

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA EDUCATION

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Abstract:

The family is the first and most important social group in which are achieved foundations of whole human life. There child acquires his first knowledge, skills and habits. However, upbringing in the family cannot be viewed separated from the wider social context. There are also the mass media that have become part of the family environment and in some ways its presence and messages affect on the family and its members. Family communication, experience of self-worth of each member, the family rules and value system as well as the family relation to the larger society make basic aspects of quality of family environment. Considering that today the media have become very present in the family, the question is: Are the media an incentive or disturbance in creating a quality family environment? Parents are an unavoidable media socializer and the significance of parental intervention is particularly stressed for young children, who have just started meeting with the media and everything it offers. Undoubtedly, the media is a source of cultural and spiritual wealth and useful information; they help us in familiarization with contemporary social, political and other developments and trends, and provide the opportunity of learning about the world. On the other hand, in some families the media took primary place, direct and emotional contact is very rare and is replaced by a virtual relationship such as communicating by telephone, text messaging, e-mail, watch TV. Feelings of warmth, understanding and mutual support are almost marginalized. Because is necessary to talk with children about what they saw and heard, with an intention to help them evaluate and understand the meaning of moral instruction and the nature of the content that is offered in various types of media, the aim of this paper is to analyze the positive and negative effects of mass media on family environment and communication. Also, the importance of media education will be highlighted.

Key words:

family, communication, media, hidden educators, media education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Family is a group which is a part of society and not isolated from the wider environment, but is in constant interaction with it, and the political, economic, social, demographic and cultural opportunities inevitably affect it and the quality of its educational function. Although in society constantly undergoing changes are happening, that affect the meaning and role of the family, it is a primary framework within which one satisfies emotional, financial and social needs of each family member. Successful performance of educational functions of the family is possible only in a favourable family setting or atmosphere, which is sometimes more important than the individual parental practices and educational methods. Satir (1983) points out that a healthy family atmosphere is the one where each member can achieve extremely high experience of self value, direct and honest communication, flexible rules of behaviour that are appropriate to current needs and situations, and an open attitude towards society. It is the duty of parents to provide their children with a healthy environment in which they can develop positive personal characteristics, gain

love and trust that are a precondition to a healthy psychological development of the child. Direct and honest communication implies a clear verbalization of what one thinks, feels and experiences. Messages should be clear and appropriate, and the relations between family members in such situation are not disturbed. The systems of family behavioural rules according which a family functioning are obligatory for all members and vary from family to family. Those families who manage to adapt these rules to changes that come over time are considered to be healthier. The open relationship towards society implies that family is able to take a critical attitude towards the influences that come from outside, among other things, the influence of mass media and manage to adapt to the reality in which it currently lives. Thereby, a family does not lose its uniqueness and intimacy. To achieve the above mentioned it is necessary that the family, as community of members, keeps investing maximum effort, energy and willpower.

Today we are witnessing large exposures of modern families to mass media, as well as families' crisis. The crisis of the modern families is evident in professional stress and rhythm of life, alienation, lack of communication and responsibility, and the weakening of family and social ties. With a child's genetic potential and the impact of environment on child development and formation of his personality, parenting it is extremely important. However, the absence of quality parenting opened the way for a variety of negative effects, including the negativities that come through the mass media (TV, newspapers, radio, the Internet, movies, etc.). Are the media the one that affected the crisis of families and those who deepen it? Are they the ones who educate our children, and "talk" to them through advertisements, the Internet, tabloid or media are encourage a family dialogue?

2. MEDIA AND THEIR IMPACT ON SOCIETY AND FAMILY

Most theoreticians dispute over a definition of the mass media. One of interpretations is that the mass media are only newspapers, radio, television and the Internet. These media are based on strong informative component and present the reality. According to another interpretation the mass media includes film, books and sound recording media. Malović (2007:11) quotes the simple definition of mass media according to American theoretician Tonny Bennett, which states: "...the media of mass communication are print, radio, TV, film and sound recording media." Usual division of media based on respecting technological assumptions is to: a) printed b) electronic and c) new media. The print media includes a book, daily, weekly, monthly or half-month periodicals (newspapers, magazines, journals), and the electronic media radio and TV. Photography and film are media "sui generis", the newer medium is the Internet, and every day the newer ones are created. However, language is a common means of all media, the word organized in text (Lipovčan, 2006).

Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton (Kunczik and Zipfel, 2006:37) stated the following functions of the mass media: the media increase the prestige and authority of individuals or groups by legitimizing their status, reinforce social norms, and in some conditions are operating dysfunctional which can cause non-participation and passivity. Malović (2007), states that the mass media are not only news and information. They are not just mere entertainment or powerful educational tool, but they are all of this together. The mass media bring a worldview to our home, family and work environment which we sometimes do not want to accept, but it cannot be discarded. Relationship between the media and society significantly determines the relations in society. One could say that media are neither out nor above society, but

what the society is, such are the media. The degree of openness of society can be determined by identifying the openness of the media.

Hedges (2011) describes the dramatic and disturbing rise of "post-written" society that craves fantasy, ecstasy and delusion. As claimed, today we are divided into two sides: one, the minority, is based on the written world that knows how to cope with complexity and can separate the "delusion" from the truth. The second, and that is the majority, which daily increases, withdraws from reality into a false security and magic. In this other society, serious movies, newspaper and books, as well as meaningful, intelligent conversations are pushed to the margins. Hedges points out how cheap spectacles and celebrities serve as an indispensable everyday fun, but also as idols we want to become. The corporations entertain us, inform and bombard us by advertisements and promotions. They are structured so that they increase their income with no consideration for human life, social gain or business consequences on the natural environment. They tell us who we are and make us believe what we can become. Vertovšek (2012) states that growing fear is that the media (as well as their owners and patrons) are increasingly resisting the clear principles of media and journalistic profession, as well as ethical considerations and become a tool and weapon of world corporations and the elite in protecting the wealthier minorities from the majority. Also, we should mention another phenomenon, whose roots go back to the last century, but to which more attention is paid only in recent times and this is increasing individual and social dependence on media. We face the fact that the media increasingly neglect their informative role and function, persuasion is turning into a mere propaganda, entertainment also becomes the methods and techniques of manipulation of drawing attention to major events and their causes and consequences while transmission of culture, rather than in a positive frame of spreading democratic process, becomes a sphere to fulfil corporate and socio-political goals.

Sigman (2010) while travelling to distant lands observed that the inhabitants of most distant parts of the world act or speak in a way that were able to learn just by watching videos or television programs broadcasted from far away. Further he claims that a global village is gradually being formed in which each culture comes into contact with the feelings of some other (mostly American) culture and neglect the contact with their own culture. The media, including TV, affect the perception of beauty, the disappearance of cultural differences, sexuality etc. There is a flood of global value and that system of delivery of new value causes strange changes in the different cultures of the world. Television preoccupation with innovations leaves on us the impression of constant changes. With hypnotic effects changes in the brain are brought out. Namely, it has been investigated and determined that 30 seconds after you turn on the television, our brain becomes neurologically less able to evaluate what we see. Incoming information are being absorbed by our brain uncritically. It was determined that the left side of the brain, which adopts the information logically and analytically, turns off, enabling the right side, which processes the information through emotions and uncritically, to work undisturbed. It really describes us as passive recipients remotely controlled by television. Unfortunately, television is not the only medium that affects us in that way.

However, it should be noted that media, in addition to the foregoing, has a positive role. The positive side of media is a quick spread and availability of information, as well as the transmission of useful educational programs. Media equally protect the interests of children, young people in general and vulnerable populations and inform

on specific topics. Through the media one can be familiar with certain contemporary problems and their solutions or find help in solving them. Miliša et al. (2009) claim that technological advances like a computer or Internet and globalization of notification create an excellent opportunity to access the information from the media and the pedagogical implications of distance learning like E-learning. Media influence the awareness and change of attitudes, beliefs and behaviours and this makes them one of the most powerful educational tools of our time. Sanders et al. (2000) therefore emphasize that media should play an important role in development, supportive and preventive programs to improve parenting skills and better communication within the family. The task of parents and professionals is to maximize the positive effects of media and minimize the negative effects.

3. COMMUNICATION WITHIN A FAMILY AND MEDIA

Communication within the family is particularly significant. There is no good communication in life and in the family if participants do not convey specific information to each other or do not select information that is relevant for further development of mutual relations and creation of confidence. Communication is a fundamental requirement of educational work in the family even more so as a parent should be a role model for a child, an example, a friend, a counsellor. The family is in some way a mediator between children and the community, the most appropriate school for emotional and social relationships. Rosić (2005) defines communication as conversation, dialogue, listening, persuasion, reporting, advising two partners, two interlocutors, parents and children. Communication is a two-way process and includes the following: understanding the thoughts and feelings expressed by the other person and responding in an effective manner.

A child learns through close relationships how to communicate from an early age. According Buljan-Flander and Karlović (2004) this applies to movement and expression of emotions by smiling, with glances, by frowning, showing and sharing, negotiating etc. A child, with these simple exchanges, develops his system of problem solving and communication with other people. So a child develops feelings, desires, and picture of himself. Emotional tone and subtle interactions in a relationship are the key for who we are and what we learn. The way in which a child communicates with his parents and the extent to which parents respond to signs of a child's needs condition the kind of interpersonal relationships that will be established in later years (Cajner Mraović, 1999).

Family communication patterns are an important area in which the child acquires his experience of meeting with media. According to Kundanis (2003) there are two dimensions of communication patterns in families - a socially oriented and conceptually oriented dimension. Social orientation refers to the attitudes of family and social norms of behaviour by which parents appreciate the differences, promote social harmony and a pleasant atmosphere in family relationships. In these families, children are encouraged to present their arguments and to be careful not get hurt or offended them. On the other hand, conceptual orientation is more focused on the information and on attitudes towards family objects and ideas. Conceptually oriented parents emphasize the importance of discussing and considering the problem from all sides before making any decisions. In such families children use media content as help in complex reflections of social reality and become more active and educated consumers, while in the socio-oriented families children use media content in their own lives and use it as a model of behaviour.

In pedagogical literature and practice, there are four basic types of parental education and means of communication through which we can examine the way in which children build their relationship towards media. These are: democratic, autocratic, permissive and indifferent style of parenting. Lacković (2009), Miliša et al. (2010) singled out the following:

- Democratic upbringing is the desired style of parenting in which the communication is at the highest level and where the child is in the position of the subject. It allows a choice between alternatives, respect for authority of knowledge, affirmation of positive educational examples, criticism and creativity. The goal of democratic style is self-actualization that can not happen if a child is not educated in the spirit of duty, responsibility, patience, devotion and self-sacrifice. Such upbringing strengthens the internal motivation of the child, encourages him to take responsibility for his actions, thereby creating mutual trust. In such upbringing the child becomes aware of the existence and importance of others and different persons and peoples, cultures, customs, beliefs. In contact with various messages that come from the mass media such child will be responsible and parents will take time to share comments, explanation, discussion and reception of contents.
- The autocratic upbringing entails "a firm hand" where a child is an object in any form of communication. The child is not raised to be independent but is lead towards a crisis of identity and a low level of self-esteem. Therefore, this type of education is most pernicious. The autocratic parent believes that only he knows the answers to all the questions and children have to follow his instructions because he is always right. In this type of upbringing because of low self-esteem a child may undergo influences coming from media and uncritically accept them.
- Permissive upbringing also called anarchic or "laissez-faire". The focus in this style of parenting is on child's wishes and interests. It is likely that such a style will result with raising of an egocentric person. This upbringing allows to hate school, favours legalization of drugs, relativises authorities etc. Simply, the child wants to fulfil all his wishes and that is a breeding ground for commercialized media that have set a goal where the most important thing is to please the child.
- Indifferent upbringing also does not encourage responsibility and quality communication. Such a parent is at least emotionally engaged and is more focused on himself than to his own child. Indifferent parents often see only the power of money, but not love and in a climate of indifference silence is a logical consequence. In order to solve concerns about the child, these parents would prefer to buy a TV, cell phone or computer and will not pay attention to building a child's self-esteem and responsibility.

It is extremely important that parents encourage democratic atmosphere in the family and create an atmosphere of mutual appreciation, respect, listening, to encourage their children to express their discontent, stimulate cooperation agreement and conversation especially when it comes to themes and messages that come from various types of media. Cajner Mraović (1999) points out that the family is a communication network in which a young human being establishes standards and norms of behaviour and develops its expectations and ideas. Conversation with child's parents and other family members is very important means by which the child

seeks to express his ideas and wants to establish their relationships with others. In this kind of communication one does not only use the words because the conversation necessarily involves the transmission of feelings and attitudes, gestures, facial expressions and posture. Child's development is greatly affected by the extent to which it can freely communicate with his family members, content of the communication, especially its clarity. It can be concluded that children develop their identity under the influenced of many factors including media but the parental role is most important in the creation of their relationship to media. Parents influence their children's behaviour as well as their attitudes and words. It depends on the parents whether and in what way their children will be exposed to a variety of media during the whole day, periodically during the day or not at all.

4. FAMILY AND HABITS THE USE OF MEDIA - REVIEW OF SOME RESEARCH

Today's amount of information the average child encounters in one day is higher than the amount of information a man in Middle Ages encountered throughout the whole life. Modern families do not have a lot of quality time together and it generally spend their limited quality time by watching TV. Sigman (2010) claims that watching television not only becomes a favourite pastime but it is a privileged activity and our main source of everyday experience. When we add the use of the Internet, computers, DVDs and mobile phones the total time we daily use in front of the screen even exceeds the number of hours we spend on sleeping. Today when we regret the lack of time, we should examine what exactly we are doing with our most valuable resources: our time and our children. Not only does television take a lot of time but affects our psychological, political, and even neurological and metabolic functions, and that we are not even aware of it.

Over the past few years the use of various media among children and adolescents has become more common than ever before. Every day we launch the latest models of iPod, cell phones, tablets, notebooks, day is unthinkable without exchanging SMS messages and viewing video clips on YouTube. Communicating through social networks has led to the fact that young people are rarely out of contact or out of the reach of various media.

Roberts and Foehr (2008) claim that children and adolescents in the United States are flooded by media. They have television sets in their rooms, personal computers in living rooms, and digital music players and cell phones in their backpacks. Per day on average they spend more time with media than in any other activities, except sleep. American children aged 8-18 years reported to spend more than 6 hours a day with some media. Also, the more present phenomenon is "media multitasking", meaning using multiple media at the same time, and the use of media reaches 8.30 hours per day.

Numerous studies have shown that there is a correlation between school achievement and the time that children spend using various types of media (Gentile and Walsh, 2002), so in the case where children watch television more than 10 hours per week, school performance decreases while watching television increases, also among them there are more symptoms of stress and violent behaviour (Villani, 2001). Moreover watching TV really affects family interaction, because there is less verbal communication, less direct eye contact among family members, however, there are more physical contacts while watching television programs (National Institute of Mental Health, 1982). In Croatia, a study among children of elementary schools

(Miliša et al., 2009) showed that television is watched more than 5 hours a day by 12% of children and 18.8% of children watch TV 3-5 hours a day. It is interesting that according to the statement of children, their parents significantly spend less time watching television, meaning that 9% of parents spend their time in front of the TV 3-5 hours a day and 4.3% of parents spend their time more than 5 hours a day in front of TV. In their room TV have 53.8% of the children, 39.70% said they watched TV alone and 32.5% with a brother or a sister, then with parents and at least with friends. Also, 25% of children have stated that the parents do not talk about media deals and amenities.

Apart to the TV, the occupancy with other media is similar. Thus, the increased use of the Internet is linked with a small amount of time spent in company with other people, weaker communication and increased depression and loneliness (Hughes et al., 1999; O'Toole, 2000; Demirer et al., 2013), and often playing of video games is also correlated with lower grades among school children (Gentile et al., 2004). Many people today talk about the usefulness of interactive television and the Internet because they are used in communication. But even so family relationships are being damaged. Sigman (2010) states a study which examined 73 families and the effects of the Internet on social inclusion and psychological well-being of family members. Tested families often used the Internet for communication and the researchers concluded that greater use of the Internet communication was followed by a decrease of communication between other family members; there was a reduction in social circle of contacts and increase of feelings of depression and loneliness. They also concluded that watching TV causes social exclusion and deterioration of mood, as well as limited social interaction face to face. It was discovered that the Internet and television cause poor quality of life and impairment of physical and mental health. In fact, when people socialize more, they are happier and healthier, both physically and mentally.

As for movies, devastating is the fact that one of the eight Hollywood films show the rape (Villani, 2001), therefore it is clear that the content analysis of movies and TV programs shows that children and young people are exposed to violence every day.

Exploring the use of mobile phones, Buckingham (2004) found that there is still not enough academic research on mobile telephony but they were performed for the purpose of testing and manufacturing markets. Until now, it was found that in the United Kingdom children and young people have great access to mobile phones and 71% of those from 11 to 19 years of age have their own mobile phones, which is an increase of 42% compared to year 2000., while the research of Crabtree et al. (2003) shows that 90% of young people and 90% of children ages 5 to 9 have access to mobile phones to a certain degree.

As for radio, Millwood Hargrave (2000, according to Buckingham, 2004) in her study of the BSC has found out that older children and adolescents usually listen to the radio in their rooms and they are interested in different radio stations that their parent listen to. The omnipresent techniques such as MP4/5 players and mobile phones make it difficult to control that media to parents.

Exploring the print media it has been found that the amount of reading contributes significantly to enriching vocabulary, general knowledge, knowledge of spelling and grammar, a fluent speech, controlling for differences in intelligence and reading abilities (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998). But it raises questions of content that children and young people read.

It can be concluded that today one cannot consider the life and development of children and young people outside the context of media influence. Media increasingly takes the place of other factors of socialization of young people such as family, school, church and influence on the formation of values, attitudes and lifestyles. Miliša and Zloković (2008) name today's family "a fast food family" because according to them the feelings of warmth and love, understanding and mutual support to is marginalized or (not) postponed for certain time. Such a family gives up its fundamental task of parenting, socialization of children leaves to chat and blog, teaching and learning to web surfing while daily communication within the family is replaced by instant messaging, text messages, e-mails etc. A model of such family relations is life next to one another, instead of one with the other. Due to the large amount of time that media have in the lives of family members and impact that they have by sending certain messages they might be hidden educators of modern times. Unquestionably, the child cannot fully be preserved from hidden educators, from their various good and bad role models and examples, and it is neither desirable to isolate the child and separate it from the environment in which it should grow up. However, parents must try to meet the situation and opportunities in an environment where the child moves, the positive and negative impacts arising from it and to properly set up and show to a child how to behave and act. As the educational activities are more conscious and straighter, which is more planned and consistent, the easier it will be fully to suppress all unwanted side effects and hidden educators, including the mass media.

5. FAMILY AND MEDIA EDUCATION

As for children and young people to find their place in constantly increasing variegated offer of media, it is necessary that the adults have certain directions. Therefore, first the adults must become media competent, especially parents, then teachers and professors, in order later to be able to direct children and young people. The knowledge that parents have about the mass media and their influence, plays a significant role in the formation of family habits of using various media. This is why a media education for parents and children is required.

According to Miliša et al. (2009) media education deals in the adoption of media literacy and mastering media competencies. The main objectives of media education are: recognition of media activity, analysis and evaluation of media products, the distinction of fiction from reality, the distinction between manipulation and/or educational activities and recognition versatility of media contents and forms. Media literacy is the ability to create own opinion from verbal and visual symbols that we receive through the mass media, it is the ability to select and choice, questioning the abilities and ability to act which allows us not to be vulnerable (Thoman, 1999). Messages from the media are constructed and every one of us explains their meanings in his own way. Media are primarily a commercial product intended for a specific audience. Each of the previously mentioned mass media is unique and in such a manner it should be understood. The importance of media literacy is just discovering how certain media products contribute to the meanings which we create by ourselves. Parents and children need to use the following strategies of media literacy (Silverblatt, 1995): moderation, participation, debate about television industry and other media, talking about reality and fiction in entertainment programs, presenting of understanding of the media and the selective choice of programs and shows. Temperance and participation in the use of various media with children, relate

more to the protective role of parents and adults, and discussion, conversation and active choice of content refers to the acquisition of skills of a child. To become a media literate does not mean to have a certain knowledge about media, but to know how to ask the right questions about what is being watched, read or heard (Žderić, 2009).

Some authors have compiled a list of useful strategies which would parents should follow when it comes to using a variety of media (Kundanis, 2003):

- avoid using the TV as a babysitter;
- restrict the use of television;
- watching television and movies with children;
- examine the personal habits of parents in using various media;
- set clear rules;
- keep television in a place that is not very pointed out;
- not placing the television and computer in children's bedroom;
- to be informed about the program or the movies that children want to watch before they are allowed to watch them;
- use the radio, CD player or computer when television is not turned on;
- offer other activities for children in which they can have fun and enjoyment.

Applying this strategy in the family can affect how children will use the media and the message they receive from them, but also how to be media literate. Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) pointed out a series of studies which have demonstrated the positive effects of having parents who reduced the undesirable effects of media such as aggression, fear and drinking alcohol, and enhanced the desirable effects such as learning from educational TV shows. In literature one can come across two described behaviour of parents when they want to prevent the negative effects of the media, namely: *active* and *restrictive*. Active behaviour includes commenting, discussing and explaining the content coming from the media. Restrictive behaviour refers to the sheltering the child from inappropriate content in the media, and includes strict family rules on the limitation exposure of the child to such content. Various authors have found advantages in both behaviours of parents. Outcomes for children will depend primarily on the age of the child, family characteristics, and parental perceptions of the impact of media and content and manner of selected behaviours of parents (Kundanis, 2003; Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2005).

The challenge to parents is not to be passive observers, but according their own life experiences to help children to make the best use of immense resources to which nowadays they have access to. We are not only talking about the need for the development of cognitive skills, children should be offered assistance in navigating among countless chaotic stimuli. The acquisition of media literacy is possible by communication with all members of the family, and with the acquisition of media competence media will be able to be an encouragement and not a disturbance in family dialogue.

6. CONCLUSION

Previous studies have shown that mass media have a powerful impact on the lives of families and children in contemporary society. Media effects can be positive and negative. It is very important that parents are aware of this impact and they take care of how their children are exposed to certain media and what kind of content they consume. The disturbing fact is how much time children spend watching television

and use other types of media. The more time they spend with media, the less time they have for leisure activities and communication with other family members. It is the obligation of both parents and society to increase the positive effects of the media, and reduce the negative. Missing discussions about the contents about media with their children, parents miss the opportunity to unobtrusively raise their children. Teaching parents and children to have a selection among the contents offered in various media, how to evaluate the values promoted by the media and the general promotion of awareness on the effects of media is a challenge for teachers and other professionals. It is therefore necessary to implement preventive and educational programs for parents to strengthen their parenting competence, teach them new skills and encourage the development of media literacy. Also, it is important to use the media to promote various educational programs and programs that could affect the awareness of parents on media literacy and the use of different strategies for the benefit of their children. In future researches one should focus on the impact of educational programs for the development of media literacy among parents and children, and it would be interesting to compare the results between parents who have attended training programs and those who did not. Besides, one could examine the differences in parents' behaviour toward younger and older children before and after the passing educational programs.

7. REFERENCES

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