

Author note

These slides offer only a partial impression of our presentation on the Media Representation Initiative. Many visuals and supplementary details have been removed, so the slides do not fully reflect the depth or quality of the original talk. The presentation provided some background information on the initiative and discussed recent research insights on how gender is portrayed in the media and how such portrayals may influence the development of gender roles among young viewers.



Meeting SeeMeBeMe

Youth and Media scholarship at the University of Amsterdam



Please note, these slides have been edited for sharing purposes.



Center for research on Children, Adolescents and the Media



Dr Irene van Driel



Dr Sindy Sumter

CcaM – founded in 2006 -
hosts over 20 youth and
(entertainment) media
researchers



Kids and youth
screentime
is changing rapidly
in quantity and quality

How can we still make sense of this?



Why?

Shared goal to understand how young people – children and adolescents - are shaped by their media experiences and identify both the risks and benefits that **entertainment** media afford.

What?

Constantly-evolving series of projects that tackle timely questions informed by theoretical and societal questions.

How?

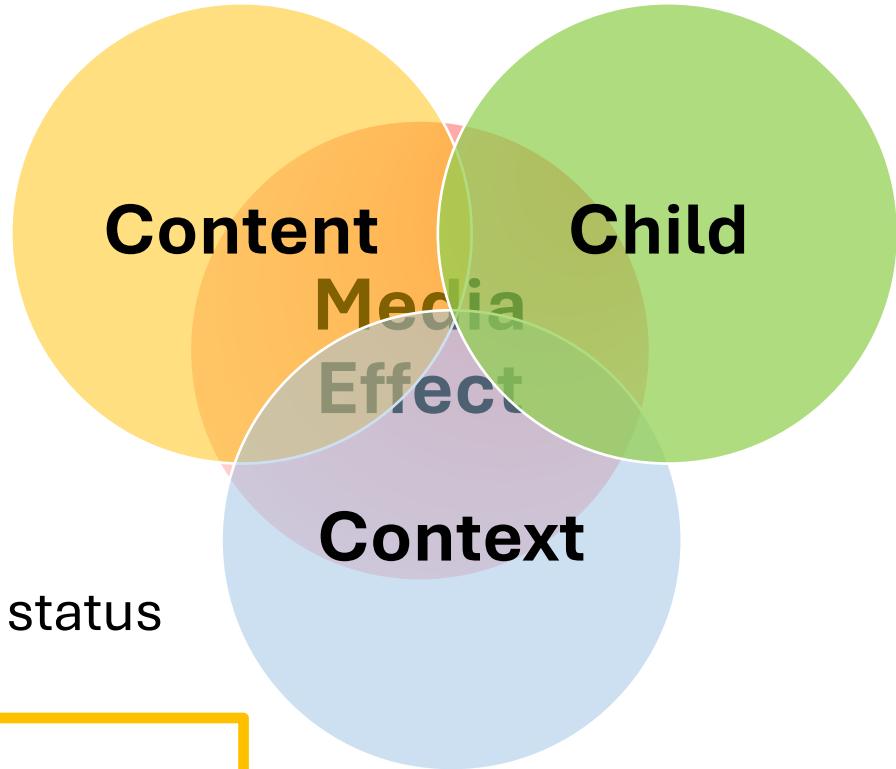
Shared methodological approach to understand the interplay between media and the child (adv stats/individual difference models).

How?



- Age
- Personality
- Mood
- Social skills
- Attention skills
- Pre-existing (mental) health status

and
Identity



SeeMeBeMe's origin story

Pool of researchers with shared curiosity, commitment, and complementary expertise to understand the **role of identity**

→ Societal need:

Dutch and European young people are increasingly diverse, and will benefit from media that reflects this, but research is needed to show if and how

→ Student need:

Our Dutch and international students are a young audience and future international media makers

→ See Me Be Me



A Conversation That Matters



WE BELIEVE:

Inclusive and authentic media representations help kids, teens, and young adults imagine possibilities, build confidence, set positive goals, and better understand others.

This allows them to feel comfortable, true to themselves, and open to learning about different perspectives and experiences.

Guide: Education, Workshops & Best Practices

Investigate: Assess needs & share insights

Connect and celebrate: Youth, experts, media creators, scientists

SeeMeBeMe's First Event



THE POWER OF MEDIA REPRESENTATION FOR YOUTH

SCIENCE ROLE MODELS

What scientists do we want to see **more** of in our favorite series and movies?*

LIFESTYLE: A SCIENTIST AS COOL AND SOCIAL

1 **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** **APPEARANCE: SCIENTISTS WITH HOODIES AND NAILPOLISH**

Scientists with white labcoats, glasses, tubes, Petri dishes, and microscopes. Even for STEM scientists a lab coat is not the default lab attire. Plus, the lab coat symbol of science overshadows the wide variety of non-lab-based disciplines.

We need scientists in hoodies, jeans, with a pencil or microscope, on top of a mountain or at a science festival. Scientists with nail polish, high heels, casual dresses or shorts, or VR headsets.

EXPERTISE: SOCIAL SCIENCES, HUMANITIES AND ARTS (SSH) ARE SCIENCES TOO

The majority of scientists in fictional content are medical doctors or researchers in STEM-related research areas. Students in the SSH research areas will be key players in tackling current societal challenges, such as climate change, migration, and inequality.

We want to see more variety in the sciences represented on screen, from marine biologists to art historians and media scientists. We imagine pandemic movies where virologists and social scientists can share the lead.

SKILLS: STRAIGHT A'S NO WAY - THE ROAD TO DR IS NOT ALWAYS EASY OR LINEAR

Genius scientists who were meant to be academics from the day they were born and excelled at any test. Becoming a scientist is not always a calling and the road is not always easy. Science is more than crystallized intelligence.

It's important to remember that scientists are through trials and tribulations. And yet a scientist can also have a learning disability, whether it's ADHD, ADD or dyslexia, and bring home report cards without straight A's.

PROCESS: SCIENCE IS SLOW AND ZIGZAGS

Science that values fast moments and efficient results. Because science is a process of trial and error, with moments of failure, setbacks, doubt and starting over, it is a collaborative effort. To build trust in science, it is important to show how it works. We need to do away with the misconception that one experiment brings the truth.

It's important to remember that science is a process, that science is teamwork, and let scientists provide input in shows with science in it.

IDENTITIES: ANYONE CAN BE A SCIENTIST

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SeeMeBeMe spotlights *gendered* mirrors and windows



Research: Gender Representation in entertainment media & technology



1. SUMMARIZE
EXISTING RESEARCH



2. IDENTIFY
CHALLENGES



3. EVIDENCE-BASED
INTERVENTIONS

Gender development x Media

Entertainment media is one of the socialization actors that communicate what is acceptable and normative.

Research facts

Before 3 years old, kids' favorite media characters are...

Boys: 98% listed male characters

Girls: 20% listed male characters

There are more male characters and more varied roles for these characters.

Source: Bond, B. J., & Calvert, S. L., 2014.

Gender in Media:

What is “good” or “bad” representation?

Quantity (Frequency)*

- Overrepresentation
- Underrepresentation (minority or minoritized identities)
- Absence of representation: erasure

Quality

Misrepresentation, for example:

- Gender role stereotypes**
- Body representation
- Sexualization

*Based on content analyses research and industry reports (mostly US context).

**Stereotypes = *learned associations between gender and specific characteristics, behaviour, roles, appearance*

Gender development x Media: which lessons do children learn about gender?

Early childhood:

*Boys are better than girls, more rewards observed for boys

Middle childhood:

*Boys: More male-stereotyped play

*Girls: Less interest in science, wanting to be thinner

Adolescence:

*More tolerant views of sexual harassment

*Belief that women are responsible for sexual assault

*Appearance = self-worth

Relevant readings:

Ward, L. M., & Aubrey, J. S. (2017)

Ward, L. M., & Grower, P. (2020)

Santoniccolo, F., Trombetta, T., Paradiso, M. N., & Rollè, L. (2023).

Gender development x Media: common stereotypical portrayals

Pink princesses
Gender stereotypical appearance

Sweet girls, dominant boys
Gender stereotypical inner traits

From stay-at-home moms to “fire men” pigs!
Gender stereotypical occupation

It's pervasive...

Gender stereotypical portrayals can also be observed for emerging technologies, including robots

Challenges: Why don't we just do it “right” already?

- ✓ There has been a focus on quantity over quality
- ✓ Hiring practices are not always accompanied by company culture changes
- ✓ Companies try out new narratives may (initially) experience backlash
- ✓ New narratives are informed by assumptions about consumer demographic, rather than actual audience needs/wishes

Evidence-based interventions: How to do it “right”?

Step 1

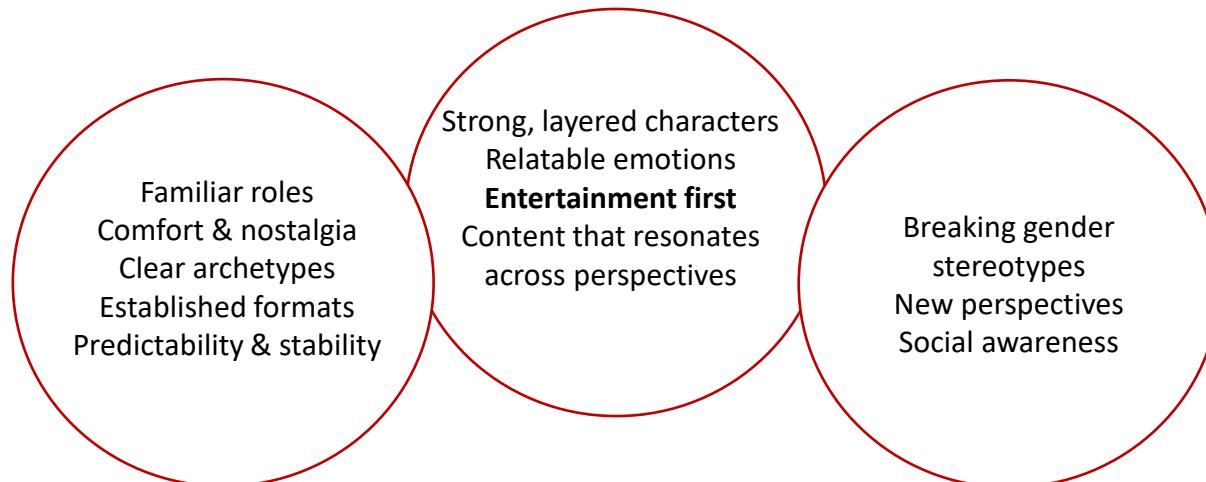
- ✓ Need for evidence-based media and technology design
- ✓ Account for interactions between identities

Who is your audience, what is your goal?

Traditional gender viewers

Progressive gender viewers,
allies, minoritized gender groups

- Optimize **identification** with the character for both groups
- Insert elements that are **recognizable** for both groups



Authentic Representations: What Could That Look Like?

Examples

Ada Twist - <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13241650>

Samuel - <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15498808/>

Current & Future Research Projects

1. How can we use social media and role models to change gender narratives for teens?
2. How can we co-create authentic media narratives with youth? → videogames
3. How can we use generative AI as an ally to representation and inclusion?
4. Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate?

Current & Future Projects: Join us?



Insta, LinkedIn: @SeeMeBeMe_

<https://seemebeme.org/>