“Sometimes it’s a bit too much Disney”

Exploring Norwegian Parents and their Ambiguous Domestication of Disney

Abstract

Parents are often ambivalent about their children’s engagement with popular culture, where popular culture is seen as trivial and potentially harmful. In this article I explore how Norwegian parents of girls experienced the Disney tween shows, and tied in merchandise of *Hannah Montana* and *High School Musical*. As the parents interviewed reported feeling ambivalent and conflicted about the Disney shows, the article makes use of Bakhtin’s dialogism and domestication theory to explore this ambivalence. Employing the concept of voice from Bakhtin, the interview data suggest five voices the parents drew on—the educational voice, the voice of children’s autonomy, Disney as innocent and safe, the voice of caring consumption, and the culture critical voice. The analysis focuses on how these voices operated, how they were expressed in the interviews, and what these different voices produced in terms of how Disney was included in the everyday home life.

Keywords: tweens, Disney, moral economy, parents, domestication, Bakhtin’s dialogism

Introduction

This article explores how Norwegian parents experienced and talked about their daughters' enjoyment of *Hannah Montana* and *High School Musical*, two Disney Channel shows targeting tweens, the 8-12 year olds. The case of Norwegian parents serves as an interesting example for two reasons. Firstly, Norwegians in general, and parents specifically, see the commercial aspect of Disney with tie-in merchandise as problematic (Sørenssen, 2014). Closely tied to this is a fear of Americanization of traditional Norwegian values, through Norwegian children's exposure to content from the Disney Channel (Enli, 2013). Secondly, Norwegian parenting has strong emphasis on children's rights and a focus on the autonomous and competent child (Kjørholt, 2005). As a consequence, Norwegian parenting tends to be described as child-centred (Gullestad, 1997) and permeated by a culture of negotiation (Sommer, Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2009). As such, in relation to media use Hagen demonstrates that Norwegian parenting is characterized by finding a balance between "care and control, and between autonomy and dependence" (Hagen, 2007, p. 370).

Parents in this study expressed an ambivalence when talking about their daughters' enjoyment of the Disney shows. This is not surprising as scholars who have explored parenting in relation to consumer and media culture, have reported on parents' ambivalence (Brusdal, 2007; Buckingham, 2011; Clark, 2012; Hagen, 2007; Willett, 2017). To analyse the ambivalent relationship parents expressed having with Disney and how conflicting notions operated in the interviews I will make use of Bahktin's dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). And to further explore what this ambivalence produces in relation to how the franchises were discussed and experienced by the parents, I will make use of domestication theory (Haddon, 2007). By highlighting tensions and negotiations this framework enables us to look beyond the

dichotomies of benefits/risk of media use, and the passive/active child (Sørensen, 2006; Willett, 2017).The goal is explore how the Disney tween franchises becomes part of the everyday life in families.

Disney and parents in Norway

Disney is one of the most recognized brands in the western world (Drotner, 2004; Wasko, 2001) and *Hannah Montana* and *High School Musical* have been very successful globally (Potter, 2012; Reznik & Lemish, 2011) and in Norway (Sørenssen, 2012). In Norway Disney has a strong presence (Hagen, 2001; Mjøs, 2010) and the majority of Norwegian children have access to Disney Channel and spend time watching television every day (Medietilsynet, 2014). *High School Musical* is a trilogy where the audience follow Troy and his love interest Gabriella. Belonging to two different social and ethnic groups, Troy a jock, and Gabrielle a "brainiac", challenge common stereotypes with a shared passion for musical theatre. *Hannah Montana* is a sitcom in which, Miley Stewart leads a double life of a regular school-girl by day and a teenage pop star by night.

Legislation in Norway prohibits commercials targeting children on television, however, children's television programs can promote tie-in merchandise. Mjøs (2010) argues that there is a symbiosis between television programs and merchandising, which is at the heart of commercializing media and communications environment. Merchandising has always been important for the Disney Company (Telotte, 2008), and this is also true for *High School Musical* and *Hannah Montana* as there are a plethora of products available for purchase.

Traditionally in Norway there has been a fear that television will result in Americanization of Norwegian culture (Enli, 2013), which is understood as Norwegian sovereign national culture

becoming indistinguishable and replaced by superficial and materialistic values and a commodification of social life (Beck, 2015; Ritzer & Stillman, 2003). Americanization, understood as a commercial force, is widespread globally (Baudrillard, 1988; Lemish, Drotner, Liebes, Maigret, & Stald, 1998; Wasko, Phillips, & Meehan, 2001; Wills, 2017). According to Enli, Disney Channel is seen as "the symbol of a general threat from globalization and commercialism to the language, identity and culture in Norway" (Enli, 2013, p. 84). While the focus in this study is limited to Norwegian parents, it can be relevant for other contexts as this study contributes to an understanding of how Americanization can be experienced by parents.

Several scholars have researched Disney franchises. Some focus on how girls talk about love and friendship through *High School Musical* and *Hannah Montana* (Reznik & Lemish, 2011; Sørenssen, 2016) while others focus on how gender and beauty are constructed through *Hannah Montana* (Blue, 2012; Kennedy, 2014; Northup & Liebler, 2010). The focus in this article is on the parental perspectives. Peers play a pivotal part in children's interests, media, and consumption use (Buckingham, 2011; Corsaro, 1997), and children in their tween ages are seen to move from being family oriented to being more peer oriented (Adler & Adler, 1998; Berndt, 1999; Suoninen, 2001). However, parents still have an authoritative status in their children's lives and their understandings of consumption and media use (Clark, 2012; Johansson, 2010; Qvortrup, 1994). A focus on parental perspectives is therefore important when attempting to understand the surrounding relational context of tweens, media, and consumption.

Theoretical framework

Domestication theory combines audience studies with sociology of consumption on the one hand, and the symbolic nature of consumption on the other (Haddon, 2007) in order to explore media's acceptance, rejection, practices, and meanings in the household (Hartmann, Berker, Punie, & Ward, 2006). Domestication theory seeks to make sense of people's perspectives on, and actions in relation to, media (Haddon, 2017). There are two strands of domestication theory, a media studies version and a sciences and technology (STS) version. The media studies version operates with four phases; appropriation, objectification, incorporation, and conversion (Silverstone, Hirsch, & Morley, 1992). While the STS version focuses on three features; (1) the construction of practices related to an artefact, (2) the construction of meaning of the artefact, and (3) the cognitive processes related to the learning of practices and meaning making (Sørensen, 2006). As this article explores how parents talked about the Disney tween franchises, and focus is on the discursive construction of meaning, I will make use of the STS version. When using the term domestication I refer to the acceptance of, and how, Disney was included in the everyday home life

Domestication theory proposes that families work to create stability in their household when negotiating the acceptance or rejection of media texts and merchandise. According to Silverstone et al. (1992), an issue at stake for the household when domesticating commodities and media texts has to do with communicating one's taste and morals to one's surroundings. This is a performative aspect, which can be tied to Goffman's notion of the presentation of the self (Goffman, 1959; Haddon, 2011). The different moral positions leading families to accepting or rejecting media are grounded in a sense of self (Silverstone, 2006) and as such they are a part of how one communicates identity. Tied to this moral positioning, domestication

theory suggests that the concept of "moral economy" can be used to explore how the household is enacted as "a social, cultural and economic unit actively engaged in the consumption of objects and meanings" (Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992, p. 6). The moral economy of the household is the outcome of a dynamic where moral positions are negotiated and balanced. In this article, I will explore how the parents performed and communicated their moral economy in their meeting with me.

Bakhtin's concept of voices (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) will be used to explore how these dynamic moral positionings worked in the data. A Bakhtinian voice reflects the values the speaker draws on. For Bakhtin voices are a process, they do not exist in social isolation—words do not represent something stable or a "truth" belonging to the speaker. Instead, they are social, dynamic, and changing (Komulainen, 2007; Tobin, 2000). The flexibility of voices helps nuance the moral economy of the household as *not* a stable entity but rather, as subject to change and negotiation (Bakardjieva, 2006). Bakthin distinguished between more or less authoritative voices. The voices of authoritative others or taken for granted truths can be heard within an individual's talk and these authoritative voices can be conceptualised as moral positions. As Tobin put it; "Bakhtinian theory teaches us that the utterances of individuals are most usefully understood as expressions of the perspectives and tensions of their larger society" (Tobin, 2000, p. 144). Exploring which authoritative voices the parents drew on can inform us both of how the individual parent deals with the larger tensions in society, and of society itself, as the authoritative voices are constituted through their reproduction.

In addition to seeing voices as contingent rather than fixed or inherent to the speaker, Bakhtin uses the metaphor of the musical concept of polyphony, which means several voices operating simultaneously (Bakhtin, 1981). Making use of the concept of polyphony when examining the

interviews means looking at how parents evoke several voices within one utterance. Another Bakhtinan concept that is useful is heteroglossia, which covers the coexistence and conflict between different types of voices (Bakhtin, 1986). So, while the term polyphony entails multiple voices, heteroglossia entails different and potentially conflicting voices. Heteroglossia reflects the ideologies present or the points of view in speech (Dufva, 2004). When utterances are polyphonic and conflicting, there is a melting together of different languages, in other words, heteroglossia is present (Lachmann, 2004). The aim of this article is to explore which voices parents drew on when they talked about their daughters' consumption of Disney, how these were in conflict, which taken for granted truths, or authoritative voices, were drawn on, and how these where combined and balanced.

Methodology

The data presented in this article derives from a larger study exploring the construction of the age group tweens in relation to Disney media content and merchandise. The larger dataset consists of ethnographic field observation of tweens in two after school programs, focus groups with girls, and interviews with strategically chosen girls from the observation and focus group setting (Sørenssen, 2014). The data employed here are interviews with the parents of seven girls. I interviewed three sets of parents, both mothers and fathers, and conducted two interviews with fathers and two with mothers. The parents belong to Norwegian's middle class. They all had at least a Bachelor's degree; they were all employed, and had educational aspirations for their children (see also Clark, 2012; Willett, 2017). The parents were all Norwegian born, as were their daughters. At the time of the interviews the girls were 10 to 12 years old, thus in the latter part of their tween years. I interviewed the parents once in their home and the interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed

them verbatim. The interview guide was semi-structured with open questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) focusing on Disney, and their daughters' relationship with Disney's tween content and merchandise tied to *High School Musical* and *Hannah Montana*.

In the interviews the parents were talking as parents, thereby performing parenthood in the interview context. I interpreted the moral economy of the household based on how they situated themselves and their family, and based on which authoritative voices they drew on when talking with me. As Buckingham (2000) argues, parents tend to position themselves and their answers as social desirable when they participate in research. In analysing these interviews, I have studied them as social interactions in their own right—I did not treat the parents' statements as factual or fictitious descriptions of meanings of practices, but rather as ways of positioning themselves and enacting parenthood within the social context of the interview.

The study was carried out in accordance with the ethical requirements of the Norwegian Ethical Board for Social Research. Informed consent was gained from the parents, who were informed that they could withdraw at any time. Names have been anonymized. All translations from Norwegian to English prioritized clarity of meaning over verbatim.

The five voices used

In the coding process I employed an abductive approach drawing on both theory and the data collected (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). The analysis revealed a tug-of-war between parents' animosity towards what they saw as superficial and consumer-oriented Disney content on one hand, and wanting to please their daughters on the other. This ambivalence inspired the use of the polyphony and heteroglossia as a way to explore the conflicting notions that the parents were communicating.

In the interviews I found multiple voices coexisting, through the analysis process I distinguished five different types of authoritative voices. For a voice to be defined as authoritative I looked for utterances which were permeated with presuppositions, utterances which bore with them a taken for granted truth that I understood as being preacknowledged as facts. These authoritative voices are expressions of taken for granted truths, or "languages" thus within the interviews the parents were both polyphonic and heteroglot. Firstly, I found *the educational voice*, where parents wanted their daughters to learn through entertainment. Researchers such as Livingstone (2009), and Buckingham and Scanlon (2003) found that for many parents, entertainment in the home should ideally be teaching children something meaningful. The second voice is *the voice of children's autonomy*, where parents emphasized that their daughters had a right to their own cultural expressions, and thirdly there was *the voice of Disney as innocent and safe* as Disney has been able to create the idea that it makes 'good media' as opposed to 'bad media' (Giroux & Pollock, 2010). The fourth was *the voice of caring consumption* where parents talked about how knowing what their daughters liked and acknowledging this by letting them watch or buy tie-in merchandise as an act of caring parenting. Caring consumption as a concept is here derived from Pugh (2003) who argues that for parents; "consumption is part of caring adequately, involving the complex tasks of managing and meeting children's needs and desires" (Pugh, 2003, p. 1). In addition to these four voices, my data suggest that there is a fifth highly present and strong voice. I have called this *the culture critical voice* where parents expressed disapproval of "Americanization"—meaning commercialization—of childhood. Although different voices prevailed in the interviews, following the features of domestication theory, a question remains as to what these different voices produce in terms of how Disney was domesticated and how practices and meanings were constructed.

The educational voice and the voice of children's autonomy

Throughout the interviews, the notion of entertainment being trivial and of little value emerged. Being mere entertainment, the Disney tween content was not considered desirable for their daughters by any of the parents. The parents in the interviews would often name television programs with a focus on learning as something that they would prefer their children to watch. By communicating a hierarchy of content one is also communicating values circulating in the moral economy of the household. The strong presence of the education voice may be exemplified by a quote from the interview with Katie's mother and father:

> Ingvild: Are there any programs you would like Katie to watch?
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> Katie's mother: I'm happy when she watches something that's realistic, like Animal Planet, then I think, this is good. When they learn something, because I like it when they can learn something and be entertained at the same time, now they've switched from watching Scooby Doo every morning to watching Crocodile Hunter instead, and I think that's better in a way
>
> Katie's father: Yes, and it's nice to hear them learn from the television as well
>
> Katie's mother: Yeah, right? It has more substance; I feel it's nice, because there is so much brain dead entertainment.

In this quote Katie's mother suggested that she approves educational entertainment for her daughter. The quotation ends with Katie's mother criticizing much entertainment as "brain dead." Katie's mother also used the word realistic, indicating a critical stance towards programs regarded as being unrealistic, a type of argument other scholars also have encountered (Buckingham, Scanlon, & Sefton-Green, 2001). Fiction in itself was not held in high esteem, and she continued the sentence suggesting *Animal Planet* and wanting her daughter to learn something from television shows. This type of account, where parents expressed a desire for

their daughters to use television for both entertainment *and* education, was typical for the parents in the data.

In addition to wanting their daughters to learn from television, some parents also expressed dislike for the content of the Disney tween programs due to their lack of meaningful content. Susan's mother was very explicit about how much she detested *Hannah Montana* and how she found it problematic that her daughter spent time watching it:

> Ingvild: But what do you feel is problematic with her watching it?
> Susan's mother: I think it causes stupidity (laughing). It's not conducive to her personal growth, I think it causes stupidity, *Hannah Montana* I think is stupid, literally speaking, I cannot for the life of me understand why it's fun.

By claiming; "it's not conducive to her personal growth" Susan's mother drew on an understanding of children as unfinished becomings that need to be developed (Qvortrup, 1994). Thus underlying the educational voice, there was a perception of a need or a want for television shows to foster cognitive or social skills. In the interviews, parents expressed a preference for learning over pure entertainment. This can be seen as a moral positioning, and through this, parents were communicating the moral economy of the household. As Bakhtinian voices are understood as always social and contextual, the authoritative voices act as expressions of tensions in society (Tobin, 2000) implying that there is a tension of television for learning versus for entertainment.

While the educational voice was prominent, it did not operate alone. Even though none of the parents expressed that they would *want* their children to watch *High School Musical* or *Hannah Montana*, most parents did not mind them watching it either. The voice of education was

strong, but in the interviews this authoritative voice was often accompanied by another authoritative voice, namely the voice of children's autonomy. This voice focused on the children's "right" to their own cultural expressions. As Kjørholt states "children have the right to "realize themselves in 'free activities'" (Kjørholt, 2005, p. 158). In the interviews there was a tension and polyphony as the parents employed several authoritative voices simultaneously thus evoking heteroglossia. On the one hand, being able to learn something from television was prioritized over entertainment, but on the other hand, their daughters' right to be entertained and choose programs on their own, was seen as pivotal. What the parents expressed was not a binary of either disliking it or accepting it but rather, a process of negotiation and compromise.

> Ingvild: Would you rather see her watch something else than Disney Channel?
> Cathy's father: Yes, but she does that in addition, so we don't have…, sometimes it's a bit too much Disney, so we ask her to switch to NRK [Norwegian Public Broadcasting], but if it was up to her she would watch Disney Channel always, but Saturday mornings are her mornings, and that's when she watches it.

Cathy's father was not thrilled with Disney content. However, he talked about Cathy as having a right to her own taste, and Saturday mornings were "her mornings." Using the phrase "her mornings" implied giving his daughter ownership of specific periods of time during the week. This also implied that for the rest of the week, time is owned by others, for example by school, after school programs, different activities, and parents. Thus, naming Saturday mornings as "hers" Cathy's father acknowledged and contributed to what he might think of as her self-enjoyment. In addition to the right to be one's self, the quote above can be read as ambiguous since Cathy's father also expressed wanting to restrict how much Disney was watched and wanting her to switch to public broadcasting. Opting for NRK over Disney Channel implies that public broadcasting was deemed better than commercial broadcasting and the national broadcasting company was held in higher regard than the Americanization that Disney

represents. Thus, a heteroglossia prevailed as several authoritative voices operated within the same statement.

The authoritative voice of education, while strong, was moderated by the authoritative voice of children's autonomy. The voice of education was performed when parents said that they want their children to watch something with more substantial content than Disney shows have. On the other hand, the authoritative voice of children's autonomy and right to their own cultural expressions was also drawn on, and none of the parents said that they would deny their daughters opportunity to watch Disney tween programs.

The good, the bad, and the commercial nature of America

The authoritative voice of Disney as innocent and safe surfaced in all interviews. This voice is rooted in the notion that family is at the core of the Disney brand and therefore wholesome for children (Bryman, 2004; Buckingham, 2001; Giroux & Pollock, 2010; Wasko, 2001). The safe voice entails that Disney is more family focused as opposed to Nickelodeon, for example, which creates a "us versus them" perception of children and parents (Banet-Weiser, 2007, p. 59). What was not expected was the voice that accompanied, and nuanced, this authoritative voice. For while the parents expressed accepting their daughters watching Disney tween programs, they also expressed dismay with the ideology conveyed in these programs. The voice nuancing the innocent and safe voice was the culture critical voice. All the parents used the culture critical voice when discussing Disney, and parents described a tension between being okay with the content of Disney media, while at the same time opposing Disney's American values (that conflict with Norwegian values). Parents described these values as superficial and commercially oriented. The authoritative voice of Disney as innocent and safe conflicted with

the culture critical voice. As Cathy's father previously quoted, he wanted Cathy to switch from Disney Channel to NRK. Katie's mother serves as a good example of this polyphony and heteroglossia when she described her ambivalence concerning Katie watching Disney:

> Katie's mother: I have to admit, despite the fact that Disney possibly is Satan it's very innocent, which makes me actually like Disney. I prefer her watching Disney over a lot of other stuff, especially if Disney, if the marketing from Disney doesn't make her want to go out and buy things, then I think it's okay. Disney has existed for a long time, so you sort of have your own feelings towards Disney and their characters, like when you yourself were young, so it's natural that one feels almost a sort of safety towards Disney.

In this quote, we can see the two voices being articulated, which represent an ambivalence that was present in all of the interviews. If we dissect the segment, we can see that Disney served as children's "good media" and that parents also have a relationship with the brand. Thus, nostalgic feelings and reflections around the parents' own childhood evoked the innocent and safe voice. However, Katie's mother also mentioned a potentially harmful issue—the commercial nature of Disney. She expressed fear of her daughter possibly becoming materialistic, claiming that watching Disney was acceptable as long as Disney did not "make her want to go out and buy things." Thus, she implied that embedded within the Disney realm, there is such a commercial influence. As Katie's mother described feeling "a sort of safety towards Disney", the Disney tween programs were domesticated due to its perceived innocence and safeness, and despite the culture critical voice. Her remembrance outweighed her critical stance.

Other parents in the interviews also drew on the culture critical voice, stating that Disney is materialistic and superficial. However, simultaneously they perceived Disney content as safe and proper, legitimizing why it was acceptable for their children to watch it. Several parents

expressed how they disapproved of the commercial aspect of the Disney tween concepts, but this disapproval was not strong enough to ban the television shows in their home.

As well as the fear of Disney content communicating superficial and materialistic messages, parents also expressed issues with American subtle messages that could potentially disturb and influence Norwegian values and practices. These potentially harmful issues were discussed as *Americanized* or merely American being different from Norwegian.

> Susan's father: It's not anything I am concerned about exposing the kids to, but at the same time…
>
> Susan's mother: Don't you get embarrassed?
>
> Susan's father: Yes, no, I have some version of the "simplified states of America", I think they have a simple view of life, often
>
> Susan's mother: Especially in the movies
>
> Susan's father: Especially in the movies yes, but it infects society, I think so anyway
>
> Susan's mother: It's just something about getting everything fed with a teaspoon.

Susan's parents expressed a concern for and made use of a voice about media being powerful—potentially in a negative way—in relation to society. This excerpt clearly belongs to the culture critical voice, which included also an anti-American voice. In the quote, the United States was dubbed the "simplified states," suggesting a different and inferior way of life and ideals. By distancing themselves from the "American" view and way of life—which often parents explained as being more individualistic, materialistic, and self-serving—parents solidified their own belonging to the Norwegian culture of social democratic ideals. Mary's father sums up what he thought of American culture:

> Ingvild: What do you think of *High School Musical?*
>
> Mary's father: I think it's very American

Ingvild: What do you mean by that?

Mary's father: I have to admit, I have negative connotations, and it's sort of gaudy, Technicolor, type story, with all the right ingredients in place. Making use that all the American groups are there, to make sure that everyone can identify with something, and of course music and everything that helps support and make it broad to appeal to a wide audience, and that's catchy, and pompous. According to my taste it's pompous. I can see that there is something there that the kids like, and, well it's not the worst, and I understand that they like the songs, they're catchy. Generally I think there is too much influence of American culture; it would be nice with a counterweight.

Ingvild: For example?

Mary's father: Well, they could have elements from other parts of the world

Ingvild: So what is it specifically that you don't like about this «pompous American»?

Mary's father: Well, it's sort of the whole Disney concept, it's a thoroughly commercialized product, even if they do tell stories about friendship and that has a positive ring to it, but everything is tied together with the commercialization, a commercial package with tons of merchandise and very much tied into idolization and consumption, which I am very sceptic towards.

As with Katie's mother, in this segment Mary's father drew on conflicting authoritative voices as he claimed he did not approve of the "thoroughly commercialized product" while simultaneously acknowledging that the stories told had "a positive ring to it." Thus, he was engaging in heteroglossia, drawing on both the innocent and safe voice and the culture critical voice. Mary's father, as Katie's mother, made use of the "good media" argument, but also the "bad products" argument. Mary's father ended this segment by talking about idolization and consumption, two values that he does not approve of. He described these values as "American"—as opposed to Norwegian—and as typical of Disney. Mary's father suggested that there is "too much influence of American culture." He later claimed that this culture is a commercial culture—buying into the content can also mean buying into the commercial aspect. As such the content was—implicitly—perceived as a potential threat to Norwegian culture in

this segment as it also did in the segment with Susan's parents. Norwegian culture appears to be perceived, ideally at least, as the opposite of commercialization and idolization and as such provided a strong presence of the culture critical voice.

As demonstrated, contradicting voices of the moral economy of the household surfaced in the interviews. The content was for the most part deemed watchable, although parents would not consider it a favourite, and the commodities being offered added another layer of complexity.

Domesticating the Disney merchandise

While watching or not watching the content does not involve, in itself, monetary outlays, the Disney tween content comes with a multitude of merchandise. Earlier parents were cited as being skeptical of the commercial nature of Disney. From the outset, merchandise was described as problematic. Buying the products can be seen as "buying into" the commercial aspects of the Disney tween franchises as Katie's mother expressed. However, parents were able to make room for the merchandise in the moral economy of the household. The voices articulated in relation to the merchandise were on the one hand the voice of caring consumption and on the other hand the culture critical voice.

A way of, not banning, but rather negotiating the merchandise and their potential domestication in the moral economy, was employing an argumentative voice, which I call the durability argument. In the parent interviews, when talking about merchandise, the idea that merchandise should be useful and durable surfaced. In the data the perceived use and value of a product was an important dimension in how parents prioritized children's requests for consumer goods.

Being useful was described in terms of the type and quality of the merchandise. Generally, the merchandise was considered pricey yet of bad quality.

> Ingvild: Do you have any opinion about all the merchandise one could buy, there are clothes and…
> Susan's mother: I haven't seen it all, but I do have an opinion that, I want, really it doesn't matter to me if there is a Hannah face on it, if she really wants a Hannah face, but then the rest needs to be okay. I mean if she wants a sweater with a Hannah face, then I need to be able to wash it, and it need to look more or less ok after that, and needs to last for a while, if you understand what I mean. I'm not going to spend money on something that is useless in the first place. Even if it has a Hannah face on it.
> Ingvild: Do you think that the products with Hannah faces on them are useless?
> Susan's mother: Not all, but many of them are. Some of the stuff, I've bought them for people who want them for their birthdays, and I go and touch towels, right, and they are really thin, and I think, ok, when you've washed the towel three times, how much is left of it, and that I think is unnecessary.

Being useless as Susan's mother here suggested some of the *Hannah Montana* merchandise were, was tied up in the quote above to being of bad quality. Susan's mother used a sweater and a towel as examples, which are useful items. However, the print on the sweater washed off, and the towel disintegrated, and as such they were, in fact, useless. According to Susan's mother, a product should be durable. Susan's mother situated herself as a critical consumer, not someone who takes part in frivolous consumption. While she stated that she did not mind if Susan wanted a Hannah product, she simultaneously stated that most Hannah products were of poor quality.

As a continuation of the durability argument, another way of avoiding merchandise was to use risk as an argument. Insisting that Hannah products were of poor quality could also be used as a reason for not purchasing them.

Ingvild: Do you have any general opinion about all the merchandise one can buy?

Ida's mother: She hasn't asked to get any of it really, so I haven't needed to say no, but I think that if she had asked for *Hannah Montana* beddings, I would have said no.

Ingvild: Why?

Ida's mother: First of all because I'm afraid that there is too much dye in them, so I would have used that as an argument, that there is harmful dye in them. That would have been my main argument, but it's mostly because I don't like them.

For Ida's mother it was not only the potential lack of quality, but also the fear of merchandise being physically harmful. Although, as she stated, she would use this as an argument, she claimed that her "true" feelings were that she did not like them. Thus, Ida's mother mobilized the notion of the protective and responsible mother. She performed this as a role, as an argument for not letting her daughter have the *Hannah Montana* bedding and not necessarily telling her daughter that what she might want is something that her mother does not like. We can also observe the work parents do in relation to the commercial features of Disney products. Ida's mother was not talking about some negotiation that had happened between her and Ida, but rather which arguments would be set in motion *if* Ida were to ask for *Hannah Montana* bedding.

Parents did not only express disapproval towards the merchandise. There were also instances of parents wanting to please their children through the merchandise. This is where the authoritative voice of caring consumption emerged:

Ingvild: So for example the merchandise aspect of it, does Mary have any *High School Musical* or other Disney stuff?

Mary's father: Yes, I have to admit, I'm probably, I probably have as much of a double standard as everyone else I would think, I feel on one hand that this is not good, but when it comes to the situation, where you want to please your child, then I think about what Mary likes, yes she likes *High School Musical*

for example, and then I buy something with that on it, and then you're suddenly against what you really think and mean. Then you've sort of gone into the trap, but at least the consideration for her is the priority

Mary's father's statements here can be explained by what Pugh (2003) labeled *consumption as recognition,* as he recognized Mary's wants and interests. Mary's father talked earlier of the problem with the commercialization of Disney and what he perceived as an excessive focus on things. Mary's father clearly experienced a dilemma of wanting to raise his child with politically correct ideals while at the same time wanting to please his daughter by giving her Disney merchandise. According to Mary's father, Mary's want for these things outweighed his animosity towards the commercial aspect of Disney, thus the voice of caring consumption outweighed the culture critical voice.

In addition to wanting to please, and using the durability argument, another tactic was simply to verbally protest the commercial aspect. Thus, by applying the culture critical voice, while simultaneously turning a blind eye to gifts received, implicitly and non-verbally, the caring consumption voice is evoked. Often the merchandise came (with more or less approval) through the "back-door" as other adults and relatives often gave the girls' Hannah products. Ida's mother for example did not actively buy Disney products for her daughter but allowed other relatives to do this. She did not "buy into it" but Ida still had products from her favorite movies.

Ida's mother: She doesn't have a lot of *Hannah Montana* things I don't think, not that I know of, but she has *High School Musical* things, innocent things, she has a puzzle that's a ball, with *High School Musical* on it, and that's sort of proper toys, only it has a picture of them on it, she doesn't really want for much of that stuff. I mean, if she wants, if she needs a new book bag, then she doesn't want a *Hannah Montana* book bag or anything, then she wants different kinds of bags, so she doesn't want a lot of that stuff, I don't

experience it as her wanting a lot. And what she has, she has not gotten from me, she gotten it from, I think mostly my mother and father, because they have been out shopping together, and Ida comes home with the things. A *Hannah Montana* book I think she has

Ingvild: How do you feel about that?

Ida's mother: It's totally fine, it's sort of a free haven.

Ida's mother kept her distance from the products, while simultaneously accepting that others gave her daughter *High School Musical* merchandise. In this excerpt we can see how the moral economy of the household is the the outcome of a dynamic where moral positions and tensions are negotiated and balanced. As a mother, she maintained her critical consumer stance while her daughter was able to enjoy the merchandise. This was a way to include *High School Musical* in the moral economy of the household, without actually including it—rather it was included by default.

Discussion: Ambivalent voices producing an ambiguous moral economy

In this study, how parents talked about their ambivalent experiences with the media texts and tie-in merchandise of *Hannah Montana* and *High School Musical*, revealed which authoritative voices they drew on, and what this ambivalence produced in relation to how the franchises were domesticated. The parents in the interviews drew on five contradicting authoritative voices, which the parents were in dialogue and negotiation with, attempting to come to terms with their daughters' fascination with the Disney tween franchises. The heteroglossia and polyphony that emerged in the interviews suggest a negotiable and dynamic moral economy of the household and that the domestication of these texts and merchandise was a complex process.

Data revealed that there were two main reasons why Disney was domesticated as an acceptable practice (i.e., watching *High School Musical* and *Hannah Montana*). First, parents were comfortable with their children watching Disney, as Disney was a trusted family brand that represented the innocent and safe voice. Second, there was an understanding for this type of content as enjoyment for their children as well as Disney being part of their cultural framework of references, which was a part of the autonomy voice. However, the culture critical voice was evoked as the parents' uttered concern for their daughters becoming superficial and materialistic. Yet, parents would, in the context of the interview, defend the children's "rights" to be entertained. Hence, the innocent and safe voice, and the autonomy voice together solidified the domestication of Disney in the household.

The parents, in their domestication of the Disney tween franchises, incorporated the messages they perceived as being in tune with the moral economy of the household (the stories with a positive ring to them) while simultaneously opposing "American" commercial values, which most parents expressed as embedded in both the media texts and merchandise. When discussing merchandise, complexities of the moral economy of the household were prevalent. A way parents reported on enabling them to avoid, while simultaneously include, the merchandise in the moral economy of the household was to allow other adults to purchase merchandise for their daughters. This resulted in a complex domestication as the parents would not actively bring the items into the household themselves, yet simultaneously they would not ban or exclude them.

Framing this analysis with Bakhtin's concepts made it possible to dissect the voices and see them in relation to one another focusing on the moral economy of the household as a constant struggle amidst the conflicting authoritative voices. Bakhtianian voices are not inherent to the

speaker, but rather expressions of present ideologies and perspectives circulating around children, media and consumption. Thus, we can see these interview statements as representing both how the individual parent deals with the larger tensions of society, but also of society itself as the authoritative voices are constituted through their reproduction.

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