



This paper is taken from

*Citizenship Education in Society
Proceedings of the ninth Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2007

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 978-1899764-90-7

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
 - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
 - a official of the European Commission
 - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as

Pembecioglu Öcel, N. (2007) The Distorted Image of the World Through Magical Characters and TV Serials: The Child's Point of View, in Ross, A. (ed) Citizenship Education in Society. London: CiCe, pp 613-630.

© CiCe 2007

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The rector and the staff of the University of Montpellier III
- Andrew Craven, of the CiCe Administrative team, for editorial work on the book, and Lindsay Melling and Teresa Carbajo-Garcia, for the administration of the conference arrangements
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of the Department of Education and Culture of the European Commission for their support and encouragement

The Distorted Image of The World Through Magical Characters and TV Serials: The Children's Point of View

Nilüfer Pembecioğlu Öcel
Istanbul University (Turkey)

Abstract

Television serials had fewer distorted images of the world a decade ago. What has changed, in families or education systems, to make the children believe in fairytale-like sitcoms? Television screens are now full of magic images: do children believe in them. Data is collected from two sample groups, one from a big city and one from a smaller town. We analyse the number of the children watching these serials and the way they are making use of the information in their own lives. Analysis of the discourse of the serials helps understand the material and the way children are represented.

Introduction

Many common actions are changing their value and meaning. Eating, for example, is not the same activity as it was a decade ago. It is the same as buying, reading or talking to people. Nowadays, the modern world is imposing its new values on almost all cultures. Although people try to find out many other ways to make life more meaningful, they are spending most of their time rather passively. Perhaps one of the most important activities of the new millennium is listening. Listening has gained more importance in the audio-visual world as to give more eclecticism to the individual. Mostly, the mere meaning of listening of two decades ago has changed its form into the listening of media messages, listening of the inner voices or listening to the call of consumption.

The modern individual has a lot more freedom than the previous ancestors. The more eclectic way of using time and energy brought up extra concepts such as 'free time'. One of the main ways of using this free time is not activities such as painting or reading. It is either shopping or watching television. Both have different senses for the modern individual of the present time than in the past. To the people in the past, watching television was something done with care, usually in a family surrounding after the discussion of the possible choices of watching time and broadcasted programs. However, for today's people it's just an ordinary activity, usually performed in an individual way. Even if the families try to find a way to control what their children watch, the children starting at the age of three or four might have a great possibility of having a set of their own in their rooms. Thus, their individual decisions on what to watch and when to watch are gaining more importance compared to the past. However, there is a much wider range of television programs to choose from nowadays, each having a different degree of challenge for the little kids. Most of the programs see this part of the audience as the consumers of the future. Thus, they produce films and commercials accordingly. The habit formation years of childhood could easily be used as to form addicted consumers of several different brands. On one hand, the creativity and individual capabilities of

This paper is part of *Citizenship Education in Society: Proceedings of the ninth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network*, ed Ross A, published by CiCe (London) 2007. ISBN 978-1899764-90-7; ISSN 1470-6695

Funded with support from the European Commission SOCRATES Project of the Department of Education and Culture. This publication reflects the views of the authors only, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained in this publication.

children should be given importance, yet on the other hand the giant companies do not want to create an audience as to resist their emphasised products, but to obey whatever they are pursued by and convinced of through the media. If we consider that 65% of the average 8-12 year old children in the USA have a television and a computer in their bedrooms the number of the children audience all around the world could be estimated somewhat.

The action of watching television is associated with different concepts now than in the past. These new concepts seem to be a bit more dangerous such as child abuse, being exposed to unhealthy contents and exploitations of reality. The children of the last decade seem to have different reading habits than the children of the past. They have a different understanding of reality and creativity as well. Some call them the Einstein Generation; some refer to them as Generation Z. Whatever they are called, they'll become the adults of the future soon and they will shape the future. What if they are unable to make up their own stories or imagine their own futures? To many psychologists, educationalists and researchers it seems that they can only repeat stories about cartoon characters or the exploits of the latest action hero.

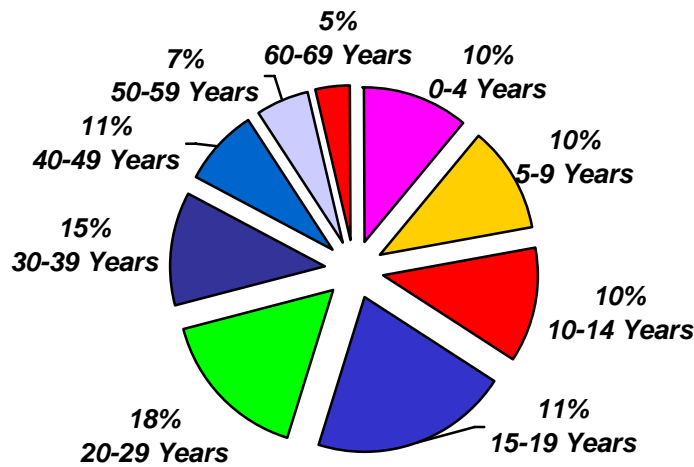
Gloria De Gaetano asks to the parents:

Why aren't first graders talking about the latest artwork they drew or the poetry they composed? Why are they talking about the cartoon they watched before school and the TV program they must watch after school? Why are many teens today preoccupied with how closely their bodies match the male and female models in the magazines they read more than with their own creative process? Rather than being attentive to their own inner lives, their own creative expressions, and to the people who love them, too much of our children's and teens' attention is focused by corporate agendas... This type of culture is new to humans, so parenting in it is new as well. And it's tricky. Even if we turn off the televisions in our own homes and rigorously monitor video, movies, video games and computer usage, our kids still live and breathe in an industry-generated culture.

This is a problematic situation mostly in the USA. Yet, the murmurs of the EU countries and even Turkey are about to be heard. When we consider the situation in the modern society, children are mostly left alone or in front of television sets to endure the absence of their parents during their long working hours. Thus, television is mainly used as a baby sitter or a pain reliever. Knowing this fact, the television programmers design their programs accordingly as to entertain their audience as much as possible. The last decade had an interesting turn regarding the upgrading of sitcoms and giving more importance to the fantasy world. The sitcoms, reflecting the real world and mainly the social settings in the family and school, increased the percentage of their audience both on the side of adults and children. Nowadays, the television channels reaching up to the number of 120 or more locally and nationally, give importance to sitcoms. These are designed as to gather the main audience of the channel. The competition gets hotter so much that sometimes the most beloved sitcom of one channel is totally transferred to another channel. Of course, the main economy underlined is not only having access to the sitcom or its famous and beloved characters but also to the income of the commercials scattered

through the program. Once the set audience is captured, then the continuity of the commercials and incomes are guaranteed.

The population of Turkey has 41% of the whole population under 18 years old, and this stimulates program designers to produce more for youngsters.



Purpose and Methodology

When we have a look at discourse analysis and other research we see a different structure of television broadcasting in the past. A decade ago television serials were not so full of distorted images of the world. This was the case not only in Turkey, but also all around the world. But then, what has changed in the societies, families or education systems to make the children believe in those fairytale like sitcoms so that the television screens are now full of these magic issues? There are also many other questions to be asked: Do the children believe in these? Did they watch them ever before? How are they affected? How much do they depict the characters into their own real world? The paper aims to find an answer to these questions.

For the study, the data collected from two sample groups, one from a rather modern school, having the children of the well off families and the other from a rather small one having the average or lower scales of families. Through the questionnaires and insight studies what will be discussed is more concentrated on the increasing number of these unreal soap operas and sitcoms and their impact on the children. The data gives us clues on how much these sitcoms are watched and how far they were making use of the virtual information in their own lives. The discourse analysis of the serials aimed to help us to understand the material as a text. It was also important to see the way the children were

represented in these. The content analysis of these programs also helped to get some more clues regarding the type and frequency of the dilemmas created in the serials, the way they exemplify the problem solving skills and importance of the social behaviours representing good and bad / inclusion and exclusion in the group and society depicted in the films.

Findings and Interpretation

Turkey is a very young country, and this brings many different issues to the agenda. This is a very important factor implementing the political ideas and thoughts into the general population of the country. One of the issues is elections for example. Having the voting age as 18 for the last two elections brought many different aspects into the media. Anybody could argue that in order to be serious enough to vote at the age of 18, the children should have an effective register before 18. Thus in a way, it means the politicising of childhood and including the children's opinions and reflections into the general government policy to a certain extent. In this sense, the expectations of children, their opinions and their problems gain a new perspective. This might seem to be very dangerous or healthy depending upon how it has been conducted and implemented throughout the country. In any case a discourse of childhood is developing, the adults are trying to understand the children and youth even if they try to make use of it for manipulative purposes. Also the adults are giving importance to the discourse with youth. They want to establish good bridges with the youth because they also implemented many promises regarding their expectations and possible demands. As a result, it could be possible to see many young faces during the political campaigns and meetings, and children all of a sudden became the centre of interest.

All these new faces of youth in the media and social settings bring up the need to be positioned in a more careful way. There appears to be new needs and requirements of the society such as learning more about the children and youth, to teach values to children, to teach the stages of democratisation and to teach the dynamics of the society

All these could be done through a very powerful and determined education system. School systems might have some structural and infrastructural problems all over the world. Thus, when it comes to education issues, all the other institutions should unite and have certain policies. The media is one of the main support systems providing the open and distance education possibilities to countrywide destinations. Media also provides the cultural values and the social situations to 'teach' the life issues in general. Here we may make use of the television serials and their beloved characters to maintain these goals. Yet, some of these serials have nothing to do with the real world because only they refer to imaginary magical worlds they create.

Of course the concept of escapism is not only a problem in Turkey - if it is a problem at all. The fairy tale like sitcoms are available more than ever throughout the world. If we would like to have a deeper analysis of the situation in Turkey, we can see many different types in almost all television channels. In fact, in its core sense, these type of unreality shows also bear a kind of a tendency to escape from reality and even from the society. But, contrary to the belief that this escape is never out of the society, but into a smaller and rather ambiguous society to share the similar values. The youth watching

similar serials develop a certain type of language and value system that adults cannot understand. One of the most interesting issues discussed mainly in the written media is the way these serials take place in the television channels. The same media criticise the attitude of that the other part of the media approves of. The newspapers mention the possible impact of these magical serials on youth and children and ask why most of these serials are available to children.

Tyler states (1947, p. xiii)

Movies are dreamlike and fantastic, their assumptions are simple, the existence of the unconscious mind as a dynamic factor in human action, and the tendency of screen stories to emphasize – unintentionally – neuroses and psychopathic traits discovered and formulated by psychoanalysis. Thus, Hollywood movie-makers are used to combining their own automatism of mental and physical behavior with that of the characters of their products.

Öcel states that people like to be some part of the mysteries and myths. That's why they create myths or contribute to the created ones (Öcel, 2004: 320). At this point, we may consider all the information and the ads and metacommunication of the films as a type of myth creation. And people would like to be part of it through either talking about it or buying objects related to the film themes or actors/actresses. It is believed that the by-products of the films sell more than the film itself.

As Fearing puts it, it is frequently expressed that films are 'pure entertainment' providing a means of escape from the world of reality. An opposing view pretends to put the films into a point far from being 'just/mere' entertainment or 'escapist' entertainment; films have definite and presumptively bad effects on the population. For these, Hollywood is the synonym for sin and its main function is to provide 'dreams' for millions, since the essential role of films in the society is to entertain and amuse or to afford an opportunity for a harassed and anxiety-ridden population to 'get away from it all' by escaping into a land of fantasy.

As Fearing states the term 'entertainment' is psychologically ambiguous (Fearing, 1972:122). It might be very interesting to see that different cultures and societies show different reactions to the same film. Thus, the popularity and entertainment factor attributed to a film would be just a vogue one. In fact, the popularity of the cinema films mostly owes too much to the decision makers. Since the television sets at home provides a more individual sense of cinema going, the popularity of the television programs have a similar sense as well. Yet, this time, it is not only the decision makers but also the scenario writers. Here we also see that the promotion of the activity of cinema going changed place with the television watching activity. Today, in most of the countries cinema films and cinema saloons are looked at as the points of escape from real society. Although the cinema saloons are always considered to be 'public places' rather than places for individuals, these are used now for different purposes requiring different readings at different layers. Perhaps the ironic point, or rather dilemma that should be underlined here is that these saloons have both the function of escaping from the social realities for the individual, yet also bringing the individual into another pseudo-society, where everybody experiences the same adventure throughout the film but nobody knows

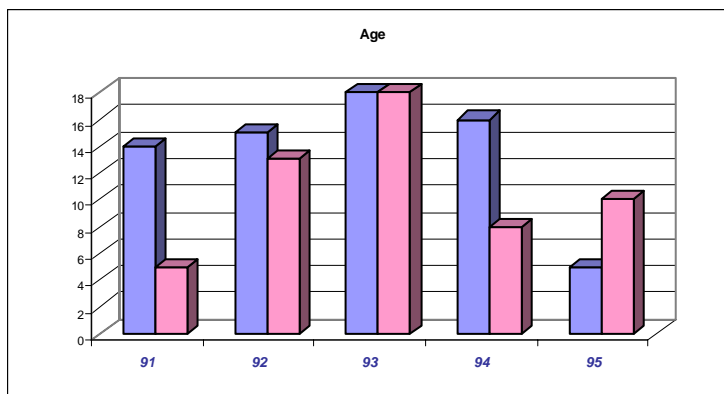
each other or talks to each other apart from accepting this silent membership of the secret intrasocial enjoyment. Thus, as Öcel puts it, (Öcel, 2004) cinema going is usually associated with being sociable, individually being involved in an activity such as going out, taking place in the society, planning for something, etc. Nowadays, the cinema is replaced by the television and all these values now are attributed to television watching. The more they watch television the more the people feel sociable, involved and included. If they miss an episode or a certain part of the program there is the fear of being excluded from a part of the conversation or the society. This exclusion could be a temporary or a permanent one. That's why most of the individuals are forced to watch the programs as to keep themselves updated.

It is not only the activity of watching television but also the huge impact of what has been watched that is discussed here. Most of the sitcoms for children now have magical powers enabling the characters to solve their problems without struggling too much with real world issues but rather in a magical way. Of course this is not the reality and nobody is skilful in real life as to solve all the problems that are dealt with in the sitcom time.

It is also interesting to note that the television serials were not so much full of the distorted images of the world just a decade ago. What changed in the societies, families or education systems to make the children believe those fairy tale like sitcoms so that the television screens are now full of these magic issues? Here we may have several questions:

- Do the children believe in these?
- Do they ever watch them?
- How are they affected?
- How much do they depict the characters or embed this pseudo-social communication into their own real world?
- What is the impact on them?

In order to answer these questions this study had two sample groups, one from a well-known private school and one from an ordinary public school: Total 125 students.



The age groups of the sample groups and the girls/boys proportions can be seen in the graph.

Discussion and Conclusion

When the television channels were analysed, it is not that surprising to see a magical sitcom in each of them. Whereas in channel D we have *The Young and Inexperienced Witch*, a competitive channel, ATV provides a similar character 'Selena' depicting another type of Witch. Whereas the *Young and Inexperienced Witch* and her two aunts try to solve their daily problems with the help of the magic, Selena and her sisters use magic as well to solve all their daily problems.



No need to say but having similar themes and plots each channel has the same potential. They all challenge the young people.

- The idea of decomposing the world or creating a world of fantasy may seem to belong to the private and profit-making channels at first, yet, there are more TV serials in the channels representing the fundamentalists and right wing:
- In Channel STV: *Büyük Buluşma – Final Meeting*
- There is no magic but a kind of holy meeting forcing the individuals to question their misbehaviours after their death and giving education about religious issues.



- In Channel STV: *Beşinci Boyut – 5th Dimension*
- Again, questioning life after death and giving education about the religious issues.

- Tarık ve Diğerleri: Having A Child in the Leading Role. No Magic but several incidents of reframing the world.



- In Channel Show they also have many cartoons and another serial called My Best Friend, taken after the magical lamp of Alaaddin



- In TRT channels they also have many cartoons depicting the real world as a cartoon one, in which all the impossible is possible



Methodology

- Through the questionnaires and insight studies the reason of the increasing number of these fictive serials were questioned and their impact on the children were discussed.
- The attitudes and behaviours of the students in given situations were also compared to the attitudes and behaviours of the characters in the serials.

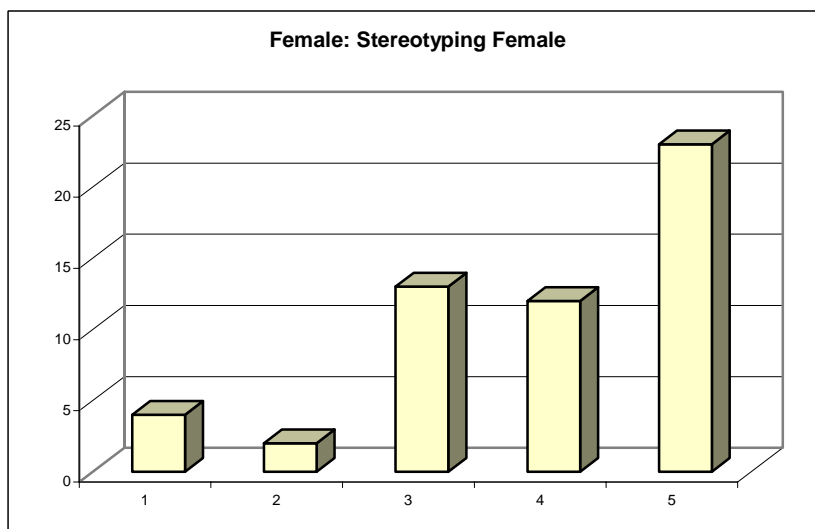
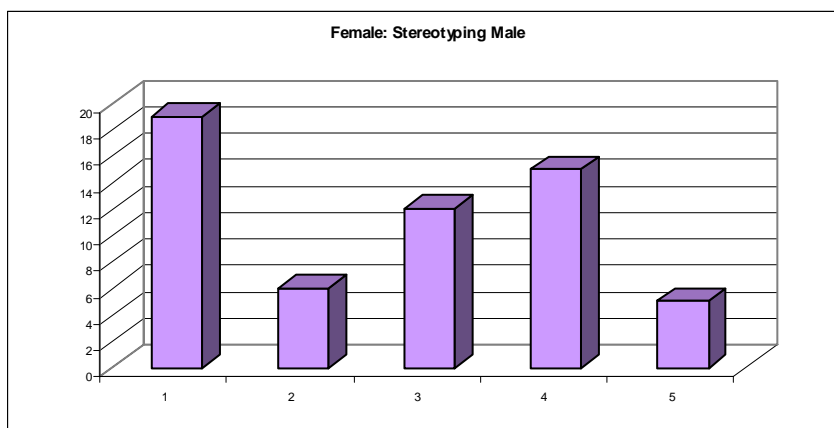
• *Findings*

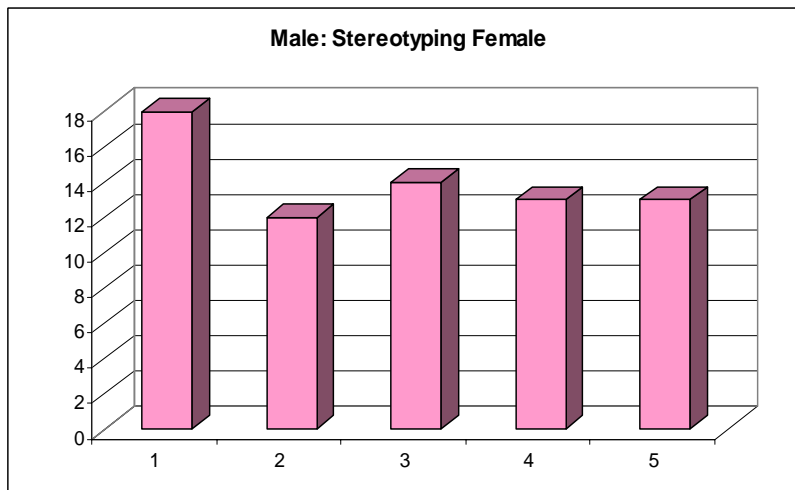
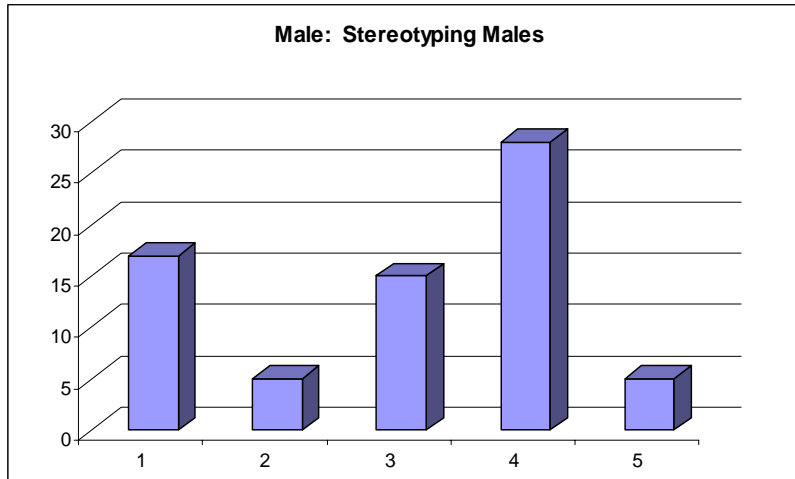
- The data includes the number of the children watching these serials and the way they are making use of the information in their own lives.
- The discourse analysis of the serials also helps us to understand the material and the way the children are represented in these serials.

• *Findings*

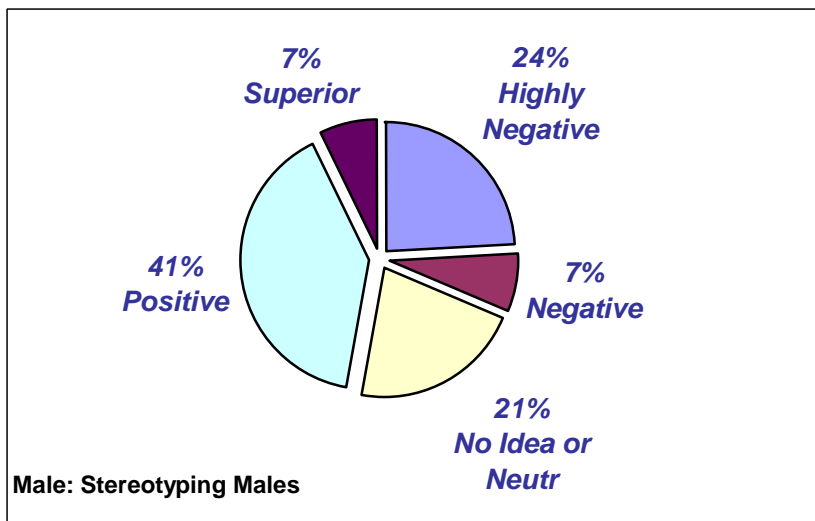
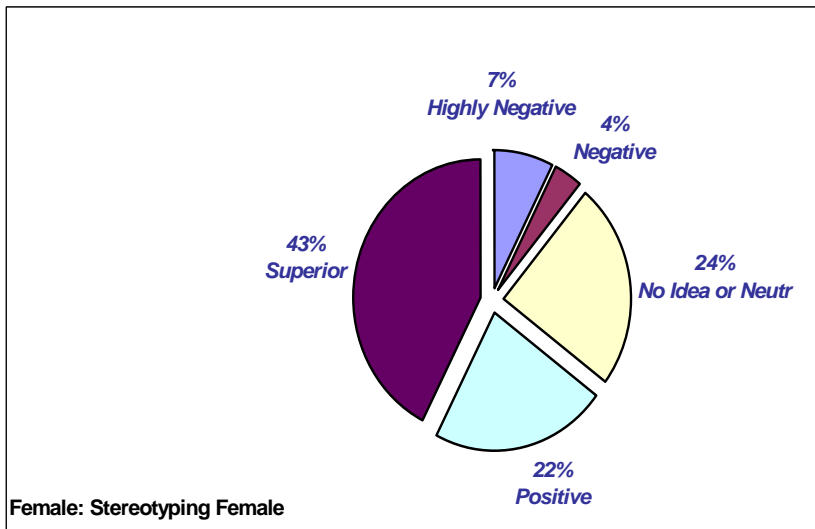
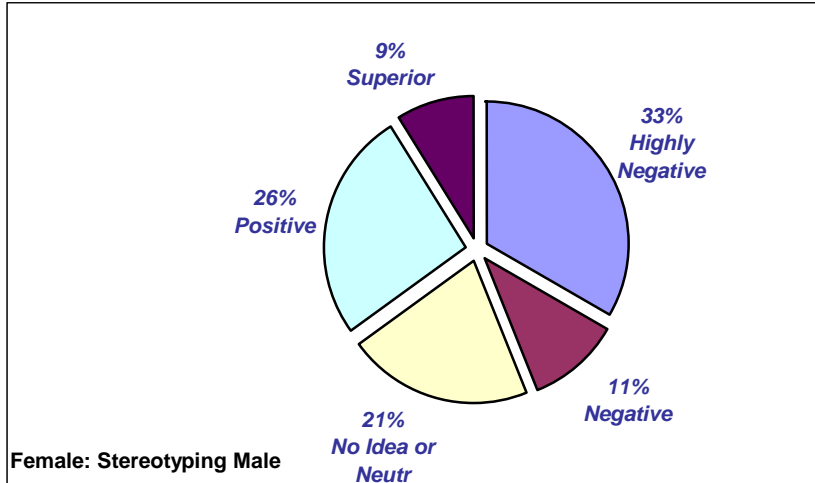
- Content analysis of the serials,
 - The frequency of the dilemmas created,
 - The way they exemplify the problem solving skills,

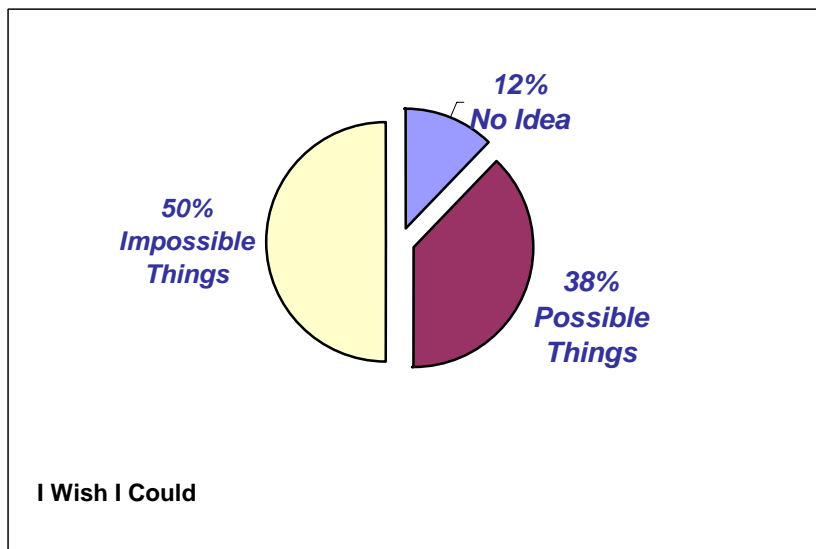
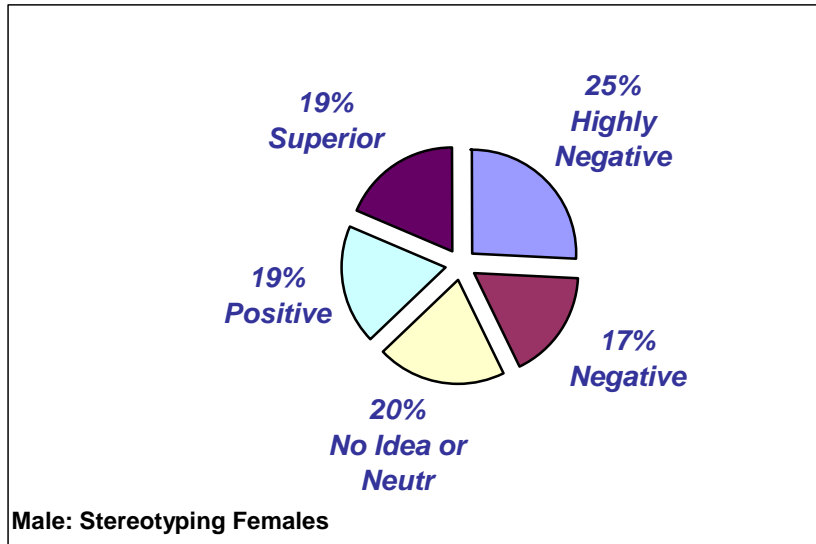
- Importance of the social behaviours representing good and bad,
- Inclusion and exclusion in the group and society depicted in the films,
- The possible reactions of the characters facing difficulties,
- The sexual identity is emphasised in these serials and findings support that as well.
- It can easily be seen that the children follow the stereotypes given them through the television serials.
- Specifically, the most watched one Inexperienced Witch has these stereotyping almost identical in the minds of the students.



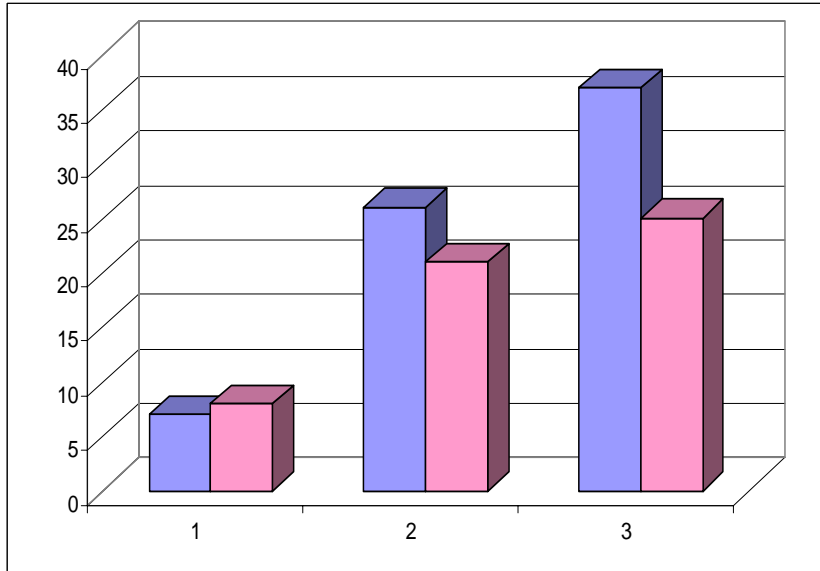


- Females see themselves as superior to males and other girls,
- Females see the males with highly negative qualities,
- Males see the females mostly with their highly negative qualities,
- Males see themselves with highly negative qualities as well,
- Males lose their self-confidence and self-esteem in front of girls and in social situations,
- Males try to get rid of dyadic conversation and try to stick to their manly habits such as football or cars.

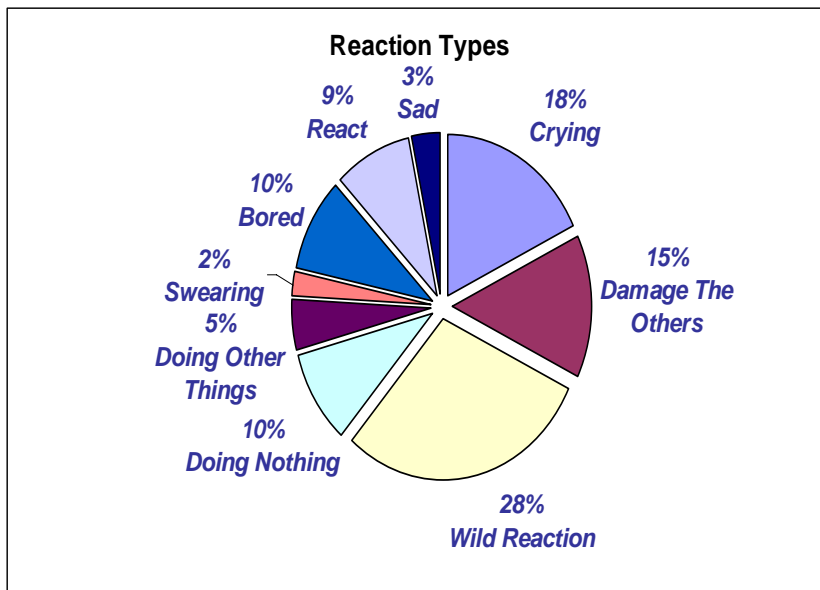




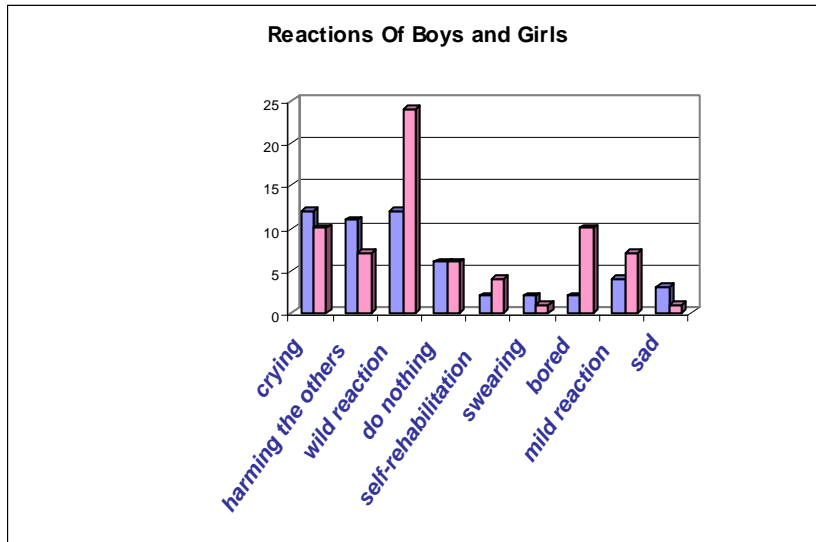
- They are all after the impossible.



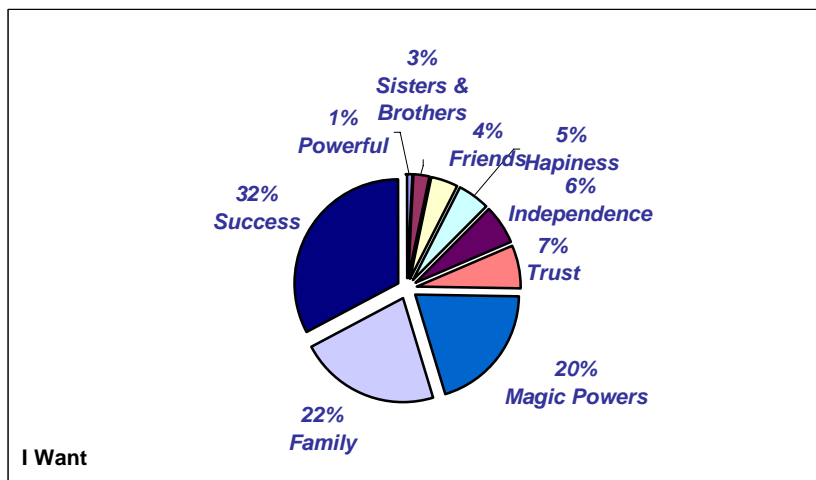
- Girls seem to have more a rational way of thinking compared to boys.
- No idea / Possible Things / Impossible Things



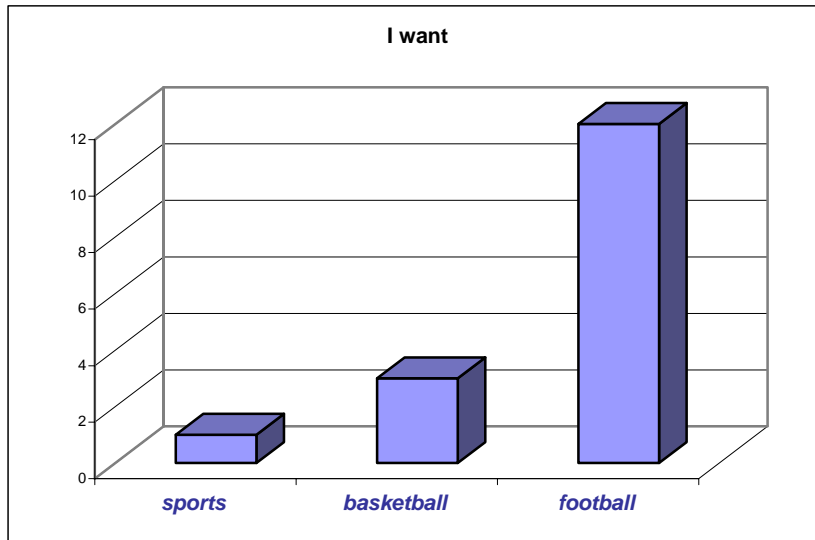
- The most common reactions are wild ones and harming the others.



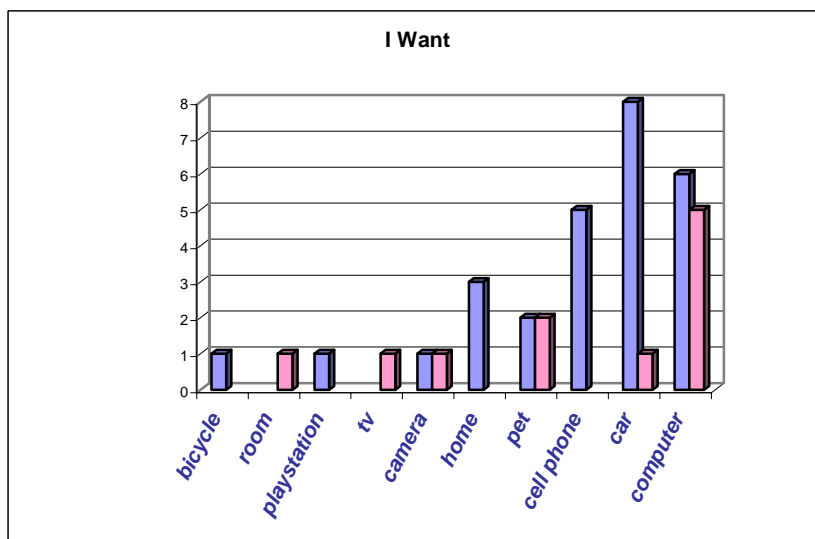
- Girls seem to have more wild reactions than boys when they come across unwanted or unexpected things.
- Going back to the assumptions of this study, we may say that the great majority of the children are watching these films, perhaps more than watching, are fond of them and watching them regularly. 97 % watching them all.
- They grasp the information given through these films as real world information.
- They make use of the dialogues in these films in their daily dialogues.
- They model the relationships, behaviours and attitudes in these films.
- So, these films have a great impact on them.
- Just to give an idea, we may have a look at the percentages of students who would like to have the following for their real lives.



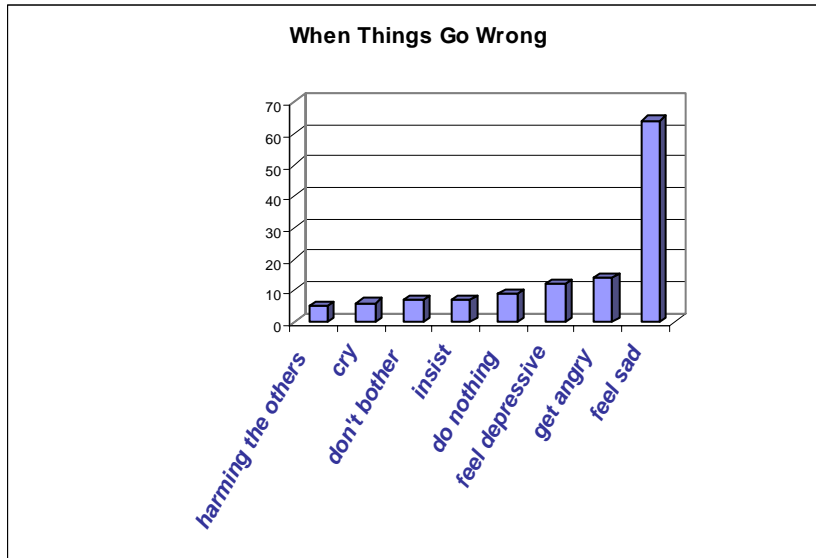
- They depict the characters in the serials or the characters in the serials are using the stereotypes they have.



- They want the things the characters in the serials have or these characters represent the models they would like to become.



- They react in the same way the characters react in the serials.



- They repeat the dialogues in the serials following the same wording, rhythm and intonation patterns.

