

The 'post-revolutionary' Czech consumer generation

mainstream youth in context of individualized society



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MAINSTREAM YOUTH

TWO TYPES OF MAINSTREAM YOUTH

The „Sheeple“



Sociological concept



“Sheeple” - a combination of the words *sheep* and *people*.

- ◉ describes people who act in direct reaction to saturation advertising, going out and buying the ‘must-have’ fashions and fads of the moment
- ◉ refers to people who don’t tend to think for themselves but basically follow the crowd or believe what the media, or marketing tells them

◉

(www.macmillandictionaries.com)

Outline

- ◉ 1. Criticism of „**negative sociology of youth**“ → tendency in youth research to focus on extremes
- ◉ 2. **Neglect of ‘ordinary, mainstream’ young people** → **stereotype** of mainstream consumers as passive and conformist sheep
- ◉ 3. Research design and data collected - **sociological concept** of mainstream youth → between two extremes of total conformity and total rejection
- ◉ 4. **Anti-zombie thesis** - mainstream youth in context of individualized society → questioning the stereotype of passive, and apolitical conformists
- ◉ 5. **Cosmopolitan attitude** - new perspective on the mainstream youth as reflexive consumers.
- ◉ 6. Mainstream youth as an **avant-garde of cosmopolitan youth?**



Some Problems Identified in Recent Research Concerned with the Young Generation

...the development of young people's value orientation points to hedonism and pragmatism accompanied by the diminishing importance of global and social values. The mainstream within the young generation is adapted to society and identifies with it. Mainstream media are an important instrument of social conformity (...). The mainstream of the young generation is to a large extent manipulated by the media and accepts the opinions and positions generated by them.

- **(State Youth Policy Conception for the Years 2007 – 2013, 2007 p. 4).**

normality and ordinariness



Criticism of youth research

- ◉ **Too much focus** on „melodramatic expressions“ of youth →
- ◉ **Rebellion, resistance, manipulation, exploitation**
- ◉ **neglect** of mainstream (ordinary youth)!!!









Criticism of youth research I.

Too much focus on „melodramatic expressions“
of youth → **BUT in reality**

**the majority of young people have been
incorporated into the cultural
mainstream!!!**

→ **neglect of mainstream (ordinary youth)!!!**

Criticism of youth research II.

binary thinking US x THEM

Mainstream was always everything that has been left after the subject of study has been defined against it.

mainstream x anti-mainstream **does not work!!!**

Extremes became the norm (ordinary became „sheeple“)

Research Design

- ◉ Exploratory phase: collection of essays, 44 university students (20-25)
- ◉ 6 focus groups (58 young people 15 – 30 years)
- ◉ 2 small group semi-structured interviews (7 young people 19 – 22 years)

○ US

- Individual consumers
- Choice makers
- Reflexive
- Nonconformist
- Normal, ordinary
- Creative, original, not average
- Consumption as a means of negotiating , and maintaining identity - focus on lifestyle

○ THEM

- Fashion victims
- Followers
- Manipulated
- Conformist
- Radicals, extremes
- Cookie cutters, trend-followers, poseurs, fakers
- Consumptions as a source of identity, brand-devotees

○ **“nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies”**

(Bourdieu, 1990, p.132)

◉ **Contemporary Mainstream**

- ◉ Individual consumers
- ◉ Choice makers
- ◉ Reflexive
- ◉ Nonconformist
- ◉ Normal, ordinary
- ◉ Creative, original, not average
- ◉ Consumption as a means for maintaining identity - focus on lifestyle

◉ **„Sheeple“**

- ◉ Fashion victims
- ◉ Followers
- ◉ Manipulated
- ◉ Conformist
- ◉ Radicals, extremes
- ◉ Cookie cutters, trend-followers, poseurs, fakers
- ◉ Consumptions as a source of identity
- ◉ - „brand-devotees“

extremes



Youth
subcultures
Active
Resistant



Total rejection
Rebelliousness

Mainstream
youth



Critical, conscious,
normal, reflexive,
individual

extremes



“Sheeple”
Passive
Manipulated



Total acceptance
Conformity

If most young people do not embrace explicit hostility to dominant social institutions, this does not make them zombies or sheeple - mindless human beings



Mainstream youth in context of individualized society

Values freedom and personal choice

Lack trust in corporations and government

Critical

Individualistic

Attracted to

Wired

diversity

multi-tasking

Mobile

no secure future

flexible

highly adaptable

Instant information

Young people are not „cultural dupes“ they are conscious and reflexive of the pressures !!!

Šárka, 17 years: Well, (some young people) need to feel they are cool and in. This is a general expression, but I would suggest that it means they need to fit in and they watch MTV for example, and consequently everybody wants to be a hip hopper.

Jan, 18 years: What came to my mind is foolishness and ignorance. Because a certain group of people sets some trends and indoctrinates and infects with their ideas the rest of society. And these sheeple take it. Because they fear that they won't be in. And they wanna fit in.

Adam, 17 years: I think everybody is affected. We are influenced by brands. We are brand-conscious [laugh]. Sometimes we don't want to be, but the brands are everywhere - on TV, in commercials, everywhere.

Being normal does not mean being average.

Karolína, 25 years: Sheeple are people without fantasy and individuality. They consume whatever there has been set out for them. They have no fantasy and own inventiveness.

Lenka, 21 years: I love brands. I prefer more commercial ones, such as Nike and Adidas, but I always mix them and create my own individual look. So I buy T-shirts and trousers in XXL size. Definitely I am not into brands specialized for the hip-hop culture (...) I like kind of an extravagant look, but I hate to be a 'cookie-cutter'. I mean, I hate to look like every second girl.

Reflexive consumers

Nika, 20 years: It seems to me that today people waste with everything. Our society is consumer society. Yes this is the right word. People have everything and they appreciate nothing. I think I fit into this society. But I am older now, so I think more about what I am doing. Well yes, I love to be dressed according to latest trends, but if I tell myself that this is unnecessary, I do not drive a car for example and use instead of it a public transportation, or I buy environmentally friendly stuff.

Dana, 22 years: My best friend is a gay. I love talking with him, especially about fashion, he has got a really good taste.

David, 23 years: I like going to house parties, especially in Prague. You always meet some interesting people, and you can chat in English when you meet foreigners for example.

Cosmopolitan attitude

„Stop destroying our planet. It's where I keep all my stuff.“



Mainstream youth as
avant-garde of
cosmopolitan youth?

New politics?

- „Ultimately, one can spare oneself the detour through membership meeting, and enjoy the blessings of political action by going straight to the disco“ (Beck, 1998: 5)
- **David, 23 years:** I like going to house parties, especially in Prague. You always meet some interesting people, and you can chat in English when you meet foreigners for example.

Thank you

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