

Sexy Girls, Heroes and Funny Losers

Gender Representations
in Children's TV around the World

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Contents

Preface – How It All Began...	VII
<i>Maya Götz and Dafna Lemish</i>	
Introduction	1
<i>Maya Götz and Dafna Lemish</i>	
1. Gender Representations in Children’s Television Worldwide: A Comparative Study of 24 Countries	9
<i>Maya Götz and Dafna Lemish</i>	
2. “Wasp Waists and V-Shape Torso” Measuring the Body of the “Global” Girl and Boy in Animated Children’s Programs	49
<i>Maya Götz and Margit Herche</i>	
3. Seductive Little Girls on Children’s TV: Sexualization and Gender Relations	69
<i>Jeanne Prinsloo</i>	
4. “Make Her Skinnier, Make Her Curvier”: Sexualised Girlhood in Japanese Cartoons	91
<i>Damien Spry</i>	

5. Heroes, Planners and Funny Losers: Masculinities Represented in Male Characters in Children’s TV	107
<i>Maya Götz, Gunter Neubauer and Reinhard Winter</i>	
6. How Diverse Are Superheroines? Ethnically Diverse Girl Characters in Globalized Children’s TV	131
<i>Elke Schlote</i>	
7. “Without a Family”: Representation of Families in Children’s TV around the World	151
<i>Dafna Lemish</i>	
8. Consumerism and Gender in Children’s Television	169
<i>Kara Chan</i>	
9. “What Really Annoys Me about the Way Girls and Boys Are Portrayed in Children’s Television” Children from 21 Countries Write Illustrated Letters to TV Producers	181
<i>Maya Götz and Margit Herche</i>	
About the Authors and Their Own Favorite Character When They Were a Child	203

Preface – How It All Began...

“Gender representation inequalities in children’s TV. What? That’s still an issue?”

“We have many strong girl characters, more than boy characters.”

Both of these statements are typical responses by children’s television executives and producers when gender representation issues are raised. Yet, from research as well as social perspectives, gender representation is definitely “still” an issue as, unfortunately, both equality as well as diversity “still” need to be worked on intensely in children’s television, as well as in societies, worldwide, in general.

Interestingly, gender representation is an area with substantial potential for collaboration between researchers and TV-executives. As part of a public broadcasting service, the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) at the Bavarian Broadcasting Cooperation in Germany is well-placed to advance realization of this collaborative potential since the IZI mission is to promote quality in children’s, youth and educational television. One very concrete point for such collaboration is to foster sensitive, critical examination of the representations of gender in children’s television. In addition, IZI has long realized that with an increasingly globalized media industry, such a pursuit can only be productive in the long run if it takes place within an international context.

One outstanding opportunity to combine research with praxis, in order to promote social change, is provided by the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL; a biannual festival and workshop with over 450 experts and decision makers of children’s TV from over 60 countries who come together for six days to share their work, to learn, and to discuss such issues. The central theme of the 2008 gathering of the PRIX JEUNESSE, was “Boys, Girls and Television, the Role of Gender”. The 2010 theme was “Celebrating Diversity”. Together, these provided us with a rare opportunity to make a difference with our research results in children’s television.

With this goal in mind, we began to seek research partners in the winter of 2006/2007 by activating our network of colleagues. In the end, researchers in 24 countries agreed to record and code “routine, everyday” television broadcasts for children and to systematically analyze the content. The result of this process is the largest international media analysis of children’s television worldwide performed to date.

The cooperation of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media, with the aid of a generous grant from the Ford Foundation, made it possible for 35 participating researchers to meet in Los Angeles in January 2008. Together with the Geena Davis Institute we organized the Research Round Table on Gender and Media, and also had an opportunity to work closely and constructively with producers.

When the initial results of this global study were presented in June 2008 at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL, the television executives present were, to put it mildly, humbled. Gender-sensitive materials produced for television executives have since been part of 40 to 60 workshops that the PRIX JEUNESSE network runs every year worldwide. In this way, academic work and excellent collaboration within a large international team has actively contributed to the improvement of children's television across the world. We would like to take this opportunity once again to explicitly express our thanks to this committed group.

From an academic point of view it would almost have been a "sin" to interpret and assess this rich sample of children's television from 24 countries by solely conducting general quantitative content analysis and one special analysis that focused on the measures of body images. Accordingly, the next step was to undertake analyses of additional themes, such as the image of the family, the construction of femininity in dramaturgy, the construction of masculinity in successful series, and consumer behavior and themes in the specific genre of anime. Therefore this second phase of the project – *Children's Television Worldwide: Gender Representations* – sought to delve significantly deeper into the investigation of the construction of gender and to share it with over 450 producers at the PRIX JEUNESSE 2010. This book now presents results from both phases of the media analysis.

The entire project would have been unthinkable without the dedication of many people and the international collaboration of partners in 24 countries. We offer our sincere thanks to the leaders of the national teams and their participating members. The compilation of the large data set on over 26,000 TV characters and the statistical analysis that followed would not have been possible without the skill and diligence of Dr. Ole Hofmann and Sebastian Scheer.

Such a project required extensive and efficient administrative organization undertaken by Rosemarie Hagemeister and Birgit Kinateder. Evelyn Reiter did a wonderful job paying exceptional attention to detail and patience in dealing with very busy people and in assembling all the chapters together into a book. The professional editing for language and clarity, in particular of the non-native English contributions, was done by the skillful and dedicated work of Dr. Peter Lemish. We are deeply grateful to all of these professionals.

Finally, we are particularly grateful not only to individual people, but also to the institutions of the IZI and PRIX JEUNESSE FOUNDATION, as well as to the people who have made such institutions a thriving reality for nearly 50 years. These institutions offer the unique possibility of organizing and conducting ongoing research outside of the conventional routes of academic and industry research, as well as sharing the results with television professionals worldwide. Today, when children's media is dominated by the forces of the market and the maximization of profit, these are the institutions that can really make a difference, for the benefit not only of the media world, but for our societies at large.

Maya Götz and Dafna Lemish

Sexy Girls, Heroes and Funny Losers

Gender Representations in Children's TV around the World

“Sexy Girls, Heroes and Funny Losers – Gender Representations in Children’s TV around the World” presents the most comprehensive study to date of gender images on children’s television. Conducted in 24 countries around the world, the study employed different methodologies and analyses. The findings illustrate how stereotypes of femininity and masculinity are constructed and promoted to children. It presents findings that may well require even the most cynical observer to admit that, despite some great strides, children’s television worldwide is still a very conservative force that needs to be reimagined and transformed!

