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Cyberspace as a current frame of reference
for teenage life and values

Every decade has its own specific cultural and political characteristics which directly influence the shape of the society and the system of values of the young generation. Due to the ongoing processes of change we are faced with generation differences which do not result from the features of the generation, but from the historical, economic and social context. The fast development of technology and the technologization of everyday life, which change the mode of functioning of an individual as well as the whole society, are additional factors which shape the new generations.

At present we can talk about the information-based society. As A. Augustynek points out, in the year 2000 there were several hundreds of thousands of the Internet users, whereas six years later the number amounted to 12,6 million users[1]. Gradually, computers started to dominate every sphere of our life: our professional lives (the majority of workplaces are computerized), housework (our contemporary household devices are miniature computers; we also do shopping and make payments via the Internet) and entertainment (online television, Internet databases with documentaries and feature films, social media, online gaming, discussion forums and communicators).

What is interesting, in its early stages the work with computers was based on mathematics, whereas today the "communication" between humans and computers is becoming more humane, it is based on the methods and features of interpersonal face-to-face exchanges in order to simplify the use of computers and make it more user-friendly. The keyboard-based interface requires certain skills, whereas verbal communication, which uses the computer and the Internet, lowers the level of difficulty for potential users[2]. These technological possibilities seem to be a perfect way to eliminate the barriers that disabled people face: telecommuting, voice-operated computers, reprocessing texts as verbal messages and vice versa, Internet messaging, online shopping and email. Besides these practical solutions, one can

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[1] A. Augustynek, *Zagrożenia komputerowe*, „Studia Humanistycznie" 2007, nr 5 www.wh.agh.edu.pl/other/cv/zawodowy_AndrzejAugustynek.pdf (accessed on 23.11.2011).
[2] B. Ziółko, M. Ziółko, *Przetwarzanie mowy*, Kraków 2011, p. 26-31.

notice more commercial solutions which aim strictly at increasing consumption: the Internet available in mobile phones, purchasing public transport tickets via text messages (SMS), sending advertisements to mobile phones. In this sphere the computer games industry seems to hold a central position. It operates based on up-to-date information technologies (state-of-the-art graphics, 3D technologies, interactive online games) in combination with the knowledge of the psycho-sociological human needs (sense of belonging, acceptance, emotional connection to others). It is rightly described by B. Ziółko and M. Ziółko: "in role-playing video games computers pretend to be human…"[3] – what else is an avatar if not a virtual, computer-generated equivalent of a human being? What is more, it is not only possible to create an image of the avatar, communicate through it and interact with other users through it, but one can also express emotions by means of it. It turns out that new technologies embrace the possibility to recognize emotions, which is combined with influencing human emotions. Because of the very same reasons new marketing solutions have emerged – such as virtual personal consultants who provide information about the company, or even solve simple customers' problems. The look of such a consultant is borrowed from a real person, yet the conversation is directed by a computer programme which uses new technologies, including speech processing[4]. Such a significant technological progress not only simplifies our work and enables development in the field of medicine, which gives us a chance to live longer, but also influences our psycho-social life. As a result of the development of the new technologies, we can observe such phenomena as: Internet addiction, video-game addiction, an increase of aggressive behaviour, a low level of social skills, social isolation (decrease of the number of direct social contacts), cyber-crimes, development of pornography. Hence, to understand the generation of today's teenagers, it is necessary to analyze their lifestyle and, in particular, the lifestyle of the new information society. These new conditions of living and new virtual educational environments shape new systems of values, which directly influence the present educational and socializing-related processes and problems.

The analysis of the literature on the subject enables us to depict the following generations of the last century: 1970s, 1980s, modern society of the 1990s and the post-modern times of the 21st century (see Table 1). The post-modern society is usually associated with fast development of technologies, which are available to everyone, hence it is often called the web society. This society is characterized by a good material status, the needs that can be satisfied easily, considerable mass media influence on the lifestyles, susceptibility to suggestions and manipulation as well as individualism[5].

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[3]   Ibidem, p. 317.
[4]   Ibidem, p. 316-324.
[5]   T. Matuszko, *Plastyczność w epoce ponowoczesności*, [in:], *Przemiany wartości i stylów życia w ponowoczesności*, J. Daszykowska, M. Rewera (Ed.), Warszawa 2010.

According to the research carried out by W. Anasz and J. Mariański, which analysed the generation of 1990s teenagers, religious values became clearly less important compared to the previous generations, whose access to religious practices was more difficult due to the political system. Mariański suggests that the canons of values accepted by teenagers change with the development of the modern society[6].

The comparison of the results of M. Szymański's research with D. Sikorski's analysis (which was based on the research carried out between 1988 and 1996 by CEBOS [Public Opinion Research Center] (1988, 1992, 1994, 1996) leads to similar conclusions. The youth from the twentieth century prioritised the following values: a successful and happy family life, reciprocal love relationships, friendship, acceptance, kindness and respect of others. As Sikorski suggests, by choosing such values, the young generation accepted the inner value of a human person, the value of an individual, and expressed the will to belong to small social groups.

Table 1. Characteristics of the generations of Polish youth in the 20th and 21st centuries

Teenagers' Generation	1970s	1980s	1990s „modern society" „X"	21st century „postmodern society" „Y", „klapkowcy" ["flip-flop generation"]
Generation values	- decent job, security, family, friends - respect, being useful, - pragmatism	- affiliation values, - family, love, friends, - education and good job, - self-realisation, individual development	- friendship, freedom, happiness, justice, - family, work, free time	- egocentrism, individualism, self-realisation, success, tolerance, - family, good job, career, education - consumerism
Generation's main historical events	- totalitarian regime, - election of Karol Wojtyła for the Pope, - „Gierek's times" so called "times of prosperity", - political emigration	- totalitarian regime, - crisis, - Martial Law, - John Paul II's pilgrimage to Poland - fall of the Berlin Wall - Round Table negotiations - political and economical emigration	- young Polish democracy, - open boarders and easy international travelling - religion lessons at schools - travels and economical emigration	- European Union, - Poland in the Schengen agreement, - death of John Paul II, - September 11 2001: World Trade Center attacks - travels - work abroad

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6   M. Szymański, *Młodzież wobec wartości. Próba diagnozy*, IBC, Warszawa 2000.

Interests	Music: Festivals in Opole, Sopot, Zielona Góra, H. Vondračkova, M. Rodowicz, U.Sipińska, The Beatles, The Rolling Stons, Czerwone Gitary, ABBA Film: *Godfather, Saturday Night Fever, Easy Rider* - **prywatki** (home-based parties)	Music: Festival in Jarocin, The Doors, Madonna, Republika, Lady Punk, Maanam, Queen Film: *Enter the Dragon – Bruce Lee - Indiana Jones, Star Wars* - **prywatki** (home-based parties), discotheques	Music: Festival *Przystanek Woodstock (Destination Woodstock Festival)*, Europe, Michael Jackson, Nirvana, Jon Bon Jovi, George Michael, Kasia Kowalska, U2 Film: *Pulp Fiction, Natural Born Killers, Dirty Dancing, The Silence of the Lambs, Forest Gump* - **discotheques**	Music: Open'er Festival, Britney Spears, Back Street Boys, Eminem, Spice Girls, Puff Daddy Film: *South Park, Matrix, The Lord of the Rings, Kill Bill* - **clubbing**
Technologies available	- television, - reel-to-reel tape recorders, cassette recorders - landline telephones, - record players and vinyl records	- full-colour television, - reel-to-reel tape recorders, cassette recorders - walkman, slide projectors	- walkman and CD-player, - VHS players, - computers, - first computer games, - mobile phones, - first IRC networks and instant messengers - Compact Discs	- mp3, mp4, - iPod, notebook, laptop, iPhone. - Internet, - modern computer games (avatars), - social networks, - digital photography

Source: Own analysis based on: M. Szymański, Młodzież wobec wartości. Próba diagnozy. IBC. Warszawa 2000; A. Łaszyn, Szybki puls nowej generacji, „Marketing Serwis" 2000, nr 2; www.alertmedia.pl ; own research.

For the 20th century youth family is of major significance, with all remaining ethics subjected to it. The set of the values the young subscribe to presents them as people who respect others and who have good interpersonal relations. Those generations are characterised by the following features: easiness in establishing interpersonal relations, the ability to help others, directedness, politeness, kindness and fairness. The following personal features were deemed and unaccepted: egocentrism, indifference to the problems of others people, putting the material status first, social indifference, thoughtless damaging of other people's property, ignoring other people, unkindness, boorishness, lack of solidarity, hypocrisy, insincerity, bureaucracy and intolerance[7].

The first attempt to evaluate the young generation and the transformation of their attitudes in comparison to the previous generations was made at the beginning of the 21st entury. C. Rohde (the author of the 2003 Global Cool Hunt report) wrote: "Young people want to be attractive, trendy and sexy. Every product, service, brand or message which allows them to feel like that appeals to them because it

[7] D. Sikorski, *Wartości i aspiracje współczesnej młodzieży*, www.lcez.lublin.pl/pliki/Wartosci_i_aspiracje_mlodziezy.doc (accessed on: 26.05.2011).

strengthens their faith in themselves and their self-esteem"[8]. The priorities listed by youngest generation seem to confirm the importance of family values, yet, on the other hand, some egocentric attitudes and behaviours dominate: being successful and satisfied, strong autonomy of the individual, no attachment to a given place, materialism, a low level of empathy and altruism[9]. According to current research[10], contemporary youth (*Y generation, cyberspace generation, post-modern generation*) is open to types of behaviour that were unaccepted to the previous generations, which is connected with substantial changes in the system of values of the said generation. The result of such a then-now discrepancy is the problem of inter-generation communication and understanding (parents, teachers vs. youth). Taking into account egocentric and individualistic attitudes of today's teenagers, one can draw a conclusion, that the sense of the common (society's) good ceases to be an important value for them. What follows from the lack of an appropriate value system, the existence of social bonds is threatened. On the basis of these observations, the phenomenon of growing violence and loneliness among the young people becomes more understandable.

Being a teenager is related to one fundamental factor which often contributes to the state of social exclusion both in broad and narrow sense. Adolescence is a critical time the time of substantial transformations: physical (changes in physical appearance and the hormonal processes in the organism), psychological (emotional shifts often affecting the so far stable relationships within family and peer groups, or reshaping the individual's value systems) and social (the end of the primary school and transfer to the junior high school [gimnazjum], adapting to the new school environment, shaping of the teenager's identity and seeking autonomy from the family). All these changes often lead to the so-called teenage identity crisis. Additionally, these changes can be reinforced by the processes which take place within the family or the peer group themselves, which may reinforce the feeling of social exclusion[11].

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8   A. Porańczyk, *Świat wartości i wyborów młodych Polaków,* „Zamojskie Studia i Materiały", Pedagogika, Zamość 2005, p. 75
9   Research carried out by the Institute of Sociology of the Warsaw University (May 2011 report) showed that the majority of those who witness school bullying remain passive and ignore violence.
10   Institute of Sociology of the Warsaw University research, Programme Szkoła bez przemocy [*Non-Violence School Programme*], Annual Report 2010, p. 36-40, http://www.szkolabezprzemocy.pl/1246,raport-roczny-2010 (accessed on: 13.12.2011); Research of the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology in Warsaw, Teenage Prevention Workshop „Pro-M": *„Czynniki chroniące i czynniki ryzyka związane z zachowaniami proble-mowymi warszawskich gimnazjalistów: klasy I-III"* http://www.ipin.edu.pl/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/ 06/Raport3.IPiN_2011_v11PRESS-final.pdf (Accessed on 12.12.2011); Research of the High Scool of Menagement and Administration in Zamość from October 2011; part of the Project *Zintegrowany Model Kulturoterapii w Pedagogice Młodzieży Zagrożonej Wykluczeniem Społecznym*, J. Skwarek, M. Kowerski, B.Klimczuk, *Udział w kulturze a wykluczenie społeczne młodzieży*, „Zamojskie Studia i Materiały", Pedagogika, Zamość 2011, p. 9-17.
11   P.Forma, *Generacja Y a funkcjonowanie współczesnego gimnazjalisty*, http://www.pitwin.edu.pl/artykuly-naukowe/nauki-humanistyczne-i-spoleczne/593-generacja-y-a-funkcjonowanie-wspoczesnego-gimnazjalisty (accessed on: 10.12.2011).

Facing the puberty crises a teenage person assumes an attitude typical of situations of challenge or difficulty and threat. In the first case the reaction is mobilisation and a motivation to act. The second case leads to tension, stress and the impression of not being able to come to terms with reality. The choice of attitude is determined by the social skills, family and peer support, the adolescent's personality, value system, self-esteem, and experience in dealing with difficult situations all gathered under the umbrella term of social experience[12].

Examining the norms of adolescents' behaviour, one can observe that teenagers spend less and less time with their parents, and more with their peers on extra-school activities, which is also connected with the teenager identity crisis. According to the 2010 annual *Non-violence at school Social Programme* report, parents do not know how much time their children spend online, or how much time is devoted to hobby or sports clubs (the conclusion is that children spend their time totally out of control and awareness of their adult caregivers)[13]. The contemporary teenagers, born and brought up in the era of the development of technologies and called the network generation or iPod generation, spend their free time in front of their computers. In junior high school computers are definitely not used for educational purposes but for entertainment: video games, social networking and films. This is the space where their alternative life in the peer group is centred because instant messengers enable communication, entertainment and shopping without leaving home. This is why the Internet addiction can be more and more often observed among teenagers.

Analysing this phenomenon in 2009, M. Szponar came to the conclusion, that junior high-schoolers, who make Poland's biggest group of the Internet users, dominate in the population of chat and instant messaging users, as well as constitute a considerable part of the online gaming and social networking communities[14]. Moreover, as the Canadian research shows, in the 10-16 age group there is a correlation between the frequency of new audio-visual media use (television, computer, the Internet, video and computer games) and a number of risk behaviours (use of psychoactive drugs, Internet addiction, violence, high-risk sexual activity). Therefore it is important to note that the media quite often promote risk behaviours as socially acceptable, which distorts the system of values of their juvenile user[15].

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[12] http://praesterno.pl (accessed on: 15.06.2011).
[13] Program „Szkoła bez przemocy" [*Non-Violence School Programme*], Annual Report, 2010, p. 36-40, http://www.szkolabezprzemocy.pl/1246,raport-roczny-2010 (accessed on: 13.12.2011).
[14] M. Szponar, *Online czy offline? Struktura korzystających i niekorzystających z Internetu w Polsce*, „Studia Humanistyczne" 2009, nr 7, p. 91-94.
[15] V.Carlson, W. Pickett, I. Janssen, *Screen time and risk behaviors in 10-16-years-old Canadian youth*, www.sciencedirect.com (accessed on: 13.09.2011).

School violence as a phenomenon has been analysed in the recent years. In the light of the World Health Organisation's definition (WHO, 1995), violence is a purposeful use of physical power, with the intention to either threaten or harm, against oneself, someone else or against a group or community which causes or may cause hurt, physical damage, death, psychical pain, may cause developmental problems or depravation.

The comparison of school violence in Poland and in other parts the world shows that the more western the country, the bigger the problem is, while Eastern European countries have a distinctly lower level of school violence; and the problem practically does not occur in Japan. However, the foreign research also shows that victimization[16] or ricochet violence is even more dangerous than the actual act of violence, usually presented by the media. Specialists conclude that there is a link between large-scale acts of violence and the phenomenon of long lasting victimization which the perpetrators had experienced before.

The research conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Warsaw University (the May 2011 report) shows that almost one tenth of Polish pupils have experienced some sort of violence[17]. The research was carried out both in city and village schools, but no significant differences were observed. However, it has been noted that the material status of parents is related to the potential victimization (poorer pupils more often experience physical and psychological violence). According to the tested pupils themselves, the characteristics of the victims include: being "toady", having low grades, lacking self confidence and physical skills, "strange" clothes[18]. Other factors seen as stigmatizing among Polish teenagers include: disabilities, addictions and dangerous behaviours (playing truants, violence), as the results of the research into discrimination entitled *Social diagnosis* show[19].

An analysis of differences in pupil behaviour between the year 2006 and nowadays shows the increase of verbal violence aimed at both, peers and teachers, relational violence and extortions. Verbal violence can also be found in the sphere of new technologies: text messages, e-mails, social media where insulting comments are posted. The research shows that 17% of the examined group of pupils have heard of unauthorised broadcasting of information, photographs or films featuring their peers. Cyberbullying in Polish schools is therefore a fact. Since it is still a relatively new form of social behaviour, relevant legislation as well as the code of practice still fall behind the events of privacy and dignity violation. Teenage identity crisis and the yet not shaped system of behavioural codes in the sphere of the Internet pose

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[16] Psychological violence, ridiculing, bullying, isolating, deriding, physical violence, treating someone as a scapegoat.

[17] A. Giza-Poleszczuk, A. Komendant-Brodowska, A. Baczko-Dombi, *Przemoc w szkole*, Research report, Warszawa 2011 r. www.szkolabezprzemocy.pl/pliki/333-sbp2-szkoly-ost-wersjadoc.pdf (accessed on: 13.12.2011), p. 2.

[18] A. Giza-Poleszczuk, A. Komendant-Brodowska, A. Baczko-Dombi, *Przemoc w szkole*…, p. 20-28.

[19] Czapliński J., Panek T., *Diagnoza społeczna 2009*, www.diagnoza.com (accessed on: 26.05.2011).

a threat of normative exclusion[20]. Unfortunately, teachers do not seem to be sufficiently sensitive to cases of such behaviour. Both teachers and parents usually notice and react to the results of overt physical violence[21].

The majority of school violence victims remain passive due to fear, lack of trust, shame, need to be accepted by the group and to be part of the school community. A significant number of victims (15-30%) state that "nothing actually happened". What is alarming is the fact that, according to about 50% pupils, the witnesses of violent acts do not stand up for the victims and do not take any action or intervene (24% of pupils say that "everyone has to look after themselves", and 22% belittle such situations)[22]. This proves a low sense of integration, a lack of community and common responsibility as well as of loose emotional relationships among pupils. Moreover, the results indicate a low level of social skills of teenagers, their inability to act assertively, mediate and solve problems. Taking into account the fact that in such a psychologically unstable period as adolescence teenagers need additional support, one can conclude that junior high school environment (new school, new peer group, need of acceptance) seem to generate risk behaviours.

Taking this situation into account, University of Management and Administration in Zamość presented a proposal to prepare *The Integrated Modes of Culture-Based Therapy in the Pedagogy of Teenagers Facing Social Exclusion*. The aim of the project was to prevent social maladjustment of the junior high school youth. Among the proposed activities to support socialization of teenagers (workshops in interpersonal communication, assertiveness, relaxation, art therapy, drama and music therapy) the programme includes training sessions which tackle the problem of cyberbullying and the responsible use of cyberspace.

The aim of the programme is to present the definition of the phenomenon ("cyber-bullying is a type violence which uses information and communication technology. Those technologies include mainly the Internet and mobile phones"[23]), its age specificity features (cyber-bullying affects mainly the youngest), its forms (bullying, threatening, blackmailing with the use of the Internet, publishing of ridiculing or compromising information or materials such as photos or films) and actions (email, chats, instant messaging, web sites, blogs, social networks, discussion forums, text messaging and MMS services)[24].Teenagers are usually unaware that cyberbullying affects the victim in the same way as physical violence does. Every type of such an activity is related to a particular law. Hence, for the sake of prevention and resocialization, one of the modules of the programme presents criminal liability with particular attention paid to cyberbullying crimes committed in virtual reality. Free

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[20] A. Giza-Poleszczuk, A. Komendant-Brodowska, A. Baczko-Dombi, *Przemoc w szkole...,* p. 20- 36.
[21] Program „Szkoła bez przemocy" ..., p. 31.
[22] A. Giza-Poleszczuk, A. Komendant-Brodowska, A. Baczko-Dombi, *Przemoc w szkole ...,* p. 36.
[23] Ł. Wojtasik (ed.), *Jak reagować na cyberprzemoc?*, 2nd edition, www.dzieckowsieci.pl (accessed on: 15.11.2011), p. 5.
[24] Ibidem, p. 5-6.

access to different technologies has resulted in their improper use, exemplified by social exhibitionism or violating the privacy of third parties in social networks such as Nasza Klasa, Facebook or YouTube. It can definitely be observed that, with the erosion of the system of values, respect for human dignity and privacy is disappearing. The contemporary system of the prevention of social maladjustment and resocialization must include a programme building a system of values, morality, empathy and responsibility[25]. Former offensive phrases written on blackboards or in courtyards have been replaced with the Internet forum and social network posts whose readership is bigger and which definitely last longer. In the workshops we have used the multimedia materials and good practice suggestions available from www.dzieckowsieci.pl, in the form of short educational films presenting the consequences of cyberbullying both for the victim and for the aggressor. Moreover, we have also planned a workshop in which teenagers prepared a school magazine about cyberbullying: this included the creation of a comic book about cyberbullying, the possible reactions, the help to be offered and consequences of violent behaviour. When young people prepare such a material they consciously analyse the contents, and the meaning of the problem. Moreover, the creation of a school magazine creates an excellent opportunity to discuss intellectual property rights, such as use of photographs without the owner's or model's permission, and stimulates the participants to look for creative, individual solutions.

An additional panel in the said programme is addressed to parents and aims at making them aware of cyberbullying and possible interventions in such cases both at school and on the local community level. To make parents realize how serious the situation is it is advisable to use multimedia materials (feature films: *Sala samo-bójców* [*Suiciders' hall*], educational films available from www.dzieckowsieci.pl), which make the message clear and show how important the problem is. Moreover, it is necessary to make parents realize that their children live in a different educational and socializing context, they have a different system of values, different peer group ethics, so it is essential to understand their point of view and attitudes to the issues at hand in order to reach an inter-generation agreement and solve the existing problems, and face the threats.

Based on the analysis of the changing living conditions, the impact of new technologies on the lives of individuals and families, the generation gap, the negative consequences of the higher standard of living (individual comfort more important than the compromise for the sake of the common good), we can observe the necessity to educate young people not only at schools, but also in terms of their social skills and appropriate use of new media. Hence, modern educators must face the challenge of implementing up-to-date preventive, diagnostic, educational and

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25   M. Wierzańska, *„You are worth it"- Y generation. Transformacje postaw pokolenia Y,* „Nauki Pedagogiczne", 2010, nr 13, p. 195.

resocialising activities in the environment where living conditions of children, teachers and parents change rapidly.

Cyberspace as a current frame of reference for teenage life and values
Summary

Problems of education and socialization are directly linked to social, cultural and economic transformation, because it creates new life conditions, attitudes and trends. Currently, the progress of information technology has led to substantial and dynamic changes in everyday reality, life conditions and values of the young. The current research shows that contemporary young people are open to behaviours found unacceptable by the past generations (the generations of their parents and teachers). The author presents a detailed description of successive generations of the past and the present century, with an indication of individual differences in shaping the educational environments. She points out that new technologies, in addition to offering positive and helpful solutions, also give raise to negative phenomena, such as: addiction to the Internet and computer games, rare personal relations with other people, anonymity of the individual or a new dimension of violence: cyberbullying and victimization. These phenomena are the result of two factors: the development of technologies and changes in the system of values. The article presents a project undertaken at the Zamość University of Management and Administration whose aim was to prevent social exclusion of contemporary students.