

iCarly Gender Schema Theory Case Study

Topic: The stereotypical gender roles in 2000s television shows, most specifically in the show iCarly, concerning the Gender Schema Theory.

Article Summaries:

Part 1:

1. “My Real Imaginary Friends: iCarly and the Power of the Hyperreality”

LaTouche, J. (2011). My real imaginary friends: iCarly and the power of hyperreality.

Americana, 10(1), 2.

<https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=b1b927c5-e279-4704-b910-64006ebd6b30%40redis&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBIPWlwJnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=72499528&db=sih>

As people continuously watch television shows, they become progressively more involved and grow a bond with the characters in the show. Viewers begin to have a sense that their “friends” in the shows are their real friends and develop a hyperreality. The show *iCarly* has specifically used this technique to engage its audience. From the beginning of *iCarly* airing in 2007, it grew in popularity to be the most popular live-action children’s show on television (LaTouche 2011). People turn to shows that include hyperreal experiences because they are better than everyday realities and it provides them with comfort from everyday pressures. The creation of hyperrealities is based on authentic events, and by doing so, allows for shows to add their level of internal legitimacy to engage viewers. Due to the rise of digital technology, *iCarly* has taken the hyperreality approach to a mainstream audience in newer ways than past shows (LaTouche 2011). For example, *I Love Lucy* blended the elements of real and fiction in ways to create a hyperreal space for viewers (LaTouche 2011). *I Love Lucy* was a situation comedy about the characters Lucy and Ricky’s marriage (LaTouche 2011). The show decided to air an episode about the couple, who were married in real life, about planning to have a baby and viewers began

to believe that the son who played the part was their son in real life (LaTouche 2011). Hyperrealities that blur authentic and fictional situations became more popular in television narratives due to the rise of reality television (LaTouche 2011). The central theme of *iCarly* where Carly, Freddie, and Sam create and produce a weekly web show became the foundation of *iCarly's* hyperreality (LaTouche 2011). The television show was strategically illustrated as being produced by the three teenagers. This heightens the reality that viewers are watching a real web show production. The show fully engaged with its audience by including viewer-submitted videos that were submitted to *iCarly's* actual website which gives the audience a way to authentically interact with the characters (LaTouche 2011). This models a way that viewers' investment in the show allows for viewers to be almost a character in the show, therefore, this changes the ways that viewers engage with the media (LaTouche 2011).

2. ***“iRewatched iCarly in 2021: Here are my thoughts”***

Tinsley, M. (2021). *iRewatched iCarly in 2021: Here are my thoughts*.

<https://www.hercampus.com/school/northwestern/irewatched-icarly-2021-here-are-my-thoughts/>

This is an editorial opinion based on the author, Morgan Tinsley, rewatching the 2000s hit show *iCarly* when it was released on Netflix. She was questioning the themes that were used in *iCarly* that she believed did not necessarily reflect modern culture (Tinsley 2021). Her first example was when Freddie was “constantly belittled and insulted for not being ‘manly’ enough” and how he took all of the jokes based on not being stereotypical male (Tinsley 2021). This theme would portray to little boys that there would be something wrong with them if they don’t appear masculine enough and devalue feminine traits (Tinsley 2021). Also, Gibby’s girlfriend in the show played by Emily Ratajkowski was the stereotypical ‘dumb hottie’ as a majority of

secondary female characters appear ‘dumb’ or ‘crazy (Tinsley 2021).’ Tinsley also mentioned the numerous examples of when sexual assault or harassment was used as comedic reflection which encourages negative morals in the audience, especially younger kids (Tinsley 2021). Gibby’s entire character trait was based on him being shirtless therefore his body was played as a joke (Tinsley 2021). The lack of diversity in the actors was touched upon as well in regards to the cast being almost entirely White (Tinsley 2021).

3. “Viewer Perceptions of Gendered Characters: Parent and Child Reports on Gender Stereotypical and Gender Counter-Stereotypical Behaviors on iCarly”

Hentges, Beth. (2020). Viewer perceptions of gendered characters: Parent and child reports on gender stereotypical and gender counter-stereotypical behaviors on iCarly. *American Communication Journal*, 22(1), 1–13.

<http://www.ac-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Viewer-Perceptions-of-Gendered-Characters-Parent-and-Child-Reports-on-Gender-Stereotypical-and-Gender-Counter-Stereotypical-Behaviors-on-iCarly.pdf>

Stereotypical behaviors have been a common consensus in society ever since the beginning, but with the increase of media and television services, it is evident that these norms are portrayed in more than a social society. This research focused on the sitcom, iCarly from 2007 to 2012 (Beth, 2020). Coders in this research were asked to watch a single episode of iCarly and were then asked questions to gauge an understanding of the television stereotypes. It was found that most girls identified with Carly as being their favorite character and the one they can relate to the most (Beth, 2020). Broadly, in television shows outside of iCarly, male characters are more talkative, get more screen time, and are more aggressive (Beth, 2020). In contrast, female characters are more concerned with appearance, are highly attractive, and have nurturing behaviors (Beth, 2020). With that, it was concluded that female characters are more

likely to act masculine (Sam) than vice versa. In addition, “research does indicate a link between television viewing and holding gender stereotypical beliefs” (Beth, 2020). Research also found that different attributes of a television character can be portrayed in a variety of different ways (Beth, 2020). For example, if a woman was wearing a skimpy dress, with high heels, and make-up, and was chasing a bad guy down a street, some viewers would consider that sexy while others would think of it as heroic (Beth, 2020). Therefore, viewers who identify with a specific character will tend to only see the positive attributes of their personality. This directly ties into wishful identification which “is a process where the viewer attaches particularly positive attributes to a character that they themselves wish they could possess” (Beth, 2020). In specific relation to iCarly, there are four main characters—two are male and two are female. Parents of girls reacted more positively to the episode they were asked to watch than parents of boys. Carly was described as sweet, nice, a singer/dancer, smart, pretty, good head on her shoulders, and polite (Beth, 2020). Sam, however, was described as hungry, mean, lazy, angry, rude, wild, and boyish. One parent commented, “She seems almost like a boy [who’s] always in trouble with the teacher and acting up in class” (Beth, 2020). Parents were next asked to relate their daughter to one of the four main characters in iCarly. One parent added, “She is a mix of Carly and Sam. She usually tries to do the right thing, but she definitely has that strong-willed assertive side” (Beth, 2020). When the children in the study were asked to pick a character that they most identified with, the boys picked Sam due to her masculine qualities. This ties into the study's most important finding that both parents and children reacted more negatively to male characters displaying feminine attributes than vice versa. Therefore, Sam's displaying of masculine qualities was not completely unattractive in the viewer's eyes but left room for stereotypical interpretation.

4. *Development of Sex-Trait Stereotypes Among Young Children in the United States, England, and Ireland*

Best, D.L., Williams, J.E., Cloud, J.M., Davis, S.W., Robertson, L.S., Edwards, J.R., Giles, H., &

Fowles, J. (1977). Development of sex-trait stereotypes among young children in the United States, England, and Ireland. *Child Development*, 48, 1375–1384.

<https://cars.endicott.edu/cgi-bin/public/ecidbauth.cgi?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=eue&AN=519744297&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Stereotypes affect men more than they affect women in both a social and societal way.

Children have the capacity through school, activities, and media to determine sex roles that are occupied by both men and women. This study, specifically about kindergarteners, knew adult-defined stereotypes at an extremely young age (Best et al., 1977). Usually, this recognition is first represented by hair length and style of dress. This study analyzes grade school students in England, Ireland, and the United States because of their similarities in historical association and language. The results of this study were that “the mean male stereotype subscore was higher than the mean female stereotype subscore and that the mean total stereotype scores increased regularly with age” (Best et al., 1977). The difference between the subscores was significantly different at the age of five but did not show as large of a gap at the eight-year level (Best et al., 1977). Therefore, five to eleven-year-old knowledge of stereotypes increases linearly throughout a person's life (Best et al., 1977). In addition, Americans knew more about male stereotypes than women which can be possibly explained by the male-dominated culture and politics. At age five, children describe women as gentle and affectionate, and by age eight they are describing them as weak, emotional, and submissive (Best et al., 1977). Differently, at age five, women and men are described as strong, assertive, and dominant, and by age eight that changes to cruel, coarse, loud,

and ambitious (Best et al., 1977). The drastic change in the adjectives used to describe men and women at different ages shows how their stereotypical behaviors are taught. This scholarly source also discusses that “there was evidence of a general sex difference with young boys showing a greater awareness of the male than the female stereotype, while the young girls appeared to have nearly equal knowledge of both” (Best et al., 1977). This can be since society expects more from men than women, so their attention may be more concentrated to the attributes they need to possess. At a young age, children learn “sex-appropriate” behaviors which are reinforced by television, books, and other media.

5. *Is Kids TV Sexist?*

Poniewozik, J. (2009, May 28). *Is kids' TV sexist?*. TIME.

<https://entertainment.time.com/2009/05/28/is-kids-tv-sexist/>

One-third of lead characters in television shows are girls and this study analyzes those that are fictional, animated characters. More girls are the leads as the audience gets older because the stereotype of that certain age is clear and consistent (Poniewozik, 2009). Television production companies give the audience what they want to sell, which are girly girls and aggressive boys. This makes sense because that is the stereotype for both gendered groups. In the kid's television show, *The Backyardigans* there are three male and two female characters. Uniqua is female and a pink creature, she comes off as confident and assertive (Poniewozik, 2009). Pablo is male and is a blue penguin, he is nervous and has many phobias (Poniewozik, 2009). Concerning assigning colors to genders, it could be argued that animators rely on such correspondence to appeal to the younger audience (Poniewozik, 2009). In addition, *The Powderpuff Girls* had three main characters, Bubbles, Blossom, and Buttercup (Poniewozik, 2009). These names are ladylike which is stereotypical, however, this is one of the most feminist

shows to ever go on television (Poniewozik, 2009). This study suggests that quantifying fictional characters is difficult especially due to the nature of the audience and what needs to be done psychologically for the series/show to sell (Poniewozik, 2009).

What specific media texts are you thinking of analyzing? List at least three ideas.

- A singular iCarly episode that the 4 main characters are in Carly, Sam, Freddie, & Spencer
- Compare the social media platforms of Jennette McCurdy (Sam) and Miranda Cosgrove (Carly)
- Television cooperation social media and commercials that portray the iCarly characters

We decided to analyze a clip from an iCarly episode. Some of the key points that relate to gender characteristic stereotypes are when Spencer initially says to Freddie's friend Shane that he is a nerd because he is friends with Freddie, but when he gets a closer look at him, he believes he is not a nerd because he is handsome. Spencer says "Wait you're not a nerd, you're kinda handsome." This insinuates that nerds cannot be attractive or shouldn't be. The second stereotypical trait that Sam and Carly portray is when they are filming their web show with blueberries in their noses, when Shane comes into the room, both girls immediately blow the blueberries out of their noses and Sam takes off her wig to look good and impress him. Also, there is a distinct difference in the costumes that Carly and Sam were wearing. Carly was dressed in a more feminine and revealing coconut bra Hawaiian girl outfit, whereas Sam was in a more conservative and "masculine" disco outfit with a large afro on.

Gender Schema Theory

The gender schema theory is used to explain the role of gender to oneself and others. It consists of stereotypical traits and actions that people do that children from a young age learn to associate with certain genders. There are five propositions to the gender schema theory that make it applicable to society. The first proposition discusses that children are taught to link certain attributes to link sex and gender together, for example, clothing, colors, and activities are associated with male or female such as pink being a very feminine color. Secondly, children use the sex-linked associations discussed in the first proposition to make sense of cues that he or she perceive. An example of this would be that a child would have difficulty identifying a girl with short hair and a lowered-pitched voice because it is not typical of a female. The third proposition talks about self-concept through gender schema that a child develops through self-monitoring and evaluation such as what to say, what to wear, or how to act in certain situations. The fourth proposition discusses the anticipatory structure which shorthand assigns gender meaning to oneself and others when relevant cues activate the schema. A relevant cue could be a woman wearing a flower-printed skirt would relate to her being a highly feminine woman. Lastly, gender schemas are judgemental to what is natural or unnatural, right or wrong, valued or unvalued. An example of this would be a man staying home to care for his children while the woman goes off to work as this is stereotypically seen as wrong and that man could be viewed as weak.

In iCarly, there are four main characters: Carly, Sam, Freddie, and Spencer. All these characters have certain characteristics that either confirm or contradict the concept of the gender schema theory. Carly is an easygoing, smart, and beautiful girl who will do anything for her friends and family and cares about others deeply. She dresses in pink and other feminine colors that contribute to the idea behind the gender schema theory and acts as a stereotypical female. Sam however does not act as a stereotypical female, she is aggressive, wears unfeminine

clothing, is obsessed with food, and attributes male qualities. Freddie acts as a stereotypical male but possesses some feminine-like qualities. He is intelligent and is into technology, and his excitement about these activities can contribute to his femininity. Lastly, Spencer can be described as a goofy, artistic, easygoing personality that possesses mostly masculine qualities. These gender schemas are considered what is right or wrong in society which is parallel to popular television. When societal stereotypes influence children's television shows, it influences the child's perception of not only the character but also of stereotypes that evolve from each personality.

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