

**This is an electronic reprint of the original article.  
This reprint *may differ* from the original in pagination and typographic detail.**

**Author(s):** Puolimatka, Tapio

**Title:** The Educational Implications of the Atomistic Family Structure : How the Atomization of the Family Undermines the Education of Critical Citizens by Making People Vulnerable to Indoctrination and Propaganda

**Year:** 2017

**Version:**

**Please cite the original version:**

Puolimatka, T. (2017). The Educational Implications of the Atomistic Family Structure : How the Atomization of the Family Undermines the Education of Critical Citizens by Making People Vulnerable to Indoctrination and Propaganda. *Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia*, 38, 176-191. <https://doi.org/10.15388/ActPaed.2017.38.10800>

All material supplied via JYX is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of the repository collections is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or educational purposes in electronic or print form. You must obtain permission for any other use. Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone who is not an authorised user.

# The Educational Implications of the Atomistic Family Structure: How the Atomization of the Family Undermines the Education of Critical Citizens by Making People Vulnerable to Indoctrination and Propaganda

**Tapio Puolimatka**

Professor of educational theory and tradition  
Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä  
Address: P.O. Box 35, 40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland  
E-mail address: [tapio.puolimatka@jyu.fi](mailto:tapio.puolimatka@jyu.fi)  
Tel.: +358-408053648

**Abstract:** *This article uses historical and sociological research as the basis for a philosophically argued thesis about the negative educational consequences of the atomization of the family structure. Carle Zimmerman's theory of the social causality involved in the atomistic family structure is illustrated with an example of a Bolshevik social experiment and applied to the atomization of the modern Western family as shown by contemporary social science research. The focus is on the ways that the atomization of the family undermines the education of children into autonomous and critical citizens. Once the normative structures of marriage and family disintegrate, the identity and relationship rights of children are violated. This violation is often experienced by children as a rejection. Such a rejection wounds children morally and undermines their faith in moral norms. Furthermore, the disintegration of the family leaves children in a state of emotional and moral deprivation, which undermines their ontological security and their development into autonomous moral agents and critical citizens. By exposing them to the emotional influence of the cultural myths used in propaganda and indoctrination, these deprivations make them externally-directed instead of developing their capacity for autonomous deliberation and independent moral agency. Insofar as citizen's views and attitudes are directed from the outside, they fail to function as a counterbalance to the ruling elites, and democracy deteriorates into elite rule.*

**Keywords:** *Family, education, democracy, propaganda, indoctrination.*

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyze the negative educational implications of the atomistic family structure that is prevalent in Western societies today. As a general concept, the concept of *educational implications* refers to both positive and

negative implications for the educability of the members of a family – in other words, those influences that enhance their education as well as those that hamper it. The positive implications include the increase in the freedom to develop one's unique individuality. These positive influences are prominent in the milder forms

of atomization, where the relative independence of family members allows them more freedom to express their individuality. The negative influences, however, become more evident as the atomization of the family receives momentum and the negative consequences of family disintegration begin to overshadow the positive ones. They include increased emotional deprivation and moral uprooting due to the disintegration of the moral and social ties between family members. The disintegration of family ties undermines the child's ontological security, which threatens the child's ability to develop into an autonomous moral agent and a critical citizen. To compensate for the emotional, social and moral deprivation, isolated family members become dependent on the emotional stimulus provided by cultural myths employed in indoctrination and propaganda. Due to limitations of space, however, this article concentrates on these latter, negative influences.

The concept of an atomistic family refers to a family structure that is in the process of disintegration: the legal, moral, social and emotional ties between family members become looser and family members function more and more as separate individuals pursuing their unrelated goals and less and less as members of a morally, legally, socially and emotionally united family institution. This concept is central to Carle Zimmerman's (1947) typology of family history. The negative consequences of the atomization or disintegration of the family are also a central focus of contemporary family sociology. For example, the sociologist Patricia Morgan (2014, p. 218) points out that "family disintegration has

already inflicted massive problems and costs" and that "with the weakening of social cohesion and atomization of social life goes a diminishing sense of personal autonomy."

My research question: what kind of negative educational implications does the atomistic family structure have for educating citizens for a democratic society?

My main thesis is that the atomization of the family undermines children's ontological security and leaves them in a state of emotional and social deprivation, which makes them vulnerable to propaganda and indoctrination and thereby undermines democracy. I use historical research done by family sociologist Carle Zimmerman to form hypotheses about the linkage between family structure and cultural development in general. These hypotheses are then corroborated by social scientific research as well as philosophical considerations.

Although Zimmerman's 800-page study *Family and Civilization* was originally published in 1947, it has recently experienced a renaissance, with a new edition of the book being released in 2008. Zimmerman's work is based on a wide-ranging analysis of the major historical sources on the Western history of the family. It is difficult to find its equal in terms of thoughtful explication of family dynamics and their historical development.

Historical research can be used to argue that the atomization of the family has coincided with the development of society towards totalitarianism in two ways: (1) the atomization of the family makes citizens less able to stand against the totalitarian tendencies of elites, and (2) totalitarian

movements, once they have seized power, work intentionally towards the atomization of the family.

The main focus of this article is on the first process. One can distinguish two main reasons why the atomization of the family undermines democracy, as there are two different processes that lead to greater vulnerability to propaganda and indoctrination within an atomistic family structure:

- 1a) The fragility of close personal relationships within the atomistic family and its greater tendency for disintegration make family members vulnerable to the emotional power of cultural myths that are exploited in propaganda and indoctrination;
- 1b) Once the normative structures of marriage and family disintegrate, the identity and relationship rights of children are violated (Somerville, 2007). This violation is often experienced by children as a rejection. Such a rejection wounds children morally and undermines their faith in moral norms. As a result, they find it more difficult to acquire the transcendence inherent in the moral attitude. Insofar as they are controlled by their drives and appetites, they become more vulnerable to propaganda and indoctrination.

It is generally acknowledged that the social relationships, value frameworks and power structures within the family mold the personality of the family members and thereby influence the whole of society. Moral relationships within the family are reflected in moral relationships in the society at large.

Vulnerability to propaganda and indoctrination poses a danger to democracy. As

people are guided by mass media instead of taking an independent stance on issues relevant to the governing of democracy, critical discussion diminishes and power is concentrated in the hands of the elite.

## Family and Civilization

According to the Harvard sociologist Carle Zimmerman's classic *Family and Civilization*, the rise and fall of civilization is dependent on the family: "the final outcome in numerous great historical changes is decided by changes in the family" (Zimmerman, 1947, p. 782).

Zimmerman argues that in familism "we can approach closely that dream of the philosophers, determining the 'first' cause in social systems" (p. 782). He further states, "thus when we speak of the 'fall' of great civilizations like those of Rome or Greece, in which an inner decay is the main agency, we are justified in giving an absolute causal analysis" in terms of familistic decay (pp. 782-783). Zimmerman points out:

This single-factor statement of historical cause does not preclude all the other "causes" set forth by the philosophers of history. It simply points out that the final outcome in numerous great historical changes is decided by changes in the family. It gives the family a unique main-index place in judging historical change; it also makes family change the final decisive force (p. 783).

Thus, Zimmerman's main thesis is that civilization grows out of familism. He further describes the process that occurs when civilizations become more affluent:

[Civilization] loses its original connection with the basic spring which furnished the essence of civilization. When this pro-

cess has gone too far, the civilization soon exhausts its inventory of social “material.” Then occurs a reaction or decay. The amount of reaction and decay and the length of these “Dark Age” periods seem to depend upon how quickly the culture finds its way back to the fundamental mother-source – familism (p. 783).

### Three Main Family Structures

According to Zimmerman, there are three main family structures that have dominated the history of the family in the West: *trustee*, *domestic*, and *atomistic* (two stages). These three family structures have different value frameworks as well as different power structures. Thereby, they create different educational frameworks for raising children and helping them develop the capacities needed for well-functioning citizenship in a democratic society. In this way, family structure has an impact on society as a whole. (1) The trustee family functions as the representative of the clan or tribe and has little independence. After the fall of Rome, this family type was dominant in Europe from 500 to 1000. (2) The nuclear family is at its strongest in the domestic family, which is relatively independent of the larger clan while it is committed to fundamental family values and norms (1000-1800). At the first stage of (3) the atomistic family, the outward form of the marriage is largely intact while the values and norms supporting it gradually disintegrate. The emphasis is on individual rights rather than on family norms (1800-2000). (4) The atomistic family, in its second stage, is the weakest form of the family: the disintegration of the family extends even to its outward structures (2000-).

The atomistic family implies the gradual disintegration of central family norms, such as permanence, exclusivity (i.e., faithfulness), complementarity of the sexes, the norm of biological connectedness, respect for the identity and relationship rights of children. The disintegration of these norms undermines children’s emotional and moral development.

### The Main Features of a Society Governed by the Atomistic Family

Zimmerman points out that there are various “forms of action and thought” that characterize the atomistic phase of the family structure. He detects these features in both ancient Greece and Rome as well as in modern European history. These features include the following aspects:

- [1.] Increased and rapid “causeless” divorce [...]
  - [2.] Decreased number of children [...]
  - [3.] Elimination of the real meaning of the marriage ceremony [...]
  - [4.] The spread of antifamilism of the urban and pseudointellectual classes [...]
  - [5.] Breaking down of most inhibitions against adultery [...]
  - [6.] Revolts of youth against parents so that parenthood becomes more and more difficult [...]
  - [7.] Rapid rise and spread of juvenile delinquency [...]
- (pp. 776-777).

Zimmerman argues that the development of the atomistic family will ultimately prove “devastating to high cultural society” (p. 19). He underscores his statement with analyses of how the development of the atomistic family undermined the culture of ancient Greece and Rome. Zimmerman suggests that “the antifamilism

of times of high atomism is not good for society and hence becomes antithetical to the individual” (p. 782). For example, Zimmerman linked a family breakdown to the “rapid rise and spread of juvenile delinquency” (p. 777).

### **The Consequences of Family Atomization**

What kind of consequences does the atomization of the family have for the well-being of children? I address this question from two viewpoints. First, I present a historical example from recent history. Second, I refer to some contemporary social science research on the subject.

First, I discuss the issue from the historical point of view. While the educational implications of various family structures have been analyzed in the history of ancient Greece and Rome as well as in the history of modern Western societies (see Zimmerman, Sorokin), the development from the domestic family structure into the atomistic one is visible at an accelerated pace in the French Revolution of 1789 and in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia. Since the French Revolution, the atomistic family structure has gradually gained ascendancy in the West.

### **An Example: the Bolshevik Social Experiment**

I begin my discussion with a historical example from the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Almost immediately after seizing power, the Bolsheviks introduced a new marriage law that completely changed the structural norms governing marriage. By breaking up the traditional family, they

aimed to gain firmer control over individuals by subjecting them to the influence of propaganda and indoctrination.

At the beginning of their rule, the Bolsheviks regarded the strong nuclear family as a threat to their attempt to achieve complete control over the country’s citizens. That is why they first endeavored to weaken the nuclear family. The social consequences of weakening marriage were catastrophic, however: hundreds of thousands of children were abandoned and became street children. The cost of disintegrating marriage, however, eventually became too high for society, and the Soviet state was forced to back off from its utopian program. They began to regard their earlier legislation as confusion created by counter revolutionaries.

The Family Code, instituted by the Bolsheviks in September 1918, introduced radical changes in marriage and divorce, in the laws of inheritance and those governing abortion. Divorce proceedings were revolutionized. Article 81 of the code stated: “The mutual consent of the husband and wife or the desire of either of them to obtain divorce shall be considered a ground for divorce” (quoted in Ginsborg, 2014, p. 30).

The justification offered for the Bolshevik reformation of marriage sounded humane. Alexandra Kollontai, the first Commissar of Public Welfare in the Bolshevik regime, proclaimed easy divorce as a way for women to free themselves of violent husbands. In her pamphlet, *Communism and the Family*, she celebrated the new divorce law. “Henceforth, a working woman will not have to petition for months or even for years to secure the right to

live separately from a husband who beats her and makes her life a misery with his drunkenness and violent behavior” (Kollontai; quoted in Ginsborg, 2014, p. 36). Kollontai, however, hoped for the imminent withering away of the entire family. She argued that, under the conditions of revolutionary Russia, “the family is ceasing to be necessary either to its members or to the nation as a whole” (ibid.).

The revolutionary elites were so caught up in their utopian ideology that they could not discern the basic preconditions of ordinary life. The fact is that, in those conditions, a stable family would have been absolutely necessary to protect vulnerable mothers from exhaustion and hunger, and children from abandonment. Paul Ginsborg (2014, p. 49) writes:

Bolshevik family legislation on marriage and divorce, designed to protect women from violent husbands and to liberate them from unhappy unions, could be used in quite a different way by the other sex. Men slipped in and out of marriage with embarrassing ease, often acting irresponsibly in terms of the families they had created. By 1925-6 the urban parts of the USSR had far higher divorce rates than those of Western Europe. We have no way of telling how many of these divorces were instigated by men and how many by women, but many social and political commentators of the time commented upon the plight of single, unemployed mothers who were unmarried or divorced or widowed. Very often the only way out for these women was prostitution.

The plight of these single mothers added to their vulnerability and the probability of their children ending up as homeless and abandoned. Many different factors contributed to this human tragedy. The death

of many men in the First World War left numerous women struggling alone. The horrors of civil war, the terrible epidemics of cholera, typhus and scarlet fever, along with widespread famine, all added to the number. The liberal divorce law was one more factor that left mothers vulnerable and led them to abandon their children. “By late summer 1921, legions of children from that region, having lost their parents or been abandoned, bedraggled and lice-infected, tottering from exhaustion and hunger, began to appear on the streets of Moscow” (Ginsborg, 2014, p. 50.) At the height of the wave, in 1921-2, the homeless and abandoned children numbered between four and seven million (ibid.).

The negative consequences of the atomization of the family were recognized in the preparation for the new Family Code of 1926. Dmitry Kursky, the People’s Commissar for Public Justice, noted that new problems had arisen in the Soviet society in the years after the Family Code of 1918. The number of non-registered marriages and divorces had increased greatly. In their wake came the problem of abandoned and destitute women. The old Family Code had envisaged inadequate support for women and children in the event of marriage break-up (Ginsborg, 2014, p. 58).

## **Contemporary Social Science Research**

This historical example about the negative effects of the atomization of the family is, admittedly, an extreme one. However, it helps us to understand our contemporary Western situation by highlighting the connections between the legal, moral, social and emotional aspects of family ties and

their consequences for the well-being of children. Current social science research shows similar negative consequences of the disintegration of the family, albeit in milder and more gradual forms.

There are various ways that a family can disintegrate. Often the disintegration starts with the loosening of the legal, moral, and emotional ties between family members and their alienation from each other. Once this inner disintegration has advanced, it may lead to outward disintegration, such as divorce.

According to current social science research, adolescents who witness the divorce of their parents are more prone to depression, failure at school, lower academic attainment, temptations of illegal drugs and alcohol as well as crime. High divorce rates predict low rates of participation in community politics, recreation and educational activities (Christensen, 2008, pp. 294-295). Divorce is, of course, better for children than a high-conflict marriage, which is the worst example of the disintegration and atomization of the family.

A stable and low-conflict marriage has significance for the healthy development of the child. As Moore et al. (2002) find, "research clearly demonstrates that family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps children the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage." Furthermore, they observe that "Parental divorce is also linked to a range of poorer academic and behavioral outcomes among children. There is thus value for children in promoting strong, stable marriages between biological parents."

Extensive meta-analyses of relevant social science research show the benefit

of the intact family of married biological parents for children's healthy development (McLanahan et al., 2005; Parke, 2003; Wilcox et al., 2005). Family structure – the set of residential arrangements of children's main caregivers – has important consequences for the welfare of children. "Numerous studies have shown that individuals generally fare best both in childhood and in later life when they grow up with both of their biological parents [...] Put simply, children benefit from the economic and emotional investment of parents who reside together continuously, and these investments are generally higher among biological than among surrogate parents." (Heuveline et al., 2003, p. 48)

A stable and low-conflict marriage has great positive significance for children's emotional well-being. Children who grow in intact married families are significantly less likely to suffer from depression, alcohol and drug abuse, delinquency, and thoughts of suicide than children of divorce are (Wilcox et al., 2005, p. 27). Children in divorced families are worse off than children of continually married parents on measures of psychological well-being (depression, distress symptoms), self-esteem (positive feelings about oneself, perceptions of self-efficacy), and conduct (behavior problems, aggression). Children of divorce have weaker emotional bonds with mothers and fathers than do their peers in two-parent families. Studies show that the differences in psychological well-being between children with divorced parents and children with continuously married parents persist well into adulthood (Amato, 2005, pp. 77-78).

The research team of Judith Wallerstein originally started studying the effects of



divorce on children with the optimistic assumption that children can easily adjust to living in new family forms and will quickly recover from divorce. After conducting a 25-year longitudinal study that followed children of divorce, she ended up changing her mind: her research revealed that the negative impact of divorce did not limit itself to childhood and adolescence but became most evident in adulthood. “When it comes time to choose a life mate and build a new family, the effects of divorce crescendo” (Wallerstein et al., 2001, p. xxix).

Loren Marks (2012, pp. 735-736.) sums up the state of research as follows:

Over the past few decades, differences have been observed between outcomes of children in marriage-based intact families and children in cohabiting, divorced, step, and single-parent families in large representative samples [...] Differences have recurred in connection with myriad issues of societal-level concern including: (a) health, mortality, and suicide risks, (b) drug and alcohol abuse, (c) criminality and incarceration, (d) intergenerational poverty, (e) education and/or labor force contribution, (f) early sexual activity and early childbearing, and (g) divorce rates as adults.

As the family withers, the state must grow in order to compensate for the failure of the family. The social and economic costs of the disintegration of the family are immense. A study by the Brookings Institution finds that \$229 billion in welfare expenditures between 1970 and 1996 in the United States is a result of the breakdown of the marriage culture and the subsequent exacerbation of social ills: teen pregnancy, poverty, crime, drug abuse and health problems. Benjamin Scafidi (2008) estimated that divorce and unwed childbear-

ing cost taxpayers \$112 billion each year (Girgis et al., 2012, p. 46).

A more grievous problem for democracy is that society easily resorts to a widespread use of propaganda and indoctrination to replace the moral fabric that is traditionally maintained by the family. Once the family disintegrates, the individual is left without the close personal relationships that would satisfy one’s need for emotional intimacy and moral support. To compensate for the lack of emotional intimacy, the individual becomes dependent on the emotional stimulus provided by the cultural myths employed in indoctrination and propaganda (Ellul, 1973). The state, as a result, usurps more power and becomes more totalitarian.

### **Democracy, Autonomy and the Family**

What kind of educational implications does the atomization of the family have for educating citizens for a democracy? At the most general level, my claim is that without the support of a close family unit, children are unable to develop the capacities needed for the continuation and development of democracy. Systemic constraints are insufficient to maintain the stability of the democratic system, as is shown by the history of Germany in the 1930s. Citizens’ emotional and moral autonomy are preconditions for the stability of democracy; once these powers weaken, people become vulnerable to propaganda. Democracy is possible only when citizens are sufficiently autonomous to resist the lure of public propaganda.

The very concept of democracy entails the concept of autonomous and critical cit-

izenship, since *democracy* means the political rule by the people, which the latter cannot really exercise unless their political choices are based upon informed deliberation on the alternatives. The relationship between democracy and autonomous, free, and critical citizenship can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The democratic ideal of the rule of the people assumes that individual citizens are capable of free moral agency;
- 2) Free moral agency assumes that the agent's actions are not simply the results of factors beyond his control, but involve free intentionality;
- 3) Free intentionality assumes an advanced capacity for reflection and for making appropriate moral distinctions;
- 4) A reflective moral consciousness and capacity for critical thinking cannot develop without being educationally fostered through a non-manipulative environment together with a high level of care, especially in the early stages of a child's development;
- 5) Self-knowledge protects a person from manipulation and thus safeguards his rational and moral autonomy.

Autonomous citizens are a precondition of democracy. If citizens are guided from the outside by propaganda and indoctrination, their right to vote may be a mere formality, since their voting behavior can be manipulated by unscrupulous seekers for power. And because close family ties cannot be collectively manipulated, these ties strengthen democracy.

In contrast, if a person can be manipulated at will, his/her political influence is only ostensible. (S)he cannot indepen-

dently control those in positions of power. Society becomes divided into a ruling elite and the mass to be manipulated.

Once the family disintegrates and becomes more atomistic, the children are, in a sense, given more freedom, as their parents are less able to guide and control their lives. This may not imply an increase in the development of children's autonomy, however. Parental supervision may be replaced by the control of peers, which may be more totalitarian than that of the home. This kind of peer control may then contribute to more juvenile delinquency and moral disintegration. Thus, the conditions most congenial to acting out autonomy are not necessarily the ones most conducive to its development. Even if a person is best able to act autonomously in a situation with the least restrictions, it does not follow that she would grow into an autonomous person in such a situation; the atomization of the family and the resulting permissive education does not guarantee the development of autonomy. The development of autonomy presupposes at least one close and relatively stable relationship at the early stages of a child's development. Brainwashing has been discovered to be effective on people who lack close emotional relationships (Keiser & Keiser, 1987, p. 20).

It is a serious failure to threaten a child's ontological security, as often happens with the disintegration of the family. Insecure persons will not be critical citizens, because they lack the strength to oppose prevailing opinions. If a child is deprived of unconditional affection in his early development, his native feelings are left unused. The tragic consequences

of such conditions for the development of personality can be exemplified in children who have grown up in institutions where they have received only minimal care. The following is a description of a child of 45 weeks who has grown up in such an institution.

Outstanding were his soberness, his forlorn appearance, and lack of animation. The interest that he showed in the toys was mainly for holding, inspecting and rarely mouthing. When he was unhappy he now had a cry that sounded neither demanding nor angry – just miserable – and it was usually accompanied by his beginning to rock. The capacity for protest which he had earlier was much diminished. He did not turn to adults to relieve his distress or to involve them in a playful or pleasurable interchange. He made no demands. The active approach to the world, which had been one of the happier aspects of his earlier development, vanished. As one made active and persistent efforts at a social interchange, he became somewhat more responsive, animated and motorically active, but lapsed into his depressed and energy-less appearance when the adult became less active with him. (Provence & Lipton 1962, pp. 134-135)

This extreme case provides a picture of how the development of a child can be thwarted as the result of the disintegration of his home and the lack of affection he receives in an institutional setting. Only a person with a sense of her own worth knows how to protest when she is not treated with proper respect.

The emotional capacities developed in a close and affectionate relationship at home are necessary preconditions for the development of an independent personality, capable of critical thinking. Unless a person has an advanced capacity for reflection,

one can be manipulated and led along paths that threaten one's moral independence. An undifferentiating consciousness incapacitates the person for resisting the manipulation of one's moral feelings. It is not sufficient to deal with this manipulation intellectually; one should also be able to analyze one's moral responses and set them in proper perspective (Siegel, 1988, p. 41).

### **Propaganda and Indoctrination, Myths and Ideology**

I have argued that the disintegration and atomization of the family results in children who lack the emotional and moral support to adequately develop their capacity for moral agency and critical self-reflection. The lack of emotional and moral autonomy exposes them to manipulation by propaganda and indoctrination.

Insofar as young people fail to develop sufficient emotional and moral autonomy, their rationality functions well only on the surface. In the depths of their consciousness, they are irrationally guided by their needs and desires, which can be influenced by modern methods of mass communication. The powerful images used by mass media may bypass people's conscious thought processes and have a direct impact on their emotions. With the help of emotionally charged images, reality is represented in a simplified form using images, rhetorical expressions, stories, advertisements, slogans and interpretations. These methods of propaganda are then augmented by indoctrinatory teaching at school.

Jackall (1995, pp. 3, 7) has suggested that propaganda influences human behavior

ior and attitudes in ways that largely bypass rational deliberation. Skillful propagandists become “technicians in sentiment,” who are able to determine which symbols will resonate with particular audiences. Interpretative experts create representations, which bear only a passing resemblance to the actual realities they portray, instead supplanting them, for all practical purposes, once they are internalized by great masses of people.

One central connection between indoctrination and propaganda is that complex propaganda does not function well without “pre-propaganda,” the conditioning of minds with vast amounts of incoherent information posing as “facts” and “education.” Systematic and extensive indoctrination (i.e., one-sided teaching that does not develop people’s critical capacities) makes people vulnerable to propaganda.

Kellen (1973) points out that people, who have been educated in this way, are the most vulnerable to propaganda for three reasons: (1) they absorb large amounts of second-hand information whose validity they have not learned to evaluate. (2) They feel a compelling need to form an opinion on every important question of our time, and thus easily succumb to opinions offered to them by propaganda for interpreting disconnected pieces of information. (3) They consider themselves capable of “judging for themselves” without the support of natural communities, like families and the opportunities for communication that they offer.

Since the microcommunities of the past, like families, the Church and villages are disintegrating, the individual is left within a mass society with needs that propaganda offers to fulfill. An isolated,

lonely and ineffectual individual is offered personal involvement and participation in important events, an outlet and excuse for one’s more doubtful impulses, a sense of being on the side of the good and the right. In short, one is offered a meaning for one’s existence (Kellen, 1973, vi).

Since the images used by mass media convey a partly illusionary picture of reality and use methods that bypass people’s conscious reflection, they constitute “a menace which threatens the total personality,” according to French sociologist Jacques Ellul (1973, p. xvii). Insofar as a human being is “malleable, uncertain of himself, ready to accept and follow many suggestions, and is tossed about by all the winds of doctrine,” propaganda may produce “the most profound changes in his personality” (p. xvi). The fragility of human beings is exposed in their readiness to accept images that make them feel better and help support their wishful thinking.

### **Cascades of Information and Opinion**

A major reason for the effectiveness of propaganda is a self-reinforcing process of collective belief formation, which produces what are known as “availability cascades.” Timur Kuran and Cass Sunstein (1999) define availability cascades as social cascades “through which expressed perceptions trigger chains of individual responses that make these perceptions appear increasingly plausible through their rising availability in public discourse” (p. 685).

When public discussion is limited to the repetition of superficial and one-sided slogans at the cost of critical analysis and

sincere discussion, availability cascades easily develop. Insecure people are more prone to protect their social image than truth and justice. Many people, when subjected to such an availability cascade, do not have the time or energy to analyze the issue independently. In addition, they may be unwilling to express their opinions sincerely, insofar as they are afraid that it might lead to social isolation. Therefore, availability cascades gradually lead to opinion cascades that succeed in convincing public opinion even though most people have never formed an independent critical opinion on the matter.

The discussion becomes one-sided, because the issue can be discussed only in a certain light, in a politically correct discussion. Those who still dare to express their thoughts honestly are given negative labels that ostracize them from their social environment and cause others to avoid their opinions and their company. When opponents' opinions have been labeled as prejudiced, information and opinion trends begin to develop. As they grow and become stronger, they eventually take public opinion with them and become information and opinion cascades. In the end, society has only one acceptable opinion and all those opposing it are morally suspect. As a result, public discussion becomes one-sided. All public media proclaim one orthodox doctrine and are afraid to give room to opposing views in order to avoid having their public image tarnished.

Once these trends become information and opinion cascades that take the whole society with them with an almost irresistible force, they begin to direct public decision-making. These kinds of sudden

changes in public opinion are not based on rational reasons, but on emotional influences, built on the prevalence of one-sided media coverage and the threat of social ostracism. These factors together make emotionally and morally insecure individuals deny their real thoughts and values in public in order to maintain their positive social standing. This kind of process restricts freedom of thought and creates a threat to the functioning of democracy: popular rule does not function properly if citizens do not dare express their opinions sincerely.

The mechanism driving this process is a combination of information and reputation motives: "people with incomplete personal information on a particular matter base their own beliefs on the apparent beliefs of others" (Kuran and Sunstein, 1999, pp. 685-687). They subject themselves to social influences and falsify their own preferences to earn social approval and avoid social disapproval. Availability entrepreneurs and activists manipulating public discussion try to initiate availability cascades in order to promote their political objectives.

According to Kuran (1998, p. 535), the threat of social ostracism makes people unwilling to express their opinions honestly, sincerely and argumentatively. Discussants are controlled by the inhibitions that public media have succeeded in creating in the minds of citizens with the help of emotionally charged images. They have reason to be afraid of serious consequences to their reputation and social image were they to defend views that have been attached with negative labels in the public. People know that they will have to pay a heavy price for expressing their

sincere opinions on an issue labeled with emotionally charged images.

In order to avoid social ostracism, Kuran (1997, pp. 3-5, 26-30) contends that people begin to hide their real thoughts, as they are afraid that they might not be able to stand the isolation. This initiates a process that Kuran calls “preference falsification.” People refrain from expressing their genuine opinions and values in order to avoid social isolation. As more and more people fail to express their genuine opinions, the politically correct view gains more prevalence. Differing opinions gradually disappear from public discussion, because people are unwilling to pay the high price for expressing them. As a result, the society gradually drifts towards a mass illusion: the whole society is governed by the images that are separated from reality, because hardly anyone dares to express their sincere thoughts.

Furthermore, Kuran (1998, pp. 536-537) argues that hypocrisy and insincerity are the most serious problems in contemporary democracy. He further elaborates this point:

In keeping their insights to themselves, knowledgeable individuals impoverish public discourse, which impairs society’s capacity to generate compromises and reforms [...] Under these conditions, private thought languishes as well, making problems seem insoluble. Thus, the social pressures that impel people to falsify their preferences, values, and knowledge can exact potentially huge social costs (p. 542).

Sincerity easily disintegrates under social pressure, which obstructs the functioning of democracy and leads to harmful social decisions.

Once families disintegrate, children become emotionally insecure. They then come to lack the emotional stability and autonomy to stand against the threat of social ostracism used by propaganda to make people conform to politically correct views.

## **The Power of Ideology**

In addition to emotionally charged images, propaganda uses ideas that have been crystallized into ideologies. Ideology differs from myth in that a myth is much more deeply imbedded in the human psyche, is more emotionally charged and has stronger powers of activation. Even though ideology consists of a set of ideas that are often irrational, they are still ideas rather than mythical images. What myth and ideology have in common is that they are collective phenomena and their persuasive force springs from the power of collective participation (Ellul, 1973, pp. 116-117).

Ideologies further work towards the disintegration of the family, because they do not respect fundamental norms and values, but regard them as material that may be remolded according to the needs of ideology. As argued by Goudzwaard et al. (2008, p. 182):

Ideologies possess a power or force by which they influence our norms and warp our values. With ideologies, values like justice, love, truth, freedom, solidarity, and *oikonomia* (economy) become emptied and then refilled for the sole purpose of legitimating certain ends and justifying the means required to implement them. Ideologies thus cripple the original power of these profound direction-setting ways.

Goudzwaard and his colleagues (2008, pp. 33-34) state that the French Revolu-

tion provides us with a good illustration of what this means in practice. Since a society of freedom, equality and brotherhood was felt to be an unquestionably good and just goal, it seemed appropriate and morally justifiable to execute by guillotine hundreds of citizens in the middle of Paris day after day. These executions were inspired by romantic idealism, and at the same time they were carried out with business-like precision and military effectiveness. The society of the French Revolution was dominated by a new kind of rationality that inspired people to believe that executions were good and just for the purpose of achieving prosperity and freedom for all.

Goudwaard et al. (2008, p. 34) then state that, in accordance with the same ideological model, both Nazism and Communism set an absolute goal or end (the arrival of the Third Reich and the victory of the working class, respectively). For the purpose of achieving this end, all means were allowed and truth itself was to be defined in its terms. Moral principles were reoriented to these absolute goals: the Nazis claimed that “the Party is always right” and Lenin insisted that the “Truth” is whatever that advances the arrival of the Communist utopia. Such ideological reinterpretations were used to justify terror and violence (e.g., concentration camps and the gulag archipelago) as means for achieving the idealized end.

When an end is made absolute, whatever comes in the way of achieving the end becomes evil. Opponents become evil, untrustworthy and immoral by definition and are made into scapegoats for everything that is wrong. The Nazi ideology forced the Jews into this position and thereby jus-

tified their total annihilation in the Final Solution of the Jewish Question. Those fighting for the absolute end are good by definition, even if they resort to cruelty and cause suffering to other people.

Massive propaganda fascinated and mesmerized the societies living under Nazism and Soviet Communism, and directed people to follow the plans of the ruling elite. People had to speak well of the State and the Party. Illusion, rather than a sense of reality, began to rule these societies.

Totalitarian ideologies undermine the healthy foundations of society, because they lead to a reduced, truncated view of humanity and the world. The ideological distortion of reality conflicts with the realities of ordinary life, and produces human misery. This conflict will lead either to the disintegration of society or the demise of the ideology. Either the society succumbs to the ideology and slowly disintegrates or the ideology loses its appeal because of its conflict with reality.

## **Conclusion**

The atomization of the family threatens children’s ontological security, leaves them without close emotional relationships and undermines their morality. As a result, they find it more difficult to develop into emotionally stable and morally conscious individuals, capable of autonomy and critical thinking. Such individuals become vulnerable to the emotional lure of the myths employed in propaganda. Once propaganda builds availability and information cascades, such insecure people find it difficult to resist the pressures to conform. This leads to a situation where rule by the people is replaced by the ma-

nipulative power of the elites. The resulting system is democratic in name only, as it lacks the essential ingredient of democ-

racy: critical citizens capable of forming an independent counterpoise to the power of the elites.

## REFERENCES

- Amato, P. R. (2005). The impact of family formation change on the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of the next generation. *The Future of Children*, Vol. 5 (2), p. 75–96.
- Christensen, B. (2008). Family and civilization: Carle Zimmerman confronts the West's third family crisis," in C. Zimmerman: *Family and Civilization*, James Kurth. (Ed.). Wilmington, DE: ISI Books.
- Ellul, J. (1973). *Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Gingsborg, P. (2014). *Family politics: Domestic life, devastation and survival 1900–1950*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Girgis, S.; George, R. P.; Anderson, R. T. (2012). *What is marriage? Man and woman: A defense*. New York, NY: Encounter Books.
- Goudzwaard, B.; Vander Vennen, M.; Van Heemst, D. (2007). *Hope in troubled times: A new vision for confronting global crises*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Heuveline, P.; Timberlake, J. M.; Furstenberg, F. Jr. (2003). Shifting childbearing to single mothers: Results from 17 western countries. *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 29 (1), p. 47–71.
- Jackall, R. (1995). Introduction, in R. Jackall (Ed.) *Propaganda* (pp. 1–9). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Keiser, T. W.; Keiser, J. L. (1987). *The anatomy of illusion: Religious cults and destructive persuasion*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Kellen, K. (1973). Introduction, in Jacques Ellul: *Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Kuran, T. (1997). *Private truths, public lies: The social consequences of preference falsification*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kuran, T. (1998). Insincere deliberation and democratic failure. *Critical Review*, Vol. 12 (4), p. 529–544.
- Kuran, T.; Sunstein, C. R. (1999). Availability cascades and risk regulation. *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 51(4), p. 683–768.
- Marks, L. (2012). Same-sex parenting and children's outcomes: A closer examination of the American Psychological Association's brief on lesbian and gay parenting. *Social Science Research*, Vol. 41(4), p. 735–751.
- Moore, K. A., Jekielek, S. M., Emig, C. (2002). Marriage from a child's perspective: How does family structure affect children and what can we do about it? *Child Trends Research Brief*, Bethesda, MD: Child Trends. Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org/files/marriagerb602.pdf>.
- Morgan, P. (2014). *The marriage files: The purpose, limits and fate of marriage*. London: Wilberforce Publications.
- Provence, S., Lipton, R. C. (1962). *Infants in institutions*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Scafidi, B. (2008). *The taxpayer costs of divorce and unwed childbearing: First-ever estimates for the nation and for all fifty states*. New York, NY: Institute for American Values. Retrieved from <http://www.americanvalues.org/pdf/COFF.pdf>.
- Siegel, H. (1988). *Educating reason*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Somerville, M. (2007). Children's human rights and unlinking child–parent biological bonds with adoption, same-sex marriage and new reproductive technologies. *Journal of Family Studies*, Vol.13 (2), p.179–201.
- Wallerstein, J.; Lewis, J.; Blakeslee, S. (2001). *The unexpected legacy of divorce*. New York, NY: Hyperion.
- Wilcox, W. B.; Doherty, W.; Fisher, H. et al. (2005). *Why marriage matters: Twenty-six conclusions from the social sciences*. New York, NY: Institute for American Values.
- Zimmerman, C. (1947). *Family and civilization*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.
- Zimmerman, C. (2008). *Family and civilization*, (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.), J. Kurth (Ed.). Wilmington, DE: ISI Books.



**ATOMISTINĖS ŠEIMOS STRUKTŪROS ĮTAKA UGDYMU:  
KAIP ŠEIMOS ATOMIZACIJA KENKIA KRITIŠKAI MĄSTANČIŲ PILIEČIŲ  
UGDYMU PAVERČIANT ŽMONES PAŽEIDŽIAMAIS INDOKTRINACIJOS  
IR PROPAGANDOS**

**Tapio Puolimatka**

S a n t r a u k a

Remiantis istoriniais ir sociologiniais tyrimais, šiame straipsnyje išsakoma filosofišškai pagrįsta tezė, kad šeimos struktūros atomizacija lemia neigiamus ugdymo padarinius. Bolševikų socialinio eksperimento pavyzdžiu iliustruojama Carle'o Zimmermano su atomistine šeimos struktūra siejama socialinio priešastingumo teorija, kuri, kaip rodo šiuolaikiniai socialinių mokslų tyrimai, dažnai taikoma šiuolaikinės Vakarų šeimos atomizacijos procese. Siekiama išsiaiškinti, kaip šeimos atomizacija pakerta vaikų, kaip savarankiškų ir kritiškai mąstančių piliečių, ugdymą. Kai ima irti norminės santuokos ir šeimos struktūros, pažeidžiamos vaikų teisės į tapatumo formavimąsi ir santykius šeimoje. Ši pažeidimą vaikai dažnai išgyvena kaip atmetimą, kuris žeidžia vaikus

moraliai ir pakerta jų tikėjamą moralės normomis. Be to, šeimos iširimasis sukelia vaikams emocinę ir moralinę deprivaciją, o ši silpnina jų ontologinį saugumą ir neleidžia jiems užaugti savarankiškais, dorais ir kritiškai mąstančiais piliečiais. Dėl tokios deprivacijos vaikai patiria emocinę propagandoje ir indoktrinacijoje pasitelkiamų kultūrinių mitų įtaką, jų orientacija tampa eksternali, prarandamas gebėjimas savarankiškai galvoti ir moraliai veikti. Kadangi piliečių nuomonė ir požiūris yra veikiami iš išorės, jie nesugeba veikti kaip atsvara valdančiam elitui, todėl demokratija pavirsta elito valdymu.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** šeima, ugdymas, demokratija, propaganda, indoktrinacija.

*Įteikta 2017 01 04*

*Priimta 2017 04 20*