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The role of media in children's make-believe worlds

A cultural comparison of Germany, Israel, the USA and South Korea

Children seem to have quite similar make-believe worlds across cultural borders. Television plays a significant role in many fantasies, but only certain parts attractive for children are extracted. They serve to symbolize experience, to further the self-image and promote communication.

Children use the media, particularly television (Livingstone et. al., 2001). The significance is not only restricted to the reception situation; traces of television can be found in a whole variety of interaction contexts. Everyday observations, as in the case of the 4-year-old Xaver telephoning with Tinky-Winky or that of two 8-year-old girls crawling through afternoon day-home as The Lion King - the strongest women in the world - are nothing exceptional. As revealed in the other articles of this publication, TV characters like Ernie can also become kids' imaginary companions (Taylor, Rogge in this issue). This is not just a question of one simple "effect" of television viewing. What we see here are the indications of the meaning kids create in their use of television material - a link that has been demonstrated in a number of individual cases (e.g. Bachmair, 2002). Investigating this relationship between fantasy and media on an empirically broader scale is extremely difficult, however. Fantasies by their very nature are very intimate, not always conscious and frequently indescribable in words - especially for children. Consequently, if the significance of the media is to be investigated, many customary procedures will hardly prove suitable. Experimental studies, in which children are required to continue telling a disrupted story (Greenfield,1981; Ruco, 1984, Greenfield, 1986) or the observation of fantasy play after the viewing of specific programmes (Valkenburg, 1994) are one possibility. In the multi-national IZI study "The role of media in children's make-believe world" we pursued another course. We offered children in four countries the possibility for daydreaming and then had them explain to us what they had imagined. We went about our search for traces of media afterwards.

Method

Our focus in the wide subject area of children's make-believe worlds is on "big daydreams", a concept describing what children have previously imagined on a number of occasions, usually during the day, perhaps sometimes at night, too. During a uniformly constructed fantasy journey - accompanied by music and a read aloud text - the children in all four countries imagined themselves in their "big daydream". Afterwards they drew that daydream, wrote several sentences about it, and explained their make-believe world and related media connections in individual interviews. Further data and background information on the child's background, favourite media and leisure activities etc, was provided by open-ended questionnaires completed by parents and educators. The study was carried out in Germany, Israel, South Korea, and the USA in order to reveal preliminary cultural influences on these fantasies. The study focused on the 8- to 10-year-old children. This age group still clearly belongs to middle childhood, manifesting the cognitive skills for differentiating between reality and fiction, capable of expressing its inner thoughts verbally, and able to draw as well as to autonomously put down ideas in writing in at least several sentences.

The study was carried out in the spring and summer 2001, included both boys and girls and - when possible - typical diversities of the respective country. In Germany the study took place in cities and suburban areas in the north (Osnabrück), the south (Munich) and the east (Dresden). In South Korea the study was undertaken in Seoul and in the country; in the USA in small town locations. Particularly exciting is the study group from Israel, which included both Jewish children (from secular as well as religious homes) and Arab children (Table 1). As is often the case in qualitative studies, small samples were studied in each country, which do not permit the development of valid generalizations based on quantitative description and analysis. The real research goal is to gain insights, reveal deeper connections, and point out qualitative tendencies within the framework of a multi-national comparison.

Sample

Germany	60 children/ 37 girls and 23 boys, (city / countryside, North-, South-, East-Germany, incl. children from ethnic minorities)
Israel	53 children / 25 boys and 28 girls (35 Jewish-secular, 6 Jewish-religious, 3 Muslim-Arab, 9 Christian-Arab, city / countryside, different classes)
USA	37 children / 15 boys and 22 girls, (education-oriented middle class)
South Korea	47 children / 22 boys and 25 girls, (city / countryside, middle class)
Total	197 children/ 112 girls and 85 boys

The analysis of the qualitative project focused on the child's picture of the make-believe world and the story explained in writing and in the interview. The information from educators and parents, in which adults expressed their perspective of the child (and consequently of themselves), was used as background information. Initially, every individual case was thus reconstructed descriptively.
The methodological orientation of the study is set particularly on the "grounded theory" approach (Glaser, 1992). The methodical-practical approach employed in typification procedures was the agglomerative procedure, i.e. groups were clustered according to similarities and differences, which subsequently provided the typical variants (see Kluge, 2001, p. 257). The parameters of comparison in this typology were:

- The nature of the make-believe world
- The child's place in the world and the wishes to act
- Biographical and everyday life traces in the make-believe world
- Media traces in the make-believe world

In October 2001, when we presented each other our collection of almost 200 pictures and stories, we immediately noticed several cultural differences, particularly in the type of portrayals, the painting techniques, etc. On the other hand, in terms of contents, we detected strong similarities we had not anticipated. At the same time it was also possible to identify special cultural features.

The world of make believe

The children painted and spoke about foreign lands, towns and wonderful nature: worlds, in which they felt at ease, and could be what they wanted to be. The study shows an astonishingly high level of congruity with respect to the children's "big daydreams". Although the 197 children live in various parts of the world - with very different traditions and media offerings - it was possible to group the children's fantasies into nine categories based on the data:

- The world of harmony with nature and animals
- The world of conflict and threat
- The world of sensual enjoyment

- The world of amusement
- The world of supernatural power
- The world of technology, machinery invention
- The world of travel
- The world of the foreign land
- The world of royalty

There seem to be typical patterns of "big daydreams" across cultural borders. Model examples of four of these worlds are:

The world of harmony with nature, people and animals

Many children imagined worlds in which utter harmony with nature and animals prevailed. This is a world of peace and tranquillity, nature is lush and beautiful, and all one has to do is to enjoy and be a harmonious part of it.
Dana, a 9-year-old girl from Israel (case 11) portrays her own paradise. It is a state of peace and harmony with nature, set in a biblical context - the Garden of Eden:

In my imaginary world I was in heaven. In heaven there were all kinds of flowers, trees, birds, pleasant air, all kinds of things (...) and a smiling sun. On the tree there is a baby-bird and an apple. It's like Adam and Eve's garden, with the Tree of Knowledge. Nothing will happen to us if we eat the apple, because we are a bit cleverer than Adam and Eve. The sea is very deep and has dolphins, fish, sharks (...) and lots of animals and also a Pokémon named Togepy. All my friends, and my parents, and all the extended family, and my uncles, and my friends, and cousins are there. Not in here are the boys from class and those that I do not know. There are no shelves and other people, no stores, only tents (...) you may have tea there, because there are herbs and salad. There is no school, it is vacation all the time. You can play, go on walks, swing on the swings (...) you can see the sun shining, and you can see the winter when the leaves fall down. You can see the flowers blooming, and the trees growing. I walked to the trees to climb on them, and found animals to raise, and grow flowers, so as to improve heaven a little bit.

The theme in Dana's make-believe world is harmony with nature and animals, living with her family and friends in open nature. The sea is full of real and invented sea creatures, even a Pokémon finds its way into paradise. You can play there, go for walks, and ride on swings. You can see the flowers in bloom and watch the trees grow. Obligations like attending school do not exist in this world, it is always holidays. Dana looks after animals and flowers - her contribution to paradise (Fig. 1).

The world of conflict

On the other hand, children also talk about make-believe worlds full of conflicts and fighting. They refer to Digimon or Dragon Ball Z battles; kingdoms have to be protected and dinosaurs threaten the peace. Mainly boys' fantasies fell into this group. They use their magic powers and special abilities to rescue themselves and their loved ones. They conquer their foes, take up special positions and provide order in their fantasized worlds. In his make-believe world, "Under the Sea", 8-year-old Yun'sang (case 6, South Korea) sets out for the bottom of the sea to watch a fight with a leopard who threatens all the other sea creatures. Yun'sang is on the side of the good sea creatures. He is the main figure in his make-believe world, although he cannot be seen in the drawing (Fig. 2).

"Everything is peaceful here until the leopard turns up. The whale makes a noise the leopard doesn't understand and all the fish are warned. Then I start fighting. Here in the undersea world there are invisible animals, too, such as lions and flying horses that also fight for us. On the surface of the water sail ships with red flags. The ten fishermen on each ship really wanted to catch the fish and eat them, but because of the fight they have sailed a long way away. Now they can return and perhaps catch the leopard and perhaps a couple of fish, too - but anyway the leopard dies in the end."

The world of sensual enjoyment

In their fantasies children also emphasized the many "good things" in life, with all kinds of wonders to delight the senses. Wonderful rainbows materialize before the children's eyes. Birds sing and make children cheerful when they are sad; soft flowerbeds invite them to make themselves comfortable. But, above all there is lots of candy for them to eat: plantations of chocolate trees and trees with sticks of rock candy hanging down, walls made of butterscotch, and streets and trees made of gingerbread. Katrin (case 7, Germany) is 8 years old. Her make-believe world depicts a land where it is possible to eat candy non-stop without putting on weight:

"In gingerbread land everything is made of gingerbread: the houses, the castle and the people, too. Candy rains down from a cloud, every type you can imagine. You only have to make a wish, and down it rains. The sun fills the cloud up again, so there's always enough. In gingerbread land you can nibble everything, not the people but the houses. Then they have holes you have to fill again. You stick in gingerbread and seal it with icing. That's good fun because you can then lick your fingers. That's how the roads in gingerbread land are built. You simply put down some gingerbread, it rains icing, and the road is ready. In my gingerbread land there is always some candy, you never get fat because if you're candy you can't get fat."

The world of amusement

There were worlds providing loads of fun and excitement without conflicts or dangers - fantasies with children flying on huge birds, experiencing thrilling times in amusement parks, selecting the film shown at the local cinema. One example is Ben (case 1, USA - Fig. 3):

"My dream place is an imaginary amusement park-a big one. There's a candy tree, a clubhouse, and an animal amusement park. There are a whole bunch of courses you can do like swing off the tree house, land on the trampoline, and jump into the pool. I'm running the obstacle course-swinging off the rope onto the trampoline and landing in the pool. Some of my friends are with me in the tree house and one friend is in the candy cane tree. The candy cane tree has all kinds of candy inside it. All of the people can go into the animal changer and when they become animals they can go into the animal amusement park. There are a lot of animals in there and they can go on all kinds of rides. The sign on the animal amusement park says "Animals Only" so you have to be an animal to go in and play on the rides. This amusement park is in my backyard and it's invisible. Only kids who are my friends can see it. Others will just walk right through it. The animal amusement park is floating. You can change into different kinds of animals. Inside there's a kind of computer. You type in something like bird or four-footed animal and then it gives you a whole variety of choices. You could say "cat", and then it would give you a whole variety of cats, cheetah or leopard or something. You could type that in and could push that and then you'd become that animal."

The child's place in the world and the desires to act

In their make-believe worlds children take action. Initially, of course, through imagining, painting and telling the make-believe world. But in their worlds they also imagine certain action situations they wish for themselves; they experience things that they would like to experience - these are their "desires to act". The reconstructions of the individual cases usually reveal two, or sometimes three desires for action, but only one comes clearly to the fore in most. When clustered in groups, six typical desires for action came to light:

Experiencing harmony: Experiencing harmony represents the key feature of their make-believe world for a number of girls and several boys. They imagine themselves in an intact world of tranquillity, without any stress or constant disputes. All evil, all danger is banned from this world. Their own experience is the centre of attention, but the world around them offers them the conditions needed. The children do actually participate in creating their world, but, first and foremost, they experience and enjoy it. Numerically, this is the largest cluster, dominated by the wish for this almost paradisiacal state.

Experiencing thrill: In one group containing very many boys the main priority is experiencing excitement: encountering adventures, waging battles or discovering something thrilling. Frequently

repelling danger is the prime objective, crowned with success as a result of transformation or extension (e.g. by a powerful ally). This is a pleasurable, enjoyable experience.

Being special: Another typical desire to act is experiencing oneself as someone special or being acknowledged as special by others. This experience or acknowledgement can be associated with admiration, with the feeling of being the centre of attention or showing others one's superiority. But it can also be just the experience of staging a display of one's specialness without having to be acknowledged by others.

Being connected: Another group of typical wishes is experiencing a close bond with others (people or animals), "being in a relationship". The children refer to community and friendship. In their make-believe world they imagine themselves as part of a group or friendship they create as partners.

Protecting and being protected: A number of fantasies focus on the subject of protecting or being protected. The active or passive form can almost always be detected here in alternate rotation, i.e. relatively clear identificatory processes are in progress. In this respect, both are expressions of a category of typical desires to act.

Acting independently: Acting independently is the explicit core of a number of fantasies. The children wish to organize, stage-manage and effect something in their environment. They want to assume responsibility, to find their way autonomously and to form their environment. For this purpose they imagine a world around them where they are left in peace, a world they can naturally determine themselves.

Biographical and everyday-life traces in the make-believe world

Children's experiences are reflected in their make-believe worlds and desires to act. In a number of fantasies children's references to their own real life-world are apparent. For example, several children include friends in their make-believe world, while parents, on the other hand, appear more rarely. Pets play sometimes a significant role in their imagined world, as do places the children have visited on family trips. These references to concrete experiences are not only the children's allusions to real features in their lives but they also serve as the starting point for their daydreams. Several children integrate in this way a tale or story they have been told by a person who plays an important role in their lives.

You'jong (case 24, South Korea) dreams of a meeting with Jesus, about whom she has heard from her parents often before. Tessina (case 3, Germany) invents a paradise for animals, which she names "Seashells", following her mother's story about the Seychelles. Maroum (case 10, Israel) fantasizes about Switzerland, of which his father has told him so many good things.

Several fantasies reflect a particular identity-forming interest, which is also significant for daily life. The children have fantasies of horses, soccer matches, or sailing on ships, i.e. things they are particularly thrilled by in their own daily life. In several of the make-believe worlds children tune into pleasant experiences, such as holidays with the family or a visit to an amusement park, and develop them further. Similarly, they also select some negative experiences they have had and repair them in the fantasy world through creating different ending or changing several features.

Annelie (case 36, Germany) was on vacation with her parents, but not allowed to go swimming on her own. In her make-believe world she is granted that permission and goes swimming. A striking example is Noa's make-believe world (case 14, Israel), who dreams of being together with her dead mother on a beautiful deserted beach where nobody else is present.

Real experiences enter the children's fantasies and daydreams; they are individual elements or the starting point of the daydream. If the children are asked about their "big daydream," that is about their positive dream worlds, they turn these life-world experiences - whether encountered directly or related by a significant person in their lives - into something good for themselves and their desires to act.

What children extract from the media: traces of media in the fantasies

A central theme of the study was the analysis of traces of media discovered in children's make-believe worlds. We wanted to know how children use the "raw content material " derived from their media-related experiences in their imagined worlds. Theoretically it may be said that everything in the children's make-believe worlds is somehow connected with the media. In our analysis, however, we focused on the traces in children's dream worlds that evince a direct link to the media. Sometimes these traces are explicit, i.e., when the drawing closely resembles a well recognizable figure, or when in the interview the child states a specific media text as the source (e.g. the name of a book or a television programme). At other times the media traces can be reconstructed through making an implicit connection between the child's drawing and story and details in the interview, even when the child does not refer to it in words.

The connections between the make-believe worlds and the media vary in intensity. They range from dream worlds that seem to stem entirely from a media experience to those that reveal no direct traces whatsoever. In approximately two thirds of the cases, either explicit or implicit, clear media traces were evident. Television is the primary medium, but other media such as computer games or books serve as the starting point and part of the dream world. However, visual media, i.e. television in particular, but also video cassettes, and films, play the most significant role in the children's stories. This is much in line with current research on children and media: television remains the most dominant medium in European children's lives, regardless of infiltration by new communication technologies (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001). One exception is the central role that computer games seem to play for boys in South Korea.

It is frequently difficult to confine the media trace to one particular medium or text, for children are directed by their interests and scan a whole range of media for a certain theme (e.g. dinosaurs, horses). They partly absorb complete media environments such as Pokémon, and it becomes impossible to tell whether collecting cards, watching the television series, going to see the cinema film, or playing the computer games are the origin of the media trace.

Three typical variants can be compiled from the reconstructed media traces: settings, figures and stories.

The setting

Children brace from the particular medium a location, an environment, or a context. This can range from adopting the whole setting as background for their make-believe story to just selecting a single object or small element and planting it in a non-media related setting. Several dream worlds are completely media-dependent and follow the original text very closely (Figs. 4 and 5)

Udi's story (case 1, Israel), for example, takes place in the land of Harry Potter, based on the book series; Jack (case 25, USA) chose the setting of a popular television quiz show for his dream world: Who Wants to be a Millionaire? - Gui'hyong (case 4, South Korea) developed his story in the setting of the movie Jurassic Park.

Less clear is the case of the 8-year-old Katrin (case 7, Germany), for example. She stated that "Gingerbread Land" (see below) had its roots in a specific episode of the Saban cartoon series Bumpety Boo (Super RTL) viewed two weeks before the interview. Katrin adopts the setting of a certain sequence: in a quiz show the hero Ken and his talking car have won a trip to a Cockaigne, an imaginary land of ease and luxury, and eat their way through the castle. For Katrin, however, neither the general story (the quiz show, the fight between good and evil) nor the male heroes are relevant for her make-believe world. She only takes the Cockaigne element (Fig. 6).

In several cases the trace back to the medium is even less apparent at first sight. Here the children integrate only a selected object into their make-believe world. For example: Gyu'sang (case 34, South Korea) integrates a car from a computer game into his dream world, which is otherwise about electronic houses and magic powder. Narmeen (an Arab-Israeli girl; case 49, Israel) adds a bench to her drawing of a basketball game with her friends. They can sit on it and have a rest, as the girls do in her favourite Arab cartoon series, she said.

Characters

Another typical theme of media traces in children's dream worlds is the use of characters. Here again a wide variety of possibilities, ranging from the complete adaption of the personality and appearance of figures to selecting just a particular special ability, appearance, a name or a costume. Sometimes the links and similarities to the original figures are extremely clear. In other cases the character does not even appear in the picture and does not emerge until later when the background story is told (Figs. 7 and 8).

The Israeli girl Tali (case 6) dreams of singing on the stage side by side her favourite female singer. The German boy Robby (case 43) imagines that the dragon in the film Dragon Heart is his friend. Every evening before he falls asleep he tells him about what happened during the day. The South Korean boy Yon'uh (case 20) fantasizes two figures fighting around him. Both are adopted from an Internet flash animation: Mashimaro and Zolaman. The American girl Audrey (case 28) draws Pikachu, a key Pokémon figure in her picture.

Tanja (case 53, Germany) provides an illustration of adopting just marginal elements from a character. She draws herself in the magnificent princess's dress from the film Sissi to highlight her own specialness and create a romantic atmosphere around her. She does not use other elements of the film, such as the narrative regarding the role of the Emperor Franz-Joseph or Sissi's fate. They are not important for what she wants to feel, imagine, and express. A particularly insightful example to describe how children borrow from the media for personal use and their themes is presented by Omer (case 2, Israel - Fig. 9):

"In my fantasy the world is exclusively mine, and I am the ruler. I wear this very special suit. The red cape is like Superman's. That green there is my hands that I can climb everything with, like Spiderman, and the blue there is from a fire laser-beam weapon. The red is a belt with Pokémons. That lilac colour is my flying shoes, and the horns come from Batman's mask. I am the Grand Master, and I have a sword like in Star Wars. That area around me is my room. It's very, very big and has many over life-size figures. There is a carpet and a bed and many things for training like walls for climbing. There are weights for muscle training, too, like they do at the Olympics. There are also Pokémon figures, for example a giant Pikachu. In this world there are good people and bad people and a school in a mountain like Hogwart's school in Harry Potter. I have already graduated from there. And there are tropical plants like in a jungle, but pets, too, such as a dog. In the middle of my world there is a mysterious island like in Jules Verne, with many whales like in Moby Dick. When I sleep, I dream of the super powers of the TV heroes, but I have also added a bit from my own imagination."

Omer adopts the abilities and strengths from a whole range of media figures and integrated them all into one character. Strengthened by these powers he is immune to possible attacks and threats, he is powerful and virtually invincible in his many imaginary adventures.

Stories

In a number of fantasies children adapt a certain narrative structure of the media text, using it in their make-believe worlds as a kind of "backbone" on which they base their own story. Ruben (case 40, Germany) experiences travelling through space in a spaceship, based on the story of the film Armageddon. Martin (case 22, USA) experiences a part of Peter Pan's story in the film Hook. Jun'sik (case 29, South Korea) follows the adventures of the story and the computer game Kingdom of the Wind. Children integrate into their make-believe worlds those parts that are interesting and attractive for them: in Jun'sik's case, battles between knights and the life concept of energy, which falls from the trees like leaves until one is dead for a certain time. For Martin's daydream, (case 22, USA), the basketball game is particularly interesting, a rather short scene in the film Hook, when the now adult Peter Pan has to compete against the Lost Boys to prove his worth.
But not only fictional texts feed into children's fantasies. We found that also information from documentary or science programmes can become the springboard for entire dream worlds. For example, Dam'dok (case 40, South Korea) knows from scientific programmes what the Earth looks like when seen from outerspace. With his brother and father he floats up into space by means of large balloons to grasp this phenomenon for himself. Kevin (case 27, USA) has read a book on the American astronaut Neil

Armstrong and fantasizes of being a member of the crew. Together they discover new worlds and occupy them for the USA. Tessina (case 3, Germany) develops her story of providing a special place for endangered animals around some bits of information on them she learned from a television documentary.

Aesthetics

One parameter cutting across the three categories of media traces is the aesthetic component of their drawings. Sometimes children use symbols from the media to refer to specific programmes, books or computer games. In this case symbols from the media represent the media themselves. But the kids also adopt special representation techniques to symbolize movement (for example, frequently drawing lines of movement as in comics), noises (ray-shaped symbolization, music notes), light (rays) - or they use balloons for representing verbal communication. Sometimes, however, they adopt the symbolization of complete concepts, as does Katja (case 29, Germany) who uses the UNICEF emblem to develop her make-believe world of living together in peace. Last but not least, the way of structuring stories and telling them to others is partly determined by the media, although there is not always detailed evidence to confirm this.

The role of the media in children's make-believe worlds

As we have discussed above, children include a variety of media texts in their fantasies in a variety of different ways, and they do it for a host of reasons which can be summarized under three categories: for symbolizing experience, to further the self-image and to facilitate communication. In this process the children are active meaning makers who choose to include elements from their everyday life, including their media experiences, in their make-believe worlds. Children use media to represent sensory experience or to symbolize their own perception of themselves. They integrate particular media contents while ignoring others, to impart a meaning to their own experience, using them to express their own emotions.

Children employ media stories to reflect their own experiences and as the starting point of imagining and seriously developing their own pleasing stories. When doing so, they can choose to remain relatively close to the media stories or to only use fragments of them. But it is mostly their own story they tell, using media material selectively, among other things. The question of which media fragments pass into the kids' fantasies and which they do not use is not primarily one of genre, style, fiction or non-fiction. Rather, the decisive criteria is whether they fit in the kids' themes and advance them. It must be material with which the children can symbolize their experiences, invent their own stories, and communicate with others. Neither is the decisive element how spectacular is the media content or how much action it contains. Rather, they need to offer condensed forms of experience. They may contain detailed description, but must not be confining for the child's imagination (see Neuss in this publication, for example). Limitations arise when pre-defined notions in the text run counter to the children's individual self-appraisal or values.

An example for this line of interpretation is the reconstruction of the case of Patricia (9 years, Germany, case 59). For months she has a "big daydream" which she has been developing mainly at school or also during her homework. She calls it "The Land of Milk and Honey" (see Fig. 10):

"I dream of a land of milk and honey. This is great, because there are so many beds to sleep in and I really like sleeping. And besides this there are many fruit trees, which are always full of fruit. And in this land of milk and honey there are all Pokémon characters. And there are also humans, but only those who believe in Pokémons and love them. Others are not admitted in. Here there are my favourite Pokémons (at the moment): this is Snorlax, and he loves to sleep as much as I do. I'd also love to be Butterfree, because it can fly so nicely. Vileplume, a flower and I like flowers and Mew, my favourite Pokémon, which looks sooo cute and could explode half the globe, when he's angry, but that didn't happen so far. Well, then there is the Pokémon Tokepi, but I play it as a moon manikin. Tokepi was brought to the moon. Tokepi is always flying back and for the moon and the land of milk and honey, because his parents live on the moon. And he also goes to school on the moon. There is also moon-general knowledge as a subject. I'd love to have that so that I wouldn't have to dream of the land of milk and honey during the boring school lessons."

Media traces in this description point out explicitly to Pokémon and Patricia's favourite book: "The 35th

of May" by Erich Kästner. On their strange journey to the South Seas both heroes (Konrad and his uncle Ringelhuth) pass by 'the land of milk and honey' (second chapter), in which being lazy is promoted as a life style. Patricia's make-believe world is named after this land. In the original story there are lots of comfortable beds, in which Patricia places the Pokémon Snorlax, who loves to sleep as much as she does. To sleep and "hang out in bed" is Patricia's favourite activity, not being considered appropriate for a 9-year-old otherwise. In her make-believe world she finds a way to positively value this characteristic. The partial story about Tokepi, travelling between two worlds, can be understood in looking at Patricia's own biography. Patricia's father is a military officer and the family had to move house every other year. Nine months prior to the investigation the family moved from California to Munich, where the girl was struggling in particular at school. Similar to Tokepi she has been repeatedly brought into new and different worlds. With this story (being more complex in the original version) she "works up" her experiences in her make-believe world and finds a way to turn it into something active. She even has a reason for her failure at her studies at school and her lack of interest in educational contents: normally, like Tokepi who lives in two worlds, she would also have to go to a special school and learn other things. The character Mew, who is her most favourite Pokémon, has a special significance for Patricia. According to Patricia although it looks cute, it has the ability to explode half of the earth. For Patricia Mew is an orientation point in her behaviour towards her classmates, with whom she has been experiencing great difficulties at the time of the study. When she is attacked by them she doesn't fight back, but becomes "very quiet". She also "ignores" the negative comments made by her Bavarian teacher (according to her as well as to her mother), without justifying herself on one hand or changing her behaviour on the other hand. This behaviour is very similar to that of Mew in the Pokémon movie, which Patricia watched with fascination. Mew is attacked, but the psycho-lightning does not hurt him. He could lash back (which he eventually does in the movie) but he is aware of his superiority and power. Mew, we suggest, is an inner powerful image to which she clings during hard times with her conviction: "I am more powerful than I seem to be!"

Gender traces in the fantasies

Gender-specific tendencies exist in all four countries, and are usually immediately apparent. The girls' fantasies tend to place an emphasis on harmony and they frequently fill the entire picture with a landscape. Traces of media are less evident in the girls' make-believe worlds. The boys' pictures are often saturated with unequivocal references to current media contents, and many pictures portray a conflict situation. With very few exceptions girls do not draw male figures and boys do not draw female figures. In accordance with gender-specific socialization processes girls stress harmony and their orientation towards the centrality of relationships in their lives. They are responsible and organize their world for lasting permanent structures. The fantasies of most boys, on the other hand, tend to be episodic with the emphasis on action. They seek and enjoy clashes, repel danger and fight for a good cause. They seem to do everything to avoid harmony. The worlds of the girls and the boys seem to be completely distinct.
However, what seems at first sight to be two completely different worlds is revealed in a detailed analysis to have, in fact, quite similar characteristics. Danger, so it seems, is present in both genders' worlds. In the boys' case, the confrontation or the dangerous being is usually immediately present in the drawing and story. With the girls' drawing, however, this is not the case at first glance, but is often revealed under closer secondary analysis of their stories. Isabel (case 52, Germany) alludes to evil people and to criminals turned back by spies at the border. Tessina (case 3, Germany) introduces a clear arrangement for protecting her animals who are endangered by human beings: during the day people may visit the island, but the night belongs solely to the animals.
Whereas boys often fight against the threat or danger directly in the picture, girls organize them away and make them disappear. Hence, both boys and girls find ways to confront threats and dangers, but they do it in ways supported by their gender-specific socialization. They perform gender by finding an appropriate "girlish" or "boyish" way to handle such issues within their peer group and especially for us as researchers.
Traces of media, as mentioned above, are found more frequently and clearly in boys make-believe worlds. Media characters in particular are frequently present in boys' fantasies, while in the girls' they are extremely rare. The incidence of fantasies without clear traces of media is twice as high in the case of the girls. This is not surprising giving what we know from gender-specific media analyses according to which most heroes of the children's programming are male, and they are presented in a much wider

range of roles, professions, and personalities. Television as well as computer games seem to offer too little for girls' fantasies, particularly in terms of the possibility for imagining themselves to be strong, powerful and to be able to take independent action. Girls are accordingly compelled to invest a lot more in processing, interpreting, and making the media material meaningful and relevant to them. In their make-believe worlds they prefer the potentially androgynous creatures like the Pokémon figures (grammatically most of them are neuter) or CatDog (half female cat, half male dog). Another strategy they seem to employ is to simply omit the male heroes from the text and to borrow media setting alone. Sometimes they invent their own female make-believe figures that were not in the original text but would have fitted in well. The boys' fantasies, on the other hand, reveal traces especially of action-adventure films and computer games, documentary programmes, as well as mythical stories where men are the heroes. The clear traces of media in the boys' fantasies suggest that boys search for images of masculinity they expect to find mainly in the media. These choices are, however, often extraordinarily conservative, contributing far too little to a well-balanced identity formation of developing boys (Winter/ Neubauer 2001).

Cultural traces in the fantasies

The similarities existing across the borders of the four countries described above are also complemented by special features in each. Just as media traces evident in the make-believe worlds were understand in the context of familiarity with children's media environment, cultural traces can be reconstructed and interpreted against the backdrop of knowledge of the unique characteristics of the four cultures.

Germany

The German study produced several traces that can be considered special. Animals, for example, are evident in the children's fantasies in all the countries, but particularly frequently in the case of the German children. Over 70% of all make-believe world pictures in the German sample feature animals, which play a significant role in the story. They represent children's interests, they symbolize the feeling of being threatened, they embody the wish for close relationships - for showing and being shown love and affection - and for gaining strength.
German kids experience one particular related moral conflict, however, that is reflected in their fantasies: they are divided between their love of animals and the consumption of meat. In their fantasy world they find ways of coming to terms with this conflict. They go about informing other people, or justify why they eat meat but still love animals, and why they should be protected. This is also an apt context for a theme that is significant in a relatively large number of German children's make-believe worlds: the protection of the environment. Boys and girls imagine how they can create environments in which animals can live in peace. They want to drive environment-friendly cars, disassociating themselves from other (imagined) countries that have no environment-friendly industry. Besides the effect of watching nature and environment television programmes, it is in all likelihood mainly the primary-school curriculum that contributes to this awareness and concern. Children want to actively protect nature in their make-believe world, to avoid waste and to behave in an environment-friendly way. These make-believe world elements are clearly linked here to power and competence fantasies. This connection is extremely gratifying; offering support in the form of more symbolic material which is socially desirable. The girls in the German sample reveal an additional conspicuous feature. A relatively large number of them focus on the wish to "act independently and self-determinedly" in their make-believe world. There is a regional difference in the forms of expression of this wish: girls in the north of the Republic frequently use horses as symbolic material for this desire to act, girls from Bavaria in the south use queens or princesses as their motif. The reason for this difference can be easily associated with their regional environment - in the north part of the country, horses are much more available and central to the culture; while in Bavaria, castles and the myths surrounding them are far more central.

Israel

The study in Israel was designed to take into account the diversity of the population in Israeli society and the Jewish-Arab conflict, in particular. A fifth of the sample consisted therefore of Arab Israeli

children, of both Muslim and Christian origin, while the rest represented the Jewish majority of the country. We wanted to find out more about the fantasies of children growing up in a fundamentally divided society. In their everyday world they experience enduring, violent clashes resulting in an escalation of hate and aggression accompanied by the widespread feeling of despair and the loss of all hope. Accordingly, we expected to find in the children's dream worlds references to their concerns and attitudes towards this situation.

However, contrary to our expectations the conflict did not overshadow children's make-believe worlds and coping with it did not serve as a dominant theme in their stories and wishes. Both Jewish and Arab children did not explicitly wish for worlds where there were no terrorist attacks, no suicide bombers, no military occupation and no racism. All in all we found only a few references to the political situation, and mostly in passing. Only one 9-year-old Jewish girl, Amanda, seemed pre-occupied with terrorist attacks and made an explicit wish for a world without them. In her utopian world she drew a bomb and crossed it out with a thick X explaining: "I draw an X on it, so there are no wars and no terrorist attacks." Later in the interview she described her make-believe world in detail:

"There is no school and there are no studies, and there is no need to work there because they have everything, and there is no need for money (...) this is why I draw it in a cloud, so it means it is imaginary, where I really want to live, a place without terrorist attacks."

Similarly, we were not faced with any stories in which children imagined themselves as military heroes fighting against the enemy or defending their own people. We found no Jewish, no Arab, and no general nationalistic symbols in the fantasies. There were no national flags or slogans, no religious symbols or cultural icons, and virtually no mention of the collective - neither in a religious nor in a nationalist context (the one exception being three Jewish boys' wishes for a victory by an Israeli soccer team). The sole indication that children are aware of the situation and are concerned came indirectly. Several Jewish and Arab children said that they tried to avoid reading newspapers or watching television news because they were troubled by the contents. Presumably the children partly suppress the political situation, inclining to create in their fantasies a kind of counter world where the conflict and the threats it poses on their well-being, identity, and morality are nonexistent.

As anticipated, we found in the study several differences between Arab and Jewish children. Due to the low number of examples, however, they should rather be seen as ideas and tendencies. The dream worlds of the Jewish children revealed more traces of an individual orientation: "for myself", "to be all by myself", "to be independent", "to do only things I want", "to have no parents telling me what to do", "nobody is there who expects to discipline me". The Arab children, on the other hand, seemed to be more geared to the collective: in their dream worlds, they tended to be with other people, mainly with their relatives or friends. One possible interpretation of this difference can be associated with their collective cultural-social orientations. On the whole, Jewish children currently raised in Israel are oriented towards a Western-modernized society, highly Americanized and characterized by the typical processes of individualization, commercialization and privatization. Arab-Israeli children, on the other hand, while being raised in the same country, usually grow up amidst traditional social-institutions much more resistant to change. The traditional society focuses heavily on the extended family as well as responsibility for the Arab minority collective, which has been systematically discriminated against due to the complexity of the political situation in the region.

One possible indication of the sense of alienation, in which these Arab-Israeli children are raised, is their lack of acknowledgement and identification with the State of Israel as an entity. In their stories, these children referred to their village or town, but never to the country or state, neither by naming it or indirectly. While Jewish boys, for example, identified with Israeli soccer teams and proudly wished for their victories - the Arab boys chose to skip their country of citizenship and to identify with a far-way team from Brazil, or to draw a flag of Switzerland.

USA

The US-American part of the study was carried out in Urbana, Illinois. This is a medium-sized university town in the Midwest. The population is primarily middle-class. Geographically, the landscape there is very flat. There is no large body of water close by. The fantasy of the coast/water was clearly noticeable - sand, sun, mermaids, dolphins, etc. Mountains also figured in several of the fantasies. Feature-length movies played a significant role in the US-American fantasies more than in the other countries. Four children referred to the movie Shrek, for example, which had just arrived in the cinemas not long before

the survey period. In the USA, movies play an important role in the children's media environment. When a new movie enters the cinemas, marketing campaigns aim at generating excitement - with product spin-offs and promotional campaigns involving fast-food chains and other child-oriented businesses. For example, it is common practice for plastic figurines of movie personalities to be given as bonuses in special children's meals. Via TV commercials the kids are urged to collect these toys. In this way the figures can become a ubiquitous part of children's culture even before the launch of the movie. The theatre run is routinely followed up by the release of a video, which can also be accompanied by a new advertising campaign. Once children own a video, it is common practice to view it many times. This cycle of promotions and advertising through different media outlets over the course of time, with subsequent repeated viewings, may explain the notably more important role of movies in the fantasies of the American kids.

Another striking point is the emphasis of personal strength and individuality in the fantasies, evident in all countries, but clearer and more widespread in the American pictures. The United States is a society that attaches considerable value to those who are successful due to their own motivation and action - and this is evident in several children's fantasies. Being successful is an intrinsic part of American children's fantasies. They interject themselves into situations where they can take action in the world, instead of reacting to the world. They are strong, they have everything under control and they call the shots. This corresponds to the cultural norms and social values: "Most western industrialized societies tend to place individual above collective aims for various historical and cultural reasons. Traces of autonomy and self-confident approaches in individuals are those generally respected and directly encouraged by parents in these societies." (De Loache and Gottlieb, 2000, p. 13). Autonomy and self-confidence are encouraged more than solidarity with others or self-denial. It is not only perfectly acceptable to be different (within certain bounds); it is fine to rise above the crowd and to be special. These values are evident in the fantasies of the American kids, where their individuality and competence are spotlighted and celebrated.

South Korea

What is initially particularly striking about the Korean pictures is their special design. Many pictures are painted with a background colour, using intense, radiant colours. This certainly has something to do with the painting materials available, but is also deeply rooted in the culture. Korean children have to be trained at an early age in specific, precise painting and drawing techniques. The background, however, is to be sought even more deeply in traditional roots, still very much alive in modern Korea and which influence identity-formation and everyday culture. Towards the end of the 2nd century B.C. Confucianism crossed Korean borders to become life's leading philosophy there. The philosophical teachings deeply influenced the lives, thinking and behaviour of the Korean population, constituting the state doctrine in the Kingdom until the beginning of the 20th century (Yi, 1995, S. 64). To this very day Korean family structures and daily habits, education at home and at school in South Korea are anchored in the norms and values of Confucian ethics and their culture moulded by Confucianism (e.g. Glasenapp, 1957; Eberhart, 1971; Kim, S.H., 1986; Yun, 1995).

The most important Confucian basic doctrine and principles are:

- Adaptation to the world
- Observation of order and conventions
- Subordination of human society to the divine order

The Confucian principles of ethics are:

- Inequality in the status of all human beings
- Educability of all human beings
- Necessity of renunciation of individual freedom in favour of social-emotional security

Five rules for ordering interhuman relations in state and society are:

- Loyalty between subject and authority

- Reverence, respect, devotion in the parent-child relationship
- Strict division of man's and woman's roles
- Rank differences through respect and deference of young people for older people
- Trust and esteem between friends

In Korean society, academic education and elite universities enjoy high esteem. Scholars generally occupy a socially privileged position, constituting the civil service. Nowadays a rigorous system of selection based on scholastic achievement is applied in education to cream off the best, the elite, which is matched by the parents' efforts to provide their children with a sound, promising school education. Private tuition in addition to school tuition, with the corresponding financial burden for the parents, almost goes without saying. The originally positive Confucian heritage that everyone is educable and should enjoy education was interpreted one-sidedly in the modern competitive society, leading to enormous pressure on children and young people to perform well at school. This is expressed in the fantasies which contain explicit references to such pressure that the kids would like to escape from. The girl Hyon'ah (case 5) would like to fly to the USA, since she believes that kids in the USA and other countries do not have to learn so much. The boy Seyong (case 18), a model pupil, would like to live in a world where he can live without the pressure to do well exerted by adults. School as an unpleasant factor, which children quite emphatically would like to exclude from their dream world, exists in other countries, as well. But in Korea it is explicitly the pressure (not school as a whole) that the kids refer to. While some wish to flee from the pressure to do well, others have assimilated their responsibility to always produce good, neat work. The girl Young'son (case 12) fantasizes even in her dream world a clock that confirms she has produced the results demanded of her and praises her - some kind of Alter Ego. Another characteristic in which the cultural heritage of Confucianism is reflected is, for instance, the high level of group consciousness, which results in the children being very reserved about portraying themselves as something special in their fantasies.

And yet it is not only the tradition of Confucianism that reveals itself as a cultural speciality in the kids' fantasies. In comparison to the other three countries considerably more traces of media from computer games are apparent. This can be probably explained by the enormous interest in multimedia in Korea. Computers and multimedia equipment are absolutely normal basic facilities in every classroom. In the children's upbringing the special potential of multimedia is underscored; parents and educators alike encourage the kids to use computers. The question as to whether a generation of frequent users is being weaned that is not always able to handle the fascination of computer games is ignored by society. Particularly regarding the boys this trend provides food for thought.

Educational implications

In this study we offered children an opportunity for fantasizing and investigated the extent to which media and cultural traces are evident in what they imagined. One phenomenon becomes quite clear: children have a rich make-believe world. They express it mostly with discernible traces of the media, but partly without any.

Television, the primary medium for kids' fantasies, can supply material for the make-believe world, if television matches the children's themes, their world of experience and their appropriation patterns without placing excessive demands. This applies not only to specific genres and formats, fiction or non-fiction. However, the media also supply patterns of interpretation that are not always appropriate for the kids and their situation in life and are not necessarily to their advantage. The study revealed problem areas in regard to gender issues as well as the perception of other peoples.

For example, there was a case in Dresden where a girl fantasized taking knowledge and merchandise from Germany to the "dummies" - meaning the Africans. Certainly, such perceptions are mainly formed by the social environment. The media traces, however, clearly refer to animal documentaries where usually "ignorant Africans" kill or harm animals unnecessarily. The "good and clever" whites (in this case Germans) discover this and teach the "Africans" how to do things properly. The girl adopts this interpretation pattern, it is true: It gives her the opportunity and freedom to take action. She becomes a German missionary.

This may indeed be subjectively meaningful, but with the aid of the media she creates stereotypes and perceptions that correspond to a (nationally formed) hierarchization. It is therefore urgent that the media generally, especially those for children, apply their clichés more cautiously.

Another problematic aspect is that television also opens up wishes in children's make-believe worlds or can formulate a title to the fulfilment of their wishes. Due to the close link between television and advertizing and licensing markets especially in commercialized television, the danger is that consumer wishes are confused with freedom of choice, and that children are just seen as customers with spending power.

Last but not least, it must be borne in mind that television per se is easily accessible and a continuous occupation of time for a large number of children. Singer and Singer (see for example 1999) drew the conclusion from their research that continuous television consumption of heavy users, as well as negative feedback from the surrounding environment can also limit the ability to fantasize. However, the possibility that television as an activity in itself constitutes an intense experience has not been a focus of this study yet. As a result of the constant exposure to this intensive media experience, the mental freedom necessary for the development and maintenance of the fantasies can be lost (Klemm, 1999). Media literacy is required for such a process, including the plain ability to switch the television off. In order to develop media-literate children, it is necessary to invest in media-literate educators and parents, not only in the context of appropriate television use. Adults need more skills to comprehend the expression of children's fantasies, in all of its forms, with or without traces of the media. According to Singer it would certainly also assist children if adults themselves were open to their own fantasies. Television's significant role for the make-believe worlds of children should not be underestimated. It can be used to promote fantasy if children and their parents are able to contend with its contents, viewing duration and discussion of the television traces in a competent and literate way and if producers are aware of their responsibility, do not exploit children but take them and their diverse characteristics and needs seriously, and join hands in supporting their healthy growth.

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NOTES

1. *The evaluation of the child's drawing was based on Norbert Neuss' approach (1999). The child's individual statements made during the interview - the subjective meaning perspective having been understood - were used to formulate a story that adhered as closely as possible to the child's original quotes, emphasizing what was particularly important for him or her.*

2. *The German-language term "Handlungswünsche" (desires to act) is closely related to that customarily used in German-language media science research "handlungsleitende Themen" (themes of relevance for children's development) (Bachmair 1982, Charlton/Neumann-Braun 1986, also Theunert 1995, Neuss 1999 etc..) Unfortunately, there is currently no broadly based systematics of the term and analysis levels. This explains why we opted for a smaller, descriptive evaluation perspective and term, close to the empirical material.*

3. *We would like to thank Ruth Etienne Klemm Ph.D., a child psychologist and expert for children's fantasies, for the help with the reconstruction of this case.*

4. *The study took place only a few months after the second uprising in the Palestinian occupied territories, and before the complete escalation of the current crisis.*

INFORMATION

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▶▶ *to the top*

The study deals on children and mass media use: A study of the vote of mass media use in childhood socialization. It throws light on one of the most remarkable features in human development. This feature is the transformation of the child from a low, helpless and defenseless infant to a self fending adult, by the process of socialization. The relent introduction of satellite communication has further reduced the world to we global village. What role them the mass media play during the process of childhood socialization? Phrased differentially what are the interlocking relationship between the child the media and the cultural acquisition of his society? All we find in most programmes designed for children in the mass media are songs, dances story's telling and plays. Since some decades the media's presence in children is completly omnipresent. The media is used by children as an agent of socialisation on their knowledge. Children's news media use social intructions acquaintances function as primary sources of causal effects for each other. Thus the media's effects are getting more and more important in the children's educational system almost more than the parental upbringings. In these times, it create for the child and adolescent spectators an immediate experience of a virtual reality that become at once central to the fantasy lives of young peoples. Muc Role of Social Media for Children and Young People's Wellbeing. Approaches to the Study of the Effects of Social Media. ii) Material dimension: text, images and interactions that are produced and made visible on digital platforms and devices. iii) Social dimension: with whom and how children and young people interact via social media, which can promote and enhance interpersonal connections at peer, family, local and global scales. 4. active agents in media practices and the world around them (Jenkins et al., 2006). Social media can thus also be understood as a 'cultural mindset' towards the diverse production, use and purposes of digital communications (boyd, 2014). This diversity can be broken down into technical, material, social and motivational dimensions. Children and adolescents' use of media has greatly increased in the past 5 – 10 years, which has been documented in numerous Kaiser Family Foundation Studies. The most recent 2010 report regarding behavior of two thousand 8 – 18 year olds showed that the average child spent 7.5 hours each day using media. However, because of multi-tasking, children actually crammed 10.75 hours of media use into that 7.5-hour period of time. As part of the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Children Phase Three, adolescents between 12 and 15 years of age from 37 countries provided information on television viewing habits. Eighty-nine percent of adolescents reported more than one hour of television viewing daily. Media exposure of younger children. Media and the Make-Believe Worlds of Children offers new insights into children's descriptions of their invented or "make-believe" worlds, and the role that the children's experience with media plays in creating these worlds. This distinctive volume: *outlines the central debates and research findings in the area of children, fantasy worlds, and the media; *provides a descriptive account of children's make-believe worlds and their wishes for actions they would like to take in these worlds; *highlights the centrality of media in children's make believe worlds; *emphasizes the multiple creative ways in which children use.