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Genesis of Handicaps, Handicap and Handicapping [*Oleg Stavitsky*]

Key words: *handicapism, handicap, handicapping, disability.*

Annotation: *The article analyses the genesis of handicapism on phylogenetic and ontogenetic levels, describes the process of origin and development of this phenomenon, analyses external and internal conditions that favour handicapism, handicap and handicapping.*

Introduction

Statement of the problem. As the problem of handicapism in foreign and domestic science is rather unexplored it is particularly important to find the factors that cause the occurrence of this phenomenon both at individual and societal level. In this context it is important to select phylogenetic and ontogenetic sources of origin and spread of handicapism and handicapping.

Given this the **object** of the article is to analyse the factors that act as formation and development sources of handicapism and handicapping manifestations trends.

Results of theoretical analysis. Handicapism is a phenomenon known to mankind since its appearance. Although the term itself was not used (neither it is today), the manifestations of this phenomenon occurred regularly.

At all times in society there were different estimates of human "inferiority" (blindness, deafness, mutilation, etc.). For many centuries a handicapped person was perceived as defective, with a full range of negative traits: hypertrophied biological needs (alimentary, sexual), bad habits, lack of spirituality, negative moral (selfishness, lack of guilt, aloofness, etc.) and volitional (high suggestibility, negativism) character traits. And all that, according to members of society, was a direct result of disability. Therefore a person with disability was considered totally "different", and the prospect of forming their positive personal qualities was virtually impossible [5].

In prehistoric times, people lived in tribes, communities or tribal families as it was impossible to survive on their own. The communal system provided all the necessities: food, clothing, dwelling, tools, etc., but the development level of productive forces was primitive. Having no extra food, the tribe sought ways to dispose of anyone unable to make their own living. When an individual with signs of disability appeared in a tribe (a micro group), it caused many concerns among its members. On one hand, the community was shocked by the birth of such child, on the other – everyone understood that such member of the group will not benefit but burden them. Fear was the result of encountering anything new, unfamiliar and incomprehensible; fear that the same fate and eventual death awaits all other members of the tribe. Taking care of disabled was a real ordeal, especially in conditions of nomadic lifestyle.

Community's main reason was family preservation instinct, which demanded to sacrifice one life to save the whole species. And the problem was solved in the most primitive way.

It was fear that forced the tribe to get rid of crippled or disabled children: they were either abandoned or deliberately killed (as a burden or a curse). Often mothers were executed together with their babies, because people were unable to explain the birth of cripples other than by mothers' connection with dark forces that could harm the whole micro group.

In modern films about ancient history of mankind there are episodes in which primitive groups turn people with signs of "otherness" (hair colour and fuzziness, eye colour, etc.) out of the tribe. Everything new and unknown made people afraid of possible unpleasant consequences one could expect from "others." Gradually the image of "other" became a concern causing stigma. Thus stereotypes and prejudice appeared making their way out through behavioural responses, which by their nature were manifestations of handicapism.

Those babies with disability, who were not subjected to deprivation or execution, remained in the tribe until they died themselves as they couldn't adjust to the environment on their own. But even under such circumstances people with disabilities could not perform all functions assigned to the tribe members. That is why they had no value among their fellow tribesmen and attitudes accordingly were discrimination, harassment and mockery. That is back in the prehistoric period handicapped individuals were subjected to a full range of handicapping manifestations from both the community as a whole and its members.

The period of antiquity was no exception in its attitude towards "disabled". People with disability were not considered proper citizens, but had the status of slaves. A person with congenital or acquired mental or physical disability awaited physical death or social segregation at best. Even privileged family offspring were exposed to handicapism manifestations; moreover it was prescribed by legislation. Handicapism factor divided elite society into "fully functioning persons" (recognized citizens) and "inferior" ones (unrecognized). People with physical or mental disabilities had no access into the ancient world of free citizens [3].

In ancient Rome people with physical / mental disabilities were regarded as "unnecessary eaters". They were mostly paupers. The laws of Rome gave parents the right to kill their "defective" children. Roman philosopher Seneca even found "rational justification" for such laws: "We execute maimed and drown weak and helpless children, and we do it not because of anger but reason in order to separate ill from healthy" [7].

Modern history knows there was a custom among the Prussian tribes to take ill children's lives or leave them to the mercy of fate.

In countries with low productive force development in later historical times there were cases when abnormal children were subjected to extreme forms of handicapism manifestation. This applies to XIX century India, China, Buddhist Asian countries. In Tibet and South China abnormal children got killed even in the XX century.

Licensed killing of disabled children – infanticide – as extremely violent manifestation of handicapism was fairly typical at the early stages of society development.

It should be noted that in the old days such attitude towards people with disabilities was not everywhere. For example, ancient Greek society was more humane to people with special needs, despite their cult of bodily strength and beauty.

Christian doctrine introduced religious sensibility and religious sympathies into the pagan world. Early Christianity called for mercy and encouraged people to help cripple and

needy. Recognizing human suffering as a special reward from God, religion forbade Christians to limit the rights of people with disability or use violence against them. Unable to explain the causes of injury, it declared these defects a "divine punishment" for their sins or sins of their ancestors [1].

However, it was difficult for former pagans to take to the new ideals that contradicted ancient tradition of aggressive rejection of people with mental and physical disabilities. Medieval law followed the ancient (prescribed in Roman law) understanding of rights or rather deprivation of people with disability [1].

Actually, the church was the first to show an example of compassion and mercy towards people with special needs. In the Middle Ages monasteries began to set up shelters (known as hospitals, clinics, etc.), which in a few centuries partly became property of the state.

However, the available modern extensive network of hospitals and specialized clinics, a large number of different funds that are designed to help people with special needs, a system of social assistance and related services, a number of legislative acts do not erase the problem of handicapism in our society. Although it should be noted that due to the development of civilized society the handicapping manifestations today are not as violent and destructive as during the Middle Ages.

We have briefly, although considering all major psychological points, viewed the phylogenetic development of handicapism phenomenon formation in social and individual consciousness. And we were convinced of the effectiveness of the same psychological laws, mentioned previously [4]. We also traced handicapping reactions formation from instincts to conscious behaviour. That stigma of a disabled person that formed thousands of years ago is still causing handicapism manifestations today. Social nature of handicapism is confirmed by the fact that specific forms of its manifestation became more civilized with further social development: from brutal and destructive to softer ones.

Now let's review the ontogenetic development of handicapping behaviour and handicapping reactions.

Methodological basis for handicapism ontogenetic analysis are S. Maksymenko's provisions that specific psychics forms are not given from birth but appear as social examples. Therefore, mental development progresses as these samples are being acquired [2, p. 122].

Leaving the newborn period behind (since none of us can recall it), let us begin our analysis from the moment we could remember and realize something. We take the most typical situation of a child's development – in the bosom of their native family. Of course, in other circumstances not everything is perfect, but it follows almost the same scenario, the same psychological laws. In some cases, abnormal upbringing accelerated formation of the phenomena we mentioned above, comparing to full, problem-free families. In single-parent, dysfunctional families children have more opportunities to learn the meaning of the word "other" and thus manifest handicapping reactions behaviour or form a handicap complex.

Being inside the family, children feel as if in their cradles: they are caressed, fed, protected, watched over, adored. Typically, none of the family members taught them anything bad, e.g. to despise "other", make fun of them, humiliate them, etc. So how do we come to understand, recognize the category of "otherness"?

The answer to the question is simple and we all have passed that stage. Ironically enough it is children's fairy tales. Children hear several of them every day. Listening to the

story, looking at beautiful, colourful illustrations, children vividly imagine the plot and main characters. They virtually "immerse" into the tale: they empathize with heroes, understand complex relationship between them, give emotional evaluation to heroes' actions and deeds, distinguish good and evil.

Early childhood is a sensitive period for development of many higher mental functions. Imagination development caused by fairy tales favours intensive development of psychics in general, its emotional and intellectual spheres (according to L.Vygotsky, S.Maksymenko, I.Bekh, O.Bodalev, O.Leontev, V.Davydov, L.Bogovych and others). Therefore, importance of live communication, the role of fairy tales and stories read by parents can not be overestimated in terms of mental development.

Marie-Louise von Franz states in her studies [6, p. 15] that a tale is much better remembered than a short realistic story. This happens because fairy tales have some pattern that corresponds with personal unconscious of each individual. "... Accordingly, any fairy tales, where social consciousness structures appear, deeply affect our emotions and are memorised for a longer time" [6, p. 16].

We have heard various tales. Let us analyse the tale "Ugly Duckling" by Hans Andersen which is known to children all over the world, and try to highlight those aspects that favour formation of handicap and handicapping.

Let us recall the passage where the ugly Duckling first appeared before the farmyard. First of all, before that moment neither mother-duck, nor the ugly Duckling, nor his siblings had any idea that one of them is "different", unlike everybody else. Mother-duck, although feeling and seeing the difference between her ducklings, loved the "other" one all the same, especially when she saw he could swim. The Duckling himself didn't realise he looked different.

Thus, it was only after the ducklings were presented to the farmyard that they learned about "otherness". This emphasizes the social nature of the handicapism phenomenon.

Secondly, when one of the ducks hit the ugly Duckling the mother-duck told her: "*Leave him alone,*" said the mother; "*he is not doing any harm.*" The statement while being unbiased and fair was not convincing to the community: "*Maybe so, but he is too large and awkward, he doesn't belong here!*" Thus stigma "other" is also a social product, and each concrete individual bears it. Even if members of the farmyard sympathized and wanted to help the ugly Duckling – they didn't do it. Individuals accept stigma uncritically, categorically, without any proof – as an axiom.

Thirdly, the phrase "*was made fun of as much by the ducks as by the chickens*" suggests that the category "a relative – a stranger" (duck - chicken) differs from the category "other." The manifestations of handicapism do not depend on nationality, religion, skin colour, etc. We have already mentioned this feature concerning categories of "xenophobia" and "handicapism" [4. p. 40-43]. Clearly, the author united these different species of birds on a subconscious level, but this only confirms that the roots of handicapism phenomenon lie deep. Similarly children learn subconsciously that "normal" ducks, hens and turkeys are opposed to "abnormal" Duckling.

Fourthly, the sentence "*The poor Duckling did not know where he dared stand or walk; he was quite unhappy because he looked ugly, and was laughed at by the whole farmyard*" illustrates how handicap appears (psychological complex, individual, inner self-perception of a person with special needs, self-image deformed by functional limitations)

under the influence of society [4, p. 33]. Awareness of person's own inferiority and "otherness" leads to emotionally intense negative evaluation of themselves. That is the Duckling wasn't frightened or worried by his own "defect" but by what others thought of him and how they accepted him. This again confirms the difference between the term "disability" and "handicap", which was intuitively (or maybe deliberately) disclosed by the author of the fairy tale.

Fifthly, handicapism manifestations can be dominant, more emotionally expressive than family's care and love: *"...and then it grew worse and worse. The poor Duckling was hunted about by every one; even his brothers and sisters were quite angry with him, and said, " Ah, you ugly creature, I wish the cat would get you!" Even his mother said she wished he had never been born!"*

Sixthly, handicap, as an internal psychological complex, can be quite an effective motive, complicated motivational complex, which is stronger than logic and reason: *"And the Duckling could not stand anymore; he ran and flew over the fence."*

Seventhly, even minor, accidental, neutral situation (*"The little birds in the bushes flew up in fear. "That is because I'm so ugly", thought the Duckling; and he shut his eyes, but flew on further..."*) is perceived by individuals with a handicap complex through their own inferiority. Excessive sensitivity, vulnerability and high emotional sensitivity to neutral social situations are inherent for this category of people. These individuals have rather low effectiveness of psychological defence mechanisms of their selves.

And the last thing that attracts our attention in this tale within the scope of the problem studied is that in the final part when the ugly Duckling saw representatives of his own kind, he said: *"I will fly to them, those royal birds! And they will kill me because I am so ugly and dare to approach them. Better to be killed by them than to be plucked by ducks, pecked by chickens, pushed about by the maiden who feeds the poultry-yard, and to suffer hunger in the winter."*

Then he flew to the water, and swam towards the beautiful swans. The moment they espied the stranger, they rushed to meet him with outstretched wings.

"Kill me," said the poor bird; and he bent his head down to the surface of the water, and awaited death." The conclusion is obvious – persons with a handicap complex are suicidally inclined. This is the most socially undesirable result of the handicap; this is what social workers, teachers and practicing psychologists should work on. Reduction of handicap emotional load means reduction of the suicide risk among people with such complex.

Here are a few more popular children's fairy tales, which have some veiled information about social determinants of handicap and handicapism: "Lame Duck" (a folk tale), "The Wild Swans" (Hans Christian Andersen), "Little Longnose" (Wilhelm Hauff), "The Story of Little Muck" (Wilhelm Hauff), "Wee Little Havroshechka" (a folk tale), "Tom Thumb" (Brothers Grimm), "Kashtanka" (Anton Chekhov), "Grey-Neck" (Dmitry Mamin-Sybyryak), "One-winged Lark" (Hryhir Tyutyunnyk), "The Humpbacked Horse" (Petr Ershov) and many others.

Of course, we are not against children's tales and, by no means, wish to diminish the educational and cognitive value of literature. The given psychological analysis of the tale leads to an important methodical conclusion: lack of child's personal experience, high suggestibility, uncritical perception of information from the reference person (parents and family members, who actually read fairy tales) require careful explanations, interpretations of

characters' behaviour and motives, proof of socially accepted moral conclusions on the part of adults.

Leaving out other fairy tales and stories, which inspire handicapism manifestations, we will just focus on some popular characters. Different fairy tales have different plots, but there are some generalised images that, in terms of psychology, have become resistant stigmas which are passed on from generation to generation. For example: Baba-Yaga, the old witch, Yaga-wooden-leg are old, lame and hunchbacked, with crooked noses and long tangled hair; Solovey the Brigand is a one-eyed dwarf; Koschey Immortal is old and skinny. Hence prejudice, attribution and stereotype, attitude formed yet in childhood: humpbacks make us afraid (subconsciously), dwarfs repel.

Speaking of how cartoons affect child's psychics, it is worth noting that only old (Soviet) films really contain some goodness, justice, compassion, etc. Today, most foreign films are full of cruelty, meaningless fights, unjustified aggression, hatred, scenes of abuse and violence. They boast such methods of punishment that the Inquisition and the Nazi would never imagine: "Tom and Jerry", "Pokémon", "Shrek", "Goof Troop", "Scooby-Doo", "Godzilla", "The Simpsons", "Family Guy", "The Wild Thornberrys", "Aaahh!!! Real Monsters", "The Angry Beavers" and many others. Searching for positive educational moments in these films is a waste of time; trying to create something worse is a task even more difficult. Therefore, by keeping their children away from watching these movies adults prevent them from such socially undesirable mental formations as greediness, vindictiveness, sadism, cruelty, hypocrisy, hatred, etc.

Conclusions

If the family provides an incorrect (or no) interpretation of educational content of the story, children receive certain information, knowledge of "outsiders", "relatives", "others" and form socially undesirable attitude on a subconscious level. In the future (when an individual is included in social relations, e.g. children's micro group in the yard, district, kindergarten, school) children form their own experience, which adds to the previous attitude, the stigma of a particular society. Socio-psychological mechanism of stigmatisation is triggered and results in handicapping as individual psychological characteristics.

The effectiveness of further educational process will determine whether this character trait remains a latent destructive impulse, which is activated in emergency situations, or becomes a permanent destructive character trait.

Promising direction of research. Promising direction of research is detailed and thorough analysis of handicapism phenomena, development of ways and means to stop its spreading at the societal level and correction of handicap and handicapping as personality trait.

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