

Stereotypes conveyed in Television

STEREOTYPED CHARACTERS CAN NEGATIVELY INFLUENCE the way we view real people in society. Television tends to depict racial groups , as well as genders, in the same manner. More often than not these groups are stereotyped in a negative way by television. People who watch large amounts of television begin to view these people negatively in real life. They base their opinions on how they see these groups on television. Positive stereotypes can also be found by viewing television. However, there are far fewer positive stereotypes than negative ones.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are understood to be different things to different people. [Durkin \(1995\)](#) describes them as being based on extreme characteristics attributed to the group with usually negative values attached to that group. [Sprafkin and Liebert \(1988\)](#) added that a stereotype is applied, whenever a group is depicted or portrayed in such a way that all its members appear to have the same characteristics, attitudes or life conditions.



June Cleaver, portrayed by Barbara Billingsly, has given viewers the image of a housewife. A woman who cooks, cleans and takes the children everywhere they need to go.

Gender Stereotypes

The majority of gender related studies focused their attention on women. Very few studies involve male stereotypes. Studies have shown that women are portrayed on television as passive, being dominated by men, governed by emotion, overly emotional or dependent.

Women are also depicted as less intelligent than men and generally weak. The roles which women are assigned tend to be marital and family oriented. In addition, women are rarely shown to be able to successfully combine marriage and employment. Women are typically younger than men on television and usually disappear between the ages of 35 and 50. Ironically, women are five times more likely to be blond.

Racial Stereotypes

Although racial stereotypes have not received the attention which gender stereotypes have, studies have shown that many racial stereotypes have been conveyed through television. Some of these stereotypes include:

- Italians were generally depicted on television as Mafia hoodlums.
- Asian people are perceived as invaders or karate experts.
- Hispanic people as comics, banditos or gang members.
- Native Americans as savages, victims, cowards or medicine men.
- People from the Middle East are seen as terrorists or oil sheiks.
- Homosexuals as being effeminate.
- All Blacks are lazy
- All Asians are sneaky
- All Latinos are on welfare
- All Whites are racist

Positive stereotypes:

- All Blacks are great basketball players
- All Asians are smart
- All Latinos dance well
- All Whites are successful

Positive Stereotypes

Children are the ones who tend to benefit the most from television. Although there is a concern about children learning negative stereotypes, a lot can be learned by watching television.



Sesame Street is praised for its ability to incorporate different racial groups into its show. Shown here with Elmo, is Maria, a regular on the show, since the show began.

Children can learn about various occupations by seeing a variety of careers being portrayed by characters on television. Script and schemes for social situations are learned based upon television prototypes.

Critics have endlessly praise Sesame Street for its ability to incorporated various racial groups into its show. Children are able to see different racial groups interacting in a positive way with one another. An increase in positive intergroup attitudes has been identified among preschoolers.

Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood has been identified as a program which promotes prosocial behavior in preschool age children. Children learn behaviors such as: nurturance, sympathy, take persistence, empathy and imaginativeness. Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood reinforces positive role playing. This has especially affected children of a lower socioeconomic status.

Adapted from Shannon Shebloski