

# ***Analysis on the Enlightenment Effect of Sesame Street on Children's Personality Exploration and Self-identity***

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**Abstract:** In recent years, with the progress of social economy and the development of education, children's mental health has increasingly become the focus of attention. As an important medium of children's education, TV programs are very popular with children, and have a profound significance in the shaping of children's health. American television program *Sesame Street* as a popular children's program, from the plot content, role setting, theme selection, present form, etc., conforms to the preschool children's acceptance preferences, and successfully utilizes the medium for the key period of children's mental development, accurately grasps the mental health characteristics of preschool children's love of imitation. The program plays a good enlightening role in guiding children to discover their own personality and construct the self identity. The concept of "personality exploration and self-identity" is related to "self". In the pursuit of personality and self-positioning, children are guided to establish self-awareness, cultivate self-management ability and self-respect feelings. This paper mainly analyzes the enlightenment effect of *Sesame Street* on children's personality exploration and self-identity. The program promotes children to establish confidence, form self-identity, constitute the supporting conditions of mental health, for children to lay a solid foundation, and promote the formation of children's mental health and sound personality. At the same time, as a successful TV program that is deeply loved by children and has the significance of health education, it provides examples and references for creating more high-quality children's TV programs.

**Keywords:** *Sesame Street*, children's personality, self-identity, enlightenment education.

## **1. Introduction**

According to a social survey, 64.2% of children in Beijing watch TV every day, 19.5% often watch TV (3-6 days a week) and only 1% do not watch TV [1]. It can be seen that children use TV as a media with high frequency and high preference. Based on children's love for TV programs, many countries have launched children's channels and children's programs, and *Sesame Street* is a representative of many excellent children's programs.

Preschoolers are a critical period for children's mental development. Given the fact that preschoolers at home enjoy watching TV, the producers of *Sesame Street* came up with the idea of using lively and interesting TV programs as a means of education [2]. Adults are rarely seen in *Sesame Street*, which is different from other children's program. Children are the main characters in the programs. The characters in the show display their childlike innocence, without worrying about

adult's scolding and teaching, and they grow spontaneously and live happily. There is no too much preaching, no too much competition and knowledge taught in the program [3]. The creator accurately grasps children's nature, acceptance degree and the proportion of education.

Beijing Normal University professor Peng Danling and other studies found that children are an active processor when watching TV, and they can consciously adjust and allocate their attention. They always choose to pay attention to the information they can understand, do not pay attention to the information they can not understand [4]. The study argues that the comprehensibility of TV content is the main factor determining children's TV attention, and that the content of the program influences children's growth. When children watch TV, they will make their own thinking about TV content, and initially form their self-understanding, consciousness and cognition. These subjective self-consciousness can imperceptibly shape children's personality cognition and constitute the underlying logic of mental health. In addition, the plot and character characteristics in the program will also promote children to establish confidence from the side, form a sense of self-identity, and constitute the supporting conditions for mental health.

This paper takes the children's TV program *Sesame Street* as the research model and the preschool children aged 2-5 as subjects, and studies the enlightening role of *Sesame Street* on children of this age group in personality exploration and self-identification. This essay explores about the important influence of the program on children's personality enlightenment and self-consciousness construction in the critical period of mental development. The research significance of the paper lies in providing examples and references for creating more high-quality children's TV programs by studying *Sesame Street*, a successful TV program that is popular among children and has health education significance. By sorting out characteristics of children's mental health development at different stage, the paper is designed to grasp features of children's psychological growth and help them to grow up in a healthy and happy way that is more acceptable and enjoyable to them. Through the analysis of the role of personality and self identity on children's health, the essay clarifies the underlying mental health logic that supports individual development, further strengthen the importance of children's mental health construction, and recognize the effective way of mental health education, so as to provide early education and strong support for individuals to integrate into the society, improve the ability to resist stress and frustration, and realize the value of life.

The research hypothesis is that *Sesame Street* is conducive to the enlightenment of personality discovery and self-identity of preschool children aged 2 to 5.

The term "personality exploration" refers to finding one's own uniqueness, that is, the internal particularity and shining point of the character, thinking, ability and other aspects. "Self-identification" refers to the affirmation of oneself, that is, to face up to oneself, accept oneself, and gain confidence.

Personality exploration is the premise and foundation of self-identity, and self-identity is the support and guarantee of personality exploration. The former makes children realize that "everyone is unique, I am unique", while the latter makes children realize that "accept their all, they are the best". Both work together on the construction of children's mental health.

## 2. Overview of *Sesame Street*

*Sesame Street* is a children's educational TV program produced by the Public Broadcasting Association of America (PBS). It is by far the most Emmy award-winning children's program (153, as of 2009). The program has been launched in more than 150 countries around the world, and has been loved and recognized by tens of millions of children and their parents around the world, showing its continued popularity and educational value [5]. The program uses a combination of puppets, animation and live action, presenting a humorous style [6]. Adhering to the concept of "using TV to help children learn", the program teaches children basic reading, arithmetic, colors, names, letters and

numbers, basic knowledge of life such as crossing the road, as well as rich knowledge on values, morality and human issues. The characters in the program are distinctive, unique and lovable. The main characters are optimistic ELMO, BIG BIRD, who is excited about new things, COOKIE MONSTER, who likes cookies, slightly serious BERT and happy-go-lucky ERNIE.

### 3. Plot and Character Analysis

"Personality exploration and self-identity" is a process of acquiring good self-awareness, self-management and self-respect. When people get along with others or when they are alone, they explore the differences between themselves and others and find their own personality characteristics. Personalized thinking and behavior inspire us to think creatively and solve problems creatively. When the problem is solved, people will have a sense of self-recognition. This confidence encourages them to make responsible decisions in the face of more difficulties, to achieve success for themselves and others. Then, they can clarify the self-value and gain self-identity from the recognition of social groups, so as to further strengthen their personality characteristics and explore their own unique potential, and so on in a virtuous circle and upward spiral.

The concept of personality exploration and self-identity is related to "self", which is about the pursuit of personality and self-positioning. The awakening of self-consciousness can be reflected in the level of interaction with the surrounding external environment, and the germination of personalized thinking can also be explored in the cultivation of innovative thinking.

Personality exploration and self-identity is related to stress response, interpersonal communication, teamwork, creative decision-making and other real-life scenarios, which involves almost all aspects of social life, constitutes the cornerstone to support children to form an independent personality, self-confidence and self-improvement mentality. And it is directly related to children's mental health.

#### 3.1. Plot Analysis

Clip 1: After Elmo and Abby shared the drink, the two thought together about what a straw can do and came up with different creative ideas.

Character: Elmo called his name by Elmo in the conversation.

Associated with health: in the face of small problems in life, they think creatively and put forward different plans, showing their exploration of unique thinking and stimulating their formation of personalized and independent thinking. Elmo likes to mention himself by his name, showing the awakening of self-awareness and identification with himself. In the program, there are also many practical plots and examples of using creative and unique thinking to solve problems. These details guide children to explore personalized thinking and positive self-affirmation.

Clip 2: Julia, suffering from depression, just hesitated to meet Wolf. After her friends introduced her to different ways of greeting, she touched her fists with Wolf and took a step forward on the road of communication.

Character: Julia herself has some psychological barriers and difficulties in socializing, but with the help of friends, she gradually develops social skills.

Associated with health: Everyone is not perfect, and it is these imperfections that constitute each unique individual. With social support, children learn to embrace all parts of themselves, including the temporarily or always imperfect parts, and actively try to get out of trouble, accept themselves, become better selves, and gain a sense of self-recognition.

Clip 3: Garfunkel flew to the air when frightened by the camera, and he needed a troll to say "nap time" in his ear before he could fall into a deep sleep. Blogg just began to worry that others would see his different wings, Mrs. sparklenose Found him and told him that "sometimes differences make

the difference." Blogg stepped forward, saved everyone, won their recognition, and became more confident.

Character: Blogg feels inferior because of his own unique wings, but the fact is that when he uses his own unique features to solve problems, he finally gains confidence.

Associated with health: In the face of collective difficulties, individual's unique ability and personality strengths are magnified and highlighted. The original characteristics of being isolated and ridiculed are turned into advantages and the courage to solve problems. After solving problems, one can gain affirmation from the outside world and inner self-identity.

Clip 4: Mando sang to tell children to break stereotypes and set rules. The correct answer is not the only one "You are you, I am me, be brave to be yourself and love yourself."

Character: The four doll characters who interact with Mando each have their own personality, and people are respected and loved, which encourages children to recognize themselves.

Associated with health: There are many such songs in the program that encourage children to play what they want to play, without the gender stereotype of girls playing with dolls and boys playing with guns; to dance what they want to do, to sing their favorite songs, to play their favorite music instruments; to choose their favorite sports style and career. In short, children are encouraged to do whatever they want to do. Questions "How about you?" in the song guide children to think about what kind of person they are, forming personality discovery and enlightenment leading role. In addition, the song also conveys that every skin color and body shape is beautiful, and everything is the best for yourself, affirming each different individual and helping children build confidence and form a sense of self-identity.

### 3.2. Role Analysis

The nature of children is to imitate. Children are full of curiosity about the things around them, and the behavior of the characters on TV easily cause children to imitate. There are 15 main characters in *Sesame Street*, each of whom has their own different personality characteristics and ways of doing things. These personalities and behaviors can easily have a subtle influence on children. The playful Elmo has an infectious laugh, likes to refer to himself by name, and shouts "ELMO wants to play!" all day. Big Bird is slow to respond, but never be discouraged. Cookie Monster's mantra is "me want cookie", but he is nutritiously conscious and his tastes are becoming more and more diverse. Although Oscar The Grouch has a bad temper, he is kind. Each character has its own advantages and disadvantages, but they are very real and close to life. Different characters reflect themselves in real life, and children think about their own personality characteristics in the characters with different personality characteristics. Each character in *Sesame Street* is widely loved by the audience, which also makes it easier for children with different personalities to accept themselves and build up confidence. *Sesame Street* shows a positive power. Compared with some negative and violent animation works, *Sesame Street* is harmless for the enlightenment of children's personality discovery and self-identity.

## 4. Conclusion

The key elements of children's mental health education include: paying attention to children's emotional needs, respecting children's personality differences, cultivating children's autonomy, stimulating children's enthusiasm, guiding children to establish good interpersonal relations and developing children's psychological quality. These elements are interwoven, and together constitute the foundation of children's mental health education [7]. *Sesame Street* is conducive to the enlightenment of personality exploration and self-identity of preschool children aged from 2 to 5. *Sesame Street*, from the plot content, role setting, theme selection, presentation form, conforms to the

preschool children's acceptance preferences, successfully uses the medium, for the key period of preschool mental development, accurately grasps the mental health characteristics of preschool children to discover their own personality, guides children to construct self-identity and plays a good role in enlightenment.

Self-consciousness is the condition for understanding objective things of the outside world. People must understand themselves, and have a deep awareness of their own needs first, in order to understand the rest of the objective world. As Fromm said in *The Art of Love*, children can only experience the "being loved" environment of "I know I am me" and "Mom and dad love me" before producing "others are also me" and "I want to love mom and dad" [8]. *Sesame Street* is designed for preschoolers aged 2 to 5 to initiate personality exploration and self-identity in overcoming difficulties and solving problems, thinking independently and exploring creatively, cultivating imagination and discovering interest points, and forming interpersonal communication and relationship with peers, so as to help children form self-awareness.

Psychological health and mental hygiene are important parts of health. The healthy growth of children and adolescents affects every family [9]. Children are in the rapid development period of life, and their originally blank world needs to be painted on the initial background color under the guidance of the outside world. If the background is too dark, then the later remedy is really powerless; if the beginning is gorgeous and colorful, a few later strokes will be the icing on the cake [10]. *Sesame Street* paints a beautiful background color for children's young hearts, helping them to excavate and reveal their personality, forming the source and foundation of confidence, and shaping their self-recognition and identity. This strengthens the construction of mental health from the inside, constructs the underlying logic of mental health, and lays a solid foundation for the long-term future development of children.

As a successful TV program deeply loved by children and of health education significance, provides examples and references for creating more high-quality children's TV programs. By sorting out the development characteristics of children's mental health in different periods, this paper grasps the characteristics of children's psychological growth in different periods, so as to help them grow up healthily and happily. Personality exploration and self-identity are the underlying mental health logic that supports individual development. Personality exploration stimulates individual's unique potential; self-identity strengthens confidence and self-improvement foundation, and maximizes personal value. Personality exploration and self-identity work together to strengthen the construction of mental health, and lay a solid foundation for individuals to integrate into the society, improve the ability to resist pressure and frustration, and realize the value of life.

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