

# Danny's parade

The Dutch production *Danny's parade* (NPO/NPS) is a documentary format about the 14-year-old homosexual Danny (cf. screenshots 1, 2) and his socio-political involvement. Being gay, Danny does not only want to be accepted by his private environment (cf. screenshots 3, 4); he also wants homosexual teenagers, and not only adults, to get the chance to attract public attention and to be perceived in a positive way. This is why he fights for teenagers under 16 to share their own boat in the Channel Parade (the Amsterdam version of Christopher Street Day). Having learnt about Danny's plans, the media cover his story – and eventually he is invited by a TV channel. A vivid discussion unfolds about the question whether gay teenagers, at their age, should draw that much public attention to their sexual identity (cf. screenshot 6). In the end, Danny succeeds: He is able to gather enough teenagers under 16 to participate in the Channel Parade with him, and they are given their own boat (cf. screenshots 7, 8).

The special quality of the programme consists, on the one hand, in getting to know how a teenager and his environment deal with his gay identity, and, on the other hand, in presenting this teenager's involvement in socio-political activities.

*Danny's parade* was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2008 finalists in the 12-15 category.

## International experts' opinions

In discussion groups at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2008, many experts approved of the fact that the main character is a teenager standing up for his personal feelings. Some, however, thought the programme focusses too much on Danny's involvement, leaving too little space for his personality, his feelings, etc. Against the background of their own cultures, some criticised his being presented as a hero. In contrast, some liked the aspect that the programme did not present the teenager as a victim, but as a young person who has the courage to stand up for a still controversial matter. For others, the fact that the programme made them think about the open-mindedness of their own cultures was a positive aspect.

“It is important that there are programmes like that because kids who have homosexual preferences need to see that they are not alone. But I felt that we never actually got to know him. We never saw him in his daily life.” (female expert, United Kingdom)

“It is very far away from my identity or my culture. ... The problem is that Danny is drawn as a hero. That he tells his parents about his homosexuality, and to tell us about it is okay. However, I have a problem with presenting him as a hero.” (male expert, Egypt)

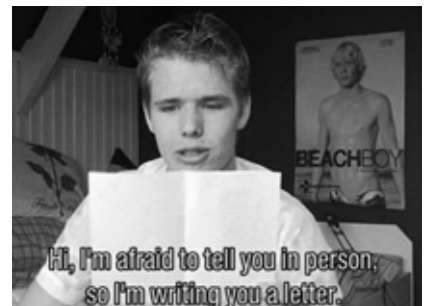
“We would try to protect a boy who wants to come out. Maybe we would hide his face. We would try to protect the boy from his family, school, or society. We would hide his identity and also his age because in our society it is not accepted that a boy comes out at that age.” (female expert, Taiwan)

“Usually programmes about coming out of the closet describe this period in life as very hard, about being beaten up and so on. This show was very inspiring for me because it shows that you can tell a story like that in a positive way, without feeling guilty or the feeling that everybody hates you.” (male expert, Sweden)

“It makes me wonder if we could do a programme like that in our country, how would the media react, who would cause us problems? It was very good for starting a thinking process.” (female expert, Finland)



Ill. 1: The 14-year-old Danny Hoekzema



Ill. 2: At the age of 12 Danny came out in a letter to his family



Ill. 3: Danny's parents were surprised – and took it easy

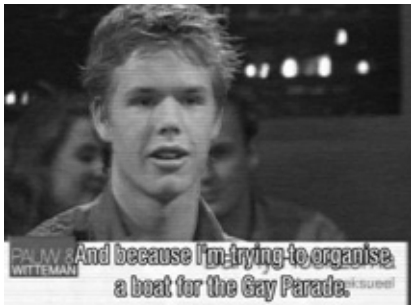
### German teenagers' opinions

Students aged 14 to 16 and of various international origins of the European School in Munich watched and discussed the programme in 5 same-sex groups.

Most of them related personally to Danny and his commitment. While the girls rather spoke about his involvement in general terms, the boys tried harder to distance themselves from his homosexuality and emphasised that they were not personally affected by it.



Ill. 4: Danny's brother is still a little confused



Ill. 5: Danny being a guest on a famous Dutch TV show



Ill. 6: Employees of a diner admire his commitment



Ill. 7: Danny is looking for teens to ride a boat at the gay parade



Ill. 8: Danny with other gay teenagers on their boat at the parade in Amsterdam

#### *...Danny's commitment...*

Most of the young people were impressed by Danny's commitment and courage. They tried to comprehend his individual motives.

"He is very courageous. To tell others at that age, when they think everything's a joke, 'it is okay to be gay'. This is very... In this case you need a lot of courage and strength to tell such a thing to everybody." (female teen)

"Well, I think he also did it in order to deal with it a little bit better himself. That he turns it into such an extreme project and totally goes public with it. That he occupies himself with it all the time and other people, too, to be able to say: 'I'm not the only one.'" (male teen)

#### *...Quality and purpose of the programme...*

Several young people thought that Danny exaggerated in standing up for the general perception of gay teenagers all over society, too, in addition to his earlier private coming out. Others, in contrast, thought that showing a teen aiming for a broader public perception was exactly the quality and purpose of the programme. It would encourage other homosexual teenagers and would help develop an understanding for them.

Like some of the adult experts, some of the young people also thought that the viewer learnt too little about Danny's personal experiences and motives.

"Well, I thought the programme as such wasn't half bad, but it was really stupid that he makes such a fuss about being gay. I think such an effort is not really necessary. You just accept these people and that's that." (male teen)

"Other teenagers won't be able to understand that. On the other hand it also reaches the few gay ones, which is good, of course. And yes, it then also helps us to understand them, which is good, too. But I don't know how it would come across. Because, as I said, for a straight person it is hard to relate to." (female teen)

"Well, I'm not sure if this was the purpose of the programme, but it is totally possible that many are bullied for being gay. And I think that the programme somehow showed what he did and not why he did it. It said: young people are afraid to tell. But it wasn't explained why. That one woman, she once explained quickly: 'Yes, he has lost a lot of friends.' However, this aspect wasn't really noticed amidst all the other stuff." (male teen)



### Opinions from teenagers in 7 countries

For the first time the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2008 included the votes of an international youth jury, which was organised in co-operation with broadcasters worldwide. Teens between 12 and 15 in 7 countries discussed and judged 16 programmes in the category 12 to 15. Here is a summary of their discussions on the programme *Danny's parade* and the ranks and scores (a score of 10 is best) they assigned it.

In **Norway** the programme was discussed as an important show. It was appreciated as a well-made documentary about a brave boy: "It is original, something new." It was considered important that homosexuality was not shown as something dangerous. This would help others in the same situation. *Rank 2, Score 7.5*

The **Armenian** youth jury discussed the programme as new, original, funny, and interesting. It was appreciated as a good portrayal of the protagonist and told in a dynamic way. At the same time they considered it as not appropriate for the age group 12 to 15 because they thought it to be culturally inappropriate for Armenian teenagers and said that they couldn't identify with Danny: "I don't like the idea." – *Rank 14, Score 5.9*

The youth jury from **Brazil** referred to the programme as interesting and strong. But they doubted that a 12-year-old boy could be really sure about his own homosexuality. The scene in which Danny and his boyfriend kiss was considered as unnecessary for the programme's story line. The teenagers remarked distinctly how very far away the reality shown in the programme was from their Brazilian reality, and a definite cultural contextualisation was made: "Only the Dutch could do a programme like this." – *Rank 9, Score 8.45*

The **US-American** youth jury enjoyed watching a documentary especially made for their age. At the same time they criticised how the documentary focussed on the press coverage and Danny's private life most of the time, instead on his socio-political involvement. The jury's strongest point of criticism: Danny became famous for being gay, not for his efforts to unite gay teens. But the segments on Danny's organisational endeavour were regarded as high-quality programme. – *Rank 4, Score 8.4*

In **Korea** jury members pointed out that homosexuality was a taboo they knew very little about yet. For them, therefore, the documentary was "hard stuff" to deal with – which, however, was seen quite positively. They complimented Danny on his courage and realised how they began to slightly change their prejudices. They became more aware of how their own culture handles gay people: „We usually treat them as ones from other planets, but it was surprising to see them equally without prejudice." – *Rank 9, Score 4.98*

In **Syria**, after many discussions with parents and educators, it was decided that *Danny's parade* had to be excluded from screening in the Syrian youth jury. The reason: "The boy-to-boy-kiss was too much for many parents and educators."

In **South Africa** the youth jury discussed the programme with particular commitment. *Danny's parade* was seen as a learning tool in that they heard about and understood what being gay means from a young person's perspective. Some criticised the kissing scene as "very disturbing" and "unnecessary". From their point of view the programme should have included "scenes educating the public how to deal with people who are gay. How to get over the fear of them? How to get over the stigma?" – *Rank 6, Score 7.2*