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What Do Children See on CBeebies? A Textual Analysis of Gender Representation and Identity on British Pre-School Television

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Abstract

Drawing on initial findings based on textual analysis, this paper discusses the representation of gender roles in UK pre-school public service broadcasting (PSB) television programmes, specifically aired on CBeebies. The analysis presented here is taken from the first part of a larger, multi-method doctoral study that will also undertake empirical research with children. The research asks how gendered behaviours are learned and adapted by pre-school television and aims to better understand how children learn about and adapt (or not) their behaviour to conform to (or challenge) normative gender roles represented on public service broadcasting television. The paper also emphasises the importance of the role of public service broadcast television in shaping and representing gender roles due to its prominence, popularity, and civic educational responsibilities. This research uncovers, through the textual analysis, how the biggest children's PSB outlet represents gender and, in turn, educates children about gender.

Keywords: gender, pre-school television, public service broadcasting, textual analysis
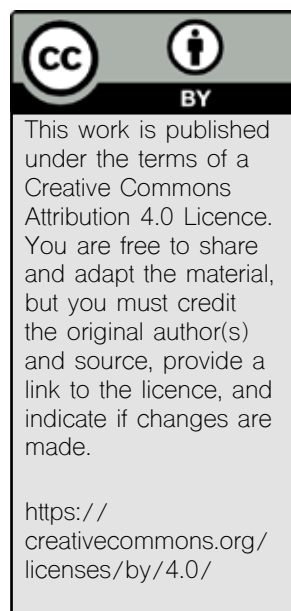
Introduction

This paper outlines preliminary themes and findings of a research project that investigated the representation of gender roles in UK pre-school public service broadcasting television programmes, specifically those aired on CBeebies. The scoping analysis presented here is taken from the first part of a larger, multi-method doctoral study and was necessary before undertaking empirical research with children themselves. The overall aim of the analysis was to better un-

derstand how these children's programmes represent normative representations of gender, or challenge gender roles, and how the pre-school viewers may learn about such gendered roles. The research will also start to consider how children could adapt (or not) their behaviour to conform (or challenge) such portrayals. This research will develop the existing work of those such as Lemish (2010), Raymond (2013), Gotz et al (2008) and Briggs (2006) following on from their recommendations, to gain a further understanding of how children interpret, learn, and understand gender through television consumption within the very early years of their development.

Messenger Davies (2010) argues that public service broadcasters often provide a nurturing and 'paternalistic discourse' (2010, p. 4). She continues that the public service channels, often take the child viewer more seriously due to their educational and public responsibility. CBeebies is the largest and most successful public service broadcasting channel for children in the UK. Due to its prominence and responsibilities, it is important to understand how progressive gender roles and identities are understood and portrayed to our children, as the BBC prides itself on educational values and representing the diverse British population. Bignell (2008) argues that children construct and negotiate meanings of the wider world via television programmes. He argues that this helps them to '…learn and understand themselves, other people and society' (2008, p. 308). He highlights that the portrayal of society is played out through the characters and their televisual appearance. They expose the real in a fantasy world for children to understand adults and their roles and constitute part of a child's social integration. He states that for a child to make up their own mind is an '…essential part of their gradual integration into society as a whole' (2008, p. 308).

The aim of the analysis was to understand how CBeebies represents gender and, in turn, educates our children about gender through selected programming, as suggested through Bignell's (2008) meaning-making process. It is also important to highlight here that such programmes are constructed and produced by adults themselves. This is particularly important when considering the pre-school audience as they are perceived as the most vulnerable and protected group of children. Such power may determine child audiences' lack of agency and freedom, particularly if dominant and restrictive gender roles are portrayed on screen.

The children's television programmes chosen for analysis were deliberately selected for inclusion in the sample as they had both male and female 'main' characters. These programmes are *Bitz and Bob, Charlie and Lola* and *Topsy and Tim*. My reasoning for this selection process is that the role, positioning, and performance of the two gendered characters offers an opportunity to directly compare gender role norms throughout the broader analysis across the research. It is also important to highlight here the style of the programmes. *Topsy and Tim* is

live action, *Charlie and Lola* is hand drawn animation and *Bitz and Bob* is computer animation. The varying styles of the programmes also provides an opportunity to examine the significance of realism in the gender roles represented. The three programmes were produced over a thirteen-year period, which offers some understanding as to how, if at all, gender roles and representations had developed over the years. I viewed and re-viewed each programme from all series of the selected programmes, before proceeding to code across gender variables and analyse the gendered roles of programme characters, drawing on grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Luisi 2018). The systematic approach by which to analyse data and develop a framework, enabled the examination of related and integrated themes within the findings.

Methodology

Fairclough (2003) explains that textual analysis is an effective way of conducting social research that focuses upon the language and images of a text that can lead to developing and asking theoretical questions about the social world through a 'meaning-making' process (2003, p. 8). This 'meaning-making' process is described as a process which produces 'causal effects' (2003, p. 8). He argues that although scholars have been led to believe this is a notion of social constructivism, that the world is socially constructed, this is a simplistic view of how texts work which, rather, 'textually construe' the social world (2003, p. 8) through ideological assumptions. He argues that emphasis should be placed upon the social events that are represented within these texts as they are 'selectively filtered' and representations are both included and excluded (2003, p. 139). Fairclough (2003) refers to characters within a text as 'social actors' (2003, p. 206) and that discourses should be analysed whilst considering the positions in which social actors represent themselves within such texts. For example, the characters within the programmes should be analysed not only for what is at the forefront of the narrative but also what is not visible. This suggested selective filter was used when conducting the textual analysis taking into consideration not only the characters' roles themselves but the mis-en-scène, outfit choices and the relationships between the sibling characters themselves.

The textual analysis explored thematic links between the three programmes. Following on from a pilot study that analysed approximately 15% of the total sample, key themes were identified whilst undertaking the textual analysis and thematic coding categories were devised to identify key moments within the selected programmes and their representation of gender roles, some of which are highlighted further within this paper. The children's television programmes that have been chosen were selected as they have both male and female 'main' characters. It was thought the role, positioning, and performance of the two gendered characters could be directly compared and clearly contrasted throughout the analysis. In total, all 194 episodes were analysed that

have aired on television in the programmes' respective series. The pro-
grammes were watched in the order that they were aired, to gain a full
understanding of the narrative and to clearly track gender roles and
identities. The process of the analysis was to watch an episode and then
watch the same episode again whilst writing memos. This was con-
ducted to familiarise myself with the narrative and the action and to
endeavour to capture key moments whilst writing notes. Whilst under-
taking this activity, naturally themes and similarities started to appear.

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) highlight that through textual analysis sym-
bolic interaction can also be identified. The term symbolic interaction
refers to how identity is formed through communication '…making both
individuality and social community possible' (2011, p. 42). Symbolic
interaction observes the role and relationships by actors and how the
'message design' by producers of a text becomes important (2011, p. 44).
They state '…it opens up for scrutinising the meanings inherent in social
phenomena lest they be objectified as structures and functions' (2011,
p. 44). The textual analysis I outline here aimed to analyse and high-
light the symbolic interactions within the selected sample to start to de-
construct the meanings being produced for pre-school child audiences.

Although symbolic interaction has been used within the textu-
al analysis, this theoretical approach doesn't consider that an au-
dience may challenge any construction of social reality and a
pre-school audience would not necessarily accept gender rep-
resentations passively. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) also acknowledge
this by highlighting how research can '…validate analytic claims
if their truthfulness is not based in a presumed correspondence be-
tween their content and an objective reality' (2011, p. 45). In this
way, it is hoped that the empirical work with children will provide
such an opportunity to hear the voices of the pre-school participants.

Findings

This section will explore and highlight some of the findings from
the textual analysis of *Topsy and Tim*, *Charlie and Lola* and *Bitz and
Bob*. The gendered nature and visual signifiers that are identifiable
with either being a girl or a boy within the mis-en-scène of the pro-
grammes will be highlighted, as well as identifying narratives that
challenge such stereotypical, gendered representations. This sec-
tion also highlights the difficulties that both male and female char-
acters face when attempting to identify with their gender through
image and play. Ultimately, the research will aim to track the de-
velopment of gender roles over a thirteen-year period, within these
CBeebies programmes, starting with *Charlie and Lola* (2005) moving
on to *Topsy and Tim* (2013) and ending with *Bitz and Bob* (2018).

Charlie and Lola

Charlie and Lola clearly represent their respective genders through

their clothing, tastes, and surroundings throughout the series. Charlie is seen to wear the same t-shirt, with his name on in differing colours such as blue, red, and green, throughout the series. This is paired with a grey pair of trousers and green trainers. Lola is seen to wear a plethora of outfits throughout the series, often paired with accessories such as butterfly hair clips and red shiny shoes. Throughout the programmes she is often seen to be wearing floral dresses and takes a particular interest in fashion through dressing up activities. Lola meticulously plans her choice of outfit when packing to go on holiday with Grandparents or to sleep at a friend's house. Charlie does not take an interest in the same activities and is only seen to be wearing different outfits for a specific activity, such as Halloween or a fancy dress party. Throughout the series he does not mention his clothing and does not display a particular interest in his image or voice any concerns. Lola is clearly not only interested in fashion but is self-conscious about the way she looks and is particularly aware of her image and the gendered expectations placed upon her as a female. She often compares herself to other female peers and shows signs of vulnerability and confusion. Lola does not seem confident in her choices as a young girl and often copies her friend's images.

Lola often struggles in being the younger sibling as she is less in control but also has difficulty relating to her brother's gendered 'boyish' activities. When Dad takes Charlie to the park to play football or swimming, Lola is often left and home wondering when Charlie is going to return and displays behaviours of isolation. Although the siblings have a close relationship, there does seem to be a gendered divide between them, and this is displayed within the episode 'This is actually my party'.

Charlie is having a monster themed birthday party and has invited his friends to join him to celebrate. Lola is the only female at this party and struggles with the monster theme. She imagines herself dancing during party games and ballerina cakes and looks upon Charlie with dismay when he is decorating the house with bats, green décor, and spiders. She announces, "shame there is no pink icing!". When Dad and Charlie go to the shops to get more scary masks, Lola helps Mum make more party cakes. Lola sees this as an opportunity to add flowers and sprinkles to the cake and change the monster music to ballet music. She says, "pretty dancers… yuck take these monsters out!" She also changes party bag gifts from monsters to hair accessories and jewellery.

Lola is dressed as a ballerina rabbit for the party and Charlie is dressed as a monster. Charlie's friends also arrive as monsters and Dad makes up monster games for the party. But Lola then takes over, opens the presents, and puts ballet music on as the boys stiffly dance and then ask about the monster games.

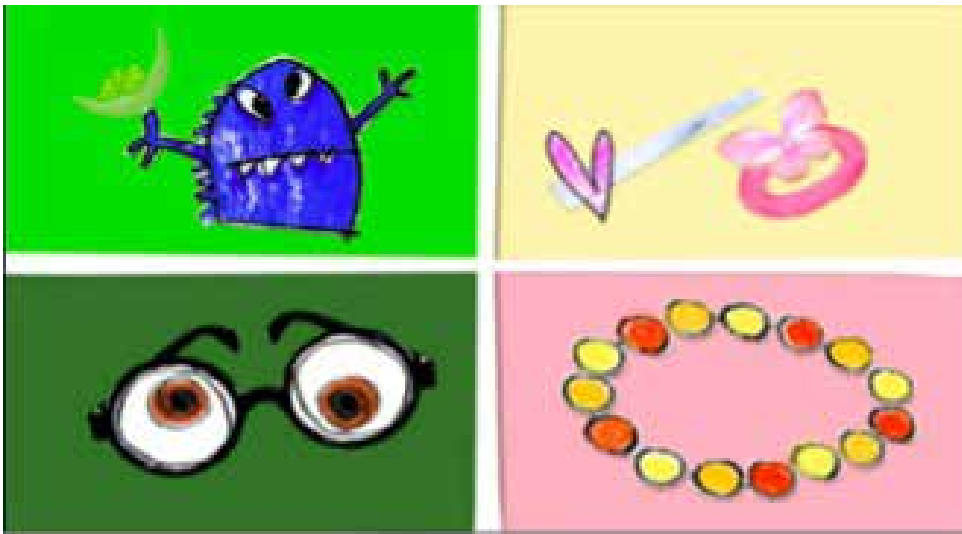Lola is not always seen as performing these roles via direct instruction

Image 1 Charlie's monster world v Lola's girl world

from her parents, but through socialisation and becoming inducted into the norms and expectations of the environment she is within. She has become conscious of this role which motivates her thinking, decisions and how she identifies as female. Holland (2004) observes the lack of agency in girls aspiring to be the 'fairy princess who becomes the bride' (2004, p. 190). Particularly in modern pre-school media, children are fascinated with how to transform into the epitome of femininity and beauty. Holland (2004) states that 'The imagery of girl children balances childhood and femininity in contradiction and competition' (2004, p. 191). Young boys also face similar challenges,

Image 2 Monster Charlie and Ballerina Lola

as their expectations to become a male that is masculine and strong determines how successful their childhood conditioning has been.

Topsy and Tim
Holland argues that childhood '…is part of an elaborate drama in

which children perform well-known roles' (2004, p. 20) and those are often gendered. She argues that without the input of children childhood remains 'impossible' as it is mediated by adulthood. She notes that the family structure is a place in which is shaped by policy makers that preserve morals and values. She further highlights that such traditional representational imagery of the family is 'highly unstable' (2004, p. 51) as families come in many forms. She uses the examples of single parent, same sex, step and adopted families, noting that popular imagery fails to recognise this and that available imagery of the 'cereal packet' nuclear family dominates (2004, p. 51). These families that appear in popular media forms are those people that fit norms. Holland (2004) describes the family as positioned models with specific gender roles that represent '…expected relations of power and subordination' (2004, p. 51) but acknowledges that this family now rarely exists. She states it has become a simple 'shorthand convenience' (2004, p. 53) but is a particular and limited ideal of the family. This child-shaped space, as she calls it, has become potentially damaging as it creates pressure to replicate it and a sense of exclusion if it is not.

Topsy and Tim's family are what Holland (2004) would describe as a 'cereal packet' nuclear family (2004, p. 51). The family would seem to be of a middle-class background, living in a semi-detached house in the suburbs of London and contain Mum Joy, Dad Brian and twins Topsy and Tim. The twins also have regular visits from their paternal Grandmother, whom they have a close relationship with, throughout the series. The traditional family structure sees that Mum stays at home looking after the children and is the primary care giver, whilst Dad runs his own business and is the breadwinner of the family. The regular characters that appear throughout the series also conform to traditional gendered roles, for example, DIY Derek, Ceri's Dad the fireman (who is never referred to as a firefighter), the postman and male builders. Outside female characters that have an occupation are minimal, except for Topsy and Tim's female teacher and female babysitter making an appearance.

Topsy is seen, on one occasion in the episode New Babysitter, to be trying on her Mum's shoes, watching her Mum apply make-up and insisting that she joins her Mum and Dad's night out so that she can wear her fairy dress. Visual signifiers throughout *Topsy and Tim* clearly define the male and female gendered identities within the mis-en-scene, play and outfit choices. Within one episode of *Topsy and Tim*, 'New Clothes', the tensions and difficulties the characters face in transitioning from their shared image as twins, to a little girl and a little boy, are highlighted.

Mum, Joy, returns from shopping with new clothes for the twins and announces that she has 'big girl and big boy jeans' for the twins to try on. Topsy's jeans have pink butterflies on them whereas Tim's jeans have a green dinosaur on them (Image 3). Topsy is very excited by this and rushes to try them on whereas Tim struggles with this image

that he is meant to embrace and refuses to try them on. After some encouragement from his Dad, Tim questions his parents as to why the twins have gone from wearing the same clothes, often stripy top and jeans, to now different clothes. Mum explains that as you get older, you will like different things and Tim identifies that he likes dinosaurs and Topsy likes butterflies. Whilst explaining this, Tim's Mum even shows him the matching baby grows that the twins wore whilst they were babies also explaining the significance during childhood of growing up and transforming and developing an 'individualised identity' The transformation of these clothes is significant as it marks the need to establish their own gendered identity, as instructed by their Mum and Dad as they are 'growing up'. It should be highlighted here that although the parents are encouraging the children's individualisation, they are in fact reinforcing the opposite in terms of shaping their gender roles. The children have little autonomy within their choices, even though Tim was happy to continue to wear the same clothes as Topsy and voices genuine and complex concern about not being a twin anymore and that these gender identities are divisive.

Once Tim tries on the jeans, Dad again emphasises that "You look all grown up son!" and this approval from his masculine role model seems

Image 3 Topsy and Tim's new butterfly and dinosaur jeans

the age of the twins, as they are about to enter primary school and it could be argued that the twins need to develop their own gendered and independent identity to be accepted within friendship circles in school. As Lee (2001) argues, adults are key to shaping childhood and being judged as successful parents as overseeing the 'stable completion' (2001, p. 36) of their child's entry into adulthood through conforming to societal expectations. Lee (2001) further highlights, children are rarely allowed to deviate from this framework that is

powerfully reinforced by parents. Neither parents nor children, in this sense, are empowered by social structures and are muted as both children and adults are bound to the same gendered frameworks.

As the series continues visual signifiers begin to separate the two children as female and male, and butterflies and dinosaurs appear on many occasions within the mis-en-scène of the series such as clothing, bedroom décor and even a split birthday cake (Image 4) which appears to be a key visual signifier of the divisive nature of gender, particularly within sibling relationships.

According to Bignell (2008), a child's understanding of the imagery on the television screen, relates to their understanding of television codes, conventions, and production processes. Bignell's (2008) view is that this is often dominated by the concept of the 'adult world' and

Image 4 Topsy and Tim's split butterfly and dinosaur birthday cake

based on the understanding of these codes, children negotiate their differences and similarities to adults through television representation. He states that when a child watches television, the most important aspect of it is that '…it provides a resource for working through conscious and unconscious understandings of their identity, and their social position in relation to adults' (2008, p. 308). Due to the nature of pre-school television and the repetitive techniques used it should be asked how the use of split identity through repeated visual signifiers, such as within *Topsy and Tim,* and other preschool television programmes that use similar techniques, impacts upon the internalisation of such gendered norms and the meaning-making process.

Lury (2011) explores the production techniques of preschool television

and uses *Teletubbies* as an example of the use of colour and space and claims that this programme has '…taught children how to watch and listen to television' (2011, p. 89) through these techniques. She observes that preschool children watch television differently to any other television audience and that this programming often aims to develop social development and learning processes through using bright colours, large movements, and repetition in which Lury (2011) describes as a 'child-centred pedagogical style' (2011, p. 89). Children gradually build an understanding of the programme and how the world works, through a process of 'testing, repetition and imitation' (2011:89) and Lury (2011) uses sound as an example. A child will hear a sound and connect it to another feature of the world, so they then understand the sound and the object that makes the sound. 'Knowledge is achieved through close attention, through listening, questioning and then being rewarded with a visual response' (2011, p. 92) alongside the imagery of a child's 'real-world experience' (2011, p. 91).

Bitz and Bob

Bitz and Bob may have aimed to challenge stereotypical imagery for young girls watching the show, but typical female and male visual signifiers are apparent within the series. The colour pink is a large part of Bitz's image with the first image of Bitz shows her building a pink castle in the opening credits and the phrase 'Steam pink stlye!' is repeated by Bitz throughout the show. Bitz wears a pink tutu, pink gloves, and goggles (Image 5) and this image is described by the BBC as 'a mix of girl power and steam punk chic' (BBC, 2018). Bob, on the other hand, embraces the stereotypical boyish imagery; he is usually dressed as, and referred to, as Robo-Bob. The robotic outfit, made from cardboard, becomes a large part of Bob's identity throughout and is almost his alter-ego and aspirational hero figure.

Although *Bitz and Bob* aims to highlight alternative gendered stereotypes, the programme still demonstrates that the female characters are interested in their image and fashion, whereas this has little interest for the male characters. Throughout the narrative of the series, Bitz and Princess Purl are often seen to accessorise objects with 'shiny sequins' and put a 'feminine' stamp on male orientated clothing, such as a safety hard hat. Although primarily driven by the female characters, male characters are also seen partaking in traditional 'feminine' play activities within the series. The episode 'Jungle Fashion Show' is an example of this as Bitz is shown creating a hat in the playroom and Bob is making a robo hat. Although Bob is taking part in this designing of clothing, it is consistent with his ongoing activity of perfecting his robot outfit so that it can assist him throughout his adventures, rather than merely for his image. When the story progresses, Princess Purl is seen at the centre of the narrative as the 'super hat model' that both Bitz and Bob are photographing. Purl is naturally posing in front of the camera and this effortless role is taken on with ease, almost as

it is expected of her. As the story progresses, the male characters are also seen on the runway towards the end of the show, but the boys are mimicking the girls' performance and strutting on the catwalk. This scene highlights the attempts of *Bitz and Bob* to be a progressive programme; the males are seen to be taking part on the fun runway, and it could be argued that it is positive to see them taking part in a particularly feminine activity, but they are very much shown be adopting a new mode of behaviour which, it is implied, is 'natural' to Purl and Bitz.

Of of the two siblings, Bob seems less comfortable within his identity and is still striving to become masculine whilst also admiring Bitz's abilities, intelligence, and style as his older female sibling. Gotz et al. (2008) highlight these difficulties that some boys face when they have strong female role models as they often push back and try to discover their masculine identity whilst being surrounded by female leaders. The literature argues that boys assume that they have to be able to be aggressive and live up to masculine behaviours that are central to 'boy code' which are '…toughness, emotional disconnection, and aggression' (2008, p. 135). This becomes complex when women are powerful within young boys' lives, as mothers, babysitters, or teachers, as boys then receive conflicting messages. This in turn becomes confusing as they are also now encouraged to show softer skills and emotions and wonder how they can extract positive attributes from the female role model without being 'feminine'. Gotz et al. suggest

Image 5 Bitz and Bob

that 'The result is that boys are torn between traditional and new images of manhood, conflicting messages and expectations, and they receive contradictory or ambivalent feedback' (2008, p. 136). Although Bitz is not a mother or an educator per se, she takes on this role as

the elder sister often nurturing, guiding, and educating Bob on how to behave and, more specifically, how to solve Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) problems. This is not a problem exclusive to Bitz and Bob as we see that Lola faces the same difficulties when performing her female gender roles but preferring to take part in activities with her brother that are rather more 'boyish'. In many ways the series *Bitz and Bob* challenges female stereotypes through the character of Bitz. The stories within the series follow the same format with Bitz and Bob playing in their playhouse, entering their own imaginary world of adventures with Bitz saving the day with her engineering problem solving skills. Bitz is seen as in control, dominant and comfortable in her leadership role within the team, but she does this whilst maintaining femininity with interests in fairytales, princesses, pink and shiny sequins.

Bitz's character seems to be an attempt to model the postfeminist ideal that women can be both feminine and succeed within male orientated STEAM subjects, although this does not come without some questions. Could it not have been enough to just have a female engineer at the centre of story with a pure focus on the engineering, building and science of the problems Bitz faces? And why is there still a need to reinforce that Bitz imagines a world wherein princess imagery and building castles is a goal? Bitz does often build other things such as cars, theme parks and hot air balloons, but the fairytale theme is dominant. Bitz's brother Bob also faces many gendered tensions around his masculine identity, but it seems that the programme (and society?) is not yet ready to cut ties with traditional stereotypes.

Gotz et al. (2008) explain that boys often imagine themselves under attack in fighting scenes. They argue that by imagining such a world '…they assume roles and try to live up to expectations of traditional, stereotypical masculine behaviour as projected in the "boy code" of toughness, emotional disconnection and aggression' (2008, p. 135). The researchers argue that boys are consistently trying to prove that they can beat other boys and their competitive nature is because boys have a fear of not being 'man enough' (2008, p. 136). Physical fighting is seen as an expression of strength and is a 'dominant marker of manhood' (2008, p. 139) to beat an opponent. The researchers found that boys' imaginary world contained the most traces of media texts within their drawings. They concluded that this was because most media texts are more attractive and identifiable to boys than girls, although both genders are restricted by the media (2008, p. 149). If this is the case, the texts analysed still portray such messages and, importantly, to pre-school children who are still navigating their way through the world and learning each day about themselves, and their gendered identity. Although the moral educational value of many of the stories are about sharing, compromising, and demonstrating a loving and healthy family relationships is laudable, how much of

this is compromised by the continuing reproduction of gendered differences and behaviours of boys and girls to a young audience? Can narratives about engingeering be genuinely transformative alongside pink castles and princesses?

The preschool audience, through viewing television, create their own image, identity and understanding via specific narratives, symbolic interactions between characters and visual signifiers within the mis-en-scène. A repeated gendered identity or concept becomes the norm, and such repetitive techniques are used across all three of these programmes. For example, the overreliance on the fairytale narrative arc used across both *Charlie and Lola* and *Bitz and Bob*, and the repeated gendered division of labour within *Topsy and Tim*. Television and media certainly have the power to change visions of childhood and open wider discussions around variety and culture, but further agency is needed to give the child audience such options.

Conclusions

This research revealed that across the thirteen-year period that included *Charlie and Lola*, *Topsy and Tim* and *Bitz and Bob*, CBeebies have started to make some steps to create an aspirational world for pre-school children which is not bound by gender. This analysis highlights encouraging progress, such as male characters being shown as sensitive to image dilemmas like those of their female sibling characters. Progress was also noted as over the thirteen-year period in which the programmes were produced CBeebies can be seen to have moved away from narratives that send messages that to successfully achieve adulthood does not always have to be defined by heteronormative relationships (such as those that are present within *Topsy and Tim* and *Charlie and Lola*) but achievements, such as education and careers, can be celebrated (as in *Bitz and Bob*). However, such progress is still attenuated with the enduring iconography of pink, fantasy lands that tend to define femininity in largely restrictive ways. The content analysed also demonstrates that boys were still bound by traditional forms of masculinity and these restrictive frameworks are reinforced by normative nuclear family structures and competitiveness which routinely figured within the programmes analysed.

This textual analysis, although limited to those texts analysed, highlights that there is still more which producers of children's public service television might offer. Furthermore, with the suggestion from scholars, such as Buckingham and Scanlon (2003), that parents are becoming reliant upon children's television and the commercialised media market as an extended platform of learning, it is important that producers better understand the images projected and the meanings internalised by children, particularly representations of gender. The learning materials that have led to the explosion of 'edutainment' (2003, p. 75) within recent years are not only packaged with televi-

sion but now increasingly with other digital devices such as tablets whereby extra-curricular activities are packaged into fun, educational games which many children play. This is even more relevant now, in 2022, than in 2003 (emphasised by the global pandemic) and the reliance on technology and media to teach children at home. Parents have become further responsible for schooling and home education to '…acquire the 'skills' they will need for educational success' (2003, p. 75). This is reemphasised through parent sections on websites, such as CBeebies, which also reference the use of the national curriculum. This dual branding is attracting parents' due to the selling of specific 'quality education' needs as well as selling entertainment to children.

It is also important to note that this research was undertaken at a time where the BBC is under significant pressure, due to increasing commercial competition and recent government funding cuts. Children's media, specifically, has also been hit by the recent announcement of the discontinuation of the Young Audience Content Fund (YACF). There is a fear here that as domestic production further decreases, so will representations of diversity and progressive representations of gender roles and identities. The empirical research that will follow the analysis outlined in this paper, aims to further understand the impact that this is having on the child audience, as well as how receptive pre-school children are to current gender representations. The continued research will not only aim to better understand how children are educated and understand gender roles through public service broadcast television but, vitally, it will provide an opportunity to hear the voices of the child audience that is rarely heard.

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