

Health education in Top Shape- governing and communication strategies in the edutainment series *Top Shape*

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Abstract

Contemporary society is often described as a “learning society”, in which citizens are educated to reflect on and evaluate their well-being and lifestyles. In school, this is done through assessments: ratings and evaluations, in working life through staff appraisals and health evaluations, and in everyday life, media is used for self-assessments. Focus in this article is on the later. Mass media has become an increasingly common tool to produce and promote knowledge about health and lifestyle. In various edutainment programs experts and coaches supports participants to improve their lives in one way or another. In this article I will focus on the series “Toppform” (Top shape) broadcasted on Swedish television in 2008. *Top Shape* is one of the health and lifestyle TV- series that use coordinated communication channels to interact with its viewers. Parallel with the program being broadcasted on television, it is also represented with material on the Internet. This study focuses on the material that is represented on the website of the TV-series, which also contains material used for teaching in school settings. By that, the material constitutes an interesting encounter between entertainment, school education and public health education and is therefore fruitful to study from a perspective of health communication. I adopt a critical discourse analytic approach, in which power relations and the constitution of social practices are in focus.

Key Words: Health education, media, governing, edutainment, discourse

Introduction

The welfare system and the choice of communication channels for health messages has transformed rapidly during the second part of the 1900s. A greater emphasis is put on communication through media (Olsson, 1997; Eriksson, 1993), and media has taken on a new cultural role as a provider of education as well as entertainment (Atkins & Wallack, 1990; Jansson, 2001). Contemporary research has made visible how mass media has become an increasingly common tool to produce and promote knowledge about health and lifestyle. In various edutainment series experts and coaches supports the participants to change their lives to the better in one way or another (Atkins & Wallack, 1990; Johansson, 2006, Fairclough, 1995; Bolander, 2009; Andersson, 2011; Seale, 2003; Bell & Hollows, 2005) Parallel to these new ways of communicating health the conditions for participation in society have changed to a greater emphasis on responsibility and risk, which calls for a high level of moral consciousness from citizens (Cruikshank, 1999; Foucault, 1980; Rose 1999a; Rose 1999b). A societal change which is often described as a way to a “learning society”, in which citizens are educated to reflect on and evaluate their well-being and lifestyles. In school, this is done through assessments: ratings, self-assessment and evaluations; in working life through staff appraisals and health evaluations and in everyday life individuals make self-assessments by comparing their own performance with others and/or by performing tests provided by media (Bolander, 2009; Andersson, 2011). In this article I will focus on the TV-series “Topp form” (Top shape) broadcasted on Swedish television in 2008.

Aims and outline

Top Shape is one of the health and lifestyle TV-series that use coordinated communication channels to interact with its viewers. Parallel with the broadcasting on television, *Top Shape* is also represented with its own website. This study concentrates on the material that is represented on the website, which also contains material used for teaching in school settings. As such, the material constitutes an interesting encounter between entertainment, school education and public health

education. It is therefore fruitful to study from a perspective of health communication. My interest in analyze is how the TV series communicate with the viewers on their website to legitimize their knowledge and build a foundation of trust that makes it possible to change the behavior of the viewer.

In this article, education and governing are studied from a perspective that emphasizes discourses and language as mediators of advices and standards on health. In discourses we can find a variation of subject positions and truth claims. The credibility of a statement depends on who utters it and what position in the discourse that person holds. The expert's opinion is valued higher than the common man's opinion because the expert holds a position in discourse with more power and greater opportunity to define the knowledge and the difference between true and false (Foucault, 1980; Foucault, 1993; Fairclough, 1995). In such an analysis language become central though it constitutes social identities as well as social relations and systems of knowledge (Fairclough, 1995). The central point here is that the text is never just a text rather:

The text simultaneously represent aspects of the world (the physical world, the social world, the mental world); enact social relations between participants in social events and the attitudes, desires and values of participants; and their situational contexts (Fairclough, 2003: 27).

I have pursued the analysis according to the branch of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed by Norman Fairclough. CDA is a method proven to be useful in media analyses as it focuses on language and interaction as social practices effected by power relations and structural conditions (discourse) for what counts as truth or knowledge (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough, 2002). The analysis focuses on three elements: the description of the text, the interpretation of relationship between text and interaction and finally the explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context (Fairclough, 2001: 91).

In all texts there is a relation to other texts that

will set the tone and give extended meanings to the utterances in the text. Fairclough calls this relationship intertextuality (Fairclough, 2003). Media language and logic represents particular way of presenting the world to its viewers, which includes selections of social identities that fulfill their purpose in mediating the message of the series (Fairclough, 1995).

Fairclough has identified three important set of questions in the analysis of the language of media texts which have also guided my work. These questions are:

1. How is the world (events, relationships, etc.) represented?
2. What identities are set up for those involved in the programme or story (reporters, audience, 'third parties referred to or interviewed)?
3. What relationships are set up between those involved (e.g. reporter-audience, expert-audience or politician-audience relationships)? (Fairclough, 1995: 5).

Fairclough summarize these paragraphs into questions on representations, identities and relations. In this text I analyze how this is done in the case of Top Shape.

Top Shape challenges the school

"Top shape challenges the school" is a suite of 12 programs broadcasted on Swedish Television (SVT) in the autumn 2008. The suite of programs was filmed in a ninth grade in Norrköping, a city of 132124 inhabitants, located in the south of Sweden. The participating class was selected on the basis that it would represent a "normal" ninth grade that is a class with no explicit health problem, nor a class that focused on sports and health (e.g. football classes). Although, in the same school as the selected class there were football classes which were used as a reference group in the program(s) to show differences in health-status but also to make obvious how the participating individual's health and performances improved during the interventions of the 12 programs.

In the case of Top Shape, structures and communications with the viewer works on several levels (both one way mediated and two way mediated) to create a discursive field of truths. In addition to the broadcasted TV-programs there was a website on which results of the competitions were published. The website offered possibilities to watch the programs, and to gather information on food, training and healthy lifestyle (Topp form 1). Beyond the public material one could sign up to get the Top Shape newsletter. If doing so, one would receive an email with information about the content of the next program. Each email starts with a brief explanation of the content of the program. This is followed by different links that leads the recipient to the program and extras so that the recipient can visit the website easily. There are also links to discussion forums where the recipient is invited to participate in discussions about any issues in the program.

A school class as the choice of setting for Top Shape is not a coincident; school as an institution has long been an important factor in health education in Sweden since it has proven to be a fruitful strategy to influence lifestyles among adults, and by that families, via their children (Eriksson, 1993; Olsson, 1997; Palmblad, & Eriksson, 1995). This also points to one of the main features in contemporary media expressed by Fairclough,

and that is the tension between public and private. Another tension that he highlights is the tension between providing information and to entertain (Fairclough, 1995). Based on its characteristics Top Shape can be categorized as an "edutainment" series as it combines the two genres: education and entertainment. One of the features in the description of edutainment series is that it transcends the discursive boundaries between home and school environment (Atkins & Wallack, 1990; Bolander, 2009; Nordberg, 1996; Wallengren, 2005). In contemporary media this genre mixing has become increasingly common, which makes the relationship between text and genre even more complex and intriguing (Fairclough, 2003).

The host of the series *Blossom Tainton* is a famous person to the Swedish people who made herself a status as an artist and as a health lecturer, model and Christmas host in television in 2005. In 2002 she won the Swedish national song contest *Schlagerfestivalen* with the song group *Aphrodite*.

The group represented Sweden in the Eurovision Song Contest the same year. She has also published material related to fitness. In other words, Tainton is a person who, through her experience and practices in fitness, has an established trust or ethos in health education. Ethos in this case is the social identity that the expert signals verbally and non-verbally in interaction with the viewers. Ethos is often built up by intertextual linkages to other texts or arenas (Fairclough, 1995), in this case Tainton's credibility is built up mainly on her expertise in fitness but also by her affability which creates a sense of trustworthiness and confidence.

The major health threat

In the forthcoming sections I will focus my analyze of how Top shape communicate with the viewer on their website, starting with how Top Shape legitimize their position as health educators. In the motivation of school pupils as a target group for the series one can read the following (Toppform 3, 2010):

High time to reverse the trend!

This fall, Top Shape is challenging school. We do it because the situation is more serious than ever when it comes to child and adolescent health. We want to show the realities of today and inspire both young people and their parents to change.

Our children are eating more sweets and junk food than ever before while they are moving less and less. Researchers agree that children and young people need to move at least one hour a day, preferably one and a half. It is not about hard physical training, but to bike or walk to school, be active in their leisure time, playing, being out and so on. Physical activity makes it possible for children to cope better in school. We know that children's motor skills are strongly linked to reading and writing, memory and ability to deliver good results at school. But unfortunately the situation is bleak in terms of children and youth lifestyle.

The rhetoric in the quote is built around a looming threat that must be battled and a call for coordinated action to deal with the situation. By doing so the text is creating an image of the future and a future plan with the help of the black painting of the present.

Since the future always involves a degree of uncertainty, it works as an effective vision (myth) to unite people, in this case viewers of Top Shape. By envisioning the present as a threat, and offering a plan for a better future the text addresses the viewers' desire and benevolence. The basic features of the discourse at this juncture is that the population is facing a major problem and that Top Shape, with their knowledge and tools, can lead them/us on the right way. This is an important element in governing strategies since effective governing requires the will to be governed (Andersson, 2007; Foucault, 1980; Rose, 1999). According to Fairclough social agents act in a space constrained by discursive and social practices. By this means, that Fairclough's envisioning of discourse give room for agency as well as governing structures. Thus, subjects are neither totally free nor socially determined rather they are somewhere in between. The interesting question in research is how structure and agency interrelate in the recreation or constitution of discourse in various fields (Fairclough, 2003).

In the quotation well-known stereotypes of the active and the passive citizen occur. Stereotypes in themselves withholds moral messages about what is a desirable lifestyle and not. The preferred lifestyle is the active citizen who take care of his/her health. The passive citizen is a portrait of an irresponsible low achiever (Andersson, 2007; Rose, 1999). Top Shape's ambition is, as stated in the quotation, to increase the viewer's active responsibility, but also to bring health thinking in to the school environment.

As seen, health education in Top Shape is focused on family and school. But it is not just children who are educated and trained in Top Shape management. Top Shape also addresses an audience of television viewers and Internet users who are enclosed in the series discursive community. This is made possible by the varying channels and modes of communication (Fairclough, 2003). On the website the host Blossom Tainton explains (Toppform 3, 2010):

In the program you will meet others in the same situation that can give you hints on various activities that strengthen both body and knob. On the Web you can deepen your knowledge and receive advice and the right tools to make a difference. In addition, in the UR program "Mission Health" that is also broadcasted this fall, you who are teachers can get advice on how you can support your students. It is high time that we all are committed to make our children and young people will feel better!

The text is intriguing inasmuch as the material is presented as a benefit or as a tool that is offered to the reader/viewer. It's about "support" and "help" rather than to conduct and admonish. There are a number of key words in this text that are interesting to study further. Firstly, it is interesting how the text works to create identification and a sense of community to me as a reader by explaining that I will "meet others who are in the same situation." So I am not alone, Top Shape will help me to find others with similar problems. The presupposition of a shared problem is a way to create authenticity in the text by taking the knowledge of

the problem and a common shared ground of experience in health issues as granted (Fairclough, 1995).

However, it is not always obvious who is addressed in the text. It is either a viewer with unhealthy habits or a teacher with students who are unhealthy. The text alternates between general appropriations intended for all audiences, and the more specific school rhetoric that emerge in the description of the UR material which states that the material is meant for teachers to use to support their students. One clue to the mystery of recipient is to look at how agency works in the text. When the viewer is addressed it is all about how he or she as an individual can use the pages and advices in direct action on his/her life and body; when the teachers are addressed they are addressed as experts that are supposed to 'support' their students.

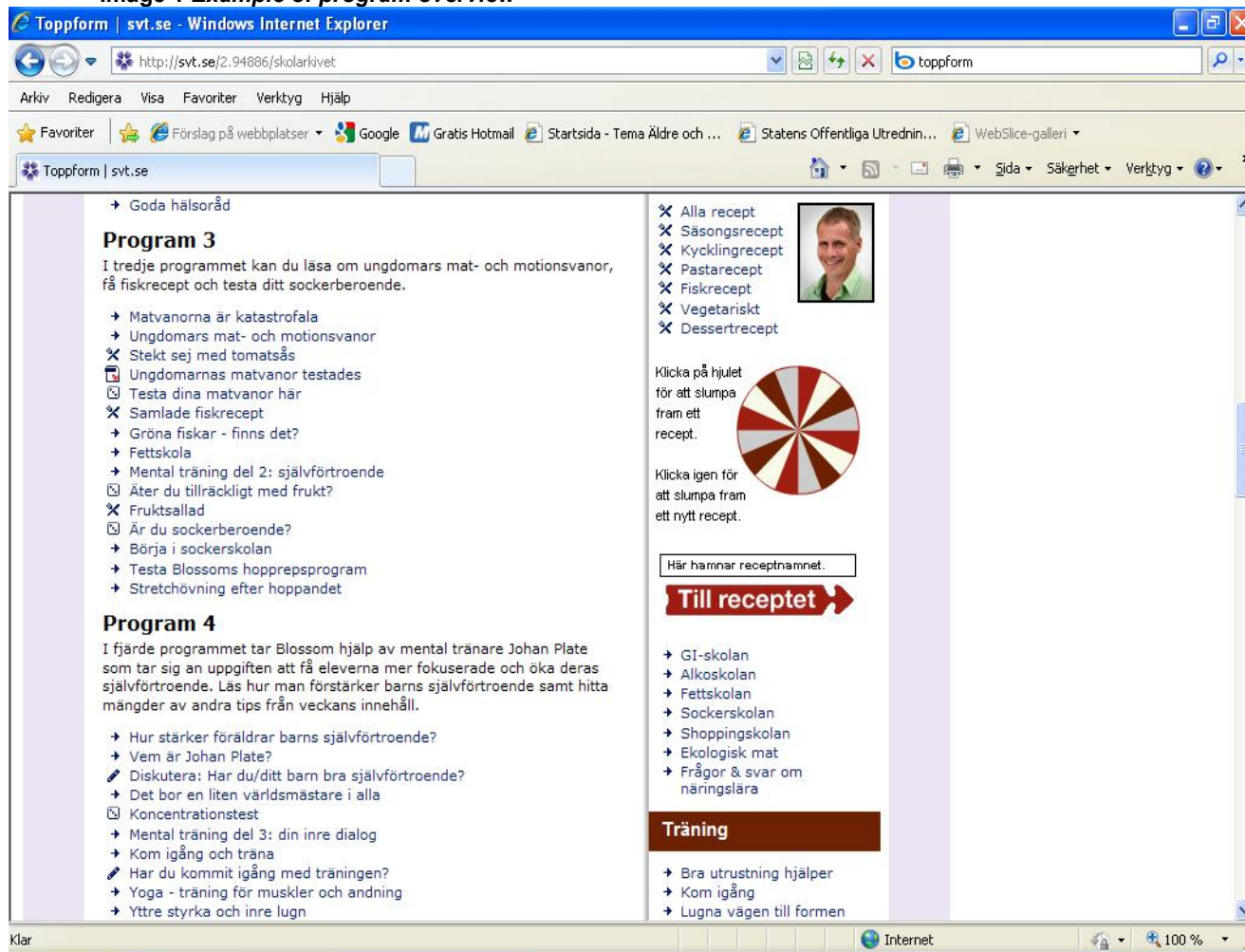
The last sentence in the quote is interesting though it states "our children and young people" which thereby excludes children and young people as the addressed audience. Thus, it seems like the last sentence is addressing some undefined but presupposed "us" of adults with a common "ownership" of the children and youths. By creating a shared interest in action the text also provides the viewers with a world view and incentives to act in accordance to the discourse (Fairclough, 1995).

Health School mediated through several channels

The website has a section called "school library" (Toppform 5, 2010), which incorporates material from the whole suite of programs. Here it is possible to get to know the participating students through personal presentations, test oneself in various fields related to health and lifestyle and get information about healthy/unhealthy food, fitness diets, etc. (Toppform 1, 2008; Toppform 6, 2010). The website material is presented under headings that give associations to education. As examples, one can learn more about food under headings such as "Sugar School," "Fat School" and "GI-school" (Toppform 2, 2008) As evident the intertextual relationship with educational texts is outspoken on the website and works as a legitimizing element, creating credibility as it associates with other values connected to school; education, professionalism and knowledge.

On Top Shape's website the viewers of the series have access to all the programs in the series and interactive tests about diet and health. They can also get advice on how they can improve their lifestyle. Each program is presented together with a brief explanation of the theme and content of the program. Furthermore a number of links to self-evaluation tests, health information, recipes etcetera is presented. The print screen below is an example of the overview of program 3 which theme was food-and exercise habits. In the associated links one find subjects such as "Food habits are disastrous", "Food and exercise habits among young people", "Green fish-do they exist?" "Fat school", "Subscribe to Sugar-school" "Try Blossom's rope program"; links to recipes, and self-evaluations such as "Test your food habits here", "Are you addicted to sugar?"

Image 1 Example of program overview



The above extract displays several examples of an educational rhetoric, i.e. "fat school" and "sugar-school" and in addition the governing function appears in expressions such as "Have you started your training?" "Are you addicted to sugar?" or in the various tests which the viewer is invited to do. The tests can be read as a system of self-evaluation where one can compare one's own results with the fall out of the adolescents in the series (for example "young people's eating and exercise habits"). In addition, interactive forms of education and assessment are offered, such as discussion forums based on evaluative principles addressing issues like how the viewers are to relate to and govern their children.

The title of the discussion forum's message board in the extract is: "Do you / your child have a great self-confidence?" The message board is an opportunity to compare oneself with others, thus placing oneself in relation to a scale of normality. Opportunities are offered for identification and fellowship with others on the message board as well as to distance oneself from the opinions expressed, and those who express them. Irrespective of if the recipient distance or identify him-/herself with the statements, he or she will contribute to a normalization of the values that the program conveys, since these values are the common yardstick which, those taking part of the discussion forum relate to (Fairclough, 2003). How close or how far from the experts' statements about normal is my everyday practices and my self-estimation?

An even more explicit example of self-evaluation and self-discipline is the 'Health Diary' which is also found on the website. 'Health Diary' is a program offered to viewers for free. In the 'Health Diary' viewers can record their health habits every day to get an assessment of them from the experts in the series (built on automatic standard values). The registration of the daily habits also offers an opportunity to evaluate if there has been an improvement or deterioration in one's everyday habits. Black on white the accuracy of the individual's lifestyle is made visible.

A better school and better expertise

Top Shape has its own manifesto which they convey on the website. It is possible to read the manifesto thinking that the aim is to make schools healthier, but the borderline between what Top Shape considers to be weaknesses in school and what is considered to be deficiencies in students' home environment is indeed blurry. What seems clear however is that Top Shape advocates that school ought to compensate where home environment fails and if school fails too, Top Shape has to step in and help school to live- up to its responsibility as health educator (Toppform 4, 2010).

In today's education debate we talk a lot about knowledge, order and ratings. However,

sedentary, poor diet, too little sleep and too much stress is the cause of many of the problems in school. In Top Shape challenging the school Blossom takes Top Shape to a higher level. Together with parents, young people, schools and a number of key people they are working to improve the health in a ninth grade.

In the quotation above Top Shape defines their own subject position in the discourse as something that is better and more accurate than what school offers. In connection with the criticism of contemporary school environment Top Shape claim that they are experts on health education. The approach can be compared with results from Eva Bolander study of the edutainment series 'Ask Olle', a Swedish television show on sex education and

advice to adolescents. In her study she notes that the program Ask Olle describes itself as "the program that succeed where sex education often fails" (Bolander, 2009; Heimer, 2003).

Similar to Ask Olle, Top Shape emphasize that they are appointed experts on education in school environment. In Ask Olle this is done by emphasizing that the expert Olle has a background as a teacher and that he used to lecture in schools about sex education (Bolander, 2009). Likewise to Ask Olle the participating experts in Top Shape are presented with titles and their professional background. This creates legitimacy for their role as experts (Fairclough, 2003). As an example, on the website there is a link that says "Who are you Johan Plate?" (one of the experts) following an introduction of Johan Plate:

Image 2 Governing strategies when introducing the experts

Plate's professional background as a physical education (PE) teacher is highlighted and underlined. Even, more important is how Top Shape emphasize that he is more than an "ordinary" PE teacher. This is brought forward in a statement where Johan Plate says that he has realized that the conditions and skills in school in general are not enough to help youth's develop well-being and healthy lifestyles.

Like many other pictures on the website Plate meets the viewer's gaze with a smile. The visual intimacy is reinforced by a heading that gives the impression of a call. "Who are you Johan Plate?". The personal approach is

also reinforced by a statement in first person later in the text. The intimate and everyday tone breaks the factual narration in third person featuring Plates career. In the preamble Johan Plate is presented with both first and last name but in the continuing text only last name is used which corresponds to, for example, the authoritarian text. The presentation of Johan Plate is an illustrating example of how Top Shape uses the shift between intimization and the expert role to build confidence in relation to the recipient (Fairclough, 2003). The authoritarian style builds up his status as an expert. The more personal and reflecting approach is e.g. used in text when Johan Plate

is reflecting on his approach to the project (Toppform 7, 2010):

It is through the hints and maybe a little trick that he now takes on and will help young people in Top Shape class. It appears to him that this is something he is passionate about.

- I said yes right away, Plate says smiling. I like young people in this age. They have that charming mix of adult and children. It creates wonderful opportunities to influence their view of mental processes and their performance. My role is to act as a mental coach and advisor to students but also for educators and parents in this project.

The combination of expertise and testimony about his commitment to youth, education and psychology build up the ethos of Johan Plate which communicates authenticity, commitment and reliability (Fairclough, 2003). As, stated earlier, ethos is the results of interaction with the viewers and it is created both through direct statements as

well as through actions. Plate has his ethos built up by his earlier profession as a PE teacher which creates intertextual linkages to the arena of education. This same strategy is used in the program *Ask Olle* to build up the ethos of the expert Olle. Old instruments of rhetoric used in a new social context (media) with a possibility to reach and influence so many more than in direct and personal interaction (Fairclough, 1995).

Identification and intimization

On the website there is a section called "school library". In this section it is possible to learn more about the students in the class. The information is, of course, based on what Top Shape defines as interesting. In short, the viewer get to know the following; what the participating students think about school food, what they eat for breakfast, what they do in their spare time, how they relate to school sports and class, what educational program they would like to go to when starting upper secondary school and what they think they will be doing in ten years.

Image3 Strategies in introducing the pupils

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'Toppform' website. The browser's address bar shows the URL <http://svt.se/svt/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=93242&a=1139382>. The website header features the 'TOPPFORM' logo and the tagline 'UTMANAR SKOLAN'. Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for 'mat', 'träning', 'miljö', 'inre balans', 'testa dig', 'spela', 'kontakt', and 'se toppform | skolarkivet'. The main content area is divided into several sections. On the left, there is a large photo of a young man, followed by the text 'Burim tycker till om...' and 'Skolmat'. Below this, there are sections for 'Frukost', 'Fritid', 'Gymnasieval', and 'Klassen'. On the right, there is a 'Nyhetsbrev' section with a form for email sign-up, a 'Klassen' section with a photo of a young man, and a 'Mentala coachen' section. At the bottom right, there is a 'svt Rapport' section with various news items.

The presentations follow the same logic as the presentation of John Plate and the other experts, with the difference that there are no attempts to build an expert status through a voiceover. As the experts, the students are presented with an image consisting of a portrait (close-up) where the person looks straight into the camera but the style of the text is different, creating another discourse of personal identities and possibilities of identification (Fairclough, 2003). The written presentation follows a

standard template of questions. The given answers are written in colloquial expressions such as "grilled cheese" instead of "sandwich", or "hang and chill with my friends." This format gives an impression of intimacy, which creates an opportunity for the viewer to identify with the pupils. This is explicitly stated on the website with the words "you will meet others who are in the same situation." The term "you" suggest an increased intimization of the messages, the recipient feels noticed or singled out (Eriksson, 1993; Fairclough, 1995;

Fairclough, 2003). A recipient who can identify with the message or the designated group is much more likely to adapt to governing strategies than a recipient who does not identify with the message or the image of the designated group that the sender conveys (Kjeldsen, 2006; Rose, 1999a; Rose, 1999b; Fairclough, 1995). By representing diverse viewpoints, personalities, different social status, different ethnic backgrounds, a mix of gender and different health record the viewer is offered a wide range of identification options, which increases the possibility to influence the recipient (Fairclough, 1995).

The course of action builds up a community of viewers and students at two levels: first, by the way viewers can follow the students through presentations on the website and programs. Here, the viewer is offered the opportunity to identify with the students as individuals with characteristics that he or she will recognize. The students stand in as friends who share the same goal. Secondly, the material on the website creates an order of discourse where viewers and students are provided with an opportunity to share the same doctrine, (Fairclough, 2003). The shared conviction serves as a framework for their actions. This framework will reward certain behaviors that are desirable and exclude or punish behaviors and opinions that are undesirable (Foucault, 1993; Fairclough, 2003).

Conclusions

Although Top Shape was broadcasted in Sweden it is not exclusively a Swedish phenomenon. TV shows with similar content and communication strategies are broadcasted worldwide. Top Shape creates a community for those who follow the show, a community that is disconnected from the national and geographical boundaries, as well as time limits. The community is based on health, in which exercise and healthy food are important cornerstones. I interpret the activities in Top Shape as an upbringing into a discourse. In this case it is the discourse of a healthy lifestyle. Note, that it is not any healthy lifestyle - it is a healthy lifestyle within the rules and standards that experts in "Top Shape" believes to be right. As the recipient accepts the message, he or she also chooses to deny other perspectives and agrees with Top Shape's definition of right and wrong. In other words, the recipient submits to the discursive conditions and governing strategies (Foucault, 1993; Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough, 2003).

The governing strategies in Top Shape are in line with the governing strategies of the advanced liberal society analyzed by the British sociologist Nikolas Rose. According to Rose the increasing influence from the market in society has changed the traditional role of institutions and created new relations to expertise. An increasing number of governmental institutions have also been taken over by nonprofit or private providers (Rose, 1999b). Top Shape's school project can be seen as such a takeover of

the traditional institutions informative and educational function. I am referring primarily to their own claim to be better than school, but also on their health establishment grants that may well be seen as an alternative to, or extension of the National Public Health Institute. This also goes along well with what Fairclough describes as genres of governance and the promotional genres which he means have become increasingly popular in contemporary societies. Promotional genres could shortly be described as the marketization of social life, an increased take over, governance of and investment in social life by market interests (Fairclough, 2003).

In this post-modern way of governing the subject plays a central role. It requires active participation of subjects that take responsibility for themselves. Thus, the subject becomes politicized, that is, that there may be a political liability by his/her actions. The system is also based on increased social control where power is increasingly initiated from subject to subject in everyday life instead of being imposed on individuals from authorities. As Fairclough puts it (Fairclough, 2003: 55):

All forms of fellowship, community and solidarity depend upon meanings which are shared and can be taken as given, and no form of social communication or interaction is conceivable without some such 'common ground'. On the other hand, the capacity to exercise social power, domination and hegemony includes the capacity to shape to some significant degree the nature and content of this 'common ground' which makes implicitness and assumptions an important issue with respect to ideology

Like other edutainment programs Top Shape contributes to a loosening of boundaries between the private and the public sphere (Fairclough, 1995), but what makes Top Shape especially interesting is how it unties the boundaries between schools and welfare institutions on one hand and television as an institution on the other. This is e.g. done in Top Shape's section "School Library" which can be read as an informal institution designed by a shared ideology of health. To create this ideology the series use a communication of both practical advices as well as comprehensive and vivid images of societal risks and the failing health status in youth. The advice and information has a semblance of true and rational facts and is supported by the commitment and ethos of the experts which creates a high modality (Fairclough, 1995). Thus, the message served by Top Shape becomes something else than mere moral exhortations (Rose, 1999) it becomes an effective tool of governing and a prerequisite for positive health fosterage.

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