability to organize unplanned meetings with friends, which in their opinion would be rather impossible if they were parents: „I’m fine like this. After work I go to the gym with the guys, we have trainings twice a week. On Friday or Saturday we always go out for a drink. Well, maybe not always, but often, every two weeks, that’s for sure. This lifestyle suits me. I don’t want to change that, at least not for now” [M11, 33 years].

6.3. Relations between the partners in voluntarily childless families

Both women and men, especially those who strongly rejected the idea of parenthood, emphasized that they aim at autonomy, independence and freedom

of action in different spheres of life. On the one hand, they declared that their relationship with their beloved is of great importance to them, but on the other they manifested a reluctance to have another person (the partner, as well as the child) “for one’s own”. They pointed to the need for self-determination and autonomy in relationships with other people. All the participants in the study who declared in favor of permanent childlessness described the relationships they were in as good partner relations – couples who make important decisions together, share household chores such as cooking, cleaning, etc. However the situation was different in case of men and women, with the latter mainly declaring that they were only postponing the decision to have a child. Half of the respondents in this group, both women and men, accepted stereotypical roles assigned to each sex (mainly the women emphasized their engagement in housework – cooking and cleaning - despite their involvement in paid work). Female respondents who delayed the decision to become a mother were concerned, among other things, that if a child appears all additional duties will fall on their shoulders. They were aware of the fact that in most families the women mind the children, and men rarely engage in childcare and household duties: “I already have one child – my husband. Were it not for me, he would die” [F8, 35 years, FGI_1]. „After all, it’s obvious what would happen – house, nappies and everything on my shoulders. I see what he’s like. He kind of helps me at home, but I always have to tell him what to do, how to do it. It’s fine as it is. I don’t want to change it, because I’m afraid that the whole burden of childcare would fall onto me” [F1, 30 years].

6.4. Children and parenthood in the eyes of the childless by choice

Our analysis of respondents’ statements indicates differences in the way voluntarily childless people perceive a child itself, and the parental role. The majority of those interviewed who declared in favor of permanent childlessness (both women and men) confessed to having a negative attitude towards children. Three female respondents considered this a key reason for their rejection of becoming a parent. One of them did not hide with her hostility toward children: “I told my mother once not to encourage me to have children if she doesn’t want to visit me in prison [...] crying, yelling, that drives me mad. I would probably use physical violence against a howling child. And I’m aware of this” [F5, 31 years]. This group of respondents also indicated that parenting can adversely affect someone, both personally as well as his or her relationship with a partner: “We don’t want to destroy what we have now. You know, we read each other books in the evening, during the day we have discussions, massage one another, have sex [...] I couldn’t imagine this with a kid. Our cat is sometimes jealous of our affections, so we have to stop, because he goes crazy, let alone a child [...] we’re living in a symbiosis that fits us both and we don’t want to change that” [F18, 33 years].

Moreover, characteristic of this group was the belief that it is impossible to reconcile a successful professional and personal life with the duties of parenthood. According to these respondents a child ruins any plans for life and does not allow for self-development. Some of them displayed an indifferent attitude towards children and parenting, and only one female respondent admitted that she was very fond of children, particularly the older ones: "I like kids, especially the older ones you can already talk with. I think I'm even a cool aunt. Sometimes, I take our friends' daughter to the movies and we have fun together, but my own child... no. No, I don't want it, I'm fine. I have so many friends and acquaintances and we support each other so there's nothing else I need to be happy [...]" [F13, 35 years]. A more positive perception of children and parenting was observed among those who simply postponed the decision concerning procreation. These respondents mentioned that every now and then they associate with children – either from their own extended families or with kids of their friends/acquaintances: "At times, my sister asks me to stay with her daughter. She's my goddaughter. Sugar pie [...] I realize that having children can be very cool, but for now we have other priorities. A child – not yet. For now, work, the house, and first of all we need to finish this house off" [F3, 30 years].

Taking everything into account, it may be said that for the voluntarily childless partners who took part in the study, having children does not constitute a key value or a focal point of life. People without children tend to focus on fulfilling their professional roles and career development as this is a priority for them – at least at this particular time – and conversely motivates them to postpone the parenting decision. We may observe growing aspirations on the part of individuals (mainly women), aware of their own advantages (skills, competencies) that can be utilized in numerous fields, including among others to ensure their career growth and professional self-realization. Parenthood cannot compete with the other attractive opportunities in life outlined by the childless, such as: a social activity, travelling, a consumer lifestyle, or the desire to maintain a slim figure, as mentioned by some of the female respondents.

7. Conclusions

The statements made by the respondents, both those with children and those childless, confirm the observed changes of norms and values, as well as the alterations in the family model and the way a family functions. The traditional concepts of femininity and masculinity included a specific and significant demand to perform a particular parental role. This imperative appeared to be stronger in case of women, and required from them full commitment to

their offspring. For young, educated Poles having children today is principally a matter of choice, not obligation. The “naturalness” and the “necessity” of both motherhood and fatherhood have been questioned, primarily by the childless, who seem convinced that not every woman has to be a mother, nor every man a father, in order to experience fulfillment in life. Parents participating in the study, however, more often perceived the carrying out of parental roles in terms of human “nature”.

In modern societies social control over behaviors associated with the intimate sphere of life of individuals has been noticeably reduced. So too has the pressure decreased on young people to have a ‘complete family.’ Recently, a child itself has become an autotelic value - it is “economically worthless”, yet “emotionally priceless,” which was highlighted mostly by the people with children. Children are also referred to as “a luxury” that becomes competitive with other consumer goods. And they may become an obstacle “hindering one’s self-fulfillment and active participation in a world perceived as a complex set of multifarious opportunities [...] Parents’ concern about the quality of their offspring puts them in a double-difficult situation of choice – between the quantity and quality of children, as well as between the child’s interest and the quality of their own lives” (Gawlina 2003: 35, 36). This was noted by the childless respondents.

While for the mothers and fathers who participated in the study having children was a life goal and priority, this does not mean, however, that they were ready to give up other activities. Women, as those who most frequently suspended their careers to provide childcare, emphasized the importance of work in their lives, and not only as a source of income. Young parents tried to work out together solutions that would allow them to combine work and family responsibilities. Although not always successful in their attempts, due to the different degrees of involvement in professional work, the parents’ first aim was to create a partnership family model. The childless respondents, on the other hand, expressed the belief that while it is not impossible to reconcile the role of a parent with the role of an employee, it would involve many difficulties and limitations. Taking advantage of the “rewards” that accompany childlessness was worth more to them than being a mother/father, at least at the present time.

Our case study, based on the representatives of the two categories of young, educated Poles, makes it clear that nowadays it is increasingly difficult for an individual to give up a career and the opportunity of professional work. Not only is employment a value in itself, but it is also indispensable as a source of income, which enables the pursuit of other goals in life. Thus one may choose childlessness and not to have progeny and, as we were assured by those without children, lead a successful, rewarding life which does not become any less interesting or empty due to the lack of a child, as one may find alternative ways for self-realisation. However, the supporters of such an approach and life choice remain in

the minority, and the overwhelming majority of individuals decide to pursue both values – family and work – avoiding the necessity to choose between the two, but creating the necessity to strive to reconcile the obligations associated with the two values.

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RODZINA I PRACA, RODZINA ALBO PRACA – DYLEMAT MŁODYCH WYKSZTAŁCONYCH POLAKÓW

Streszczenie. Głównym celem artykułu jest przeanalizowanie dwóch dróg, spośród których młodzi, wykształceni Polacy zmuszeni są wybierać – mieć dzieci i łączyć obowiązki rodzinne z tymi z pracy, albo nie mieć dzieci. Tekst jest próbą odpowiedzi na pytania: 1) jakie argumenty traktowane są przez rodziców jako zachęcające do reprodukcji? 2) jak rodzice godzą rodzinne i zawodowe zobowiązania? 3) dlaczego, w opinii par, które zdecydowały, że nie chcą być rodzicami, warto pozostać bezdzietnym?

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, praca, rodzicielstwo, bezdzietność.