IF HE CAN SEE IT, WILL HE BE IT?

REPRESENTATIONS OF MASCULINITY IN BOYS' TELEVISION

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media
If she can see it, she can be it.™

equimundo

USC Viterbi School of Engineering

KERING FOUNDATION

GLOBAL BOYHOOD INITIATIVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to examine messages about masculinity present in popular television programming among boys ages seven to thirteen. Much of the existing research on gender representation in children's television has focused on girls and women, and for good reason— female characters are typically underrepresented and shown in highly stereotypical ways. However, far less is known about depictions of masculinity in contemporary children's programming. Media representations of masculinity have "real world" effects on the well-being and behavior of boys and men and can impact their beliefs/behaviors toward women and girls. Media has the power to challenge limiting masculine norms in ways that support men's reduced engagement in violence and self-injurious behaviors, and improve their health and happiness. This report fills that gap by analyzing depictions of boys and men in children's television programming.

This report was produced through a collaboration between Equimundo, a global leader in promoting gender equality and preventing violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women, girls, and individuals of all gender identities, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary's University, the first research-based organization working within the media and entertainment industry to improve gender representation, and the Kering Foundation, which works to combat violence against women around the globe. Additional data for this report was also provided by the Signal Analysis and Interpretation Laboratory (SAIL) at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering, and Nielsen.

In this report we analyze representations of masculinity in the most popular boys' television programs from 2018. We started this project in 2019 and made use of available data from 2018. We examined the top 25 Nielsen-rated television programs among boys ages seven to thirteen. Our television dataset includes a total of 3,056 characters from 447 episodes. This executive summary presents our major findings.

REPRESENTATIONS

We find surprising gender and race parity when it comes to leading characters in the most popular boys' TV shows, but vast under-representation of LGBTQIA+ characters and characters with disabilities.

Gender

- Gender parity has been achieved with leading characters, 49.6% of whom are female and 50.4% are male.
- Female characters are underrepresented when it comes to overall, supporting, and minor characters in the most popular boys' TV shows.
- Female characters speak and appear more often than male characters (68.0% of speaking time and 57.2% of screen time).

Race and Ethnicity

- Racial equality has been achieved with leading characters. People of color make up 38% of the U.S. population, and 36.0% of leading characters.
- Characters of color are underrepresented when it comes to overall, supporting, and minor characters in the most popular boys' TV shows.

LGBTQIA+

- There are no LGBTQIA+ characters in leading roles in the most popular boys' televisions shows, and they make up less than 1% of supporting or minor roles.
- Only 1.2% of episodes pass the Vito Russo Test[1] for humanizing representations of LGBTQIA+ characters.

Disability

- One-in-five Americans have a physical, cognitive, or communication disability, but no leading roles feature characters with disabilities in boys' TV.
- Characters with disabilities account for only 1.5% of characters overall.

STEREOTYPES

Equimundo has identified different pillars of masculinity, referred to as *The Man Box* study, which reflect cultural beliefs about how "real men" should behave. While we find some evidence that popular TV for boys challenges some of these stereotypes, we also find that media reinforces the idea that "real men" are self-sufficient, tough, physically attractive without effort, engage in high risk behaviors, and value paid labor but not caregiving.

Self-Sufficiency

- Boys are more likely than girls to be shown without parents (57.0% compared with 42.8%).
- Girls are more likely than boys to be shown in a close relationship with mothers (6.4% compared with 3.8%).

Acting Tough

- Male characters are less likely than female characters to show emotions, including empathy (22.5% compared with 30.6%), happiness (68.3% compared with 75.2%), and even anger (28.8% compared with 36.6%).

Gendered Values

- Male characters are more likely than female characters to be shown engaging in risky behaviors (20.0% compared with 14.0%).
- Male characters are less likely to be shown engaging in hands-on parenting duties (4.5% compared with 7.7%).
- Male characters are more likely than female characters to be shown having an occupation (30.5% compared with 26.1%).
- Male characters are less likely to be shown as "very competent" parents than female characters (3.9% compared with 7.5%).

Aggression

- The most prominent stereotype about masculinity depicted in children's television is of boys and men as aggressors. In boys' TV, male characters commit 62.5% of violent acts against another person.
- Male characters are more likely than female characters to be victims of violence (23.1% compared with 13.6%).

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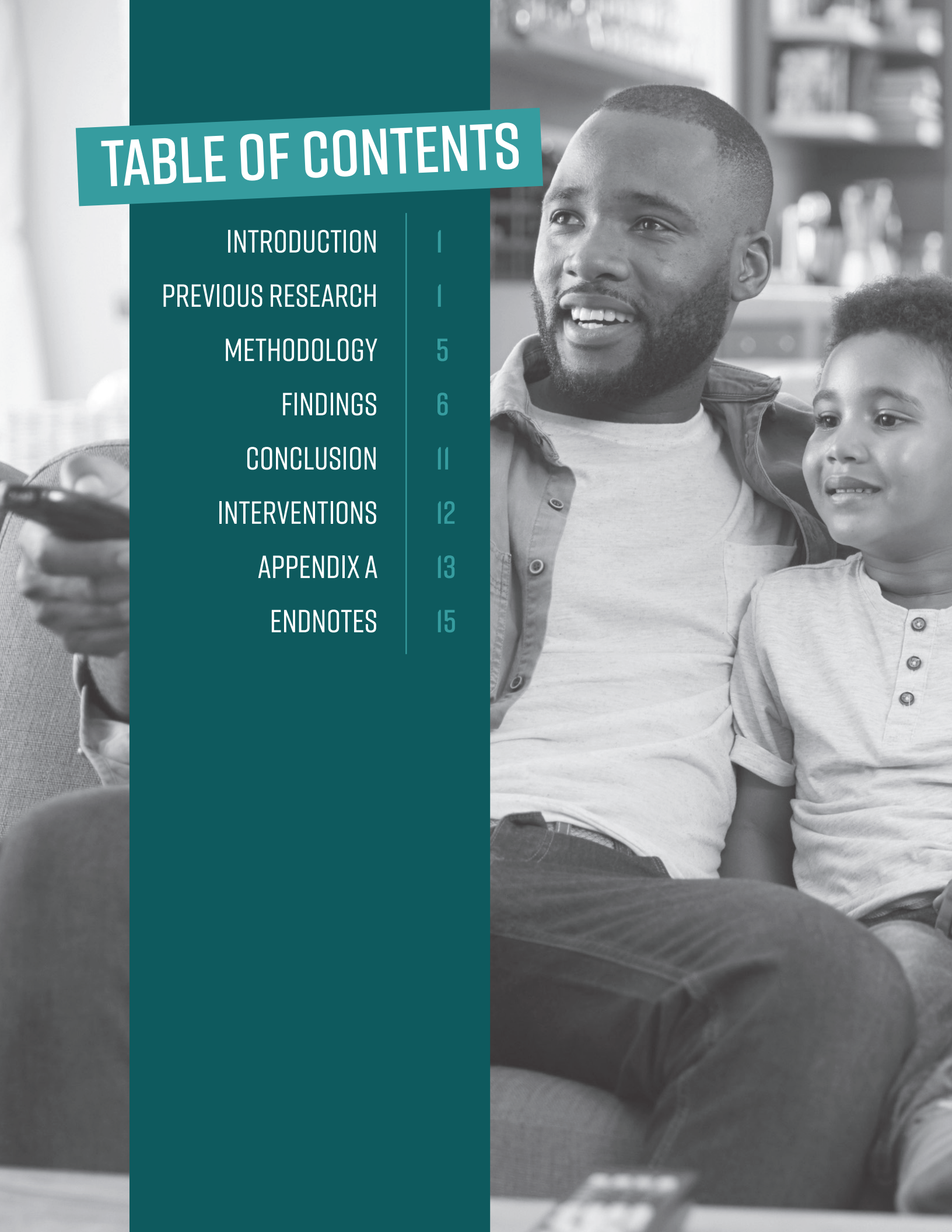


FULL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to examine messages about masculinity present in entertainment media popular among boys ages seven to thirteen. Much of the existing research on gender representation in children's television has focused on girls and women, and for good reason—female characters are typically underrepresented and shown in highly stereotypical ways. However, far less is known about depictions of masculinity in contemporary children's programming. This report fills that gap by analyzing depictions of boys and men in children's television programming.

This report was produced through a collaboration between Promundo, a global leader in promoting gender equality and preventing violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women, girls, and individuals of all gender identities, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary's University, the first research-based organization working within the media and entertainment industry to improve gender representation, and the Kering Foundation, which works to combat violence against women around the globe. Additional data for this report was also provided by the Signal Analysis and Interpretation Laboratory (SAIL) at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering, and Nielsen.

We begin this report with a look at previous research on representations of masculinity and media impact, followed by an overview of the study methodology and findings. We close this report with recommendations for content creators, parents, and other adults who work with boys.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In this section, we focus on previous research as context for understanding our findings. We delve into a detailed description of what we mean by "masculinity," followed by an assessment of media influence and an overview of representations of masculinity from previous studies.

STEREOTYPES

Masculinity refers to a range of behaviors and traits that are primarily associated with being a man in a given culture. These traits often include emotional restrictiveness, self-reliance, aggression, risk taking, casual attitudes about sex, and an avoidance of behaviors labeled as feminine.[2] These pillars were developed from existing research and Promundo's research on masculinities globally, which reflect cultural beliefs about how "real men" should behave, that often have detrimental effects on boys and men.[3] These seven pillars are:

1. SELF-SUFFICIENCY: Men are expected to be entirely self-reliant. They should figure things out on their own without help from others.
2. ACTING TOUGH: A man should always defend his reputation and be willing to use physical aggression to do so. A man should also act strong, even if he's afraid or feeling vulnerable.

3. **PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS:** A man should be physically attractive, but effortlessly so. A man who spends too much time worrying about his looks is not masculine.
4. **RIGID MASCULINE GENDER ROLES:** Men should engage in stereotypically masculine activities and embrace stereotypically masculine roles. For example, a man should be willing to take risks, be a leader, and be the financial provider for his family. He should be less focused on "feminine" skills such as cooking, cleaning, or caregiving.
5. **HETEROSEXUALITY AND HOMOPHOBIA:** Being gay or queer is not manly, and men should avoid being gay or perceived as being gay.
6. **HYPERSEXUALITY:** Men should value sexual conquests over intimacy, and never say "no" to sex. Men are expected to be naturally sex-driven and the sexual initiators.
7. **AGGRESSION AND CONTROL:** Men should be willing to use violence to get respect and should have the final say about decisions in his relationships.

Through a series of surveys and focus group discussions, called *The Man Box* study, Equimundo found that men in the U.S., U.K., and Mexico report various ways in which these masculine norms impact their daily lives. One central way in which these norms impact boys and men is in the pressure they receive from others to fit into these masculine expectations. A majority of survey participants in the U.S. (59%) and Mexico (59%) report being taught by their parents to hide feelings of nervousness or fear. Additionally, 3-in-10 men report pressure from romantic partners and male peers. Regardless of whether or not boys and men accept these stereotypically masculine roles for themselves, it is clear that they are well aware of these expectations.

Promundo's *The Man Box* study[4] finds that, in many ways, men are beginning to reject certain aspects of traditional masculinity. While men reported awareness of masculine expectations, such as heterosexuality and the pressure to always say "yes" to sex, fewer men personally agreed with those ideas. Men in all three countries also rejected the notion that men are superior to women, or that men should not have a role in caregiving. Despite this progress, men are particularly likely to affirm societal pressures to live up to these norms of masculinity associated with toughness, independence, and emotional restriction.

Here are some examples, in their own words:

"When expressing negative feelings, you don't really want to do it. Because again, it makes you look weak. And also you feel like you can deal with those problems yourself. Sometimes men will just try to so-called 'deal with it' and eventually it will end up with suicide."
-Focus Group Participant, U.S.

"Because I was raised that way, I cannot break that, like even when I come on the verge of crying, nothing happens. I just sit there and get more mad at what is going on because I can't break. It just forces [me] to go more internal and I can't have that outlet."
-Focus Group Participant, U.S.

"With guys, I don't know if it's as they grow older, as their responsibilities change, all drift off. And through friends that I know, people that I've met, they kind of feel alone."
-Focus Group Participant, U.K.

Together, these findings indicate while some stereotypical aspects of masculinity are actively challenged, other aspects of masculinity, such as toughness and emotional restrictiveness, are still going strong. Our study uses these pillars of masculinity as a framework for examining representations of manhood in children's programming.

WHY MEDIA MATTERS

Children's screen time has increased dramatically[5] and youth today are more immersed in media than any generation before. Recent estimates of media use indicate that tweens (ages eight to twelve) consume an average of six hours of entertainment media (film, television, video games etc.) on a daily basis, and teens (ages thirteen to eighteen) consume an average of nine hours daily.[6] When we think about this in terms of weekly viewing, it becomes clear that media is the time equivalent of a full-time job for youth.

Despite the changing media landscape, television continues to be the most common medium.[7] Although technology has changed rapidly, the availability of DVR recordings and streaming devices (e.g., computers, cell phones, tablets, game consoles) actually helps connect young people to even more TV content that is available around the clock.[8] A comprehensive study of media use among youth ages eight to eighteen finds that only 59% of TV viewing was live, followed by 12% on DVD, 12% on mobile streaming, 9% online, and 8% on demand.[9]

Another report by Common Sense Media finds that 62% of tweens watch TV on a daily basis, a far greater number than those who listen to music (37%), play mobile games (27%), or watch online videos (24%) daily.[10] On average, children eight and older consume 2.5 hours of television a day.[11] Research also finds that boys consume a greater amount of media compared with girls, and that parents are more restrictive of girls' television viewing than of boys'.[12] With greater consumption and fewer restrictions, boys may be particularly vulnerable to media messages.

Youth are already vulnerable to media messages for various developmental reasons. Middle childhood (ages eight to eleven) is characterized by an increase in independence, heightened self-awareness, and a desire to fit in with peers. During this period, children begin to engage in social comparisons, or the frequent evaluation of their skills, abilities, and behaviors in comparison to others. The adolescent years (ages twelve to eighteen) are critical for identity exploration and formation. As teens begin developing a sense of identity, they must wrestle with gender norms and social expectations around dating and sexuality. As children pass through these stages, messages about how one is expected to act are particularly salient, and children turn to parents, peers, and media for examples. Many scholars argue that media is a critical part of identity formation because it provides youth with a plethora of examples, including portrayals of themes that they may not yet have personal experience with (e.g., dating, occupations).[13] Media also allow youth to feel connected to peers and build subcultures, or peer networks joined by common interests.[14] In fact, some argue that media normalizes attitudes and behaviors by acting as a "super peer," or a powerful best friend.[15]

REPRESENTATIONS OF MASCULINITY

Given the vast amount of time that youth spend consuming media and the role media play in identity formation, it is important to examine messages about gender that are prevalent in such content. Decades of research on gender representation in media have revealed that girls and women are underrepresented, and when present, are often sexualized or shown in stereotypical and domestic roles.[16] In contrast, boys and men are more likely to be shown in

occupational roles rather than familial roles.[17] For example, men on television are significantly more likely than women to be of unknown marital and parental status,[18] allowing men to be defined by characteristics other than romantic or familial relationships. This also contributes to notions of men as stoic, self-sufficient, and not needing social support or social connection.

Content analyses also indicate that male characters are often responsible for the majority of aggressive acts,[19] and overrepresented in depictions of risky behaviors such as substance use and reckless driving.[20] In one analysis of teen-oriented films across three decades, researchers found that male characters committed 86% of aggressive acts.[21] These depictions reinforce the notion that part of being a man involves a willingness to take risks and engage in violence.

While male characters are overrepresented in depictions of violence on-screen, men and boys are also overrepresented in real life aggressive acts, such as intimate parent violence, sexual assault, homicide, and physical bullying. However, it is also true that most boys and men do not carry out physical violence. Thus, television accurately depicts men as the primary actors in aggressive behaviors, but it fails to show enough boys and men questioning or countering violence, which could set a more aspirational way forward.

Another common depiction is that of the sex-driven man with seemingly uncontrollable sexual urges, who prioritizes sexual conquest over emotional intimacy, and is sometimes willing to engage in predatory behaviors to gain sexual access.[22] Researchers refer to these depictions as the "Heterosexual Script."[23] The Heterosexual Script encompasses the notion that sexuality, particularly heterosexuality, is a defining component of being a man. In this script, men are the sexual initiators, use their status (e.g., wealth, power) as courtship strategies, and show that they won't take "no" for an answer by continuing to pursue women who have rejected them.

Documenting and understanding media content is critical, because television is more than just a source of entertainment; it is also a powerful communicator and teacher of cultural norms and values. Indeed, a vast body of social science research has found that media contribute to a wide array of outcomes— everything from attitudes towards the self, attitudes towards others, interests, ideologies, and even behaviors. For example, TV viewing has been linked to body dissatisfaction, occupational aspirations, interest in plastic surgery, attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ folks, attitudes towards racial minorities, gender stereotyped attitudes, and even behaviors like substance use and disordered eating.[24]

Although much of the work examining media effects on gender beliefs has focused on representations of women and attitudes towards women, a smaller body of research indicates that these media effects extend to men's behaviors and their beliefs about masculinity, specifically.[25] Media use has been associated with men's emotional withdrawal,[26] endorsing the belief that men are sex-driven,[27] and adherence to masculine norms.[28] In an experimental study, researchers found that exposure to media that depicted men as emotionally withdrawn resulted in men being less willing to engage in communication in real life.[29] Likewise, men who were exposed to hyper-masculine media content later endorsed the notion that violence is manly.[30] Survey research has also linked men's media use to their beliefs about how men are or should be, as well as their personal adherence to masculine norms.[31]

Now that we have a good sense of contemporary definitions of masculinity, and the role media play in shaping and upholding prevailing notions of masculinity, let us turn to our study. In the next section, we discuss how we examine representations of masculinity in the most popular TV programs for boys.

METHODOLOGY

Our study examines the top 25 television programs popular among boys ages seven to thirteen. These programs were identified using Nielsen rankings, and include sixteen live-action and nine animated shows. We analyzed a total of 447 episodes from these shows. We generated a representative sample that took into account the number of episodes for each show for the 2018 season. The unit of analysis for human expert coding is character.

Our television dataset includes a total of 3,056 characters. The most prominent characters who drive the unfolding storyline are classified as leads or co-leads. Characters who are not leads but contribute to the storyline are classified as supporting characters, and characters that appear only briefly are coded as minor characters. We identified 391 leading/co-leading characters (hereafter referred to as "leading"), 1,443 supporting characters, and 1,222 minor characters. Leading characters are of particular importance given their central role in the narrative, and previous research has shown that character prominence is an important factor in influencing viewer perceptions.

We also employ the Geena Davis Inclusion Quotient (GD-IQ), the only software tool in existence with the ability to measure screen and speaking time through the use of automation (see Appendix A). This revolutionary tool was developed by GDIGM at Mount Saint Mary's University and funded by Google.org. The GD-IQ, which incorporates machine learning technology, was designed by Dr. Shrikanth Narayanan and his team of researchers at the University of Southern California's Signal Analysis and Interpretation Laboratory (SAIL), along with Dr. Caroline Heldman. Additionally, our human expert coding team is staffed by Ph.D.s who have extensive experience in content analysis. Our coding process entails multiple coders looking at the same content and reaching agreement, which produces higher validity and reliability than other media studies. The codebook was developed by the Institute, with input from Equimundo and the Kering Foundation.

FINDINGS

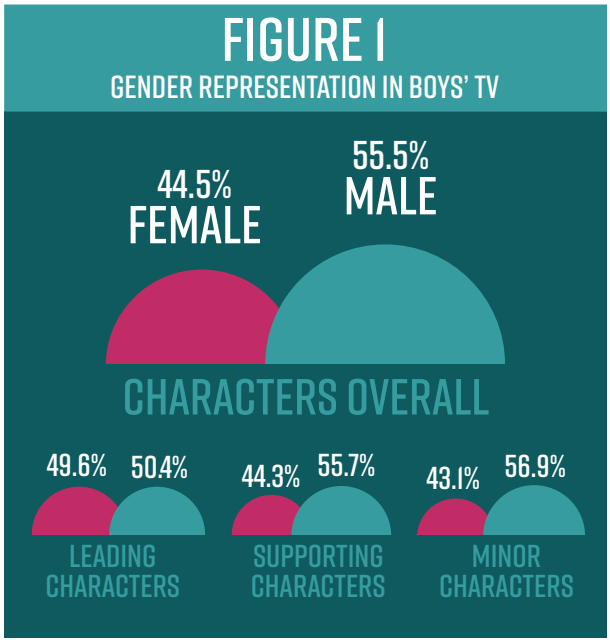
REPRESENTATIONS

Gender

We find remarkable gender parity when it comes to leading characters in boys' TV programs, although female characters lag behind in overall characters, and in supporting and minor roles (Figure 1). Also, female characters speak more and appear more often than male characters.

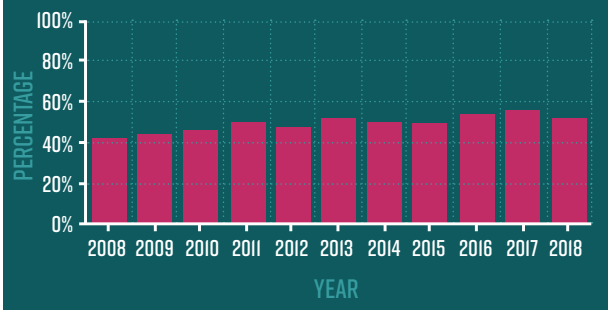
- When it comes to leading characters, 49.6% are female and 50.4% are male.
- Overall, 44.5% of characters are female and 55.5% of characters are male.
- Female characters account for 44.3% of supporting characters, and 43.1% of minor characters.
- Female characters account for 68.0% of speaking time.
- Female characters receive 57.2% of screen time.

FIGURE 1
GENDER REPRESENTATION IN BOYS' TV



These findings parallel a recent analysis by the Geena Davis Institute showing that children's television reached gender parity with regard to leading characters, starting in 2011 (Figure 1).[32]

FIGURE 2
PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE LEADS IN BOYS' TV, 2008-2018



Children's television is performing better than family films (G, PG, and PG-13), where male characters have outnumbered female leads two-to-one in films from 2007 to 2018.[33] Progress in family films has also been slower, with women making up 23.8% of leads a decade ago compared with 32.8% today.

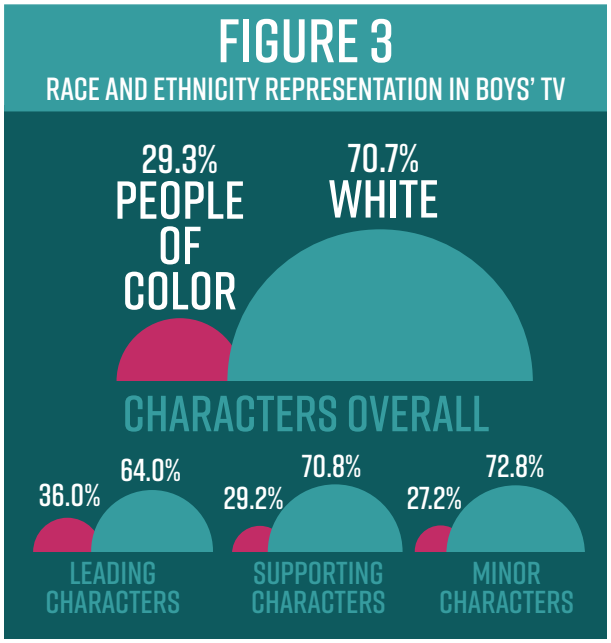
We also examined the percentage of episodes that passed The Bechdel-Wallace Test. This test measures whether a show 1) has at least two female characters who, 2) talk to one another, 3) about something other than a man. A show must meet all three criteria to pass the test. Nearly two-thirds (63.2%) of episodes of popular boys' TV shows passed the Bechdel-Wallace Test.

Race and Ethnicity

When it comes to race, we find equality of representation for leading characters but not less prominent characters.

- People of color make up 38.1% of the U.S. population, and 36.0% of leading characters. Among leading characters, 14.5% are Black, 12.8 % are Latinx, and 7.0% are Asian. There are no leading characters who are Native American, Middle Eastern, or Southeast Asian.
- When it comes to characters overall, only 29.3% are characters of color.

- Among supporting characters, only 29.2% are people of color. Black characters account for 16.6% of supporting characters, followed by 7.1% Latinx, 3.3% Asian, 1.2% Southeast Asian, 0.2% Native American, and 0.2% Middle Eastern characters.
- People of color account for only 27.2% of minor characters. For minor characters, 16.6% are Black, 4.1% are Asian, 3.0% are Latinx, 0.7% are Southeast Asian, 0.4% are Native American, and 0.1% are Middle Eastern.

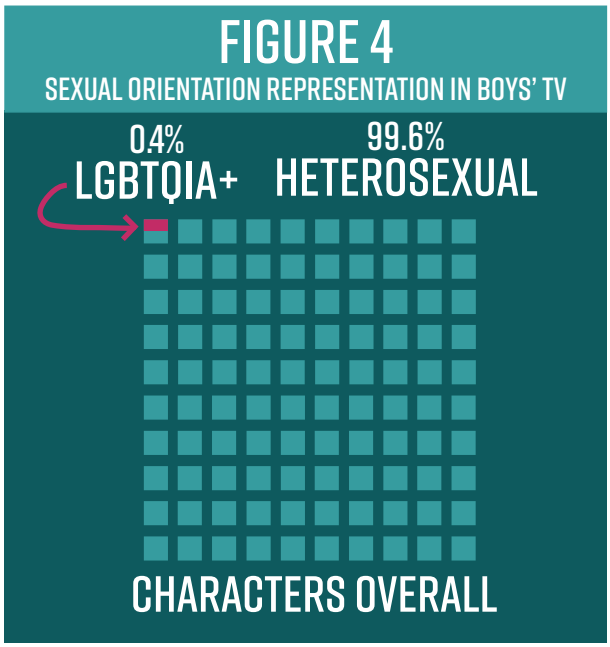


In an analysis of the top children's shows of 2018, people of color made up 26.1% of leading characters.[34] In the top children's films of 2018, 28.8% were leads of color. Compare these figures to the one-in-three protagonists in popular boys' TV who are people of color.

Sexual Orientation

LGBTQIA+ Americans make up 4.5% of the population,[35] but are virtually non-existent in the most popular boys' TV shows.

- Overall, 99.6% of characters are heterosexual and 0.4% are LGBTQIA+.
- LGBTQIA+ characters are completely absent among leading characters.
- LGBTQIA+ characters constitute only 0.7% of supporting characters and 0.3% of minor characters.



The erasure of LGBTQIA+ characters is a pattern in children's media. LGBTQIA+ characters made up only 0.2% of leading characters in the top children's television shows of 2018, and only 0.4% of leading characters in the top family films.[36]

LGBTQIA+ characters are better represented in popular films (rated G, PG, PG-13, and R), making up 4.4% of leading characters. The stark difference between general content and family-oriented content (children's TV and family films) illustrates that sexual orientation remains a taboo topic in family programming, and reinforces the idea that men are supposed to be heterosexual—a pillar of manhood.

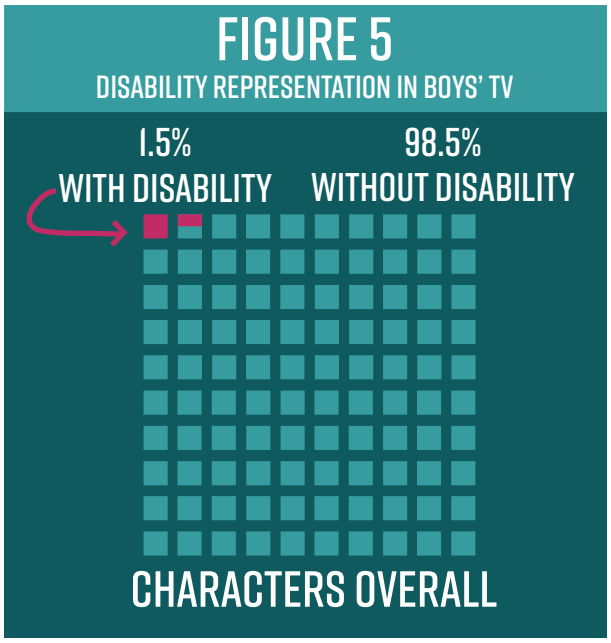
The Vito Russo Test was created by GLAAD, a non-profit advocacy organization focused on improving LGBTQIA+ media representations. This test measures whether a show 1) has an LGBTQIA+ character who, 2) is not solely defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity, and 3) are an important part of the plot. The show must meet all three criteria to pass the test. Only 1.2% of episodes passed the Vito Russo Test, mostly due to the fact

that LGBTQIA+ characters are virtually non-existent in popular boys' TV shows.

Disability Status

Characters with disabilities are virtually absent in the most-watched TV shows for boys.

- Americans with physical, communication, or cognitive disabilities make up 19.0% of the U.S. population,[37] but are only 1.5% of characters overall (Figure 5).
- Only 0.5% of leading characters in boys' TV are shown with a disability.
- Only 1.9% of supporting characters are shown with a disability.
- Only 1.3% of minor characters are shown with a disability.



The severe underrepresentation of people with disabilities is also evident in children's television more broadly, and in popular films. In both the top children's TV programs and top-grossing films of 2018, less than 1.0% of leading characters had a disability.[38]

PILLARS OF MASCULINITY

In this section, we analyze how the pillars of masculinity listed above are challenged or reinforced in TV shows popular with boys. We examine narratives and representations of self-sufficiency, acting tough, physical attractiveness, gendered values, heterosexuality, and aggression and control.

Self-Sufficiency

We assessed self-sufficiency by examining the relationships present in the lives of male characters. We asked—are male characters shown in close relationships with friends or parents? And how often are they shown in close relationships compared with female characters? Close relationships are indicated by behaviors such as spending quality time together and confiding in each other.

Close to half, or 46.7%, of leading and supporting male characters are shown in close friendship with other characters. Of those close friendships, 28.0% are with both male and female characters, 14.2% are with other male characters only, and 4.2% are with other female characters only. This is comparable to findings with female characters, 47.3% of whom are shown in close friendships with other characters.

CLOSE TO HALF OF MALE CHARACTERS ARE SHOWN IN RELATIONSHIPS

Among child characters, boys are more likely than girls to be shown without parents (57.0% compared with 42.8%). We also found gender differences in the quality of relationships with parents. Girls are more likely than boys to be shown in a close relationship with mothers (6.4% compared with 3.8%) or with both parents (4.5% compared with 3.5%). This finding shows that, when it comes to parental relations, popular boys' TV shows reinforce the idea that boys need their parents less than girls.

BOYS' TV SHOWS REINFORCE THE IDEA THAT BOYS NEED THEIR PARENTS LESS THAN GIRLS DO

Acting Tough

A central component of acting tough is restrictive emotionality, or difficulty in expressing ones' feelings. We found that male characters are less likely than female characters to show a range of emotions, including empathy (22.5% compared with 30.6%), happiness (68.3% compared with 75.2%), and even anger (28.8% compared with 36.6%). Male and female characters are equally likely to show sadness, fear, or shame.

MALE CHARACTERS ARE LESS LIKELY TO SHOW EMOTIONS THAN FEMALE CHARACTERS

Male characters of color are more likely than white male characters to display shame (10.2% compared with 6.3%) and less likely to express an emotion other than anger to other male characters (7.0% compared with 14.5%). Male characters of color are also less likely than white male characters to be shown communicating with their sexual or romantic partner (2.0% compared with 7.1%). These findings are concerning because they suggest that stereotypes about men of color as worthy of shame and less emotional and communicative are present in children's television.

BOYS' TV SHOWS REINFORCE THE IDEA THAT MEN OF COLOR ARE LESS COMMUNICATIVE THAN WHITE MEN

Physical Attractiveness

Body standards for men are different than body standards for women. While female characters are held to the thin ideal—a slender, feminine body with a small waist and little body fat—male characters portray a broader range of body types.

Almost half (47.1%) of female characters are shown as smaller than average, compared with 34.0% of men. Male characters are more likely to be shown as unusually muscular than female characters (2.4% compared with 0.1%). Ideally, entertainment media will include a range of body types in content in order to challenge the idea that there is one ideal body type for men and women.

MALE CHARACTERS PORTRAY A BROADER RANGE OF BODY TYPES THAN FEMALE CHARACTERS

Male characters also encompass a broader range of attractiveness compared with female characters. Thirty-six percent of female characters are of above-average attractiveness, compared with 24.8% of male characters. Male characters are more likely than female characters to be shown as "worse than average looking" (10.6% compared with 1.7%). This diversity of attractiveness challenges the idea that "real men" are supposed to be universally attractive.

BOYS' TV SHOWS ARE CHALLENGING THE IDEA THAT "REAL MEN" HAVE TO BE UNIVERSALLY ATTRACTIVE

Gendered Values

We assessed the presence of rigid masculine gender roles and values by examining leadership status, competitiveness, risk taking, dominance in sexual or romantic relationships, caregiving behaviors, and occupational status. A character is considered to be a leader if others followed his or her behavior and/or directives. Leaders could occupy formal positions of power in corporations, politics, criminal organizations, the military, or more informal positions of power, serving as leaders in social groups.

We found that male characters are less likely than female characters to be shown in positions of leadership (36.3% compared with 40.8%), and equally likely to be competitive or show dominance in a romantic or sexual relationship.

MALE CHARACTERS ARE LESS LIKELY THAN FEMALE CHARACTERS TO BE SHOWN AS LEADERS

Male characters are more likely than female characters to be shown engaging in risky behaviors (20.0% compared with 14.0%).

MALE CHARACTERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE SHOWN ENGAGING IN RISKY BEHAVIOR

Although male characters are equally likely as female characters to be depicted as parents, and to be depicted as warm and loving caregivers, several gender differences did emerge. Male characters are less likely to be shown engaging in hands-on parenting duties (4.5% compared with 7.7%) and less likely to be shown as very competent in parenting (3.9% compared with 7.5%).

Male characters are also more likely than female characters to be shown as having an occupation (30.5% compared with 26.1%). There are no gender differences in management, professional, sales, administration, or military careers. In contrast, male characters are more likely than female characters to be shown in criminal occupations (e.g., bank robber, shoplifter; 5.5% compared with 3.5%).

MALE CHARACTERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE SHOWN HAVING AN OCCUPATION

Heterosexuality, Homophobia, and Hyper-sexuality

To examine this pillar of masculinity, we assess character relationship status, courting behaviors, and perpetration of sexual violence.

The majority of characters (79.0%) in programs popular among boys are single, with no gender differences found in relationship status. Male and female characters are equally likely to express romantic interest in someone. Only 0.7% of male characters and 0.2% of female characters continued to pursue someone they were romantically interested in despite being rejected. This means that not taking "no" for an answer is rare in popular boys' TV shows.

IN POPULAR BOYS' TV SHOWS, CONSENT IS RESPECTED IN ROMANTIC PURSUITS

We also assessed a spectrum of sexually aggressive behaviors, from verbal harassment to sexual assault. Verbal harassment includes unwanted sexual comments, verbally objectifying remarks, and sexist or crude jokes. Physical harassment includes inappropriate or unwanted advances, attempts to seduce, or voyeurism. Sexual coercion includes the use of bribery, threats, blackmail, or deceit to gain sexual access. Sexual battery refers to unwanted touching outside of clothing, and sexual assault refers to unwanted touching underneath clothing. No gender differences emerged in the perpetration of sexually aggressive behaviors, and these behaviors are extremely rare in children's programming popular among boys.

Aggression and Control

We examined aggression and control by documenting instances of violence, identifying the perpetrators and targets of violence, and assessing motivations for using violence. We see the strongest gender differences within this pillar of masculinity.

Male characters are more likely than female characters to perpetrate violence against people and property (3.3% compared with 1.6%). Male characters also committed 62.5% of violent acts against another person, compared with 37.5% of acts perpetrated by female characters. The most prevalent targets of violence are other adults (87.9%). Male characters are more likely than female characters to be victims of violence (23.1% compared with 13.6%).

MALE CHARACTERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE SHOWN PERPETRATING VIOLENCE

Several gender differences emerged in motivations for violence. Male characters are more likely than female characters to use violence in self-defense (7.9% compared with 4.7%), retaliation (1.6% compared with 0.6%), or for personal gain (4.8% compared with 2.3%).

Overall, these findings indicate that the stereotype of boys and men as aggressive or violent remains strong in media content popular among boys.

CONCLUSION

Media is one clear way that boys learn the rules of masculinity, and our findings show that harmful aspects of masculinity are both challenged and reinforced in the most popular boys' TV shows. Our positive findings are as follows:

- We find gender parity with leading characters, screen time, and speaking time. This runs counter to a popular misconception that boys will not watch content featuring girls and women.
- A high percentage of male characters are shown in close friendships, which challenges the masculine stereotype of men as loners.
- Few male characters are portrayed engaging in sexually aggressive behaviors, which challenges the masculine stereotype that centers male sexual conquest at all costs.

When it comes to reinforcing harmful aspects of masculinity, our findings are as follows:

- Male characters are shown engaging in risk-taking behaviors at a high rate.
- Male characters are shown working in paid labor at a higher rate than female characters, and are rarely shown as competent caretakers, which reinforces the masculine norm of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers.
- A sizeable number of male characters are shown as violent, which reinforces the idea that violence and aggression are intrinsically tied to being a man.
- People of color are underrepresented in boys' TV content, as are LGBTQIA+ characters and characters with disabilities.

Just as what we see on screen matters, what we don't see on screen matters as well. Communication scholars find that the absence of representation of any particular social group helps maintain social inequality by denying the existence of those identities, a concept referred to as "symbolic annihilation."[39]

According to the results of this content analysis, the typical man on TV is heterosexual, does not have a disability, and is prone to violence. In reality, Gen Z is gender/sex fluid, with 52.0% identifying as something other than straight or heterosexual.[40] Additionally, one-in-five young people have a disability, and boys and men are not naturally prone to violence. When we fail to represent this diversity on-screen, we also deny youth the chance to draw inspiration from characters that make them feel seen and reflect their realities.

INTERVENTIONS

These are recommendations specifically designed to improve healthy representations of men and boys on screen.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTENT CREATORS

- **COMMIT TO INCLUSIVE STORYTELLING** that reflects the broader population and viewing audiences. An easy way to measure success here is to see how identities represented on screen (gender, race, sexual orientation, ability status, age, and body size) match up to presence in the broader U.S. population. It is essential to make sure that characters are not tokenized, stereotyped, etc. based on their identities.
- **USE SPELLCHECK FOR BIAS** at the script stage to uncover unconscious gender, racial, sexual orientation, ability, age, and body size bias. This automated text analysis tool provides concrete feedback for immediate improvement. It is especially important to analyze scripts prior green lighting to make sure that the cast is gender and race balanced in terms of the number of characters, the prominence of the characters, and character speaking time.
- **USE THE GD-IQ** later in the production process to evaluate representations of gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, age, and size in video content. This automated tool provides precise data on presence, prominence, screen time, and speaking time that editors can use to improve the final version of their film, TV episode, TV series, ad, or other media content.
- **AVOID COMMON STEREOTYPES ABOUT MEN AND PARENTING.** Allow male characters to be primary care providers who are competent and involved in the day-to-day lives of their children. Show male characters packing school lunches, driving kids to school, and helping with household chores, and emotionally connecting to sons, daughters, and others.
- **ALLOW MALE CHARACTERS TO EXPRESS A FULL RANGE OF EMOTIONS.** Include male characters that model close friendships, family relationships, and healthy expressions of emotions. Avoid using vulnerable emotions (e.g., sadness, fear) as a catalyst for destructive behavior.
- **SHOW BOYS AND YOUNG MEN ASKING FOR HELP, PARTICULARLY FROM PARENTS.** Avoid depicting boys and men as solitary or as having to "go at it alone." Allow male characters to maintain social and familial relationships and to seek out support from others.
- **AVOID GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE.** Allow male characters to resolve conflict in other ways. Give male characters opportunities to de-escalate aggressive situations or walk away from conflict. Provide opportunities for male friendships to be shown in a positive light by allowing boys and men to call out their peers for use of violence, rather than portraying men as readily violent or as bystanders.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS AND THOSE WORKING WITH BOYS

- **AVOID MEDIA THAT REINFORCES DAMAGING GENDER NORMS.** For example, when you see men or boys on screen who are portrayed as the "loner" stereotype, use this as a way to start a conversation about healthy ways to express emotions.
- **FIND MEDIA THAT CHALLENGE GENDER NORMS AND IDENTIFY HEALTHY OR POSITIVE ROLE MODELS.** Identify media characters and real-life role models that exemplify healthy masculinity.
- **CALL OUT STEREOTYPICAL DEPICTIONS OF MANHOOD.** When you see narrow depictions of masculinity in advertising, television, or film, call it out and use as an opportunity for discussion. For example, if shows present male characters engaging in bullying or aggressive behaviors, ask questions such as: why is it that so many boys are showing bullying? How else could boys react in that moment?
- **MAINTAIN AN OPEN DIALOGUE AND ACTIVELY REACH OUT TO BOYS WITH HELP AND SUPPORT.** The older children get, and the more platforms become available for TV viewing, the harder it can be to restrict the content they are exposed to. Help prepare boys to navigate the media landscape by maintaining a continuous dialogue about the media they like and consume.

APPENDIX A

The GD-IQ was funded by Google.org. Incorporating Google's machine learning technology and the University of Southern California's audio-visual processing technologies, this tool was co-developed by the Institute and led by Dr. Shrikanth (Shri) Narayanan and his team of researchers at the University of Southern California's Signal Analysis and Interpretation Laboratory (SAIL), along with Dr. Caroline Heldman.

To date, most research investigations of media representations have been done manually. The GD-IQ revolutionizes this approach by using automated analysis, which is not only more precise, but makes it possible for researchers to quickly analyze massive amounts of data, which allows findings to be reported in real time. Additionally, the GD-IQ allows for more accurate analysis, and because the tool is automated, comparisons across data sets and researchers are possible, as is reproducibility. Automated analysis of media content gets around the limitations of human coding. Beyond the significant advantage of being able to efficiently analyze more films in less time, the GD-IQ can also calculate content detail with a level of accuracy that eludes human coders. This is especially true for factors such as screen and speaking time, where near exact precision is possible. Algorithms are a set of rules of calculations that are used in problem-solving. For this report, we employed two automated algorithms that measure screen time by gender and race, and speaking time of characters by their gender. Here is an overview of the procedures we used for each algorithm.

SCREEN TIME ANALYSIS

We compute the screen time of female characters by calculating the ratio of female faces to the total number of faces in the film's visuals. The screen time is calculated using online face detection and tracking with tools provided by Google's machine learning technology. In the interest of precision and time, we estimate screen time by computing statistics over face-tracks (boxes tracking the general outline of each face) instead of individual faces. The face-tracks returned by technology include different attributes of the face with the corresponding time of occurrence in the video. Among the attributes returned for each of the detected faces, we use two parameters - the confidence of the detected face and the system's posterior probability for gender prediction. A threshold of 0.25 was empirically chosen for determining confident face detection.

Due to multiple characters appearing on screen simultaneously, the face-tracks can be overlapping. A gender label is then assigned to each track using the average gender posterior associated with the confident faces in the track. If the average gender posterior probability of the track is greater than 0.5, the track is classified as a "female track," otherwise, it is a "male track." The number of frames with confident face detections in each track is summed up across all tracks to get the total number of faces. The number of female tracks is aggregated to get the total number of faces predicted as female. Finally, the screen time is computed as the ratio between the number of female face detections to the total number of face detections across the length of the movie. Supplementary analysis shows that screen time estimated at frame-level (individual faces) instead of using face-tracks was not significantly different and was comparable. Furthermore, computing the average of gender posterior over tracks has an added benefit of "smoothing out" some of the local gender prediction errors. Face-tracking incorporates temporal contiguity information to reduce transient errors in gender prediction that may occur with analyzing individual faces independently. We performed a similar analysis for character race and screen time.

SPEAKING TIME ANALYSIS

Using movie audio, we compute the speaking time of male and female characters to obtain an objective indicator of gender representation. The algorithm for performing this analysis involves automatic voice activity detection, audio segmentation, and gender classification.

Voice Activity Detection:

Movie audio typically contains many non-speech regions, including sound effects, background music, and silence. The first step is to eliminate non-speech regions from the audio using voice activity detection (VAD) and retain only speech segments. We used a recurrent neural network based VAD algorithm implemented in the open-source toolkit OpenSMILE to isolate speech segments.

Segmentation:

We then break speech segments into smaller sections in order to ensure each segment includes speech from only one speaker. This is performed using an algorithm based on Bayes Information Criterion (BIC), available in the KALDI toolkit. Thirteen dimensional Mel Frequency Cepstral Coefficient (MFCC) features are used for the automatic speaker segmentation. This step essentially decomposes continuous speech segments obtained in the VAD step into smaller segments to make sure no segment contains speech from two different speakers.

Gender Classification:

The speech segment is then classified into two categories based on whether it was likely spoken by a male or female character. This is accomplished with acoustic feature extraction and feature normalization.

Acoustic Feature Extraction:

We use 13-dimensional MFCC features for gender classification because they can be reliably extracted from movie audio, unlike pitch or other high-level features where extraction is made unreliable by the diverse and noisy nature of movie audio.

Feature Normalization:

Feature normalization is deemed necessary to address the issue of variability of speech across different movies and speakers, and to reduce the effect of noise present in the audio channel. Cepstral Mean Normalization (CMN) is a standard technique popular in Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) and other speech technology applications. Using this method, the cepstral coefficients are linearly transformed to have the same segmental statistics (zero mean). Classification of the speaker as either male or female is based on gender-specific Gaussian mixture models (GMMs) of the acoustic features. These models are trained on a gender-annotated subset of general speech databases used for developing speech technologies using frame-level features for each gender. The GMM we use in this system has 100 mixture components and is optimized by tuning the parameters in a held-out evaluation set. For a new input segment whose gender label is to be predicted, the likelihoods of the segment belonging to a male or female class are computed based on this pre-trained model. The class with higher likelihood is assigned to the segment as the estimated gender prediction. The total speaking time by gender is then computed by adding together the durations for each utterance classified as Male/Female. This gives us the male and female speaking time in a movie.

ENDNOTES

1. In order to pass the Vito Russo test, the television show must contain a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer, and that character must not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity (i.e. they are comprised of the same sort of unique character traits commonly used to differentiate straight/non-transgender characters from one another). The LGBTQ character must be tied into the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect, meaning they are not there to simply provide colorful commentary, paint urban authenticity, or (perhaps most commonly) set up a punchline. The character must matter.
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