IS TV MAKING YOUR CHILD PREJUDICED?

A report into pre-school programming

hopster
EVERYBODY'S HAPPY

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Watching content, whether it be on a tablet, mobile or television set is an everyday part of the modern pre-schooler's life.

The connected world makes media both mobile and instant, and there has never been more choice in terms of the programmes available.

It has been estimated that the under 8s are consuming an average of 2 hours and 19 minutes of screen time per day [1] and, by the age of 3-4, over 50% are watching YouTube [2].

With a body of evidence to show the impact of television viewing on children's attitudes and opinions as well as that prejudices are learned rather than pre-existing, this report sets out to explore some of the most popular content that pre-schoolers today are watching, rating it specifically in relation to the attitudes these shows may be nurturing.

Whilst a number of shows and story lines deliver positive social messages for pre-schoolers; many of the key findings highlight that more work needs to be done to help positively shape the perceptions of our youngest generation.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

1 Disability representation is minimal, and some negative stereotypes persist, e.g. disabilities on evil or threatening characters.
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2 Working class families were severely under-represented, appearing in just 9% of episodes, whilst being 50% of the actual population.

3 Gender stereotypes are numerous. Female characters were seen to be objectified and, in some cases, undermined by male characters.

4 No same-sex parent families were represented and there was little evidence of LGBT+ representation in any shows.

5 Ethnic minorities were only included in around half of the content examined, and often in the background. Only 6 shows (out of 50) had BAME characters as the 'stars' of the shows.

6 Many additional negative stereotypes were also portrayed: from incapable single mothers to greedy/lazy overweight people and 'nerds' wearing glasses.

7 Pre-schoolers are more likely to see negative cultural, social or gender stereotypes on streaming and subscription services than free-to-air channels.

8 CBeebies has 3 of the top 5 most inclusive and representative shows.

9 Popular YouTube series 'Webs & Tiaras' was the lowest scoring show.

INTRODUCTION

Why we set out to examine pre-school content
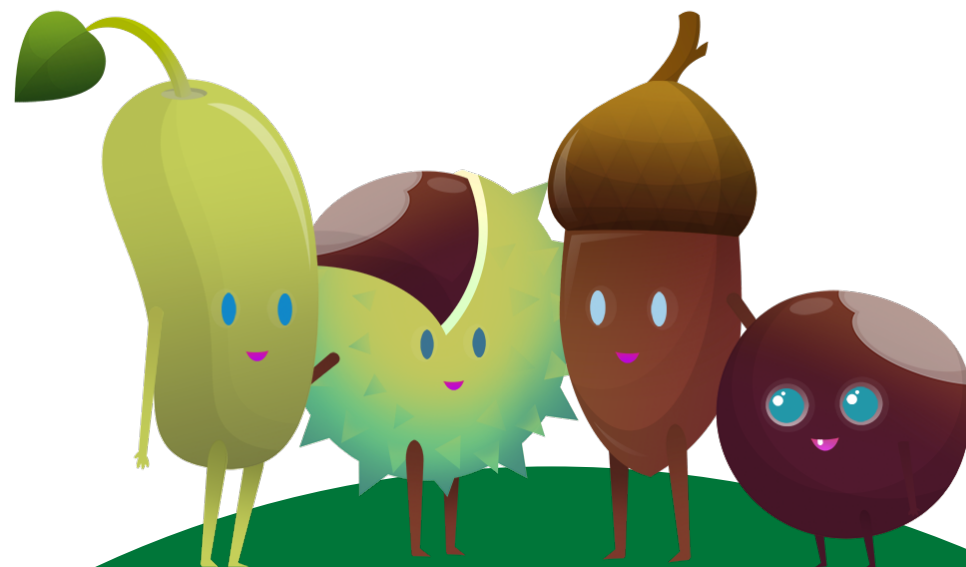
Pre-schoolers today are children of Millennial parents who, growing up in the digital era themselves, take a more relaxed approach to technology and spend more time online than the generations that precede them [3].

Alongside this, programme supply for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers has boomed in recent years, in the form of 'traditional' television programming, apps and UGC channels. With so much screen time, and so much more choice, kids TV app, Hopster, set out to examine the content that is filling the days and minds of our youngest generation.

As a creator and host of a range of pre-school content, this study includes shows on offer via Hopster, as well as popular content outside of it. The role of television as a communications medium and learning tool to socialise children cannot be underestimated.

In academic research, it has been claimed to be the *"most popular, constant, and consistent source of information on, among other things, socialization, including that which is expected, accepted, and taken for granted"* [4]. On areas such as gender, studies have shown *"children may exhibit gender-biased behaviours and develop the gender-biased attitudes that they see on television"* [5].

There is a large body of academic research which concludes that children are not born with prejudice. Amongst others, Allport, 1954 stated, *"it has been found that children under 4 are aware of differences between people, but they do not show signs of prejudiced behaviour"*[6]. Rather, prejudice is a learned behaviour. Byrnes (1995) explains, *"children begin developing attitudes about various groups in society as early as ages three or four. Initially such attitudes are quite flexible. However, as children grow older such attitudes become more difficult to change"*. [7]

It is therefore an indisputable responsibility of programme makers and content creators to ensure they are helping our youngest generation become rounded, respectful members of society. Although fantasy and fiction may be the common construct for children's programming, there is always the opportunity for inclusion, representation and the challenging of social stereotyping within the narratives created.

What we were looking for

Disability Representation

- Characters that have a disability should be equally represented
- The character can be a lead or background character
- Disability does not need to be addressed as a storyline or theme – it is about representation

BAME Representation

- The content should represent the interconnected, diverse society in which children live
- A character of ethnic minority should be equally represented
- Consider whether the character's inclusion is tokenistic
- Consider whether the character is a two dimensional cultural stereotype (e.g. an Indian shopkeeper) or whether they are more fully developed and authentically portrayed

Gender Neutrality

- Male & female characters have equal screen time
- Male & female characters are equals in ability
- Males & females have professions that break traditional stereotypes
- Colours do not conform to traditional stereotypes (e.g. pink & glitter for girls)
- Equal emotional empowerment for males & females

LGBTQ+ Representation

- LGBTQ+ characters should be equally represented
- The character can be a lead or background character
- Sexuality/gender does not need to be addressed in a storyline or theme – it is about representation

Setting Excellence in Social Standards

- Objectification: Being desired for beauty/as an object rather than whole self
- Body Representation: Varied body-types are being represented
- Bad Behaviour: Violence and inappropriate language are not encouraged
- Social Representation: Working class / middle class / upper class should be equally reflected
- Families: Varied family set-ups are also represented

Selecting content for the study

From Nick Jr., Disney Junior, CBeebies, Tiny Pop, Super Simple Songs and ChuChu TV, the under 5's have never been better catered for.

By the age 3-4, 96% of pre-schoolers are watching 15 hours a week on a TV set and 53% are spending 8 hours online, with 21% owing their own tablet.[8] A study into the screen time in the US, found that between 0-8 year olds screen time averages at 2 hours and 19 minutes per day.[9]

This first task for this study was therefore to analyse where this viewing time is being spent. Using Ofcom and Barb data, we set out the balance of channels pre-schoolers are watching, acknowledging that around 50% of 0-3 year olds have access to SVOD services such as Netflix, Amazon and NOW TV[10] and, by age 3-4, over 50% are watching YouTube[11], Once the channel mix had been defined, viewing data was collected to help select 50 of the top shows for pre-schoolers. For Netflix, we went to the 'popular' and 'everyone's watching' lists being promoted on the service.

With over 50% of children having one or more siblings in the home[12] a 10% allowance was given to programmes aimed at an older audience, in order to cover off the likelihood that a percentage of pre-schoolers are exposed to content aimed at a slightly older demographic.

The resulting list of shows used in the study was:

1. Peter Rabbit
2. Something Special
3. Octonauts
4. Postman Pat
5. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
6. Pokémon
7. SpongeBob SquarePants
8. Masha and the Bear
9. Thomas the Tank Engine
10. Fireman Sam
11. Blaze and the Monster Machines
12. Ben and Holly
13. Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
14. Tom and Jerry
15. Muppet Babies
16. PJ Masks
17. Vampirina
18. Peppa Pig
19. PAW Patrol
20. Ranger Rob
21. Alvin
22. My Little Pony
23. Chip and Potato
24. Dinotrux
25. True and the Rainbow Kingdom
26. Barbies Dreamhouse
27. All hail King Julien
28. Beat Bugs
29. Little Baby Bum
30. Mother Goose Club
31. Super Simple Songs
32. ChuChu TV
33. Webs and Tiaras
34. Mr Bean
35. Sooty
36. LEGO Ninjago
37. Horrid Henry
38. Enjie Benjie
39. Sarah & Duck
40. Kazoops
41. Go Jetters
42. Topsy and Tim
43. Hey Duggee
44. Bob the Builder
45. Digby Dragon
46. Little Princess
47. Noddy
48. Shimmer and Shine
49. Appletree House
50. The Wiggles

Selecting content for the study

continued

Each of these shows then underwent desk-based research with a minimum of three episodes being watched in full by a specialist, independent, children's research team, commissioned by Hopster.

The shows were then qualitatively evaluated against pre-agreed criteria, specifically focused on the extent to which the shows were representative of key minority, or marginalised groups within UK society, and to what extent stereotypes were being reinforced in relation to these groups:

- **Disability**
- **BAME Groups**
- **Gender Stereotyping**
- **Social Representation (class)**
- **LGBT+ Representation**

All shows were also ranked, in order to compare results for each criteria.

By the age of 3-4, 96% of pre-schoolers are watching 15 hours a week on a TV set and 53% are spending 8 hours online, with 21% owing their own tablet.

THE RESULTS

Channel and content summary

The broad, channel level conclusions were as follows:

•Subscription and streaming media services (e.g. Netflix, YouTube) were concluded to be more likely to perpetuated negativestereotypes within pre-school content than their 'free-to-air' equivalents.

•Three of the top highest-ranking shows were created by CBeebies: 'GoJetters', 'Something Special' and 'Apple Tree House', with classics 'Fireman Sam' and 'Bob the Builder' also coming in the Top Five.

•The worst performing content was from YouTube channel 'Webs and Tiaras'.

On representation of disability

Representation of disability across all shows, series and channels was poor. Despite 22% of the UK population having impairments or disabilities [13] disability was only shown in 16% of programmes included in the study.

Furthermore, over half of the programmes featuring disabled characters used them either in a tokenistic way (they were not central to the storyline), or their disability was used negatively (e.g. to make them appear sinister or threatening).

For example, in 'Dinotrux' a villain is shown to have Tourette's Syndrome and muscle spasms, whilst another character is teased for his small size and colour. In 'LEGO Ninjago' a villain, the Iron Baron, has prosthetic limbs and is partially sighted.

A huge exception to this rule is CBeebies' 'Something Special' – a long running show exclusively featuring children with disabilities, and a presenter who communicates using Makaton signs.

The show normalises disability through representation, whilst not highlighting it within the narrative.

'Fireman Sam', 'Hey Duggee' and 'Chip and Potato' are further examples of content that scored highly for representation of disability.

Characters in these examples took key/ lead roles in the narrative and were portrayed as fully rounded and three dimensional vs. defined by their disability.
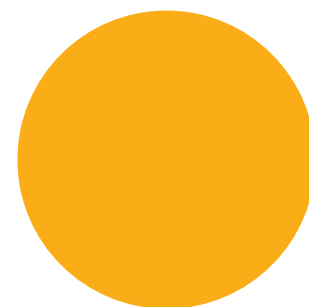
On BAME representation

White characters dominated the content selected for this study.

Although, in some cases, BAME representation could be viewed as challenging (e.g. if the characters are animals) ethnic minorities were absent from over half of the episodes viewed.

In just under half of the cases where BAME characters were included, they were background/ tokenistic e.g. 'Horrid Henry' and 'Ranger Rob'. A minority of shows were almost entirely white e.g. 'The Wiggles' (as currently shown on Netflix) and 'Shimmer and Shine'. In the case of 'The Wiggles', since 2013 the show has been dominated by four white performers, with key supporting members also being white. In shows where BAME characters were included, they were rarely portrayed as 'the star' of pre-school content. Just three out of the 50 shows analysed had a BAME character as a consistent lead ('Apple Tree House', 'Go Jetters', 'Blaze and the Monster Machines') as well as three of the

YouTube nursery rhyme channels 'ChuChu TV', 'Mother Goose Club' and 'Little Baby Bum' - which included consistent BAME representation, albeit not through named characters.

Also notable within the study are shows like 'Go Jetters', which evidence that non-real life characters can still achieve BAME representation amongst their lead roles, either visually, or through the use of voice over artists. 'Teletubbies' (not a core show in this study) adopts a similar approach to representative - despite featuring 'non-real life characters, 'minority races' have lead roles.

An area which feels under-developed, and a missed opportunity, is representation of faiths, and celebrating integration alongside it.

On gender stereotyping

Some pre-school content is making great strides to challenge gender stereotypes. Some notable examples are, 'Go Jetters' who feature a male unicorn, as well as 'Thomas the Tank Engine' and 'Bob the Builder' who have female characters, presented with equal ability as the males. However, over a third of the episodes viewed perpetuated gender stereotypes e.g. boys who fight ('Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' and 'Blaze and the Monster Machines') or girls who were image orientated ('Barbie's Dreamhouse Adventures' and 'Dinotrux').

Some of the most positive, popular and long running shows still feature unhealthy gender stereotypes e.g. males as the knowledge bearers ('Postman Pat') and protectors ('Fireman Sam') and women who clean ('LEGO Ninjago').

In many cases, male protagonists are shown to be more powerful or important than their female counterparts, taking on the roles of doctors or policemen. In 'Octonauts', the most influential members of the crew: the Captain, the Professor, the Doctor and the Medic are all male, and male characters outnumber females by 2 to 1. In 'The Wiggles' – one of the youngest skewing shows included in the study, there are consistently 3 or 4 men who sing and dance, alongside one woman.

On gender stereotyping
continued

Objectification of female characters

A similar imbalance is true on 'PAW Patrol', where, although all equally capable, there are only two female dogs alongside the five male leads. 'Blaze and the Monster Machines' also features close to all-male characters.

In both of these shows the female characters are defined by the colour pink and often shown in the background of the show's promotional imagery and merchandise.

In the most extreme examples, female characters were shown being undermined by males.

Across the three episodes of the Emmy award winning Netflix series 'King Julien' included in this research, one character stated *"why am I feeling girly"* in response to crying, whilst another character claimed that an overweight woman scared a monster away because of *"her looks"*.

When it comes to males, as well as having overly muscular physiques ('Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles') males were typically the trouble-makers within storylines (e.g. 'Horrid Henry', 'Peter Rabbit') or the villains ('My Little Pony').

Looking further into female stereotypes, a considerable amount of objectification was noted in the 50 shows examined. Whilst more obvious in the likes of 'Barbie's Dreamhouse Adventures', a pre-occupation with female body ideals can also be seen through younger pre-school content. For example, in 'Mickey Mouse Clubhouse', Minnie Mouse (who works in a boutique) and Daisy Duck are always shown in high

heels and mini skirts. More recently developed characters, from the likes of 'My Little Pony' and 'Shimmer and Shine', also show stereotyped femininity, e.g. through their long thick hair and over-sized eyes.

Social representation

The majority of shows do not represent a balance of real-world society. Although deliberate fantasy plays a large part in this, if we are to consider the influence of pre-school content on children's perceptions and understanding of the world, it must be noted that palaces, castles, mansions, and 'privileged' families are being presented, through pre-school content, as the norm.

Nationally around 50% of the UK are working class [14], but working class families only appear in under 9% of the episodes included in the study. Where working classes are represented, their inclusion can be negatively stereotyped, for example, in 'My Little Pony' the goats have strong regional (US) accents; but are also portrayed as unintelligent and in 'LEGO Ninjago', a poor character is shown to be ashamed of his upbringing.

Wealth is celebrated via the homes in which many characters live, and sometimes directly within the narrative, for example in 'Beat Bugs' a character who is perceived to be wealthy is called beautiful because of the wealth.

Shows that do not conform to this stereotype include 'Little Princess' where, despite the lead character being a princess, she (like her servants) has a regional accent and 'Apple Tree House', which is set in London's Tower Hamlets.

The latter is a strong example of social representation, featuring children who live in real world social environments, including a character who lives on a canal boat and is home schooled.

On LGBT+ representation

There is little evidence of representation of LGBT+ in any shows. Across 150 episodes, only seven alluded to an LGBT+ character or scenario and, in all cases, these were non-lead.

For example, in 'Barbie's Dreamhouse Adventures' a female, who runs a garage, is called Benjamin – a name Barbie comments upon as being unusual for a girl. Across all of the content included in the study, there was no representation of same sex parents, despite (in real terms)

same sex couples, and those identifying as LGBT+ having consistently increased for the past 20 years.

In the UK today there are now close to 200,000 families with same sex couples.[15] Some of the shows making strides in LGBT+ representation include 'Hey Duggee' (featuring Mr and Mr Crab in some episodes) and 'Go Jetters' (featuring a male unicorn as a lead character, and an episode where male characters are shown leaning in to kiss one another) and 'True and the Rainbow Kingdom' (with the Rainbow King as a prominent character).
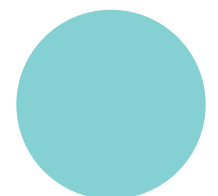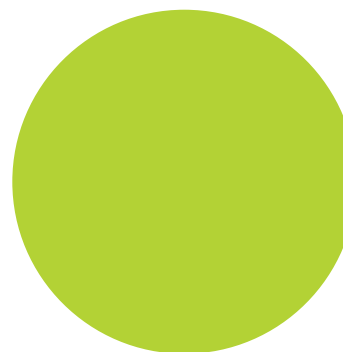
Additional social stereotypes

A number of additional stereotypes were noted as being perpetuated, these included characters in glasses being portrayed as 'nerds' ('King Julien') or single mothers being incapable ('Fireman Sam').

Only 2 in 5 (36%) of shows in the study included a variety of body shapes, and often overweight characters were shown as lazy or greedy. For example, in 'Beat Bugs' a principle overweight character was shown eating three cakes in one go and getting stuck going through a gap.

CONCLUSION

Whilst huge steps have been made in recent years, in terms of inclusion and representation, parents still need to be mindful of the content their pre-schoolers are exposed to. With children absorbing more content at a younger age, producers at the pre-school end of market need to carefully consider the implicit messages their content is delivering.

This is especially true on streaming services, where there is far more choice and, based on our research, less regulation. Where UGC content exists, the opportunities for pre-schoolers to be exposed to poorly created is obviously far greater.

In the case of 'Webs and Tiaras' (a YouTube show with close to a million subscribers and 179 million views) concern around the suitability of the content has been raised in the past. In 2017 the show had 3.7 billion views, but was then apparently taken down only to be re-launched. Dated content is also prevalent on services that make volume of shows a priority. For example, early episodes of 'Tom and Jerry', featuring African American housemaid, Mama Two Shoes, are still available on Amazon and YouTube.

HEY DUGGEE ✔
@HEYDUGGEE

Follow

FAQ: why does Happy the crocodile have an elephant as a parent?
A: Happy is adopted. Not all families look the same.

10:00 AM - 12 Mar 2015

195 Retweets   555 Likes

Hopster believe in total inclusivity and equality, whether related to religion, gender, sexuality or society. We have surrounded ourselves with staff, content creators, suppliers and investors who share our values and we have created programmes to reflect this. It is clear from our research that the majority of shows aimed at pre-schoolers have positive aims, but stereotypes can still creep in, with some audience groups being under represented or used in a tokenistic way.

We applaud the progressive examples highlighted in our study and strive to reflect the modern world in everything we ourselves make. Shows that offer particular focus on representation (e.g. 'Something Special' for disability, or 'Apple Tree House' for social representation) work particularly well with pre-schoolers who are not able to notice nuances in the way older children can. [16] Subtle, background inclusion does little for representation with very young children, as they require more explanation in order to understand the world around them.

We believe that battling prejudice in adulthood is about normalising society during childhood.

Our content aims to help our youngest generation understand and appreciate the wonderfully diverse world in which they live, and enable them to grow in to well rounded, open minded members of society.

We look forward to a future where pre-school content is devoid of anything that could limit children's ambitions or narrow their understanding before they've even hit the classroom.

There will always be a place for 'classic' content, much of which is deeply loved by parents and children, but we also welcome and support programming that seeks to modernise and diversify. 'Bob the Builder', hosted on our platform, is a great example of this where, for the 2015 relaunch, the female worker, Wendy, was repositioned as Bob's business partner, and a new, prominent, black character, Leo was introduced. This is a great show that is well suited to the world we live in.

Hopster's "Love is Love" content, which sets out to overtly celebrate all types of families

APPENDIX

References

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Specific episodes referred to in this report:

NOTES TO EDITORS

Dinotrux – S5: Ep1 – 'Imposters'

Dinotrux – S5: Ep5 – 'Deadtrux Part 1'

LEGO Ninjago – S6: Ep4 – 'Misfortune Riding'

LEGO Ninjago – S5: Ep 2 – 'Ghost Story'

Beat Bugs – S3 – 'Baby You're a Rich Man'

Barbie's Dreamhouse Adventures – S1: Ep2 – 'Clubhouse (Remix)'

Hey Duggee – S1 – 'The Sandcastle Badge'

Go Jetters – S1: Ep1 – 'The Eiffel Tower France'

King Julien – S5: Ep3 – 'Night Creatures' & S5: E13 – "The End is Here"

My Little Pony – S5: Ep23 – 'The Hooffields and McColts'

Fireman Sam – S11: Ep9

Postman Pat – Series 3: Ep 26

Research for Hopster conducted in partnership with independent specialist kids research agency Dubit Limited (Dr. Lily Law)