

Androcentric Bias: Anthropomorphic Characters Promoting Masculinity

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Abstract

Cartoons on television are a platform for gender representation because of their varied content. It is observed evidence that cartoons hold a more dominant role over the centuries. The stereotyped gender representation in animated television programs affects viewers, particularly young children, in a variety of ways. The purpose of this study is to analyze how anthropomorphic characters promote masculinity in Indian television cartoons. The character comparison was conducted to determine whether cartoons in India promote masculinity or not. It was discovered that anthropomorphic male characters played the main characters and dominate one, while female anthropomorphic characters are underrepresented, indicating that gender is stereotypically portrayed. Through androcentrism, the article would examine how the gender stereotypes given to the nonhuman characters in these shows perpetuate gender unfairness. This study examines how gender stereotypes are promoted through the pretense of “children’s entertainment” in animations and how these problems might be addressed.

Keywords: anthropomorphism, androcentric bias, children, feminine, Indian cartoons

1. Introduction

Cartoons are frequently expressive, humorous, political, cultural, religious, and scientific, among other things. Watching cartoons are a child’s daily habit that helps to shape their mind and behavior. It is considered a great educational tool like textbooks and projectors. “Televisions are universal now because science and technology have evolved over the decades” (Ali et al., 2022, p. 104). According to author Fakhar Naveed, a researcher in mass media communication stated: “Television is utilized for official, casual, and non-formal education. In support of formal education, television typically serves as a supplementary and reinforcement tool, and can even be tied to school curricula and timetables.” (Naveed, n.d.). According to the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) India, “children in India are viewing more television than ever before, and this trend is expanding” (What India’s Youngest TV Viewers Want to Watch | WARC, n.d.). Cartoons have been around since 1300 BC and in the early 1900s, modern cartoons appeared, ushering in a revolution in children’s entertainment. But at the same time cartoon channel broadcasting is an unending process, it possesses both positive and negative effects on the behavior of children (Ghilzai et al., 2017). Changing technology and children’s interest in visual narratives helped inspire many writers and moviemakers to create animal fables in which the plot is told through visual images and moving objects (Agarwal & Ahmed, 2017).

Animals in media for young children are depicted through fantastical and unrealistic aspects, which include wearing clothes, talking, and engaging in human-like activities. Author Larsen states that “numerous stories for young children feature anthropomorphized animal characters, such as a fox who connives, a puppet who lies and gets into all sorts of trouble, a rabbit who is arrogant, and even a turtle who perseveres” (Larsen et al., 2018) likewise in media also took the same into action, because children’s brains are like molten iron, and they can be shaped to be anything they are exposed too (Ghilzai et al., 2017, p. 107). Anthropomorphism is served to create both empathy and misunderstandings linking between humans and nonhumans. The term “Anthropomorphic” means interpretations can foster a stronger sense of kinship while also reinforcing species hierarchies focusing on attributed values in humans. In the debates about whether anthropomorphism is valid or not, we must recognize and deconstruct the discourses of science that declare anthropomorphism to be illegitimate and look at the actual practices of anthropomorphism” (Taylor 2011). “Until the

latter half of the nineteenth century, it referred to the practices of attributing deities with humanlike characteristics or bodily form. It can be understood as a projection of the human character of other animals, practices that brings an animal into the human world. Studies suggest that anthropomorphism is linked to pro-environmental behaviors” (Tam, 2015).

Media representations of animals show them generally behaving like humans and possessing numerous human-like characteristics. Anthropomorphic animal presentation frequently compromises information concerning genuine between-species distinctions, particularly those related to behavioral tendencies. All the major characters in anthropomorphic animal stories can communicate, play, and dance in the same way as humans can. So, few researchers “presenting various animal species as human-like may confuse the true variations between species” (Tarłowski & Rybska, 2021, p. 2). “Discrimination against women or inequality can be observed in a variety of contexts, ranging from personal to professional. Gender and sexuality beliefs are taught in children from birth. Around the age of two, a kid grasps the concept of gender and sexuality” (Sahi, 2022, p. 10). Even though cartoons and animated movies are thought of as “clean” or “safe” for kids, it is critical for parents, in particular, to recognize the subtle ways in which they mold the brains and personalities of young viewers. Even before they enter school, children are surrounded by items that form their perceptions of themselves and the world. Even though there are a lot of cartoons about gender equality today, there is still a lot of work to be done in this area.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

To examine and expose the gender stereotype in anthropomorphic depictions of television cartoons for Indian children

To identify masculinity being more common than femininity in Indian children's cartoon programs

To highlight the sleight promotion of masculinity as naturally superior to femininity

1.2 Review of Literature

In the year 2006, a researcher called Chris claims that television depictions of animals and their environments are not only genuine, but also “completely different” (Chris, 2006, p. 7) and he also argues that from the 1890s through the late 1930s, nature documentaries, films, and movies emphasized the contrasts between humans and nonhuman animal studies. Simultaneously, early wildlife films highlighted indigenous people’s animalistic inferiority, as though they, like wild NHAs, were to be “tamed” and “civilized”. Through television programming, the children’s entertainment sector has evolved quickly during the past few years. Previously, Cartoon Network was the sole youngsters’ television station in India, but in recent years the number of children’s networks has expanded. “Keeping in mind that young children with developing minds watch many hours of television, and recalling how television reinforces gender stereotypes, it is not surprising when children develop stereotyped beliefs” (Witt, 2000, p. 322). According to researcher Fitzpatrick in his study discussed children who “Seeing more of the other gender may lead young girls to view themselves as less important or as second-class citizens” (Fitzpatrick & McPherson, 2010, p. 134). Continuous watching of gender-biased cartoons may feel others as second-class people. “Research on television viewing and children’s socialization indicates that television has a great impact on children’s lives” (Witt, 2000, p. 322). So, parents and guardians of children may be conscious while they watch television. Ruchi Jaggi conducted a study on the representation of gender in certain Indian television cartoon shows, such as *Chhota Bheem*, *Doraemon*, *Ninja Hattori*, and *Oggy and the cockroaches*, using the text analysis method, and determined that cartoon networks in India are more diverse in terms of character portrayal (Jaggi, 2015). Based on content analysis, a study conducted by Gauravam determined the ratio of male and female characters in Indian cartoon programs such as *Chhota Bheem*, *Doraemon*, *Motu Pathu*, *Sab Jholaal Hai*, and *Sinchan* (Gauravam et al., 2020).

1.3 Conceptual Framework

“Androcentrism is a large societal structure in which men are regarded as more important than women” (Bailey et al., 2019, p. 16). In a scientific debate, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman* used the word “androcentrism” to describe a way of looking at things. Perkins Gilman’s 1911 book, *The Man-Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture*, was an investigation into androcentric practices in society and the problems they caused. Under androcentrism, masculinity is the norm, and anything that is not masculine is called “other”. Perkins Gilman said that men’s ways of living and thinking were universal, while women’s ways were seen as strange. “Androcentrism is a distinct type of gender bias” (Bailey et al., 2020) The androcentric bias happens when men’s experiences are seen as the norm and women’s experiences are ignored or seen as strange or abnormal.

2. Methodology

The researchers used a mixed method to examine gender promotions through various anthropomorphized animated programs in the media from the top 10 anthropomorphized cartoon shows on Indian children’s televisions, short out

from the top 20 Cartoons programs in India (Singh, 2020). Episodes were obtained from wikia.com and watched on youtube.com. The appearance of the anthropomorphic character was analyzed to answer the below research questions.

- Why is it that male characters are more numerous and dominant than female in television cartoons for children?

Character analysis is a detailed study of one or more characters for academic arguments with both a thesis and evidence from the main text. “The point of a character analysis is not only to better understand the character, but also the mind that created the character” (Character Analysis, n.d.). Character comparisons show how characters are similar and different and how they fit into the tale. Contrasting characters can indicate how their decisions and backgrounds influenced them and reveal the plot’s complexities.

3. Sample Size

This study primarily focused on only 10 anthropomorphic representation-based programs out of the top 20 animated programs on children’s television networks in India. Researchers watched several episodes to analyze through the lens of character analysis for this study. The sample consisted of selected episodes from the top 10 (in terms of television ratings) anthropomorphic cartoon programs that are broadcast in the category of children’s programming in India. The research was conducted during July and December in the year 2022. The following programs (listed from highest to lowest rating) obtained the highest number of points in the ratings: (information received from (Singh, 2020)). *Tom And Jerry, Mickey Mouse, Doraemon, Winnie the Pooh, Oggy and Cockroaches, Scooby-Doo, Timon and Pumbaa, Tweety, Courage the Cowardly Dog, Chhota Bheem*. The names of the television programs that were considered for the analysis are provided in the table that follows. The researchers decided to eliminate replication after noticing that certain episodes were also frequently repeated.

4. Discussion and Findings

The 10-animation series features several gender stereotypes and objectification of women. Traditional gender roles, in which males make important choices and lead the family and females are projected to be submissive and dependent, are harmful to everyone, especially women. Gender roles limit a child’s full potential and success. A gender-neutral environment should be provided for children to encourage their healthy development and aid in the formation of a sense of self. Most children learn gender-specific responsibilities by seeing their parent’s daily activities. Repetition of this on television serves to strengthen their innocent notions. All this content has a profoundly damaging effect on the sensitive minds of young children. When children see such cartoons, they internalize and accept everything they see as true. This influences their psychological and mental growth in their daily lives. Not only is the depiction of women as inferior incredibly upsetting, but this objectification of womanhood conveys the wrong message to young viewers. “Children mostly love to watch Tom and Jerry, Doraemon, Oggy and the cockroaches specifically” (Ghilzai et al., 2017, p. 114).

“Tom and Jerry have been on the top list with immense popularity among children as well as adults since its beginning” (M. M. Islam et al., 2021, p. 70). Many people believe that the children’s cartoon Tom and Jerry (also known as T&J) is one of the ‘innocent’ and ‘pure’ types of entertainment that can be found today. But both the gender cat and mice are male. It is an American animated media property and series of short comedies developed by William Hanna and Joseph Barbera in 1940 with a running time between 6 to 8 minutes. The sequence centers on the conflict among the eponymous characters, a cat called Tom and a mouse termed Jerry. It is most known for its 161 short films produced by *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*. Each short’s plot often revolves around Tom’s various tries to capture Jerry and the subsequent mayhem and damage that ensues. “Sometimes he does this because his owner wants him to, and sometimes he does it on his own” (M. M. Islam et al., 2021, p. 75). Tom seldom catches Jerry due primarily to Jerry’s intelligence, cunning, and good fortune. However, they have demonstrated true friendship and compassion for one another on numerous occasions. They nearly never talk; nevertheless, smaller characters are not equally constrained, and Tom and Jerry do occasionally speak English. “Each episode comprises over 6-10 minutes duration. But it does not allow its audience to feel boredom” (Khan et al., 2022, p. 388).

Mickey Mouse is “recognized as one of the most universal symbols in the history of humankind” (Forbes, n.d., p. 248). Walt Disney Productions Mickey Mouse is a sequence of American animated comedic short films. The series aired between 1928 and 1953, it embodies everything Walt Disney wanted to convey: joy, pleasure, dreams, and the power to bring people closer. The Mickey emblem can prompt happy moods and create remarkable experiences, resulting in powerful and constant meaning all over the world. It is shown as a happy and playful anthropomorphic mouse. “He has become an icon” (Forbes, n.d., p. 249).

“Doraemon is a popular Japanese cartoon series at present” (N. N. Islam & Biswas, 2012, p. 205) and the cartoon character Doraemon is a male robot cat (Sahi, 2022, p. 11) without ears who comes from the 22nd century to assistance a young boy named *Nobita*. Plenty of his robot parts make him seem like a low-quality product. First, it came out in

Japan as a manga or comic series. Then, it was turned into an anime. This show is so popular that Disney Channel is showing it in more than one language.

Winnie the Pooh was made up by the British author and playwright A. A. Milne. He wrote some children's books in the 1920s and named the protagonist after his son Christopher Robin's teddy bear. In the 1960s, Winnie made a big jump across the Atlantic and joined the Disney family. He first appeared in some short films, then in full-length movies, and finally, in his most recent form, in the 3D television puppet show *The Book of Pooh* (2001-2002). After the show ended, the episodes were sold on clip and DVD. The main character is Winnie the Pooh, who is played by Jim Cummings. He is a "bear with very little brain". Who is very ignorant and sweet, and he is always in a good mood.

Oggy and the Cockroaches, which has been broadcast on Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, and Sonic, is the most popular Cartoon show with children in India. "Almost 77% of children watch the *Oggy and the Cockroaches* animation" (Hemalatha R & Puttaswamy C.K, 2018, p. 325). It has 4 completed seasons, the fifth of which is presently airing in India, while seasons six and seven are currently airing in other developed nations. It is an anthropomorphic series about a cat who spends all his time eating junk food while watching television or performing domestic tasks. A gang of cockroaches is making fun of him. Oggy has developed an ambivalent relationship with cockroaches and their brood. Oggy suffers from a fear of heights. Three cockroaches named "Dee Dee," "Marky," and "Joey" enjoy playing pranks towards Oggy. The characters prefer to communicate using silent gestures. Every time they interact, they employ useless expressions (Khan et al., 2022, p. 388).

Scooby-Doo is an American animated media franchise that started with an animated TV show that debuted in 1969 and continued in several other forms. *Joe Ruby* and *Ken Spears* wrote the script for the first *Scooby-Doo* show made by *Hanna-Barbera Productions*. It was called *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You?* In the novel *Scooby-Doo* format, there is a scene near the end of every episode where the heroes figure out that the villain, who seems supernatural, is an actual being in a costume.

Timon & Pumbaa is a Walt Disney Television Animation-created American cartoon buddy comic television series. Based on Disney's 1994 animated blockbuster *The Lion King*, it follows Timon the meerkat and Pumbaa the warthog as they live by the "Hakuna Matata" philosophy. In contrast to other *The Lion King* products, the vibe of the episode is more comic. When Scar tricks Simba into abdicating his royal duties and fleeing, Simba joins an all-male brotherhood consisting of a calculating, joking meerkat, Timon, and an oafish, gas-passing warthog, Pumbaa.

Tweety is male despite the assumptions people may have of him due to his bushy eyebrows and high-pitched voice. His gender has been ambiguous on purpose. Sylvester and Tweety were one of the most iconic duos in the history of animation. "Sylvester tries to grab Tweety, who is trapped in a cage in a high-rise building's window" (Okrent & Arika, 2002, p. 180).

Courage the Cowardly Dog is a John R. Dilworth-created and Cartoon Network-distributed American animated comedic horror television series. Stretch Films, Dilworth's animation studio, first aired the series from 1999 to 2002. "It is the only children's show that has a plot and style like older animated movies. The others are much more modern in their plots and styles" (Galkiene, 2018, p. 445). The protagonist is a dog who lives with an older couple in a rural home. A friendly yet easily scared nuisance dog.

"Chhota Bheem is the most popular animated property in India and throughout South Asia" (Balaji & Lakshmikantha, 2020). This show is accessible in English, Hindi, Telugu, and Tamil. It is an Indian animated comedic adventure television series produced by Green Gold Animations of Hyderabad. Bheem is a courageous, powerful, and clever young man. He frequently solves everyone's issues, which impresses the Dholakpur locals. The plot is set in a fictitious village in the kingdom of Dholakpur. The non-human character Jaggu is a blue, chatting monkey with his unique approach to problem-solving employing gimmicks and a sense of humor. Bheem learns from him valuable techniques such as swinging from trees. He enjoys playing practical jokes on Kalia, Dholu, and Bholu.

3.2 Statistics and Data Analysis

Analysis of data and the reporting of the results of those analyses are fundamental aspects of the conduct of research. Accurate, unbiased, complete, and insightful reporting of the analytic treatment of data (be it quantitative or qualitative) must be a component of all research reports. Researchers in the field of psychology use numerous approaches to the analysis of data, and no one approach is uniformly preferred if the method is appropriate to the research questions being asked and the nature of the data collected. The methods used must support their analytic burdens, including robustness to violations of the assumptions that underlie them, and they must provide clear, unequivocal insights into the data.

5. Conclusion

"Television is a dominant medium in India. The complex relationships between children and television are redefining childhoods" (Jaggi, 2015, p. 6). In today's world, watching television is more than only for enjoyment; it also reflects

the social phenomenon of society. According to the research article Learning Cultural Values in Chhota Bheem by Abou Raihan et al (2016), “By viewing animated cartoons, youngsters grow more resourceful and creative” (Rinku et al., 2016). Today, television plays an important role in educating many things youngsters, such as how to interact with others, solve personal troubles, and make friends, in addition to imparting basic decision-making abilities, and so on. “Kids fantasize about TV cartoons and imitate them in all possible manners including their way of talking, playing certain roles and way of behaving in day-to-day life.” (Gauravam et al., 2020, p. 2942).

People around the world utilize television for many determinations. As a kind of entertainment, however, television is the most effective medium. Children of various ages amuse themselves by watching children's television programs. Children spend a considerable amount of time watching television. According to research, children spend two to six hours every day watching television. This viewing habit has both beneficial and harmful consequences. Children spend a significant portion of their day in front of the television. They eat breakfast, and lunch, and do schoolwork while watching television. Children have their content selection preferences. Several forms of media serve as socializing agents in the lives of youngsters. “Dominant media messages tend to promote certain ideologies more than others” (Jaggi, 2015, p. 4). So chosen children's cartoon directors of the above-listed programs promote Masculinity but forgot to include the female character. In addition, this study would provide a documented list of cartoons and animations that promote masculinity rather than feminism so that future animators and animation film directors would have the upper hand in defending their productions against allegations of portraying dominant male anthropomorphic characters. To avoid difficulties in the promotion of masculinity, animators can always refer to this list while developing or developing new content for visual entertainment geared toward youngsters. Local authorities should pay greater attention to the issue of promoting exclusively anthropomorphic male characters in such a popular animated series on television networks around the world. Instead, emphasize both male and female anthropomorphic characters in similar ways.

Based on the androcentrism framework, the top 10 anthropomorphic animated cartoon programs in India majorly promote male characters more than female characters. In the past 100 years, the animation business has exposed audiences all over the world to some incredible characters. Animation has been a kind of visual entertainment that has been delighting people of all ages for more than a century. Through anthropomorphism, the number of major male nonhuman characters vastly outnumbers the number of essential female characters.

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