

Gender Representation in Animation: A Study on Children's Television Programming in India

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Children's cartoons under-represent women and privilege their physical appearance: facial attractiveness, body weight, unrealistic body shapes over any other trait that a woman could be positively identified with. There is a huge gap between women's position in the society and their portrayals on television. This paper primarily explores images of gender propagated on children's cartoon in Indian television programmes. Purposive sampling techniques has been used to identify the top five animation/cartoon programming for each year from 2001 to 2014 from the sampling frame of 10 programmes on the basis of television rating. The analysis established that male characters are much higher in number as compared to females both in primary and secondary character categories.

Keywords: Gender representation, television programme, cartoon, animation

Despite the proliferation of several media technologies, television occupies an important position in children's lives. The images and sounds of the television screen have become integral part of children's everyday lives. This study primarily explores images of gender propagated on children's television cartoons in the Indian context. The heterogeneity of the Indian socio-cultural context somehow does not get represented in the dominant socio-cultural media discourse, which is mostly lop-sided and surprisingly more homogenous. This homogeneity, unfortunately, is based on the concept of standardised codes and norms. When this standardisation gets extended to media content for children, its repercussions can be both long-lasting and detrimental. According to the KPMG-FICCI Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report 2015¹, India is the second largest television market in the world after China with 168 million television households (p. 6). The same report states that the kids' genre has a viewership share of 7.3 per cent (p. 22). Animation has been a big draw on children's television channels in India. According to the Ernst & Young Report²

Literature Review

Gotz et al., (2008) conducted quantitative media analysis of children's television in 24 countries across the world. The main characters of the fictional programmes were coded for the purpose of this research. The results showed a 'clear under-representation and stereotyped depiction of female characters worldwide'. India was a part of the sample for

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this project. 158 fictional programmes were coded from various Indian children's television channels including Cartoon Network, Disney, Doordarshan, Nick, Pogo, Sony, Star One, Star Plus, Sun TV, Surya TV among others. The main highlights of this research with respect to Indian children's cartoon television programme were:

- (i) The content of animation programming was about 81 per cent.
- (ii) Domestically produced content accounted for only 15.8 per cent of the total programming.
- (iii) There were 36.1 per cent female characters and 63.9 per cent male characters.
- (iv) Females mostly operated in groups. Loners were only males.
- (v) Females appeared slightly more often at private places and at school, males at public places and work sphere.

Jaggi (2015, p. 1-17) conducted a textual analysis study on the most popular television cartoon programmes on Indian television. This study analysed four cartoon shows—ChhotaBheem, Doraemon, Ninja Hattori, and Oggvand the Cockroaches. The key findings of this study were:

- (i) No female protagonists exist. Female characters are side characters.
- (ii) There is a severe dearth of female characters in terms of numbers.
- (iii) Most characters are shown to live up to the social norms of gender roles.
- (iv) Males engage with what is deemed masculine and females engage with what is deemed feminine.
- (v) Physical strength is the source of popularity for boys.
- (vi) Girls are more domesticated.
- (vii) There are few oppositional, non-stereotypical sub-texts in a few narratives which are largely undeveloped.

The above section demonstrates the severe paucity of research in the space of children and television in India and gender representations on children's television, in particular. Hence, the subject needs more rigorous engagement especially in the Indian context.

Streicher's (1974) study is one of the earliest references used by the researcher to review the literature on representation of gender in children's television programming. She conducted a 9-week study in 1972 and reported that male characters outnumbered female characters in an overwhelming manner across all genres of programming. The gap was glaring in the 'chase and pratfall' genre and improved in the 'continuing adventure' genre. Female characters had more presence and stronger roles in the 'teachy-preachy' genre. However the more mature tiles like doctor or professor were given to male characters only. Mothers were shown to be working in the house only and no male character was shown to provide any help in household chores. Streicher (1974) concluded that there was significant perpetuation of gender stereotypes in television programming aimed at children. Bem developed the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), a psychometric instrument, used to measure masculine and feminine gender role perceptions (Bem, 1981; Holt & Ellis, 1998; Hoffman & Borders, 2001). The list of masculine and feminine traits (adjectives and phrases) proposed by Bem (1981) and eventually used by Holt & Ellis (1981) were as under:

Masculine Traits	Feminine Traits
Acts as a Leader	Affectionate
Aggressive	Cheerful
Ambitious	Childlike
Analytical	Compassionate
Assertive	Does not use harsh language
Athletic	Eager to soothe hurt feelings
Competitive	Feminine
Defends own Beliefs	Flatterable
Dominant	Gentle
Forceful	Gullible
Has Leadership Abilities	Loves Children
Independent	Sensitive to the needs of others
Individualistic	Shy
Makes Decisions Easily	Soft-spoken
Masculine	Sympathetic
Self-Reliant	Tender
Self-Sufficient	Understanding
Strong Personality	Warm
Willing to Take a Stand	Yielding
Willing to Take Risks	

Male characters outnumbered female characters across television content for children. Male characters are shown in primary roles. Female characters are limited in their roles as they are mostly seen as secondary and tertiary characters.

Children's cartoons under-represent women and privilege their physical appearance – facial attractiveness, body weight, unrealistic body shapes over any other trait that a woman could be positively identified with.

There is a huge gap between women's position in the society and their portrayals on television. The main focus of media messages centered on the importance of physical appearance and relationships for girls. Under-representation, sexualisation and subordination of females; prevalence of traditional gender roles and over-emphasis on body image.

Male cartoon characters display more physical aggression. When female characters display aggression, it is social in nature.

Female characters over time are losing their traditional feminine characteristics and some studies state that they are acquiring traditional masculine characteristics.

This is not true for the male characters, who strongly portrayed masculine stereotypes and did not move towards acquiring any traditionally recognised feminine characteristics. Studies on representation of masculinity are lesser in comparison to studies on representations of femininity in media content.

Conversations in cartoons describe girls in terms of their physical appearance and boys in terms of their activities.

Female characters were more attractive than male characters implying that only attractive females find a place in the story; however males can be unattractive and still retain prominent roles.

The list of masculine stereotypes includes the following categories– dominant, independent, rational, intelligent, analytical, assertive, strong, brave, ambitious, active, competitive, insensitive, sexually aggressive and attractive due to achievement.

The list of feminine stereotypes includes – submissive, dependent, unintelligent, emotional, receptive, intuitive, weak, timid, content, passive, cooperative, sensitive, sex object and attractive due to physical appearance.

Programming for the younger children is more sex-stereotyped as compared to programming for relatively older children.

On the basis of the literature review, the sub-objectives of the study are:

- (i) To find out the ratio of male and female characters in cartoon shows on Indian children's television channels
- (ii) To examine and analyse the physical portrayals of male and female characters in cartoon shows on Indian children's television channels
- (iii) To examine and compare the similarities and differences between behaviour-related masculine and feminine representations in cartoon shows on Indian children's television channels

Media content forms a system of representations. Hall (2013) states that language is a representational system. When language is replaced with images and sounds, they also form a representational system. It is in this representational system that meaning gets produced. Representations are almost invariably gendered, and we need to examine the interactional situations that are suggested by the media as a way of building and shaping gender identities. Media texts can be analysed to deconstruct gender representations in different ways. The content analysis method used to analyse gender representations in cartoons on Indian children's television channels uses the quantitative technique but is not based on positivism. While the content analysis aims to describe the disparity in gender portrayals in the cartoon texts, it also acknowledges the sub-textual meanings of these representations.

Methodology

Purposive Sampling technique has been used to identify the top five animation/cartoon programming (films telecasted on television and television series) for each year from 2001 to 2014 from the sampling frame of top 10 programmes on the basis of television ratings.

Sample size: The content analysis was conducted on a total sample of 135 cartoon show episodes and films in all (N=135), as listed below–

- (i) 117 episodes from various cartoon/animation series from 2001 to 2014
- (ii) 18 animation/cartoon films from 2001 to 2014

Inter-coder Reliability: The coders were three post-graduate students of Mass Communication. All coders were females and in the age group of 21-24. They were trained by the researcher. All categories were explained to the coders and written operational definitions (the codebook) were given to them. After the training, all the three coders were given the same episode of a show to be coded by each of them independently and an inter-coder reliability of more than 85% was achieved. The percentage agreement index was used to calculate

inter-coder reliability. The same episodes of five different cartoon shows were coded by all the three coders. Hence a total of five episodes were coded by each of the coders. There was no disagreement with reference to coding of the variables in Part 1 (physical appearance) and Part 2 (social settings and activities) of the codebook. There were disagreements in coding six out of the total 40 variables (behavioural attributes and communication patterns) in Part 3. Hence the percentage agreement was calculated as under:

Pa (percentage agreement) = Total number of agreements/ Total number of variables x 100
 Percentage Agreement = $34/40 \times 100 = 85$

Hence an inter-coder reliability of 85% was achieved.

The coding sheet for content analysis was divided into three parts and all categories were operationally defined.

- (i) Coding of the episode/film
- (ii) Coding of characters: Primary female and male, secondary female and male, gender-neutral
- (iii) Masculine and Feminine traits: 40 variables in the categories of physical appearance, social settings and activities; and behavioural traits and communication patterns.

Results

Number of Characters: Gender-wise Distribution

A total of 1057 cartoon characters were coded from a total sample of 135 shows and films. 748 characters were males, 292 characters were female and 17 were gender-neutral characters. Hence 70.76 per cent cartoon characters were males, 27.63 per cent cartoon characters were females and only 1.61 per cent cartoon characters were gender-neutral. In terms of primary characters, 194 were male characters and 51 were female characters. There were no primary gender-neutral cartoon characters.

Physical Attributes and Attire: Description of Gender Specific Representations

While make-up was evident to enhance the facial attractiveness of female characters, it was not a primary characteristic of male characters. Primary male and female characters were not portrayed as fat. Only few secondary male and female characters were portrayed as fat. In terms of height, primary male characters were portrayed as tall and secondary male characters were portrayed having medium to short height. In some cases, the male cartoon character playing the rival or antagonist in an episode or film was shown to be tall. However, both primary and secondary female cartoon characters were portrayed to possess short to medium height.

Hypotheses

H1: Male characters outnumber female characters in cartoon shows on Indian children's television channels. The male cartoon characters in the sample under investigation outnumber the female cartoon characters by a ratio of 2.5: 1. Hence the first hypothesis is proven.

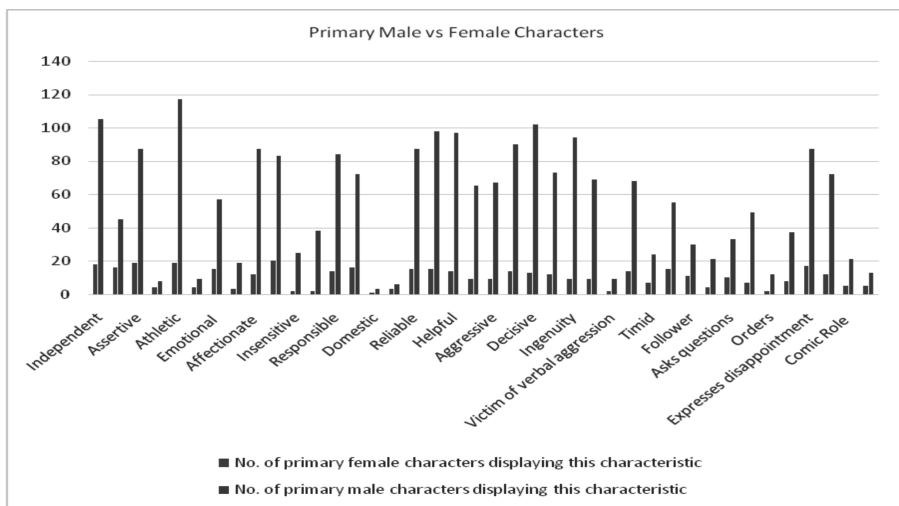
H2: The representations of male and female characters in cartoon shows on Indian children's television channels are consistent with the masculine and feminine gender stereotypes of physical and behaviour-related attributes.

It is clear from the analysis above that the overwhelmingly higher number of male characters in the overall sample over 14 years also leads to male characters displaying all the behavioural characteristics more than the female characters. However as mentioned above, out of the 40 behavioural characteristics coded for this study, 27 were stereotypically masculine behaviours and 13 were stereotypically feminine behaviour variables. The following is the list of stereotypically masculine behaviour variables.

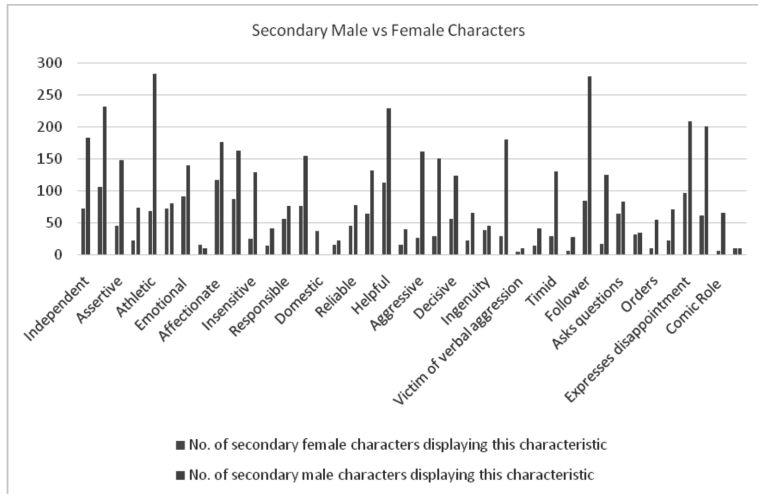
Independent	Analytical	Brave
Assertive	Helpful	Achiever
Athletic	Leadership Ability	Asks questions
Insensitive	Aggressive	Answers questions
Technology savvy	Competitive	Orders
Responsible	Decisive	Bragging behavior
Mature	Strong	Shows Anger
Professional	Ingenuity	Comic Role
Reliable	Victim of physical aggression	

Paired t-tests using SPSS were conducted to find out the relationship between male characters (primary and secondary) and the display of stereotypically masculine behavioural characteristics mentioned above. The test generated a *t*-value of -3.773, *df* as 25 and *p*-value of .001 ($p < .05$), thus proving the research hypothesis. The followings are the list of stereotypically feminine behaviour variables that emerged from arigourous review of literature:

Dependent	Victim of verbal aggression
Submissive	Timid
Non-athletic	Follower
Emotional	Incompetent
Romantic	Expresses disappointment
Affectionate	Flatterable
Sensitive	



Paired t-tests using SPSS were conducted to find out the relationship between female characters (primary and secondary) and the display of stereotypically feminine behavioural characteristics mentioned above. The test generated a t-value of -5.955, df as 25 and p value of 0.00 ($p < .05$), thus proving the research hypothesis. The following are the consolidated snapshots of gender-wise portrayals of behavioural attributes.



Results

The content analysis study established that male characters are much higher in number as compared to females in both the primary and secondary character categories (ratio: 2.5:1). Since the number of male characters is extremely higher than females, more kinds of behaviours are also displayed by male characters. However what is significant to observe are the categories in which male and female cartoon characters perform highly masculine, highly feminine and cross-typed behaviours. There is an overwhelming adherence to masculine and feminine stereotypes in the case of primary male and primary female characters, respectively. They hardly display any cross-typed characteristics, except for primary males being romantic and primary females being achievers in few cases. Secondary male characters portray some cross-typed behaviours: submissive, dependent, emotional and sensitive. Secondary female characters portray some cross-typed behaviours: responsible, mature, reliable and helpful. However an overwhelming number of male characters show anger, ask questions, brag, order, are brave, become victims of physical aggression, display leadership, are competitive, professional and portray a comic role. But an overwhelming number of female characters are non-athletic and domestic. The content analysis study establishes that there is a negligible number of gender-neutral characters. Even the behaviours portrayed by these cartoon characters are in the following variable categories - submissive, timid, comic role, dependent, follower, victim of physical aggression, express disappointment.

Notes

¹FICCI- Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry is an association of Indian business organizations; **KPMG** is one of the largest professional services companies in the world and one of the big four auditors, along with Deloitte, Ernst & Young (EY) and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

²Provides consultancy to media & entertainment businesses in India.

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