

The Effects of Social Media on the Dreams of Preadolescent Girls

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Abstract : The aim of the quali-quantitative research conducted in the spring of 2021 (still in the midst of the Covid-19 emergency) was to analyze the relationship between the imaginary of 142 girls aged 10-12 from two Italian cities in the Emilia-Romagna region (the capital, Bologna, and Parma) and the influence that various socialization agents can have on it, with particular attention to social media. In order to investigate the relationship between imagination and media, two tools were used: first, the girls wrote an essay in class about their future lives, imagining waking up one morning as a thirty-year-old adults. Six types of "dreams" reflecting the values and lifestyles characteristic of contemporary Italian society emerged. Additionally, the girls completed a questionnaire on their leisure time and, in particular, media consumption aimed at identifying their favorite characters. The results provided insights into understanding the reference values and lifestyles that define their subculture (they belong to the so-called Generation Z). Another interesting aspect of this research is the possibility of comparing the results with those of a similar study on preadolescent imaginary conducted in 1995, involving 292 girls from Milan and Bologna, belonging to the Millennial generation. The narratives about the imagined adult life reflect some crucial changes undergone by Italian society in a quarter of a century: there are advancements towards gender equality, and the imagined family is increasingly detached from tradition. There is a more persistent dream of a life marked by beauty, wealth, and fame, while at the same time, there is a greater social commitment, from solidarity with marginalized people to environmentalism. Furthermore, the mentioned new digital and robotic professions will project us into the near future.

Keywords : gender equality, gender stereotypes, imaginary, preadolescents, social media

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