

# Presenting the same faces in the same roles?

## Gender and typical roles of children's TV presenters in Germany

The gender proportion is also an issue when we take a look at the presenters in children's TV programmes. In this short research article we summarise the results of the analysis of 52 presenters on German public and private channels according to their gender and typical roles.<sup>1</sup>

### *Fewer female presenters, in typical roles*

The disproportion of male and female characters which was observed in fictional programmes, e. g. in the international gender analysis of children's TV (see Götz et al. in this issue) can also be found when we take a look at the presenters in children's TV: Of the 52 hosts 20 are female and 32 are male. This is a ratio of 38.5 % women to 61.5 % men: Females again clearly are a minority on children's TV, on public TV stations as well as on the private ones.

Gender equality at least in a numerical sense was found in less than half of the analysed programmes (43 %) – here, a man and a woman share the position of the host, whereas in 48 % of the programmes one or two males host the programme. Only in 4 programmes (9.5 %), which are all broadcast on public TV, a woman hosts the programme alone.<sup>2</sup>

It is very revealing to take a closer look at the roles female presenters have: Out of these 4 programmes there is only one with a presenter who transgresses a "typical female role", e. g. being emotionally competent, explaining patiently and focussing on communication. In addition to these qualities, the presenter Karen Mark-



Ill. 1: Typical news presenter: Gesa Dankwerth (left) from *neuneinhalb* (ZDF/KI.KA) (right: average of 3 women and 2 men)

wardt in *Karen in Action* plays a more active role. She courageously puts herself in the middle of the action, for example when trying out a new sport.

Taking all the programmes into account, we find an imbalance of the gender of the presenters according to genre: whereas in children's news programmes the ratio between men and women is balanced, in programmes aimed at knowledge transfer and/or entertainment men dominate strongly: Only 5 of the 15 (co-)presenters in explaining and actively exploring roles in knowledge and documentary programmes are female, and the 4 quiz shows on TV are all hosted by men. Here, again, children find "traditional role perceptions" reflected: it's mostly men who can be explorers and scientists – and it takes a man to master an exciting, funny game show.

Another interesting aspect relates to the presenter's age: Most of the few older hosts (15 %) are from the grandparents' generation, and – even more important – all of them are men. It is hard to understand why the po-



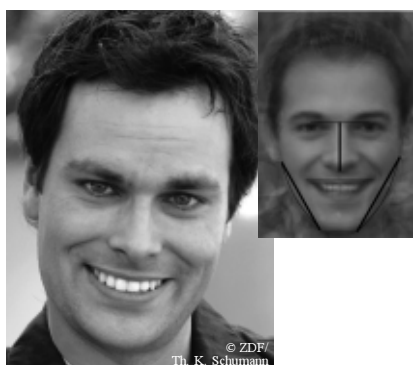
Ill. 2: Typical "explorer": Willi Weitzel (left) from *Willi Wills Wissen* (BR/KI.KA) (right: average of 5 presenters)

tential of elderly hosts is tapped only rarely in children's TV at the moment, considering the popularity "elderly" presenters enjoy among children.<sup>3</sup> It is even harder to understand why there are some roles or role combinations missing entirely, e. g. a female presenter of grandmother's age or a programme co-hosted by presenters of 2 age groups. In addition to that we don't have any presenters of children's age on German television.

### *Typical appearances of male and female presenters*

We could find some striking similarities in the presenter's appearance in connection with the role they play in the programmes. For this, it is necessary to distinguish between "young" presenters who went through a casting and "older" ones who have been in the business for a long time and were not chosen for a programme for their "looks".

In children's news programmes we find presenters with narrow faces and high foreheads, quite long noses and pointed, prominent chins. The 2 male



Ill. 3: Typical male game/quiz show host: Daniel Fischer (left) from *1, 2 oder 3* (ZDF) (right: average of 8)

and 2 female presenters from the programme *logo!* who take turns look astonishingly alike, and Gesa Dankwerth who has her own programme *neuneinhalb* only stands out because of her curly hair (see ill. 1).<sup>4</sup>

There are 10 male hosts in the roles of “explorers” in knowledge and documentary programmes. The hosts who went through a casting can be easily recognised: all have a narrow “egg-shaped” head, a long nose and a pointed chin (see ill. 2). The 4 female presenters in the knowledge and documentary genre do not form one type, however, it stands out that 2 of the 4 women have a visible migrational background, and here we find the single female host who is a bit obese. Therefore, these 3, for one reason or another, stand out from the rest of female hosts as “being different” – in parallel to the traditional notion that “women scientists” are something exceptional. The 4<sup>th</sup> female host, Karen Markwardt, sets herself apart from the other female presenters: not only because she hosts the programme on her own but her features are in line with those of a typical male “explorer”.

The role “host of a game or quiz show” is strongly dominated by men, and the 6 male hosts have typical physical features, too: a broad chin, relatively small noses and broad mouths (see ill. 3).

In preschool programmes and art/crafts programmes we find a tendency of quite rounded faces and small



Ill. 4: Typical preschool/art (co-)presenter : Singa Gätgens (left) from *Mitmachmühle* (KI.KA) (right: average of 6 women and 3 men)

noses in men and women (see ill. 4). And it is only in the category of the “funny hosts” that individualised, different appearances are allowed.

### Conclusion

A long list of criteria put forward by children<sup>5</sup> shows the diversity of reasons why children like certain presenters: In addition to the content of the programme, a humorous presentation, comprehensive explanations, and the presenter’s display of competence and social behaviour are decisive factors for children to watch it.

But as was shown, the presenters’ roles and looks are stereotyped and often not very individual. Wouldn’t it make sense to promote the diversity of looks of the performers, and to emphasise more the children’s criteria about their behaviour? Castings, however, reproduce certain visual types over and over again.

What is more, in certain genres some – especially female – role models are missing entirely, and where they (are) present, female presenters mostly seem to follow roles which emphasise “traditional female qualities”: being emotionally competent, explaining patiently and/or sharing the show with a male co-presenter. ■

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Of the 52 male and female presenters on children’s TV in Germany (November 2007), 36 hosts can be found in programmes of the public broadcasters ARD, ZDF and the children’s channel KI.KA, and 16 in those of the private TV stations SuperRTL, NICK, JETIX and Disney. The presenters had to host a full programme (and are not just introducing/announcing programmes/games), and these programmes had to be produced in Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Karen Markwardt in the activity/documentary series *Karen in Action* and the school remodelling series *Aktion Schulstreich*, *Stephie Müller-Spirra* in the counselling programme *KI.KA Kummerkasten* (Engl.: KI.KA trouble box), and *Gesa Dankwerth* in the children’s news programme *neuneinhalb* (Engl.: nine and a half).

<sup>3</sup> E. g. *Felix Heidinger* from *Felix und die wilden Tiere* (Engl.: Felix and the wild animals) or *Peter Lustig* from *Löwenzahn* (Engl.: Dandelion). A former study by the public broadcaster ZDF found out that pre-adolescent children have no preferences concerning age or gender of TV hosts (Becker 1992, p. 150).

<sup>4</sup> For creating the average presenters’ faces we superimposed their photographs using the software which is available online on [www.faceresearch.com](http://www.faceresearch.com). This webpage is hosted by experimental psychologists of the university of Aberdeen/Scotland in the UK.

<sup>5</sup> In a meta-analysis of IZI studies on hosts in German children’s TV the results of 8 IZI research reports and documentations were brought together. In a secondary analysis we evaluated the opinions of more than 850 3- to 15-year-old children. In addition to the published studies (see references) the following data was used for the meta-analysis: the documentations of the children’s jury at the TV film festivals *Prix Jeunesse International 2006* and at the *Goldener Spatz 2003*, as well as 4 IZI research reports on particular programmes.

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