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.

Amsterdam School of Communication Research

CcaM

Center for research on Children, Adolescents and the Media

Dr Irene van Driel

Dr Sindy Sumter

SEE ME BE ME The Power of Media Representation

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?

CcaM

Center for research on Children, Adolescents and the Media

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.

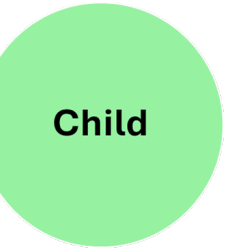
What?

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

How?

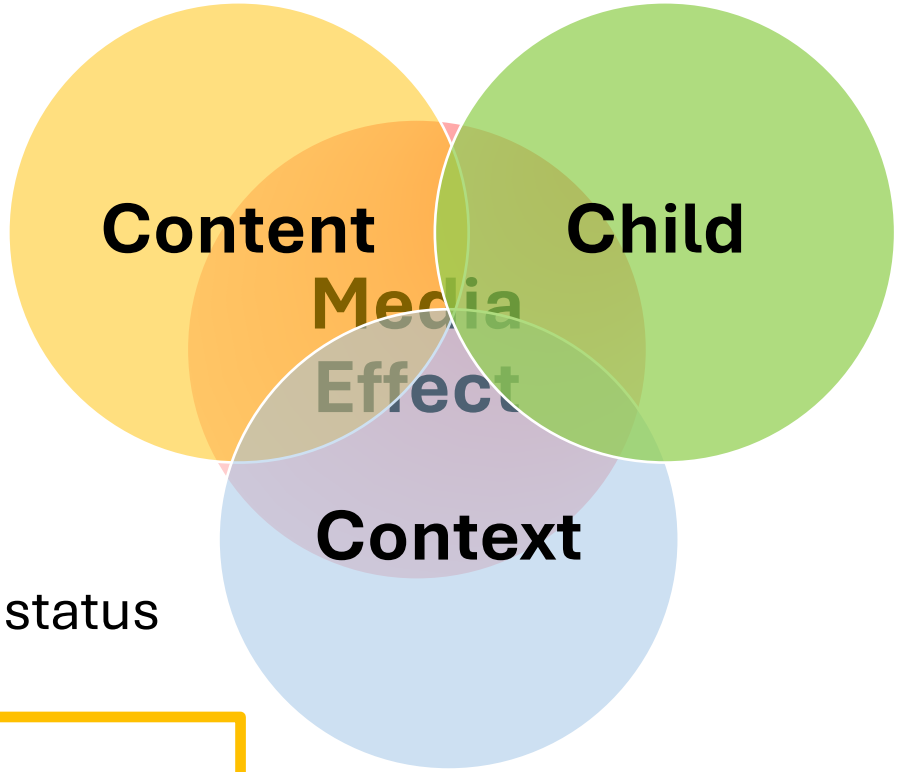
Shared methodological approach to understand the interplay between media and the child (adv stats/individual difference models).

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

Science for Inclusive Innovation in Media & Technology

SEE ME BE ME

HOME TEAM ABOUT

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

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SeeMeBeMe's First Event

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.

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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 readngs:

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

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

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

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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 emergin g technologies, including robots

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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

Tompkins, J. E., & Martins, N. (2022). Masculine pleasures as normalized practices: Character design in the video game industry. *Games and Culture*, *17*(3), 399-420.

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

Step 1

✓ Need for evidence-based media and technology design

✓ Account for interactions between identities

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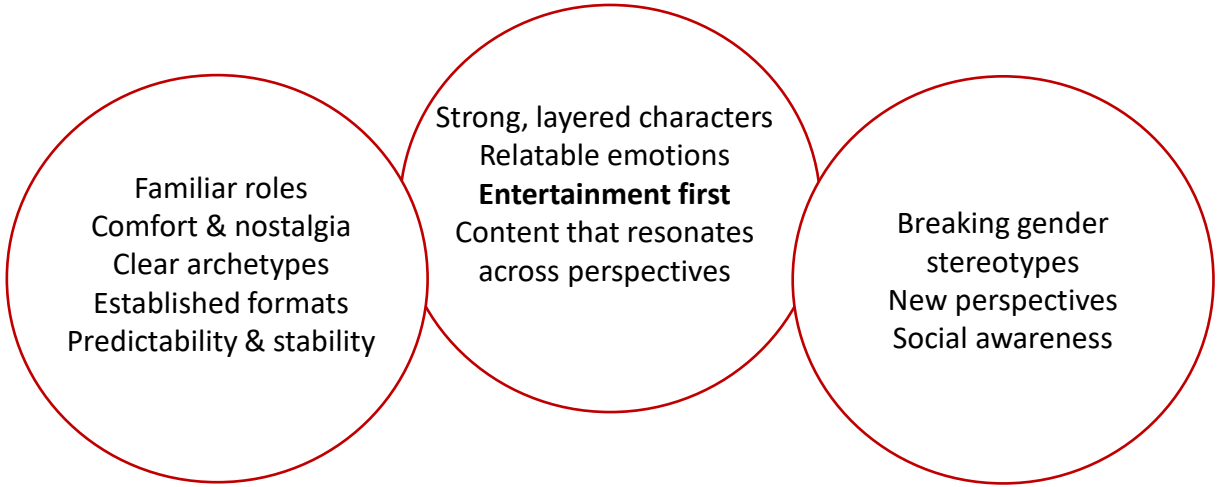
Who is your audience, what is your goal?

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/