Girls and Electronic Mass Media

".... SOMETHING THAT COULD REALLY HAPPEN"

By Birgitte Tufte

Danish Summary: I forbindelse med ungdomsforskningen er det vig-
tigt at tage fat i kønsproblematikken. Det viser bla. den sene-
ste udviklingen indenfor dansk medieforskning, der især beskæf-
tiger sig med modtagesiden. Der eksisterer store og vigtige for-
skelle mellem drenge og pigers (14-15 årige) konsum, perception,
fascination og brug af TV, video og film.

De foretrukne præferencer falder indenfor kategorierne 1) spæn-
dingsfilm, 2) morsomme film, 3) ungdomsfilm og 4) voldelige film
med tendens til, at begge køn kan lide 'sjove' og spændende film,
mens pigerne oftere nævner danske ungdomsfilm og kærlighedsfilm
end drengene, som er optaget af mere hårdtslående film. Når de
ser filmene sammen, er det drengenes foretrukne film, som domi-
nerer. Nogle af pigerne oplyser, at de ofte ser sammen med det
modsatte køn, hvad drengene ikke gør. Forklaringen er, at piger-
ne bl.a. ser video sammen med større brødre/drenge. Begge køn
ser altså film af ovennævnte kategorier, hvor drengene dog helst
ser spændingsfilm og ikke kærlighedsfilm - måske især for at vi-
se pigerne, at de er nogle barske fyre. Pigerne er klar over, at
det er den slags mekanismer, der er på spil - at der for drenge-
ne er tale om den 'nødvendige' tilegnelse af den gængse mande-
rolle, som retter sig mod en instrumentel og distanceret tilgang
til verden og en undertrykkelse af følelser. Men hvorfor?

Der sker et skift i pigers aktivitet og evne til at klare en
masse ting omkring 12-års alderen. Herfra bliver hun mere pas-
siv og øger det indre fantasiliv. Omkring samme alder sker der
som regel det, at hun fra at have en tæt veninde vender sig imod
flere venner. Under opvæksten udvikler der sig således specifik-
ke kvindelige kvaliteter i.e. 'et stærkt fantasiliv', 'subjekti-
vitet', 'intuition'.

I udviklingen af den kvindelige kønskarakter foretages grænse-
afprøvninger. Disse lader sig aflæse i de videoproduktioner, som
piger har produceret i forbindelse med medieundervisningen i
folkeskolen. Videoproduktion i kønsopdelte grupper præsenterer
på samme tid både et fristed og et afprøvningssted.

Det kulturelle mønster ændres i denne tid og normer og værdier
flyder. Sammen med udviklingen af de specifikke kvindelige vær-
dier, som skabes gennem opvæksten, kan pigers forhold til medi-
erne ses som en måde at finde identifikationsmodeller på. De pi-
ger som undersøgelsen omfatter 1) ønsker at se film om ting,
der virkelig kan ske, 2) underkaster sig drengenes film prefe-
rencer, fordi det først og fremmest handler om sociale relatio-
ner i gruppen og mindre om den aktuelle film og 3) bruger video-
produktioner som redskab til at fortælle om det de virkelig fin-
der vigtigt.

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For the purpose of developing a model for teaching television
viewing skills in the Danish secondary school I have underta-
ken an investigation on the use of media and media preferen-
ces especially regarding television and video among one hun-
dred 14-15 year olds. The data collected so far in my research
have not yet been interpreted and interrelated. I am still ana-
lysing my results.

As mentioned earlier during this conference the study of recep-
tion is a current trend within Danish mass communication re-

search. However, this kind of research is difficult: it necessitates the devolopment of new methods because it concerns the exploration of human consciousness. The problems become even more complicated when it is a question of working with children of different ages.

I have gradually come to realize the importance of the gender differences - sex differences - in respect to television and video. In the initial phase of my research project I divided the children into the 'normal' categories of heavy and light viewers of television and video. It turned out, however, that the gender variable was more dominant.

The purpose of my project is to investigate TV perception and understanding - and to increase understanding through a method og teaching which combines video production and TV analysis. There are differences between the boys and the girls both in their comsumption, perception/fascination of TV and video - and in their own production of video. I am going to present some of these differences and to relate tehm to theories about socialization and media.

Viewing Patterns and Preferences

Generally speaking boys spend more time than girls in front of the television screen, and surveys show that during adolescence television viewing time diminishes compared to earlier periods.

As regards the 14-15 year olds of my project there is a certain viewing pattern: They watch TV during the week-end, especially Saturday - Dad and the boys starting out in the afternoon with the sport's programme. In the evening the whole family watches television. Now and then the 14-15 year olds run off to watch TV and video together, with some friends- especially if one of them has the house to herself. Both boys and girls prefer to watch television and video in peer groups - if possible. It seems as if watching TV with a group of friends is

the main thing for many children. Watching video with friends occurs mainly during the weekend, and rented videofilms are prefered.

I have checked their video consumption during a period of 3 weeks - and found that the following categories of films are the most popular:
1) Action films (James Bond etc.)
2) 'funny' films (for instance the Danish films about "Olsen-banden")
3) Youth films (some of the favourites are Danish films like "Zappa", "Tro, håb og kærlighed")
4) Violent films ("First Blood", "Rambo", "Rocky" etc.)

Girls tend to watch less video than boys and go less often to the cinema. However, in my material there was one group of girls who did not spend much time on TV- but did so on video - and together with "persons of opposite sex". The boys in the same class did also watch video - but not with "persons of opposite sex". What was the explanation?

It turned out that the girls watched video during holidays when they got bored. They mainly watched with other girls, and they saw various thrillers, but sometimes they also watched the violent films, and then - as one of the girls puts it in an interview: ".... we had to get som of the friends of Katja's big brother to watch as well....". "And they probably didn't mind" - was the sarcastic remark from one of the other girls in the group of intervewees. So THAT was the explanation of the girls watching with "persons of opposite sex". When the children watch the kind of TV programmes and films described above it may however, be a question of supply and demand. What do they really prefer?

As previously mentioned the boys are very much oriented towards 'action films' and they NEVER say that they prefer love films.

The girls mention some of the 'action films' as films they like but they prefer thrillers, love films and Danish youth films.

When they are asked why they prefer certain films the boys an-
swer that the films are exiting or funny whereas the girls say
that the films deal with things that "could really happen...",
that they are "realistic" - or that they like them because they
are "funny".

There are certain video films that neither boys nor girls like,
e.g. the Zombie films (about some monsters who cannot die), and
the girls answer to a greater extent that they dislike "films
with violence and killing". In one of the interviews I ask two
girls if they have been frightened by some of the video films
they have seen. One of them answered:

> "No, not really, because - in real life - you will never meet a man with-
> out a head. I'm not afraid of that kind of films ... but there was one
> film I didn't like. It was "The day after" - and it was about what hap-
> pens after the bomb.
> I didn't like that one - because it was realistic - there are bombs -
> and it may happen - in six months or maybe tomorrow....
> Ordinary 'action films' - that doesn't matter - but "The day after" - I
> thought about it for a long time ....."

In spite of the differences between girls and boys as to tele-
vision and video uses and preferences they have one thing in
common: For both sexes the peer activity is an important aspect
... to watch in a group of friends has a great priority. This
is especially due to video. It is a characteristic of video as
a medium that you can choose WHERE, WHEN and WHAT you want to
watch. This gives a certain freedom.

The way older children/young people watch video together could
be interpresed as a longing for a "room of one's own" - and
that children are looking for personal and culturel identity
and patterns of orientation.

Violent films like "First Blood" and "Rambo" are popular - es-
especially among the boys - but they are also seen by the girls.
For both sexes peer pressure could be a main explanatory factor.
Maybe it is important for the boys at that age to be 'tough',
enduring the films - to impress the girls. In the companion-
ship in front of the screen the girls may become afraid, be
thrilled - and the boys may thus have a chance to play the pro-

tecting role. That may be one of the functions of the films. Another function could be that - by means of this type of film - they try to prepare themselves for major conflicts, e.g. war or at least to handle their concern about the future.

Maybe they are trying to control inner drives - which are not very much under control in the age of adolescence. In fact a variety of things are going on in the peer group while adolescents are watching video films.

Sometimes the girls express a surprisingly distinct understanding of the social and psychological pressure resting on the boys due to the role expectations attached to the male in our society. The girls understand that the boys for instance have to suppress emotions to become a 'real man' due to the norms of society.

I've talked with two girls about the film "The blue lagoon" (a story about two young people shipwrecked on an island who fall in love and have a child).

> 1. girl: "If they (the boys) saw "The blue lagoon" they would fall asleep"
>
> 2. girl: "Or die of laughter..."
>
> Interviewer: "What about the Danish film: "Tro, Håb og Kærlighed" (Faith, hope and love)?"
>
> 1. girl: "That was a nice one"
>
> Interviewer: "Some of the boys think it is awful..."
>
> 1. girl: "Well - it's about love, isn't it?"
>
> Interviewer: "Do you think that they just pretend to be very tough?"
>
> 1. girl: "Yes, I think that a lot of boys really do like such films (as the "Blue Lagoon")
>
> Interviewer: "They just don't want to admit it?"
>
> 1. girl: "Yes, in a way..."
>
> Interviewer: "They just try to behave as tough guys?"
>
> 1. girl: "Yes, they 'play a game' - trying to behave as if they hate love - but everybody is interested in love, don't you think?.."

This is an example of how the girls carefully make an interpretation of the boys' behaviour: that the girls ascribe various emotions to the boys which the boys themselves try to suppress...

Why is gender difference so conspicuous?

Recent Danish research regarding boys' and girls' attitude towards school as well as the future proves a sudden shift in the girls' perception of school and a stagnation ot their capability in various school subjects at the age of adolescence whereas the boys move forward. When younger girls - for instance 12-year-olds - are asked about their future professions, they have a lot of ideas, whereas girls a few years later will give stereotypcal answers corresponding to the expectation of 'normal' female professions.

Why does this "adaption to reality" ("reality" as the girls apparently see it) and underestimation take place - and why does it become a limiting factor in girls' lives? Helene Deutsch, an American psychologist, is one of the few researchers who have worked with theories about adolescent girls. She describes the period of adeloscence as a time of life when the girl gradually moves from being active and capable of a lot of things to a more passive mode of behaviour characterized by an increasing inner fantasy life - and she tries to adapt to 'reality', she is 'turning towards reality' as Helene Deutsch puts it.

As for the girl's relations to friends she normally has a very close relationship to one girl friend when she is 10-12 years old - later on she moves towards several friends. Helene Deutsch points out that specific female qualities are developed during the period of adolescence. Some of the key concepts are ' a strong sense of fantasy', 'subjectivity', 'intuition'.

The combination of a rich imagination and subjectivity may lead to a kind of intuition which could be a very positive quality - expressing itself for instance as 'care for other people'.

Video production

Finally - in continuation of the above mentioned I would like to present some examples of girls' video production.
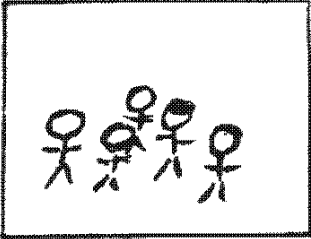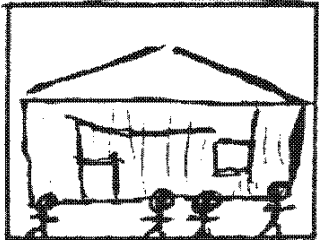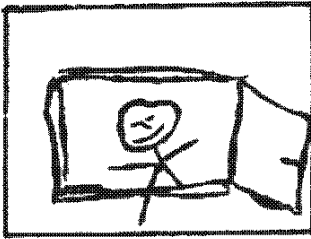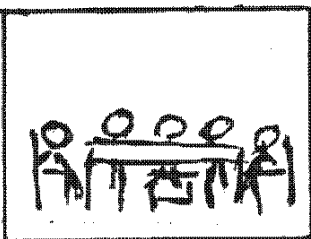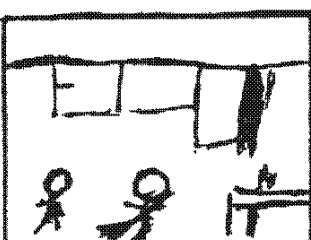
In the cource of the project we worked with groups of boys, groups of girls and with mixed groups producing video. The boys were very interested in technique, in the possibilities of making special effects etc., and they imitated the genres they were familiar with. Their productions moved from poor imitations of music programmes, crime series etc. to better and more independent productions of the same kind.

The girls made similar imitations, but from the beginning they were more interested in making productions about their own life. In this context I would like to describe the productions of two groups of girls. The first group started with a production about being mobbed and the next production was called "The women's paradise".

This is a production about some women - apparently from the women's liberation movement - squatting a house. They hate men, sleep on the floor and stage demonstrations against men. At the end the house is taken over by the police, and the production ends with a sign saying: "When the police came, the house was pulled down and now the women are roaming the streets".

My reason for mentioning this video is that these girls apparently have been looking for alternative identification models. And the alternatives presented to them are the media myths about feminists, hating men, sleeping together on the floor and staging demonstrations.

To exemplify the development in the different stages of their video production I would like to describe the process in a group of girls who in the beginning went through the 'normal' imitation stages making - among other things - a fashion show. Watching their own fashion show which lasted 20 minutes and which was extremely monotonous, they got very bored and critical: "We are never going to make a fashion show again". Their last production was a little film about a girl being mobbed by her girl friends because she had fallen in love with a boy. The girls very much enjoyed producing the film and discussing

8 a. The girls

	SCRIPT	Page 1
Title		Date

No.	Picture	Sound
	A group of hippies/ women from women's lib are talking to-gether	They talk about where they are going to li-ve and sleep
	The group sees an uninhabited house	They discuss whether anyone lives there and they agree to occupy the house.
	They climb the house (close up - taken from the in-side)	
	The hippies tidy up and settle down	
	The group has a meeting in the evening	You hear that they decide to demonstra-te the next day
	Later they to to bed	

it afterwards. Making this production the girls chose topics they were familiar with and interested in. It was a film about love, mobbing and friendship among girls, made on their own conditions. No wonder they enjoyed making and showing it.

Is it necessary to segregate boys and girls in video production? I was an observer in one of the mixed groups, and mainly the boys took care of the technique. The teacher had instructed them all- boys and girls - to be camera "men" by turns - but even when the girls specifically were asked to use the camera they refused to do so saying: "HE knows much better...."

But the girls had a lot of ideas about what they wanted to produce and how to organize the other children. It seemed as if the girls saw the technique as a tool to tell a story - to visualize some ideas and left the technique to the boys. In order to break these stereotype roles. I think it is necessary to start with separate groups of boys and separate groups of girls. That would compel them to work with the traditional area of the opposite sex. Later on they should of course work in mixed groups.

Conclusion

Television, film and video are important factors in the daily life of adolescents, and the fascination is great. The young people's fascination with certain films and television programmes as I have described it can probably be interpreted in different ways.

One interpretation is that by means of the electronic mass media they try to find identification. They are curious about the adult life - what will it be like? Cultural patterns are changing today. Norms and values are floating. Maybe this state of insecurity AND at the same time all the possibilites - seen in relation to the children's age, characterised by regressive and progressive forces at the same time - offer the background for the children's and the young people's uses and

preferences. In a world characterized by atomized life style
and by an increasing amount of "second hand experience" chil-
dren and adolescents are looking for coherence, meaning and
identity. In their search for these things they use different
tools - some of them being TV and video.

Although the girls watch "Dallas" and "Dynasty" etc. it doesn't
seem as if the stereotyped sex roles of those series come
through in their own production. Apparently, at least some
Danish girls refuse women of various TV series as identifica-
tion models, but it is sad that when they are looking for al-
ternative models, the media only offer the described clichés.

An English media researcher, Kevin Durkin, has written a book
about 'Television, Sex roles and children' and his conclusion
is that the stereotypcal sex roles of TV do not necessarily
affect the children. His opinion is that mass media do not in-
ject into the audience a certain amount of persuasive communi-
cation per day, BUT there is no doubt that the sex roles of
the screen normally confirm the already existing sex roles in
society.

He also concludes, however, that young people - more than ot-
her groups - are looking for orientation about sex roles through
the media. I quote:

   "adolescence may be a period when individuals are likely to
   pay particular attention to television sex role information
   and in some cases try to relate it to their own lives" (129)

One of his other points is that there is a correlation between
maternal attitude (lower educational level of the mother) and
the girls' acceptance of sex role stereotypes on TV, so that
it is a question of a family background factor - and not of
the medium as such.

He also concludes that adolescents apparently seek to orient
themselves about sex roles through the mass media, more so
than other age groups. Even though their TV comsumption is less.

The general change in cultural patterns and norms together with the development of specific 'female qualities' created during the period of adolescence - as described by Helene Deutsch, are expressed when girls of 'my' research project:

1) Wish to see film about "something that could really happen.."
2) Submit to the boys' film preferences - because the social relationship in the group is of greater importance to the girls than the content of the films.
3) Use video production as a tool to tell stories about the things they are really thinking of.

I would like to emphasize, however, that one should neither consider the 'female qualities' as a result of a capitalist, male-dominated society bound to oppress the girls, nor should one overestimate and consider female qualities in such a positive way that the result will be a polarization between the sexes.

It MUST be a question of investigating and working towards an understanding on both a theoretical and practical level which does not lead to a polarization, but which aims at the development of a method of teaching which accepts and uses as points of departure the fascination with electronic mass media AND the different patterns of consumption and preferences of boys and girls.

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Mass Media and the Cultural Life of Young Girls

By Else Fabricius Jensen

Danish Summary: Begrebet ungdom er skabt af det kapitalistiske borgerlige samfund med kernefamilien som centrum. Ungdom er således den alderskategori, der ligger mellem den ansvarsfrie barndom og den fuldt udviklede voksne personlighed.

Inden for ungdomsforskningen er man først sent blevet opmærksom på pigers specielle forhold i ungdomsperioden. Ungdomsforskningens beskæftigelse med drenge hænger nøje sammen med drengenes mere synlige aktiviteter. I modsætning hertil er pigernes sub-kulturer mere private og skjulte. Ungdomsforskningen beskæftiger sig bl.a. derfor mest med de spektakulære ungdomskulturer og altså ikke med generelle hovedtendenser, hvilke især feministiske forskere har pointeret i forbindelse med opfattelsen af, at piger blot var passive forbrugere af massekulturprodukter.

Pigesocialiseringen skaber særlige former for pige-kulturer. De forhold som den patriarkalske kultur tilbyder kvinder afspejler sig derfor dels i pigens higen efter bekræftelse og kærlighed dels i søgen efter uafhængighed og frihed.