

Celebrated but Amusing? An Intersectional Analysis of Children’s and Young People’s Media Portraits

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In this paper, the focus is on cultural representations of children and young people in the Finnish media. The research data consists of 150 articles drawn from Finnish newspapers between 2003-05. It is mainly portrayals of children and youth (ages 7-18) who have been successful in the field of sports, the arts or education. The portraits are analysed as a particular media genre, from a critical discourse analytical perspective, combined with an intersectional analysis. The focus is on cultural constructions of age, childhood, youth and gender, but connections to representations of class and ethnicity will also be explored. Five case studies – the portraits of three athletes below the age of 13, a young female rap artist and a young entrepreneur – are used to demonstrate the analysis.

While on surface the media portraits seem to celebrate the young interviewees, on a closer look, however, it seems that they implicitly convey stereotypical, and often negative understandings of childhood and youth. At the same time, they also seem to implicitly reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Intersections of age, gender, class and ethnicity interact in particular ways in the texts and work to create particular images of young people as either ‘amusing’, ‘threatened’ or ‘serious’. It seems that it is particularly the combination of masculinity with young age that creates tensions in the media portraits, while femininity does not appear equally problematic.

Celebrated but Amusing? An Intersectional Analysis of Children's and Young People's Media Portraits

In this paper, the focus is on recent media representations of children and young people. My analysis concentrates on the ways children and young people are presented in newspaper portraits, as targets of positive public attention. The aim is to direct attention to the ways media texts construct childhood and youth. These questions are relevant in relation to children's and young people's possibilities to be taken seriously in the adult society. Media has an important role in producing images for adult audiences of children and young people as actors in the public realm. My interest in these portrayals of children and young people is linked to a more general research orientation towards the changing social and cultural meanings of age in today's late modern society (Aapola 1999, 2002 and 2005), as well as their intersections with other social categories.

Currently, there is an intensive negotiation about understandings of age taking place on various levels of the society. The media is one of the major sites where different notions concerning age and stages of life are circulated and debated. Therefore, it is important to study media representations more closely. What kind of images of young people are presented, and for what purposes? Who are the young people portrayed in the media? What kind of discourses of age (see Aapola 2002) and particularly childhood and youth are evoked in the portraits of young people? And how are the media portraits of children and young people constructed from an intersectional point-of-view, looking at the intersections of age with gender, class and ethnicity?

My background data has been derived from the largest newspaper in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat*, during the time period of year 2003 to (mid-)2005, and it consists of altogether about 400 articles about children and young people. In this presentation, the focus is on a particular journalistic genre, namely personal portraits. They represent about a third of the articles in my larger archive, namely 150 articles. Personal portraits have not been studied very often (however, see Siivonen 1999), although they have become ever more prevalent in the media in recent years, with its current trend towards intimization and personification (see Fairclough 1995, 51).

Here, I present an analysis of a sample of personal portraits of children and young people, picked from the larger data as case studies. The young people presented in these articles can be deemed as successful as they have all made considerable but different types of achievements within various fields of life, including sports championships, artistic performances, or professional or educational achievements. The ages of the young people in the portraits that I concentrate on in this paper vary from 7 to 18 years. Previously, I have looked at slightly older young people's portraits (Aapola-Kari 2006). I have analyzed the data within a critical discourse analytical framework (see f.ex. Fairclough 1995, Aapola 1999), combined with an intersectional approach. The theoretical background of the study is linked to current debates about the changing life-course and the meanings of age in late-modern societies, particularly on changing processes of growing up (Aapola et al. 2004). This analysis is part of my research project 'Young People Transgressing Cultural Age Orders'¹, where I have also conducted life-course interviews with young people about their varying processes of growing up (see Aapola 2005).

1 The research project is linked to the multidisciplinary research programme 'Many Routes to Adulthood – Changing Cultural Age Orders in Finland' which I direct at the University of Helsinki. My funding has come mainly from the Finnish Youth Research Network. The project is now in the reporting phase.

Previous Studies on Media Representations of Young People

The media has a manifold task in the society: it not only mediates information about important events, but it also names issues, categorizes and classifies phenomena, and additionally, presents moral evaluations about them, and acts as a continuation of social control. The media can also have other tasks, aiming for socialization or education, as well as therapeutic tasks. (See Hoikkala 1989; Heiskanen – Mitchell 1985.) All these aspects may come to play in media representations of children and young people, and in media's portrayals of age and gender more generally.

In journalistic texts, age, similarly as gender, is used as a significant device to help 'recognize' people (Halonen 2002, 3). Finnish media researcher Irma Kaarina Halonen (2002, 3) has claimed that people are often given particular age-labels in the media, but only the young and the old are presented as particular age-groups, while adulthood is invisible. However, age and gender are more significant categories in certain media contexts and discourses than in others. For example, in crime news, advertisements and magazines, age and gender are often presented as significant features, while in general news and factual journalism they tend to be neutralized more. Finnish ethnologist Sinikka Vakimo (2001, 181) has noted that ageing people get publicity when they break age and gender norms. The same applies to children and young people: they have a certain publicity value particularly when they transgress cultural age orders (see Aapola 2005). This can be witnessed in my data. Age surfaces particularly in such 'breakage points' where there are deviations from cultural expectations concerning age, as in the case of 'young geniuses', for example. (Halonen 2002, 11-12.)

There have been several well-known studies within youth research focusing on media representations of young people. They have mainly drawn attention to the predominance of negative stereotypes of youth (f.ex. Cohen 1972/1990; Wyn 2005). Young people are often presented as threatening the social order, in the context of crime and deviance, or, alternatively, they are depicted as a group to be anxious about, and having trouble in their growing up process. Similarly, old people are often depicted from a problem point of view in the media, in the context of sickness, poverty, social marginalization and economic cost (Halonen 2002, 6) There has been relatively little research about children's representations in the media (see Kivimäki – Laiho 2001), but there are similar trends in their portrayals. Media portrayals of children and young people often have great publicity value, as they are seen as symbolizing the future of the society (Hoikkala 1989).

While the prevalence of negative representations of young people in the media is well-documented, there are also other kinds of representations. Finnish youth researcher Tommi Hoikkala has, in his analysis of Finnish media texts on the topic of young people and alcohol use, demonstrated that while there is a strong trend to depict young people within the discourse of problems, a countertrend tends to idealize and/or exotize young people (Hoikkala 1989). He concludes that young people are presented as either 'angels or demons' in the media (Hoikkala 1989).

According to Johanna Wyn (2005), media constantly circulates stereotypical ideas of young people, but not all these stereotypes are negative. She has followed recent discussions about the 'Gen(eration) Y' in the Australian media, and says that while today's young people are often presented as having trouble making transitions towards adulthood, at the same time, there are also celebratory articles about young people's life-styles and priorities. In these media texts, young people's technological skills, business sense and life-style decisions are presented as an example of how to live life in the 21st Century (Wyn 2005).

There have not been very many other studies focusing on the more positive portrayals of young people in the media. However, Lesley Johnson presents in her book 'Modern Girl' (Johnson 1993) an interesting analysis of the media's role in defining modern girlhood in the

1950's and 1960's Australian context. According to her, Australian newspapers at the time wrote special 'achievement stories' about girls and young women. Central to these narratives was to celebrate and confirm a particular kind of normative femininity. These articles emphasized how girls prepared for the roles of wife and mother with the right kinds of education, where they acquired the necessary skills (Johnson 1993, 78-81). Later, in the 1960's, new kinds of consumer markets were developed and aimed for youthful 'teens', particularly within the fashion and beauty industry (Johnson 1993, 137-145). During this time period, various beauty contests and debutante balls were popular, and they were also widely reported in the media. Even during this time, the 'achievement stories' about young women were particularly feminine, and their central feature was to present the right kinds of femininity, to find the 'right' man, and from a family.

The importance of gender in media images of children and young people is still obvious. Particularly young girls are today more prevalent in the public eye than ever before, as John Hartley (1998, 51) has noted: presently, they are targets for public politics, debate and gaze in an unprecedented way (see Aapola et al. 2004). It is, therefore, of central importance to take an intersectional viewpoint into analyzing the media images of children and young people.

As the above-mentioned studies demonstrate, positive images of young people have an important role in the media, similarly as the more negative ones. They can be used to propagate certain life-styles and gender norms, and to mediate messages about the future of the society to the mainly adult audience. Nevertheless, prevailing positive images of young people, and in particular, personal portraits of children and young people have not received wide attention within childhood nor youth studies. Personal portraits as a genre itself has, in general, rarely been a subject of study within media studies (Siivonen 1999 and 2007); Barnason et al. 2005).

Personal Portraits as a Journalistic Genre

Personal portraits are a particular journalistic genre, which has become more and more popular in the media in recent years. This has been linked to the megatrends of intimization, commercialization and personification of media content, as well as to the spread of a consumer ideology within journalism (Fairclough 1995, 51; Halonen 2002). According to Finnish media researcher Irma Kaarina Halonen (2002, 5), journalistic genres gain their content more and more from 'interesting' people – human interest – as opposed to the more traditional news criteria or public interest. Personal portraits, even in newspapers, are often based on such 'human interest' criteria (Siivonen 1999, 66, 70-72).

While many articles nowadays contain at least some kind of portrayals of people to personify news events, it is the separate genre of personal portrait that is my current focus. This genre is not always clearly distinguishable from other types of media stories. However, Jonita Siivonen has in her study (Siivonen 1999, 77) created a list of its distinguishing features, which I have also adapted in my study: personal portraits have only one main character who has been interviewed, and by whom there are direct quotes in the text. Also, there is some kind of biographical material in the article. In addition, there is at least one photograph/picture, where the main character is presented as central. Another central feature of the personal portrait genre is that it presents the protagonist in a positive light, 'in a golden jacket'. The portraits also present biographical material about the interviewee, often in a rather clichéd form (Siivonen 1999, 72-3). Next, I shall present my data and analysis more closely.

Data and Analysis

During the time period between September 2004 and May 2005 I collected more or less systematically all articles on young people that have appeared in *Helsingin Sanomat*, the

largest newspaper in Finland. I have been particularly systematic in collecting personal portraits of young people. My archive consists of almost 400 articles on young people in a Finnish context. The bulk of the articles is from *Helsingin Sanomat*, but some are from other newspapers and popular magazines. The articles have been divided in ten categories – sports, the arts and culture, education and professions, health, law and social policy, consumption and fashion, free time/hobbies, family and relationships, religion and ideology, as well as crime and accidents. Articles on children (up to age 12) have been placed in their own category.

In the data, there are about 150 articles that can be classified as personal portraits, which is more than one third of the data. Thematically these are very concentrated: about half of the portraits, 70, are from the field of sports. There are about 35 portraits within the category of culture and the arts, about 20 in the theme of education and the professions, and the rest are scattered between different thematic categories. Some of the portraits have been placed as part of a larger whole, a thematic compilation of articles on a similar topic from different angles, but most of them are clearly separate and independent entities of their own.

While childhood and youth are relative concepts and can be defined very differently in different contexts, I have chosen to focus here on portraits depicting children and young people between the ages 7 and 18. However, in my archive there are even stories about slightly older people, up to the age of 24 or 30 years. In this paper, I have included all the portraits of 18-year-olds and younger people in my data, altogether 22 personal portraits.

In the overall data there are many more portraits of boys and young men than of girls and young women. However, in this age category, the number of girls and boys is almost equal; 12 portraits of girls and 10 of boys. In the overall sports category, there are about 50 portraits of young men, and only about 20 about young women. In the arts and culture-category, there are about 24 portraits about young men, while only 12 about young women. In the field of education and professions, the numbers are about equal, about ten portraits about both genders.

It is interesting to note that all the portraits of under-15-year-olds are in the sports category. It is clear that sports is the main field where ‘little or young heroes and heroines’ are constantly created and introduced to the audience. In sports there are countless international, national and local games and competitions in dozens of different sports on a daily basis. There are always winners and losers, and many of the competitors in the most widely reported forms of sports are young. Sports journalism has been accused of a male bias, in the sense that female athletes receive far less attention. This gender imbalance is visible even in portraits of young athletes, but in the youngest age category, girls appear in portraits almost as frequently as boys. In the field of the arts, culture and entertainment there are also competitions, although not as frequently as in sports, but every day there are hundreds of performances and shows, new records and books come out, films are released and so on. There are thus many possibilities for new young people to come forward. Both in sports and arts journalism young people are portrayed as symbols of the future of the field. Often these stories are about promising young people on their way to become professionals.

My analysis consists of a close reading of the articles, informed by certain analytical questions that have been posed to the data. Some of the questions have been formulated as a result of my previous text analytical studies and my interest in definitions of age (see Aapola 1999 and 2005), and they are derived from a combination of discourse analytical and narrative approaches together with an intersectional analysis. Some of the questions have been adapted from Jonita Siivonen’s (1999 and 2007) studies on media portraits. I have also attempted to give attention to the intersections of representations of age with those of gender and class in particular. However, I do not intend to go deeper into a discussion on the concept of intersectionality in this paper, rather I will apply it as I understand it; as an inspection on

how age, gender and class as social hierarchies together construct each other, instead of looking at them as separate systems of subordination. From an intersectional point of view, the dimensions of inequality are always intertwined in people's lives, they cannot be separated. My understanding of intersectional analysis has been affected by several sources, but most importantly by Collins (1998), de los Reyes and Mulinari (2005), Krekula et al. (2005), McCall (2005) and Staunaes (2003).

At present, I have focused particularly on these analytical questions:

- what kind of discourses are activated and what kind of positions are created in the portraits of children and young people?
- how are childhood and youth presented in the portraits?
- how is age intertwined with other social dimensions, such as gender and class in cultural representations of childhood and youth?
- how do age, gender and class intersect in the portraits?

I have written "raw-analyses" of varying lengths on each article under analysis. In this "raw-analysis", I have included a short description of the article's contents, as well as more detailed observations about them, based on the analytical questions presented above. Below, I present some findings that are based on my analysis of the portraits.

Five Case Studies

First, I present five portraits picked out from the larger sample as case studies; a 7-year-old wrestler boy, a 12-year-old gymnast girl, a 12-year-old badminton player boy, a young female rap artist (16 yrs) and a young male entrepreneur (18 yrs).

All the under-18-year-old young people's portraits have been listed in an appendix at the end of this paper.

Case 1: Clinch is Jerry's ace (HS 5.5.2005)²

Summary of the Article

7-year-old Jerry Grönlund won the first prize in his series in his team's competition. He had been brought to the wrestling gym already as a 4-year-old. He masters several grips. His father is also involved in the sport. Father says: 'Jerry was a bit too nice when he was younger. That is why we wanted him to get into a sport where he has to get a grip of his opponent. Wrestling seemed good as there is no kicking nor hitting.' Jerry left football as he got more interested in wrestling. Jerry has already got many trophies from wrestling. He likes snow-boarding too. He no longer dreams of becoming a wrestler when he grows up. He wants to sell bicycles.

Jerry is big and heavy for his age. When he was only six, he had a 13-year-old opponent. Twice he has been rewarded as the most hard-working trainee in his team. Father: 'Wrestling is a good basis even if he wants to change to another sport later'.

2 Here are shortened and edited translations of the originally Finnish language articles. The translation has been done by Sinikka Aapola-Kari. The original articles are archived in Sinikka Aapola-Kari's files. Unfortunately it was not possible to reproduce the articles as photographs in this context.

Analysis

Here is a young boy whose hobby has been chosen by his parents who want his son to be more assertive, which seems like a working-class goal in upbringing. The boy himself likes wrestling, although he enjoys other sports too. The boy is represented as his father's son, under his influence, and being evaluated by him and the sports community. However, he does have his own agency too, and motivations for wrestling. He seems to value the trophies highly, as a sign of success.

He is presented as a boy who is being 'toughened' by older men in the sport in order to become more masculine. He has already had to make choices between different sports in order to excel in one, and he has already met some tough opponents. Although he is an ardent trainee, his involvement does not seem very serious. It is hinted by the father that wrestling may not even be Jerry's final choice in sports.

Age is mentioned a couple of times; first as the young age the boy started wrestling, and secondly, that the boy has had to tackle much older opponents because of his big physical size. In this story, however, the boy's childhood is not presented as threatened by the sport. His father seems to watch over him, and Jerry himself seems to have his own child-like dreams outside of the sport. His masculinity seems to be strengthened in wrestling which is represented as an exclusively male sport. The boy is presented as first and foremost a young boy, guided by his father and older men in wrestling, here and now, not making future plans in the sport.

From an intersectional point of view, wrestling could be defined as a working-class sport, and this is in line with the father's earlier worry about the boy being 'too nice' or not assertive enough. In a working-class world of masculinity, strength and stamina are important, as well as a readiness to fight whoever opponent you get. It is a highly valued characteristic, not showing fear even when faced with obvious defeat. In this story, then, implicit middle-class notions of childhood as a happy, care-free time but possibly feminine 'sissyness' are countered with a working-class culture of masculinity, where a boy has to start training early in life in order to become more masculine which is defined as 'strong and fearless'. The older men surrounding the boy direct him in the right direction. Age intersects with class in a particular way in this story, creating a slight counterpositioning between middle-class childhood and working-class masculinity, in favour of the latter.

Case 2: Emma Jousimies is a young but cool-tempered virtuoso in artistic gymnastics. Her goal for next year is to get into the A national team. (Länsiväylä 2005)

Summary

12-year-old Emma became the surprise Finnish champion of balance beam in series six, where she participated for the first time, as one of the youngest competitors. She is already part of the national B-team, but now she aims for adults' major competitions. Emma started practising gymnastics already as a 4-year-old, in the footsteps of her older sister. Emma has totally lost her heart to artistic gymnastics. Even her parents are involved in the sport. Her mother is a former artistic gymnast herself. Emma played football before, but she had to make her choice in sports early, and so she left football.

She is described as very hard-working. She goes to school in the sixth grade. She practices six times a week, four hours at a time. She also practices ballet once a week. Emma is described as a good listener, and also it is said that she can analyse her own performance. Emma herself thinks that her strength is her ability to stay cool in competitions. Her life is very busy when there are competitions every other weekend. In Sweden three weeks ago Emma got two bronze medals. Her aim is to rise into the series seven and to the national A-team at the same time. Her idol is American gymnast Carly Patterson. She has videotapes of

nearly all the major international competitions at home, and she looks at them occasionally. However, she only has a limited amount of free time. On Mondays she has some time to spend with her friends, that is her only day off.

Analysis

Emma is described as a very talented gymnast, and a hard-working trainee. She seems to be successful not only because of her technical skills, but also because she can analyse her performance and stay calm in competitions. These are clearly adult-like abilities, and they are presented as the reason why she is able to aim for the adults' series and the top-league national team. There seems to be a tension between her hard training program, her high aims in the sport and her young age. This tension is not made too explicit in the text, although the girl only has one weekday off, when to just socialize with her friends. So, Emma's childhood is not presented as threatened; rather she seems able to escape childhood into premature adulthood via her athletic skill.

The hard training schedule seems to be justified by Emma's possibilities of making it to the very top, and also because gymnastics is presented as a family matter, with both Emma's parents and sister involved too. Emma herself does not question her hard program, but seems to take it for granted. She is only happy that she does not have to practice every day. Her gender is not highlighted particularly, rather she is only referred to as a gymnast and her aim is said to be in the adults' series, not in women's series, although this is actually the case. Emma is presented as first and foremost a skilful gymnast with ambition, not as a girl or a child, even if her family is also mentioned. The discourse of age is evoked only in relation to her phenomenal success in gymnastics as a young competitor.

From an intersectional viewpoint, the story does not openly counterposition the girl's young age with her high goals in the sport nor her hard training. Gender is not emphasized either, although it is clear that it is a very feminine sport she is training for, and her idol is another young woman. Contrary to the earlier story about Jesse, Emma's interview is not framed so much as competing against other young women, but as the making of an adult(-like) athlete on the national and possibly international level. There is almost no hint of childhood left in this description of a young girl's pursuit, except for the one day off during the week that she gets to spend with other girls her age. However, neither she, nor those around her, nor the journalist seem worried about her hard training program – there is just a clear admiration for a girl who will soon escape the category of girlhood and become a full-fledged athlete on the national level, among adult women.

Case 3: Kasper Lehtikoinen is being welded for the top. The sixth-grader has his own supplier and a trio of coaches. (HS 14.2.2005)

Summary

Kasper Lehtikoinen, 12 years, usually beats his opponents in badminton with no trouble. For example, in the age-graded championships competition he beat his opponent in the 15-year-olds' category. He only wavered as his attention was caught by a cameraman. In 2004, he was chosen as 'the junior badminton player of the year', and he has gained the right to compete even in Denmark in the junior series. In an international competition in Singapore he came in top four out of 92 players. In Finland, he is a tough opponent even for much older players.

Kasper is in the sixth grade at school. He has no time for any other hobbies. Friday is his only day off. Weekends he spends mostly in competitions. From Monday to Thursday he practices badminton two hours daily. He thinks it has been rather tough for him lately, as he

has been to a big competition, as well as an intensive two-day-training period with his main coach from Denmark.

The coach became interested in Kasper two years ago. He comes to Finland to train with him at least once a month. Kasper sends a report to Denmark after each training session. In Finland, two trainers guide him weekly according to careful instructions. The Finnish trainers negotiate daily with the Danish coach and Kasper's father sends his video tapes of his son's games to Denmark for the coach to analyze.

It is unusual for such a young badminton player to have his own personal trainer and sponsors. His Finnish coach says that if everything goes well, Kasper will become an international top player. He has a very high level technical skill. Kasper's proud father says that Kasper was only 4 years and 10 months when he first played. He also says that the Danish coach has urged Kasper to move to Denmark to live and train. However, the father says they would like to keep the siblings together so far. Kasper has a little sister and a little brother. Kasper himself talks about badminton almost like an adult, in an analytical way. His goal in the sport is to become the world's best player and an Olympic winner.

In a separate side story, titled "Children or professional athletes?" the journalist asks what happens when younger and younger children are being trained professionally. In many families children's sports hobbies define the weekly rhythm. Also, to get to the top in a sport often requires training abroad. The question is then whether the whole family moves or if it would be better to send the child abroad alone. In many sports it is necessary to make the choice between professional and hobby-like training at an early age. Often the choice is made by parents. And ever more often, professional training wins over childhood.

Analysis

The young badminton player boy is presented as a rarity in his age-group because of the professional way he is being trained and equipped. He is also described as a highly talented player, who can beat much older opponents. He has a tight training program and lots of competitions, many of them international.

The boy himself has a very adult-like attitude towards his playing and reports all his training to his coach. There are, however, some childish traits in him, reports the journalist: his attention was caught by a cameraman in a game, which made his performance falter, and the journalist also defines his dreams about becoming 'best player in the world' as childish. However, this goal does not actually seem out of place if one looks at the way the boy's trainer talks about his talent, and his previous international successes.

The father is very involved in the boy's training, but he is not ready to treat the boy as just a skilful sportsperson and send him to live and train abroad. He emphasizes the importance of keeping the siblings together, at least for the time being. Curiously, he does not mention the parents' importance for a child this age.

The journalist seems to have serious doubts about the professional way some young players are trained in relation to their young age. She asks whether the choices about such a hard training program are actually made by the parents, and whether this is harmful to the young players' childhood. The boy's gender is not emphasized, and there are both men and women involved in his training.

From an intersectional point of view, in this text, the young player is represented on the other hand as a very skilful, almost professional player, and on the other hand as a child, whose childhood is threatened by the hard regime of training. Childhood is thus juxtaposed with the tight schedule, as well as the possibility of training abroad. These are not seen as belonging to a child's life.

There is thus a clear-cut difference to Emma's story above, where no such worries about her lost childhood are expressed, although she is of the same age and has an equally hard

training scheme. We can only wonder whether a boy's childhood is more valuable than a girl's or why this discourse of 'child protection' was raised in connection to this young boy's interview, but not in relation to the young girl's story. It would seem their situation is quite similar otherwise, but the boy's trainer is from abroad, and there is the possibility of him having to leave his family and move abroad as well. Maybe it is this 'danger' that makes his situation seem more problematic from an age perspective.

Case 4: Girl-poet raps serious stuff. A meeting with MC Dust. (HS 1.5.2005)

Summary

'MC Dust' is a 16-year-old girl who comes from a town in eastern Finland. Her real name is not revealed. She is introduced as someone who looks like a serious poetess with her fleated hair and without makeup, but who does not write about the stars and the moon, as could be expected, instead, she writes about anorexia and child labour. She is referred to as 'probably the first female political rap artist in Finland'. She is contrasted with a popular young male rap artist, 'LittleG' whom she differs from because her lyrics are 'not suitable for children's ears' – she uses swear words. Now she is publishing her first own album. She looks like a nice girl-poet according to the journalist, but her texts are serious and critical, and are not meant for children.

Despite the girl's young age, her texts are mature and thoughtful, as the reporter emphasizes. She has written down her thoughts since a young age, and she is already an experienced musician, although she is still in school. Her brother closely supports her musical career, and her school does not seem to suffer either. She listens to many kinds of music, even if her own style is rap. She compares her music with Rage Against the Machine, a political group that mixes different styles. For her, writing texts is conscious experimenting, not just a direct autobiographical outlet. She raps and writes about serious things, but she also likes to give some hope. She does not like to position herself as a model for girls, instead she hopes that she will find an audience for her message as an artist. She has not thought about her future very much. She would like to continue doing music, but she is aware that it is very uncertain.

Analysis

The young woman rejects the typical stereotypes associated with youth and girlhood: she writes 'serious' texts, not 'superficial' ones, as you could expect a young girl to do, nor does she write about traditional 'poetic' topics, such as the nature. The young artist's youth is presented mainly as something that raises suspicions, but against which her actions testify. She proves that she is not a 'typical' dreamy teen-aged girl, nor a 'nice girl'. She has some of the rebellion of youth, but she is also a professional.

From an intersectional point of view, 'MC Dust' is introduced as a 'girl-poet', which creates a tension for the story: while a young woman who writes is easily identified as a 'girl-poet', 'MC Dust' does not fit the genre neatly, as her texts and her style – rap – are not part of the traditional poetic genre, nor are they anything 'girly'. She performs serious music, which is already at least partly professional. Still, youth combined with girlhood is a negative characterization, and the artist seems aware of this, as she refuses to be a model for younger girls. It seems the protagonist receives certain respect because of her artistic achievements in spite of being a girl, not because of it.

Case 5: Eetu Hyppönen sells euros by profit. (HS 9.11.2003)

UCCE-company markets untouched coins. The CEO will be 18 years next Thursday.

Summary

A young man has started to sell coins to collectors, and his transactions have gradually expanded so much that he was forced to take his business away from his family home, and to leave school, as his business grew to such proportions. Now he lives by himself, and has got a real base for his company. He has received help from older business associates (men), because he has not been able to take official responsibility for his firm as he has been under-age. Now he will be old enough to take over. He wears a pin-stripe suit and is very busy. At home he has a pool table and two scorpions as pets. He did not finish gymnasium but now he will be taking a course for business people under the guidance of a business school director. He sees the future of his company positively, and thinks of new products and ways of marketing all the time. He is also weary to give away his business secrets.

Analysis

The portrait gives a two-layered message. On the one hand, the business idea of the young man is presented as a good one, and his company is blooming. Its products and business strategies are discussed as in any business story (the article appeared in the economy section). At the same time, however, the young entrepreneur and the first stages of his company are presented in an amused tone.

The young man himself clearly positions himself within the male-dominated business world, with other male directors. This is witnessed in the symbols of his success: a busy timetable, a traditional suit, a comfortable sofa and a pool-table. However, the journalist presents him as a bit ‘macho’ young boy who has only recently been under his mother’s wing. In the end of the story he is reminded that his ‘right place’ would actually still be in school, not running a business. A central role is given to older men, who have helped the young man in his pursuits in the business-world. His youth has presented a formal hindrance for him to act fully in the world of money. Also, his actions have not been in accordance with his role as a son in the family: his mother has kicked him out of the family home because his business took too much space.

From an intersectional point of view, then, this young man’s pursuit into the serious world of finance and the company of other business executives, leaving behind the world of school and his childhood home, is clearly regarded as a crossing one should not attempt at such a young age. The young man’s life-style which can be defined as ‘business class’ macho masculinity is seen as particularly unfit with his young age, and is more or less implicitly presented as funny in the portrait.

Conclusions

Intersections of Age, Gender and Class

The five sample cases presented above demonstrate how the portraits of young people often contain implicit ideals of youth or childhood, and how tensions are created within the texts if the persons in question depart from these ideals. While the young people who are portrayed in the media, clearly represent the ‘angelic’ youth (see Hoikkala 1989), models for the society, their portraits can also be read ‘against the grain’, as conveying implicit messages to the (mainly adult) reader about other types of childhood or youth, who are deemed less celebratory or ideal.

Gender is rarely discussed directly in children’s and young people’s media portraits. However, in most of the young people’s portraits, there are at least slight references to some gendered aspects in the interviewee’s life. The portraits of boys and young men depict worlds that are unquestionably presented as masculine: they are portrayed as newcomers, even if skilful ones, to traditionally male fields, such as corporate culture or wrestling. From an intersectional point of view it seems that childish traits are particularly unsuited with

masculinity, whether it be working-class or middle-class masculinity. For the young women, by contrast, gender as a significant category is more often brought up explicitly in their interviews. For the athletes, it is nearly always reminded that they play in special competitions for girls or women. In the case of the female rap artist, there is the – erroneous – expectation that she wants to be a model for other girls in particular. The contradiction between a girl's young age and her skills are not as clearly evoked as in the stories about the boys.

While ethnicity is not explicitly discussed in any of the sample stories, it is still implicitly present at least in the sense that whiteness is taken for granted in all the sample cases, and possible minority identities are not brought to surface. Usually they are only made explicit in the portraits when a person's looks or name differs clearly from the majority of Finnish population.

It is typical for portraits as a media genre that they construct an interesting journalistic contradiction in the protagonist him/herself (Siivonen 1999). It would seem that in the portraits of children and young people, this tension is often built around the young person's age. In children's and young people's media portraits, childhood and youth are constructed as first and foremost inexperience, vulnerability, uncertainty, emotionality and possibly superficiality and immaturity, and only in the second place as a positive resource, even if only activated in the future.

The discourse of childhood is usually not evoked very clearly in the sample portraits of under-13-year-olds. However, it is present implicitly. In the wrestler's portrait (Jerry), childhood is present in the implicit discourse of parenting, which the father activates in indicating the kind of aims he has had in encouraging him into wrestling. Childhood is also present in the discourse of age where older opponents represent a particular challenge to the young athletes. This is activated in all the sports-children's portraits. In the gymnast's portrait (Emma), her cool nerves are emphasized as her special strength on her way towards the adults' series. This implies that a more typical childish – and perhaps even more particularly girlish – emotional and nervous mindset would be a hindrance. Childhood is thus implicitly labelled as emotional.

In the badminton player's portrait (Kasper), the discourse of childhood is activated explicitly, as being undermined in the professional training scheme. In the sports-children's portraits, there are several indications of phenomena usually only associated with adulthood, not childhood: hard work, strict schedules, little free time and determined, ambitious aims far in the future. In the portraits which focus on children, the limits of childhood are only emphasized in one portrait, that of badminton player (Kasper). In the others, the children are not presented as particularly threatened, although the gymnast's (Emma) training program is even harder than the badminton player's. Her portrait concentrates only on the great achievements she has made, and the writer does not seem too concerned about her minimized free time.

In all the above stories focusing on children, the child's talent is proved by the child's success against older opponents. In all these portraits, the children have also started in their particular sport at a very young age, and continued purposefully towards their success. While the youngest wrestler boy's (Jerry) portrait still holds the future open, despite the boy's good success in the sport, the two 12-year-olds are presented as on their determined way to international success and a professional career. However, the price they are paying for this ambition is treated differently in the two portraits. While the discourse of threatened childhood is evoked in one of the texts, in Kasper's portrait, it is not activated in the other one, in Emma's portrait, although the situation seems to be very similar for both of them.

Also youth often appears to be something that creates tension in the portrait of a young person. While it is usually precisely their young chronological age that has made the protagonists worth interviewing in the first place, the meanings of young age nevertheless

often appear problematic. The young female rap artist (MC Dust) is presented as a 'modern-day poetess', who, despite her young age, is 'serious' and 'critical', as if the writer would have expected to meet someone who was superficial and perhaps dreamy, out of touch with today's reality. It seems surprising to the writer that despite her young age, the young woman has written lyrics that cannot be played to children, because they contain swear words and discuss serious topics such as anorexia. In the case of the young gymnast (Emma), the girl is described as 'young but cool-nerved'. Thus the young people in the portraits appear as positive special cases, different from the rest of youth, who are presented as having many negative characteristics.

After a closer look on the intersections of age, gender and class in the portraits I claim that these social dimensions interact in particular ways in the interview texts, and work to create particular images of young people as either 'amusing', 'threatened' or 'serious'. It seems that it is particularly the combination of masculinity with young age that creates tensions in the stories, while femininity does not appear equally problematic.

Discussion

Media portraits of boys and young men and girls and young women are part of a large and ever-growing pool of media representations of young people. While previous studies have emphasized the prevalence of negative stereotypes of young people in the media, on surface the personal portraits of young people would seem to be more positive images. Portraits are also a growing genre in journalism. The young people who are portrayed are all exceptionally successful in different fields of life, and they are presented in a more or less positive light.

The young people in the analysed portraits can be seen as presented as 'media heroes and heroines', as exceptional children and young people who have done heroic deeds. They are the 'angels' as opposed to the 'devils', which young people are more often portrayed as in the media (Hoikkala 1989). However, both 'angels' and 'devils' are easily exotized, presented as far removed from the reader's everyday life. Heroes and heroines have many functions in journalism; they are ideals, something to dream about, to admire, and to discuss in everyday situations (Hultén 1993, cited in Siivonen 1999, 67). On a closer look, however, it seems that even these on the surface positive images implicitly convey stereotypical, often negative understandings of childhood and youth. At the same time, they also seem to implicitly reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, even if they do mostly not discuss gender explicitly.

Children and young people deviate from the adult norm in the society, and as such they often run into various prejudices and stereotypes, based on their age. While media texts do not necessarily explicitly aim to reproduce discriminatory attitudes towards minority groups, such as age groups, they can do so implicitly, by the way they present different issues regarding these groups (Raittila 2004).

In principle it seems possible that the growing number of personal portraits of successful children and young people in the newspapers would actually help in bridging the differentiation between 'them' (children and young people as an age-group) and 'us' (the mainly adult – and male - audience), by giving young people themselves a more direct voice in the media (see Raittila 2004, 234-236 ja 282).

But, on the basis of my analysis, it seems that this is not the case. In a similar way as women have traditionally had to represent their female gender when men's gender has been invisible, and ethnic minorities have had to represent 'ethnicity' while white people's ethnicity has remained invisible, young people in the media represent their age group when adults represent the norm whose age is not mentioned. Stereotypical notions of childhood and youth are reinforced even in positive media texts on youth.

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Appendix: Under-18-year-old's portraits in the data

Children's portraits: sports

- First-grader ski jumper (male), unofficial Finnish champion
- 7-year-old wrestler (male), local champion
- 10-year-old trial motor biker (male)
- 12-year-old gymnast (female), Finnish Champion
- 12-year-old alpine skier (male), successful in international competitions
- 12-year-old tennis player (female), winner
- 12-year-old badminton player (male), in professional training

Young people's portraits

Sports

- 13-year-old figure skater (female), Finnish champion
- 14-year-old bowler (female) who has got a medal in the Finnish championships.
- 14-year-old badminton player (female), aims for European Championships.
- 15-year-old swimmer (female), Finnish Champion.
- 15-year-old basket ball player (male), junior Finnish Champion
- 15-year-old freestyle alpinist (male), competes at World championship level
- 15-year-old skier/jumper (male) at World Championship level
- 16-year-old gymnast (male), Nordic Champion
- 16-year-old javelin thrower (female), in special training
- 17-year-old tennis player (female) who has been in an international training program and is quickly gaining speed towards a professional career in tennis.

Arts and culture, other themes

- 15-year-old rap musician (male), has published his first album
- 16-year-old rap musician (female), first album coming
- 16-year-old student (female), will move to Helsinki alone in order to study
- 17-year-old student (female), trains to be a clothing artisan, aims for starting her own firm
- 18-year-old student (female), is active in her own community
- 18-year-old CEO (male) who has started a successful company that mediates Finnish coins to collectors in other countries.