



Kinga Kuszak

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Children in search of happiness. Appearances of a happy childhood

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Abstract:

The article tackles the issue of the contemporary childhood. The author notes that in search of a happy childhood, the essence of childhood is often lost. Instead of a genuinely carefree and happy childhood, the reality created for today's children is full of appearances. In her discussion of the subject, the author refers to a selected approach to happiness. She also identifies, based on Janusz Czapiński's proposal, the difference between happiness and feeling happy. She points to the fact that 21st-century life is an endless chase after the future, lacking the opportunity to focus on here and now. Childhood too is treated as a race towards adulthood. In the course of her argument, the author identifies and describes selected styles of creating a happy childhood: an abundant childhood, an active childhood, a childhood in the limelight, a boundless childhood, a childhood among people. Concluding her argument, the author proposes that instead of chasing happiness and creating the appearances of a happy childhood for children, it might be better to simply slow down the pace of life when possible and value the present. After all, "sharing the joy of life is the essence of a satisfying child-parent relationship." The author also discusses the role of the teacher as a person supporting the parents in their parenting roles.

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Introduction

*We live longer
but less precisely
and in shorter sentences.
We travel faster, farther, more often,
but bring back slides instead of memories.*

Wisława Szymborska, "Nonreading"

Like many observers of contemporary life, the poet recognises that constant change, the resulting lack of time and haste, consumption and the desire for easy and fast entertainment, have dominated human life today. They take part in the constant risk that has made life unpredictable. Anthony Giddens stresses that the concept of control has also become devalued, as "change does not consistently conform either to human expectation or to human control." The inability to control events increases the feeling of uncertainty. Ulrich Beck adds that the risk incurred by contemporary humanity is due to the fact that each individual is encouraged to be independent and to be highly individualised, and on the other hand, they are limited in the process of individual action, which causes a sense of discomfort and frustration. In Beck's opinion, "in advanced modernity individualisation takes place under the general conditions of a societalising process that makes individual autonomisations increasingly impossible. The individual is indeed removed from traditional commitments and support relationships, but exchanges them for the constraints of existence in the labour market and as a consumer, with the standardisations and controls they contain. [...] [There are] secondary agencies and institutions, which stamp the biography of the individual and make that person dependent upon fashions, social policy, economic cycles and markets, contrary to the image of individual control which establishes itself in consciousness." In such a reality, the model of a child's functioning and the image of a happy childhood have also changed.

Selected approaches to happiness

From the beginning of human thought, happiness has been considered one of the ideals of life, and the search for its essence can be found in the works of philosophers since ancient times. Analysing the rich literature on this issue and referring to common knowledge, one can say, after Janusz Czapiński, that "we

can say about happiness the same as St Augustine wrote about time: 'What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know.' The concept of happiness is similar to the concepts of art, language, game, science. It cannot be defined in a classic way, because [...] it contains a whole family of meanings without one common distinctive element. Regardless of the objective difficulty of describing what is meant by "happiness," people have been trying, as Wilhelm von Humboldt put it, "in order to reflect, the spirit must in its progressive activity stand still for a blink, to gather what was just represented into a unity and in this manner to posit it as an object against itself." The human effort to define happiness requires an understanding that the different ways of presenting it "have their own historical dimension, are surrounded by realities, and therefore cannot be transferred faithfully to other, distant times."

According to Zbigniew Tatarkiewicz, there are four main approaches to happiness:

- happiness as a favourable random circumstance, in other words a favourable set of events, the luck of the draw,
- happiness as intense joy, a state of bliss or intoxication,
- happiness as the possession of the highest goods,
- happiness as satisfaction with life.

The author emphasises that "this quadrupling is an abundant source of turbitudity in our thoughts of happiness, because four terms denoted as one tend to permeate each other in consciousness and produce a single concept with indefinite content [...] And even if philosophers accept only one of them, and eliminate the others, the average person will retain the tendency to use one word to describe these four different things." He then notes that total, complete and constant happiness is almost never attained. Therefore, one should always distinguish between the ideal of a happy life (the theoretical concept of happiness – K.K.) from the real sense of happiness that every individual experience or can experience. Tatarkiewicz recognises that humans are not able to experience happiness without interruption, because they "cannot constantly think about their life." It is also not possible to constantly experience pleasure, because "pleasure that lasts becomes sorrow." He proposes the following definition of happiness: "happiness is a lasting, complete and justified satisfaction with life," "justified" that is, not based on illusion, but on reality.

J.R. Averill and T.A. More, analysing the essence of happiness, describe it in four dimensions, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions of happiness

Degree of objectivity	
Activation level	Subjective (well-being)
high	Joy
Low	Satisfaction

Source: Averill J. R., More J. R. 2005, p. 832

The first dimension consists of sensations and is located on a continuum from low activity states – satisfaction, mental balance, peace of mind, to high activity states – joy, excitement, ecstasy. The second dimension, that is, the degree of objectivity, is connected with the determination of the emotional state on the basis of internal (subjective) or external (objective) criteria. It is worth emphasising, as the authors do, that “although satisfaction and joy differ in the level of activation, both of these emotions inevitably have a subjective component.” According to J.R. Averill and J.R. More, happiness should be identified with eudaimonia, so it is a short-term state and manifests itself in a certain type of behaviour. Happiness is about being involved in activities that are important for the individual, even if one has to endure temporary inconveniences and overcome difficulties during their implementation. It can be said, then, that happiness is an aspiration to something important, subjectively or objectively valuable. Maria Szyszkowska also follows this path, emphasising that “the pursuit of higher values, the unwavering and directed [...] human energy, the joy of fight, and the pursuit of an objective unattainable in its full dimension – the goal in which humanity is expressed first of all. Along this path, we can experience happiness, which increases our willingness to persevere in the chosen direction, regardless of any adversities.” As the author points out, the condition for achieving a sense of happiness is, on the one hand, an expectation of it, and on the other hand, the goal of the activities. Happiness can only be achieved if the individual is able to find support within themselves. M. Szyszkowska also notes that “lasting happiness is connected with a difficult path of internal development, which is closely connected with moving towards values exceeding the current dimension of existence. Pursuing utilitarian goals, one experiences at most pleasure, never happiness. [...] Happiness is intertwined with action with positive mobilisation towards the realisation of values.” Importantly, “happiness can be experienced when one rejects the world fixed in notions, because one grasps what is dynamic in the surrounding reality [...] Happiness is an experience, so it dies when it is put into words.” Other authors: Sonja Lytubomirsky, Ken Sheldon and Da-

vid Schakade not only attempted to “put into words” what is contained in the concept of “happiness,” but also proposed the following formula (happiness formula):

$$H = S + C + V$$

The level of happiness (H) experienced by people is, in their opinion, determined by the biologically conditioned potential range of the feeling of happiness (S), as well as conditions in life (C) and voluntary activities (V). “V” is, as J. Hadit emphasises, conscious, intentional actions that shape our attitude of acceptance and weaken our emotional attachment to the outside world. An important element of happiness is the internal motivation to be happy. According to Janusz Czapiński, there are three dimensions of happiness, which include:

- the will to live,
- general mental well-being,
- partial satisfaction.

The author distinguishes between two concepts: “happiness” and “sense of happiness.” In his opinion, happiness is “a positive attitude towards the goals with which a person identifies themselves, which give meaning to their life,” and this sense of happiness “has the character of a conscious assessment of one’s own life. These experiences and judgements can change much more easily under the influence of various circumstances than the core of happiness.”

From these definitions and approaches chosen for the purpose of this paper, it follows that happiness is related to an inner sense of well-being, which is the result of the possibilities an individual has to achieve real, personal (not imposed from outside) goals stemming from recognised values. Taking this approach to happiness as the starting point, in the further part of the study I will attempt to analyse images of happy childhood (often created or inspired by media reports) functioning in the social consciousness.

Models or appearances of a happy childhood?

The current discourse on childhood emphasises that a child “is described as a developmental entity rooted in culture and history [...]. It is assumed that childhood is socially constructed, and therefore not naturally given, but is shaped in important ways by its historical and cultural context.” Observing the reality in which contemporary children function, one cannot help but notice Danuta Wa-

loszek's observation that contemporary childhood is being "manipulated on an unprecedented scale. Everything for advertising, for profit, for popularity. The most dangerous are the attitudes of many parents and educators who agree to such manipulation." Childhood is treated as a stage of human life in which a person becomes, only in the future will they be valuable members of society, so it is possible to interfere in its course. In the public consciousness there is a current belief that young people develop "from an imperfect, incomplete individual, by means of various factors [...] they become more and more "mature and developed." Thus, childhood is the starting point for a better (and sometimes worse) life in adulthood. It is seen as a stage in which an investment is made in the subsequent lives of individuals. The consequence of this is that childhood is "accelerated" and the period of childhood is shortened, or even replaced with a fast adulthood, which manifests itself, for example, in the sphere of behaviour, dress, designates once typical of the older age group, sexuality, liberal customs, access to pathology, drug addiction, violence, banditry. As J.Z. Górnikiewicz stresses, "adolescents are rapidly penetrating the reality that until recently was restricted to adults, and the whole process is strongly catalysed by overwhelming new media, especially the Internet." After all, childhood is supposed to be a good springboard for a happy life in adulthood. For this to happen, it must be "a time of special work on oneself and on behalf of the years to come in terms of career/stabilisation." For we live in the culture of "only one time" – the future time, "the past time is treated as a place of contemptible relics, and the present time as a starting point for the future." In addition, the role of a happy childhood is also highlighted. It is impossible not to agree with Helena Izdebska, who notes that "the desire to ensure the happiness of children rises in many families (also in the media – K.K.) to the level of the most important issues, and with a very arbitrary interpretation of what it would mean, it generally produces negative results and, contrary to desires, impoverishes the process of upbringing." We live in a time of compulsion to be happy and compulsion to have a happy childhood. I will therefore analyse the five semblances of a happy childhood that emerge from the analysis of the lifestyles of children and their parents, which have been identified for this study:

- an abundant childhood,
- an active childhood,
- a childhood in the limelight,
- a boundless childhood,
- a childhood among people.

An abundant childhood

Robert Frank noted that contemporary people lose a lot of valuable energy in pursuing goals that only seem to bring happiness. One such objective is to ensure the abundance of material goods, which of course involves constant consumption. This thesis is further developed by Zygmunt Bauman, who emphasises that people who practice a consumerist (abundant – K.K.) way of life have above all a longing for the appropriation, possession and collection of objects, valued for their comfort and/or social respect, which they grant their owners. As the aforementioned author goes on to write, consumerism links the vision of happiness not so much with satisfying needs, but with the ever-increasing number and intensification of desires requiring immediate consumption and hasty replacement of objects which are supposed to satisfy those desires. We are therefore faced with a vicious circle of needs and desires, as new needs require new goods, and new goods require new needs and desires. In such a situation, material goods and goods age faster, which requires their immediate disposal and replacement with newer ones. Many valued things quickly lose their charm and splendour, “it may turn out that before the owner had a chance to enjoy them, they are suitable only for a rubbish dump.” Zygmunt Bauman adds that “one of the most important consequences of identifying happiness with the purchase of goods that bring happiness is postponing the hope that the pursuit of happiness will one day end. [...] Cunningly shifting dreams of happiness from a vision of a full and fully satisfying life to tracking the means necessary to achieve it, the markets make sure that the search never ends. The tracked objects change at a dizzying speed. Both the trackers themselves and their zealous mentors and guides are aware that if the search is to be successful, the items that are sought must quickly go out of use, lose their lustre, appeal and seduce power. We must be able to part with them without regret when it comes to replacing them with other, “newer and better” products, sentenced in advance to a similar fate. Happiness in the form of an anticipated state of bliss to come after a purchase is imperceptibly replaced by the state of acquisition that precedes it, an act full of joyful expectations, imbued with pure and impeccable, because not yet disappointed, hope. Children are included in this spiral of chasing after happiness, understood as abundance. Every day, dozens of advertisements are directed to them for products necessary, if not essential, for their happiness. They distort the image of a happy childhood by building a world that functions “on the principle of closed circulation,” in which games and product advertisements are presented, and the prizes are media artefacts that become synonymous with happiness un-

derstood as the possession of subsequent goods. Mariusz Jędrzejko and Karolina Karolczak-Wawrzęła note that the variety of offers addressed to children means that “to be somewhere, to see someone, to participate in something, to have something becomes not only an internal need, but also a result of external pressure.” Children who are encouraged, or even forced, to chase after more products, certain ways of consumption that are being offered to them in an increasingly attractive form, are becoming members of a community that Zygmunt Bauman called a swarm. Swarms are not burdened by concern for survival, rituals characteristic for groups, because swarms come together, split apart and gather again because of various occasions caused by always changing interests, attracted by ever new, usually moving targets. Such a goal is for children to have another, new toy, an object which will soon be replaced by a new, more attractive one. Children form a swarm around it, their only purpose to show that they each have one. The children who make up the swarm around the toy do not form a team focused on achieving a specific goal together, but are, as Z. Bauman put it, “the sum of parts, or a collection of self-driving elements, compounded by ‘mechanical solidarity’, expressed in the reproduction of the same patterns of behaviour (each child plays with their own toy as was suggested in a film or in an advertising spot” – K. K.). The swarm resembles a sequence of Warhol’s repeated paintings in which none is the original.” What is worse, every child wants to be in this swarm, because the swarm gives a temporary illusion of belonging. Unlike groups, “swarms do not know separatists or rebels – at most they find ‘deserters’, the ‘klutzes’ and ‘lost sheep’, who, outside of the swarm, are exposed to frustration, loss, feeling of lack of fulfilment, and thus they experience a lack of happiness.

Active childhood

Jonathan Haidt notes that contemporary humans constantly pose themselves new tasks and face external challenges, which in turn are supposed to make them happy. The author develops this idea as follows: “We dream of promotion, of getting into a prestigious school, or of successfully completing a major project. We work without respite, imagining how happy we would be if we managed to achieve this goal. Then we achieve it and – if we are lucky enough – we experience the euphoria that lasts for an hour or (at best, several hours), especially if the success came unexpectedly and if we found out about it in one moment. In most cases, however, we do not experience euphoria at all. When success seems more and more probable, and the crowning event only confirms what we have started to

expect, we experience a feeling of relief and pleasure connected with the fulfilment of the task. In such circumstances, our first thought is rarely “Hurrah! Fantastic!” and much more often: “OK. What is my next task?” In this observation, we can hear the conviction that it is difficult for contemporary people to feel the joy of what is happening and what they are experiencing at a given moment in their lives, because something is constantly pushing them forward. It is a desire to gain more, better, faster, to gain – in a rush, with a great effort – new, ephemeral goals. Intensive activity is typical of the “best quality” model of childhood. This model is dominated by the belief that a childhood in which one invests, which is intensely lived, is happier. The child’s day, week, month and school year are tightly filled with meticulously planned activities. There is no time or place for stopping and being bored, children are brought up “in the cultural matrix of a constant search, testing their talents and interests.” B. Smolińska-Theiss notes that “the traditional category of ‘free time’ does not reflect the complexity of the whole phenomenon related to educational plans and activities [...]” There are many of them, they tightly fill the days of many children. Every moment of inactivity causes a feeling of discomfort in the child and their loved ones, and as a consequence, the invention and creation of new activities. The life of contemporary humans is dominated by the category of “optimally used time.” According to Sue Palmer, it means randomly created hours spent with a child during which both the child and the adult have an obligation to be in good mood. However, their excess, as well as the overload of duties and tasks, causes tiredness and a sense of lack of free time, which affects both children and their parents. Instead of happiness, “the rush for achievement, constant action, the race with time, takes away the child’s childhood, which, once lost, will never return.”

Childhood in the limelight

Currently, the model of childhood in the limelight is popular and often uncritically implemented, and the presence of the child in the media is identified with their success and happiness. Many parents believe that by participating in the media, a child “touches” a better world and has the opportunity to meet popular and influential people. In fact, however, during participation in popular television programmes, the child is placed in the role of a jester, which is supposed to entertain and amuse the childish and immature adults gathered around them. It is cast as a “graceful creature,” a “sweet child, a sweetie, a doughnut to be eaten”, a sweet Elf – “sensitive and not resistant to reality, clumsy and in this awkwardness funny,

moving,” the adults that surround the child are people who care about their own “eternal youth” – in fact infantile, lost in a pre-figure culture. They are based on eternally young fools and all-knowing experts speaking on every possible subject. Most of them, as S. Palmer emphasises, “gained fame and wealth mainly due to being eccentric and egocentric.” In their expert roles, they encourage children to compete and race for the best possible places in successive instalments of the show in a not very sophisticated, often even primitive way. The child is supposed to meet the expectations of adults who want to have a good time. The child’s task is to play a role as described in the script, and their behaviour, a statement contrary to the expectations of the adult audience, evokes a grimace of dissatisfaction on the faces of the audience and unfriendly, confusing comments, which are illustrated in the following dialogue:

Host: What is a bribe?

Girl: Is it an instrument?

Host: But what kind? A more financial or musical one?

Girl: Musical

Lack of reaction from the audience and jury. The host quickly moves on to the next question. In this example, the child acted contrary to expectations, and its statement does not correspond to the convention of amusing adults by showing how children expose the “hidden parts” of the adult world. The child was supposed to be funny, and their statements should put adults – parents (guardians) – in morally ambiguous situations, expose family secrets, then an adult audience would have reasons for satisfaction, and the child protagonist of the programme would be rewarded with applause and positive comments, such as:

Girl: A curse is when my mom gets upset, she curses.

Jurors: Bravo!

One of the jurors: Something out of real life at last!

Situations in the limelight also stimulate antagonistic relationships between children and motivate them to take shortcuts, in a morally ambiguous way. Watching these shows, it is impossible not to agree with Dorota Zawadzka, who comments on the participation of children in one of the programmes with the following words “in *Mali Giganci* it suddenly turns out that you have no talent, that someone who does something completely different and in an objectively weak way is by some miracle better than you. It’s like Russian roulette. How will your child understand it? The no longer concerns the authors of the programme.” The au-

thor of the blog describes the situation of violation of a child's dignity, an important element of the broader psychological well-being of an individual. Heliodor Muszyński noted that "humans, as they grow up in society, assimilate a certain standard of respect, which people give to every representative of their own species. In other words, every individual in the course of social life discovers that a person, simply because they are a human being, has the right to respect for their person." As a result of such experiences, children discover something completely different – you are respected when you manage to put someone down, to humiliate a competitor, or when you say or do something that makes viewers laugh. Such situations also distort the essence of competition, making it a rivalry without rules. The point is to win at all costs.

A boundless childhood

The belief that the condition of a happy childhood is freedom and a lack of restrictions is based on the assumption that "children are not passive players in social structures and processes, but actively contribute to the creation and definition of their own social world." In adults' recollections of their happy childhoods, the categories that appear in the statements are: freedom from duties and worries, love of their loved ones, the possibility of spending time in free, unrestricted activity, in any place and in any way adopted by the child. Images of free childhood can be found in the excellent descriptions of free play in the novels of Astrid Lindgren, such as *The Children of Noisy Village* or *The Children on Troublemaker Street*. I would like to cite a fragment from the latter:

The other day Jonas and I were playing pirates and Lotta wouldn't leave us alone. So Jonas asked her:

"Don't you know what to *do* when you play pirates?"

"You stand on the table and jump and you are a pirate," Lotta said.

"But there is a much better way," Jonas told her. "You lie on the floor under your bed and you hold still."

"Why?" Lotta wanted to know.

"You just lie there pretending that you're a pirate and you keep on saying over and over, 'More food, more food, more food.' That's what pirates do," said Jonas.

Lotta believed this *is* what pirates do. She crawled under her bed and said, "More food, more food, more food," over and over again.

Jonas and I climbed up on our table and sailed away on the sea while Lotta stayed under her bed saying "More food." It was almost more fun watching Lotta than playing pirates.

[...]

Sometimes we play hospital. Jonas is the doctor, I am the nurse, and Lotta is a sick child lying in her bed.

"But I don't want to lie in my bed," Lotta said the last time we asked her to be the sick child.

"I want to be the doctor and stick a spoon into Mia Maria's throat."

"You can't be the doctor," Jonas said, "because you can't write a description."

"What can't I write?" Lotta asked.

"A description is what the doctor writes. It tells you how to take care of sick children," said Jonas.

Jonas can print and he hasn't even started school yet. He can read, too.

Jonas and I got Lotta to lie down in bed and be a sick child.

"How do you feel, my little girl?" Jonas asked. [...] "I have to give her a needle," he said.

Once when Jonas was sick the doctor gave him a needle so he would get well again and that's why he wanted to give Lotta a needle. Jonas picked up a darning needle which we made believe was the kind the doctor used.

But Lotta didn't want a needle. She kicked and screamed:

"Don't put a needle in me!" [...] "I still don't want a needle," Lotta howled.

That almost stopped us from playing hospital.

"Well, I'm going to write out a description anyway," said Jonas. He sat down at the table and wrote with a crayon on a piece of paper. He printed it in block letters, but I still couldn't read it.

Jonas and I think it's fun to play hospital. But Lotta doesn't think so.

According to Astrid Lindgren, a children's game is a time filled with imagining and creating reality according to what the child knows and is able to present in their mind about this reality. Imagining, for example, that they have received a letter from a mysterious sender who had hidden their treasure on an island, the child would have to act as a treasure hunter, so they would have to follow the rules of searching for a treasure. It is necessary to obtain accessories necessary to undertake treasure hunting activities. They must meet the criteria for treasure hunting. Roles must therefore be assigned to items and objects and rules must be laid down for how they are to be used. In so doing, the child uses their knowledge and experience. They take up and perform the game as they know it and are able. In playing, the child transforms what they can see and observe in their surroundings by choosing those elements that allow them to play according to the adopted rule(s). Unfortunately, today's children only have the opportunity to engage in activities that only seem to be free play; in fact, the style of play has changed dramatically, certainly it cannot be said to be free and unrestricted. The youngest children function in the environment of objects invented for them by adults, objects called modern, interactive toys. In fact, these items are not really for fun, but need to be activated by pressing a button. Many of them can be easily destroyed, damaged or lost during the manipulation undertaken by the child. Therefore, when play-

ing with them, they have to be careful and follow instructions. They cannot show their ingenuity and creativity, they cannot play as they wish. It can only reproduce movements, situations designed by those who know how to tie a child to a particular brand, as expressed in the following description advertising a popular toy:

Every year, Christmas edition Barbie's outfit surprises with its unusual cut and perfection of every detail. A stylish hairstyle, evening make-up and beautiful accessories emphasise the elegant and festive style. This is a great event for the collectors of the iconic Barbie doll. For 27 years now, the Christmas edition of Barbie has been appearing before Christmas and delighting with its outfit [...] This year's model of the Christmas Barbie is the quintessence of Christmas inspirations. The ruby-silver dress with bell-shaped cascades of ruffles looks perfect on both commercially available dolls: the light-skinned blonde and the dark-skinned brunette.

Instead of running around and exploring the surroundings of the house, climbing trees and wading in puddles, the contemporary child has been locked up in a room and given toys imitating a luxurious, glazed and unreal world (e.g. Barbie as a bride, the pink Barbie car, the pink Barbie wardrobe, pink hair styling instruments, artificial Barbie hair, etc.). Looking at such toys and children's attempts to play with them, it is impossible not to agree with Bronisława Dymara, who says that it is necessary to "bring back the element and joy of fun," that these appearances of fun should be replaced with authentic play bringing joy and experience important for future life.

A childhood among people

Many educators and psychologists studying social relations find that an individual's sense of happiness is connected with rich and diverse social contacts. A contemporary child operates in many social spaces and has the opportunity to establish a number of relationships with other people at home, in a kindergarten (school), in the neighbourhood, in a shop, in a backyard, during extracurricular activities, in a sports club. However, exposing individualism and satisfying individual needs and aspirations in the world means that other people are perceived as competitors and rivals to be treated with cautious and even mistrust. Therefore, most of the social contacts that are undertaken by people in the 21st century are fleeting meetings during which the youngest generation learns the principles of, among others, "civil inattention." As Anthony Giddens writes, "Civil inattention is not the same as ignoring another person. Each individual indicates recognition of the other person's presence, but avoids any gesture that might be taken as too

intrusive.” A. Giddens continues, “Our lives are organised around the repetition of similar patterns of behaviour from day to day, week to week, month to month, and year to year.” By observing and imitating one’s loved ones, receiving information from them about the desired reactions in a given situation, one learns to be among people so as not to enter into relations. It should be added that the majority of contemporary human relations (also those of a child) are transient, fast, short, and also indirect (on the Internet, by e-mail, etc.). Most children live in a world of unrealistic contact with other people, and their representative is a 9-year-old described by S. Palmer, who during the conversation “proudly presented his ‘virtual world’ – a bedroom where there was a TV set, a DVD player, a computer, a game console [...]. That’s where he spent most of his time after class.” When the author asked where the child’s parents were while he spent time in the virtual world, she received the following answer: “Dad watches matches on TV, and mom... mom is probably checking her e-mail.” Multimedia was designed to facilitate and improve interpersonal contacts and communication, meanwhile studies clearly show that children who have free access to television, computers and mobile phones, who are highly active on social virtual networks spend less time establishing direct social relationships with their peers, which in turn is reflected in a sense of lack of happiness and alienation. And yet, it has been known for a long time that real-time, face-to-face relationships with other people are crucial for an individual’s sense of happiness. For example, S. Pinker stresses that “the social bonds we create determine our level of satisfaction with life, cognitive ability and resistance to infections and chronic diseases.”

Summary

Summarising my reflections, I would like to recall the words of Zygmunt Bauman, who described the world around us and the people operating within it and noted that “you can give your loved ones expensive gifts to reward them for the time you could spend with them, but did not spend with them, for all the conversations you did not have and for the complete or almost complete lack of more convincing signs of our interest, compassion and care. But neither the excellent taste of restaurant dishes nor the high-priced brand labels attached to the gifts purchased in a store match the value of the happiness that could be brought by those goods the lack or shortage of which is thus intended to be compensated. Nothing can replace our shared presence at the table, with food prepared together with a view to their shared consumption, nothing can replace the time that someone important to us

will devote to patiently and attentively listen to our most intimate thoughts, hopes, fears, nothing can replace the authentic evidence of loving attention, dedication, and care. Since not all goods necessary to achieve a 'subjective sense of happiness' can be reduced to a common denominator (and this applies especially to material goods), they escape attempts at quantitative balancing." Instead of chasing happiness and creating the appearance of a happy childhood for children, it may be better to simply slow down the pace of life and nurture the moments that last, because "sharing the joy of life is the essence of a satisfying relationship between a child and a parent." Perhaps in this context it is worth considering the role of the teacher – the person supporting the parent in their parental role. Perhaps it is time for the teacher to give up the role of the guardian holding the child and their loved ones accountable for carrying out the next school task, "spurring" a spiral of chase after success measured by the results of tests and rankings, and to get closer to the child and their parents, so that together they can experience important and less important moments which are, after all, unique.

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