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Stereotypes of Teenagers' Images in Audiovisual Media Texts about Schools and Universities

Alexander Fedorov ^{a,*}, Anastasia Levitskaya ^b, Olga Gorbatkova ^a, Anvar Mamadaliev ^{c,d}

^a Rostov State University of Economics, Russian Federation

^b Taganrog Institute of Management and Economics, Russian Federation

^c International Network Center for Fundamental and Applied Research, Washington, USA

^d Volgograd State University, Volgograd, Russian Federation

Abstract

Having analyzed over a thousand of audiovisual media texts, the authors of the article conclude that in the Soviet, Russian and Western cinema stereotypes of teenagers as positive characters can be divided into the following main groups: 1) positive leaders (high achievers); 2) "nerds" (overly diligent students), 3) average performers. Naturally, the Soviet cinematography had to be more or less ideologically filled with communist values, while in the West and in modern Russian cinema, individual, family and / or group values come to the fore.

Stereotypes of teenagers as villains/ evil characters can be, in the opinion of the authors, represented by the following groups: 1) offenders and criminals; 2) narrow-minded/struggling students; 3) "silver spoons" (representatives of the rich "golden youth"). There are nuances, too. For example, in the Soviet cinema heirs of wealthy families were replaced by handsome egoists from the intellectual background, and there were far fewer juvenile offenders than in the American and European media texts. The Soviet cinema (with the exception of a few *perestroika* pictures) did not emphasize schoolchildren's sexuality.

In general, the analysis of stereotypes of teenage images in audiovisual media texts on the theme of the school and university shows that, despite the national, sociocultural and ideological differences, the stereotypes of these images have more similarities than differences.

Keywords: character, stereotype, media text, film, school topic, students, university.

* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: 1954alex@mail.ru (A. Fedorov), a.levitskaya@tmei.ru (A. Levitskaya), gorbatkova.olga@yandex.ru (O. Gorbatkova)

1. Introduction

In this article, we address stereotypes of teenage images in audiovisual media texts on the topic of school and university. As in our previous work (Fedorov et al., 2017), we rely on technologies developed by C. Bazalgette (Bazalgette, 1995), A. Silverblatt (Silverblatt, 2001: 80-81), W.J. Potter (Potter, 2001) and U. Eco (Eco, 1998; 2005).

2. Materials and Methods

The material of our research is comprised of audiovisual media texts on the theme of school and university. The main method is character analysis. To identify the main stereotypes of characters, we have studied 1107 audiovisual media texts (feature films, TV series, music videos) related to the subject of the school and university.

3. Discussion

Researchers have repeatedly tackled the topic of stereotypical images of teenage images (with emphasis on gender aspects) in media texts (Álvarez-Hernández et al., 2015; Atkinson et al., 2011; Bachen, Illouz, 1996; Behm-Morawitz, Mastro, 2008; Bleakley et al., 2008; Brown, et al., 2005; Celestin, 2011; Cushion et al., 2011; Driesmans et al., 2016; Halffield, 2017; Halffield, 2017; Jupp et al., 2011; Larken McCord, 2008; Zheltukhina et al., 2017; McDonald, 2008; O'Neill, 2016; Pai, Schryver, 2011; Rufer, 2014; Santiago, 2013; Seif, 2017; Signorielli, 1997; Stern, 2005). In particular, it was noted that the media of the second half of the XX century – the beginning of the 21st century portray young people in an unbalanced way, that is, rather negatively than positively, and negative image stereotypes (juvenile crime, alcohol/ drug addiction, etc.) lead to increased public fears, which do not correspond to the real state of affairs. In doing so, *Guardian*, for example, is likely to rely on facts, whereas articles about young people in *The Daily Mail* or *The Sun* appeal to emotions. In contrast to media representation, facts state that, for example, 70 % of stab wounds are not related to juvenile delinquency (Jupp et al., 2011: 23-25), and the overwhelming majority of young men and women are law-abiding, keen on education, sports and creative activities, whereas media prefer to highlight stories related to youth crime. Moreover, modern media texts often create the image of adolescent egoists who do not relate to parents and civil/social obligations (Stern, 2005: 23-28). This kind of selective media information about teenagers leads to stereotyping of their images to crime, cruelty, laziness, imbalance, disrespectful attitude towards elders and peers, etc. (Jupp et al., 2011: 23-25).

At the same time the influence of romantic media stories about the ideal relationship of adolescents in recent years is becoming weaker (Driesmans et al., 2016), although, of course, the cliché of a "good girl", young, pure, innocent, and kind, waiting for her prince charming may be found in media texts XXI century as well (Álvarez-Hernández et al., 2015; Santiago, 2013).

Another lop side of modern media is the emphasis on young gays and lesbians, which again gives a disproportionate impression of the percentage ratio between heterosexual and homosexual teenagers. At the same time, in a certain part of the media texts, heterosexuals (both adults and young) are presented as conservative characters who neither accept nor support the spread of homosexual relationships (Seif, 2017: 40).

As for the role of media in activation of young people's sexuality, the research shows that sexually coloured media texts (incl. melodramas, comedies, television shows, music videos, etc.) create the illusion of the widespread prevalence of hypersexual activity and experiences of adolescents, and judging by these media texts, sex occupies 90% of the life sphere (Ward, 2003: 347). As for visual media hypersexualization of characters, it is important to note that it is more pronounced in female images, including complete nudity or close-ups of body parts (Álvarez-Hernández et al., 2015). It is clear that the sexist media messages perceived by the teenage audience to some extent influence the development of the personality of teenagers, and their social roles in the future.

In the part of gender analysis of media texts, researchers note (Halffield, 2017: 60) that in recent years comedy series / films have been creating their stories in such a way that rude treatment of girls, including sexual violence, can be perceived as an everyday routine that does not deserve any legal or ethical evaluation. Gender stereotypes of media images of teenage bodies (especially vivid in social networks) can appear both idealized and sexualized (Pai, Schryver, 2011:

31-32). Being able to create photos/videos and instantly upload them on the Internet, a teenager today is no longer a passive receiver but a sender of media messages as well. Some of the most common teenage messages are "selfie": exploring their body abilities, some teenagers take pictures of themselves not only in defiant, sexual poses, but also in situations dangerous to their lives (on the roofs, on top of trains, etc.). For the record, in the Soviet cinema a naked teenage body, of course, was tabooed, and first appeared in the drama *Tomorrow Was the War* (1987), where a high school student is featured examining her breast in front of the mirror.

Alcohol consumption plays a significant role in media stereotyping of teenagers. In modern audiovisual media texts, young people who consume alcohol are rarely positioned negatively. As a rule, these are attractive guys and girls, whose use of alcohol in no way leads to dependence on it, on the contrary, serves as a trigger to start fun adventures and pleasures. In many TV shows, films, commercials, alcohol consumption is seen as acceptable (often glamorous), which does not cause any problems. Moreover, studies have shown (Atkinson et al., 2011) that even condemning the image of (non-extreme) intoxication and the associated inappropriate behavior of a teenager can still send a signal to a teenage audience that such a phenomenon is generally accepted and normal. The alcohol theme in media texts with the participation of teenagers is gender-specific: while female characters may drink a half-glass of champagne (female drunkenness usually causes condemnation), for male teens alcohol is often served as a truly "man's" activity (Atkinson et al., 2011).

Media stereotypes of teenage images are also manifested in relation to ethnic and national characteristics. For example, black adolescents are regularly associated with negative news and stories (crime, violence, aggression, etc.) (Cushion et al., 2011: 87-90). As for particular national examples, we may mention the media image of a French teenager in American media texts: on the one hand, French characters appear elegant, romantic, seductive, temperamental, artistic, cook well, observe etiquette and follow fashion, and on the other hand - unfriendly, arrogant, imperious, confrontational, selfish, immoral, do not respect rules, procedures or time limits; eat sweets but stay slim; can speak English, but prefer not to (Ferber, 2008: 20).

4. Results

Teenagers as positive characters, their values, ideas, clothing, vocabulary, body language, dwelling.

Positive leaders: students with humanistic (in Soviet media texts – socialist) values, as a rule, neatly dressed, attractive in appearance, artistic/expressive verbal and non-verbal communication. As a rule, they come from ordinary families (live in comfortable apartments or houses), they lead "average" students, organizing various charity and useful things. They study well, do not drink or smoke, do not use abusive language and, of course, oppose any drugs. They are self-confident altruists, who are accustomed to set serious (often socially significant) goals and achieve them (male characters usually win at school academic or sports competitions, and female – in music or dance contests). They can resist any attempt of negative influence. They are fit, dressed simply, but neatly, they have nice looks and voice. There might occur romantic relationships' problems, of course, but they are eventually resolved in the best way.

Examples in Soviet cinema: *Timur and his Team* (1940, 1976), *Vasek Trubachev and his Comrades* (1955), *Practical Joke* (1976), *Troublemaker* (1978), etc.

Examples in Russian cinema: *Students* (2005), *High School Students* (2006-2010), *Freshman* (2016), *Save Pushkin* (2017), etc.

Examples in Western cinema: *College Swing* (USA, 1938), *Grease* (USA, 1978), *Elections* (USA, 1999), *The Emperor's Club* (USA, 2002), *Freedom Writers* (USA-Germany, 2007), etc.

"Nerds" (very diligent, hard-working students): the main type of activity is excellent study and self-analysis. These intelligent kids from ordinary families (though they may sometimes have a single parents or their parents may be quite eccentric) are not interested in power over people (although they hope for their future professional success). They do not use alcohol and drugs, but often experience sexual problems, are sometimes reserved, shy (sometimes due to the fact that they are bi/homosexual), carelessly dressed and, as a rule, clumsy. Usually they do not use rude language and obscene gestures. In the finale of some media texts, they are transformed as "Cinderella": radically changing their appearance and way of life, they become a subject of admiration by peers.

Examples in Soviet cinema: *Scarecrow* (1983), *Leader* (1984), *Temptation* (1987), etc.

Examples in Russian cinema: *High School Students* (2006-2010), *Scarecrow-2* (2009), *Physics or Chemistry* (2011), etc.

Examples in Western cinema: *Allons z'enfants* (France, 1981), *Mask* (USA, 1985), *Noce blanche* (France, 1989), *Jack* (USA, 1996), *Física o química* (Spain, 2008-2011), *Song for a Raggy Boy* (Ireland-UK-Denmark-Spain, 2003), etc.

Average students: have typical teenage interests and problems related to school, family, and love experience, they are law-abiding, heterosexual, sociable (quite often they find a common language with both parents and teachers), they are handsome, have pleasant voices and good manners; live in good (by the standards of the particular society) living conditions.

Examples in Soviet cinema: *Red Tie* (1948), *The Story of the First Love* (1957), *Wild Dog Dingo* (1962), *Someone is Ringing*, *Open the Door /The Girl and the Buglar* (1965), *I Loved You ...* (1967), *Man-to-Man Talk* (1968), *The Transitional Age* (1968), *Woodpeckers don't have headaches* (1974), *One Hundred Days After Childhood* (1975), etc.

Examples in Russian cinema: *What a Wonderful Game* (1995), *American* (1997), *Let's Make Love* (2002), *The Disappeared Empire (Love in the USSR)* (2007), *Physics or Chemistry* (2011), *Chastnoe Pionerskoe/I Give you my Word* (2012), *14+* (2015), *The Good Boy* (2016), etc.

Examples in Western cinema: *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (USA, 1939), *Maddalena ... zero in condotta* (Italy, 1940), *Future Stars/Futures vedettes* (France, 1955), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Australia, 1975), *Física o química* (Spain, 2008-2011), *Freedom Writers* (USA-Germany, 2007), etc.

Teenagers as "villains"/negative characters/antagonists, their values, ideas, clothing, vocabulary, body language, dwelling.

Offenders and criminals: the main type of occupation – various types of offenses (including domestic violence), crimes (including murder, drug trafficking, which is more common for male characters), smoking, alcohol and/or drugs consumption, sex. In Western media texts such characters are often African American or Latin. They are selfish, cruel and self-confident. Their appearance and vocabulary can be of any type, but basically they use rough vocabulary, have sharp voices and use obscene gestures. In many cases, they are defiantly dressed and have a sporty physique (male characters), wear a bright makeup and are slim (female characters), although there are different options for appearance and clothing. In relation to education, there are two main options: complete ignoring/skipping classes and/or aggressive behavior during classes, or, conversely, such characters study well, skillfully concealing their secret vices, criminal inclinations and psychological manipulation. Basically, they are teenagers from poor families (in this case they often live in horrible living conditions), but there are also characters with rich parents.

Examples in Soviet cinema: *My friend, Kolka!* (1961), *The Republic of ShKID* (1966), *Minors* (1976), *The Last Chance* (1978), *Recognize Guilty* (1983), *Plumbum, or the Dangerous Game* (1986), etc.

Examples in Russian cinema: *Teacher-in-Law* (2007), *School* (2010), *Physics or Chemistry* (2011), *Student* (2016), Alex Sparrow's music video *I Love You* (2017), etc.

Examples in Western cinema: *Crime School* (USA, 1938), *The Blackboard Jungle* (USA, 1955), *School: Confidential!* (USA, 1958), *Delinquent School Girls* (USA, 1975), *La liceale seduce i professori* (Italy, 1979), *Class of 1984* (Canada, 1982), *Class of Nuke 'Em High* (USA, 1986), *Zombie High School* (USA, 1987), *Class of 1999* (USA, 1990), *Kids* (USA, 1995), *One Eight Seven* (USA, 1997), *Devil in the Flesh* (USA, 1998), *La journée de la jupe*, France (Belgium, 2008), *Jennifer's Body* (USA, 2009), *Polytechnique* (Canada, 2009), *The Perfect Student* (USA, 2011), *Hello Herman* (USA, 2012), etc.

Narrow-minded/struggling students: the dominant activity is a primitive pastime (including surfing the entertainment sector of the Internet), boredom in class, absenteeism, a habit of being a laughingstock in class and at home. They are usually lazy, not self-confident, possess scant knowledge and skills. Clothing and vocabulary in this case can be any, but the appearance is rather unattractive, and the body either overweight or awkward. Their social origin is differentiated, although for the most part these teenagers are from underprivileged families.

Examples in Soviet cinema: *We'll Live To Monday* (1968), *The Big Break* (1972), *Asthenic Syndrome* (1989), etc.

Examples in the Russian cinema: *Everybody Dies but Me* (2008), *Physics or Chemistry* (2011), *Corrections Class* (2014), *The Teacher* (2015), etc.

Examples in Western cinema: *La professoressa di scienze naturali* (Italy, 1976), *La liceale nella classe dei ripetenti* (Italy-France, 1978), *Les sous-doués* (France, 1980), *Screwballs* (Canada, 1983), *Loose Screws* (USA-Canada, 1985), *One Eight Seven* (USA, 1997), *La journée de la jupe* (France – Belgium, 2008), etc.

"Silver spoons" (representatives of the rich "golden youth"): their main activity is dominance, which can include offence (for example, domestic violence) and even crimes. To a greater extent these people come from wealthy white families (possessing chic mansions and expensive cars), are interested in power over people and sex, rather than using alcohol and drugs (the latter may take place, but in moderate doses). They are selfish, sarcastic, ironic and self-confident, expensive and fashionably dressed and, as a rule, handsome, speak with pleasant voices. Sometimes they can use rough vocabulary and obscene gestures. They study mostly very well, but despite excellent studies, sometimes hide secret vices and psychological manipulations.

Examples in Soviet cinema: *Certificate of maturity* (1954), *We'll Live to Monday* (1968), *The Practical Joke* (1976), *Temptation* (1987), *Dear Elena Sergeevna* (1988), *The Jester* (1988), *Darling Ep* (1991), etc.

Examples in Russian cinema: *School No. 1* (2007), *Yulenska* (2008), *Barvikha* (2009), *Seniors* (2006-2010), *Golden. Barvikha-2* (2011), *Physics of Chemistry* (2011), *Chastnoe Pionerskoe- 3 / I Give you my Word-3* (2017), etc.

Examples in Western cinema: *Gross Misconduct* (Australia, 1993), *Apt Pupil* (USA-Canada-France, 1997), *Física o química* (Spain, 2008-2011), *Election* (USA, 1999), *The Emperor's Club* (USA, 2002), *Jennifer's Body* (USA, 2009), *Dans la maison* (France, 2012), *Dismissed* (USA, 2017), etc.

5. Conclusion

In Soviet, Russian and Western cinema stereotypes of teenagers as positive characters can be divided into the following main groups: 1) positive leaders (high achievers); 2) "nerds" (overly diligent students), 3) average performers. Naturally, the Soviet cinematography had to be more or less ideologically filled with communist values, while in the West and in modern Russian cinema, individual, family and / or group values come to the fore.

Stereotypes of teenagers as villains/ evil characters may be, in our opinion, represented by the following groups: 1) offenders and criminals; 2) narrow-minded/struggling students; 3) "silver spoons" (representatives of the rich "golden youth"). There are nuances, too. For example, in the Soviet cinema heirs of wealthy families were replaced by handsome egoists from the intellectual background, and there were far fewer juvenile offenders than in the American and European media texts. The Soviet cinema (with the exception of a few *perestroika* pictures) did not emphasize schoolchildren's sexuality.

In general, the analysis of stereotypes of teenage images in audiovisual media texts on the theme of the school and university shows that, despite the national, sociocultural and ideological differences, the stereotypes of these images have more similarities than differences.

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