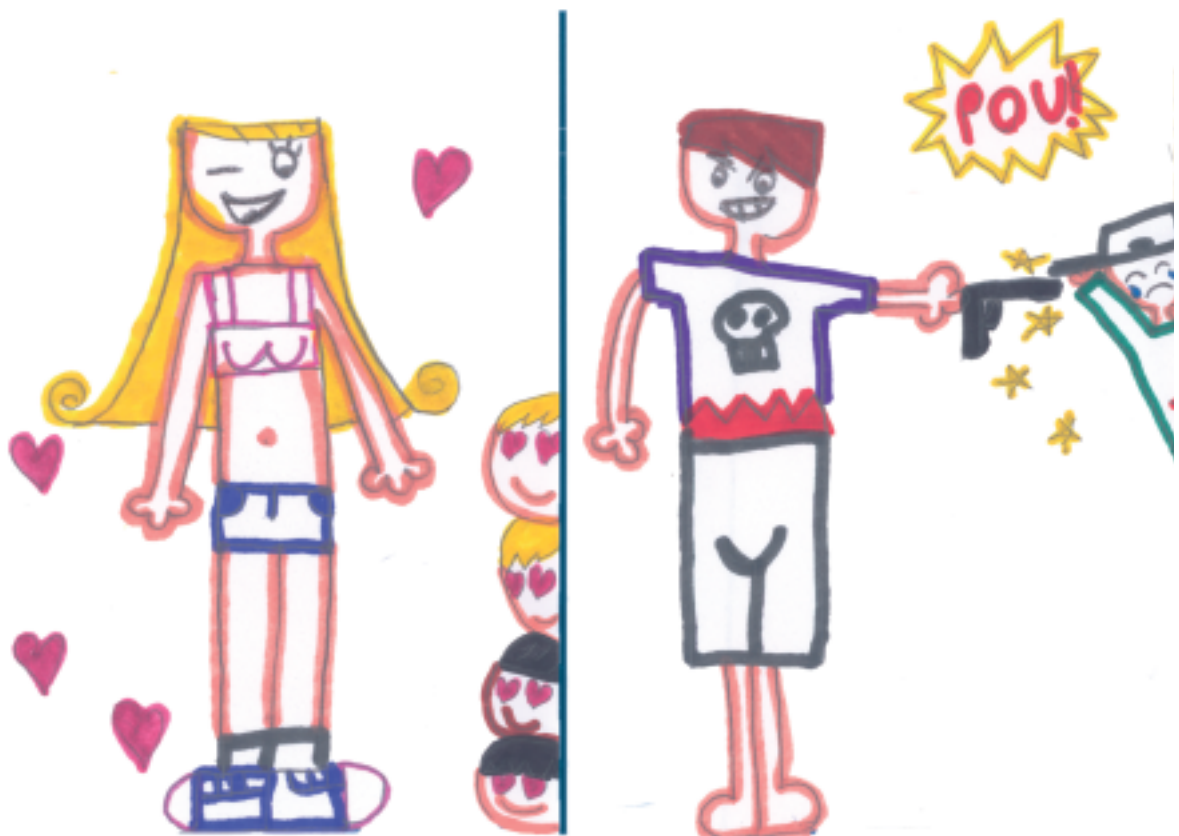


TELEVIZION

Internationales Zentralinstitut für das Jugend- und Bildungsfernsehen (IZI)

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Girls and Boys and Television

The Role of Gender



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The equality of men and women was stipulated in the UN Charter as early as 1945. In 1996, a total of 196 nations committed themselves by contract to equality and to the elimination of discrimination.

An empirical look at children's television, however, soon reveals that with regard to TV programming, the achievement of this goal is still a long way off. Granted, strong female characters are not completely absent, but far more often young and adult men are the heroes in TV programmes. The most comprehensive international analysis of children's television to date reveals an unambiguous tendency: Of all the main characters on children's TV only 32 % are female – in reality, however, women count for 51 % of the world's population.

Why is it that an area identified as educationally so significant for the development of gender images should be characterised by such an imbalance?

Undoubtedly, there are manifold explanations. But certainly stereotypes and TV producers' inadequate understanding of what girls and boys want and need are significant. Another group of producers shift their gender-specific commitment towards boys, who are regarded as a neglected target group hard to reach with quality television.

Regrettably, reception studies into children's and young people's television contribute little to orientation regarding matters of gender mainstreaming. What remains are mainly unanswered questions: What are the problem areas in current TV for children? What are girls and boys looking for, and how do they engage with the programmes offered to them? And, of course, particularly the question: Why do we still encounter stereotypes after 150 years of feminism?

We hope the contributions presented here at the very least will point out a number of provocative aspects and draw attention not only to some problematic issues but also to opportunities for change.

Cover illustration: Carina (girl, 11 years old) from Brazil draws what annoys her about the stereotyped depiction of girls and boys on television.

TELEVISION

GIRLS AND BOYS AND TELEVISION – THE ROLE OF GENDER

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Maya Götz et al.
Gender in children's television worldwide

In the world's largest quantitative media analysis of children's TV so far the main characters of fictional programmes in 24 countries were coded. The results show a clear underrepresentation and stereotyped depiction of female characters worldwide.

Rebecca C. Hains
Are super girls super for girls?

Supergirls populating the screen as active heroines are attractive role models for girls – but it is problematic that even with these characters physical attractiveness is central. A qualitative study from the USA shows how 8- to 11-year-old girls judge the appearance of characters in girl power cartoons and how they relate it to their own body.

Maya Götz
Just pretty, responsible, and compliant?

Qualitative case studies and a representative survey investigated girls' and boys' favourite characters. The results: depending on the action-guiding topics, girls prefer successful, strong, at times cheeky, and tragic characters.

Reinhard Winter/Gunter Neubauer
Cool heroes or funny freaks

One point which has been totally neglected so far in gender research is boys and their preferences concerning TV. For the first time, scientists who research on boys introduce the combined results of their long-time research here.

Maya Götz/Dafna Lemish
Media and the make-believe worlds of boys and girls

This multinational study showed that children integrate media stories into their daydreams. But there is a gender-specific difference: Whereas boys follow the story lines and carry them further, girls take parts out of the original medium and leave out the male hero.

Divya C. McMillin
"When we stop being scared ..."

The diverse TV preferences of Indian teenagers can be ascribed to their gender perspective and their social status, as is shown by this qualitative study. Boys prefer comedians and strong heroes, girls choose TV films and soap operas, according to their social status preferably for entertainment or as standard for their social advancement.

Firdoze Bulbulia
Race, class and TV preferences

Case studies of adolescents from South Africa and their relationships with their favourite TV characters show how gender, age and ethnical background play into the selection and reception of TV programmes.

Corinna Kramp
Performing gender in postures

In this IZI study, teenagers from different countries and cultures were asked to decode photos with gender-specific gestures and to perform their own gender in sitting postures.

Dafna Lemish
What does gender mean?

According to feminist theories gender differences are – unlike the biological differences – socially constructed and modifiable. What could a gender-equitable world in children's TV programmes look like? Producers from all over the world were interviewed, and their views are paralleled with the development of feminist thinking.

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