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Brainless Bullies and Frantic Bodies: A Qualitative Study of Select Indian-Broadcast Animated Programs

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Abstract
This study examines the prevalence of fatphobia, heteronormativity, and neuronormativity in select Indian television cartoons either produced domestically or dubbed locally. Selected for their long-standing popularity, these cartoons serve as a potent medium for educating young viewers about cultural norms and expected behaviours within specific socio-political settings. Drawing from emerging scholarly literature pertaining to fatness, neurodiversity, and gender and sexual identity, this study will qualitatively evaluate these programs to examine how the cultural conventions in which they are embedded continue to be rooted in hierarchies that deem certain bodies normative while dehumanising others. This study draws on the scholarship of Gaye Tuchman, whose work deals with the portrayal of women in television but may be expanded to encompass other disadvantaged bodies that remain subordinated in comparable ways. Since the biases related to body image, health, and gender invoked on-screen have real and tangible implications for their audiences, they merit careful investigation.

Keywords: Fatphobia, Heteronormativity, Neuronormativity, Symbolic Annihilation, TV Cartoons.

Introduction

Children begin to develop normative social behaviours at an early age, with television—particularly animated content—serving as a notable influence in this developmental process. In India, visual content and messaging conveyed through television programs have become an essential aspect of children's daily lives, particularly following the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s. According to *#shootingforthestars,* the *Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report 2015* published by FICCI and KPMG, the children's genre constituted 7.3 percent of the overall viewership share in 2014.[1] The reforms of the 1990s facilitated access for children to multiple channels and a diverse array of content, particularly animated programming, which have come to serve an instructional and developmental role comparable to that of parents.

By providing a cultural framework and interpretive guidance, cartoon programs enable young viewers to effectively understand and navigate their socio-political environments. Research within the Indian context has explored the influence of television on

[1] FICCI-KPMG, *#shootingforthestars: FICCI-KPMG Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report 2015,* 2015, https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2015/03/FICCI-KPMG_2015.pdf.

children's cognitive development and its implications for their personal and educational growth.[2] Additionally, research has been conducted on how children's media in India, affect young viewers by conveying values, ideologies, and perspectives that remain rooted in hierarchical frameworks, which establish certain experiences as normative while marginalising or delegitimising others. The process of shaping marginalised identities often establishes a normative standard, against which these identities are viewed as deviations or as belonging to out-groups. Research on identity-related marginalisation in Indian television cartoons distinctly underscores this concern, encompassing studies concerning the portrayal of gender roles[3] as well as ethnic and religious minority groups.[4]

While the theme of marginalisation in Indian television cartoons has been explored in academic literature, specific aspects such as body size, ability, and sexuality have received comparatively less scholarly focus. This might be partially explained by the relative novelty of disciplines like neurodiversity studies, fat studies, and queer studies in India. Furthermore, movements for acceptance of neurodiversity, fatness, and queerness have only recently gained traction. Consequently, the portrayal of fatness, queerness, and neurodivergence in Indian television cartoons remains insufficiently examined within academic research.

In this study we seek to examine the prevalence of fatphobia, heteronormativity, and neuronormativity in select cartoon programs broadcast on Indian television. The representational strategies employed in these programs to reinforce normative standards and marginalise such identities as fat, queer, and neurodivergent will be critically examined. The term heteronormativity, as used in our paper, refers to the ways in which societal and cultural practices reinforce the belief that there are 'two separate and opposing genders with associated natural roles that match their assigned sex, and that heterosexuality is a given.'[5] Fatphobia is characterised as a societal bias that unjustly assigns moral, sexual, and intellectual inferiority to fat bodies[6] based on the assumption that achieving a slender or slim

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[2] Binod C. Agrawal and Mira B. Aghi, eds, *Television and the Indian Child: A Handbook* (New Delhi: UNICEF); Binod C. Agrawal, *Children's Television in India: A Situational Analysis* (Concept Publishing Company, 1990); Snehlata Shukla, 'The Impact of SITE on Primary School Children,' *Journal of Communication* 29, no. 4 (1979), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1979.tb01749.x.

[3] Ruchi Kher Jaggi and Madhavi R. K. Reddy, 'Gender Representation in Animation: A Study on Children's Television Programming in India,' *Media Watch* 8, no. 1 (2017), https://www.mediawatchjournal.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Gender_Representation_in_Animation_A_Stu.pdf; Ruchi Kher Jaggi, 'Deconstructing Gender in Cartoon Programming on Children's Television Channels in India: A Textual Analysis,' *IMS Manthan (the Journal of Innovations)* 10, no. 1 (2015), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283007645_Deconstructing_Gender_in_Cartoon_Programming_on_Children's_Television_Channels_in_India-A_Textual_Analysis; Ruchi Kher Jaggi, 'Children's Perceptions of Gender Images in Indian Television Cartoons,' in *Beyond the Stereotypes? Images of Boys and Girls, and Their Consequences,* ed. Dafna Lemish and Maya Gotz, University of Gothenburg, 2017.

[4] Kaifia Ancer Laskar and Shiba Amir, 'The Underrepresented "Other": Portrayal of Religious Minorities in Hindi Language Cartoon Shows,' *Journal of Creative Communications,* 16 June 2022, https://doi.org/10.1177/09732586221103953.

[5] Jojanneke van der Toorn et al., 'Not Quite Over the Rainbow: The Unrelenting and Insidious Nature of Heteronormative Ideology,' *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 34 (12 May 2020): 160, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2020.03.001.

[6] Kate Manne, 'Introduction: Fighting Weight,' in her *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia* (Crown, 2025).

physique is the ideal standard, and that being fat reflects a moral failing.[7] The term neuronormativity describes the 'normative judgment to certain ways of being psychologically constituted—seeing some ways as normal and others as defective.'[8]

We employ the term 'Symbolic Annihilation,' originally introduced by media scholars George Gerbner and Larry Gross, to describe how the underrepresentation of certain groups in the media influences perceptions and diminishes the visibility of marginalised populations.[9] Gaye Tuchman further classified the term into three aspects: condemnation, trivialisation, and underrepresentation, explaining that when marginalised groups are depicted on screen, their portrayals often rely on stereotypes, inaccuracies, or an emphasis on negative traits, which can perpetuate harmful biases.[10]

While Tuchman's work deals specifically with the representation of women in television, it may also be expanded to encompass other groups and identities that remain subordinated in comparable ways. This study will utilise her framework to explore additional, less-examined dimensions of marginalisation, such as ability, body size, sexuality, etc. It will also integrate current research in media psychology to demonstrate how the analysed cartoon programs, whether through intentional omission or skewed portrayal, contribute to the cultivation and reinforcement of prejudices against marginalised groups among young viewers, thereby influencing societal perceptions of these communities. Additionally, this study will incorporate emerging scholarly literature pertaining to fatness, neurodiversity, and gender and sexual identity to illustrate how the implicit association of moral superiority with certain human traits—traits that are otherwise part of normal human variation—inadvertently contributes to the marginalisation of individuals lacking in those traits.

For this study, a selection of cartoon programs broadcast on Indian television was made—whether domestically produced or imported and subsequently dubbed into local languages. Using a convenience sampling method, we selected the following titles—*Bandbudh aur Budbak*,[11] *Chhota Bheem*,[12] *Crayon Shin-chan*,[13] *Doraemon*,[14] *Motu Patlu*,[15]

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[7] Marisa Crane, 'What Is Fatphobia? Definition, Examples, and Why It's Harmful,' *Within Health*, 4 July 2024, https://withinhealth.com/learn/articles/what-fatphobia-definition-meaning.

[8] August Gorman, 'Against Neuronormativity in Moral Responsibility,' *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 10, nos 1/2 (2024): 1, https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/fpq/article/view/18721.

[9] Gerbner and Gross, 'Living with Television,' 182.

[10] Gaye Tuchman, 'The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media,' in *Culture and Politics: A Reader*, ed. Lane Crothers and Charles Lockhart (St. Martin's Press, 2000), 154.

[11] Aashish Mall, Mayank Patel, and Avinash Walzade, dirs., *Bandbudh Aur Budbak*, produced by Paperboat Animation Studios, aired 13 February 2015, on ZeeQ.

[12] Rajiv Chilaka and Binayak Das, dirs., *Chhota Bheem*, produced by Green Gold Animations, aired 6 April 2008, on Pogo TV.

[13] Mitsuru Hongo, Keiichi Hara, and Yuji Muto, dirs., *Crayon Shin-chan*, Hindi dubbed version, Tokyo: Shin-Ei Animation, 1992–present, dubbed and broadcast in India by Hungama TV, 2006–present, television series.

[14] Sōichirō Zen, Shinnosuke Yakuwa, and Hirofumi Ogura, dirs., *Doraemon*, Hindi dubbed version, Tokyo: Shin-Ei Animation, TV Asahi, and ADK Emotions, 2005–present, dubbed and broadcast by Disney Channel India, 2013–present, television series.

[15] Suhas Kadav, dir., *Motu Patlu*, produced by Cosmos-Maya, aired 16 October 2012, on Nickelodeon.

and Ninja Hattori[16]—each of which has maintained lasting popularity among Indian children over the past few decades. These programs have been broadcast on major Indian children's television networks, including Pogo TV, Nickelodeon, Hungama TV, Disney Channel, and ZeeQ. The portrayal of fatness, queerness, and neurodivergence was critically examined using qualitative content analysis, allowing us to identify recurring patterns and overarching themes within the selected television programs. Since the programs were selected using a non-probability sampling method, there are limitations to this study, and its findings may be less generalisable. Nonetheless, it reveals the explicit and implicit ways in which fatphobia, heteronormativity, and neuronormativity operate within Indian television cartoons.

Breaking down fatphobia: Cartoons and body image

Media often reinforces weight and size-based stereotypes, encouraging viewers to perceive characters with fat bodies as 'lazy, gluttonous,' or depraved.[17] Morally repugnant behaviours, such as lying, cheating, and aggression, are often tied to a lack of physical appeal. In the cartoon programs we analysed, bodies serve as the primary locus for the depiction of moral conflicts between characters. In *Chhota Bheem*, for instance, the titular character Bheem is shown to be a natural leader, brave, fierce and strong, quite the opposite of Kalia, the miscreant. Their moral rivalry is shown to be associated with their contrasting physical appeals, with Kalia being fat and dark-skinned while Bheem is toned and fair-skinned. This results in a polarised portrayal that could lead viewers to attribute moral significance to physical and bodily characteristics, potentially leading to, in Tuchman's terms, condemnation of individuals who fail to conform to a standardised ideal body type.

While overt vilification is a common method employed to symbolically annihilate individuals with larger bodies, their experiences can also be trivialised when they are placed in ludicrous situations that elicit a mixture of disdain and laughter. Kalia regularly endeavours to outwit Bheem and his friends through various scheming tactics; however, by the conclusion of each episode, his plans are ultimately thwarted by Bheem. Kalia is characterised as adversarial, although not posing a substantial threat. As a result, viewers may view him as less deserving of serious consideration, specifically in comparison to Kichak, another character who makes occasional appearances in the show. While Kichak has a darker complexion like that of Kalia, he possesses a well-toned physique, which warrants a higher level of consideration and respect. While his skin complexion renders him evil, his muscular build establishes him as a credible competitor, deserving of recognition as a legitimate rival, unlike Kalia. Fatness, therefore, is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be confined to a singular dimension, nor does it have an inherent essence independent of the intricate intersections of caste, class, colour, and gender hierarchies. When intersecting with other forms of oppression, such as colour discrimination in the case of Kalia, it can result in increased vulnerabilities that heighten the individual's risks and challenges. This is further

[16] Fumio Ikeno and Hiroshi Sasagawa, dirs., *Ninja Hattori*, Hindi dubbed version, Tokyo: Shin-Ei Animation, 1981–1987; reboot 2013–present, dubbed and broadcast in India by Nickelodeon India, 2012–present, television series.

[17] Wendy Oliver-Pyatt, 'The Dangers of Stereotypes About Weight, Size, and Shape,' *National Alliance for Eating Disorders*, 25 September 2024, https://www.allianceforeatingdisorders.com/weight-stereotypes/.

underscored by the widespread prevalence of colourism within the Indian subcontinent, which frequently leads to the marginalisation of individuals with darker skin tones.[18]

Gian, in the Japanese anime series *Doraemon*, much like Kalia, is depicted as a bully, which is presumably a natural consequence of his dark complexion and larger build. He is characterised as having a quick temper and often exhibits aggressive behaviour towards his peers to access their toys. When viewed in the context of his socioeconomic background, this characterisation seems to indicate a divergence, especially in manners, in comparison to his peers from more comfortable backgrounds. Instances in the show where his mother is shown reprimanding him for his reluctance to deliver goods locally for their family store indicate that his family relies, in some capacity, on Gian. Instead of exploring why Gian may be the only child without toys, the show portrays him as a disruptive influence, engaging in behaviours that pressure others into complying with his whims. His body size appears to provide him with an undue physical advantage relative to his peers of the same age group. This depiction may have the consequence of reducing fat people to an immanently hostile group that is inherently predisposed to exploit others through coercion, thereby symbolically annihilating them. This is somewhat ironic, given that research indicates that fat children tend to experience higher rates of bullying.[19] Therefore, this portrayal could be detrimental to the well-being of fat children, particularly those from backgrounds like that of Gian, as portraying them as bullies could inadvertently provide rationalisation for their mistreatment by others.

When fat characters are not disparaged as malevolent on-screen, such as Gian or Kalia, they are frequently exploited as sources of humour or comic relief. Tuntun Mausi from *Chhota Bheem* is an example of this; she is often outmanoeuvred by Bheem, who always manages to steal laddus from her store. Given that her role in the storyline is typically marginal, it is noteworthy that her appearances are mostly employed for comedic effect, particularly in sequences where Bheem teases her by taking her laddus. This reduction of fat characters to mere sources of humour in children's television perpetuates weight-based stereotypes and may reinforce discriminatory attitudes, thereby contributing to their symbolic annihilation.[20]

Tuntun's portrayal notably differs from that of Achhi Jadugarni, or the Good Fairy, from the same show, who exemplifies one of the few positive representations of fatness across all the programs analysed. Portrayed as a force for good, she occasionally appears in the show to assist Bheem in his endeavours. Depicted as an old, wise woman, her appearance commands admiration and respect rather than disapproval, unlike that of Tuntun. Her association with the supernatural realm may further influence viewers' perceptions of her physical appearance. Tuntun, in contrast, does not possess the magical authority that bestows legitimacy upon Achhi Jadugarni's fuller physique.

Like Tuntun, Jeeva from *Bandbudh aur Budbak* is frequently a target of body shaming, often disguised as harmless teasing. Portrayed as having a larger physique and a slight lisp, he does not display outright hostility toward the main characters Badrinath and Budhdev; however, he frequently attempts to outsmart them. Despite his efforts, he consistently

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[18] Marium Javaid Bajwa et al., 'Colorism in the Indian Subcontinent—insights Through Situated Affectivity,' *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 10 March 2023, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-023-09901-6.

[19] Janet D. Latner and Albert J. Stunkard, 'Getting Worse: The Stigmatization of Obese Children,' *Obesity Research* 11, no. 3 (2003), https://doi.org/10.1038/oby.2003.61; Jacqueline Weinstock and Michelle Krehbiel, 'Fat Youth as Common Targets for Bullying,' in *The Fat Studies Reader*, ed. Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York University Press, 2020).

[20] Oliver-Pyatt, 'The Dangers of Stereotypes.'

encounters defeat by their hands, which often results in humorous scenarios. His physical appearance and speech impairment are used not to undermine his dignity, but rather as a comedic device aimed at evoking humour and amusement. Therefore, although he is not explicitly condemned, there is a discernible trivialisation of his experiences which diminishes and effectively undermines both his identity and that of individuals with similar physical characteristics.

In contrast to Jeeva, Dubey Sir from the same show tends to receive a comparatively different treatment, as his larger build and commanding presence elicit respect and deference rather than mockery. He is characterised as a stern and authoritative teacher who regularly punishes Badrinath and Budhdeb when they crack jokes in the classroom. The portrayal of corporal punishment inflicted on children in the show reflects a wider societal pattern within the Indian subcontinent, where teachers often justify disciplinary measures as necessary for guiding students toward academic improvement. Therefore, if his appearance can garner acceptance and evade condemnation, it can chiefly be attributed to his age, his role as a teacher, and the authority that accompanies that position. Therefore, body size should not be inherently associated with marginalisation, as some individuals with larger bodies, such as Dubey, may attain recognition through holding influential positions or embodying identities linked to privilege.

Representations of larger body sizes were observed to be infrequently, if ever, deemed acceptable within these cartoons. The few exceptions involve minor characters who are depicted in a more neutral or less critical manner; for example, Gian's mother in *Doraemon* and Masao's mother in *Shin-chan*. Their physical appearances are generally not extensively explored, as they are usually positioned as supporting characters outside of the primary narrative, which results in their underrepresentation. While these characters may serve as potential points of identification for their fat audiences, the programs often tend to overlook them and instead primarily focus on the lives of Tamako Nobi in *Doraemon* and Misae Nohara in *Crayon Shin-chan*, both middle-aged women who, despite maintaining a slender build, frequently express discontent in their personal lives due to challenges associated with weight management. It is noteworthy that none of their husbands express any dissatisfaction with their own physical appearance. In fact, women are often subject to more rigorous scrutiny regarding their appearance than men.[21]

The dominant discourse surrounding beauty primarily underscores the significance of achieving and maintaining a slender physique, a goal that is not easily attained and necessitates 'constant self-surveillance and self-discipline.'[22] This serves to establish a façade of femininity, often influenced and constrained by societal standards rooted in fatphobia, as also evidenced in the portrayal of female leads within these programs. For instance, Shizuka from *Doraemon* and Yumeko from *Ninja Hattori* not only exhibit behavioural traits commonly associated with femininity, such as calmness and compassion, but they also possess physical features that contribute to their feminine appearance. Their slender build and fair complexion, which are implicitly associated with higher social status, contribute to their overall social desirability. Conversely, a character like Jaiko from *Doraemon*, who is presented in a fairly neutral manner and may appeal to a fat audience, is relegated to a peripheral role within the storyline due to her appearance, resulting in her symbolic annihilation. Extended

[21] Maggie Wykes and Barrie Gunter, *The Media and Body Image: If Looks Could Kill* (SAGE, 2005), 1.

[22] Noortje van Amsterdam, 'Big Fat Inequalities, Thin Privilege: An Intersectional Perspective on "Body Size,"' *European Journal of Women's Studies* 20, no. 2 (2013): 165, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506812456461.

exposure to societal ideals emphasising slim and slender body types may adversely impact the psychological and emotional well-being of children with higher body weights, particularly those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds who may find these standards more difficult to attain.[23] It may also contribute to young girls engaging in 'addictive and/or destructive behaviours as a means of weight and shape control' in an attempt to conform to conventional standards of femininity related to weight and body image.[24] Additionally, limited representation can lead to feelings of exclusion among individuals who are fat, particularly adolescent girls, potentially fostering feelings of exclusion or alienation. In the words of Gerbner and Gross, 'representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation.'[25]

Our analysis identified *Motu Patlu* as the only program that features a plus-sized character in a leading role, thereby subverting the well-worn convention of portraying fat characters as antagonists. The program centres around the lives of two friends, Motu and Patlu–Hindi words for fatty and skinny, respectively. Distinguished by their size difference, they navigate various challenging circumstances and showcase their perseverance. Even so, merely elevating fat individuals to prominent roles does not necessarily ensure the elimination of more subtle or covert forms of fatphobia. The titular character, Motu, who is depicted as a voracious eater, is portrayed in a manner that elicits understanding and sympathy rather than ridicule. Nevertheless, his intense preoccupation with food is often portrayed in an exaggerated manner for comedic purposes, which irrevocably ties his eating habits to his body size. However, this reinforces the linkage between fatness and overeating, defining fatness exclusively along the axis of consumption habits. Research indicates that a range of factors—including genetic, societal, and environmental influences—play a role in determining an individual's body size and shape.[26] Furthermore, attributing body weight exclusively to overeating may be detrimental to individuals with higher body weights, as it risks trivialising the complexity of their personal experiences.

Conversely Patlu, the other titular character, demonstrates a greater interest in reading newspapers and appears to possess a higher level of intellectual competence compared to Motu. His intellectual abilities appear to be a natural consequence of his slender physique. This perpetuates the stereotype that associates thinness with intelligence and cleverness.[27] In every episode, he is typically the one to rescue the pair from danger. Patlu, therefore, is shown as a crutch that Motu sorely needs to help him with his lack of intellectual capacity, depicted to be a natural consequence of his fatness. Instead of depicting individuals with larger body types as struggling to accommodate themselves in a fatphobic world, the show portrays Motu's integration into society as seamless, ably assisted by Patlu. Therefore,

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[23] Gauri K. Kartha et al., 'Body Image Perception Among Adolescent Students in a Private School in Thrissur, Kerala,' *Public Health Review International Journal of Public Health Research* 6, no. 2 (2019): 69, https://doi.org/10.17511/ijphr.2019.i2.04.

[24] Wykes and Gunter, *The Media and Body Image*, 1.

[25] Gerbner and Gross, 'Living with Television,' 182.

[26] Rebecca M. Puhl and Chelsea A. Heuer, 'Obesity Stigma: Important Considerations for Public Health,' *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. 6 (2010): 1021, https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2009.159491; Oliver-Pyatt, 'The Dangers of Stereotypes.'

[27] Kate Devlin, 'Four-year-olds Think Fat People Are "Stupid and Ugly",' *Telegraph*, 5 August 2008, accessed 5 May 2025, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/2504562/Four-year-olds-think-fat-people-are-stupid-and-ugly.html.

while overtly condemnatory portrayals of fat characters remain common in television cartoons, merely positioning these characters as lead protagonists may not effectively prevent their symbolic annihilation through other means, such as trivialisation; *Motu Patlu* serves as an illustrative example.

Unveiling heteronormativity: Illustrating its impact

In the cartoons we examined for this study, LGBTQ+ characters—including those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, or otherwise—remain conspicuously under-represented. This could be because cartoon networks may be reluctant to feature queer characters for fear of offending their viewers and advertisers.[28] There is a broader societal expectation to conform to heteronormative standards, which producers often incorporate to align with audience preferences. Failing to do so could potentially affect their viewership and the overall success of the show. Furthermore, the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council oversees television content and has the authority to censor material it deems inappropriate for children, which can pose additional challenges to those who wish to call into question traditional heterosexual norms.

Since 'representation' on-screen signifies 'social existence,'[29] the lack of queer representation in children's television contributes to the symbolic annihilation of LGBTQ+ identities. Marginalising gender and sexual minorities by rendering their identities culturally unintelligible and dismissing their experiences as incompatible with the dominant heterosexual paradigm, argues Judith Butler, serves to reinforce heteronormative standards.[30] Attributing moral superiority to certain sexual orientations or gender identities that align with cisgender and heterosexual norms may further reinforce the stigmatisation of marginalised groups.

The depictions of characters developing into adolescence in these cartoons primarily reflect cisgender experiences and do not incorporate the perspectives of transgender or non-binary youth. Additionally, all the romantic pairings depicted in the cartoons we selected were exclusively heterosexual: in *Doraemon*, Nobita (male) is attracted to Shizuka (female); in *Ninja Hattori*, Kenichi (male) and Amara (male) both express interest in Yumeko (female); and in *Chhota Bheem,* Chutki (female) is shown to have a crush on Bheem (male). Since many of these characters are children in their prepubescent stage, it appears that the show makers may be projecting their own heteronormative biases onto the cartoon characters they are producing. This results in what Butler might describe as the 'heterosexualization of desire' arising from cultural norms that establish and regulate the understanding of sexuality.[31]

This differs from the global context, where expressions of queerness are sometimes visible. For example, the American animated series *Adventure Time* features characters such as Marceline the Vampire Queen and Princess Bubblegum, whose romantic history is subtly referenced throughout the show. Interestingly, the show's creators intentionally chose not to include explicit references to Marceline and Bubblegum's relationship, considering that

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[28] Larry Gross, and George Gerbner, 'Media Portrayals of Gays and Lesbians: Introduction,' Media Awareness Network, 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20030316172058/http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/gays_and_lesbians/.

[29] Gerbner and Gross, 'Living with Television,' 182.

[30] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990), 24.

[31] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, 24.

Adventure Time is broadcast in countries where homosexuality is not legally recognised.[32] However, explicitly depicting queer relationships can help challenge and dismantle default assumptions regarding heterosexuality. Promoting acceptance of diverse sexualities is a vital approach to addressing the prevalence of violence against nonheterosexual relationships.

While the deliberate exclusion of queer characters remains a prevalent strategy to symbolically annihilate queer identities in the programs that were analysed, it is merely one of the several methods through which heteronormative standards are upheld. Heteronormative order, as postulated by Butler, relies upon the establishment of clear and asymmetrical distinctions between masculinity and femininity, whereby these are characterised as attributes associated with maleness and femaleness, respectively.[33] Gender binaries are consequently reinforced, and their fictitious nature is elevated to perceived fact. The cultural principles underpinning these programs often emphasise uniformity and endorse restrictive gender perceptions, which may reinforce heteronormative frameworks, as illustrated by Dafna Lemish.[34]

In *Doraemon*, for example, baseball is depicted as a sport typically played by boys, whereas Shizuka is shown attending piano lessons and expressing an interest in sketching. She demonstrates enthusiasm for baking and is recognised for her compassionate demeanour. Although Shizuka is one of the most academically accomplished students at the school, she occasionally expresses an interest in pursuing a future as a homemaker. Media, in this context, can be understood—according to Lemish—as a means of socialising children into socially constructed gender norms, encompassing beliefs about the 'range of professions available to them, specific expectations regarding romance, how to manage sexual relationships.'[35] The underlying irony in attempts to confine Shizuka to a domestic role, despite her demonstrated academic excellence compared to Nobita, is further accentuated by the portrayal of Nobita as lacking traits typically expected of a young boy. He is neither particularly athletic nor notably intelligent, brave, or quick-witted. His lack of competence as a young boy is frequently the basis for light-hearted humour and teasing. As the least assertive in his group, he frequently encounters teasing from Gian and Suneo, experiencing both emotional and physical discomfort.[36] Although the narrative presents Nobita's lack of conventionally masculine traits in a humorous light, some boys may relate to him, particularly those who experience difficulties with traditional notions of masculinity or do not neatly conform to gender stereotypes.

Ninja Hattori is a television program with a storyline comparable to that of *Doraemon,* featuring a young boy named Kenichi who faces challenges related to societal expectations associated with his gender identity. A ninja arrives to support him as a full-time aide, assisting him with daily activities. In contrast to Kenichi, who, like Nobita, is depicted as acting impulsively with limited proficiency in both academia endeavours and athletics, Hattori, his

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[32] Veronica Sullivan, 'Isn't It Obvious: Queer Representation in Children's Television,' *Kill Your Darlings*, 10 February 2020, https://www.killyourdarlings.com.au/2015/11/adventure-time-queer/#:~:text=Marceline%20the%20Vampire%20Queen%20and,a%20shirt%20Marceline%20gave%20her.

[33] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, 24.

[34] Dafna Lemish, *Screening Gender on Children's Television: The Views of Producers Around the World* (Routledge, 2010), 15.

[35] Lemish, *Screening Gender*, 15.

[36] Zhouyan Wu and Zhaoxun Song, 'Masculinities in Doraemon: A Critical Discourse Analysis,' *Journalism and Media* 6, no. 1 (2025): 17, https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia6010017.

ninja guide, exemplifies qualities of courage, wisdom, helpfulness, and responsible leadership. The show implicitly indicates that Hattori demonstrates qualities deserving of respect, whereas Kenichi, at best, evokes our sympathy, and at worst, our disapproval. As a result, the development of alternative, non-stereotypical counter-narratives is undermined by the use of sarcasm and ridicule. Television thus may be perceived as reinforcing established gender norms by disseminating 'lessons about the "normal" and "proper" roles and behaviours of males and females,' as described by Michael Morgan.[37]

While boys are often encouraged to associate masculinity with physical strength and dominance, Lemish asserts, girls face ongoing pressure to adhere to specific aesthetic and behavioural expectations, influenced by societal beauty standards.[38] Femininity is frequently linked to qualities such as care, nurturing, gentleness, and sensitivity, which can contribute to a limited and restrictive conception of womanhood.[39] This narrow perception of womanhood may encourage children to conform to a predefined mould rather than encouraging them to develop authentic relationships and self-identity.

As an illustration, Yumeko, the female protagonist in *Ninja Hattori*, is portrayed as a pianist and is often seen wearing a pink long-sleeved dress, similar to that worn by Shizuka. Both characters are depicted as gentle, modest, innocent, and kind, aligning with traditional gender stereotypes. They are presented as romantic interests within the narrative and are portrayed as highly desirable, as demonstrated by their male peers competing for their affection—Nobita and Dekisugi vie for Shizuka's attention, while Amara and Hattori compete for Yumeko. Their appeal appears to stem from their fair complexion, slender physique, and middle-class background, as reflected in their polite demeanour and interests in such activities as playing musical instruments and sketching. This also applies to the characters Saira and Maira, twin sisters in *Bandbudh Aur Budbak*, who, in the show, are explicitly recognised as the most attractive girls at the school. Their attractiveness—evidenced by their fashionable appearance, proficiency in English, and interest in discussing films—is largely influenced by their light skin tone, slender physique, and socioeconomic background, like that of Yumeko and Shizuka. However, despite their desirability being tied to such factors as colour, physical appearance, and/or socioeconomic status, all of these female characters are often depicted as flat and secondary to the male protagonist. They frequently lack development and complexity, which reflects the persistence of gender bias within the show's narrative, thereby contributing to the symbolic annihilation of female characters.

However, the reinforcement of gender binaries does not require women—or girls, as in this case—to be overly feminised, as seen with characters like Yumeko or Shizuka. As an illustration, in *Chhota Bheem*, Chutki is portrayed as being considerate and respectful toward others, while also demonstrating assertiveness when the circumstances necessitate. Although she presents in a conventionally feminine manner, evidenced by her pink attire and a blush on her cheeks, she demonstrates an outgoing and adventurous personality that challenges conventional societal expectations and norms. While she often accompanies her group of friends, who are all boys, on various outings, she also assumes responsibility for household chores upon returning home and assists her mother in preparing laddus. Although Chutki

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[37] Michael Morgan, 'Television, Sex-Role Attitudes, and Sex-Role Behavior,' *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 7, no. 3 (1987): 270, https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431687073004.

[38] Lemish, *Screening Gender*, 16.

[39] Strong, Rebecca. 'Toxic Femininity, Explained — Plus, Tips to Overcome This Mindset.' *Healthline*, 1 February 2024. https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/toxic-femininity#the-impact.

demonstrates confidence and is notably the most intelligent among her peers, her reliance on Bheem, the male protagonist of the show, is evident throughout the storyline. Chutki is often depicted in situations where she relies on Bheem for protection or support, exemplifying the well-known 'knight in shining armour' archetype.[40] Her outdoor pursuits may be interpreted as challenging patriarchal norms, even though they are ultimately mediated by her reliance on Bheem. Therefore, she could be described as neither entirely conforming to nor completely disrupting patriarchal norms, but rather as negotiating within existing patriarchal arrangements.

In comparison to Chutki, Bheem displays characteristics that are traditionally associated with masculinity; however, these traits are not inherently masculine but are socially constructed to be perceived as such. Like Hattori, he demonstrates independence, courage, strength, and a spirit of adventure. Both protagonists are portrayed as courageous and resilient, frequently taking on the role of protectors for those in need. They are both male, and their traits are believed to stem from their male identity. This contributes to the reinforcement of gender role stereotypes among young children, a concern frequently addressed by media scholars.[41]

The underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ identities, combined with a rigid reinforcement of gender binaries in these cartoons, may contribute to the marginalisation of individuals who do not conform to traditional gender roles or heterosexual norms. As a result, children are encouraged to adopt a limited range of cultural behaviours aligned with predefined social roles and expectations for men and women.[42] This may result in various outcomes, including potential emotional and psychological effects such as increased stress or anxiety stemming from continuous self-monitoring and regulation of one's body and mind to conform to heteronormative expectations. Additionally, as gender binaries are shaped by factors such as caste, class, skin tone, and regional hierarchies, individuals from highly marginalised communities may encounter greater difficulties in aligning with these norms.

Exploring neuronormativity: cartoons and their impact

None of the characters analysed in the selected cartoons has been confirmed to be neurodivergent. However, certain characters within these programs appear to exhibit traits associated with various forms of neurodivergence. The narratives woven around these traits merit investigation, as many neurodivergent individuals lack recognition, clinical or otherwise, of their neurodivergence. Securing a formal diagnosis and professional aid for such conditions remains challenging for many individuals.[43] This study aims to analyse neuronormativity beyond the boundaries of specific psychiatric labels by examining the portrayal of individual traits associated with various forms of neurodivergence. The symbolic annihilation of these

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[40] Nabanita Sengupta, 'Chhota Bheem, Doraemon, Ninja Hatauri, Krishna: No Girls as Protectors or Even Survivors,' *The News Minute*, 27 May 2021, https://www.thenewsminute.com/blog/chhota-bheem-doraemon-ninja-hatauri-krishna-no-girls-protectors-or-even-survivors-28901.

[41] Lemish, *Screening Gender*, 15; Morgan, 'Television, Sex-Role Attitudes.'

[42] Myra Macdonald, *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2009).

[43] Anil Kumar and Hr Phookun, 'Barriers in the Treatment of Psychiatric Disorders,' *Open Journal of Psychiatry & Allied Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2016): 99–102, https://doi.org/10.5958/2394-2061.2016.00015.x; Graham Thornicroft, 'Stigma and Discrimination Limit Access to Mental Health Care,' *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences* 17, no. 1 (2008): 14–19, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1121189x00002621.

characters and their neurodivergent characteristics is fundamentally rooted in overarching systemic structures that often pathologise 'people whose needs differ significantly from those of the dominant majority' as argued by Nick Walker.[44] While these depictions intend to replicate and, consequently, reinforce oppressive discourses surrounding neurodivergence, they may, perhaps unintentionally, also serve as sites of identification for their neurodivergent audience. In the spectre of exclusion and naturalised neuronormativity, it is important to acknowledge that alternative readings of what are negative portrayals can also provide liberatory possibilities.

Characters exhibiting neurodivergent traits within these programs are frequently subjected to condemnation through disciplinary actions, including corporal punishment and psychological violence, which may adversely impact their well-being. Teachers and parents punish them severely for their poor academic performance, almost ritualistically. Nobita from *Doraemon*, for instance, is reprimanded by his mother for an extended period following a poor performance on his class tests, along with a prior admonishment from his teacher at school. The effective operation of power dynamics and the resulting subjugation of neurodivergent individuals can be observed in the case of Nobita, as these disciplinary mechanisms are intended to influence and shape individuals in a manner similar to Michel Foucault's concept of 'docile bodies'—those who internalise authority to the extent of unquestioning compliance, thereby reducing their ability to assert.[45] Through daily practices that monitor and subtly influence individual expression, a clear hegemony is established, shaping what is allowed and what must be restricted.

However, potentially neurodivergent characters in these programs may not always require explicit disciplinary actions to be symbolically annihilated; they can also be subject to subtle disciplinary measures that serve to condemn them. One approach to achieving this is through peer comparison, whether in academic pursuits or extracurricular activities. The emphasis on academic performance as the primary indicator of self-worth is highlighted through the distinction between characters portrayed as flawed and those exemplifying ideal traits. There is often a recurring foil character who demonstrates strong time management skills by effectively balancing academic responsibilities and extracurricular activities, completing assignments punctually, and consistently being well-prepared for tests. In contrast, the main character performs poorly in tests, lacks socially valued skills and talents, and often oversleeps, leading to frequent tardiness. This is evident in the contrasting portrayals of Nobita with Dekisugi in *Doraemon* and Shin-chan with Kazama in *Crayon Shin-chan*. The primary protagonists in these programs are frequently portrayed as lacking proficiency in both academic and everyday activities, while the contrasting character is depicted as the model of exemplary conduct . This indicates an implicit moral disapproval and the symbolic annihilation of individuals displaying traits similar to the main protagonist, who may potentially be neurodivergent.[46] In accordance with the Foucauldian framework, this process reflects the normalisation of the neurotypical standard, where representations of marginalised groups are maintained to delineate the boundaries of what are considered

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[44] Nick Walker, 'Neurodivergence and Disability,' in *Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities* (Autonomous Press, 2021), 55.

[45] Michel Foucault, 'Docile Bodies,' in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

[46] Christian Mette, 'Time Perception in Adult ADHD: Findings From a Decade—A Review,' *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 4 (2023), https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20043098.

normal.[47] Deviations from this constructed norm are used to explicitly define abnormality, which is subjected to corrective measures to uphold the dominance of the standard narrative. This default framing perpetuates the marginalisation of neurodivergent experiences and continually demonstrates the societal costs associated with divergence from the norm.

What is also emphasised is correcting neurodivergence, rather than providing appropriate accommodations for neurodivergent individuals by discouraging and penalising diverse needs. It implicitly characterises neurodivergence as a deficiency; however, this deficit-based perspective has been widely challenged by the emerging neurodiversity paradigm as being both insufficient and inaccurate, as elaborated in the work of Robert Chapman.[48] Continued reinforcement of this viewpoint may have adverse effects, particularly concerning individuals who may be neurodivergent. It requires neurodivergent individuals to continually strive to conform to neurotypical standards, often at the expense of their well-being.

Another approach used in these programs to subtly discipline characters exhibiting neurodivergent traits is through the obscuring of the processes by which knowledge is acquired. For instance, Budhdeb from *Bandbudh aur Budbak*, who is usually depicted to be lacking intellectually, temporarily exhibits exceptional intellectual abilities after a brick falls on his head during an episode.[49] As a result, he appears to possess immediate knowledge of answers to all possible questions, whether they relate to natural phenomena, societal issues, or individual circumstances. This portrayal misrepresents the nature of intelligence by presenting it as an innate characteristic limited to specific individuals, rather than recognising it as influenced by 'personal and contextual factors, such as type of academic discipline, prior education, age and gender.'[50] It leads to the trivialisation of those who experience hardship in the process of obtaining knowledge, despite the fact that such challenges are a normal and unavoidable part of learning for everyone. This narrative can be particularly detrimental to those neurodivergent individuals with specific conditions, such as dyslexia, which may make academic learning more challenging.[51]

The construction of a subordinate character who frequently exhibits traits associated with neurodivergence highlights another way in which neurodivergent individuals may experience condemnation, potentially leading them to feel pressured to conform to neurotypical standards. For instance, in *Doraemon,* Nobita is shown to sleep frequently, with this trait being exaggerated for comedic purposes, as he is portrayed to be able to fall asleep at the blink of an eye. He frequently gets in trouble due to oversleeping. This portrayal negatively characterises oversleeping and requiring additional rest relative to peers, traits which are commonly observed among neurodivergent individuals.[52]

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[47] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage, 2012).

[48] Robert Chapman, 'Neurodiversity, Disability, Wellbeing,' in *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*, ed. Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Anna Stenning, and Nick Chown (Routledge, 2020), 60–61.

[49] Zee Kids, 'Budhu Bana Budhimaan - Bandbudh Aur Budbak New Episode - Funny Hindi Cartoon for Kids,' *Youtube*, 11: 18, 10 April 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1N91nrG8zRM.

[50] Jan D. Vermunt, 'Relations Between Student Learning Patterns and Personal and Contextual Factors and Academic Performance,' *Higher Education* 49, no. 3 (2005): 227, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-004-6664-2.

[51] Darshani Hettiarachchi, 'An Overview of Dyslexia,' *Sri Lanka Journal of Child Health* 50, no. 3 (2021), https://doi.org/10.4038/sljch.v50i3.9741.

[52] Althea Robinson Shelton and Beth Malow, 'Neurodevelopmental Disorders Commonly Presenting With Sleep Disturbances,' *Neurotherapeutics* 18, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1007/s13311-020-00982-8; Abeer Al

Certain characters are also depicted as crying frequently, with their emotional expressions exaggerated through visual depictions of streams of tears gushing from their eyes, as exemplified by Nobita from *Doraemon* and Shinzo from *Ninja Hattori*. This characterisation presents the trait as a negative quality that renders these characters undesirable. This can be harmful for those neurodivergent individuals who experience intense emotions regularly. Additionally, a character's reliance on others for their daily functioning is depicted as a negative trait; for instance, Nobita's dependence on Doraemon's gadgets and Kenichi's reliance on Hattori's ninja abilities are portrayed as unlikable qualities due to their dependence on external support, rendering such a need undesirable. In an environment that is often challenging for neurodivergent individuals, especially young children who may have limited influence over decisions affecting them, framing the need for external support in a negative manner can inadvertently contribute to the stigmatisation of neurodivergent individuals with high support needs.

Although neurodivergent traits and the characters displaying them are typically condemned on the surface, there is an underlying sense of comfort and reassurance derived from their relatability. Children who find it difficult to regulate their emotions, who feel that their feelings are too big for their bodies, find in Shinzo and Nobita companions—relatable figures with whom they can identify. For individuals frequently compared to their peers, Nobita serves as a site of identification, thereby subtly subverting the broader delegitimisation of those who do not meet societal expectations. Much of the impact of neuro-ableism manifests as isolation stemming from feelings of being different. In Nobita–albeit virtual–they find someone who resembles them, who experiences similar setbacks, needs more support than his peers and who similarly struggles to meet expectations, which nurtures a sense of connection and symbolises small triumphs over loneliness, serving as a subtle act of resistance against neuronormativity.

Neurodivergence and fatness often co-occur in these programs, as sensory processing differences may contribute to behaviours such as overeating, impulsivity, impaired interoception, and emotional dysregulation-related eating. The intersectional experience between neurodivergence and fatness may potentially be observed in characters who appear to engage in frequent eating, exhibit difficulty recognising satiety, or frequently experience sensations of hunger. These eating behaviours can serve as a representation of how individuals with neurodivergent traits often use food to regulate emotions and cope with sensory over- or under- stimulation. Characters such as Bheem with his laddus and Motu with his samosas exemplify the intense interests that many neurodivergent individuals may have toward specific entities, particularly related to specific objects or foods. This can be interpreted as a reflection of sensory sensitivities that contribute to a pronounced preference for certain items. Although these traits are not typically portrayed by the creators in a positive manner, there is an opportunity for fat and neurodivergent audiences to see their lived experiences reflected on screen, thereby providing some form of visibility. Children who experience feelings of isolation due to their inability to adhere to societal restrictions often find reassurance through these representations.

Like the ways in which fatness and neurodivergence are interconnected, fatphobia and neuronormativity are also closely intertwined within these programs. This is evident in how individuals with larger body sizes are portrayed, often receiving criticism related to their

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Lihabi, 'A Literature Review of Sleep Problems and Neurodevelopment Disorders,' *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 14, (23 February 2023), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1122344.

eating habits. For instance, Motu in *Motu Patlu* appears to be unable to think clearly unless he has eaten something. This trait is played for laughs, wherein he is seen to lack all logic and does irrational and dangerous things to obtain food, making him at best a laughing stock, but more often, an inconvenience. While this pattern of representation can reinforce harmful stereotypes by linking body size to intellectual ability and self-discipline, individuals with sensory sensitivities that affect their food preferences may find some acknowledgment of their experiences in these limited—though often exaggerated—portrayals.

Individuals with larger body sizes are often depicted as lacking intellectual capacity and in need of a slender, witty crutch figure to lean on whether it is Patlu for Motu in *Motu Patlu* or Suneo for Gian in *Doraemon*. Gian is portrayed as having a quick temper and a tendency to act impulsively and without careful consideration. He also appears to have limited intellectual ability; a feature purportedly associated with his fatness. Since Suneo is the most sharp-witted and financially well-off among his friends, Gian partners with him to develop manipulative strategies designed solely to deceive and humiliate his peers.

Although Gian is depicted as an antagonist and is largely presented unfavourably, his tendency to persist against heavy odds opens the door to alternative mis/interpretations, which explain his supposedly negative traits as reasonable reactions to a society that marginalises people with larger bodies and diverse needs rather than as mere perversions. Children with experiences like that of Gian, who may be unfairly singled out, could feel acknowledged and validated, potentially finding pleasure or comfort in these interpretations of the storyline.

Overall, the interplay of fatphobia and neuronormativity exacerbates the marginalisation of individuals whose bodies and cognitive experiences are subjected to societal stigma. Because societal structures do not adequately accommodate individuals with diverse physical or mental needs, this can result in increased instances of anxiety, illness, and stress among affected individuals, despite their ongoing efforts to seek representation.

Concluding remarks

Fatphobia, heteronormativity, and neuronormativity—especially when these biases intersect—could adversely impact individuals subjected to them. An immediate and concerning consequence of this is the heightened risk of bullying, with queer, neurodivergent, and fat children being especially vulnerable in this regard.[53] Less immediately conspicuous is the increased risk of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and low self-esteem,[54] which may even have long-term implications extending into adulthood.

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[53] Valerie A. Earnshaw et al., 'Bullying Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth,' *Pediatric Clinics of North America* 63, no. 6 (2016), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2016.07.004; Jeanne Van Cleave and Matthew M. Davis, 'Bullying and Peer Victimization Among Children With Special Health Care Needs,' *Pediatrics* 118, no. 4 (2006), https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2005-3034; Weinstock and Krehbiel, 'Fat Youth as Common Targets for Bullying.'

[54] William J. Hall, 'Psychosocial Risk and Protective Factors for Depression Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Youth: A Systematic Review,' *Journal of Homosexuality* 65, no. 3 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1317467; Stian Orm et al., 'Anxiety Symptoms Predict Subsequent Depressive Symptoms in Neurodivergent Youth: A 10-Year Longitudinal Study,' *Research on Child and Adolescent Psychopathology*, 24 January 2025, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-025-01292-3; Deina Nemiary et al., 'The Relationship Between Obesity and Depression Among Adolescents,' *Psychiatric Annals* 42, no. 8 (2012), https://doi.org/10.3928/00485713-20120806-09.

Media representation plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and can significantly reinforce the systemic biases. Among the programs analysed, these forms of oppression were observed to be perpetuated through all three forms of symbolic annihilation: trivialisation, condemnation, and underrepresentation. Not only do these programs contribute to antagonising a demographic of young people whose minds and bodies experience isolation due to societal constraints, but they also obscure the ways in which societal structures impact personal challenges, fostering the perception that individuals are solely responsible for their well-being and personally accountable for any difficulties they encounter. As a result, the normative frameworks within these programs impede the development of constructive solutions by offering a limited perspective on societal issues. While the on-screen representations typically portray individuals who deviate from conventional norms of thinness, heterosexuality, and rationality in a negative manner, audiences may often interpret these depictions in alternative ways that offer them a sense of comfort or reassurance. This desire for recognition underscores the continued need for broader systemic changes.

The necessity for structural change is particularly pressing in addressing the often distorted and inaccurate portrayals of fat, queer, and neurodivergent individuals in Indian children's television, which reinforces harmful stereotypes and undermines the legitimacy of their experiences, as evidenced by the programs we have analysed. Comprehensive structural reforms, including extensive educational initiatives and the strategic reassessment of media programming, are necessary to counteract false narratives and foster a discourse centred on inclusion and acceptance.[55] Enactment of legislation mandating such measures would be a significant step in this regard. Moreover, efforts to create environmental changes that honour diverse identities and accommodate diverse needs will enhance overall well-being and reduce persistent social disparities.

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[55] Stuart W. Flint et al., 'Weight Stigma and Discrimination: A Call to the Media,' *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology* 6, no. 3 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1016/s2213-8587(18)30041-x; Jaggi, 'Children's Perceptions of Gender Images,' 161.

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