



Internationales Zentralinstitut
für das Jugend- und
Bildungsfernsehen (IZI)

Different and the Same

A Few Reminders for Children's TV Producers on the Diversity of Children



Recognize the reality of children

Children are different - every child is unique

The 2.2 billion children around the world¹ grow up in completely different circumstances. They have different resources at their disposal, different physical characteristics and social environments, and grow up with different values.



Resources

In every country there are children who are either rich or live in comfortable circumstances and others who struggle with the bare minimum needed for existence. This has fundamental consequences for life resources (nutrition, medical treatment), education (school, leisure time activities), standard of living, etc.

Physical characteristics

Children have different kinds of bodies:

They are small, big, or something in between; well-built for their age, slim, with broad or narrow hips or legs . . . and all of these in diverse combinations.

Their bodies are particularly good at doing certain things, while other things are difficult for them. They are girls or boys or sometimes something in between.

They have different facial characteristics, different colours and shapes of eyes; their hair comes in the most varied shapes, colours and styles . . . their skin colour has varying pigmentation, according to their biological makeup or exposure to the sun – and so on.

Social environment

Children are born into a social environment with a specific cultural context and national identity. Above all, however, they grow up with specific adults and their moral values. They experience their culture's values, social customs, spiritual ideas etc. in their everyday lives.

Every child is unique and valuable. Every child sees the world in his/her very own way and must create his/her own place in the culture he/she is born into. For this, he/she needs self-esteem, curiosity about the diversity of this world and the confidence to shape his/her own environment.

Info: Majority society and marginalized groups

Most societies have a dominant so-called "majority society" which can be characterized by certain features, e.g. men, white, middle and upper class, highly educated, settled in the country for generations. These are the people who hold the power. They usually occupy the most important positions in politics, the economy and the media, and thus consciously or unconsciously set their values as the norm. They define themselves as "normal", and "the others" as exception. And then there are the many others who for various reasons do not hold power. They are marginalized (from the Latin *margo* = edge), even if they may be a large part of society and do not have the same opportunities to share in decision-making and to make themselves and their point of view visible etc. Those producing television are usually part of the majority society themselves; they therefore need to recognize the limits of their own point of view and deliberately broaden it.

¹ Source: www.unicef.org/voy/explore/sowc/explore_1653.html

Image 1: © morgue FILE, 2: © PRIX JEUNESSE, 3: © Alfred Kraweiz/PIXELIO, 4: © piqsde, 5: © Schütz/PIXELIO, 6: © Hofschläger/PIXELIO, 7: © Jerzy/PIXELIO, 8: © Berger/PIXELIO, 9: © PRIX JEUNESSE, 10: © Jerzy/PIXELIO, 11: © Jerzy/PIXELIO, 12: © Marco Kröner/PIXELIO

Recognize the power of TV for children

The meaning of TV is nearly the same

Despite all differences in children's everyday lives, television has quite similar functions in the day-to-day experiences of children. They watch it alone or in the family circle, and it is integrated into the structures and rituals of everyday life. Children are making meaning and use the media as material to build up their so called "inner pictures" of themselves and the world.

A window on the world ...

Television often represents the first (mediated) experience and impressions of "other" human beings and cultures outside their immediate social environment.

... and emotionally involving stories

Television offers stories which involve viewers emotionally. This can anchor what they have seen deep in their consciousness.

... that offers learning opportunities

Television affords diverse opportunities for learning on many different levels and presents various kinds of content.

... and self-image

Children and young people use television and its stories for the construction of their own identities (the "self"), their image of who they are, and of what they can or should do in this world.

... with strong images

As representations, television images are very strong and, once acquired, "inner pictures" are often very resistant to change.

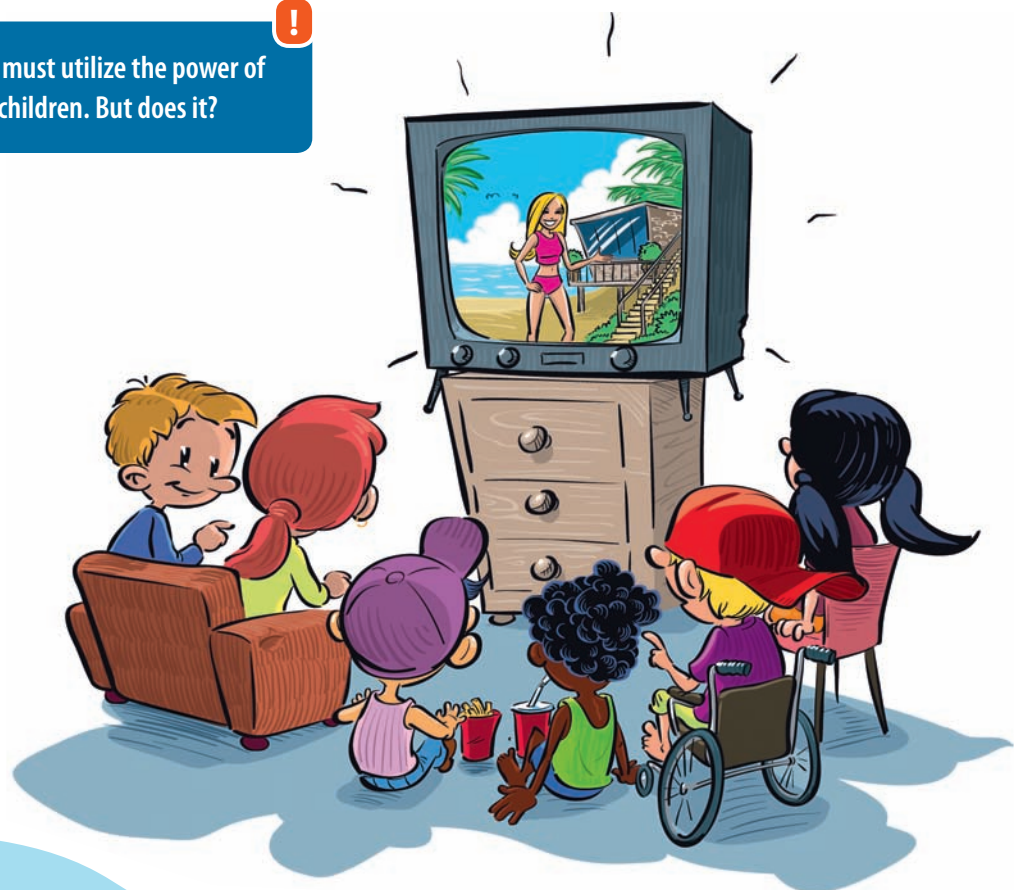
... which seem to tell the truth

Information supplied by television is perceived as accurate and "the truth". Even if one knows that it is not the truth, once it is a part of the inner representation, it is very resistant to change.

... stimulates imagination

Television becomes a springboard for children's fantasies and make-believe worlds. It leaves its mark on their constructions of identity and perspectives for the future.

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Quality children's television must utilize the power of the medium to promote all children. But does it?

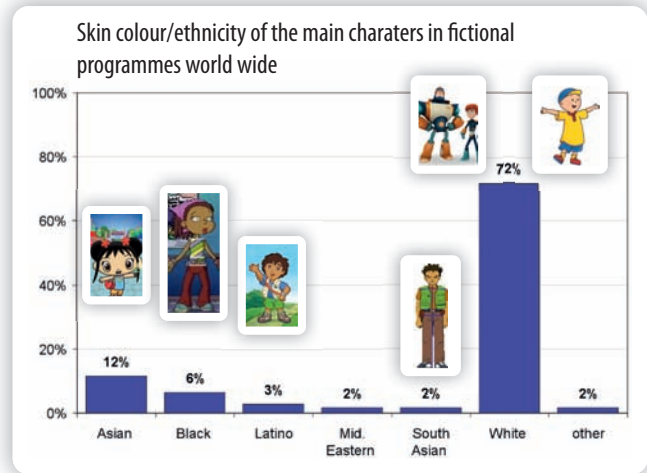


Recognize the reality of children's TV

The heroes of children's TV are usually white, rich, slim ...

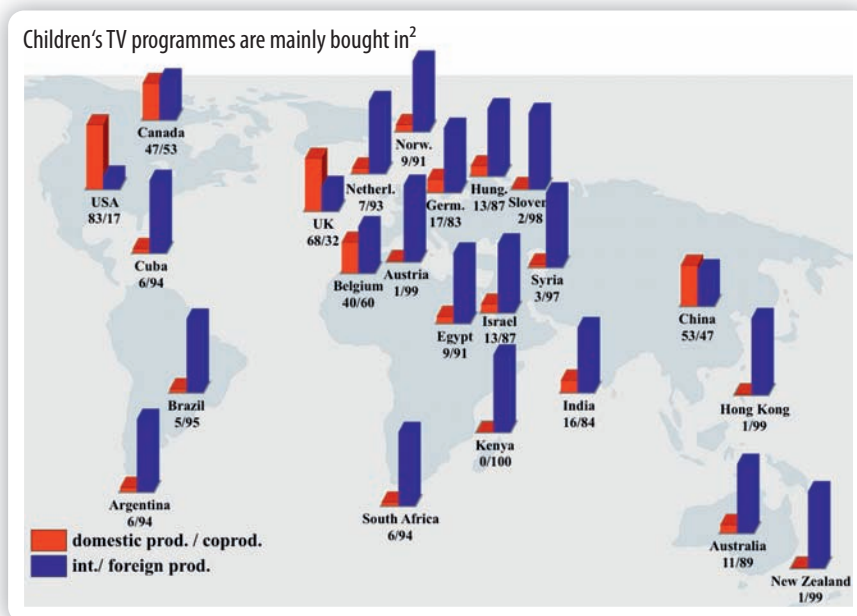
The media analysis of programmes in children's TV in 24 countries gives clear evidence how far away children's TV is from representing the reality. A few examples:²

- Only 32 % of the protagonists in fictional stories are female. In reality, humanity is about 50 % male and 50 % female.
- 72 % of all human protagonists are "white Caucasian" in skin colour. In reality, however, only about 15 % of the world's population has a skin colour like this.
- Less than 1 % of the protagonists in fictional stories are shown with a physical disability or a chronic illness. In reality, this applies to at least 10 % of the world's population.
- In children's TV worldwide, the protagonists mostly live in circumstances corresponding to the middle or upper classes. In reality, not many people worldwide possess these financial resources: 80 % live on less than 10 U.S. \$ a day.³

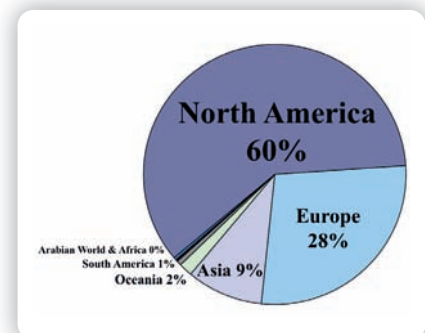


Globalized children's TV

A good part of television programming are the same shows marketed globally. In most countries, more than 80 % of the shows are imported and only a small part is produced in the same country. On the average 60 % of imported programmes originate from North America, especially the USA. The media production itself is – especially in animation – globalized. Projects are often produced in different countries, e.g. for cheaper working conditions. This offers opportunities to come closer together through sharing the same programmes and ideas – but might also flatten the content and the diverse cultural traces in it.



Where the fictional shows of children's TV world-wide are produced (average of 24 countries):²



• Global networks and those who market their programmes worldwide have a great responsibility to take children's diversity seriously.

• Individual regions and countries must seek opportunities to help children understand their specific culture and empower them.

² Götz et al.: Gender in children's television worldwide, Results from a media analysis in 24 countries. TelevIZion, 21/2008/E.

³ Source: World Bank. <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/poverty>

Images: Material of analysis, IZI
Charts: © IZI

Recognize how children „make meaning“ of your programmes

Television and its pictures and stories do not have a direct effect like a mechanism of “stimulus and response”. The process is much more complex and what children get out of a media text depends on many things: Their prior knowledge, discourses in family and peer group, and especially their own individual interpretations and concerns. The media provide “only” pictures, information and stories, but it is the individual who uses it, and every child might take something different out of the same show. Nevertheless, media shape the public discourses and can reinforce certain stereotypes. A few examples:



Kaitlyn, Emily (age 7) from South Africa, Shilpa (age 12) from India draw what princesses look like.

A princess is beautiful, white, and has long, straight hair

When asked “What is a princess like?”, girls all over the world give potentially similar answers: “She is beautiful”, she has “nice hair”, and most of the times her skin colour is white. Even the exotic princesses, e.g. those produced by Disney, offer girls in the USA the chance to imagine themselves as princesses. Girls in Fiji, India or China see themselves as “too dark” or “not good enough” to be a princess in general and a Disney princess in particular.⁴

Images: suffering African children

Images of suffering children are often so emotionally powerful that they block out any other information. In an episode of the successful educational programme *pur+* (ZDF, Germany), for example, the actual subject is a species of mosquito in Africa which transmits a dangerous disease. In parallel with the explanatory text, pictures of African children in hospital are shown. A reception study shows that what sticks in the memory are the images of children in Africa as sick and needy victims.⁵



Emotionally powerful image that blocks out any other information: a suffering child. Is this the intended message?

Political news shape the worldview

An international comparative study in the USA, Israel and Germany clearly shows the parallels between war reporting in the first week after the Iraq war had officially started and children’s perceptions of it. In Germany, the children had access to various news broadcasts, including daily children’s news programmes, which cast a critical light on the war. The children were well informed, all very critical on the war, and showed a high level of empathy for the children in Iraq. In Israel, the war was also much in evidence in the media, especially with regard to necessary safety precautions. This was also reflected in children’s perceptions of the war: gas masks, bombs falling on Israeli houses and the assumption that this war was (also) about Israel. In the USA, where children had no access to children’s news and news coverage at that time was largely superficial and pro-war, the events in Iraq were imagined to be something like a schoolyard fight.⁶



Children in Germany (left): Fathers die, mothers and children get expelled, emphasis on empathy. Children in Israel (middle): Air raids and self-protection in the centre. Children in the USA (right): We were insulted, now we strike back. – What kind of war reporting fosters understanding of conflict and the wish for peace?

In order to use television to support children and adolescents, a nuanced discussion of programming and its reception is essential. Producers, consultants and researchers need to work together closely, not shying away from self-critical debate. Such collaboration and debate should be a part of the planning, execution and evaluation of all quality television.

⁴ Uppal, Charu/Nastasia, Diana and Prinsloo, Jeanne. Both *TelevIZion* 23/2010/E.

⁵ Schlote, Elke/Renatus, Rebecca: *Pur+ aus Kindersicht*. *TelevIZion* 23/2010/1.

⁶ Lemish, Dafna/Götz, Maya (eds.): *Children and Media in Times of War and Conflict*. Cresskill: Hampton Press 2007.

Image 1: © IZI, 2: Screenshot *Pur+* © ZDF, 3-5: © IZI

Recognize Diversity: Ethnic backgrounds and immigration

Researchers distinguish 822 ethnic groups in 160 countries.⁷ In today's world there are an estimated 214 million international migrants.⁸

Being part of an ethnic minority or being a migrant ...

Members of ethnic minorities and immigrants often belong to two or more different systems of reference with more or less different values, norms, and forms of communication. They usually have to learn to communicate in these different systems in a very short period of time. They are often perceived first and foremost as "the foreigners", as "the others". This often goes hand in hand with preconceptions and stereotypes which never do justice to the individual case.



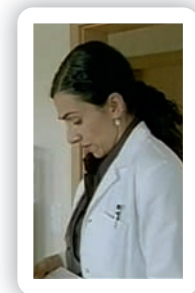
Ethnic minority and migrants in children's TV

In children's TV, characters from ethnic minorities and migrants are shown comparatively seldom. If they do appear, the multicultural background is often at the centre of the character conception. A boy with a minority-ethnic background is above all "the foreigner", and this becomes the central, problem-oriented pivot of the stories. In reality, however, the issue of belonging to an ethnic minority, or having a migrant background is only one part of children's and adolescents' identity, and only one of all the themes that concern them. But there are also positive exceptions.

Dunya & Desie (NPB/NPS, NL) is a positive example: it centres around friendship and teen issues. Dunya's Muslim immigration background is one of many contexts.

Stereotype or counter-stereotype

In the representation of ethnic minorities, stereotypes are often (unconsciously) reinforced. "Muslim women are always being suppressed", "boys with an Asian ethnic background are academic overachievers", and "boys with black skin usually hang around in groups" etc.⁹ This might be true in some cases but of course does not apply to all millions in the same way. The other typical variant: in quality children's television, characters are created as counter-stereotypes, like the tough beautiful Muslim single mom who is a doctor or a lawyer.¹⁰



Semra Koray: Turkish immigration background, single mother, successful doctor – great role model, but also a counter-stereotype.



Diversity only on the surface

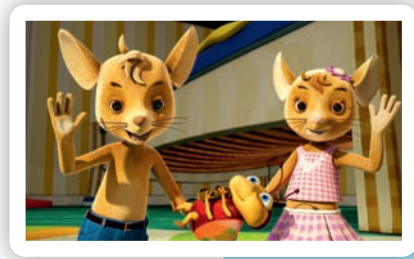
A common strategy for representing various ethnic backgrounds in children's television is to put together a group of characters with different skin colours. Thus, however, diversity is performed only by external appearances (and often follows a stereotypical ideal of beauty, as in Winx Club or Bratz). The characters are usually presented interchangeably, with little reference to their cultural background.¹¹

A White, a Latina, an Asian and a Black girl – this is a good start. But how diverse are these Bratz characters really?

Concrete support is lacking

On the other hand little attempt is made to offer concrete assistance and knowledge which would be useful for children and adolescents living in two systems of reference, e.g. concrete support for language learning in pre-school programming.

JoNaLu (ZDF, DE): Modern attractive stories provide opportunities for language learning and promote openness towards other languages.



⁷ Source: Fearon, James D.: Ethnic and Cultural Diversity by Country. Journal of Economic Growth, 8, 2003.

⁸ Source: United Nations' Trends in Total Migrant Stock, <http://esa.un.org/migration>

⁹ Götz, Maya et al.: Gender in children's TV worldwide. Results from a media analysis in 24 countries. TelevIZion 21/2008/E.

^{10 + 11} Schlote, Elke/Otremba, Katrin: Cultural diversity in children's TV. TelevIZion 23/2010/E.

Image 1: © Steinacher/PIXELIO, 2: Screenshot "Dunya & Desie" © NPB/NPS, 3: Screenshot "Renschwein Rudi Rüssel" © WDR, 4: Bratz © MGA Entertainment, 5: JoNaLu © ZDF

Recognize children's reception

In children's and young people's television there are some characters – not many – whose profiles include ethnic minority status and/or the experience of migration. How do children and adolescents deal with this?



Identification character Sipho

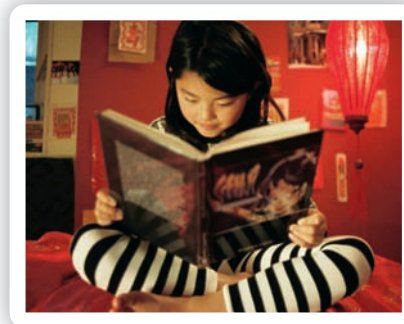
Bongani's life in the township of Soweto, South Africa, is dominated by poverty and violence. Among other TV personalities he admires the black presenter Sipho on Yo! TV (SABC, ZA), because he is respectful, self-assured, and gets easily along with others. The presenter Sipho embodies Bongani's ideals for a better future in Johannesburg. This fosters his inner pictures of a better future through communication instead of violence, and social commitment instead of criminality.¹²

Bongani and his friends, the "survivors", want to make a change in Johannesburg. Moderator Sipho offers a positive perspective: communication instead of violence and criminality.

Identification figure Bo in Genji (KRO Youth, NL)

6-year-old Bo has to assert herself against a bully in her neighbourhood. To do this, she takes the fictional character of Genji, an Asian fighter, as a model. Her own cultural background opens up spaces for the imagination without causing viewer resistance: Colombian children from diverse social backgrounds for example can relate to Bo's experiences and can understand her solution (she learns Aikido, then bravely confronts her opponent).¹³ This gives children the courage to stand up for themselves and others.

Character Bo is bullied by a bigger boy, but is taking action. Colombian children can relate to her experiences.



Systematic language support

While watching the pre-school series JoNaLu (ZDF, DE), a lot of children with and without migration background are joining in the singing and dancing on a very empathic level. The words that are connected with rhythms and rhymes are learned easily. This strategy called "Total Physical Response", well-known in learning theory, makes it easier for the brain to memorize new words.¹⁴

Learning new words while being actively in motion.



A group of children with Russian migration background is watching the story of the three heroes Jo, Naja and Lu on an adventure tour. When a mole who speaks a few words of Russian appears, the kids first cannot believe what they are hearing and get very excited. The mole can speak both languages just like them! That fosters their self-esteem.¹⁵

Children with Russian immigration background experience excitedly a TV character on German TV who also speaks some Russian words.

Diversity for quality television means:

Offering strong, unique characters with diverse backgrounds who empower viewers and embody different perspectives. Providing all children with many opportunities for connection and identification.



¹² Götz, Maya: Black, white or Turkish? TeleviZion 23/2010/E

¹³ Trujillo, Adelaida/Albert, Katharina: Genji. TeleviZion, 23/2010/E

^{14 + 15} Holler, Andrea/Unterstell, Sabrina/Götz, Maya: Supporting language learning of preschoolers with and without immigration background through TV. IZI study 2010.

Recognize Diversity: Gender

From birth onwards, children grow up either as girls or boys.¹⁶ In addition to their physicality (sex), they acquire the socially constructed meanings of gender. Their observations of how their father, mother, siblings etc. perform their own “doing-gender”, the relationships and hierarchies they experience in everyday life, the feedback they receive from others – and television, too – all shape their conceptions of what it means to be a boy or a girl.



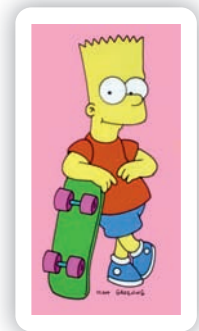
Being a boy in 2010+

In many cultures, a number of opportunities and perspectives are open to young boys. However, a great deal is also expected of them. They are supposed to be assertive, achieve something, stand their ground, be active, tolerate pain, etc. Women’s strivings towards equality, which vary from culture to culture, bring with them uncertainties which should not be underestimated, for men in general but also for young boys. What were previously apparently stable social roles, such as that of the man as breadwinner or his status as head of the family, undergo change. Positive redefinitions of men – as those responsible for the everyday raising of children, or those who also do the housework, still have to be developed.

Images of men and boys in television

Overcoming challenges, clearing all hurdles through physical strength or intellect – or simply cheekily sneaking underneath them: These are the typical formulas for boy characters in successful children’s television today.¹⁷ The behaviour of many male characters, both men and boys, is typically characterized by activity, aggression and violence. This is particularly true of rather traditional images of manhood as “reduced personality” like the lonesome cowboy, the eternal warrior, who never ever could live a mentally healthy life in reality.

Cleverly sneaking underneath all challenges. Definitely funny, but is this the only way to be a “cool” boy?



Gender images in conflict with everyday life experience

In their day-to-day experience many boys encounter women who are competent and (at least compared to them) very powerful. Particularly amongst pre-school children, moreover, girls are superior in many subject areas. And yet television presents them with images of the unquestioned dominance of men.

Veith, 10 years (with migration background) draws his role model: Son Gohan from Dragonball Z who can fight to save the world without getting tired. But is striking back always helpful?

Boys are valuable, too

While the image of the princess as a means to define oneself as valuable “by birth” is available to girls across all cultures, no equivalent is available to boys. Even in classic stories boys must first prove themselves, and only acquire value through achievement and struggle. But: all children are valuable simply because they exist – this should also include boys.

Princess Lillifee is valuable just because she exists. Why do boys always have to prove themselves and fight to acquire value?



¹⁶ Approx. 1 in 2000 is “intersexual”. Source: www.isna.org/faq/frequency

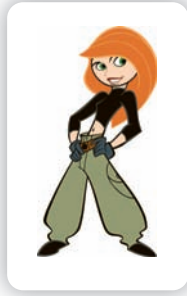
¹⁷ Winter, Reinhard/Neubauer, Gunter: Cool heroes or funny freaks. Television 21/2008/E.

Image 1: © morgue FILE, 2: Simpsons © PRO7, 3: © IZI, 4: © Coppenrath Verlag, Münster, Germany; Ill. M. Finsterbusch

Recognize Diversity: Gender

Being a girl in 2010+

In many cultures, girls are growing up with increasingly greater opportunities and perspectives. A great deal is expected of them. They are supposed to be hard-working and successful and to behave responsibly. The pressure to succeed, however, is also accompanied by traditional values, above all by the need for being nice, clean and attractive for others in their external appearance. With puberty, at the very latest, erotic attractiveness to the opposite sex becomes the vital marker of self-esteem.



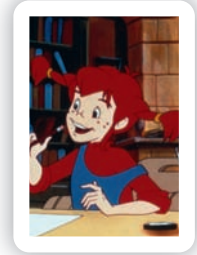
“Add-on” heroines

Strong, independent girl characters do exist, above all in quality programmes. However, they are often constructed according to the “add-on” principle. They are loved by all, successful in school, able to save the world, ultra-competent and – it goes without saying – outstandingly beautiful and slim, with long wavy hair. This fosters the pressure to be always and everywhere the best and compared to reality it means never being good enough; a clear trap for identity.

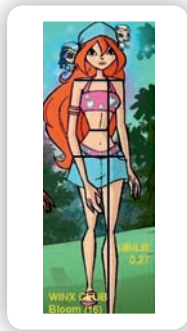
Kim Possible: A strong girl as secret agent and ultra-competent heroine. But why does she have to be so slim, beautiful and with wavy hair to save the world?

Sexual attractiveness versus “tomboy”

Two types of girls dominate children’s TV: the “typically girly” girl (the proper girl) and its counter-stereotype, the “tomboy”. Depending on her age, a “proper girl” is: preoccupied with her external appearance, concerned about her sexual attractiveness to boys, and bitchy towards other girls. The girl who is not “proper” (tomboy), therefore, is wild, strong, tough and usually red-haired.



Counter-stereotype to the “girly girl”: adventurous, strong girls like Pippi Longstocking. But why do they always have to have red hair?



Unattainable body figures and hypersexualization

Two out of three girl characters in animation currently circulating on the worldwide television market have a wasp-like figure and excessively long legs, exceeding even the proportions of Barbie dolls. These are adult erotic fantasies which by-pass the interests of children: girls and boys do not want this kind of hypersexuality.¹⁸

Measuring the body of a female hero: A slim young woman in reality has a hip-to-waist ratio of 0.8. The heroines of Winx Club have a hip-to-waist ratio of 0.36. Is there any space for organs or a backbone?

Western images and issues predominate

Overall, Western values and issues (also) predominate when it comes to images of girls and women. Life-determining situations with which girls are confronted in many parts of the world, even in 2010+, such as being denied an education, being married off to a stranger, being forced to take the whole responsibility for children and household, and, still worse, prostitution or genital mutilation, are not mentioned.

Positive exception: A documentary on the Egyptian girl Fatma, finding a way to finally go to school and learn how to read and write.



Diversity for quality television means: Helping girls and boys to live their own individuality, to cope with gender specific challenges, and helping them to get over it – rather than making it worse.¹⁹

¹⁸ Götz, Maya; Herche, Margit: The global girl’s body. In: *TeleviZion*, 21/2008/E.

¹⁹ Götz, Maya et al.: *Girls and Boys and Television. A few reminders for more gender sensitivity in children’s TV.* IZI 2008.

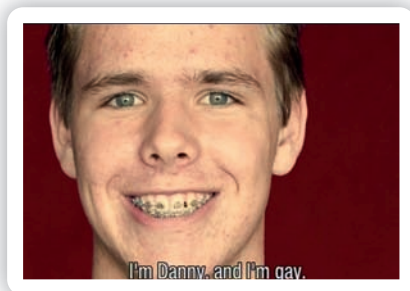
Image 1: © Sabine Meyer/PIXELIO, 2: Kim Possible © Disney, 3: Pippi Langstrumpf © ZDF, 4: Videoprint, material for analysis, 5: Fatma © Egyptian Radio and Television Union, Cairo

Open your mind to Diversity: Homosexuality

In puberty, young people become more aware of whom they are erotically attracted to. At the age of 10 to 13 they begin to think more seriously about their own sexual orientation. 5 % of people discover that they are attracted to a person of the same sex. In this respect it is a relevant theme for children's television, since children develop these feelings in puberty.

Being a gay teenager ...

When teenagers discover that they are interested in the same sex, they often perceive themselves as "different from the others". Many find it hard to admit these feelings to themselves, especially if they fear rejection from those around them. Many adolescents are afraid of the reaction of their peer group and family, and also of society's disapproval. They therefore wait a long time before telling others – if they dare to "come out" publicly at all.²⁰



14-year-old Danny knows that he is gay since he is 12. He wants to make the situation of gay teens known to the public.

Danny's Parade (NPO/NPS, NL): a teenager with a mission

Danny is not ashamed of being gay, and organizes a boat on the canal parade in Amsterdam to draw attention to gay adolescents under 16 years of age.

A reception study (Germany) shows that because Danny himself is 14, he is a believable protagonist for both gay and non-gay teens. Gay adolescents perceive Danny as someone who gives them the courage to go their own way. For non-gay adolescents, the question of Danny's coming-out is exciting and important: how can others of the same age as themselves be so sure of their orientation?²⁰

Adolescents on the international jury for the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2008 also reported, that they had not yet been confronted with this theme, and that, for some, homosexuality was a taboo in their countries.²¹

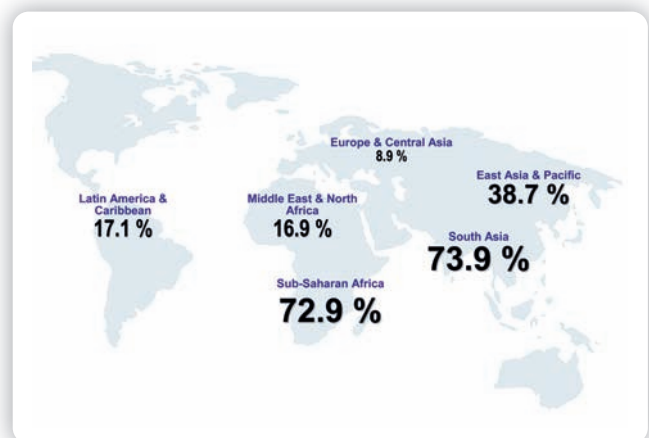
Diversity for quality television means:

Accepting other sexual orientations as such; not letting this mark of difference prevent us from recognizing the similarities between us all, and from drawing inspiration from the uniqueness of each individual.

Recognize Diversity: Poverty

Children's everyday lives are very different in different parts of the world. 2.7 billion people, i.e. 40 % of the world's population, live on U.S. \$ 2 a day or less.²³ But even child workers, in Pakistan for example, watch television as far as their daily life allows it. They too see programmes in which wealthy, upper-middle class living standards are taken for granted.²⁴

In public discourse in recent decades, there has been an increasing tendency to downplay the social conditions producing poverty, to present poverty as individual failure, and to blame people living in poverty for their own situation. Various clichés are cited, e.g. that people living in poverty cannot handle money – although studies clearly show that those with the smallest income often manage their finances with great ingenuity.



Percentage of population living with less than U.S. \$2 a day²²

²⁰ Schlote, Elke/Schreiner, Matthias: Teens, sexual diversity and TV. TelevIZion 21/2010/E.

²¹ Schlote, Elke/Schreiner, Matthias: Danny's Parade. TelevIZion 22/2009/E.

²² Source: World Bank, www.worldbank.org

²³ D. Collins, et al.: Portfolio of the poor. How the world's poor live on \$2 a day. Princeton Press, Princeton/Oxford 2009.

²⁴ Rashdi, S.I./Khooharo, A.A./Memon, R.A.: Working children and TV in Pakistan. TelevIZion 21/2010/E.

Recognize Diversity: Health

Being healthy means more than physical wellbeing and the absence of illness. We are all somewhere on the spectrum between good and poor health. Over 10 % of children and adolescents worldwide live with physical and mental disabilities and even more with chronic illnesses.²⁵



The Buddyz on the move (SABC, ZA) help their friend who is HIV+, and give her a mobile phone to stay in touch.

Being a child or teen with a disability or chronic illness ...

Children and adolescents with chronic illnesses and disabilities are confronted with many difficulties and obstacles in everyday life. Often they are intensely aware of their limitations. And yet: they too are so much more, in their identity and abilities, than “just disabled and ill”. Other people, however, usually reduce them automatically to their disability, or exclude them because they see them as a danger to their own health. This is exacerbated by preconceptions and fear of contact. What is needed here is information, to help people cast off their preconceptions and understand the wider context.

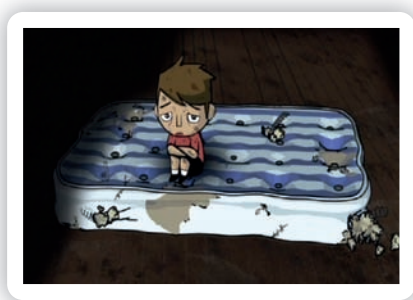
The cool athlete in the wheelchair: Desperados (CBBC, UK)

The fictional series follows a youth basketball team. Apart from wheelchair basketball player and Paralympics star Ade Adepitan all other team members are equally portrayed by disabled actors. The disability is given central importance. In a reception study non-disabled boys can easily relate to the sports theme – and to the conflicts which protagonist Kyle has with his mother over unfinished homework.²⁶

The children’s jury of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2008 declared Desperados the best quality programme of the last 2 years.



Boys and girls pursue their passion for basketball and make a cool and highly skilled team.



Dillon tells his true story of being neglected by his parents. He is protected through the animation style.

The Wrong Trainers (BBC, UK): make young people think

Poverty is also an issue in developed countries. The Wrong Trainers from the UK is an animation programme which tackles the sensitive issue of child poverty by presenting six children and their stories in a very unique way with different animation styles. The programme was a PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL winner in the category 7-11 non-fiction.

In a reception study 11-/12-year-old children were emotionally moved by the programme and expressed strong feelings of sympathy and concern. Some critically questioned their own actions, concerning bullying at school or social marginalization. At the same time, the programme also aroused fear of losing their own social status and reinforced them to increase their efforts: “Always study at school in order to get a job and to have money!”²⁷

What does it mean for children and adolescents to grow up in these contexts?
How does it affect their self-image and the value they ascribe to their family and their culture?
How can quality television give support here, and empower children and adolescents?

²⁵ Source: WHO: world Report on disabilities 2010

²⁶ Schlote, Elke/Schreiner, Matthias: Desperados. TelevIZlon 23/2010/E.

²⁷ Schlote, Elke/Schreiner, Matthias: The wrong trainers. TelevIZlon 22/2009/E.

Image 1: Buddyz on the move © South African Broadcasting Corporation, 2: Desperados © CBBC, 3: The wrong trainers © CBBC

Understanding the possibilities of TV and film

Every child is unique and sees TV with his/her very own eyes. So on one hand TV viewing is very individual. On the other hand there are many similarities between children of the same age across the world. They laugh or do not laugh about certain jokes, they enjoy the same stories and characters although they live in different circumstances. Differences in their reception occur for example because of specific knowledge and sensitivities based in different cultures, and much depends on what children are used to watch.

But children have more in common than they are different when it comes to TV watching and making sense of it. Children look for stories which they understand, which help them deal with their identity themes and which make them feel good.



Pre-school documentary *Nana paints his face* (KRO Youth, NL): A well-told documentary on a child doing something competent and authentic. Children from all over the world watch intensely.

Identity themes

One reason among others why certain stories and characters captivate children all over the world is that they communicate with them on a deeper level. A story is emotionally moving and fascinates children if it touches "identity themes" and offers "reception spaces" to deal with it. Typical identity themes of children up to approx. 10 years are for example:

- Being small but valuable
- Enjoying autonomy and being afraid of being left alone
- What is right or wrong
- Developing relationship and friendship
- Being a girl—being a boy
- Existential questions like death and birth

Children are able to use TV to deal with these themes if the story is told from a child perspective and offers an enjoyable "reception space". For example the story of *SpongeBob* (NICK) helps children deal with questions of friendship or overstepping rules. *Vicky the Viking*, a little red-haired boy has a similar function (see below). These themes can be told with many motifs.



Successful stories and characters (motifs) link to children's identity themes (which lie on a deeper level). We are the ones who choose the motifs.

Two case studies: Motif TV character Vicky as a symbol

Paul (age 9) is currently busying himself with the question of "growing up", having more freedoms, but also more responsibilities. This is easy and difficult at the same time, as one has to make up one's mind about what is right or wrong again and again. Currently, his favourite TV character is Vicky (Vicky the Viking). "He is the smartest, he always comes up with a great idea", and Paul has learned from Vicky: Violence and overestimation of one's capabilities do not help, but wits and courage do. For him, Vicky is the symbol of how one should behave in difficult situations.



Lela (age 8) is physically small and selfconfident. Her favourite TV characters are Jerry (Tom and Jerry) and Vicky, "the little child of the Viking boss". Lela witnesses herself as a competent small being and preferentially searches for characters that reflect this experience. She enjoys being a girl and virtually looks for small, canny girls that offer help within their community. But unfortunately she could only find Vicky, whom she considered a girl at the beginning.²⁸

Children can connect to a motif if it touches on identity themes that lie on a deeper level. But it is especially empowering to children (and raises their self-awareness) if they find themselves and their own diversity represented on TV.²⁹

²⁸ Götz, Maya (ed.): Die FernsehheldInnen der Mädchen und Jungen. Forthcoming.

²⁹ Götz, Maya: Black, white, or Turkish? TelevIZion 23/2010/E.

Image 1: © KRO Youth, 2-7: © IZI, 8: © IZI, 9: © IZI

Recognize the reception of TV

Typical relationships between children and TV characters

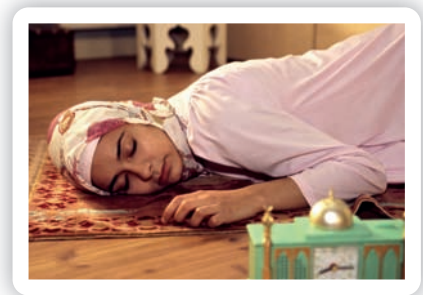
When watching TV or films, children and young people develop typical forms of relationships with the characters of the media text. Often they have one or two “connecting characters”, and develop a relationship often described as “identification”. Children and young people recognize similarities, empathize with the character, and view the narrative or plot through their eyes. Such similarities may be recognized on several different levels:

- Looks/atmosphere
- Social situation (“I’m always the odd one out, too.”)
- Plot formula (“I too always try to do the right thing.”)
- Qualities/preferences (“I like football, too; and I’m often very tired as well.”)
- Subject matter (“I too keep asking myself how to be a cool girl.”)

It is not absolutely necessary that the similarity exists on the level of concrete motifs (the same hair colour or length, situation at school, etc.), but rather that it exists on a symbolic level (a smaller creature uses its wits to assert itself against bigger creatures. . .). From the perspective of the connecting character, children often evaluate other characters according to the extent to which they prove to be “ideal friends”, “ideal partners”, “ideal mothers”, and so on. Often there are also characters from whom viewers distance themselves. They project everything they would not like to be onto these characters.²⁸

Yagmur, the strong conservative Muslim: humorous, but not a “connecting character”

The comedy series for young audiences Turkish for Beginners (ARD, Germany) is centred around a German-Turkish patchwork family. The 16-year-old daughter Yagmur is a devout, practising Muslim and positions herself within the family through her critical stance. This provides many comic moments, e.g. when she has to share a room with her new sister Lena, who is much less inhibited. Reception studies of the programme show, however, that adolescents from both migrant and non-migrant backgrounds distance themselves from Yagmur’s: neither do girls – from migrant or non-migrant backgrounds – want to be like her, nor would boys – from migrant or non-migrant backgrounds – want their girlfriends to be like her.³⁰



Yagmur is a strong character committed to traditions of her cultural background. But why isn't she portrayed as a more fun personality?



Alex does it right, Murat does it wrong

11-year-old Jens from Germany is looking for images of helping and help: He wants to become a pilot of an air ambulance and is interested in images of “being a man” and being accepted by his peers without being “big-mouthed”. This is why he likes the medical drama series St. Angela (ARD, Germany). He admires captain Alex and distances himself from Murat who has a Turkish immigration background and works as a doctor’s assistant. Jens criticizes Murat as showy and big-mouthed, “quite German-Turkish, he is a macho.” What is more, Murat often fails in his attempts to help.²⁸

Why do positive immigration characters like Murat (middle) – who could offer new perspectives on male gender roles – have to be “failures” and “losers”?

For quality television it is necessary to use the power of the medium in such a way that children learn openness towards themselves and other cultures. This means among other things to look for opportunities to tell stories not only with characters from the dominant groups. It is important to deal extremely sensitively with the positioning of characters from marginalized groups, so as not to unconsciously reinforce the existing stigmatization of minorities.

³⁰ Schlote, Elke/Spieswinkel, Anne: Typisch deutsch, typisch türkisch - ist das komisch? TeleviZion 21/2008/1.

Image 1: “Türkisch für Anfänger” © ARD/Hardy Spitz,
2: “St. Angela” © ARD/Thorsten Jander

Recognize the possibilities of TV and film

As human beings we – of course – need food, physical integrity, reliable caring people, reliable homes, etc. Beyond these basic needs, we have further needs (as identified by humanistic psychology), if we are to experience ourselves as whole and healthy personalities:

The need

- ...To be loved for one's own sake
- ...For respectful treatment
- ...For autonomy
- ...To experience oneself as competent
- ...For resonance to what we feel and do
- ...For orientation and security

Often we do not treat children and young people like that in everyday life.

To save our self, to develop and to organize our daily life and to stay in relationship, we as human beings try to develop a healthy personality. For children, stories and media offer a chance to enrich their inner world and to grow, especially if their real situation is difficult and if they are not treated, respected and acknowledged with the empathy they deserve.

Give children pictures, stories, documentation and information which they can use to develop a healthy personality – especially if they have a more difficult start in life.

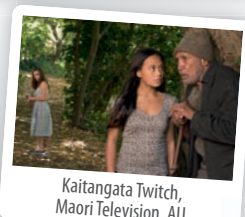
Help them to know, feel or imagine that they are:

- loved,
- proficient,
- can develop a sense for what is right and wrong,
- are allowed to have their own will,
- and that they are seen.

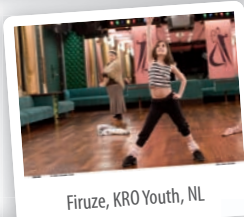
Promote excellence in children's TV – especially in the context of diversity



Neuneinhalb Blind, WDR, DE



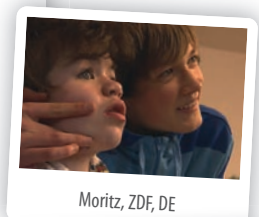
Kaitangata Twitch, Maori Television, AU



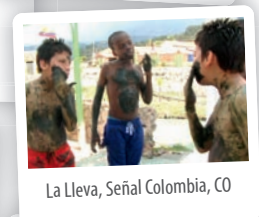
Firuze, KRO Youth, NL



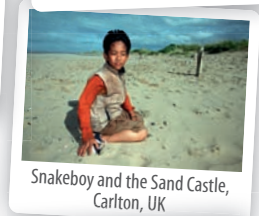
Degrassi, CTV, CA



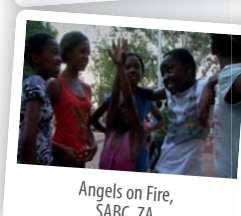
Moritz, ZDF, DE



La Lleva, Señal Colombia, CO



Snakeboy and the Sand Castle, Carlton, UK



Angels on Fire, SABC, ZA



Nobel Pokot Girl, Nation Broad. Division (NTV), KE



My Name is Baata, Mongolian National TV, MN



Takalani Sesame, SABC, ZA



Abi, KRO Youth, NL



AF1, NRK, NO



3rd & Bird!, BBC, UK



Karen in Action, BR, DE



A Special Tour, Canal Encuentro, AR



Habib, SVT, SE

Reminder on Diversity in children's TV

Reflect the real-life diversity

To base your view of children on your personal experience from everyday life (through remembering your own childhood, living with children on a daily basis, etc.) is a good start. But there are completely different children and life circumstances even in your own country.

Travel around and take part in different children's cultures!

Make the whole diversity visible in your programmes!

What is the spectrum of e.g. ethnic diversity, social resources, health, or education in your country and region of the world?

Which themes and challenges arise from this for children and adolescents?

Try not to reinforce stereotypes

TV programmes use particular characters and themes to tell their stories and transmit information. Quality TV must, however, try to reflect stereotypes within its own programming. Extreme sensitivity is required, specially in the case of marginalized groups, to avoid further stigmatizing them.

How are children, women, people with chronic illnesses, disabilities, diverse ethnic backgrounds, experience of migration etc. portrayed in your country's programmes? What can I do in order to tell their stories more fairly or provide better information? Where can I "deconstruct" common stereotypes?

Support marginalized children

Children and young people who do not belong to the dominant "majority society" often have a hard time in everyday life. Limited resources, exclusion, and other people's assumptions about them often make it a great challenge for them to develop a stable self-image and an appreciation for their own family and culture. Children's and young people's television should provide these boys and girls with the stories and characters they need to empower themselves.

Who are the kids that grow up in very difficult situations? How can I help them to live their individuality? What are the needs of children and how can we offer support through TV?

Make use of the uniqueness of diversity

People with experience of marginalization have usually found unique ways of coping with life – these experiences could be the source of stories of empowerment for many viewers. These opportunities to create unique characters from special people and from the narrative traditions of ethnic minorities are underused, particularly in a media landscape which is driven by market forces and thus tends to keep following the same formulae.

Where are the great children from diverse backgrounds who have mastered the challenges of their lives? Which – so far untold – stories do we have in our own culture which can foster the children's development?

Quality in children's TV means to offer spaces

- » to enrich children's emotional and social lives;
- » to help understand oneself and the everyday world the children live in;
- » to enjoy oneself, life and the richness the world offers;
- » to inspire and encourage children to get active in their social environments.

In order to use television to support diverse children and adolescents, a nuanced debate about the programmes on offer and their reception is necessary.

This reminder gives a few basic suggestions on how this can be done.