The construction of ”the child” in air safety videos

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Through extensive travels, I have developed a special interest in Air Safety Videos. It is of crucial importance to the airline that people pay attention to these instructions, and the creativity to catch people's attention seem to have become limitless, from videos with all naked airline personnel to paraphrasing popular films or series, featuring famous actors. My interest is however not in these spectacular productions, but in the classic air safety videos, that run for years on end, in every flight, trying to get the important message across. I am also particularly interested in the videos that feature animated characters, as these animated characters are constructed and created in the airlines image of their passengers and what their passenger are capable of. Thus, I find animated videos well suited for a cultural study. By putting depersonalized dolls in humorous or awkward situations, exaggerate features like disapproving faces or gestures, and modify bodies to fit the part they need to demonstrate, these simple portraits convey expectations of you as an airline passenger, in this particular airplane. For the target audience to feel the relevance of air safety, the producers of air safety videos need to mold the imaginary passengers to fit their real life generic passengers as much as possible. My particular concern in this paper is how these videos construct the child traveler. I have chosen to compare and contrast 16 videos that has animated characters, and where a child or children and at least one parent is present. In this paper I will focus on children’s physical appearance and how they are presented in terms of competence, presence and in communication with other characters. The airlines whose videos I compare and contrast are European (5) American (1), South American (1), African (1) Middle Eastern (4) and Asian (3), selected both from personal experience and through most frequently watched on YouTube.

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