

# CAMmer in the Spotlight

## Dafna Lemish, PhD

Dean, College of Mass Communication and Media Arts, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale Illinois  
Co-editor of [Journal of Children and Media](#)  
Contact: [dafnalemish@siu.edu](mailto:dafnalemish@siu.edu) / [personal website](#)

### Getting to know... Dafna Lemish

**What are you currently working on?** I am really excited about my current project, in collaboration with my long-time colleague, Maya Götz, Director of the Bavarian Broadcasting's International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) in Munich, Germany, and her team of bright upcoming researchers. The field study collected written stories and drawings of fear experiences elicited during childhood by watching television and films, as told by undergraduate students in several countries around the world. We were amazed to find that almost all these students had a story to tell about a frightening experience that they remember in detail to this day, and were able to visualize clearly. Currently we are analyzing similarities across cultures. At this point I can say that we are finding, as expected, that viewing age inappropriate contents – like horror films and science fiction – are common among the stories recounted by participants. However, we also found that many recalled fears stimulated by classic Disney animation movies, such as trauma of feeling Bambi's pain at losing his mother and remaining alone in the world,

or respondents being frightened by the scary witch in the Wizard of Oz. I am particularly interested in gender and cultural differences. Here you may be surprised to learn, that we found boys, as much as girls have fearful experiences and are open about sharing them. However, we are finding fascinating cultural differences – such as the availability of particular content, cultural values and ideology, or traumatic moments like 9/11 that are showing up in the stories of frightening experiences and media related nightmares in different countries. This is fascinating. We hope parents, educators, producers, and policymakers will take notice of it, as fearful experiences often result in traumatic nightmares and behavioral rituals that remain, in many cases, throughout adulthood.

**What has been your most memorable project, and why?** That is a tough question, but I would say that my [study of television producers of children's media around the world](#) is, currently, my most memorable project. I interviewed 135 producers from 65 countries around the world (and no, I did not travel

to all these places – I wish I could – rather I interviewed many of them in international events, mostly during the Prix Jeunesse – the international festival of quality children’s television that has taken place in Munich every two years for half a century). It was an amazing experience, not only intellectually, but most of all at a human level, to talk to smart, creative people from around the world who dedicate their professional lives to create high quality media for children, to learn about the things we share universally, and the cultural differences that attempt to dominate our lives. Although I have been traveling the world my entire life, this particular study was breathe-taking for me. I started with a plan to interview some 10 producers, just to get a sense of their views about creating quality media to share with my students, but I just couldn’t stop, and ended up with 135 interviews about gender equity, diversity, multiculturalism, and what it means to be a child today.

**Which achievement are you most proud of, and why?**

Without a doubt, it is my students – the new generation of talented and industrious young people who teach, work as professionals, researchers, parents, and just make a meaningful difference

in the two areas I am deeply passionate about – children’s wellbeing and gender equity. The fact that I had something to do with their education and social values gives me tremendous joy. I am so proud of them!

And another kind of mentoring, perhaps “second removed”, is founding and editing the Journal of Children and Media. There was such a desperate need for a shared intellectual arena, a place where to meet researchers from all disciplines, methodological traditions, and from around the world – a place where we can focus our attention on children and media. I am so proud of how it has developed and created around it a community of scholars – prominent, upcoming, and new to the field, and I was so fortunate to expand my networking and professional relationships and to work with amazing scholars and leaders – including my current co-editor Amy Jordan and Review and Commentary editor Vicky Rideout. I have been truly fortunate!

**What would be your work motto?**

Study what you are passionate about. For me it is often something that had to do with my own children growing up, and my own experiences as a person, and



as a woman... something that I deeply cared about. I found that the so-called lines between “work” and “leisure” become blurred, as you just truly enjoy the experience of creating new knowledge and learning about something you care so deeply about.

**Which of your publications is your favorite, and why?** This changes periodically... I guess right now I would say my new book, fresh off the press, which is a very ambitious attempt to map the entire field of children and media in one accessible book. Kind of “everything you wanted to know about all children, all media, all around the world in one book.” It just came out, so I have no idea how successful I was in achieving this goal - I am eager to get some feedback. I will feel very satisfied if busy students, parents, professionals, policymakers and the like feel that reading this one book helped them understand the basic issues we are struggling with in our field, the current answers we have, and the huge uncertainties about the future...

**If you had unlimited resources, what kind of project would you want to do and why?** I would want to study the effectiveness of media interventions in improving the lives and wellbeing of marginal and vulnerable children around the world, following the UNICEF project I was involved in with my colleague Barbara Kolucki who actually implements such interventions in crisis situations. There are so many wonderful initiatives – but are they working? Are they making a difference? Can we use media in

more valuable ways? I would want to follow several long term field experiments, with pre and post studies over time.... Imagine working with refugee children, or AIDS orphan children, or tsunami relocated children, or sex-trafficked children and using media “to Nurture, Inspire, Excite, Educate and Heal” them (as we entitled the project). That would be my dream research project.

**If you had to give one piece of advice to young CAM scholars, what would it be?** You have to truly care about children, believe in them, treat them as full and equal human beings and then everything else will fall into place regarding the questions you ask, the methods you use, and the way you interpret your findings.

**Who would you like to put in the spotlight next, and why?** There are so many deserving outstanding and accomplished CAM members and friends – it is impossible to choose... So I would purposefully like to put in the spotlight someone I don’t know well but wish I did, someone from another culture and background of most of CAM members, who brings a very fresh and unique voice to our field – Sun Sun Lim from Singapore. I’d love to learn more about her study on media in the lives of juvenile offenders, for example, and just research on media and children in Asia.