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Covidoalienation. Pedagogical dimensions of self-care versus the effects of isolation during a pandemic

Abstract: The main objective of the article is to analyze the phenomenon of covidoalienation. It discusses selected effects of isolation during the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 disease situation, referring them to the sociology of isolation institutions. The theoretical construct is based on several categories: Michael Foucault's care of the self and the concept of "le visage" (subject, face, countenance) by Emanuel Levinas. The research part consists of selected analyses from understanding interviews (J.C. Kaufmann) and participant observation on the emotions experienced during the isolation among the students of thirteen classes and the teachers from these classes. Participant observation was carried out during a series of classes on emotions in isolation with 335 children from second and third grades of primary school, in May/June 2021. The research constituted at the same time a project to strengthen the scope of pedagogical and psychological assistance, taking into account the effects of covidoalienation in the space of the institution, for which the triad: student, teacher, parent is important. The text, apart from its review and theoretical function, will serve practitioners who want to counteract the effects of covidoalienation as a situation leading to objectification, frustration, loneliness and helplessness in children and adults experiencing isolation, bereavement, helplessness and other negative situations requiring professional support.

Key words: covidoalienation, social effects of isolation in children and adults, coldness of interpersonal relations, cultural narcissism.

Introduction

*The closed loop and the tight fit are meant
to create the conditions of no exit. [...] Today, it is no exit from the others, from Big Other, and from the surveillance capitalists who decide. This condition of no exit creeps on slippers feet.*
(Zuboff, 2020, p. 640)

The comfort of life before the pandemic vs. the uncertainty and chaos during isolation, prompted many Polish social scientists (e.g. Pyżalski 2020; Nowak-Dziemianowicz 2021; Jaskulska and others) to search for the effects, the ongoing situation “enslaving” previous functioning, and strongly influencing current social behavior.

An interesting question in this context is whether we will be talking about a pandemic generation? If so, in what dimensions of life will fear related to isolation and the so-called pandemic syndrome manifest? One of the worthwhile analyses, being current biographical experiences at the same time that affects both children and adults, is the phenomenon of covidalienation. The provenience of the word is alienation in the emergency of COVID-19 disease, commonly known as coronavirus. Covidalienation is associated with feelings of helplessness, loneliness, and psychological distress caused by persistence, vigilance, uncertainty, and stress due to the spread of a pervasive infectious disease, COVID-19.

This article intends to show the dangers of isolation and alienation, which have deepened the superficiality in human relationships and contributed to a general social frustration and increased aggression, not only as a result of the pandemic. The dominance of online contacts, which are now the center of relationships, is associated with emotional cooling, lack of empathy and mutual trust, which in turn strongly affects the degree of effects of covidalienation experienced in educational spaces and pedagogical activities. The phenomenon of covidalienation has shaken the right to privacy, freedom, and exacerbated fear and ontological insecurity. The paradox of ubiquitous digitization is that, in the name of security, it triggers total surveillance and control over the individual, which not only raises enormous ethical questions (Rowe, 2020), but does not liberate from fear, does not strengthen security, and prompts a struggle for privacy that unsuccessfully attempts to counter mass surveillance, including in the school space.

First, the category of the care of the self will be discussed, which, as misread today, promotes narcissistic individuals instead of individuals who show solidarity with and are responsible for *sumum bono* – the common good. The great

health battle of the past two years has deepened loneliness, isolation and divided humanity into vaccinated/unvaccinated, poor/rich, sick/healthy, active/passive. The tensions in interpersonal relationships caused by the effects of covidoalienation affect many of the educational spaces in the student/teacher/parent school triad, which will be described later in this article. Finally, findings on emotions during isolation from the perspective of early school classroom students and thirteen female tutors of those classes are presented. The conclusions of the study are diagnostic and exploratory in nature, and the results do not claim any generalizations. Their interpretation will serve me as a practical dimension of the theoretical issues discussed in the text, the construction of which was based on Levinas' *le visage* figure, which most fully proves the importance of the face and direct contact in building bonds and relations with another human being. In turn, partial analysis of the hermeneutics of the subject discussed in Michael Foucault's lectures, served me as an example of a misunderstood contemporary the care of the self, which in covidoalienation has turned into social alienation with a strong focus on individual health and survival, shutting away from intimacy, distorting and prejudicing bonds and interpersonal relationships sustained by mediated audio-visual relations, such as instant messaging via smartphone/computer.

Architects are convinced that the pandemic has further reinforced the statutory provision that apartments without balconies should not be designed and built because families suffer, especially those in quarantine and confined to spaces with no way to go outside. I believe that the social sciences can be convinced that the effects of covidoalienation threaten the social-emotional competence of entire generations and require professional and immediate pedagogical and psychological assistance to children and adults to restore the purpose of education, work in new school conditions, and above all the motivation to establish relationships based on direct contact, on selflessness and mutual support. As a result of superficial online relationships, narcissistic traits will become even more entrenched in our culture, which in turn will lead to the tragedy of lonely, self-obsessed individuals falling into the trap of self-indulgence (Erikson, 2021, p. 275).

Self-care versus the need for social interactions during isolation

Poles enjoying perfect health or having no sick people among their relatives are a small part of the population. Statistically, every second family in Poland faces a difficult illness of a close relative. Asking questions full of fear and disappointment – why it is our child/mother/father who is terminally ill, has turned over the past years into a question: when will the disease strike our family, when everyone around us is already affected by this problem? The stressful situation created by the likelihood of rapidly contracting Covid was not always associated

with despair, destruction, or disintegration. Covidalienation took away the ability to decide the future, became the source of suffering, but often brought out the good and the beautiful, and mobilized social forces to organize community action. Above all, it revealed the importance of the common good – the willingness to help others. Ever hungry for new experiences, the Ego has learned the humbling lesson that goodness and help return to people who do good for others. All the societies across the world mobilized themselves, according to Helena Radlińska, to change the world for the better by the power of man, bringing out the potential hidden in individuals and in whole social structures (Radlińska, 1961). This has brought spectacular results in the form of volunteering, supporting health care workers, other situations revealing: selfless love, commitment to the care of the other, responsibility for the weak. The situation of covidalienation had the most painful consequences for children, who reacted most strongly with fear, who could not understand the situation of permanent change, which disturbed their ontological security. The early school children who participated in my study revealed that for them the situation of isolation was comparable to the experience of bereavement, not related to the direct loss of someone close, but with the loss of forms of previous activities. Children not being able to distinguish fake news viewed every media report as a disaster, associated with death. In addition, the lack of opportunities to interact with peers, built on trust, repetitive rituals, and conventions of daily life that define ontological security multiplied anxiety. Increased anxiety and lack of space contribute to increased aggression and social frustration during isolation, and as autonomy is taken away, personality depersonalization occurs. Another result of living in a situation of constant uncertainty are unreflective social actions based on enforced obedience, authoritarianism, despotism, humiliation and intimidation. It is commonly known, in part due to Goffman's concept of total institutions, that all of these methods and techniques do not have the intended effect, but only deepen fear and distrust (Goffman, 2011).

Before the situation of isolation and long-lasting lockdowns, we were comfortably accustomed to bustling cafes, meetings with other people, lecture halls full of listeners-students, schools full of children and teachers, crowds in malls and long-open stores. We have comfortably built a world where the hurried, buying, often thoughtless, fast-acting individual was at the center. A human who foresees and controls his or her obvious world of events and encounters. On the one hand, the pandemic situation, as many observers of social life have recognized, has positively allowed us to slow down, to focus on what is important, to switch priorities around health, family happiness, and to ask questions anew about certain imponderables, such as love versus fear, respect versus disrespect, tolerance versus social inequality. Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk, when asked in an interview: "What are we actually looking for?" told what the modern man, who had to calm down and slow down through illness, needs.

Could it be that we have returned to the normal rhythm of life? That it is not the virus that is a disturbance of the norm, but just the opposite – that hectic world before the virus was abnormal? After all, the virus reminded us of what we so passionately denied – that we are fragile beings, made of the most delicate matter. That we die, that we are mortal. That we are not separated from the world by our “humanity” and uniqueness, but the world is a kind of great network in which we are stuck, connected to other entities by invisible threads of dependence and influence. That we depend on each other, and no matter how distant the countries we live in are, what language we speak, or what color our skin is, we get sick the same way, we get scared the same way, and we die the same way. It made us realize that no matter how weak and vulnerable we feel in the face of danger, there are people around us who are even weaker and need help. It reminded us how fragile our elderly parents and grandparents are, and how much they deserve our care. It showed us that our hectic busyness threatens the world (Tokarczuk...).

In reference to a certain decadence of optimistic moods noticed during the pandemic, related to the fact that one suddenly has to slow down the pace of life, it is worth asking anew the question about the care of the self, what does it actually mean for a person experiencing covidoalienation? The lectures of the great thinker Michel Foucault on the hermeneutics of the subject and the care of the self, argue that the care of the self “... should consist in knowing oneself,” but in relationship with the other. In most of his lectures, the French philosopher argues for a rational the care of the self, because: “The care of the self implies a certain way of attending to what we think and what takes place in our thought. The word *epimeleia* is related to *melete*, which means both exercise and meditation.” (Foucault 2016, p. 31)

Thus, the care of the self has nothing to do with egoism, but obliges us to think about ourselves, to be attentive and to direct our attention to our inner self, and not to the external mechanisms of control over us, which may include material goods, narcissistic reasons for self-esteem through the illusion of a strong Ego, and thus all the “dressed-up” ways of proving our superiority over others, such as luxury cars, brand-name furniture, clothes. Being in the center of media events also have little to do with true the care of the self; individuals who, through image, written commentary fight for recognition are ubiquitous on social networks and the Internet, fueling the ego. The replacement of private space with public space and Polish 2017 youth word of the year “*atencja*”, meaning attention, created a world of illusion, of pretence, a world of attentives who care about attention but not about themselves. In a world that is indifferent to attention and attentiveness, one strives for perfection in appearance, style and manner. There is no room for shortcomings, for ignorance, for being outside the boundaries of terms: trends, must have, sale. Failure to keep up with innovations in technology, lifestyles, science, and consumer goods is clearly considered a weakness and reinforces isolation and exclusion. The expert systems that invigilate us, with the help

of artificial intelligence, in order to find out our shortcomings, encourage and manipulate us to achieve perfection, to master every lack that must be satisfied with some consumer good or presence in the world of portal/gossip communities, such as Instagram/Facebook, which are strongly exhibitionist superficial and untrue.

The emergency situation of sudden and fatal COVID-19 contraction unveiled disillusionment, exposed the inefficiency of all technological innovations, and the lack of confidence and decision-making capacity in various spheres of life. Many teachers, including academics, many doctors, many students, including the youngest participating in research on covidalienation, longing for real, true contact, have realized as a result of the experience of alienation and feeling of loneliness that Levinas' *le visage* – face plays a much stronger role. Specialists in contact with others, which is necessary in many professions, have discovered that the game of appearances very quickly leads, as a result of remote contact being the only possible one, to a sense of meaninglessness and disbelief in the tasks performed, very quickly irritates, discourages and demotivates, forces to search and change careers. All of those in their professions for whom it was natural to have contact with another person explicitly acknowledged that they felt stronger fatigue associated with fulfilling professional, parental, and marital-partnership roles taking place in one place at one time. The person affected by covidalienation felt a “generic sense of crowding” (Marody, Poleszczuk, 2004) not as a result of the crowds that used to overwhelm, but precisely as a result of loneliness and isolation from others. The constant lack of: inspiration, lability, flexibility and change in the space that surrounds us leads to despondency, a sense of emptiness, increases fear about the future and forces us to mistakenly focus solely on ourselves, but without taking care of ourselves.

We see similar effects in the situation of prison isolation, where we deal with a deprivation of personality and conformist ways of being, so strongly desired under conditions of forced separation from the outside world. (Matysiak-Błaszczuk 2016; Toroń-Fórmanek 2016, pp. 371–381). Researchers of social rehabilitation, conducting interviews in prison conditions, noticed the effects of lasting isolation, which mainly include: passivity, apathy, helplessness, depression, deprivation of needs and changes in personality, very low sense of value, feeling of loneliness, increasing phobias, deepening life-threatening conditions, including psychosis/neurosis. I will return to the effects of isolation by discussing the emotional states experienced by the children and teachers later in the text. I will now focus more on how we have been deprived of a face/identity through virtual contact.

The substitute in the form of virtual contact, which became the central focal point for relationships during the pandemic, did not satisfy the need for intimacy. Being confined to social media has made misunderstandings arising from the need to re-interpret the written word, full of symbolism, silent gestures, even more apparent, which in turn contributes to misunderstandings, conflicts, conjectures, over-interpretations. At this point it should be added that we live in a culture

that for years has raised us to control everything that happens to us, so not understanding or not knowing about something causes complexes, deepens loneliness and a kind of distance, as a result of not knowing things / issues, leads to exclusion and not keeping up with the world that is rushing, causing pressure and stress to people who do not know why they feel bad or lose the will to live. Participating in many business meetings, I myself have experienced such a state many times, when it was enough for me to miss one event, announced half an hour before the start, while sometimes technical issues prevented me from joining the meeting group, which caused delays and great discomfort and put the blame for this lack/inequality on the person, not the technology. On the other hand, shame as the most common emotion felt during remote education by the children I surveyed resulted from not knowing or recognizing something. So for the most part, this kind of shame was unfounded in the case of student-school relationships, because school is there to teach, kids do not need to know everything about computers and software they have not used before. Moreover, ignorance allows us to free ourselves from the coercive control of the unreal, virtual world in which we participate by compulsion. The famous postmodern model of “weak thinking”, i.e. the idea of ignorance which is creative, which allows for a state of uncertainty, curiosity, was brutally overthrown by the technological system and artificial intelligence of all-knowing and deciding for us expert systems, working on our behavioral data without our consent and participation. (Zuboff, 2020, pp. 103, 130, 137). Being public and available 24/7 online gives rise to further distortion of rights and deprivation of personhood. Namely, employers coerced from above to make multiple changes at once monitored their employees and being in several virtual realities at the same time, introducing chaos, despondency, lack of occupational hygiene and many other adverse conditions that ultimately comprise Covidoalienation. This trajectory of suffering has deprived people experiencing the effects of isolation of a state of inner peace. Self-care requires a state of balance and peace, allows one to discover other ways of thinking, opens one up to multiplicity, distances, without distinctions of better and worse, deprives of inequalities and is beyond all divisions. The situation of covidoalienation caused chaos, forced control and mass surveillance, and this in turn contributed to permanent fear and a sense of meaninglessness, especially in interpersonal relationships, stripped of trust and closeness.

Covidoalienation in the school triad: student/teacher/parent/

Fratenization has long been chilled out by the variety of contacts and the lowering of social trust. Fratenization is needed anew in today's schools, which have suffered from the threat of spreading disease, unexpected disconnection, and

forced remote education. Children, teachers and parents participating in the system of remote education and work, discovered once again that it is necessary to “de-school society” (Illich, 2010) and take care of relationships. Only 10% of the knowledge we acquire over 8 years of primary school and 4 years of high school is useful in life. This sad fact that the Polish school does not teach resourcefulness in life forced not only the contemporary methodologists and educators, but also parents and children to reflect. Some, accustomed to learning at home, are ready and consciously choose to transition to homeschooling. The reason, in many cases, is the observation that existing forms of teaching very often turn out to be rotten, crumbling forms that should have been forgotten long ago, because they do not serve today’s young student. Parents are calling for an end to charging children with content beyond the core curriculum. Many research reports (including my own observations and studies) show that children in the oldest grades of primary school spent 13 to 16 hours a day in front of computer screens during remote education.

Another problem that showed up in the mirror of education during Covid pandemic was the lack of motivation for remote education and the lack of response from the recipient. As a rule, coaches and speakers who have been preparing remote consultations for many years want to establish a live contact with the recipients of their services and training, they use various techniques for this purpose, spending a lot of time on the so-called “live chat” in order to solve all questions and doubts here and now. In this way they make sure, often by paraphrasing or using wordplay, that the recipient is following their train of thought, what is important to the recipient, what will be the topic of the next meeting, in short, they get the necessary knowledge from the recipient to improve these meetings, to meet the needs and dilemmas of all users of the services.

Remote education has forced multitudes of teachers to master a plethora of software and streaming platforms at a rapid pace in order to connect with students via the Internet. Most of these programs offered audio, but also video streaming capabilities, so students could see their teachers and vice versa. In practice, very often there were annoying situations when the teacher started talking and suddenly disappeared from the screen, or was sharing something, but not everyone could see the shared screen at the same time. Despite the efforts of both parties, frustration and irritation with the flaws of Internet mediated contact grew. In addition, remote education exposed even more strongly the social inequalities among students, teachers and parents. After participant observation, a study of 335 students aged 7, 8 and 9 found that remote education exposed even more strongly the inequalities between students and blamed these inequalities on the innocent and unaware student/child. Over the past two years, while performing direct school duties in the counselor’s and psychologist’s offices and on the basis of meetings with students, I have noticed many problems between school and students related to their lack of readiness for daily contact mediated

by a computer monitor. One of the drastic and visible emotional effects of this student/teacher/parent unpreparedness for the situation was and is a strong sense of shame and discomfort with teaching. Many students were ashamed to turn on the camera, for a variety of reasons: poor home conditions, single family situations, family illness situations. The school, by entering the student's environment with a camera, exposed them to an even stronger stigma of a person excluded from their peer group, ashamed of their current situation, for which the system is to blame, not the student/parent. Out of one thousand and four hundred students in a suburban primary school, only twenty percent of the students freely turned on the camera during remote education, provided they were called on to answer. University students behaved in a similar way, a significant proportion of students participating in remote education felt embarrassment associated with public speaking in a home setting. This was compounded not only by the issue of surveillance associated with making one's study place at home public, but more importantly by feeling uncomfortable about being compared to other students. Comparisons that arouse jealousy, distrust, and even aggression, especially among girls who, unable to cope with the situation of lack of acceptance, sought an outlet for their growing frustration and anger. During the remote education year, there were the highest number of interventions among children who teased each other in chat rooms by getting into puns, or made fun of their classmates' behavior, clothing, and home conditions in public.

In addition, in the analysis of covidoalienation, it is necessary to take into account the developmental age of early school children who, not having a formed personality and identity, definitely had a harder time undergoing the process of isolation. Suddenly in March 2020, time with their peers at school, time with their closest family circle (grandparents, uncles, cousins) was taken away from children.

During the interviews, a significant number of children indicated that a feeling of helplessness and anger, due to technical inadequacies of hardware and software, dominated the remote activities. A significant number of children experienced, on at least a few occasions, anger, frustration, and even crying because of sudden connection interruption during remote meetings, oral statements, and readings. In addition, there was a huge gap in the mastery of the material between children who could count on the help of an adult during their home education and those who had to work completely independently, relying solely on their own capabilities. It is projected that it will take the school a full year to close the educational gaps in early school children working in front of computer screens. The lack of preparation for classes and the deficiencies accumulated during remote education contributed to school phobias; upon returning to school, many children, fearful of the new adaptation and accustomed to home conditions, stopped attending school altogether. Emotional problems of children after remote education are also related to the traumas that children experienced in covidoalienation. In addition, the very traumatic loss of loved ones – grandmother,

grandfather, parent, and even the closest pet dog/cat – has greatly exacerbated emotional and educational problems, requiring support for additional classes with a school psychologist/counselor. Therapists, who recognized the need for institutional support during the pandemic, alert that there has been an increased need for psychologists and child psychiatrists, of whom there are only sixteen in Poland with the appropriate training and who provide assistance. Because of unprocessed trauma accumulated during covidalienation, the priority for children today are not learning outcomes, but emotional stability.

Importantly, a significant proportion of the children who participated in the project on emotions in isolation were diagnosed with a recurrent reaction to covidalienation: sadness and depression. In a very large number of cases, children experienced isolation as a “grieving” process, not due to the direct death of a loved one, but to all the negative news on social media, the lowered mood and anxiety of parents and close caregivers, and the unpreparedness for the sudden loss of many previous life activities. Early school children experienced a whole range of difficult tensions and emotions, from fear to the loss of their own health and that of their loved ones, anger at the inability to meet face-to-face, spontaneous encounters with their peers, anger at the long duration of remote education, sadness at the tension within their family of origin and the reduced mood among loved ones, the frustration of not meeting the needs of loved ones, natural bonds and social activities.

Alienato from Latin means alienation, mental isolation and shying away from other people. Upon returning to the schools, it was observed that the children manifested an alienation syndrome. It has become a challenge to adapt to the conditions, children very often manifest alienation syndrome being with their peers in the classroom. During the first few months, much of the educational work consisted of group-building activities and the ability to work together as a class. Some of the children also revealed a smartphone addiction syndrome, as they miss out on extra stimulation during lessons. Accustomed to “clicking”, “liking”, or playing computer games, they become nervous and have impaired concentration during traditional classroom sessions.

For the teacher / student and parent school triad, who had to replace real-world contact with virtual contact on e-learning platforms, maintain relationships, trust the recipient, motivate themselves and others to action, without seeing a direct response from the recipient, the covidalienation time was extremely difficult. In such a situation, the surveillance system in education has been launched, on an unprecedented scale. From the emerging opinions, full of suspicion and distrust, about authentic work, about authentic engagement, the surveillance system implemented monitoring into the education process to track every move made by the remote work/education participant. Universities and colleges have improved programs to prevent plagiarism, student dishonesty, and faculty scrutiny. Any survey, form on Microsoft Teams, Forms or Moodle is to monitor every

presence and control every minute of their users. During exams, passes, tests, the lecturer is required to reliably document the process of examination, and for this purpose he or she must remember to use and run in time many of the “plug-ins” for this incorporated, for example, Insignia on Microsoft Teams, which literally means stalking, documenting the attendance list. Here is a teacher, who is in a forced quarantine due to suspected virus, has to prove every day that he or she is working remotely, for this purpose she inundates parents with suggestions of materials, including the lyrics of English-language songs, art activities, to revise and work with the child at home. Similarly, the early school teacher is told to test the child’s skills, and to do so, not only does he or she interact in video meetings, but delegates tasks to be done in front of computers and expects to send completed projects in a timely manner. It happened that the teacher, wishing to prove remote working, forgot about the most important needs of children, such as breaks between classes, or taking care of the possibility of focusing attention, individualization of work for children with different educational and emotional needs. The system of remote education has rationed activities, created the trap of lack of decision-making and freedom in the implementation, of what has so far produced work results, and thus denied the close contact and establishment of relationships needed for motivation and development.

The parent who purchased a computer for the child to work remotely did not anticipate that the child would very quickly begin to use other opportunities provided by the computer monitor and unlimited Internet access during remote learning. School counselors were extremely puzzled by the situation of a child who experienced covidoalienation and who categorically refused outdoor recreation. Ophthalmologists were surprised to see how many very young users of remote work and learning were deteriorating their eyesight at a rapid rate. Young people have become sovereigns using the ubiquitous media, with no prior preparation for the possibilities and dangers of a “remote”, often phantasmagorical world that tempts with wealth, glamor and opportunity. I asked the students to identify one word that they thought should stay permanently in the educator’s vocabulary as the word for pandemic and covidoalienation. They pointed to the word SALE, or discount, arguing that they had never done so much shopping at such good prices before, spending a lot of time in front of their monitors and tracking down bargains. Another danger of covidoalienation is shopaholism, promiscuity, inertia in development and acquisition of knowledge, feelings of sadness and loneliness.

Covidalienation by compulsion, or rationed solitude...

Surveillance capitalism operated through unprecedented asymmetries in knowledge and the power that accrues to knowledge. Surveillance capitalists know everything about us, whereas their operations are designed to be unknowable to us. They accumulate vast domains of new knowledge from us, but not for us. They predict our futures for the sake of others' gain, not ours.

(Zuboff, 2020, p. 24)

Lack of interpersonal ties, or limiting ties are threatening phenomena, it is the first predictor at the micro-social level to lock oneself in one's own world of bad thoughts and escapes from contacts. Pedagogical and psychological counseling centers offering specialized examinations for school-age children during the pandemic were diagnosing rather emotional deficiencies than educational deficiencies, including depressive thoughts, suicidal thoughts in very young students. Misanthropy developed in students, young people began to shy away from interpersonal contact, when given the choice between remote contact and real contact, they pointed to the huge advantages of remote contact, seeing no or little threats in it. I asked students a question: if you knew a pandemic was going to happen, would you change anything in your life. Most answers, to my surprise, indicated taking care of the material sphere and buying better technical equipment, such as a new smartphone or computer.

Educators and psychologists are familiar with the phenomenon of parental alienation, which involves the deliberate and violent restriction of contact with a parent. This situation begins to surface after separation/divorce from an "ex-spouse" against whom one parent holds a grudge and who does not live with the child. Any actions designed to break the parental bond have, over the past year, also shifted to grandparents and other family members related to the child. For safety reasons and often at the request of the seniors themselves, children have not seen their grandparents for more than a year of time or even longer. This definitely distanced relationships, and the pandemic situation showed the foundation of unstable relationships within families. For it turned out that families became even more strongly self-sufficient, broke of togetherness, and their common good was divided among small groups, and group narcissism and division ensued. Parents no longer benefited from the support of grandparents and loved ones in fulfilling their roles; grandparents, in turn, caring for their own health, stopped feeling needed and became increasingly alienated from the family circle. Each of these groups struggling for survival and wrapped up in their own health security have devalued the notion of togetherness, We, in favor of individual security. In

Poland we have a saying which can be translated as “Families look their best only in pictures. Reality is often worse”, which nowadays has become even more true.

A century ago, French philosopher, Emanuel Levinas developed the concept of *Le visage*, meaning “face”. A face-to-face / subject-to-subject contact allows for an encounter with another human being. This meeting of two subjects allows one to see the other person, and thus protects him or her from feeling alone. In the interpretation of the works of Levinas (Polakowski et al. 2017, p. 132), we read as follows: “The face of another person also gives meaning, since the face-to-face relation is the essence of speech, which enable the objectification and theorization of the subject.”

Epiphany, meaning the prophecy and revelation of the value of the face in Emmanuel Levinas, is gaining momentum today, given the virtual contacts in which we demand that the recipient not only be heard, but seen, for this purpose asking that the cameras be turned on. Similarly, Martin Buber’s notion of dialog points to a category (figure, symbol) of irreplaceable face-to-face contact. It makes trust possible, it makes a secure relationship possible, it makes us realize ourselves as givers and receivers in a relationship. (Buber, 1992).

Regimented forced solitude means that not only do we have to carry out our activities in solitude – studying, working, taking care of children – but each of our activities is subjected to norms, prohibitions, orders and is documented by expert Internet systems that monitor our behavior for marketing purposes. Poles tired of the pandemic situation very often completely unconsciously functioned as puppets connected to the system, which are rendered, monitored, calculated and evaluated. The statistics reported in the media, although much of them still being sensation and fake news, trigger anticipatory anxiety that spreads across entire social groups who submit to instrumental prohibitions, rigors, strictures and norms without reflecting on them. When a primary care physician gives a patient an order to test for coronavirus, even if the symptoms are the same as a common cold, or flu, the entire surveillance procedure is automatically triggered. Even if the patient does not have the opportunity to take the test on the same day, he or she is automatically and immediately placed under mandatory home quarantine, and on the same day receives a text message from the health authorities requiring him or her to set up a “home quarantine” phone application, with the threat of a fine if he or she fails to do so. Although this does not apply to children, they in turn experience other absurdities, as when they stay within the walls of the school, where just one report to the sanitary authorities (incidentally, some principals accepted in this application a pharmacy test raising considerable doubts) is enough for the child to be punished for the next eleven days in the form of remaining at home and remote education. An adult in quarantine, on the other hand, has until recently been ordered by the state to perform tasks each day as a suspected carrier of the virus, i.e. to send photos each day to the security services from the place where he or she is in quarantine, under the threat of a police visit to his or her home and a heavy fine.

The whole situation is very stressful and troublesome, not only for emotional reasons, where patients experience profound stress hearing constant threats, orders, prohibitions and disciplinary messages, threatening with fines, in a situation in which they are not at fault, are only victims of the ongoing disease, caused by the spread of the virus. Regardless of how they feel, they still have to mobilize their forces to monitor their situation with their employer, who does not always accept remote working, despite its office nature, due to the lack of access to all documentation, or computer systems, or the necessary contact with clients / wards / students. No walks a person suspected of infection through the procedure, often the family doctor through a phone gives a brief advice and a code to perform the test, while all the information where to perform it, how to undergo monitoring, with whom to consult the result, the patient must find out on their own. When disabled or elderly patients are visually impaired, or do not have a smartphone on which they need to run the “home quarantine” application, they were forced to provide the relevant authority with an appropriate declaration, equivalent to a court oath. The procedure of suspicion and detection of coronavirus at the very start, under Polish conditions, condemns the patient to mistrust, isolation and exclusion from previous forms of life, is reminiscent of Franz Kafka’s famous *The Trial*, where everything was planned and plotted before the protagonist had time to say anything. It is as if the previous biographical history has suddenly been interrupted, now guided solely by the system and fully dependent on it.

The feeling of covidalienation comes very quickly, regardless of the test result, regardless of undergoing the vaccination procedure, regardless of whether the person with the disease or suspected of contracting the disease has the support of loved ones or is struggling completely alone with the plight of the disease. Receiving voice messages and text messages sent by a recorded voice with which no dialog can be established, stating: “You are in quarantine. You are required by law to use the Home Quarantine application. It is available on the App Store and Google Play”, reminds you that at any time of the day or night, randomly, the system can point to you as the Person who must fulfill the obligation of isolation in quarantine and not leaving the house. In turn, the omission of the so-called “task to be done”, meaning taking a few photos and sending them to the appropriate district services, results in a police raid, even if the text message appears while the person is asleep, or very unwell. The system forces us to be constantly vigilant, not to part with the smartphone, because this determines whether, in the course of a suspected illness, a person will be charged a monetary penalty for failure to comply with the statutory obligation. The burden of concern for not infecting other persons, especially those in health risk groups, has been cleverly smuggled in and exploited by corporations like Google and Microsoft using an unprecedented process of surveillance for the past twenty years, for the sole purpose of ramping up surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2020, p. 73). And the little

oddities – smartphones that fit in our pockets – serving surveillance capitalism have changed and enslaved our lives more than anything before.

Findings from the research entitled Emotions during isolation

The research project entitled: “Emotions during isolation” addressed a genuine need for primary school students and teachers to work through the difficult emotions and trauma associated with covidoalienation. A total of thirteen classes were surveyed, including approximately 335 students and 13 teachers who participated in the project that consisted not only of observations, talks but also individual understanding interviews. Before talking to the students during a full general education class, they watched a 10-minute video prepared by me about emotions, in which I explained why every emotion is good and important, and what the emotion felt during isolation from the ever-present virus might have been indicative of. The video was shared on the last day of remote education, via the tutors of the thirteen primary school classes. Then, during scheduled meetings, I discussed with each class separately, together with the children, the emotions they felt when watching the video and during remote teaching that were related to difficult situations in isolation. The intention of the educational chat was to identify and initially work through difficult situations that represented a new and often very traumatic situation for the children due to covidoalienation. I used for this purpose, for the first group of respondents, a poster prepared by me depicting different emotions of “Minions”. During the classes children were asked to identify themselves with these characters and analyze the scenes using emoticon puppets depicting: anger, sadness, shame, regret, longing, disappointment, fear, uncertainty. The children discussed vividly, showing strong emotions accompanied by crying, concern. One child already experienced strong emotions while watching the video, related to anger at the technology and isolation from the classroom where he could not share his feelings with his peer group. Of the 335 students in isolation during the pandemic, as many as 40 percent experienced trauma related to the loss of a loved one – the death of a grandmother/grandfather, in one case a father. Children experienced the grieving process with a sense of loneliness and fear for the health of loved ones, deprived of the opportunity of direct contact with a school psychologist/counselor who could only provide initial support remotely or upon return. In addition, children who showed behavioral problems before the pandemic experienced even stronger feelings of exclusion and externalized anger, aggression, defiance, and withdrawal when they returned to school. After returning from home isolation, children were found to be more likely to hide in toilets and cry in solitude, they were more likely than before to require additional stimuli and contact with media such as films and interactive whiteboards,

boys were more likely than before to start onanising during classes, while before the pandemic behavioral therapy had better results. The children often reported they felt their parents' fear and did not understand the situation of many changes they had to face. The emotion that dominated in the group of surveyed early school children was shame – because of the need to reveal on camera their family life and learning conditions. Anger, helplessness, and anxiety were also common emotions present in covidalienation. The children unanimously agreed that they wanted to learn in schools. The final point of the class meetings was to paint an individual Minion with the emotion that the early school child most often felt during home isolation, out of 335 drawings, as many as 250 of them indicated sadness and even in ten cases crying and tears on the faces of the Minions. When asked why they felt this way, the children said that it was mainly due to the lack of contact with their classmates and the fact that they had to be home alone, and that very often the teacher could not hear them, did not know what they were saying or what they were having trouble with. Understanding interviews were conducted with a group of teachers of early school classes, on school grounds, to discern the perspective of the ladies teaching remotely in these classrooms aimed at verifying information obtained from the children. Teachers observed many similar and disturbing effects of home isolation when they considered the emotions of their students, including: increased anxiety and fear and lack of spontaneity, school phobias, long adaptation to class and school conditions, lack of ability to interact naturally with peers, difficulty expressing their needs, also caused by trauma and difficult family situations, lack of psychological resilience, dominant in each of the thirteen classes studied – lowered mood, depression, lack of natural joy and spontaneity. To sum up, the research revealed that the situation of covidalienation contributed to numerous developmental changes in early school children, and one can even risk a claim that it took away their natural joy of being a child and forced them to become a more mature, reality-monitoring “little adult”. Children withdrew from spontaneous play and spontaneous activities, moving them in front of a computer monitor, thus their sense of loneliness increased. Participating in the permanent stress of family life, where anxiety, insecurity and constant uncertainty of tomorrow resonated, children became even more focused on themselves and their loved ones, closed to what was happening around them, often becoming less friendly. The only positive finding of the study on the emotional and social effects of covidalienation was the increase in digital competence and technical skills that the children had to learn at a rapid pace, by trial and error. However, this can also result in more media addiction, myopia, obesity, depressive thoughts in the future, as Manfred Spitzer (Spitzer 2021, pp. 76–88) proves when describing the very negative effects of interacting with smartphones in early school children. In addition, children with the distracted attention that they had to train in front of computer monitors now have great difficulty focusing, and suffer from insomnia as a result of being overstimulated by the images and

sounds of computers and other audiovisual media. Home isolation, which forced children into remote education, caused the most damage, in my opinion, in the sphere of developing social competence. There was an absurdity in increased media use frequency by children with social difficulties – such children were more likely to escape into the world of films, games, and fairy tales, thus blocking themselves even more strongly in the sphere of peer contacts. The same happened to adults who cannot imagine a day without their time-devouring smartphone, often giving it far more attention than their own children. A teacher moving his or her finger across the monitor of this technological creation, or tapping on the keyboard of a computer during classes at school, does not give enough attention to his or her pupils. Children who lack attention seek it on social media, where they in turn are faced with a world of fiction and a burst of unrealistic desires. Another threat is patostreaming and the spread of virtual crimes. Many children became victims of sexual offenses of varying degrees during their isolation. A child without adult supervision, staying home alone for eight hours at a time in front of computer monitors and chatting with strangers, seeking contact, was the perfect prey for sex and financial criminals.

Conclusion

The theoretical base concerning the phenomenon of alienation and control clearly indicates a worsening of well-being among those experiencing separation in a situation of permanent stress and change. This is the situation experienced by inmates of total and isolation facilities. (Goffman, 1957). Erving Goffman, in characterizing isolation and total institutions, pays particular attention to the process of deprivation of the personality, which under the influence of anxiety ceases to exist, becomes conformist, focused on surviving under the difficult conditions of separation from former life. A state of powerlessness and helplessness was also experienced by all those who were diagnosed with the disease during the pandemic, or who had to say goodbye forever to their loved ones who were in hospital isolation, with no possibility of contact or support in the last moments of their lives. Desperate acts of violation of restrictions and rights in hospitals, on the part of the family of a dying patient, were reminiscent of the ways in which a rebellious, cold calculating, or settled prisoner copes with isolation. In contrast, the passivity and apathy of many children in the remote classes, falling into depression, resembled a prisoner who was present in body but absent in spirit, who had lost the sense of functioning and was living the dream.

The aim of the article is not only to define the phenomenon of covidoalienation, but to consider how the situation of forced isolation changes our lives and to what extent it objectifies citizens. All predictions of many contemporary social scientists about alienation in virtual relationships, including Shoshana Zuboff

(Zuboff, 2020), Naomi Harrari (Harari 2019), and earlier Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman, 2003), Ulrich Beck (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2013), Eva Illouz (Illouz, 2016) Shery Turkle (Turkle, 2012) and many others, have confirmed the ubiquitous discourse of appropriation of human freedom and independence as a result of surveillance capitalism and have compounded the fear, distrust and apprehension of the future that is confirmed by the ongoing pandemic situation and the phenomenon of covidoalienation.

The research analysis attempts included in the paper were mainly based on the ground of constructivist theories, including Michael Foucault's concern for the subject (Foucault, 2016) and Emanuel Levinas' figure *le visage* (Levinas, 1998) as well as Fritz Riemann's forms of fear (Rieman 2005) and Umberto Eco's adjusted (other-direction) categories. The situation of enslavement during the pandemic revealed how the care of the self has been appropriated by the commercial market and social media, and the long-term effects that covidoalienation can have, especially in interpersonal relationships and face-to-face activities. Riemann reminds us that fear deprives us of agency, the ability to make decisions and to predict the future (Riemann 2005, p. 18). Parents, children and teachers alike are not able to predict the future, being exposed to uncertainty, misunderstanding and loneliness in the fight against the disease. Early school children, deprived of a sense of security, had to adapt quickly to a new situation of learning, entertainment and all activities, suffered many traumas requiring support and pedagogical and psychological interventions. The proposal to analyze covidoalienation is not the only view of the topic as a threatening phenomenon that increases loneliness, despondency, and the denial of direct contact and reinforces other-direction. The analyses presented constitute a construct and one possible interpretation, with the hope that they will lead to other scholarly areas and research on this topic. It should be clearly seen that the pandemic situation has motivated the positive development of new technological capabilities. Despite the many opportunities found in thriving modern education systems thanks to digitization and digitalization, the pandemic atmosphere has unequivocally revealed how difficult it is to maintain close relationships, how difficult it is to motivate people to learn, work, and meet others, under space constraints and in isolation. Life in a home environment and the prospect of increased surveillance and isolation, for many people, especially children, was associated with permanent stress and a failure to satisfy the need for closeness and a longing for natural contact with other people. The pandemic chaos, fear and distrust, caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, has brought to light what self-care is and what Levinas' *le visage* means, so much needed in the process of education and pedagogy of social rehabilitation. Many of the traumas resulting from covidoalienation will require increased and varied psychological and pedagogical support from today's schools and families, at the expense of relegating to the background the goals of success in parameterization and good learning outcomes. Misunderstanding the effects of covidoalienation can

lead to a dramatic final, which school counselors are already encountering having difficult conversations with students / parents / teachers traumatized by multiple transitions and traumatic isolation situations. The presentation of the problem related to covidoalienation is to provoke practical and preventive actions in this regard in the areas of re-socialization and interpersonal relations.

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