

## Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

"Looking at the next generation's models, idols or stars goes hand in hand with exploring the orientations and role models of children and youth. Do role models still serve as references for teenagers today or is such behaviour seen as outmoded and behind the times among peers? If in fact they still serve as role models, then who in their eyes, are models and what function does the choice of a role model have on the process of growing up? The question can be formulated differently from the perspective of the subject of their imagination: What is the common denominator between Britney Spears, Michael Jordan, Stephen Hawking, Stefan Raab, Busta Rhymes, Lady Diana, Mother Theresa and Zlatko from the Big Brother House?" – as Klaus Waldmann questioned in a study published in 2000.

Role models, idols and stars are no new phenomenon. They have always existed in human society and they will certainly continue to exist in the future as well. In referring to the process where individuals identify with role models, Sigmund Freud saw this as a psychodynamic process where an individual attempts to take on the character traits of the role model and behave in certain situations like the role model would. It is clear in the case of small children that parents clearly represent the most important reference persons, i.e. role models. This situation changes during puberty years where teenagers become more distant, developing an ability to criticize and judge and as a result are more attracted to self-chosen role models, idols or friends. They develop "a sense of belonging together and a feeling of acceptance and of being loved." Likewise, according to Rupp (2006), there is no difference when a young persons' favourite celebrity star or ideal serves as an example and consequently provides a direction alternative to young people by setting behaviour standards.

Who do we label as "idols" or "stars"? Waldmann (2000) defined them as follows: "They stand out from ordinary and run-of-the-mill persons. They are the icons for a certain profession, they represent specific cultural practices and stand for a certain kind of lifestyle." According to Rupp (2006), often reservations are expressed about these role models. She states that this is because their idols - being a product of society - are introduced to the individual from the outside and therefore become stereotypes, extraneous to the person itself and are being belittled for being pedagogic and admonitory",... Stars and idols nowadays mainly come from the film, pop and sports scene and with the help of the media, become the target of extraordinary attention — that we would not even indulge in for our own family members —, tremendous interest and singular care and are even being indirectly supported financially, yes downright "pampered".

According to Hemrik (2008), unlike in the case of role models from earlier eras, today we no longer *honour* 21st century stars, we are much more *jealous* of them and yet we are prepared, to give them our undivided attention. In addition, Hemrik claimed that, Reality Shows (i.e. Big Brother) are a good example of the fact that everyone is quite eager to watch them. When a person has been the focus of attention for a long enough time on television (in the Internet), then he/she has already become a star. Ákos Szilágyi (2000) reported how television and the computer could create a mass culture from traditional history — often even soap operas. From discussions amongst reputable writers of fairy tales and youth literature as well as child psychologists (Gyóri 2000), it is clear that the old fairy tales with their heroes and idols are gradually disappearing from child and youth culture and that they are being replaced, (with the help of television and the Internet), with a kind of sub-culture, where children are treated like "small adults".

In *Jugendkultur (Youth Culture) 1940 – 1985*, Zinnecker (1987) describes in detail how this is happening. He stressed the trend for an increasingly greater *gender gap* when it comes to role models and idols preferred by 15 – 17 year olds. For women, traits such as style, personality, physical beauty are important and women can much more easily identify with their idols than men. In contrast, men consider important traits and

achievements to include profession, sports achievements, success, perseverance, assertiveness and financial situation. Of course, the media (television, the Internet, the print media) is primarily responsible for the development of these gender-specific clichés and stereotypes. Unfortunately, in certain youth newspapers, television shows and Internet pages for young people, the above-referenced "superficial" topics were addressed in relation to their idols. On the other hand, no reference was made of topics related to the real social environment, such as jobs, unemployment, financial difficulties, competition, training and schools. (Zinnecker 1987). A comprehensive study by Zinnecker (2002, cf. also: <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vorbild>) shows that young people clearly focus on idols and stars for orientation as role models. At the time of the study, 60% of youth in Germany indicated that they had a role model (prominent "celebs" from the media world such as athletes, pop and rock singers, actors) outside the family and their immediate circle of friends and acquaintances.

What can teachers, educators and parents do so that the "traditional" role models are also maintained alongside the new idols? According to the Zsubrits study in 2002, young people and even very young children in pre-puberty are exposed to influences coming from the world of stardom and the media in Hungary. In view of this trend, it seems noteworthy that the Hungarian National Curriculum (Nemzeti Alaptanterv) stipulates the introduction in schools of a new subject called "Visual Elements and Media Knowledge" geared to 13 to 15 year old students. Moreover, it should be stressed, that visual as well as print media (youth newspapers such as *Bravo*) should be handled critically and sensibly. Parents and schools have an important role to play in this regard. Children and young people should be in a position to perceive what is reality and to be made aware that the media often only represents quasi-reality, and tries to fabricate a dream world which reproduces a greatly reduced, simplified, idealized world-view (Rupp 2006). Young adults- as easily manipulated recipients of this illusory world- are thus equipped with different tools and social skills in order to understand the stereotypes and clichés constructed by the media in order to be able to competently "dissect them" as well.

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