

THE FAMILY'S MEMORY IN US IN THE LIGHT OF NARRATION OF THREE GENERATIONS

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Radmila Švaříčková-Slabáková a Irena Sobotková (2018). *Rodina a její paměť v nás ve světle třígeneračních vyprávění* [The family's memory in us in the light of narration of three generations]. Praha:Triton

Family memory is a very topical issue, with very few experts in the Czech Republic focusing on it. The book is based on an interdisciplinary approach from the perspective of psychology and history. The view of psychology is directed towards understanding the functionality of the family, family relationships, family resilience, while the view of history is important for understanding the socio-historical context.

In the introduction, the authors define the basic theoretical grasp of the concept of „family memory“, which they understand as a process of negotiating and reshaping memories in a way that gives meaning to the family in the contemporary world. The book introduces us to the results of an intriguing research investigation in which three blood-related generations of 13 families were followed; the research sample was matched both in terms of highest educational attainment and the ratio of men to women (17:22). In describing the research method, the authors also pointed out, among other things, the added value of semi-structured interviews, which is the perceived new insight into the families' past. The starting point for the structure of the interviews was Anne Muxel's questionnaire. The authors managed to be sensitive and protect privacy even when dealing with very private topics. In a very extensive systematic content analysis, the authors proceeded in two directions: generation by generation to capture changes over time, and simultaneously generation by generation for each three-generation family to better understand what is specific, typical and unique to them.

The authors divide the book into four main chapters, which were compiled according to the results of the qualitative analysis of the data. Each chapter has a theoretical introduction, followed by the research findings, including the direct accounts of the participants, followed by the answers to the research questions and possible suggestions.

The first chapter, „Family Memory“, includes testimonies of families and individual generations on how they perceive the importance of their own history, to what extent genealogy is an essential part of their family history or a mere curiosity or even a useless thing. That family history is particularly important to the oldest generation, which fulfills Erikson's generativity, is to be expected, but readers may be surprised to learn that the youngest generation is much more interested in it than the middle generation, and in two cases family history is even only of interest to the youngest. Only in one

family were all generations interested in family history. There are many facts that strike the reader as they read through the book. For example, that when the authors talked to the participants about family history, it was mostly related to present life and childhood memories, to narratives and stories, rather than to family ancestry and family trees. The research confirmed the findings of other similarly focused investigations, namely that these are mostly not whole narratives but rather memory fragments. The authors report that across all generations it is relatively easy to recall memories of one's own parents and grandparents, partially of great-grandparents, and rarely of great-great-grandparents, but no more stories and narratives relating to great-great-grandparents appear. In the second half of the chapter, the authors describe how each generation remembers its mother, father, grandmother, and grandfather. In evaluating the results, they reflect on how surprised they were by the stereotypical picture of parents and grandparents that spoke across generations of gendered roles rather than personality traits.

Family stories thus form the basis of family memory. In the narratives of the oldest generations, the authors identified several features in family history that relate to the family atmosphere as well as to the values and traditions passed on. Functions described were the entertainment function associated with the creation of a good mood, the function of instruction, the transmission of values, or the function of satisfaction from the continuity of the family. The survey results only confirm that „sharing memories in well-functioning families is perceived by all generations as important and bonding in principle.“ However, the authors very aptly describe the importance of storytelling for family communication and strengthening family resilience. Telling unpleasant memories can often lead to making amends, explaining misunderstandings, and reconciling. The authors present the cases of four families who were much marked by wrongs, painful experiences, families who at first glance recalled less, families who outwardly appear to prefer not to recall. However, if they can draw on the inner strength of the family and do not generalize the hurtful memories, they look for the positive from them, thus using the selectivity of memories as a necessary feature for processing and incorporation, which at the same time strengthens family resilience. However, as the authors themselves conclude, „the art is to distinguish what is essential and should be clarified, and what can be left alone.“

The second chapter, „Memories and Childhood,“ was related to the goal of describing childhood memories in a multigenerational context, as attention to this line of research has not been given in the literature.

The authors sought to explore the psychological, e The authors sought to explore the psychological, emotional, relational and value aspects of memories in a multigenerational context. The description of how the participants remember their childhood and what they would wish for the next generations was already presented by the authors in their previous book „Even a family has a memory“ (2018). Now they have decided to explore what the research participants would not wish for the next generation to experience from their childhood. Two main categories were analysed as part of the analysis of the findings. The first one includes personal and family circumstances, the most frequently mentioned being bad relationships, break-ups, death, health

problems; the second one consists of unfavourable memories linked to socio-historical contexts. It was confirmed by the testimonies of the youngest generation, who could not name the social consequences they would not wish for their children in the future, that external circumstances and their influence on family history cannot be omitted, but at the same time we can live in a time when the influence of these circumstances is not significant. The authors are very positive about this trend, so if we do more to foster good relationships in families, families will be functional and the conditions for children's development will be optimal. However, the fact remains that the atmosphere in the family is more important than external influences.

An interesting part of the evaluated semi-structured interviews were also questions about memories and meanings. The most frequent recollection was in relation to tastes and smells, both in a positive and negative sense (Probably many of us can recall the smells of some of the school canteen meals that turned us on before we reached the serving window). The second most frequently described sense was hearing, which, unlike tastes and smells, was tied more to public spaces. However, these recollections tended to belong to the middle and oldest generation, and were often tied to sounds from war or other socio-historical events. According to the authors, sensory memories are very often linked to a person's emotional state.

Attention is also paid to the attachment to the place of the memory; in this investigation, too, time is confirmed to be an unreliable variable for memories. For example, the relationship to fathers' and mothers' families was also examined, which is most likely to be formed by subjectively perceived emotional closeness. Quotes from the participants explaining their family behaviour are very aptly chosen in the book; the authors were looking for similar patterns of behaviour.

The third chapter is devoted to intergenerational transmission. The authors of the research were interested in whether families continue to come together in the next generations, whether any customs and traditions are passed on in families, whether photographs or memorabilia are kept. And the connection was proven. An interesting finding was, for example, that the way intergenerational learning changes over time. The current generation is not satisfied with the formerly accustomed model of „watch now and you will learn“, but prefers non-violent learning, mutual communication, sharing, a sense of voluntariness. Therefore, the authors recommend that the younger generation should be taught by the older transmitting generation to take advantage of shared moments and situations in which they pass on experiences in a non-coercive way. The advantage of the current era is the strengthening of the role of grandparents, who are living to a higher age than they used to and have many more opportunities to pass on to the younger generation. Understandably, this transmission is reciprocal; children can help their grandparents navigate today's fast-paced era full of technical innovations. The fourth chapter relates the message of the family. The authors focused on what the participants considered most important in their life history, what they would like to pass on to the next generation of their families. It was clearly confirmed that the legacy refers especially to the emphasis placed on the functionality of the family, which must

create a safe environment for its members.

Family history connects the generations, ensuring family continuity and family integrity. Certainly the book under review has provided many suggestions for further psychological research as well as many purely human, personal issues. It prompts the reader to take many notes and stimulates a desire to navigate, record, locate, process and preserve as much information about one's own family as possible before it is lost. I haven't read a book as thought-provoking as this one in a long time.

(author's translation)

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