

The dream of taking part in a talent show

New representative survey of 6- to 17-year-olds on their ideas about “the experience of taking part in a talent show like *Pop Idol*, *The X-Factor*, *The Voice* etc.”

Previously, participation in TV talent shows was only possible from the age of 16 or 18. Now, however, formats such as *The Voice Kids* mean that much younger children can also take part in these television shows. In a cooperative study by the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) and the Media Authority of North Rhine-Westphalia (LfM), children and adolescents were asked about how they envisaged the “talent show experience”, how they viewed the presenters, and to what extent they could imagine taking part in a talent show themselves.

Munich, April 5th 2013 – For years, talent shows have held the top places as the most popular TV formats for 10- to 17-year-olds in Germany. They are watched with parents or alone, are discussed in youth media and in the schoolyard. The cooperative study by the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) and the Media Authority of North Rhine-Westphalia (LfM) surveyed on a representative level 1230 girls and boys aged between 6 and 17 about what they thought the “talent show experience” was like for the candidates, if they would like to participate themselves and how they rated the judges and different formats.

Taking part in a talent show is the greatest opportunity in your life

The results show that 80 % of girls and 60 % of boys in Germany watch talent shows regularly. The proportion in households with lower educational background is significantly higher than in higher educated ones. Talent show fans assume that participation in these shows is, for the candidates, the greatest opportunity in their lives, that they are treated fairly, and that they are fine afterwards. They assume that what one sees in the programmes is always exactly what has really happened at the auditions and workshops, and that the candidates are exactly as they appear in the show. What many fans cannot see is how much the media formats stage the participants as particular types and that the stories that are told sometimes bear a close resemblance to soap operas.

Learning how to criticize from juror Dieter Bohlen

Of the German judges, Dieter Bohlen, the juror of the German *Pop Idol* version, is the best known. Even among the 6- to 8-year-olds, three quarters know him. In particular, the boys who like watching talent shows think you can learn how to criticize others from him. From a pedagogical point of view this is definitely problematic since his comments often strike below all belts. The most highly regarded judge is Sarah Connor (*The X-Factor*), and nearly one in two of the girls would like to have her as a coach or mother.

“I’m sure it would be a great experience, and everyone could finally see what I’m capable of”

Of all the children and adolescents surveyed, “only” just under a third of the girls and a tenth of the boys aspire to be a candidate in a talent show themselves. Among the girls who are talent show fans this number rises to more than half. For almost all of them, the reason for participating would be that it would be a great experience and that they would become well-known. Around 90 % would take part because then all their friends would

see them on television, and their parents and teachers etc. could also finally see what they were really capable of. The respondents would most like to audition for the German version of *Pop Idol* (*Deutschland sucht den Superstar*) or the German *Got Talent* format (*Das Supertalent*). They do not realize that a talent show is primarily a professional business which has scant regard for individual sensitivities and sometimes well and truly degrades people.

Desperately needed: awareness and media literacy

The young people who like to watch the format have a distinctly positive view of what participation in a talent show means for the candidates. Particularly children and adolescents from households with lower educational backgrounds (but not only for them) regard talent shows as a huge opportunity for advancement, and they hope for fame and recognition. The desire to be seen and valued as a unique individual is quite understandable. Seeking to fulfil this desire by participating in a talent show is problematic, however. An IZI survey of former talent show participants shows that only a few can use this as a springboard for their individual careers, while for others it is psychologically overwhelming and can lead to years of mockery or even mental illness. There is an urgent need here for more media literacy, in order to see through the staging mechanisms of the format and form a more realistic assessment of the problem areas.

The study will be presented in German at the LfM conference: "Sprungbrett oder Krise? – Erlebnis Castingshowteilnahme" Kompetent beraten in Medienfragen! – SPEZIAL ("Springboard or crisis? – the talent show experience": Giving competent advice in media issues! – SPECIAL) on 30 April 2013 in Essen, Germany.

The research report (in German): "Bestimmt ein tolles Erlebnis!" Repräsentativbefragung von 6- bis 17-Jährigen zu ihren Vorstellungen vom "Erlebnis Castingshowteilnahme" ("Definitely a great experience!" Representative survey of 6- to 17-year-olds on their ideas about the "talent show experience"), authors: Dr Maya Götz, Dipl.-Soz. Christine Bulla, Caroline Mendel M.A., can be downloaded as LfM-Dokumentation 2013, Band 49 (online from 30 April 2013).

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