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### **Child and media chaos**

#### **Abstract:**

The media are an instrument of development and of mental, psychological and spiritual growth, but they also are a mean of mediocrity and intellectual superficiality. The media chaos is a particularly serious cultural danger. Therefore, its influence on child development is worth noting. Both in case of adults and children, the symptoms of chaos appear when the mediosphere is disordered, when the media physically, tangibly dominate in home.

Key words: media chaos, child development, pedagogy of mass media

Transformations of contemporary civilization and media culture have a great influence on every man and all dimensions of his life – work, personal life, free time. While analyzing the influence of the social media on human life, one can notice a certain paradox. On the one hand, it is improved by the most modern technology, but on the other, it generates serious dangers. Every domain is modernized, but at the same time it gets more primitive. The media are an instrument of development and of mental, psychological and spiritual growth, but they also are a mean of mediocrity and intellectual superficiality (A. Keen 2007). The media chaos is a particularly serious cultural danger. Therefore, its influence on child development is worth noting. Many families, especially those where the TV set, Internet and computer games are frequent visitors, may see for themselves how much the media can change and form the childhood.

#### **What is the media chaos?**

There are not many elaborations on media chaos (A. Lepa, M. Iłowiecki, P. Pasionek, M.M. Czarniecki). It is mainly understood as the lack of legal and ethical order in the media sectors (press law that is not good enough, lack of a pornography act, lack of a well-reasoned journalistic moral code). The media chaos that is interpreted like this, undoubtedly contrib-

utes to the emergence of the other kind of the lack of order, i.a. it leads to the cultural and social chaos. Bp Adam Lepa – as one of a few authors of the reflection on the phenomenon of media chaos– pointed out that the americanization of television and culture or contemporary mythologization, are the dangerous results of media chaos (A. Lepa 2010: 48; A. Keen 2007: 182-184).

With regard to the vastness of the topic of the media chaos in child's world, in the presented elaboration the focus was put on its analysis with reference to the child's mediosphere. The mediosphere of a man consists of the iconosphere (sphere of images), logosphere (sphere of words), sonosphere (sphere of sound) and galenosphere (sphere of silence). The largest amount of space is occupied by the sphere of images, and the smallest – unfortunately – by the silence, which has a serious implications on the soul and body (A. Lepa 2006: 54-90). Both in case of adults and children, the symptoms of chaos appear when the mediosphere is disordered, when the media physically, tangibly dominate in home. An example of this is a TV set watched at a very loud volume, also during the meals, visits, talks, children's plays, their world cognition, growing up. It is worth to invoke here the reasearch from year 2010, conducted by a group of scientists from the University in Montreal, the Saint-Justine Univer- sity Hospital Center and the american University in Michigan. 1314 children from two and a half to four and a half years old were examined. Their parents wrote down in a journal how much time they spend in front of TV each day. When they were already ten years old, their teachers joined the research and they were asked to write a report on children's activity and learning results. Children who spent more than two hours a day in front of TV at the age from 2 to 4 years old, were 7% less active than their friends. They also experienced serious problems in the relations with peers (L.S. Pagani; C. Fitzpatrick; T.A. Barnett; E. Dubow 2010: 425-431).

Therefore, one can already here – at the attempt to define the media chaos – give its characteristic features:

- disorder and excessive use of mass media,
- unsettled or even pathological condition of logosphere and mediosphere,
- disorganization of family free time ,
- lostness between the illusion of media and reality,
- chaos of a value system,
- lack of selective and critical reception of television in the family.

Media chaos may have a direct influence on child – when he or she spends too much time in front of a TV and an indirect influence – because of the parents or other carers that are enslaved by media and media culture.

### **Indirect and direct influence of chaos on child**

Many parents and tutors feel convinced that the child is protected from the negative influence of television, when they forbid to watch it. But this is not enough. The media culture is so omnipresent, that in order to be protected from its dangers, one has to do more than just stop using TV. Child may be determined by this culture by hand of the parents, who often and – what is worse – uncritically and thoughtlessly use mass media.

An adult – creator of a „failproof“ technology, collector of successes, consumer of information often feels convinced that he has a control over technology, information, life. Unfortunately, the hurry in which he lives, spiritual and emotional mediocrity, lack of real control over the world of matter and the space of interpersonal relations, makes him live in a huge chaos. This is how functions the adult – perhaps unknowingly – influences the child’s life and forms his lifestyle.

However, the most dangerous influence of media chaos occurs when it influences a young receiver directly. From the very first days, months, child receives the sound and then the displayed television picture. John Paul II was right pointing out that: “Until recently, family consisted of parents, children and possibly some relatives or someone connected with the housework; nowadays, this family circle has in a way become open for «company», that usually consist of the broadcasters, actors, political and sports commentators, important and famous people representing various professions, ideologies, nationalities” (John Paul II 2002: 91). This phenomenon is often neglected in the families. One has to realise that every utterance, coming from the TV set, shapes the child’s logosphere. Child learns new words – the important and developing ones, but also the ones that are not appropriate for his age. Child receives also the picture, colours, celebrities’ way of behaviour, body language etc. Therefore, one may deduce that together with the media’s presence in the house, the child is brought up by more people than just the parents and those people are often more influential.

In the same message, John Paul II mentioned also chaos, as a consequence of disordered relation with media in the family. The fact of media’s presence at home „is extremely beneficial, but has also hidden ambushes and dangers, that can not be disregarded. The family feels the huge tensions and increasing confusion that are characteristic features of the whole social life. There is a lack of some factors of stability that formerly provided it with a permanent in-

terior link, and allowed – thanks to the complete community of interests and needs – to keep also a community of life, that was not disturbed even by the job; that allowed it to fulfil the crucial educational and social role” (John Paul 2002: 91-92). In this words, the pope has noted one of the most heavy problems not only in the family, but in the whole society. The problem that leads to another ones: confusion, lack of stability, which means lack of order.

### **The consequences of media chaos**

In result of media chaos, its many other varieties appear in the family. Varieties that are extremely dangerous, especially when people are not aware of their existence. Therefore, it is worth to present and analyse them, at least shortly.

– **Educational chaos** – it is caused by the chaos of values in child’s world. It consists in different, usually conflicting educational contexts. The television may educate the child in a completely different way than parents do. Then, occurs the inconsistent comprehension of values (A. Zwolinski 2008: 39). This educational discord may cause a child to have doubts about the fact who is his educator, authority.

If the TV set is turned on, the child may feel safe. The television does not shout, does not demand, provides entertainment. A voice heard from the very young age calms, soothes child’s worries, being a company in sad and happy moments. In contrast to the parents who often do not have enough time, the television is always accessible. When the child is sad or is going through something, but is embarrassed to tell the adults, he escapes into film or fairytale picture. It is worth to mention that the TV programmes are made in such way, that they provide the viewer with empathy, warmth and understanding (that role is mostly fulfilled by the broadcaster). The rule of partnership is introduced by this method (A. Lepa 2008: 21-22). The results of the educational chaos are given by one of the american research. It showed that 44% of the researched american children answered that they prefer television rather than a father (J. Raszkowski 1979: 198-200). Family bonds are weakening, jeopardising the identity of the family (L. Dyczewski 2005: 225-242).

– **Social chaos**– it consists in the social isolation, loneliness, functioning in the world of illusions and fantasies among the movie characters. The result of this is also the gradual weakening of activity, getting lazier, the beginnings of a phenomenon called „the theatralisation of life” (A. Lepa 2003: 183-184; A. Lepa 2006: 25). This problem is visible especially when the TV set is turned off. A man can not find himself in the reality. Not until the TV set is turned

on again, does the viewer have the impression that life is back, that something is happening, that things, people, happenings fill the room and life.

– **Axiological chaos** – in contact with the commercial media transmission, the child is brought up to consumer values. Such activity is especially characteristic of the advertising. As it was pointed out: „the advertising, mainly in television, (...) is an element of real, widely understood education. Frankly speaking, the education that is not always desired by the parents and educators, but that is happening whether we want it or not. The omnipresent advertising, teaches the child something by providing him with the indirect, repeating experiences. The adults are not always aware of it” (P. Kossowski 1997: 9-11; P. Kossowski 1999; A. Albertowska 2006: 58-60; M. Braun-Gałkowska 2002: 10-13; T. Klosinska 1999: 652-654; M. Kuspit 2006: 22-23; A. Leszczuk 1999: 15-18; T. Masiuk 1994: 586-591; A. Zarkiewicz-Pacek 2002: 32-35; A. Adamski 2004: 90-95).

One can not have a grudge against the child for wanting to have different – the newest and often very expensive – toys, because a child is especially susceptible to such broadcastin. What is more, the child constantly receives the image of people who have everything, people who are happy, loved and admired by the society because of that. This trap is particularly dangerous for teenagers. The confrontation of the media picture with reality may strenghten the teenage angst and the feeling of loneliness (J. Mastalski 2007; J. Mastalski 2009).

The style of consumer life – it is worth to be aware of that – creates huge losses in child’s personality, big educational problems (A. Adamski 2010: 172). One will see for himself, especially when child grows up. Child who is brought up in a proconsumer way (and everyone is to a certain degree), finds it difficult to find himself in anti-consumer activities. An example of such activity is reading. As professor Burszta pointed out „ the marvel of a book consists in a fact that it does not promise anything in exchange. Those who expect are not able to accept reading, they do not understand its purpose” (W. Burszta 2007: 138).

– **Emotional chaos** – child in the first years of his life is not able to distinguish the truth from the falsity and fiction (A. Kołodziejczyk 2003). Therefore, a long contact with television may lead to crying, or even fear. Child just is not able to keep his emotional distance from the pictures he sees, in contrary to an adult. In case of the older children, the scenes of violene may lead to emotional blunting, insensibility, which sometimes causes the need of perceiving stronger impulses. They may also be the impulse for aggressive behaviours (A. Fraczak 1996; M. Braun-Gałkowska 1997: 5; M. Braun-Gałkowska, I. Uflik 2000; M. Braun-Gałkowska 2000: 94-114).

– **Cognitive chaos**– it occurs when the child is switching from one TV programme to another, not devoting enough attention to one information. Too many information may lead to the lack of focus and the cognitive superficiality: „Because of the speed in which one needs to process the pictures, it is much more difficult for teenagers to focus attention on one object for a long time” (S. von Calster 1992: 94-114). What is more, as Andrzej Sztandera pointed out, the knowledge presented in media is of “the quiz show” type (A. Sztandera 2010).

### **Education to media order**

The omnipresence of the picture „needs a committed and critical observer, demands finding a tool that could control this chaos, requires the new formation of our imagination and picture sensibility” (K. Olechnicki 2003: 278). First of all, one needs to observe its condition for some time in his own house, asking himself questions like: what is the importance of picture transmission – television, internet – in our family and how important is the verbal transmission – reading, dialogue? How do we develop our galenosphere (study of good habits – rest in silence, dialogue in silence, reading in silence, respecting one’s right to silence, meditation, prayer)? These questions will give an answer to the question: Is the mediosphere of our family threatened by chaos? If the answer is yes, it is worth to realize the danger and take appropriate actions in order to introduce the media order into the family.

The education gives parents a lot of reasons to fight for a healthy mediosphere of their child. In order to understand the seriousness of the situation, I think that one can compare the contaminated mediosphere of the family to the air pollution produced by the cigarette smoke. The research conducted in Hong Kong, published in „Pediatrics” shows that children who are passive smokers have worse results at school than their peers who come from the non-smoking families. This negative influence starts already in the womb of mother who is exposed to the cigarette smoke (A.E. El-Mohandes, M. Kiely, S. M. Blake, M. G. Gantz, M. Nabil El-Khorazaty 2010: 721-728). The child’s intellectual abilities decrease when there is one smoker in the family. The risk increases of 43% with two smokers and of 87% with three or more (L. Hak-Kan, H. Sai-Yin, W. Man-Ping, L. Tai-Hing 2009: 1306-1310). The same thing may happen with the media usage. One family member who is habitually watching TV is enough. He or she introduces the chaos into family by such behaviour. One person is also enough (it is good if this is a parent or both of them) in case of the mature mediosphere (B. Ewertowska 2010: 18-19; M. Laskowska 2009: 139-150).

It is worth to introduce a child into the media order from the first days, months of his life. In this time, one needs to remember that “television is not able to teach children the things they need to become adults. (...) The television is not able to be a good instrument of socialization” (J. Condry, K. Popper 1996: 35). Pedagogues, psychologists and media experts recommend to bring up the youngest children without television (and if it is used, one should show the children the cartoons that develop their psyche and the curiosity of the world), in the atmosphere of the mature personal communication, book reading and good fun (I. Duda 2006: 7-8; M. Laskowska 2010: 16-18; G. Lecicki 2010: 63-75). As it is emphasised by professor Wojciech Burszta: „Book is a domain of latent time and the linearity of transmission (...) Surrounding ourselves with books, guarantees the possibility to tear off from the regime of the pop cultural simultaneity” (W. Burszta 2007: 137). A. Adamski also stresses the role of children’s press in the process of education. „The children’s magazines constitute one of the contemporary means of mass communication. However, they are placed on a special position, i.e. on the borderline between verbal and visual transfers. They convey the information differently than television, radio or the Internet. Noticeably, they interact broader thanks to their specificity”, he writes (A. Adamski 2011: 211-215).

When the child is older, it is worth to introduce him or her into the world of media, because they are a valuable educational and pedagogic help (K.K. Przybycien 2007: 19-24), that educate a child to the responsible, critical, selective and conscious reception of the mechanism of creation of the media transmission (G. Rybarczyk 2006: 22-24; A. Adamski 2010).

## **Conclusion**

The subject was not supposed to only criticize the media or to negate their good influence in educational process. The purpose of this study was to show the danger of media chaos in child’s world.

As the functioning of media on the national and social level requires the law regulation and acting according to the rules of the journalism ethics, as the order in the mass media usage must be introduced into the family. This internal small law, the rules of media usage introduced by the parents, carers will order the house when it comes to media, and especially when it comes to child’s world.

The above analysis of media chaos in cultural and social aspect shows the need to conduct more research on that field. It is worth to wonder for example how will the old age of the child brought up in media chaos look like. I think that the children’s opinion should more often matter in such research.

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