The Cultural Dimensions of Publicly Funded Children's Shows

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Chapter 1 -- Introduction

"What do you do with the mad that you feel?" Fred Rogers asks the young viewers of his program, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, as quoted by Rogers to the United States Senate in 1969 (American Rhetoric, 2021). One minute later, Rogers had secured $20 million in public funding for public broadcasting. That moment led to decades of growth in educational programming around the world, and with it, a unique look into the cultural values of other nations.

Television was primed for explosive growth in 1941 when the FCC approved the airing of advertisements, but the U.S. soon joined World War II, immobilizing most non-war efforts (Levin & Hines, 2003). As the world recovered, the U.S. began to panic over education, "spawned then by the alleged deterioration in the ability of American society to compete with the technological and scientific developments of post-World-War II industrialized countries" (Lemish, 2015, p. 83). In the 1950s, Philadelphia began to experiment with televised lectures broadcast to classrooms to some success – some teachers even reported learning enough to lead drills and follow-ups with students (Levin & Hines, 2003).

As television spread across the U.S., local public broadcast stations began to pop up, eventually coming together to form PBS, the Public Broadcast Service, in 1969. While *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* was popular, PBS's first breakout hit was *Sesame Street*, produced a year later by the Children's Television Workshop (CTW), a team of researchers and designers driven by data. Rogers focused on the emotional development of children while *Sesame Street* folded pro-social behavior into its more general "kindergarten readiness" curriculum. These two shows built the foundation for story-driven morality shows and learning-driven preschool shows.

By the turn of the century, PBS shows led in global reach; more than 120 million children in 140 countries watched *Sesame Street*, with 20 of those countries co-producing segments on local priorities,

such as the conflict in the Middle East and being born with HIV/AIDS. Other countries have an inherent

fear of globalization or Americanization of their culture, especially with media that targets children, but

local participation in *Sesame Street* production keeps local cultures alive in the show. (Lemish, 2015)

Those concerns are not unfounded. One hundred years of media theory interrogates television's

influence over viewers, and children still lack the developmental protections adults have against

messaging. Children uncover the illusions of television, such as actors and scripted situations, slowly

before ages six-to-eight (Lemish, 2015). Because of this, children are quite susceptible to marketing and

have few natural resistances to advertisements. When Rogers died in 2003, he was lauded as one of the

few creators who did not sell merchandise for his show (*The Christian Science Monitor*, cited in Levin &

Hines, 2003). At that same time, *Sesame Street* brought in $7.5 million a year through merchandise, half

of its production budget. Today, however, the animated series starring Rogers' characters, *Daniel Tiger's*

Neighborhood, has a robust line of merchandise.

Rogers' fight for funding was far from over that one day in the Senate. PBS is currently funded

through a mix of public funding, partnerships, donations, merchandising, licensing, and "viewers like

you," as the network likes to remind its audience. Levin & Hines saw parallels to public school debates

under Republican U.S. presidents, writing:

> Both public broadcasting and public schooling have faced charges of diminished legitimacy as
>
> agents of the public interest, generating conservative critiques accompanied by new challenges
>
> to public funding and trust, as well as a shifting focus toward privatization and corporate
>
> sponsorship. (2003)

The "culture wars," they argue, tarnished public trust in an otherwise successful institution, and

the conservative drive to privatize the public services of the government leads to this funding gap for

public broadcast. Still, with some public funding and no shareholders for whom to chase profits, PBS can be assumed to act in what it believes to be the public interest.

While all media reflects and shapes the culture surrounding it, commercial products do naturally intend to make a profit. Commercial media, such as Disney's, for example, deliver massive profits to shareholders through brand synergy. Disney films, television programs, theme parks, and merchandise all fuel each other in a never-ending cycle. In fact, Disney Channel does not even accept outside advertising, instead running ads for its own products or tailor-crafted, Disney Channel-exclusive ads of partners. The merits of capitalism are far outside the scope of this paper, and people do seem to enjoy Disney products, but one cannot argue against Disney putting customer appeasement before public good; any public good done by such a corporation is simply an inevitable response to consumer demand for certain products sharing certain values.

Research Question

Where all these meet lies the topic of this paper. By analyzing the moral lessons of educational programs from the national broadcasting stations of different countries, one can glean what cultural values being taught are considered to be in the public interest of a nation. The world gets a bit smaller each time a new user joins the global internet, and the children of today will grow up to work, live, and connect in a completely connected world. Cross-cultural communication practices, such as Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions model, used as the basis of this research, will prove invaluable to future generations interacting with members of other cultures.

Children are also more likely to come across these media now as the international market takes many of these shows worldwide; in a twist, globalization globalizes back, and all the shows selected are available in English on popular streaming services in the U.S. Some may see it as in the public interest to consider how these international shows align with their own cultural values. The focus of this research,

however, will be on decoding the messages of these modern-day morality plays to discover what constitutes public-interest programing in these countries.

In short, the purpose of this research is to examine how closely the cultural values taught in publicly funded children's shows around the world align with those of their home countries' greater populations.

Limitations

This research was conducted over one semester of a graduate-level course by a single author, so representative decisions had to be made due to the limitations. While quantitative research can more easily be conducted on programs with a school-readiness focus through simple knowledge tests, those shows lack the focus on pro-social behavior of morality shows, leaving less material to discuss in terms of values; whether the cultural values around learning numbers and shapes vary greatly among nations is a topic for another researcher. The timeline and scope of this project also prevent the Institutional Review Board approval required for human research subjects.

Six shows were selected based on their geographic origins, local politics, recent releases, and official availability in English. They are:

- *Arthur*, an imaginative aardvark and his classmates learn life lessons in a long-running PBS show (English-speaking U.S.)

- *Bluey*, a family of anthropomorphized dogs from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (English-speaking non-U.S.)

- *PJ Masks*, a superhero show from France 5 (European liberal)

- *Masha and the Bear*, reimagined adventures of old Russian folklore characters from Russia-1 (European concentrated power)

- *Boonie Bears*, Bears confront a logger on this show that aired on Central China Television (Asian communist)

- *Bread Barbershop*, about a barbershop for talking bread that aired on the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) (Asian capitalist)

These series' availability in English already filters them once for cultural relevancy through the global market. Undoubtedly fascinating examples without English releases include *Butt Detective* from The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) about a sophisticated detective with a butt for a face and Kuwait TV's *Block 13*, a South Park look-a-like aimed at children. However, to learn Japanese and Arabic is outside the scope of this paper.

Five episodes of each series were randomly selected by a computer and analyzed by the author. Episodes of *Arthur*, due to its longevity, were limited to premier dates of 2010 and beyond.

Chapter 2 -- Literature Review

Before diving into the shows, it would be prudent to examine how media shapes the viewer, especially young viewers. In the field of communication, scholarship agrees viewers confront and process the media they interact with, though debate over the manner and extent is, essentially, the entirety of the field. Still, a look at some prominent theories should bring an understanding of media's power as a change agent in viewers and society. However, these theories often consider news or other programs for adult viewers – Severin & Tankard's *Communication Theories*, an oft-cited reference textbook, leaves any form of the word "children" out of its 12-page index – so the author will ponder reframings in the context of young viewers, followed by an examination of child-centric research.

Communication Theory

The Bullet Theory, an early model built in response to the overwhelming power of propaganda in World War I, posits that media messaging has a direct and immediate effect on receivers. It is sometimes called the "hypodermic needle theory," which evokes the image of a way of thinking being forcefully injected into the viewer's brain. Although rudimentary, the theory is a reasonable response to the destruction of World War I in the face of new mass media emerging. (Severin & Tankard, 1997)

Bullet Theory may not leave room for more nuanced models for today's adults, especially after a century of practice in media literacy, but media skepticism does not seem innate. "As they mature, children's perception of television as a 'magic window' is gradually replaced by a growing understanding that television reality is not quite like the everyday reality in which they live," a journey that last until around eight years old (Lemish, 2015, p. 51). With this context, Bullet Theory may have some merit when discussing media targeted to hyper-receptive, very young children.

Perhaps, as Marshall McLuhan proposed, the Medium is the Message; that is, the delivery method is just as if not more important than the actual content (1964), the idea of television or educational programing as a teacher is a more important research topic than the content analysis present in this paper.

On the other hand, Stuart Hall proposes his Encoding/Decoding model, applicable regardless of medium. In order to convey something as abstract as a thought, senders must use assumptions about the receiver, including about prior knowledge, association with certain words, and a familiarity with technical shorthand. In television, encoders craft a story hoping to convey their message to the audience. The audience decodes the message based on past experiences from one of three positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional. Members with a dominant-hegemonic position understand the media at face value, exactly as the encoder assumed. A negotiated position is when the viewer does decode the message as intended but does not fully accept the message, such as a decoder receiving a message about the national interest that may conflict with their personal interest. An oppositional position decodes the message in a contrary way, such as viewing messages about the national interest as instead about "class interest." (1980)

Psych-rock Japanese singer Shintaro Sakamoto plays with this concept in the song "You Can Be A Robot, Too." It seems to be an upbeat children's song about how great it is to insert a microchip into your brain to become a robot but is actually about a terrifying nightmare in which turning into a robot is unpleasant, and the cheerful children's choir has been completely brainwashed by some social force. Although the message is cheery and positive, Sakamoto calls it a "frightening worldview" (Hilton, 2014). Here, the message is supposed to be received from an oppositional position.

As children develop, they may grapple with media messages. While they may be receptive, decoding relies on prior experience, and children may not yet understand the language of film, such as

the shot angles or unrealistic pacing experienced general audiences take for granted. With this in mind, encoders must take great care in crafting clear messages for children. (Lemish, 2015)

The Social Learning theory most benefits from clear messages. While Reinforcement theory says behavior is learned through pattern recognition of punishments and rewards, Social Learning theory is based in imitation. Humans can learn by observing others, even in media. (Severin & Tankard, 1997)

Founding editor of the *Journal of Children and Media* and Interim Dean of the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University – New Brunswick Dafna Lemish writes:

[S]creen characters provide children with the raw materials with which to learn, grow, experience, feel, strengthen their inner world and self-image, and just deal with everyday life. […] Often the child-viewer shares the same perspective as a television character they admire, and lives "through" the same experiences with the character. In this way the character serves to reaffirm the child's sense of self-worth; manifest similar beliefs, attitudes, and worldview; and serve as a role model for possible suitable (or unsuitable) behaviors in situations relevant to his or her life. (2015, p. 51)

Studies consistently link at least short-term behavioral changes to programs viewed. In one study, children were likely to mimic aggressive or friendly behavior toward a clown after watching a video of another child doing the same. Another eased preschoolers' dog-phobia with videos of dogs playing with children. After an episode of Power Rangers, children were observed to be seven times more likely to play aggressively, mostly weighted by the boys in the group play-fighting in Power Rangers' martial arts-style. (Gunter & Gunter, 2020)

The final theory is the Agenda Setting theory. "The agenda-setting function of the media refers to the media's capability, through repeated news coverage, of raising the importance of an issue in the public's mind. (Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 249)" Who exactly sets this agenda has no concrete answer,

but thought leaders, such as U.S. presidents, are given as examples; notably, an increase in drug coverage during President Bush Sr.'s war on drugs and a content analysis on President Nixon's State of the Union and news on the addressed issues in the weeks before and after his speech. However, a similar study of President Carter's State of the Union suggested the media was setting the agenda for the President instead. Other examples include special interest groups, competing media sources, and the general capitalist ideology of the U.S. (Severin & Tankard, 1997)

The Agenda Setting theory is useful in considering what lessons being taught are in the public interest of a culture. The curriculum of these shows must come from somewhere, whether that is local leaders, societal attitudes, or academic research, and finding the differences between what is taught in these shows and measured cultural sentiments is the aim of this research.

Children and Media

The American Academy of Pediatrics urges caution when allowing children screentime, recommending no screentime (other than video calls) for children under 18 months and only up to one hour of high-quality programming with a caretaker until 5 years old (Council on Communications and Media et al., 2016), although children spend an average of three to four hours watching television each day (Gunter & Gunter, 2020). Lemish aggregated the following guidelines as a definition of "quality media":

- Provide children with media content prepared especially for them without taking advantage of them; content that entertains but at the same time tries to advance children physically, mentally, and socially.
- Allow children to hear, see and express themselves, their culture, their language and their life experiences through their media in ways that affirm their personal identity, community, and place.

- Encourage awareness and appreciation of other cultures as well as the child's own.

- Offer a variety of genres and content and not just reproduce texts according to a successful formula.

- Deliver media content to children at times and through technologies that are accessible to them.

- Recognize differences between children that are a result of their cognitive and emotional development, talents, interests, personality characteristics, interpersonal relationships, and social environment.

- Take steps to protect and encourage content that reflects local and marginalized cultures and those with minority languages and needs.

- Avoid unnecessary presentation of violence, sex, and racism.

(2015, pp. 209-210)

The advice on co-viewing these programs is rooted in infant attachment to their mothers and the irreplaceable benefits of interaction with parents (Gunter & Gunter, 2020). Babies do not even pay television much attention until 30 months of age. "Younger than that age, when children entered the viewing room, they generally sat on the floor facing their mother with their backs to the TV. They would play with toys, occasionally twisting around to glance at the TV." (Anderson, 2005)

Most research targets shows for this age range, especially *Sesame Street*, the subject of more research than "any other television program or series in the entire history of the medium. (Mielke, 2014)." *Sesame Street*'s development was rooted in research. CTW hoped to reach children from underserved communities with economic and social constraints that kept them from succeeding in early school years. The five goals of its curriculum were: social, moral, and affective development; language

and reading; mathematical and numerical skills; reasoning and problem solving; and perception.

Together, these factors were meant to set students up for long-term success in school. (Mielke, 2014)

> Children who watch Sesame Street enter school not only with good academic skills, but also
> with a positive attitude toward education. As a result, teachers consider them bright and well-
> behaved, expect high levels of achievement, place them in advanced groups, and give them
> positive feedback. Teachers may be especially responsive to positive classroom behavior and
> academic skills in young boys. Early school success, in turn, fosters better learning and greater
> enthusiasm about school, leading to a trajectory of long-term achievement. (Huston et al., 2014)

Even CTW studies in *Sesame Street*'s earliest years showed benefits, although its explosive

popularity gave researchers trouble finding subjects who did not watch the show. They instead sorted

participants, aged 3-5, from heavy to light viewers. 64% of the heaviest viewers could do things like

naming shapes while only 15% of the lightest viewers could. Notably, scores increased as viewing

increased, especially on frequently covered topics such as letters, regardless of whether they watched at

home or at school with a teacher. Viewing of non-educational content was not found to contribute to an

increased vocabulary (Mielke, 2014)

The social aspects of media have been shown to have substantial impact on children's attitudes

toward race, gender, and aggression. Early *Sesame Street* studies found an increase in cooperation and a

general decrease in aggressive behavior, especially when the simulated situation closely matched that of

the viewed episode (Mielke, 2014). The results found an increased effect in boys who, "[i]n American

society, […] are socialized to be active and aggressive while girls are encouraged to be compliant and

responsive to adults (Huston et al., 2014)."

Children gravitate toward characters of the same gender, but representation is often lacking.

Professions portrayed in media tend to stick to established gender norms, such as male doctors and

female nurses, and heavy viewers were found to hold stronger stereotyped beliefs on gender roles. These views are more malleable in younger viewers: an experiment showed elementary school students a show in which the mother worked and the father stayed at home, which immediately led to a change in perception of each gender's domestic duties. A repeat of the experiment with middle schoolers and career videos, modified between groups to highlight either traditional or non-traditional genders in different jobs, yielded no change in perceptions. (Gunter & Gunter, 2020)

Media can have a significant impact in how young viewers perceive people of other races, especially if they have little interaction with people of those races in real life. Cartoons featuring Black characters in either a positive or negative light furthered those stereotypes in viewers, and Black children are more likely to hold white characters as role models than Black characters, even in stories where the Black character had been rewarded for a behavior and the white character had been punished. Children were more likely to choose playmates of other races after watching *Sesame Street* segments with a diverse cast. (Gunter & Gunter, 2020)

Prosocial behavior was more pronounced in 3-5-year-old viewers of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* than of *Sesame Street*, unless the *Sesame Street* viewer was behind in that development beforehand (Gunter & Gunter, 2020). These examples illustrate the importance of shows with a focus on interpersonal, emotional, and moral development, a genre that does not receive the same level of study as school-ready shows such as *Sesame Street*. Lemish writes:

> Media are a central source for developing moral judgment as they present many tales about human conduct. For example, understanding the motivations for violent behaviors and their implications for victims is crucial in application of moral judgment by viewers. […] The way children judge television characters and their behaviors is central to the development of their understanding. (2015, p. 57)

Cultural Dimensions

Values vary greatly among countries, cultures, and individuals. Geert Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others (2011)." Hofstede began his work in intercultural communication, now called the Cultural Dimensions model, in the 1970s at IBM. He discovered trends in the data of surveyed employees from around the world and was able to replicate these results with groups outside the company. These categories later grew to six, defined with examples by Hofstede below: (Hofstede, 2011)

1. Power Distance, related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality.

Table 1

Power Distance; as exampled in Hofstede, 2014.

Small Power Distance	Large Power Distance
Use of power should be legitimate and is subject to criteria of good and evil	Power is a basic fact of society antedating good or evil: its legitimacy is irrelevant
Parents treat children as equals	Parents teach children obedience
Older people are neither respected nor feared	Older people are both respected and feared
Student-centered education	Teacher-centered education
Hierarchy means inequality of roles, established for convenience	Hierarchy means existential inequality
Subordinates expect to be consulted	Subordinates expect to be told what to do
Pluralist governments based on majority vote and changed peacefully	Autocratic governments based on co-optation and changed by revolution
Corruption rare; scandals end political careers	Corruption frequent; scandals are covered up
Income distribution in society rather even	Income distribution in society very uneven
Religions stressing equality of believers	Religions with a hierarchy of priests

2. Uncertainty Avoidance, related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an

    unknown future.

Table 2

Uncertainty Avoidance; as exampled in Hofstede, 2014.

Weak Uncertainty Avoidance	Strong Uncertainty Avoidance
The uncertainty inherent in life is accepted and each day is taken as it comes	The uncertainty inherent in life is felt as a continuous threat that must be fought
Ease, lower stress, self-control, low anxiety	Higher stress, emotionality, anxiety, neuroticism
Higher scores on subjective health and wellbeing	Lower scores on subjective health and well-being
Tolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is curious	Intolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is dangerous
Comfortable with ambiguity and chaos	Need for clarity and structure
Teachers may say "I don't know"	Teachers supposed to have all the answers
Changing jobs no problem	Staying in jobs even if disliked
Dislike of rules - written or unwritten	Emotional need for rules – even if not obeyed
In politics, citizens feel and are seen as competent towards authorities	In politics, citizens feel and are seen as incompetent towards authorities
In religion, philosophy and science: relativism and empiricism	In religion, philosophy and science: belief in ultimate truths and grand theories

3. Individualism versus Collectivism, related to the integration of individuals into primary

    groups.

Table 3

Individualism vs.,Collectivism; as exampled in Hofstede, 2014.

Individualism	Collectivism
Everyone is supposed to take care of him- or herself and his or her immediate family only	People are born into extended families or clans which protect them in exchange for loyalty
"I" – consciousness	"We" –consciousness
Right of privacy	Stress on belonging
Speaking one's mind is healthy	Harmony should always be maintained

Others classified as individuals	Others classified as in-group or out-group
Personal opinion expected: one person one vote	Opinions and votes predetermined by in-group
Transgression of norms leads to guilt feelings	Transgression of norms leads to shame feelings
Languages in which the word "I" is indispensable	Languages in which the word "I" is avoided
Purpose of education is learning how to learn	Purpose of education is learning how to do
Task prevails over relationship	Relationship prevails over task

4. Masculinity versus Femininity, related to the division of emotional roles between

    women and men.

Table 4

Masculinity vs. Femininity; as exampled in Hofstede, 2014.

Femininity	Masculinity
Minimum emotional and social role differentiation between the genders	Maximum emotional and social role differentiation between the genders
Men and women should be modest and caring	Men should be and women may be assertive and ambitious
Balance between family and work	Work prevails over family
Sympathy for the weak	Admiration for the strong
Both fathers and mothers deal with facts and feelings	Fathers deal with facts, mothers with feelings
Both boys and girls may cry but neither should fight	Girls cry, boys don't; boys should fight back, girls shouldn't fight
Mothers decide on number of children	Fathers decide on family size
Many women in elected political positions	Few women in elected political positions
Religion focuses on fellow human beings	Religion focuses on God or gods
Matter-of-fact attitudes about sexuality; sex is a way of relating	Moralistic attitudes about sexuality; sex is a way of performing

5. Long Term versus Short Term Orientation, related to the choice of focus for people's

    efforts: the future or the present and past.

Table 5

Long Term vs. Short Term Orientation; as exampled in Hofstede, 2014.

Short-Term Orientation	Long-Term Orientation
Most important events in life occurred in the past or take place now	Most important events in life will occur in the future
Personal steadiness and stability: a good person is always the same	A good person adapts to the circumstances
There are universal guidelines about what is good and evil	What is good and evil depends upon the circumstances
Traditions are sacrosanct	Traditions are adaptable to changed circumstances
Family life guided by imperatives	Family life guided by shared tasks
Supposed to be proud of one's country	Trying to learn from other countries
Service to others is an important goal	Thrift and perseverance are important goals
Social spending and consumption	Large savings quote, funds available for investment
Students attribute success and failure to luck	Students attribute success to effort and failure to lack of effort
Slow or no economic growth of poor countries	Fast economic growth of countries up till a level of prosperity

6. Indulgence versus Restraint, related to the gratification versus control of basic human

   desires related to enjoying life

Table 6

Indulgence vs. Restrained; as exampled in Hofstede, 2014.

Indulgence	Restrained
Higher percentage of people declaring themselves very happy	Fewer very happy people
A perception of personal life control	A perception of helplessness: what happens to me is not my own doing
Freedom of speech seen as important	Freedom of speech is not a primary concern
Higher importance of leisure	Lower importance of leisure
More likely to remember positive emotions	Less likely to remember positive emotions

In countries with educated populations, higher birthrates	In countries with educated populations, lower birthrates
More people actively involved in sports	Fewer people actively involved in sports
In countries with enough food, higher percentages of obese people	In countries with enough food, fewer obese people
In wealthy countries, lenient sexual norms	In wealthy countries, stricter sexual norms
Maintaining order in the nation is not given a high priority	Higher number of police officers per 100,000 population

Hofstede's most recent data on the seven countries covered in this paper, published in 2015:

Table 7

Cultural Data; Hofstede's data on the six cultural dimensions of the seven countries in this study.

Country	Power Distance	Individualism vs. Collectivism	Masculinity vs. Femininity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation	Indulgence vs. Restrained
Australia	38	90	61	51	21	71
China	80	20	66	30	87	24
France	68	71	43	86	63	48
Great Britain	35	89	66	35	51	69
South Korea	60	18	39	85	100	29
Russia	93	39	36	95	81	20
U.S.A.	40	91	62	46	26	68

Chapter 3 -- Methodology

The goal of this research is to look for differences in the values taught by popular children's shows and the values held by the greater population of the originating countries. To accomplish this, six shows were selected from the national broadcasters of seven countries. As stated above, the six shows were selected based on their geographic origins, local politics, recent releases, and official availability in English. Five episodes of each, randomly selected by a computer, were analyzed by the author for major moral lessons, episode themes, interpersonal interactions, and character traits. These were then compared against Hofstede's example list for the Cultural Dimensions model and coded to assign a score.

Hofstede provides twenty examples for each cultural dimension, ten for each end of the scale (2014), also listed above, and these were printed on a single sheet for the coder to reference during content analysis. Shows were cycled to prevent recall contamination; after an episode of *Bluey*, the coder did not see another episode of *Bluey* until after seeing an episode of each other show, for example. After each episode, the coder compared Hofstede's examples to notes taken while viewing, then assigned a score from 1-4 for each cultural dimension. Scores of 1 and 4 aligned strongly to one side of the example list while scores of 2 and 3 aligned somewhat with the list or featured elements of the opposing side.

Hofstede's data uses a scale of 1-100 but is an aggregation of a large number of survey participants. This research paper has neither the time nor resources for Institutional Review Board certification or large-scale surveys, so a simplified scale suitable for one coder, the author, was designed. Scores of 1 are roughly equal to scores of 1-25 on Hofstede's scale, scores of 2 to 26-50, scores of 3 to 51-75, and scores of 4 to 76-100. Hofstede's data was converted to this scale by dividing by 100 and multiplying by 4. It must be noted that Hofstede's data for Individualism vs. Collectivism and

Indulgence vs. Restraint were first inverted to align with the scoring system of this paper, where

Collectivism and Restraint are represented by higher scores, whereas Hofstede represents those values

with lower scores. Data with scores with less than 1.1 in difference are seen as in agreement and data

with scores with 1.1 or more in difference are seen as in disagreement.

The purpose of this research is to discover whether the values taught in publicly funded

children's shows from around the world align with the cultural values of their home country's societies.

Chapter 4 -- Results

Listed in this section are the results of the content analysis. Cultural Dimension scores are listed

for each category and each episode, along with the scores from Hofstede's data. Scores with an asterisk

have been inverted to align with this scoring system. Following each chart is a list of examples

supporting each show's average score, summarized from the coder's notes and organized by Cultural

Dimension.

Bluey

Table 8

Bluey scores

Variable	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism vs. Collectivism	Femininity vs. Masculinity	Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation	Indulgence vs. Restrained
25 Taxi	1	2	1	1	3	3
64 Sticky Gecko	1	1	2	2	4	1
117 Pass the Parcel	1	1	2	4	3	2
22 The Pool	1	4	4	2	3	1
82 Library	1	2	2	2	2	3
Average	**1**	**2**	**2.2**	**2.2**	**3**	**2**
AUS	38	51	10*	61	21	29*
Australia - Converted	**1.52**	**2.04**	**0.4**	**2.44**	**0.84**	**1.16**
Great Britain	35	35	11*	66	51	31*
Great Britain - Converted	**1.4**	**1.4**	**0.44**	**2.64**	**2.04**	**1.24**

Examples:

- Power Distance: Children are often met on their level and spoken to as equals. In "Sticky
  Gecko," mother Chili reasons with the children as they attempt to leave in time for a playdate,
  indulging in the children's games, even as her stress levels rise.

- Uncertainty Avoidance: Characters often push back or question the need for rules but
  acknowledge rules exist for a reason. In "*Library*," Stripe tells his child, Muffin, that he can speed
  up for orange traffic lights because he is special, then tells Muffin she is the most special kid in
  the world. Muffin refuses to follow the rules of Bluey and Bingo's pretend library, so they no
  longer want to play together.

- Individualism vs. Collectivism: While each character in *Bluey* is treated by others as an individual
  with rich inner thoughts, relationships and harmony within the greater friend/family group are
  important to the characters. In "*Library*," Chili stresses that "[e]veryone has their own way of
  playing," until Muffin's way of playing ends the game and Stripe has to tell her she's not actually
  the most special kid in the world.

- Femininity vs. Masculinity: The father, Bandit, is quite involved with childcare, though not
  shown to be as competent as Chili. In "The Pool," Bandit ignores Chile's reminder to bring the
  pool bag, calling it "boring stuff"; without the sunscreen and other necessities left behind in the
  bag, the kids do not enjoy the pool at all. This does blur gender roles, but the mother is still
  shown as the more capable caretaker.

- Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation: In "Pass the Parcel," one father dislikes how a party
  game has been updated to give prizes to everyone and suggests one big prize. While the
  children who leave the first few birthday parties without a prize are initially disappointed, the
  children adapt to and embrace the new rules. The tradition is changed and changed back, but

the children do adapt, and the dissenting father is initially seen as evil but later celebrated for

his version of the game.

- Indulgence vs. Restrained: Each episode centered on leisure; the parents did not work and the

   children did not go to school. While characters do come to terms with their own life control,

   such as in "Sticky Gecko" when Chili realizes she does not care if she is late to the park playdate,

   inconveniences caused by others are plentiful, such as when Bandit's pretend taxi in "Taxi"

   keeps picking up new passengers or breaking down on his way to the pretend airport.

PJ Masks

Table 9

PJ Masks scores

Variable	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism vs. Collectivism	Femininity vs. Masculinity	Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation	Indulgence vs. Restrained
68b Super Muscles Show Off	1	2	4	4	3	1
49b The Dragon Gong	1	3	3	3	2	2
120a Luna's Mega Moth	1	3	4	4	3	2
26a Slow Down, Catboy!!	1	3	3	2	3	2
88b Owlette Slips Up	1	2	2	1	4	2
Average	**1**	**2.6**	**3.2**	**2.8**	**3**	**1.8**
France	68	86	29*	43	63	52*
France - Converted	**2.72**	**3.44**	**1.16**	**1.72**	**2.52**	**2.08**

Examples:

- Power Distance: The main heroes are equal with no clear leader, and only villains are seen with an established hierarchy in their ranks, such as Night Ninja and his Ninjalino minions in "The Dragon Gong" and "Slow Down, Catboy!"

- Uncertainty Avoidence: The PJ Masks love structure and are constantly on the lookout for deviants. They find a new threat to the city to fight every night instead of going to bed. Villains celebrate their love of chaos and are punished for it by the end of each episode.

- Individualism vs. Collectivism: The team acts as a unit and is usually punished when one acts alone, such as when Catboy charges ahead of the team in "The Dragon Gong" and is quickly swept aside by Night Ninja's dragon. The in-group is more easily forgiven, such as when Gekko and Armadylan destroy the town in "Super Muscle Show Off" and An Yu asks, "What villain could be behind this?" only to drop that line of thinking as soon as she learns the destruction was caused by her friends.

- Femininity vs. Masculinity: While heroes and villains of both genders are treated equally, admiration of strength and assertiveness were common themes. The dragon in "The Dragon Gong" seemed to be a female dragon with incredible power, but that power could only be used to aid a "master," in this case, Night Ninja, a boy. Boy heroes Gekko and Catboy have powers of strength and speed respectively, and girl hero Owlette's power of flight presents as more evasive, thought-out plans.

- Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation: The PJ Masks are quite diverse and often take trips to the museum or elsewhere to learn about other cultures, such as An Yu's temple. They also occasionally team up with villains, such as in "Owlette Slips Up," showing that good and evil depends on the circumstances.

- Indulgence vs. Restrained: All characters are athletic and take control of their lives, but the premise of the show relies on keeping order in the city.

Boonie Bears

Table 10

Boonie Bears scores

Variable	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism vs. Collectivism	Femininity vs. Masculinity	Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation	Indulgence vs. Restrained
481 The Adventurers – Time for a Trap	1	4	4	3	3	2
108 Or Bust – Honey, Honey	3	1	2	4	2	1
295 Spring Into action – Stuck in the Mud	3	4	4	2	4	2
201 Or Bust – Kung Fu Bears	3	4	3	4	3	2
339 Spring Into Action – Vick's Last Days	1	3	4	1	4	1
Average	**2.2**	**3.2**	**3.4**	**2.8**	**3.2**	**1.6**
China	80	30	80*	66	87	76*
China - Converted	**3.2**	**1.2**	**3.2**	**2.64**	**3.48**	**3.04**

Examples:

- Power Distance: Bramble, the younger of the two brother bears, looks up to Briar, his older brother, but Briar does treat Bramble as a partner. Briar has the respect of the other forest creatures, and the two use their strength to protect the forest. In "Kung Fu Bears," Master Xiao Lin, their teacher, puts the bears through humiliatingly harsh training.

- Uncertainty Avoidance: The bears are in a constant battle with Logger Vick in an attempt to preserve the forest. When Vick receives a terminal diagnosis in "Vick's Last Days," he admits he did not like his job and regrets wasting his life.

- Individualism vs. Collectivism: The bears often speak in "we"s: "We have to stay on our guard. We don't know what Rex is planning next" in "Time for a Trap." Animals and humans are split into in-and out-groups, as seen in the bears' trip to the city in "Kung Fu Bears."

- Femininity vs. Masculinity: The bears are quite physically aggressive, even with each other. In "Honey, Honey," they punch and push each other as they fight over honey, and Vick shoots at them with his arsenal of weapons. All the characters in these episodes are male.

- Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation: Good and evil depend on the circumstances in *Boonie Bears*. Vick is often the villain for tormenting the bears, but in "Stuck in the Mud," the two bears act like monsters and torment Vick for fun. Vick has become their close friend by "Time for a Trap."

- Indulgence vs. Restrained: The bears are quite interested in leisure but do protect the order in the forest. In "Vick's Last Days," Vick quits his job and vows to spend the last bit of his life on a leisure activity bucket list.

Masha and the Bear

Table 11

Masha and the Bear scores

Variable	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism vs. Collectivism	Femininity vs. Masculinity	Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation	Indulgence vs. Restrained
4-2c Where All Love to Sing	1	1	1	4	4	3
2-6b Bon Appetit	1	2	2	4	4	1
2-5b Victory Cry	1	2	2	3	3	1
1-6c Little Cousin	2	1	1	3	4	2
1-4a Gone Fishing!	1	1	4	3	3	2
Average	**1.2**	**1.4**	**2.6**	**3.4**	**3.6**	**1.8**
Russia	93	95	61*	36	81	80*
Russia - Converted	**3.72**	**3.8**	**2.44**	**1.44**	**3.24**	**3.2**

Examples:

- Power Distance: Masha treats Bear as a friend and not as the caretaker role he fills. In "Bon Appetit," she makes herself the center of the cooking lesson with her outlandish attempts.

- Uncertainty Avoidance: Masha fears nothing, and Bear takes her chaos in stride. In "Little Cousin," Masha meets Bear's panda cub relative and immediately starts an intensely competitive friendship with him.

- Individualism vs. Collectivism: While Masha is quick to speak her mind, her relationship with Bear prevails over whatever task she's doing incorrectly. In "Gone Fishing!," Masha catches a wish-granting fish that sings a song about sharing your wishes with friends.

- Femininity vs. Masculinity: The other bears in "Victory Cry" have extremely gendered bodies, and Bear faces off in tennis against a big buff bear for a female bear's attention. Bear is injured, and Masha defeats him with her "secret weapon," loud, aggressive grunts with each swing of her racket. She is assertive throughout the episodes.

- Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation: Bear and Masha both adapt to changing circumstances, and Masha has big dreams for the future and a respect for other countries; "Where All Love to Sing" is a musical number about how great Italy is and how badly Masha hopes to become an opera singer.

- Indulgence vs. Restrained: "Gone Fishing!" and "Victory Cry" are both about leisure activities, but "Where All Love to Sing" ends with Masha sad about her current life, wishing to be Italian instead.

Bread Barbershop

Table 12

Bread Barbershop scores

Variable	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism vs. Collectivism	Femininity vs. Masculinity	Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation	Indulgence vs. Restrained
33 Queen's Pet	4	4	3	2	3	2
28 Sushi Tourists	4	4	3	1	4	3
52 Crab or Cracker	2	4	2	3	2	1
31 The Queen's Diet	3	4	1	3	3	3
4 Job Test	3	1	3	2	4	2
Average	**3.2**	**3.4**	**2.4**	**2.2**	**3.2**	**2.2**
South Korea	60	85	82*	39	100	71*
South Korea - Converted	**2.4**	**3.4**	**3.28**	**1.56**	**4**	**2.84**

Examples:

- Power Distance: Master Bread, the barber, is referred to as "sir" by almost everyone. Everyone fears and respects the queen, even Master Bread, though he does stand up to her in the later half of "The Queen's Diet." The characters greatly admire in-world celebrities.

- Uncertainty Avoidance: Characters were often worried, such as when Wilk convinced himself everyone wanted to turn his dog in to claim a reward for a similar-looking dog in "Queen's Pet." Master Bread always has the answers to his customers' problems.

- Individualism vs. Collectivism: Characters have a deep need to belong, such as the sushi in "Sushi Tourists" trying to replace their missing toppings or the family in "Crab or Cracker" trying to discourage their son from trying to live life as a real crab.

- Femininity vs. Masculinity: Master Bread and Wilk, both male, both shed tears in these episodes, and female cashier Choco always had a cool demeanor. Both male and female characters place a high importance on their appearance.

- Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation: Master Bread can adapt to any situation and finds Wilk's charm and ambition strong enough to overcome his clumsiness in "Job Test." In "Sushi Tourists," the tourists return home with candy replicas of their fish toppings and start a trend back home. "Crab or Cracker" ended with a history lesson on youtiao, a fried dough snack from China.

- Indulgence vs. Restrained: Characters usually come to Master Bread for help instead of solving their own problems. Master Bread, Wilk, and Choco enjoy their jobs but did not take leisure time in these episodes. Every character is made of food, but the queen's rapid weight gain in "The Queen's Diet" is shamed through dialogue and narrative.

Arthur

Table 13

Arthur scores

Variable	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism vs. Collectivism	Femininity vs. Masculinity	Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation	Indulgence vs. Restrained
17-5b Kidonia	3	4	1	3	1	3
17-7a Pets and Pests	1	1	1	2	2	3
22-3a Muffy's House Guests	2	2	1	1	3	3
17-2a Adventures in Budylon	1	1	1	2	4	2
20-1b Arthur and the Whole Truth	2	2	1	3	4	1
Average	**1.8**	**2**	**1**	**2.2**	**2.8**	**2.4**
USA	40	46	9*	62	26	32*
USA - Converted	**1.6**	**1.84**	**0.36**	**2.48**	**1.04**	**1.28**

Examples:

- Power Distance: Arthur sometimes talks back to his parents and has nightmares about the amount of homework his teacher, Mr. Ratburn, assigns. Muffy is quite wealthy and employs a full-time butler but still attends public school. In "Kidonia," corruption, in-fighting, and an inequality of wealth lead to the downfall of the anarchist government the children establish in the treehouse to protest chores.

- Uncertainty Avoidance: Arthur's family lives in fear of a mouse in "Pets and Pests," but the family dog, a friend's cat, and the neighbor's rat learn to overcome their differences and come to an understanding with the mouse.

- Individualism vs. Collectivism: Arthur's imagination is wild, and he has many flaws, but he is only able to overcome them by speaking his mind. In "Arthur and the Whole Truth," he accuses his best friend, Buster, of always agreeing with him. When Buster starts to give honest opinions, Arthur gets offended before learning that his friendship is more important than his feelings and begins to value Buster's differing opinions.

- Femininity vs. Masculinity: Arthur's parents both care for the children and do housework. Francine is often seen playing sports with the boys, but in "Kidonia," she renounces her citizenship because of Buster's smelly socks. In "Muffy's House Guests," Muffy uses an extravagant dollhouse as a bird trap and does not take a liking to the rare falcons on her balcony until she sees how cute the chicks are.

- Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation: In "Arthur and the Whole Truth," Arthur admits the "C" grade on his homework was due to a lack of effort. Arthur is stopped multiple times in "Kidonia" by family tasks, prompting his failed secession from the U.S. In "Adventures in Budylon," the characters adapt and persevere through a storm while camping in the yard.

- Indulgence vs. Restrained: Characters are quite involved in sports, but Arthur's leisure time is often interrupted by chores or homework. "Kidonia" and "Pets and Pests" both have minor plot points using law enforcement to maintain order.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicate that publicly funded children's programs may be a good indicator of a country's cultural attitudes with 29, more than two-thirds, of the 42 scores in agreement with Hofstede's data. Interestingly, South Korea and Bread Barbershop were in agreement on all six categories. What the 13 in disagreement say about a country cannot be determined with this research and may have many explanations.

As children develop a sense of self, France and Russia may find it advantageous to emphasize the agency of young characters over the larger power distances present is general society. The teamwork and sharing aspects of collectivism may be important messages for children to learn in Australia, Great Britain, and France, all highly individualistic societies.

Long-term national interests could be at play, too; Russia and China could promote an increase in indulgence as a way to grow middle-class lifestyles. The United States may be promoting restraint and a long-term orientation to slow social spending and promote saving and investment. These could be examples of the Agenda-Setting Theory in which cultural leaders set the tone for the rest of the media.

The explanation could be Americanism as well. The eight scores in disagreement from non-English speaking governments all pull in the direction of the United States' scores. American educational programs, such as Sesame Street, set the global standards for children's media, and American attitudes may have bled into the very foundation of the medium. Alternatively, their translation into English may have introduced some form of cultural bias into the programs.

Lastly, the examples Hofstede provided for each dimension may not have been enough to correctly categorize all character interactions. Masha is assertive and a bit violent as a character, traits usually associated with male characters and coded under Masculinity. However, she defied gender

stereotypes with her aggressive behavior. Where a female character embracing strong male traits fall on the spectrum is unclear.

Recommendations

This research does justify the use of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions as a framework to study media, but future researchers should develop a custom rubric more tailored to interpersonal interactions in media. Translators and localizers should also be exposed to Intercultural Communication theory as part of their language study to be better able to justify the whys of their decisions. Writers must consider the goals of the programs and keep cultural values in mind.

This research leaves open a multitude of opportunities for future research. Shows coded this way over time could be compared to Hofstede's data over time to look for concurrent trends in shifting scores. This method of coding could be used to evaluate any form of media, such as movies, books, or news programs. Viewers of these shows could be surveyed on cultural attitudes over time and compared to subjects who did not watch these shows.

Conclusion

People and media shape each other, but that dynamic is imbalanced against children. Although the APA recommends children watch little to no television, the average child spends hours a day in front of the screen. High-quality programs such as Sesame Street span the globe, often with aid from local governments, and these shows influence children at crucial points in their development.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions model is a somewhat reliable indicator when applied to publicly funded children's media of a country, but the meaning of deviations is still unclear. An adapted model tailored to media could help researchers better uncover the cultural values in media, both commercial and public, for audiences of all ages.

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