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NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION
OF EVERYDAY FAMILY LIFE IN LIQUID MODERNITY

Tools are one of the basic carriers of culture. Most individual activities, including family practices, have their roots in objects. The introduction of new tools has always been resisted at the beginning because it violated the institutionalized forms of life. Contemporary processes that deeply change the family make old behaviour patterns affecting family life useless. Furthermore, tools continue to develop and new devices, such as the computer or the mobile phone, keep coming out. New communication technologies require new behaviour patterns that institutionalize various forms of family life occurring in liquid modernity.

Keywords: digital technologies, family, institutionalization, liquid modernity

INTRODUCTION

The family is radically changing. Its boundaries are becoming fluid and membership is a matter of choice, as are the forms of marital and family life. Public pressure to get married and have children is practically a thing of the past. Every fourth child in Poland is born outside of marriage (according to the Central Statistics Office, 2017). The division of roles and family relationships are not covered by predictable scenarios that offer well-known behaviour patterns and mutual obligations. Family ties that strongly bind its members through obligatory solidarity and loyalty are seemingly evolving into a contractual relationship. All these changes have led some researchers to ask themselves the question: does the family remain as the primary social institution? After all, family interaction patterns are vanishing before our eyes. The procreation, parenthood and sexual life that used to be reserved for marriage are now independent of each other. People may have a sex life without the necessity to formalize their relationship; they may decide to have a child outside of the more or less established relationship structure; finally, they may achieve become parents without a partner or sexual intercourse, thanks to in-vitro fertilization. Does family really cease to be an institution then? It should, however, be admitted that no other institution capable of taking over its social or

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biological (reproductive) functions seems to be emerging. People still get married and follow the more traditional pattern, and a large majority of children are born within marriage. Adult children look after their parents, and the family provides the fundamental support system. The family remains a social institution; only the tools for its institutionalization are changing. This article considers how new technologies can affect families, as innovations are playing very important roles in the process of family life.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF TOOLS

In 'The Third Wave', Alvin Toffler appeals to those perceiving the processes transforming the family in terms of threat: if you want to save the traditional family, throw away all computers. It is not the availability of contraceptives, the permissibility of abortion, nor the ubiquity of pornography that pose a threat. It is the social development and new technologies that transform the family (Toffler 1985). Toffler's observation reminds us about the role of objects in social development and the changes that this development brings. When we analyse the essence and the importance of social institutions, we rarely focus on the fact they are rooted in objects. They are also an extremely important part of social reality, relationships, and behaviour patterns. According to Anna Giza-Poleszczuk and Mirosława Marody, tools are one of the three carriers of culture. Their development involves changes in the forms of social organization (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2004). Just as the invention of writing and printing created a store of knowledge independent from the memory of individuals, the expansion of other tools involves the development of the information they carry, and affects not only behaviour patterns and social bonds, but also the system of meanings that shapes social reality. The telegraph changed the perception of time and space, as does the Internet. Recalling the works of Stefan Czarnowski, Giza-Poleszczuk and Marody indicate the importance of the development of tools for changes in the organization of social life. The change of a tool, even a labour-saving one, usually comes with difficulty and takes time. This is because it involves more profound changes, as it undermines the established and set patterns of behaviour and organization of work. A woman using a spindle was mobile: she could spin and look after the household at the same time. A spinning wheel, however, chained her to one spot, thereby preventing her from doing other things. The invention of the plough was even more revolutionary. The use of a wooden plough usually required the cooperation of several people and someone else to supervise their work. According to Czarnowski, the wooden plough was an inherent part of a patriarchal peasant family. The plough shattered this hierarchy and undermined the previously undisputed position of the father (Czarnowski 1956). The new tool required new social 'tooling', a new institutionalization.

Tools are objects used in action[1]. It is impossible to separate tools from social practices and individual activities. The former are closely connected with the latter and are usually

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[1] 'One can [...] say that an object becomes a tool only through its use in action...' (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2004: 124).

at one. Most everyday activities like washing, cooking, cleaning, or eating require tools. Such activities are routine, which means the presence of objects, these essential elements of day-to-day chores, goes unnoticed. To a large extent, tools (for example, a coffee maker) are necessary to initiate daily rituals and help us go through them. According to Giza-Poleszczuk and Marody, devices play an important role when it comes to the next culture carrier, namely habits. 'People develop their habits by adjusting to objects, such as a hammer, the very shape of which carries social memory of certain operations, and by adjusting to behaviour patterns of other people, the habits of whom, in turn, carry the memory of past interactions and social cooperation, and in some cases, also the memory of solutions to various types of problems' (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2004: 129).

Social memory is one of the basic categories behind the concept of socialization and social life developed by Jean-Claude Kaufmann. It manifests itself mainly in habits/customs and tools. For Kaufmann, habits and tools are pieces of social memory that help break the limitations determined by the biological nature of man. According to Kaufmann's key thesis, it is social memory that transformed man as a biological being into a social animal, thereby contributing to the emergence of human social organization. Tools play a key role in this process. 'Thanks to first tools which stored up social memory, the transfer of knowledge between the old and the young generation does not have to start from scratch each time' (Kaufmann 2004: 31). For Kaufmann, habit – very often rooted through tools – is the essence of socialization. 'A man has no habits, but is made of habits, and when it comes to behaviour control, almost exclusively of habits' (Kaufmann 2004: 151).

Habit has become an inherent part of the essence of institutionalization. If we agree with its understanding according to what Berger and Luckman have proposed, habitualized actions make up institutionalization, which 'occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors. To put it differently, any such typification is an institu-tion' (Berger and Luckmann 1986: 96). Institutionalization means repeatability, stability and thus the 'obviousness' and 'naturalness' of behaviour patterns. Tools are an important part of institutionalization. The ard (a simple type of plough) belonged not only to a certain system of meanings connected with specific actions, but also to an established order of hierarchical relationships. The more technologically advanced plough shattered this order and violated the institutionalized system of relations and meanings. The revolutionary nature of new tools manifests itself not only in new technological usability but, above all, in the collapse of the previous order of everyday life and social relations. The use of such tools requires both new skills and the courage to break old habits regarding cooperation with people and the entire share of social life affected by these tools.

Changes taking place in modern society are often analysed in terms of technological development and its consequences. One of its distinguishing features is its speed: tools change over one generation. Nonetheless, they have an incredible ability to collect and store information, including information that is necessary in the everyday life of individuals. At the same time, the use of new tools requires new information and the rejection of old habits. There is a reason why the rejection of tradition is one of the main features of contemporary reality, and the repeatability of the well-known is no longer required or expected. New tools require special instructions on how to use them; the knowledge and experience of our ancestors

are not enough. The entire process of tool manufacturing is detached from people's direct experience. As noted by Zygmunt Bauman, until recently people were able to repair most of their household items on their own. It is practically impossible these days (Bauman 1990). To replace a gasket in a tap, a professional service must be called. '[...] the transition from tools made by practitioners to tools derived from broadly understood scientific activity seems to be a basic turning point in the historical sequence of technological changes' (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2004: 125).

FAMILY AND NEW TOOLS

Social memory demonstrated in tools covers not only their use but also the entire social order of meanings that defines and validates specific organization of social life, with its hierarchy, division of roles and positions, and systems of social relationships. The institutionalization of family life is manifested in tools used in both family rituals and everyday tasks to be fulfilled by family members. Home space itself is filled with devices that perform certain functions, both useful and symbolic. Changes affect the organization of such space as well: there is a strong link between separated rooms and a hallway and privacy and intimacy attributed to family life (Ariès 1995). Individual objects present in this space have meanings that determine the division of roles, family relationships, hierarchies and boundaries of home and family space. The spinning wheel was unambiguously attributed to the female role, while the plough was a typical attribute of masculinity, as were broom and hammer, respectively. It was believed that cleaning equipment and accessories did not require special skills necessary to use them, and thus they carried a symbolic message about hierarchy and relationship, namely that a person using them could not expect to have a high position in the structure of power or prestige. Certain devices could be used by a child, while others could not; therefore, the ability to use them was a sign of becoming an adult.

Margaret Mead identifies three distinct cultural phases. In each of these phases, there is a different subject being the primary culture carrier. In a post-figurative culture, this subject is the oldest generation because their knowledge, experience and skills ensure continuity and durability. The elders are the only source and 'storage' of social memory, which determines their position, also in the family. A prefigurative culture is the opposite. This is a culture or society wherein individuals commonly learn from those younger than themselves, not the other way around. Social development is so rapid that parents' knowledge and skills become outdated before their children grow up, so basically elders learn from youngsters. The authority granted to adults for centuries can easily be undermined. The parent-child or grandparent-grandchild relationship can no longer be built based on the position of adults as those who know better. The pace of tool development is increasing. Knowledge and information were once stored on hard disks of computers, then saved on floppy disks, then on CDs and pen drives, and today data is stored in cloud computing. Social memory and stores of knowledge have broken away not only from individuals, but also from material tools (some information is stored in virtual space). If someone wishes to refer to such memory, all they need to do is to read instruction manuals. A family message passed down from one generation to another covers

not only certain skills relating to the use of objects assigned to specific roles and situations, but also some more universal competences that allow individuals to use ever-changing tools that each time require slightly different skills. It is difficult to prepare a girl for housework if one does not know what device will be used in the future for washing, cooking or cleaning. Tasks such as cleaning or washing no longer require proper training to be given by a mother to a daughter. Dishes are put in a dishwasher and a load of washing is put into a washing machine, so the training comes down to learning washing programs and pushing the right buttons. However, these skills can be acquired by reading instruction manuals, so the training is not really necessary. Using various devices that do most of the household chores for us is not strictly assigned to specific roles: pressing some buttons is not particularly complicated and bears no relation to gender or age. Research shows that the division of household tasks by gender still exists, but it is slowing fading away.

FAMILY AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

The development of tools has significantly accelerated since the invention of the plough or the spinning wheel. The number of devices people have at home these days is ever-growing: we live in a world full of objects. The introduction of new tools or significant modification of old ones no longer causes social resistance as it did in the pre-industrial era, because this process is taking place continually. It also applies to daily necessities. These changes have been and still are related to other changes occurring in the society. According to Urlich Beck, the mechanization of household appliances was one of the factors that triggered modern family transformations. When household duties, for which women used to take primary responsibility, was made easier and faster, women gained more free time that they could spend on other forms of activities, which led to their emancipation and liberation from externally imposed social restrictions (Beck 2002). The invention of the microwave oven or the dishwasher is only a continuation of this process. It was, however, the coming of the computer that brought about a real revolution. The computer was not burdened with any meanings, unlike for instance an improved oven or drilling machine. The computer (and the mobile phone alike) cannot be used by all family members at the same time, as it is intended to be operated directly by one individual user. It is completely different from a television set. The computer somewhat forces household members to introduce new patterns of behaviour and rules regarding its use. One cannot refer to old habits or modify them, because they simply do not exist. Both the computer and the mobile phone have basically become common items. According to data provided by the Central Statistics Office, in 2017 81.8% of households in Poland had at least one computer, 81.9% had access to the Internet, and 59.5% of the respondents aged 16–74 had a smartphone (CSO, 2017).

Research on new technologies usually focuses on how individuals use them. There is also a growing body of research exploring problematic usage of computers or cell phones, such as gaming addiction or digital exclusion. However, one can also look at technologies in terms of their importance for the stability of family life patterns in post-modern reality, with liquid family boundaries, negotiated roles, democratic relationships, and the shift of tasks

thus far assigned to families by other institutions. Individuals who are related to each other, performing certain kin tasks and fulfilling family needs, cannot simply refer to behaviour patterns inherited from previous generations, for example in terms of how children should be brought up and what parental punishments they must endure. Organizing family life around new technologies helps develop new family practices. Parents are no longer those who know better, but the first providers of mobile communication technologies. They quickly cease to be experts (children are naturally better with computers than their parents) but activities relating to such technologies contribute to the creation of bonds between generations (Roux and Wróblewska-Pawlak 1999; Bougsiaa, Cackowska and Kopciewicz 2013), Królikowska 2015; Gałuszka 2016). The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren can no longer be based on knowledge and experience of the former as new technologies and everything that goes with them are introduced. Common use of the computer helps develop a bond between generations. 'My grandson is so happy to have helped his grandma. And our relationship is better because we share some common ground' (Szmigielska, Bąk and Jaszczak 2012: 350). Activities involving new technologies are also an important element of the relationship between adult children and their ageing parents. Elderly people who do not use the Internet admitted they have no need to do it on their own because other family members do everything for them: they do the shopping or make payments faster and without the risk of making mistakes (Szmigielska, Bąk and Jaszczak 2012: 349). A concern of adult children or grandchildren for the oldest generation is manifested in helping the former carry out various types of Internet operations and thus giving them a sense of security. Mobile communication technologies help keep the family strong and united (Bougsiaa, Cackowska and Kopciewicz 2013). They allow family members to be in permanent contact with each other and participate in family life ('When you miss your family, all you have to do it is to turn on your webcam and say: Hello, there! I miss you, show yourselves! And they show up for you'). Seniors say point-blank: 'The computer simply allows us to participate in their [children's and grandchildren's] life' (Szmigielska, Bąk and Jaszczak 2012: 355). It becomes particularly important when some family members live abroad, and Skype calls are an essential form of maintaining relationships and being present in someone's life. Providing a child with mobile communication technologies is becoming one of the basic elements of parental strategies aimed at giving them a good start in adult life to take a high social position in the future (Roux and Wróblewska-Pawlak 1999; Bougsiaa, Cackowska and Kopciewicz 2013). Almost 95% of married couples with children have a computer with Internet access (Czapiński and Panek 2015: 359). The skills that children develop through these technologies become a part of their cultural capital, the importance of which, as Urlich Beck points out, is growing in the era of a democratized education system (Beck 2002). Ilona Szymańska, citing other authors, shows the importance of the cell phone for the organization of home and family life. 'Cell phones make all household chores done more efficiently and faster. This is particularly important for relationships because it allows family members to divide their responsibilities flexibly, depending on the circumstances. It seems to be extremely valuable when both parents work because it helps them take care of children from a distance by providing them with the comfort of being in touch with their parents at any time; cell phones also make it easier to control more independent teenagers' (Szymańska 2010: 122).

CONCLUSIONS

The profound changes that the family is going through lead us to the question of what constitutes a family these days. Janet Finch thinks that what makes a group of people a family are meanings given to practices followed by its members (Finch 2007). When we undertake actions that carry strong 'family' connotations, we define not only the scope but also the nature of family (Taranowicz 2016). New technologies play an important role in this process because they are individualized and do not require cooperation with others. At the same time, they are primarily used for communication and provide a basic source of knowledge – shared on the one hand, but dispersed and fragmented on the other – in the post-modern world. The patterns of family practices are rooted in them. Care, compassion, presence, interest and commitment are manifested today through a meal left to be reheated in a microwave, a phone or Skype call, a text message, or an email. The family continues to perform its core functions and pursues its primary goal, namely reproducing the next generation. It must, however, do it differently, because it operates under different conditions.

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NOWE TECHNOLOGIE I INSTYTUCJONALIZACJA ŻYCIA CODZIENNEGO RODZINY
W PŁYNNEJ NOWOCZESNOŚCI

Jednymi z podstawowych nośników kultury są narzędzia. Większość jednostkowych działań, także praktyki rodzinne, jest zakorzenionych w przedmiotach. Wprowadzanie nowych narzędzi spotykało się z oporem ponieważ naruszało zinstytucjonalizowane formy życia. Współczesne procesy głęboko zmieniające rodzinę znoszą użyteczność starych schematów działania zapewniających porządek życia rodzinnego. Obserwujemy także ciągły proces rozwoju narzędzi, powstają całkowicie nowe, jak komputer czy telefon komórkowy. Wokół nowych technologii komunikacyjnych tworzą się nowe schematy działań instytucjonalizujące różne formy życia rodzinnego istniejące w płynnej nowoczesności.

Słowa kluczowe: technologie cyfrowe, rodzina, instytucjonalizacja, płynna nowoczesność