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C ultivation theory examines the long-term effects of watching television. The theory states that what an audience watches on television influences their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of reality (Riddle 2009, 1). Television programs and movies are an integral part of many children's lives, so when these programs depict minorities in a certain way, could this have an impact on their views of different social groups in real life? This paper will examine the consequences of reinforcing stereotypes in television as it relates to the representation of Jews and other minorities.

Many of us can think of our favourite television program or movie that portrays a Jewish character. Many would think it is great to have such an overwhelming representation of a marginalized group, but the reality is that Jewish characters are often poorly represented, and their characters reinforce negative stereotypes. Whether it be the nosey yenta, overbearing mother, opinionated know-it-all, frugal cheapskate, or Jewish-American Princess, there is no shortage of stereotypical depictions of Jews on television ("TV Tropes: Jewish Index" n.d). For example, in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, Larry David is a multi-millionaire, yet he is very stingy and makes a big deal when it comes to things like tipping. Another example is in the popular television series *Friends*, where Ross Geller makes a great salary as a paleontologist, but he steals hotel shampoo and travels across the city to get his haircut from the cheapest barber in town. While viewers of these programs may think such depictions of Jews as frugal is just innocent fun, it relates to the history of Jews as moneylenders.

In the Middle Ages, Jews had no right to practice any profession besides money lending. This role intensified the hostility towards them and gave the Jewish people the reputation of cheapskates (Prager and Telushkin 2016, 59-60). When television programs continue to depict Jews this way, they are reinforcing this negative stereotype. The Anti Defamation League created an index measuring antisemitism and found that 70% of those who were deemed as "likely antisemitic" never met a Jewish person (*ADL: Antisemitism Index* n.d.). A journal posted in the Howard Journal of Communications links this phenomenon back to cultivation theory because "for some people with limited direct contact with other ethnic groups in social settings, television becomes a tool with which to observe minority groups and form subsequent opinions" (Lee et al 2009, 98). As such, this type of depiction of Jews can be very damaging to the perceptions others have of them across the world.

Unfortunately, many other minorities are depicted poorly on television. Women for example, are often portrayed as weak, submissive, dependent on men, and home oriented ("TV Tropes: Women Index" n.d.). Examples of this include Disney's princesses like Snow White and Cinderella who have no marketable skills and are only good at sewing and cleaning. They are portrayed as having no ambition in life besides finding their *prince charming*. Relating this back to cultivation theory, it can give impressionable children the idea that a woman's role in society is to find a husband and to care for them.

In modern times, there are many implications of stereotyping in television that go beyond just forming implicit biases in people's minds about specific social groups. The portrayal of black people in television which often stereotypes them as criminals and thugs could be a contributing cause for police brutality against black people. Evidence shows us that unarmed black civilians are more likely to be subjected to police force than unarmed white civilians, even after adjusting for whether the arrest was for a violent crime (Weir 2016). Some stereotypes seen on television that are even seemingly positive are still very dangerous. For example, Dr. Monnica Williams, a licensed clinical psychologist and Canada Research Chair for Mental Health Disparities at the University of Ottawa, found that "positive" stereotypes like black people being more athletically or musically inclined has pushed African Americans away from pursuing college, instead favouring careers as entertainers or athletes. Both professions from a statistical standpoint can lead to failure (*Momentous Institute* 2017). Therefore, even though there are many seemingly "positive" stereotypes of various minorities, all have the similar consequences and all are still potentially dangerous.

Ultimately, television programs and movies need to change the way they portray social groups to eliminate this perception of "otherness". Television programs like *Schitt's Creek* have received praise for casting a character who is gay without ever mentioning it. This has no impact on the plot. The character does not exemplify gay stereotypes like being flamboyant, and this helps society to view "other" people as not very different to themselves – they are just people. The casual treatment of this character's sexuality and the absence of homophobia is generally rare in modern day television. The show's creator, Eugene Levy, intentionally made this decision, stating that it was a "quite protest" against LGBTQ+ tropes, which are often seen in television (Hobson 2019). This has led to praise by critics and letters of appreciation from viewers, including queer fans of the show who felt more accepted by family members, who realized that previously held assumptions were homophobic (Finkel 2018).

Change is possible and there has been a lot of progress in terms of better representation of certain social groups in the past few decades. For example, on the front of gender stereotypes there have been a lot more movies and television programs with strong female leads such as the *Hunger Games* and *V for Vendetta*. Even Disney movies, which have historically not been great in breaking down gender roles, have come out with movies recently that depict stronger women. For example, Tiana from *Princess and the Frog* faces adversity early in her life with her father's passing. She then works hard every day so that she can open a restaurant and be successful. Viewers see a woman who has ambition and this challenges the stereotypes reinforced by older Disney movies. While there have been many positive changes in terms of the portrayal of women in the past few decades, other groups, like Jews continue to be represented poorly. Samantha Maoz, who wrote a journal article at Elon University on a similar topic, found that a more accurate and meaningful representation of Jews was found when there were multiple Jewish characters in one scene. When a Jewish character was portrayed with non-Jewish characters, their "otherness" was always emphasized. Their Judaism was brought up to highlight the differences from other religious groups. However, her research found that when multiple Jewish characters were on screen, the idea of "otherness" became irrelevant. These scenes demonstrated how similar the everyday lives of Jews were to other people because the characters were not

compared to non-Jews. This often resulted in a more positive representation of Jewish folks and these representations were better received by audiences (Maoz 2018, 42).

Ultimately, cultivation theory shows how dangerous stereotyping can be in television. Even when these stereotypes seem positive, they often result in negative effects. While some social groups have been portrayed better in recent times, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done for many. Television show and movie producers can do more to eliminate the perception of "otherness" as evidenced by programs like *Schitt's Creek*. Even thought implicit biases are very problematic, it is important to remember that they are a pervasive part of life. What may seem even more bothersome is when one's own unconscious perceptions do not align with one's declared perceptions. The positive aspect of implicit biases is that they can be changed. Even when one has unconscious biases for specific social groups, it is important to recognize this and try to adopt new perceptions. Doing this may not happen easily or quickly but being aware that they exist is a great place to start for anyone looking to make changes.

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