

la globalisation, et paradoxalement, en ces temps de recrudescence des nationalismes. C'est tout comme si on avait décidé d'omettre d'aborder les droits à la citoyenneté où le genre est confronté à l'ethnie. D'ailleurs, Birte Siim reconnaît bien ce dilemme lorsqu'elle mentionne l'hypothèse de la mobilisation politique, car pour concevoir une approche féministe qui prône une citoyenneté différenciée et pluraliste, il faut que celle-ci soit harmonisée à des actions communes. Je crois que c'est précisément là que les théories féministes sont bien placées pour répondre à la question du livre et ce, de façon plurielle, bien entendu: *Quelles citoyennetés pour les femmes?*

## DADDY'S GIRL: YOUNG GIRLS AND POPULAR CULTURE

Valerie Walkerdine. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

BY SUSANNE LUHMANN

Feminist commentators have long pointed to the harmful effects of popular culture on girls: their struggles with self-esteem and body image as well as eating disorders have been linked to the stereotypes of femininity and the sexualization of girls common in ads, movies, and pop music. After reading Valerie Walkerdine's *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture*, new questions emerge as to how much class dynamics are at stake, both in the reading of representation and in changing them. In this intriguing study, the British critical psychologist and cultural studies scholar takes another look at the role of popular culture in the lives of girls, and, perhaps more importantly, at

how girls figure in the popular imagination of our culture. Her specific focus is the pre-teen working-class girl, who, unlike her older sister, the working-class teenager, has largely been overlooked by the world of cultural and feminist studies.

Walkerdine draws for her analysis on various media such as comic strips, movies, musicals, and pop music, as well as on her observation of girls watching TV and acting out pop hits. Her argument takes two directions: as a figure of popular culture the little working-class girl is the site of projective social fantasies which have little to do with herself but instead reflect more accurately the fears and fantasies of middle-class adults; and the fantasies of both glamorous and sexy femininity projected in films and pop music might be crucial to her psychological survival under difficult social conditions.

Walkerdine rejects the feminist and cultural studies production of the working-class girl as either revolutionary subject or duped object of consumer ideology because they ignore the real struggles of working-class people. She suggests that the figure of the working-class girl signifies varied and shifting social meanings according to different historical contexts. As an orphan figure in movies and comic strips she represents the charity-deserving poor; in films like *My Fair Lady* and *Gigi* she represents upward social mobility through education or marriage offered in a liberal democratic society. Underlying all this is, however, is a long history of social regulation of the working-classes, especially of working class women and girls whose sexuality poses a threat to bourgeois normalcy and civilizatory success.

Along those lines, Walkerdine suggests that the public outcry in high-brow newspapers like the *Guardian* over the eroticized images of girls in the mass media (here made-up little girls enacting pop hits on British TV) is a form of moral panic. As such it speaks to a middle-class fantasy of an innocent and natural childhood untouched by sexual desire. But it is

also a defensive mechanism with which to fend off the rather disturbing adult attraction to the eroticism of childhood, where the little girl is at once innocent and beguiling. She juxtaposes this to tabloid responses which focus on the girls' talent and success instead.

Without ignoring child abuse, Walkerdine refuses the normalizing and regulatory gaze shared by both progressive cultural analysis and the bourgeois fantasy of "childhood innocence," and instead sides and identifies with the young working-class girls and their pleasure in popular culture. Where others might see exploitation or escapism, Walkerdine suggests that media fantasies have an important role to play in a psychology of survival, in the ways that oppressed people survive the damaging social conditions of their lives. Whereas feminists and other media critics have often analyzed popular representations as realist texts with a direct socializing effect, Walkerdine suggests popular culture as a space where certain painful experiences and issues can be dealt with and worked through emotionally, in fantasy, and in ways not possible within the realm of realism.

Thus at stake in this study are at least two distinct sets of defensive fantasies projected onto the public figure of the little girl: the defensive response of the middle-class adults to the more troubling aspects of girlhood (such as sexuality and desire); and girls' engagement with media fantasies as escape from both adult regulation and complex material and social conditions.

Walkerdine's text—though at times in need of some tighter editing—is an insightful and provocative study that has a lot to offer to the ongoing discussion on media and girl subjectivity, both for the theory-inclined reader and those interested in empirical research on girls. In the end this book will change how we look at little girls with/in popular culture.