

The Program *Annedroids* Fosters Girls' Interest in STEM Issues

Munich, February 15, 2016– A recent study led by the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI), involving 301 girl and boy participants from the United States of America and Canada, revealed the following: TVO's and Amazon Prime's show *Annedroids* helps increase self-esteem, foster interest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) in girls, and reduce gender stereotypes in girls and boys.

The need for positive role models for girls in STEM areas

There is still a considerable degree of catching up to do in regards to fostering interest in STEM subjects, especially among girls. As scholars have noted, the reasons why girls don't get interested in STEM issues and don't choose their professions from among STEM areas to the same extent as boys are complex. The stereotypical assumption that STEM is – by gender – a strength of boys still prevails, and there is a need for positive role models to demonstrate that girls can be competent in science and technology fields. The media, especially children's leading medium, television, can play a key role in this respect, but so far it is still an exception that girl and woman characters apply technology at all. Unfortunately, children's TV overall misses its gender equality mission especially in what concerns STEM. One of the few exceptions: *Annedroids*, a series showcasing 12-year-old Anne who builds and operates androids and robots. Together with her lively and slightly overweight friend Shania and her Afro-Canadian friend Nick, she experiences various adventures with the technical companions. In every episode, the humorous and child-appropriate plots pick up a STEM-relevant topic.

A study in the U.S. and Canada

In a recent study led by the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television, research was conducted with 301 6-to-12-year-olds (U.S. N=203, Canada N=98). The children watched two episodes of the *Annedroids* series. Before and after watching these episodes, they filled out questionnaires assessing their attitudes toward STEM and girls, positioning in regards to gender stereotypes, specific scientific knowledge, and interest in having various jobs in the future. With open questions and drawings, children gave feedback on the show and its characters. The results of the study give clear indication that the program *Annedroids* helps increase children's interest for STEM issues, with girls in particular benefitting in the process. This is because children have an opportunity to see in this TV series girl characters who are interested in STEM, are skilled in operating new technologies, and are good at problem-solving, and because these characters can serve as role models for girls. Thus, the program makes STEM issues accessible to children by providing access to knowledge that is more restricted for girls than it is for boys due to their gender-specific socialization. The study further suggests that regular viewing of the programs can help reduce gender stereotypes by promoting gender fairness and equality in regards to STEM education and professions – for a small (yet statistically significant) number of children this was the case after watching just two episodes.

Dr. Sorin Nastasia, a contributor to the research and a professor at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, states: “The Annedroids series is successful by featuring fictional characters who show that it is possible to be enthusiastic about and competent in science and technology regardless of gender, colour of the skin, or other social factors.” The lead researcher in the study and director of IZI, Dr. Maya Götz, concludes: “The show offers girls the inspiration that they can be what they want to be and can use technology to make this world a better place.”

The International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television in Munich, Germany conducts empirical research pertaining to children, youth and educational television. In cooperation with international researchers, IZI’s mission is to contribute to the understanding of the cultural meaning of television for children and young people and of the ways that television is embedded in the children’s and young people’s lives.

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