

TEENAGE GIRLS AND (RE)PRODUCTION OF AGE IN MODERN RUSSIA

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STARTING POINTS:

- Age: between compulsion and freedom
- The shift from "life cycle" to "life course"
- Postmodern life course – without rigid age periods (Hopkins, Pain 2007, Featherstone, Hepworth 1991; Giddens 1991)
- Institutionalized life course (Held 1986, Riley 1978, Kohli 2007)

- Youth: between autonomy and transition
- Youth as "problematic" period for understanding "age stage"
- Youth is seen as a separate cultural world, which has its own inner logics of living
- Youth as the transition from childhood to adulthood (Hopkins, Pain 2007). It is constructed as a specific stage of acquiring different competencies to enter into adulthood
- Youth as corporeal phenomenon. Chronologically young bodies are special and important object of social control and discipline within the biopower and vital policy of the modern state



STARTING POINTS:

- In the sociological debate the experience of being chronologically young is marginalized topic
- A sociology of age develops primarily as a sociology of ageing, focusing its attention on the cultural experience, status, and representations of elderly people (Twigg 2004)
- In today's society, chronologically young body escapes the alarming attention, since, according to the dominant cultural codes, it corresponds to the "cult of youth" and it is not seen as experiencing difficulties with their bodily legitimacy
- Our research question: How and which (bodily) age is constituted in the period of "chronological youth" by girls and young women in contemporary Russia? How it is achieved and why this is happening?



METHODS AND EMPIRICAL DATA:

- This study (research grant No 14-05-0054) was supported by The National Research University – ‘Higher School of Economics’ Academic Fund Program in 2014
- 20 leitmotiv interviews
- Informants: girls (young women) – 15-20 years old
- 2 groups: students of highly rated schools / universities and students of general schools / vocational schools, colleges
- In this presentation we will focus on the common phenomena identified in both groups



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

- Age as accomplished / doing age (Laz 2003)
- Embodied age (Frost 2005; Laz 2003; Budgeon 2003)
- Age display (based on Goffman 'gender display')
- New bodily 'materialism' (Twigg 2004)



CONSTRUCTION OF AGE:

- Chronological youth is a space of problematization of "biological" age and its prescribed connotations for young girls
- Current age period is defined as a more mature, more legitimate, more autonomous, getting more recognition comparing with the preceding age period which in turn has negative characteristics of dependence, lack of subjectivity, etc.

"Well, I think that I already came to the stage of youth, because the teenager - a human of 16 years, after 16, I think, the life views changes, I can even see it in myself, as though it may sound strange, during the last year I changed my views a lot..." (Int. 2, female, 17 y.o.)



CONSTRUCTION OF AGE:

- Current "chronological" age does not give satisfying age identification.

“Well, actually, I think I would give myself 17 years old. I do not know.. I do not feel like 15 years old” (Int. 8, female, 15 y.o.)

- Vulnerability of age status for chronologically young girls:

“And when they find out that you're 15, they become a little bit biased, as if you still do not know anything in life” (Int. 8, female, 15 y.o.)

- The disqualification of current age status occurs among our informants: this age is better than previous one, but still it is not good enough.



CONSTRUCTION OF AGE:

- “Embodied adulthood”

- Adulthood as the end of bodily changes:

“I’m developed already, my foot is not growing anymore, my breast is not growing, nothing is growing” (Int. 3, fem., 20 y.o.)

- Adulthood as the acquisition of physical competence:

“I’ve got some cream as a present, “svanri” or something, with chocolate. I used it but it was some sort of sticky, I did not like it” (Int. 2, female, 17 y.o.)

“I bought myself shoes [heeled] Just want to train myself. Maybe two years later I again... when I’m twenty-two, I’ll be quite different. I will be ... I’ll be just such a woman. But it’s hard to walk in high heels now” (Int. 10, female, 20 y.o.)



CONSTRUCTION OF AGE:

Environments of age production:

- Family

“I remember that my mom tried to do make up to me, I do not know how old I was, well, I was smaller - 11 or 12 years old - and somehow I almost fainted. It was like something very strange” (Int.11, female, 15 y.o.)

- Market

«For a while, I buy cosmetics in “all over 37 rubles” (like ‘poundshop’). Not a bad cosmetics, fine. I do not know, I see something that is an inexpensive, and, well, and I buy it!” (Int.13, female, 15 y.o.)

- School culture

“Well, here, for example, yesterday we went with my mother to choose a school uniform, well, shoes. I look to ... something with not very high heel, because it also brings discomfort to me, but there should be some (heel)” (Int. 11, female, 15 y.o.)



CONSTRUCTION OF AGE:

- Age display: to look / to be older

“I like when they give me more (years). Basically, I like when they say that you think like adult, it's good to hear, that's friends who are older than me, much older than me, so when / ... / I have glasses that diminish my age, it is original and funny, it does diminish age, and there are glasses that, on the contrary, add age, if I hide the hair, strictly, wear glasses, I basically ... I begin to behave differently, and I think getting look older” (Int.7, female, 18 y.o.).

“Well, when people give me less years it offends me, actually... if even a hint that I can be seen as 15, 16 years old, I am still very upset. (Interviewer: Why?) I do not want to look younger! ... Look like a child to me is not very good. (Interviewer: And vice versa look older? 25, 23?) It's better than the younger” (Int. 18, female, 18 y.o.).



CONSTRUCTION OF AGE:

- Age display and social effects: adolescent girls and young women are involved in the process of "work" over their age, investing in body / corporeality for best matching and in anticipation of appropriate social effects.

- Displaying older age gives them:

- Pragmatically: the access to the spaces with age restrictions (discos, clubs, movies, alcohol shops)

“If you need to pass to the club, there is face-control. In the club, without a good make-up you will not pass” (Int.2, female, 17 y.o.).

- Symbolically: the access to heterosexuality – to cultural frame of reference of social identifications, behavioral patterns and models of representations.

“I do not know. Well, there in the 9th grade I learned to walk on the heels. I was like, I looked at myself... it can be the point in growing up, by the way, when I got up on the heels in the 9th grade, for sure. Then guys from that company began to look at me, with whom I communicate right now. Well, here is a moment of growing up” (Int. 1, female, 17 y.o.).



CONCLUSION:

The chronological youth for 15-20 year olds is neither a non-reflexive given, nor a valuable resource.

Youth is seen by girls and young women as problematic and vulnerable status.

Achieving the desired age identifications associates with the “embodied growing”

To belong to the older age group provides:

- the access to age-regulated goods
- allows them to create "adult" identity in heteronormative culture through feminine bodily (re) presentation.



THANK YOU!

