

Turning Point

Turning Point was produced by Syrian Television, Damascus. It is a documentary film in which four female teenagers are sharing the difficulties they are facing as they go through the physical and psychological changes of adolescence. They also reflect over issues such as communicating with family members, school and society.

Turning Point was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 finalists in the 12-15 category.

International experts' opinions

The international experts were astonished to see the characters of the Syrian girls who were brave and daring. "I guess I didn't think that they could actually be that vocal. When they actually went on to say in reference to sex education, 'Well, why wouldn't people want to teach us this? If they hide the info, how are we going to learn ourselves?' I was kind of blown away" (female expert, Canada). They considered them "outspoken" and inquisitive. "They had some serious questions and things that they want answers for. I don't think societies and cultures can get away anymore with the status quo with these young people. They think, and they are more aware, and it is not so easy to say, 'Well, be quiet because I said so.' You have to actually start giving them some explanations. I liked that one" (female expert, Jamaica). Two female experts from Italy and Philippines found the girls very "natural." There was however a flip side to the audacity of the girls. Some experts pointed out that these girls were not the representative of the majority of the Syrian girls and hence might not be that effective in presenting their messages. "They were really elite. So, they were not representative. Whom could I present such a film to in the country – if not to the elite? It is very limited. I think it was a little bit a pity" (female expert, Germany).

Some international experts thought that this program was very important for parents so that they could understand the reach of the Internet in influencing children. "The dangerous part of the world now is the Internet. Because this can happen; this is fiction, but in the real life this could happen. That is scary. You can do everything on Blogs and Youtube, on every website. Parents – they don't even think about it? They don't know – maybe some parents cannot use the computer, and the children do whatever they want on the Internet. That is where I think this film is very important, especially for the parents" (male expert, Norway). Another male expert from Germany



Figure 1: Girls discussing the changes in their bodies.



Figure 2: Girls like to grow up.



Figure 3: Girls are observing changes in their bodies.



Figure 4: Girls are noticing changes in the clothes they buy.



Figure 5: Girls like to see themselves in the mirror.

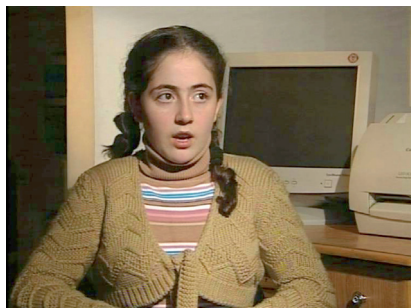


Figure 6: Girls do not know whom to discuss their issues regarding changes in their bodies.

commented, “the whole format itself seems to be more addressed to the parents. They are not going to have the kids sitting there. They are telling the parents: look, females reach the moment of being identified with a sexual desire, and they are becoming aware of it, and the change of reaction of the male population to this. That is the whole undercurrent of this scenario.”

Some also observed that although the program was about girls in Syria the message could be global. “I mean it was Syria, and I was thinking: oh, my goodness; this is Syria. Being an Israeli, and not being too familiar with everyday life in Syria, it was amazing for me to see that the same issues are so typical for anybody studying girls. It is so universally – burning issues. In that sense it was really fascinating” (female expert, Israel).

Many international experts had issues about the target group of the program. Some felt that the program was more appropriate for the adults than children. “I perceived it also as more of an adult program – that the target group is more the adults – the parents and that specific social group and not as a children’s program” (female expert, Germany). Another expert had a similar observation. “With *Turning Point*, I guess my question really is: is it a show for kids or a show for adults about kids? Because I think the message was actually aimed at the adults not at a child audience. They were trying to get a point across to the adults about the way they treat it. For me, I think, certainly in Australia, that wouldn’t be a show for kids; it would be a show for adults about kids” (female expert, Australia).

Many international experts raised the question of gender bias in the program. They thought that the program did not deal with the issues that the boys face. “The boys were dissatisfied, because they also have problems, and they didn’t see themselves in it. Nobody talked about the boys’ problems. It was really more in support of girls than of the boys” (female expert, Ghana).

They also questioned the way the program was scripted as it did not explain the full context of the situations. The program did not provide the details of the families of the characters as a result of which the experts found the situations perplexing and confusing. “I was also missing some kind of context about the families, about the circumstances in which they grow up, because they always had these girls just there as talking heads – and one time in a shop, but otherwise no idea whether they have any brothers or sisters, what their parents think about them. So that was a little weird in a way” (female expert, Germany).

International Youth Jury opinions

In 2010, the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE included the votes of an international youth jury, organized in co-operation with broadcasters worldwide. Teens between 12-15 years of age in seven countries discussed and judged 16 programs in the 12-15 years-old-category. Here is a summary of their discussions on the program *Turning Point*.

The international youth jury from Canada found the program boring and not interesting. Some pointed out that the program was made for girls. “I found it much less entertaining and it was clearly meant for girls, it was OK for our age and the idea was good but the way it was done was boring” (male). Some also questioned the target audience and felt that it was more for the parents than the children. “I think it was more for parents that may not know how their daughters feel. The message was that these girls wanted to be heard by older people” (female). There were also issues related to the production of the program. “I am a bit obsessive with grammar and the typos really put me off and got me irritated” (female). The script did not interest many youth jury members. “The angles were really annoying and even though it covered teenagers, the subjects they were talking about don’t help understand much” (male).

The international youth jury from *Georgia* had mixed reviews about the program. They liked the beginning and the topic of the program. However they thought that there was not enough happening on the screen to do justice to the beginning. “It started very interesting but then it became boring” (male). “There was not enough action, no original scenes” (female). Another female was very direct and suggested that “you don’t solve these problems by talking in front of the camera but by challenging them directly.”

The international youth jury from *Ghana* had mixed opinions about the program. Some found the program “educative” and “informative.” “It was a very insightful documentary because usually girls don’t talk about these kind of things” (male). Some found the program boring and repetitive. “I found it educative so I liked it a little, but I also found it a little boring because they kept on repeating the same thing about how their parents and their teachers gave excuses and how they didn’t understand what was going on” (male). There were also suggestions on how to improve the program. Some suggested, “I would have liked to see more interviews from parents and teachers” (male). Others hoped that the program would provide solutions to the problems discussed in the program. “It was as if they were discussing their problems and what I was expecting at the end was for them to be given answers (female).

The international youth jury from *Italy* understood the program and felt affinity with its message. “I could identify with that girl and I confirm that I feel like that too. Teachers don’t tell you things and neither do parents” (female). They felt that it was a typical program for a young audience. “It’s normal to feel different but they have gone deeper into the subject, telling how tough it is to speak to your parents and maybe to deal with overweight. It was just too long... But I liked that there were interviews and the normal life scenes” (female). However they had suggestions for improving the program. Some thought that such a program should be made for boys too. “Of course they told about girls because they are more discriminated than boys. I miss a program like that in Italy to treat boys’ problems and sexuality” (male). They also had suggestions for their national TV: “In Italy they don’t speak of those things on TV. There are only stupid programs that deal with sexuality. When they want to make you laugh they talk about sexuality” (male).



Figure 7: The program deals with the adolescent problems in girls. Boys are not included in the program.



Figure 8: The program provides an insight into the culture of Syria.

Screenshots from Turning Point © Syrian Television

The international youth jury from *Lebanon* did not have a very good opinion of the program. They felt that the program dragged and was not interesting. “Repetition of the subject and scenes, I felt really bored overall” (female). They also felt that the program was related to the problems of young females and did not concern young males at all. “It is not a guy thing. I think the boys are not interested in it and us, as girls, we don’t really think of those changes that way. Its not a big deal” (female). They questioned the choice of theme as they felt that it was an everyday kind of subject and there was nothing extraordinary about it. “I didn’t feel related to the movie at all, it is not a big deal subject, but I guess I am not living in their position so maybe to other countries it is a big deal. Don’t know, just not interested really” (female). Some also questioned the quality of the production of the program which they felt was not very high: “Sketches and pictures could be more attractive to us, it was boring in general, and I didn’t really care about the subject as well” (male). A couple of youth jury members, however, appreciated the courage of the girls: “some subjects are hard to talk about ... the girls were brave, I liked their courage, especially in Syria” (male).

The international youth jury from *Nepal* offered some suggestions. They noticed that the program featured only the female characters that made the program biased. “All the characters presented in the film were female girls, mom and teacher, so we cannot get a male point of view” (female). They suggested that the program should also focus on the problems and issues that boys had to deal with rather than concentrating only on the problems of females. “Males do feel the same way, as there are so many things that we cannot ask our teachers as well as our parents, and if we ask them they also do not give us the clear answer” (male).

The international youth jury from *Venezuela* liked the program for its bold and natural theme. “That caught my attention as the girls present their point of view regarding the changes that are happening in your body and your mind at puberty” (female). There were remarks that the program targeted primarily girls: “But such programs are more for females” (male).

Target Audience 6,4	Idea 6,8	Script 5,5	Realization 5,2
Average Score per Category by experts' voters at PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010			

Winner of PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 UNESCO-PRIZE