

# Media and the Impact on Hetero Normative Narratives of Children

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## **Abstract**

Media has a profound influence on the narratives children construct about the world around them and their lived experience. Children develop a perception of the world and its working as well as their future lives and roles in society based on media exposure. One major effect of media on children has been in quite evident and obvious heteronormative narratives. Heteronormativity has been discussed in the west in relation to gender roles and stereotyping. However, in the Indian context, heteronormativity extends itself into the over exaggerated narratives children develop imagining excessive machismo, violence and aggression as accepted ways of life. The other angle of hetero normativity relevant in India is fantasy and stories targeting children of all ages leading to the development of unrealistic expectations, flawed body image and instant gratification. This article describes various instances and examples of the impact of media on children's lives and development of personality.

**Keywords:** Heteronormativity, Children, Ecosociology

## **Introduction**

Media is an important avenue of socialization and socio-cultural exposure for children as they are engulfed by various forms of it, including books, newspapers, comics, cartoons, television, games on phones, gadgets etc. Our life in contemporary times are embedded deeply in media and almost all our contexts are rooted in media whether television, print, books or movies. Youth is using media for entertainment, to search information, or simply for spending free time, avoiding boredom, forming identity, and for cultural identification. With the impetus on using gadgets in classrooms, various kinds of media are in use in and around children of all ages both at home as well as in school.

This chapter reviews the role of media in children's physical, behavioural, and cognitive development in relation to heteronormative tendencies in the Indian context. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, the rationale focuses on the contexts of childhood that are shaped by the availability and use of the media While, traditional and newer forms of electronic and print media are considered, the chapter gives particular attention to the ways in which ecological contexts shape the impact of media on children's development and heteronormative narratives in India.

## **Bronfenbrenner and Ecological systems theory**

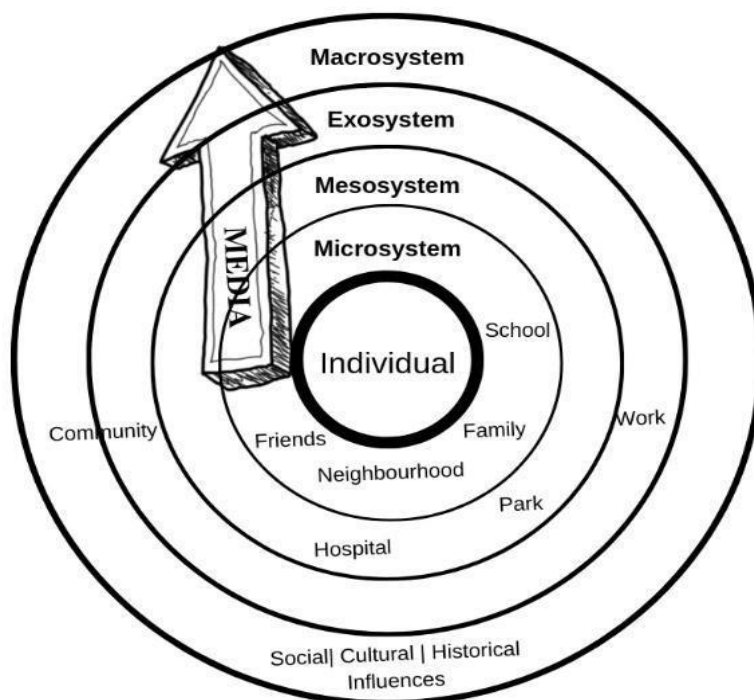
American psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner, created the Ecological Systems Theory to explain how the inherent abilities of a child and his/her environment interact to influence how he/she will grow and develop. Through the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory, there is impetus on the importance of studying

a child to understand his/her development in the context of multiple layered environments or ecological systems.

The Urie Bronfenbrenner model (1979) organizes contexts of development into five levels of external influence. A child typically finds himself/herself simultaneously embedded in several levels of ecosystems. From the most intimate home ecological system moving outward to the larger school system and the most outwardly expansive system which is the society and culture. Each of these systems inevitably interact with and influence each other in every aspect of the child’s life (Jordan,2004). There is a compelling need that Bronfenbrenner’s model is adapted in order to accommodate the roles that digital technologies and media might play in the life of the developing child in the assumptions they make regarding gender roles, violence, excessive machismo, body image issues and several forms of subtle aggression.

Bronfenbrenner’s model places the child at the heart of a system over which the child has progressively less influence as the circles move outwards from the center. The first circle is the ‘microsystem’ which consists of family and others within the child’s immediate sphere of influence, including the classroom environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem has extremely important influences on the child and the child’s development and the behaviours and responses of family, classmates, friends and teachers are also affected by the behaviours and responses of the child. Right after the microsystem is the ‘exosystem’ which is the wider community, and includes the school and its governance, worship/community groups of which the child is a part of and relationships in the neighbourhood. The exosystem has effects on the child and, is mediated by people in the microsystem – this network of mediating relationships is called the ‘mesosystem’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Beyond the exosystem is the ‘macrosystem’ which consists of local and national structures and policies at the societal level (Fig 1).

**Fig.1. Media penetrating the microenvironment of a child’s life**



Bronfenbrenner argued that the mass media formed part of the macrosystem (Fig 1) and this was appropriate at the time that the model was proposed in 1979 when mass media only penetrated the larger socio-cultural environment. In the `1970's and 1980's, media was mostly confined to radio broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, and books; Television was still a luxury and media influence can be considered to be limited to a larger cultural conditioning in the macrosystem. In contemporary times, mass media, in the sense of broadcast television/radio, studio-produced films, commercial music and commercially published newspapers/magazines are present in every layer right from microsystem to macrosystem (Fig 1). Schmidt and Vandewater (2008) review research extensively on connections between various types of electronic media and the cognitive skills of children and adolescents. One prominent finding of studies, according to them, is that the content delivered by electronic media is far more influential than the media itself. However, the same content can be interpreted in many different ways based on the socio-cultural context in the macrosystem. Hence, it is of utmost importance to place the content of specific media in a cultural context to further understand its impact; there cannot be a cookie cutter explanation or answer for the overlap and interaction of media content and the context of the macrosystem. Furthermore, even though media content is produced in the macrosystem, it is consumed within the microsystem. The discussion on cultural context is incomplete without reference to the conditioning that accompanies it!

### **Media and enculturation of children**

Conditioning is centuries of tradition handed down from generation to generation, and forms the whole backbone of civilization, culture, the social impacts and the lived experience of the same. Apart from traditions, the various impressions, propaganda, literature, television, add to the background, to the conditioning of every human being. Such cultural conditioning happens irrespective of social status, poverty, education and sophistication of human beings. This conditioning and enculturation seem to be inevitable (Krishnamurti,1984).

An infant is placed in a society with a certain culture, a certain ordered way of life. The child inherently has a tacit ability to process information for the ordered way of life to influence him/her. Over a period of time, the conditioning along with attitudes and motives, form the personality of the child. The personality of the child and the culture around him/her influence each other and vice versa. Hoebel first described enculturation as a process of 'how children learned to become adults in a particular culture' (Reese,2019). According to E. Adamson Hoebel (1954, pg.40), enculturation is "both a conscious and an unconscious conditioning process whereby man, as child and adult, achieves competence in his culture, internalizes his culture and becomes thoroughly enculturated." A person internalizes expectations, the rules and requirements for every specific demand within the society. Society does whatever is necessary to support its members in learning appropriate behaviour for any given social context and in meeting the demands of challenges. Enculturation begins before birth and continues until death.

Sociologist Talcott Parsons (1968) described arrival of a new generation of children as a recurrent barbarian invasion with respect to enculturation. Human infants do not possess any particular culture at birth, they have no conceptual ideas about the world; they are not influenced by a language or a morality. Parsons uses the word "barbarian" in reference to infants as they can be considered as 'uncultured, unsocialized individuals'. All that an infant would need in order to survive and cope within the cultural context is acquired through a process termed as enculturation in anthropology and socialization in

sociology. Thus, we can define enculturation as the process by which individuals amass knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable them to become functioning members within their societies.

### ***Media and the impact on narratives of children***

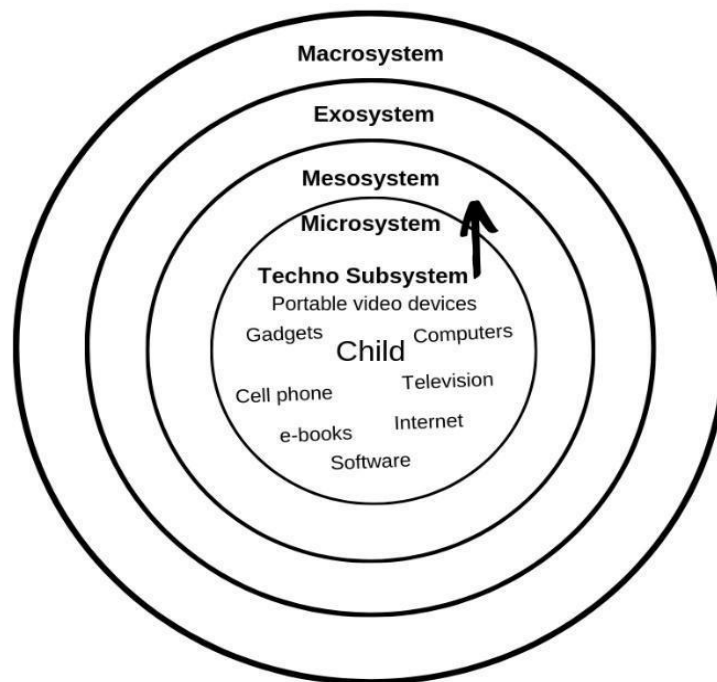
In contemporary times, community and media also play an important role in the development of children. Both community as well as media often enlarge to cover all aspects of life as children spend increasingly more time outside the family context. One of the main developmental tasks' children face on their journey to adulthood is the establishment of a stable identity (Erikson, 1968). Earlier, although the production of media was always within the macrosystem, consumption of media typically took place within the microsystem with the family. Children have for the last four or five decades watched television, in the home microenvironment with family and relatives. However, the scenario has changed now and several other types of advertising media and promotional media invade every aspect of a child's life. Every level of Bronfenbrenner's model is invaded with a variety of media impacting children in multiple ways. While the macrosystem creates the context for the media, the exosystem and mesosystem create a system of dissemination for the content and the media content is actually distributed in the microsystem. In the current age of technology and information, children are increasingly creating media; they are not just consuming it. This is particularly the case with social digital media such as Facebook but is also true of other online media such as 'YouTube' which consist only of material uploaded by users. In these scenarios, media is not only a part of various levels of influence in the child's life but also becoming an extension of their personality and social conditioning. Social media such as Facebook can be understood as contexts in which people create or perform identity in online settings. The intensely personal nature of some new media leads us to infer that they could be interpreted as manifestations of the self rather than parts of the wider ecological system (Hamelink,2003).

During current times, even the mainstream traditional media such as broadcast television is built around narratives that are wholly or partially determined by audience participation. For example, many reality television programmes include audience voting and the audience has a role in determining how the narratives of the programme may develop. While, the producers may have subtle ways of influencing audience votes; the audience feels a sense of involvement in the programme which in turn constructs their possible identities. Not only are consumers more engaged in developing the narrative of television programmes but audiences may engage in corresponding conversations through the medium of social networks such as Facebook or Twitter (a phenomenon known as 'multiscreening'). As a result, viewers are not passive recipients of the television programme but are actively constructing a discourse and possibly even parallel narratives which are shared with others. This means that even pre-digital mass media, such as Television shows are no longer completely external to the viewer. The viewer is now an active participant in the co-construction of interpretations. In some programmes, co-constructed interpretations may influence participation in audience voting and hence the direction of future progress of the programme. While children below 18 years may not be allowed to participate actively, they surely are becoming active observers and constructing their identity around the narratives they see on screen and around them.

Not only has there been significant change in the ways that people, including children, create and interact with media but the nature of media devices has also changed considerably in the last decade or so.

Interestingly, both social media and ‘traditional’ media are increasingly accessed through mobile and handheld devices such as phones and tablets. Ofcom (2014), on children’s media usage in Britain reported that “31% of children aged between 5-15 years have a smartphone (proportion rising by age) while, 71% have use of a tablet and 88% have use of a desktop or laptop computer (tablet and computer availability does not change significant by age) and that they use these devices to access news media such as the BBC”. Recognising the personal nature of engagement of media and technology use, Johnson and Puplampu and Johnson (2008) proposed a “techno-subsystem” called digi system, within the microsystem. Such has been the invasion of media in children’s lives that It can even be argued that part of the child self is ‘outsourced’ to the digital world through the performance of identity on social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. What the introduction of the digisystem implies is that in the current age, there need not be relationships or negotiation with a child’s parents or caregivers regarding media usage. The digisystem enables the wider world and the child to engage with each other and parents/ or caregivers and teachers may not necessarily even be aware of all the types of interactions that take place. This does not mean that all digital media interactions are necessarily inappropriate, but simply that they are beyond the boundaries of parental influence and control.

**Fig.2. Digisystem invading the microenvironment of a child’s life**



Parents and care providers decide where a child lives, which school he/she goes to and determine what community organisations the child will join. This gives parents or caregivers considerable influence and control with regard to the ecosystem. Traditionally, parents and caregivers are also responsible for mediating relationships between the child and the wider community. Through choices and mediation, parents shape the values and attitudes that predominate in the world of the developing child. ‘Parental control’ of technology is usually discussed in the context of online safety and access to inappropriate content such as violence or pornography. However, even when children are interacting online in safe and approved settings, the digisystem (Hamelink,2003) puts the child in contact with varied cultural and attitudinal perspectives. This may be viewed as a bane or a boon based on which type of values and moral

perspectives children are exposed to! There is a possibility that diversity of ideas is not guaranteed as a paradox of the digital world is that whilst everything is available, personalisation algorithms filter incoming material in such a way that people tend to be presented with content that reinforces existing interests and belief systems. Thus, the ecological model of childhood recognises the agency of the child and that the child is most powerful entity in the inner circles of the model. However, the child is an actor throughout the digisystem. Not only does the digisystem (Hamelink,2003) bring the world to the child, it also takes the child to the world.

### ***Media and the impact on heteronormative narratives of children***

The impact of media on narratives of children has been studied extensively in the West and heteronormativity is a prominent topic of interest. However, most of the studies in the Western world are focused on the impact of heteronormative ideas on development of gender and sexuality. Lately, there is discussion on media influenced heteronormative narratives in relation to body image issues and violent behaviour. All the three aspects of heteronormative narratives involving children and media are discussed below. Heteronormativity is the prominent cultural norm based in gender binary that makes heterosexuality the socially and culturally dominant construct. Generally, heteronormative views involve alignment of biological sex, sexuality, gender identity and gender roles as male and female. However, in the current study we are elaborating on the repercussions of heteronormativity narratives with children into body image issues, violence, gender roles and violence in society

In a study that examines preadolescent girls co-constructing heteronormativity in a group setting, the authors contended that heteronormativity is not the product of teenage transformation but instead an everyday part of life right from childhood. They propose that heteronormativity emerges from the gender divide between boys and girls but is also reproduced by and for girls themselves. This is a very important take off point for the discussion on heteronormative narratives among children. In the project involving girl children, the authors tried to understand interests, skills, and concerns of young girls. They studied nine focus groups with 43 elementary school girls, in the age group of nine years or younger. They observed that these girl children defined "interests" that were boy centered and they performed heteronormativity for other girls by setting up their interests around boys only. This article contributes to heteronormative narratives on gender and sexuality from children's own points of view (Myers and Raymond, 2010).

In a different take on heteronormativity and media influence, the authors examine accounts of heterosexuality in media especially relevant to children. The authors analyse several G-rated films grossing \$100 million dollars or more between 1990 and 2005 and find two main narratives of heterosexuality that promote heteronormativity. Heterosexuality is either constructed through heteroromantic love relationships that are depicted as exceptionally powerful, magical, and transformative. Secondly, heterosexuality outside of relationships is constructed through portrayals of men objectifying and gazing at women's bodies with great desire (Martin and Kazzyak,2009). The authors strongly contend that both of these scenarios promote heteronormative narratives in children in relation to sexuality and gender issues.

Although sexual objectification is quite common in media culture, Aubrey and Frisby (2011) propound that music videos provide the most potent examples of toxic media culture. They developed a coding

system to measure sexual objectification and its correlates in music videos. The analysis compared sexual objectification across gender and musical genres and it was found that female artists were more sexually objectified, held to rather strict standards in relation to appearance, and were more likely to demonstrate behaviour on the side of sexual allure (Aubrey and Frisby, 2011). Several such examples have been cited to build a case for heteronormative narratives in relation to gender issues and sexuality in literature.

Other than sexual objectification of women, glorification of heterosexual romantic ideals and normalization of heterosexual relationships as the norm, heteronormative narratives often tend to be built around violence in media and aggressive programming. In general, the majority of parents in the West inform researchers in surveys that they are very concerned about the amount of sex and violence in the media, and many believe such content has a real impact on young people's behaviours. Two-thirds of parents reported that they are "very" concerned that children are being exposed to too much inappropriate content in the media, and a substantial proportion think sex (55%) and violence (43%) in the media contribute "a lot" to young people's aggressive behaviour. A majority of parents continue to cite Television as the medium that concerns them the most (32%), but the proportion who name the Internet has increased in recent times (from 16% to 21%) (Rideout, 2007).

Social comparisons and media comparisons lead to the development of body dissatisfaction and body image issues among adolescents and adults, yet this relationship has been relatively unexamined among children (Tatangelo and Ricciardelli, 2015).

Both boys and girls are exposed repeatedly to images that showcase ideal-thin body types in the media. These images of unrealistically thin and attractive women then get etched in the subconscious of children. There is very little research that has examined the impact of these images on boys. However, the effect of exposure to televised thin-ideal images on boys' attitudes toward girls was investigated. These findings suggest that the media may have an indirect impact on girls' body image through the expectations the boys place on them regarding a measure of beauty and appearance (Hargreaves and Tiggemann, 2003).

Wilson (2008) reports that it is quite alarming that the social and emotional experiences of American children too often heavily involve electronic media. Wilson takes a close look at how exposure to screen media affects the development processes of children and their overall wellbeing. She concludes that media influence on children depends more on the type of content that children find attractive rather than on the actual amount of time they spend in front of the screen. Wilson reviews evidence on the connections between media and children's emotions. She points out that "children can learn about the nature and causes of different emotions from watching the emotional experiences of media characters and that they often experience empathy with those characters". Although research on the long-term effects of media exposure on children's emotional development is limited, a great chunk of evidence shows that media exposure can contribute to development of fears and anxieties in children. Wilson suggests that both fictional as well as news broadcast with imagery and stories about violence and aggression can cause lasting emotional upset. However, the themes that cause developmental setbacks to children differ according to a child's age. Wilson also explores the effect of media exposure on social development of children. Wilson (2008) reports strong evidence that shows that violent television programmes contribute to aggressive behaviour in all age groups of children.

A growing body of research also indicates that playing violent video games can have the same harmful effect on children as stories of violence during news broadcasts. There is clear evidence that children's susceptibility to media influence can vary according to their gender, age, how real they perceive the media to be, and the extent of their identification with characters and people on the screen (Wilson, 2008). Electronic media, television in particular, has long been criticized for the potential impact on children. Interestingly, there is literature on the seemingly unique effect of television on children under the age of two years. Research clearly demonstrates that well-designed, age-appropriate educational television can be beneficial to children of preschool age. Studies on infants and toddlers suggest that young children may better understand and learn from real life experiences than from media like video. Moreover, research suggests that exposure to television during the first few years of growth and development may be associated with poor cognitive development. (Kirkorian, et al., 2008).

The literature reviewed so far clearly indicates that media has a multipronged effect on children and their heteronormative narratives in Western countries. If the media is able to initiate and build heteronormative narratives that influence gender issues, sexuality, violence, aggression, poor emotional growth and development and body issues among Western countries, there is reason to speculate the same in India as well! With a globalized world, the content we are exposed to via media is quite similar all across the world!

Heteronormativity has been studied extensively in Western societies, so have been the heteronormative narratives of children. There is a huge lacuna in the area of such studies in the Indian context. I am presenting a few examples that build the case for concentrated efforts in understanding the impact of media on excessive machismo, aggression and violence among children. Of utmost importance is the construction of normative gender roles through children's popular media, including television, mainstream movies, comic books and magazines. A few narratives of lived experiences have been provided below and emanate from close experiences of Heteronormativity in the Indian cultural framework ranging from dominance of the male gender over the other fluid gender roles in the gender continuum.

Most of what is described in this chapter as heteronormative narratives, is a direct experience whether in my personal or professional domains of life and life experiences. I have myself witnessed a great deal of gender discrimination during my growing up years as a result of prominent heteronormative culture. The dominance of the importance of the male child over my existence as a female child had a very scarring and damaging impact on my life. It is this heteronormative belief all across India that is entrenched in deep patriarchy that creates a narrative that the male child is more important than the female child. Such narratives are built into the Indian psyche through several stories and mythological constructs that are coming down generations through oral traditions and family stories; the original media constructs of India!! It is these constructs and narratives that place undue importance on the male child that create a fertile bed for violence for both the male as well as female genders. Children grow up understanding toxic masculinity as the norm and both men and women are sacrificed into the fire of heteronormativity; it engulfs families, communities, social environments like schools, parks, hospitals etc. While, this description may seem like a case for a feminist perspective, the roots of it are solidly and deep rooted in heteronormativity. Heteronormativity in Indian culture is not limited to the idea of specific gender roles,



it places the male child in a higher position as compared to the female child often willing to sacrifice the female child for the male child.

Such a lived experience, especially for the child, does unprecedented damage in the growing years and then later in repetitive patterns of acceptance of the heteronormative patterns throughout their life. Apart from providing the best food, the best available comforts and education or opportunities for the male child; many parents in India even sacrifice their girl child into the gamut of violence, gender bias and severe extenuating circumstances due to unconscious social conditioning. I am describing a few instances from my professional life that illustrate the subtle thread of violence, aggression and narrative of machismo that heteronormativity is constructing in the Indian society for the child.

On a fine January morning in 2013, I landed in Mumbai with great enthusiasm to do a workshop for children at a school in an underserved community. I started my workshop and was thrilled at the immense participation from students. As the workshop progressed, I asked all of them to use their creativity and make something out of colour paper.

Then, I asked them to turn it into a triplet. All of them started reading their poems one by one. One child said

“Look at me, I am strong and tall..  
I have a strong chest and muscles and I will beat you”

I asked the child what inspired him to write the poem and he replied, “heroes in movies are like that”. I took it as a teachable and learning moment and started talking about heroes in reel life vs real life. Soon all the children started listing their parents, postman, milkman, scientists, teacher, doctor, engineer, lawyer, the old man at the end of the street who helps people cross road etc. as heroes instead of the heroes they perceive through media, television and movies. After a while, suddenly the boy rewrote the poem and wanted to share it with everyone:

“Look at me, I am strong and tall,  
Let me know if you cannot reach anything high  
I will help you”

It was amazing how the child changed his narrative, his thought process and perspective! I wish for him to be able to turn every negative into positive, to turn every hurdle into opportunity, to turn sadness and fear into joy! While, the prominent social conditioning was enculturating the child to engage in violence as a show of machismo and masculinity; it was also possible for the child to turn around and herein lies hope for the future!

While, reading has been known to be a major factor in enculturation in the West, children in India hardly read any books other than the compiled text books. Media like movies, games on gadgets are more predominant sources for enculturation in India particularly among the poor. Dominant ideas about excessive machismo and aggression are absorbed by children at every turn. Children are engaged in playing games on gadgets that normalize their perception about being forceful, violent and to show aggression on groups and people weaker than them. Young boys are naturally attracted to guns, machines

and vehicles and many games on gadgets use these to anchor children in violent behaviour through eventualities where the child is required to kill the opponent often using violence and aggression.

While, the above case may be a caricature for boys, media influence on girls is not left behind by any means! Girls are overly influenced by what can be called 'The Princess syndrome'. A few years ago, exposure to Disney princess stories was a luxury available only to the wealthy. However, with the advent of television in every home, children in all socio-economic strata are now able to access fantasy stories marketed by international production houses like Disney as well as homemade take offs involving animations about princesses. Young girls often emulate these characters and try to dress like them and behave like them. If the character has temper tantrums, then young girls develop the same traits in their effort to imitate these characters.

Heteronormativity is prevalent and impacts both the male and female children equally. I was quite alarmed in the summer of 2015; I was conducting a summer camp for children in the age groups of 3-9 years of age and several children from affluent and upper middle-class families had registered their children. It was a group of about 28 children with a 1:1 ratio distributed between boys and girls. Young girls ranging from ages 3-9 constantly played Princess games and told each other how pretty their dresses were, wore tiaras with elaborate dresses to imitate the princesses they were watching on television. They even created games where they would fall down after a series of steps and then the boys were instructed to come and save them! While this seems like harmless child play, there is a strong possibility that both the sets of children to include the boys and girls can be conditioned on gender roles through such innocent play. On one hand, the girls might assume that they are helpless and need a male figure to save them and take the idea with them as they grow up; the boys too might understand that girls and women are to be rescued by men. Thus, leading to further associations of gender specific roles for men and women.

Apart from stereotypical gender roles, it was also noticed that young girls keenly observe characters in fantasies for their attire as well as body proportions and structures. Children cannot differentiate between what they see on a screen and the reality around them. Without an awareness that body proportions are exaggerated in illustrations and animations to create visually appealing torso, children can innocently fall into a trap of illusionary perfection of body image and leading to several other secondary physical and psychological issues. Both young boys and girls can be conditioned with this mind set without exceptions. I myself, have been a sacrifice at the altar of this facet of heteronormative narrative that developed during my childhood when I was body shamed for being "fat" and carried the shame most of my life leading to impairment in decision making and making poor choices in personal life feeling unworthy and inadequate most of the time. While, heteronormativity takes ugly turns with violence, aggression and deep-rooted prejudices with already existent cultural constructs and narratives that are coming down generations; the explosion in technology and gadgets is setting up the platform for the next set of violent incursions that heteronormativity can possibly contribute to!

With the explosion in social media and technology and easy access to gadgets, the means of play also has shifted from proprioceptive sense towards engagement of sensory perception in violent games. The purpose of play has shifted from development of emotion, physical balance, social and communication skills towards distortion of balance and emotional development. Games such as Pubjje are extremely

addictive involving children in violence and aggression. Games that involve children and their perception in violent behaviour lead to development of a psyche that revels in hurtful and violent behaviour. Empathy and compassion that are natural to children are being sacrificed at the altar of technology. Technology is a tool and violent games on phones and tablets engage children in normalizing violence in daily life. The conditioning that happens through violence through technology is very long lasting, it turns the developmental processes of children into machines like un-empathetic intelligence rather than human-like emotional intelligence.

### Conclusions

Heteronormativity in India is to be looked in great depth as it has its claws into every facet of life. Critical and social perspectives have looked at gender discrimination, stereotypes, gender roles, violence against women, patriarchy in great depth in India and there is much activism prevalent around these areas. However, all of it is rooted in heteronormative narratives and constructs that are deeply entrenched in the Indian psyche and damage children greatly, often disseminating the same violent, gender biased narratives generation after generation. Much needs to be done first, to understand the nature of such heteronormativity and its roots, the reasons for its prevalence even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Mere activism-oriented approach that shuns its social evils is not going to be enough to mitigate the effects of hatred, deeply entrenched violence and patterns of subjugation of one gender over the other.

Children are exposed to conditioning at all the four levels of Bronfrenbrenner's model during their growing years. The narratives of dominance of the male child, gender roles, stereotypes, violence, aggression, toxic masculinity, body image issues, shame, anger, fear and everything that can dismantle an environment that is required for healthy growth and development of children need to be understood in great depth! Hardly any work has been done to understand the nature of fear, anger, resentment that has built up over centuries in creating a culture that does not provide equal opportunities to all children. It is imperative to delve deeper and dig further into the cultural history of India and identify tipping points that led to the development of such a narrative that damages everyone!

Male children grow up with illusions of supremacy, immense sense of entitlement that takes the shape of violent behaviour, toxic masculinity, and often atrocities on perceived weaker populations whether it is on the basis of caste, creed, religion or just gender and age. There is great merit in continuing a probe to understand the social and cultural conditions that have created such catastrophic and devastating outcomes for society at large. No one has emerged supreme in this game of heteronormativity; it has damaged perception, way of life, quality of life as both genders are growing up lopsided, unable to complement each other and create a society that works on complementarity of the male and female genders.

With the advent of technology, there has been a shift in power structure in society. Women have been able to emerge as role models for children of both genders in pursuing careers and having successful lives. As the media influence in India is now deeply entrenched in mass media such as movies, games and gadgets, there needs to be further movement towards a shift from age-old paradigms of heteronormativity towards gender sensitisation and creating a plane for social reconstruction. Programs to promote equity in gender attitudes need to move beyond a focus on individuals and target their interpersonal relationships and wider social environments. Programs in media that show equitable situations and life situations need to start

early and be tailored to the unique needs of sub-populations of boys and girls (Kågesten et al.,2016) for a change in social structure, cultural context and larger social consciousness.

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