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Mass Media and the Cultural Life of Young Girls

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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.

Konkret ytrer det sig gennem pigernes modevalg, make-up, musik m.m. der dermed er et manifest udtryk for anderledesheden overfor moderen dels udtryk for alliancen med den ydre verden. Den sidste tendens ytrer sig især gennem venindeskab og tilbagetrækning til det egne værelse. Her udvikler pigekulturen sig med nips, posters, høj musik m.v. især fra 12-14 års alderen. På trods af disse tilsyneladende kvindelige udtryksformer udvikler pigen sig inden for rammerne sat af det mandlige ideal af det feminine. Her er det især medierne der er med til at producere dette ideal, fordi massemedierne i større og større grad forhåndsorganiserer erfaringer og oplevelser i det senkapitalistiske samfund. Det kvindebillede medierne præsenterer bliver således en vægtig faktor for pigens udvikling til kvinde.

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In much earlier youth research the category of youth has been synonymous with male youth, while female youth has not found room in youth-research until recently.

There are several reasons for this male dominance, first of all the fact that youth as such is a historical category - like childhood it was invented together with the bourgeois society and the formation of the nuclear family as a social unit.

The child has to develop in the family context, withdrawn from the remaining social life, and at the same time it is dependent of the parents. This is the condition of youth - namely: liberation from the dependent state of childhood and the development of an independent grown-up person. Consequently the youthful years are necessary in producing some special qualifications for entering social relations as individual persons - the development of a capitalistic personality - and there-

fore historically the development of youth has been following a pattern determined by both class and sex.

At first it is the male bourgeois individual who must acquire these qualifications. It is only much later that the same pattern of family life and the same general demand for qualifications are developed as regards the male part of the working class. The isolation of the females in the family sphere explains why girls only very late - into this century - develop a 'youth'. Earlier girls were trained to take over the female duties of reproduction and there was no background in society for developing a female capitalistic personality.

This is one side of the girls' "forgotten youth". The other reason why girls have been overlooked in youth-research is that the research primarily originates from a concern for the unruly young men of the working class and not from an interest in youth and its problems in general.

So the background to seeing youth as an especially problematic period of life is on one hand the development of a special form of family life - the nuclear family - and on the other hand rising demands for qualifications.

In this sense it was not until the forties and the fifties that working class had a youth. Before that time young people of the working class on the whole had been able to handle the adaptation to the social demands of qualification without any special period of youth - e.g. because of a less intensive state of dependence in working class families.

The masculine and criminal aspects which have marked youth research are also found in the more recent critical youth research starting from the Birmingham School and its surveys of the social dynamic and the cultural style in different subcultures of youth.

The characteristic of the male dominated subcultures is that they are performed in a public context and in this way also become a public problem by offending the limits of society. Contrary to this the girls are not problematic in the same way. Their youth problems are usually more privatised in their forms. On the other hand we might well ask if the girls are not developing more public subcultural movements. From the conditions I have outlined, I think it reasonable to view the female liberation movement also as a movement with subcultural aspects - women's liberation demonstrates that women have had a youth in the real sense: With an increasing number of employed women and their growing dual role for the generation of mothers, the generation of women after the war was the first one growing up to face a solid demand not only to assure a future family role, but also to assure an independent role of employment. Thereby they were faced with the demand for an "independent capitalistic personality".

The reason for staying a little with the concept of culture is that these more spectacular phenomena among youth have attracted a good deal of research attention, partly because they represent an alternative and a critical potential compared with the media-communicated mainstream culture. And the hidden assumption in, for instance, the subcultural analyses of the Birmingham School is that the creativity of the subcultures are opposed to the triviality and commerciality of mainstream culture - and further that the young people in the mainstream culture are made passive consumers of products offered by the culture industry.

The criticism of these assumptions came especially from researchers in feminist studies. So the special forms and problems of the mainstream culture have in particular been noted by feminist researchers, refusing to accept the view that young girls are by and large culturally passive. The research on young girls' hidden culture has also contributed to a more differentiated understanding of how young people use the offers of the mass media and the fashion industry. In this way research has contributed to a better understanding of the

consumer culture or the mainstream culture. True, it has the consumption of goods - especially different products of culture - as the central ingredience, but the meanings contained in these products and the consequenses of the consumption are not as a matter of course the same: the way the products are selected and put together and the coherence of which they form a part are essential for the realisation of the meaning.

The Socialization of Girls and the Special Forms of Girls' Culture

Most girls are socialized to live up to the norm system forming femininity - to be oriented towards relations between persons, bringing up children, care for family and friends, and to consciousness towards the needs of others.

The socialization of the girls is characterized by their keeping a close relationship to the mother while the boys in the oedipal conflict are forced to distance themselves from the mother and instead identify with the father. The dependence on the mother is reinforced by the fact that the parents generally limit the independence of the girls more than that of the boys. The girls react to the limitations with aggression, but also with fear because the aggression is threatening the love-relation to the mother. The fear of loosing love causes the little girl to learn to turn the aggressions towards herself in the form of fear and guilt-feeling - and the girls learn to turn their consciousness towards the needs of the surroundings and to adjust to them.

The girl's dyadic relationship to her mother is repeated in her friendship to other girls. The friendships are built up around the same set of female qualities and at the same time they are used by the girl as a tool in her effort to claim independence from the parents/the mother. Relations to the girlfriend are also strong emotional relations and therefore they also protect against the loss of love from the mother.

Girls' Cultures

The structures of the girls' as well as of the young women's friendship relations, namely on one hand search for love and confirmation and on the other hand also search for independence, can be said to be an answer to the conditions of life offered to women by the patriarchal culture, but historically and classwise there are differences between the concrete forms that girls' cultures take.

The resistance of the big girls towards the ways grown-ups limit their different displays and their creativity - and also their resistance towards the boys and their growing dominance in school and other places - are expressed by the girls through for instance dance, by different linguistic expressions and through use of the products of the commercial culture industry: fashion, make-up, music, films etc.

All these things have a special meaning and are used as a symbolic demonstration of being different from the mother and to claim independence and individuality in relation to the surrounding world.

The Culture of Withdrawing

The girls use a special cultural technique - the ability to close out the surrounding world and cultivate intimacy in the relation to the girlfriend. The withdrawal can happen in all possible constellations - at school, at the leisure-institution - but a good deal of the withdrawal takes part in the girl's own room (most of the big girls today have their own room).

The function of this cultural technique is to support and confirm each other in the efforts to obtain independence. In the girlfriend relation the girls do not have to give up their own needs and desires to win acknowledgement and confirmation - and

therefore it is possible for them to work with the conflict between love and independence: They support each other with good advice, confidence and mutual identification. But they also use time on arguments, being able to train their independence without threatening the mutual love. The girls find means to symbolically express independence and withdrawal from the embracement by the family or the mother in a lot of the output from culture industry - as mentioned clothes, music, films etc., but also in things for decorating the room, knick-knacks, pillows, pictures and posters of the idols.

Musical consumption plays a very important part in this symbolic demarcation from the outer world. By establishing a "sound-wall" and through the selection of music the girls concretely mark their individuality and their being different from the musical norms of the family. Together with posters of the idols the music also forms the raw material for romantic dreams about the future and grown-up life. All these elements are included in a coherence which gives the things their special symbolic meaning.

The researcher Birte Beck Jørgensen (1985) has summarized the importance of the girls' room culture in this way:

"The commercial youth culture running through their (the girls') activities communicates pictures of an idealized femininity - largely created by men - pictures passing on male ideals about about the female. So the room culture is dominated by patriarchal and commercial culture, at the same time being an expression of the big girls' withdrawn yet active and creative attempt at liberation from uncertainty, ties and limitations". (p. 133, my translation)

Self-Representation and Offensive Femininity

The room culture develops in pre-puberty and the beginning of puberty (12-14 years of age) but gradually the cultural expression is changing: they appear in larger groups and their show-down with the control and limitations of the surroundings hap-

pens in a more direct and offensive way. Through the style of dressing, make-up and body language they draw attention to themselves, their femininity and their status as sexual beings. By provoking attention, the girls for a time ruin the picture of them as nice, quiet and almost invisible - and instead they try to exceed the limits of their behaviour. They free themselves of the family - the mother - and turns the comrades - of both sexes - but the conflict of femininity is of course not overcome with that: their self-representation takes place within the male ideal of femininity.

Apparently what takes place is a passive subordination to the industrial mass culture and a conforming to an almost imitated presentation of traditional female roles - but in spite of all the ambivalence the girls' culture also contains a strong demonstration of independence and a will to be independent.

On the Road to the Media Society - Second Hand Experiences

Common too the cultural manifestations of young people and not least that of young girls' is the dominating influence of the culture industry and the media. Among other things this is due to the social situation of many young people (and a lot of grown-ups). The social and cultural traditions have been changing since the end of World-War II and a great deal of the working class and parts of the middle class have for instance moved out of the small apartments in the center of the cities - out to the blocks of flats or detached houses in the suburbs. At the same time the women have entered the labour market in great numbers. The tendency has been a growing isolation of the single nuclear family due to the disappearance of traditional social networks - and because new ones did not really come into existence - e.g. because the blocks of flats are empty a good deal of the day and due to the lack of other social functions such as shops, library, pubs etc.

The closure of the family around itself in the limited free time is the background for the massive influx of the media into family life. The handing down of experiences and tradition is broken in central areas of life - also because of the fast changes in the structure of society and in the technological area. This means that the experiences of former generations are more or less worthless for the growing generation. This is what the German researcher on socialization Thomas Ziehe calls the cultural disengagement - in German: "Freisetzung" - The german concept captures the doubleness in the state: on one hand liberation or freedom and on the other hand an exposed and vulnerable condition.

The young people must so to speak create their own life and their own experiences - and a great deal of the material available is precisely the knowledge and the experiences offered by the electronic media. About this Ziehe says:

"Media, commercials and culture industry release an explosion of needs, dreams, wishes and expectations: our subjective possibilities are increased"

- and later:

"An ambivalent disengagement which means both freedom to choose and design ones own subjectivity: image, sexuality, style, identity; And at the same time the freedom of choice has to be formulated inside the frames of the culture industry and the market of life style - by the market mechanisms themselves!"
("Life as Post-Avantgardism", Profil 1986, nr. 2-4, my translation).

One of the consequences of this way of obtaining knowledge about the world is that a big part of the experiences of children and young people are acquired at second hand: communicated through the media. This means that they have for instance acquired knowledge and experience about future parts of life long before they arrive at that stage of life - and when they arrive at that stage they literally have their heads full of pictures guiding their experience of reality and staging a row of expectations to "how it should be to be real". On the other hand the set of conceptions will rarely be only one, but

rather several different possibilities forcing the single individual to make up her mind and choose in situations where tradition or moral would earlier have decided the choice in advance.

Ziehe suggests that this situation possibly infects the inner structure of the media-products, for instance the serial "Dynasty" where there is a tendency for every action carried out by one person to be commented on and problematized from at least five other points of view.

Until now the media consumption of young girls has mostly been marked by a massive need for music and a more withdrawn attitude to the media of TV and video. But also the girls' consumption is now increasing with the offers of several TV-channels and with the video which many have available. The way the girls use TV and Video is apparently not much different from the boys - they watch largely the same kind of programmes, mostly entertainment films, but the interest and involvement of the girls is more to "read" the social and emotional tensions between the persons in the movie, while the boys put more stress on suspense and action in the story. Yet movies about youth and love-movies are clearly preferred by the girls - while the boys dissociate themselves from those genres.

In an earlier study about the video use of 11-12 years olds, the movie "The Blue Lagoon" was a clear favourite with several girls. One of the girls mentioned with joy that the girl in the movie knew nothing about how to get children.

The movie tells the story about two children shipwrecked on a desert island. They must take care of themselves, but by the time they reach puberty they fall in love, the girl gets pregnant and has a child. The two have to make all their experiences for themselves, they have no experiences in advance and have no traditions to rely on.

The situation of the interviewed girl illustrates very well the problematic of experiences at second hand: she knows everything in advance long before she is able to have her own sexual experiences and her fascination is linked to the fact that she is allowed a view into the future - having some pictures, which she can use as a scenario for her own existence.

The presentation in the film can be said to be an alternative to the way the girl traditionally takes over the female role of a grown-up - even if the girl in the film is not exposed in a very alternative way in relation to the traditional female role. But in this way the media experience might supply several models of life. But it is an open question whether the girl's actual situation in fact contains more than one choice, and the results might as well be resignation and frustration.

There is, on the other hand, no doubt that moving pictures will have an increasing importance for production and reproduction of femininity - and that increasingly it will be from the pictures that the young girls gather inspiration for their symbolic and creative work to acquire the identity of a grown-up and independent woman.

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TV Aesthetics and the Representation of Women

By Vibeke Pedersen

Artiklen beskæftiger sig med hvordan TV æstetikken bestemmer fremstillingen af kvinder, dels generelt, og dels gennem en analyse af Bazar.

Bazar er et dansk litterært talk-show der har været sendt direkte hver uge foråret 84, efteråret 85 og foråret 86 med i alt 32 programmer. Programmets tyngdepunkt er sædvanligvis en diskussion mellem fire forfattere om et emne i tilknytning til deres aktuelle udgivelser.

Artiklen tager udgangspunkt i den angelsaksiske feministiske filmteori, der beskriver den klassiske hollywoodfilm som en form, der strukturerer det mandlige voyeristiske blik på kvinden. For at se om de samme mekanismer findes i TV, inddrages nyere teori om TV æstetikken, der på samme psyko- og tekstanalytiske grundlag beskriver TV oplevelsen som en dobbelthed af forventning og frustration i modsætning til filmoplevelsen, der bygger på etableringen af en illusion. TV giver ikke rum for opbygningen af den mandlige almagtillusion og etableringen af det voyeristiske blik. Man kan derimod sige, at alle seere generelt anbringes i en kvindelig eller prædipal situation i forhold til TV.

Men dette betyder ikke, at der ikke kan tales om specifikt kønnede tilskuerpositioner eller fremstilling af køn i de enkelte TV-programmer. For at TV skal kunne sætte seeren i en