

Abstract

BIN Norden

Børn og kultur – det æstetiskes betydning?

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**The reflected body of the child
— a critical discussion on the construction of the
online I and person**

keywords body, gender, identity, aesthetics

theme Det æstetiskes betydning i børns kultur?

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Sverige

theme

On-line communities are an open form of media, that affords the user to act upon her own interests and intentions. On on-line communities for children, the presentation as well as the representation of the person is often put to the forefront. These re|presentations reflect current values on what is beautiful, successful, interesting and exciting. Both as they are constructed by children for children, and also as cultural values interpreted by children. Further, these values are interrelated with phenomena such as gender, ethnicity, etc. The ambition with this presentation is to, using a gender perspective, make a critical reading of how children present the I and the body on on-line communities, with special attention to aesthetical values.

perspective

On the one hand, the body presented on-line is a reflection on societal norms and values on what is a beautiful, attractive, successful body/person. On the other hand, it is a reflection in the sense that the child in the construction of herself do make a conscious choice in regard to who she wants to be, what to look like, etc.

At the same time as the internet has developed into a natural and every-day phenomena in the social life of young people (Hernwall, 2001; Turkle, 1995; Tapscott, 1998; Tingstad, 2003; Medierådet, 2006), the symbolic meaning of the body has increased (Shilling, 2003). In our previous research we have showed that the body has become an aesthetic surface, modified and updated with reference to situational needs or wishes (Hernwall & Lundmark, 2006). In their use of on-line communities, there is a dialogic relation between presentation and representation. Seen as a personal creation, this re|presentation reflect a interpretative project where the construction of the body, the I and the identity. Here impressions from contemporary media is a central point of reference (Holm Sørensen, 2001; Poster, 2004). In this perspective, the on-line presentation becomes a reflection of contemporary values and norms, interpreted in the intersection between the culture of the popular and the culture of the child, between the public and the private, between the individual and the collective. But also interpreted and created in the meeting between a physical real world where the child is positioned in a traditional hetero-normative structure, and a digital world where the individual is told to create herself. Hence, the creation of the personal body is most likely a central contemporary developmental task (Havighurst, 1953).

Children, especially so in the light of the tween-concept, are active interpreters of values and norms, aesthetic as well as ideological (Tufté & Kristensen, 2006; Johansson, 2005). As members on a on-line community they are encouraged to create an on-line identity (or an avatar). This identity do not need to be faithful to the physical identity, role, or body. By way of making the I and the body public, the aesthetic dimensions – as well as the construction and the understanding of gender and gender norms – are made public for the bystander/dialogue partner (Nakamura, 2002; Siibak, 2006). An analysis of how children describe themselves in text and image on on-line communities for children, make it possible to increase the understanding for the aesthetic values among children in regard to the I and the body. Also, a great majority of on-line communities where children do participate, are created by adults *for* children, and do therefore illustrate how childhood and its value systems are constructed by adults. An analysis of children's on-line personal presentations may therefore also give access to, on the one hand how the child are constructed in medias *for* children, and on the other hand to how children as individuals and in dialogue interpret these constructions.

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