



Racial Stereotypes in Youth Media

How does the presence of racial stereotypes in popular TV Culture reflect the structure of society and negatively impact our youth?

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As modern media becomes more widespread, the embedding of racial stereotypes within the media has drastically increased, having an extreme effect on minority youth. What effect does the popular media perpetuating these negative stereotypes of minority communities have on minority children? How does it affect the way they view themselves and society as a whole? How often are these archetypes in these television programs used as comedy geared towards the eurocentric community? All are questions often swept under the rug, as minorities are told to not address their misrepresentation publicly, to be satisfied with their current representation. Progress is progress, as they say. In actuality, representation might be progressing in these television programs, but the stereotypes and typecasts being projected are not. So are we really progressing? White-dominated media and production companies have consistently pushed the idea of diverse representation within their movies by promoting the singular minority character. This character could have three lines in the whole movie, but they will be showcased as the star in order to appease the minority communities. Take Zendaya in the movie, *Dune*, she was in every poster, commercial, and source of advertisement for the movie but only had five minutes of screen time. These companies spend more time gaslighting minorities into believing that they are being accurately represented, than actually representing them. Instead of telling the minority youth that they will always be inferior to their white counterparts, whiteness as a whole is being displayed in front of their eyes for them to absorb. These characters are following every negative cliché and archetype, leaving the impressionable youth no other choice but to take it all in. Their impressionability can lead to children internalizing these stereotypes, conforming to society's expectations of minorities. By watching these television shows continuously, minority children will begin to believe that their role in society is just to support the white community. Overall, the core of the issue is that the presence of these racial stereotypes in children's media is reflective of society's opinions on minorities and has been detrimental to the social, physical, and mental development of our youth. Children will begin to internalize these stereotypes and adapt to them, becoming the negative stereotypes presented on television. If their favorite character acts like this, then they should as well. In order to fit into society, they must conform to what is expected of them.

The effect of television on people, especially children, has been well-researched for about 60 years. The first prominent research was by Gerbner & Gross, the Cultivation Theory. With the increased use of television in the 1960s, Gerbner contributed his Cultivation Theory as part of the Cultural Indicators Project - a mass study connecting the content of television programs to the effects on the viewers' mental health, and their perception of "social reality." Social Reality refers to the common understandings, behaviors, and experiences of social or cultural communities. The core of the project and its research was how the different elements of television will affect the consumers, mentally and socially. The Cultivation Theory specifically is the idea that as viewers consume media for elongated periods, it will eventually corrupt the viewers' perception of the world and their place in it. (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) The theory has been used to support the thesis that the media can contribute to people's perspective of the world by detaching them from reality. Media can give people, especially impressionable youth, a

distorted concept of what is right and wrong. Many say that by children playing more violent video games, they will become more violent and view the world more violently. Cultivation Theory boils down to the idea that what you watch, or engage with will impact your view of yourself and the world around you - whether that impact will have negative or positive predicates on what you are watching.

This theory is the basis for future studies of media's effect on viewers and connects to the widespread impact of media on minority youth. In a study by Nicole Martins and Kristen Harrison, they use the Cultivation Theory in order to research the idea of how media exposure can impact children's self-esteem based on what that media is perpetuating. Martins and Harrison surveyed about 400 hundred students, both white and black, to find the connection between what is being played on TV and how they feel about themselves. With children watching TV as their prime source of entertainment, it is bound to have a massive influence on their perception of the world and themselves. Throughout the study, they saw a trend of white boys gaining self-esteem, while white and black girls and black boys saw a decrease in self-esteem based on their favorite programs. White males have the best perception in the media as they are typically the best-looking, smartest, and most rewarded characters within a story. Meanwhile, girls and black characters are typically portrayed as the weaker characters, with less important storylines. Especially with the demonization of young black males in the media, as they are more commonly portrayed as criminals with low intellect. (Martins & Harrison, 2011) Using the cultivation theory's methodology, children will absorb what they are consuming in the media and incorporate it into their own lives. If the media is perpetuating negative views of these groups then, children will begin to believe it, thinking less of themselves. Both of these studies support the idea that the embedding of racial stereotypes in youth media has a negative impact on minorities, as it can contribute to how they view themselves in the context of society. Although both of these research extensively about the impact of media, they do not discuss how the media's perception of minorities is reflective of society and its prejudices against minority communities. Not only is the media pushing these narratives onto the youth of America, but it is also mirroring what society expects of them.

What is a stereotype? According to the Oxford Dictionary, it is "a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing." Overall, it is the exaggeration of an aspect of a community that society has accepted as fact. The term was first coined by Walter Lippmann, he claimed that stereotypes have longevity because they are passed down through generations, and are reflective of social, political, and economic motivations. Before one can understand how the application of these stereotypes in media and their effect on the youth of America, the origin of these stereotypes must be conceptualized (Lippman, 1922). Where did they come from? How did their development promote white supremacy? There are so many different stereotypes that as a society we have come to accept, not questioning where they came from or why they were made. Why do we think that watermelon is a "black" food? Or why do we associate intelligence and proficient math skills with the Asian community? Society has not only ignored these stereotypes but ignored the inherently racist and xenophobic intentions behind their creation.

Almost every western country in the world was founded upon White Supremacist ideals and the inherent belief that minorities are inferior. America is a prime example, with every single one of its core documents and beliefs centering around the idea that a white, landowning, Christian man is above all. These ideals are embedded in society and are the foundation for several global issues. Islamophobia, Racism, Homophobia, Misogyny, Xenophobia, etc., all

stem from the power of White Supremacy. One does not need to openly advocate for white supremacy to be a supporter. By benefiting from the privileges granted based on your race, regardless of your opinion, you are blindly supporting White Supremacy. In terms of media, most major outlets, television programs, channels, production studios, and writing teams are controlled by white people. Subliminally or overtly, the ideals of white supremacy leak into the media - How could a white person ever accurately depict a minority's reality? Even when these media sources try to be inclusive, they often resort to writing their characters as overused archetypes, defaulting to what they know. This is not to say that every writer, producer, or director is a white supremacist, it is saying that white supremacist ideals are so prominent and embedded in society that these creators could be unknowingly perpetuating these ideals in the media. Racism has been internalized and weaved into society, and these stereotypes being showcased on television are most likely a product of internalized racism and white supremacy.

Asians in America have been dubbed the "model minority," because of how they can blend into society easily. Sure they don't look white, but in the eyes of white America, they are the closest any minority will ever get to whiteness. This sounds like a great idea, as it would probably lead to less discrimination and bias. In reality, however, it leads to unrealistic expectations and false assumptions about Asian culture and society. All of this traces back to a 1966 New York Times Article, "Success Story, Japanese-American Style." Sociologist William Petersen penned the article to support the notion that although America was racist, and prejudiced against minorities in the 1960s, they weren't against Asians. During the Civil Rights Movement, America was under a lot of pressure to address racial issues, and perpetuating Asians as the "model minority," would divert some of this negative attention and help to paint America in a much more favorable light. The article helped to spread this to the masses, and inevitably created the Asian stereotype that we all know. Society built the idea that Asians are intelligent, - especially in math and science - invisible and stable essentially to protect itself. To ensure that the rest of the world believes the lie that America is the land of inclusivity and a melting pot of acceptance. (Corbett, 2022) This stereotype has infested not only societal views of Asians but how the media portrays them. They are always considered the weak character, whose only personality trait is being smart, and throughout the series have little development. Despite America pushing the narrative that Asians are not discriminated against, there is evidence of a long history of Asian intolerance. From the Japanese-American Internment Camps during World War II, to the recent chain of Asian Hate Crimes across the country, the Asian community still has a long way to go. Being labeled the "model minority" does not exempt Asians from racism, prejudice and violent discrimination.

The Latinx Stereotype is complex and multifaceted, with the odd combination of laziness and sexualization. A recent target has been the Latinx community with claims that they are lazy, crime-ridden, hot-headed, provocative, and the reason for all of society's ailments. But where does this come from? For as long as anyone could remember, this is what society was conditioning us to believe. Why has White America created this stereotype, and why is it targeted toward this specific minority group? Much like the Asian stereotype, the Latinx stereotype has historical roots. The Mexican-American War was a series of battles between America and Mexico from 1846 to 1848. Prior to the war, in 1845, America annexed Texas and created the 28th state of the United States of America. This posed a problem for Mexico however, as Texas was once their territory, and America supported its revolution for independence from Mexico in the 1830s. Now, a decade later, America is adding the large territory that is Texas to their ever-growing country to fulfill their "manifest destiny" - the idea that



America is entitled to all land between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans because it is their “destiny and inherent right” to expand westward. Mexico was rightfully angry that America had not only supported the cession of one of their biggest territories but then incorporated it into their own country, contributing to its growing power. Cumulatively, all of this led to Mexico’s declaration of war against America in 1846 and the start of the infamous Mexican-American War. But from this history lesson, where does the root of the Latinx archetype stem from? Well, like any war, to succeed a country needs the support of its people. They need donations, medical aid, and men willing to fight for the cause. The leaders of America in the 1840s knew that the American People might not be supportive of this war, and expenditure of their tax dollars if they just told them the plain truth - that they essentially stole Mexican land through a series of tactical political and economic moves. So instead, through intense propagandization, America sold this war as an attempt to save the Mexican people from themselves (Garcia, 2015). Although Rudyard Kipling had not yet written the book, this aligns with the “White Man’s Burden” ideology that drove the imperialist movement in western countries during the late 19th century. America’s media obliterated the reputation of Mexicans - and eventually the Latinx community as a whole - which led to the development of modern-day stereotypes. The media called Mexican women whores, who are easily convinced to have sex, and this eventually led to the creation of the provocative and sexual Latina stereotype. The media used the hypersexualization of Mexican women to degrade Mexico- if the women have no virtue what does that say about the country’s reputation? The people began to believe that Mexican women were giving it up to any willing participant, and therefore were whores. Additionally, the media was perpetuating that Mexicans not only had a short fuse but were extremely lazy. America was painting the picture for its citizens that the Mexican people were useless, and that they needed America. By America winning this war, and defeating the Mexicans, they were essentially doing them a “favor.” Collectively, the Mexican-American War set the precedent for modern Latin Stereotypes, making the American people believe that they are lazy, sexual, and hot-tempered. Additionally, America has also developed the stereotype or perception of Latinos through the overgeneralization of the Latinx Community to just the Mexican Ethnicity. It is common that an American who is not a part of that community, will say something like “Puerto Rican or Mexican, the same thing.” or “Aren’t you Mexican?” to anyone of Latin descent. To ignorant Americans, the thirty-three countries that constitute “Latin,” are basically just Mexico. It doesn’t matter if you are Argentinian, Cuban, or Ecuadorian, to the eyes of American society and its media, you are Mexican. (Costantini, 2012) This contributes to not only how the Mexican Stereotype from the Mexican-American War has been widely applied to the Latinx community, but also how this community has been disproportionately misrepresented. The American belief that the Latinx community has interchangeable, and replaceable ethnicities have bled into how the media represents this community. In many shows and movies, the actor who is playing a Latin character is not Latin themselves. Unlike the Black and Asian races, being a Latino is not technically a “race,” therefore a white actor can very easily pretend to be Latino. Overall, the Latinx stereotype is a combination of the lies being perpetuated by the 19th-century American Media, and the ignorance of White America concerning the multiethnic Latino community.

Much like the Asian and Latinx stereotypes, the origin of the Black stereotype follows the pattern of having historical origins. Black people’s long struggle in America is not a secret, and the historical origin is more obvious than that of the Asian and Latinx communities. Slavery - especially in America - is one of the benchmarks of society, molding modern perceptions of the black community, and their relationship with White America. Slaves started being imported to



America in 1619, to the Virginia Colony until the “Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves” in 1808 which stopped the slave trade. And the practice of slavery was not made unconstitutional until the establishment of the 13th Amendment almost 60 years later in 1865. American slavery’s foundation was entirely different from that of European slavery. Slavery in America was the first ever to only target a singular race of people, and continuously exploit them for over 200 years. When the Africans initially traded with Europeans and Americans for slaves, they couldn’t even fathom what the future would hold for their people. Slavery was originally not confined to a race or gender, but American Slavery changed that. Instead of it being about social classes, debt, or war, slavery became about White Supremacy vs. Black Inferiority. (Slavery in the Roman Empire Vs. North American Colonies, 2017) Black people were considered $\frac{3}{4}$ of a person, and White America justified their brutal treatment of Africans by saying it was their purpose to serve. To forever aid their White masters, and make their lives easier. How does this translate into a stereotype? In the media especially, the black characters are typically depicted as the side characters, whose only purpose is to aid the development and storyline of the main white character. This just so happens to parallel the aforementioned relationship between slaves and masters in American Slavery - inferiority vs. superiority. Additionally, how these characters act can also be connected to slavery and its fallout. Even though Slavery was abolished in the 1860s, the fight for African-American rights and respect in this country was nowhere near over - it still isn’t. With Jim Crow Laws and the Civil Rights Movement, America saw a whole new side to the “subservient” black race, one where they took a stand against tyranny and injustice. This resistance, and outspoken advocacy for their rights, led to the creation of sassy and angry stereotypes. America was characterizing and villainizing Black people as violent and furious, instead of actually addressing their valid concerns and issues. This characterization has developed into a long-standing stereotype of the black community and has been used in conjunction with the inferiority archetype to create the black character profile used by the media. (Degruy, 2022)

Although the Asian representation in youth media is minimal, it aligns with the aforementioned “model minority” stereotype. When referring to children, however, the stereotype is slightly altered, with the addition of “tiger moms” and the pressure to get into Ivy Leagues. A prime first example of this archetype is Ravi Ross from the Disney Channel hit television show, *Jessie*. The show was created to diversify Disney, as it was a show that encompassed several different cultures. *Jessie* had a great premise, but sadly it was overshadowed by the inclusion of racial stereotypes. The show took place in New York City, following an affluent family with 4 kids being raised by their nanny, Jessie, and butler, Bertram. The diversity was introduced through the varying races of the children, as they were all adopted from different countries. The eldest, Emma, was the only biological child with perfect blonde hair and impeccable style. The oldest boy, Luke, was adopted from Detroit, Michigan, and he was white sporty and popular. The other two children, Ravi and Zuri Ross were adopted internationally, Ravi being from India and Zuri from Uganda. The idea of having an inclusive family that did not allow race and relation to define the structure of their family is amazing. It is promoting ethical adoptions, multi-racial families, and inclusivity as a whole. However, when you are just writing these characters as overused and detrimental stereotypes, that progress and inclusivity are just being negated. In the show, Ravi was the brunt of every joke. He was unathletic, non-confrontational, and highly intelligent. The other characters loved to poke fun at his Indian accent, his traditional clothing, and his overall mindset. To add to the stereotype, the writers gave Ravi a pet, but not just any pet, a large Asian Watermonitor Lizard who had made the journey to America with Ravi. Just because



he preferred textbooks to basketballs, he was considered “less than,” the other characters. Ravi often changes his clothing to a more Westernized style or his interest throughout the show to appear cooler. Ravi knew that his interest and his culture were not considered “cool,” or traditionally American, and that is why even his own siblings wouldn’t accept him. Although Ravi’s character was intended to give South Asian children a sense of acceptance and representation, it essentially just reinforced what society wants them to be. It continuously pushes the narrative that Asians’ “role” in society is to be intelligent, invisible, and weak in comparison to the other races. This same ideology can be applied to the character Baljeet, from the Disney Animated Show, *Phineas, and Ferb*. The show was very similar, having kids of varying different races being represented while working together to have the “best summer ever.” What is interesting about this show, in particular, is that, unlike *Jessie*, Baljeet was not the only smart character in the show. All of the children exhibited high levels of intelligence not only in math and science but in literature, life skills, and problem-solving. However, throughout the show, Baljeet was the only character being berated and antagonized for his intelligence. Much like Ravi, Baljeet was a target of quite a few jokes about his unique accent and culture. *Phineas and Ferb* is an example of a show that doesn’t follow the Asian Stereotype exactly but uses elements of it to create the character’s profile. Baljeet shows the South Asian youth that although their friends and peers can be smart too, they will always be the ones made fun of for it. For the white race, it will be celebrated but for the Asian race, it will be denounced. Lastly, another character who highlights this archetype is Tiffany Chen from the *Jessie* spinoff, *Bunk’d*. The writers of *Jessie* strike again with the stereotypical writing of Asian characters, as they mirror the experiences of Ravi Ross in the storyline of an East Asian girl. Ravi starred in the show for its first two seasons, and the two automatically grew a friendship - Tiffany even had romantic feelings for Ravi. Tiffany and Ravi were both outcasts, dying to be accepted by society. Although Tiffany loved mathematics and science, she also loved the idea of being accepted. She also tried to appear “cooler” with different clothes and demeanor, because she was being ridiculed by the other characters. Tiffany was annoying, often nagging everyone about the danger of their schemes and essentially sucking the fun out of every situation - much like her South Asian counterpart, Ravi. A distinct difference between the two Asian characters of the *Jessie* Universe was that Tiffany’s storyline encompassed a new addition to the complex archetype - the tiger mom. Tiger moms (or parents) are typical of Chinese descent and their method of parenting is to be highly controlling of their children’s lives, ensuring they fulfill the goals set for them. Within the Asian Stereotype, Tiger Moms are typically fixated on their child going to a top university, playing an instrument, and entering a high-income field. Ms. Chen checked all of the stereotypical boxes. She wanted Tiffany to attend an Ivy League, be a top flute player, and eventually become a doctor. She felt as though “fun” was for children who did not want to succeed in life, and pushed her child to be overly studious. The combination of the Tiger Mom and traditional Asian Stereotype works to reinforce these ideas of inferiority in the minds of Asian children absorbing these television shows. With the little representation they are given, Asian children have to continuously watch their own minority group be held to insane standards while simultaneously being ridiculed for meeting those exact standards. Asian youth in particular have to face both the intense pressure of society to be intelligent as the “model minority,” and the teasing that comes with it. The Asian community is stuck in a perpetual quagmire, and youth media only reinforces these societal expectations. With children absorbing everything they see on television - especially when the characters are reflective of their own identity - the Asian youth is only being trapped in a perpetual cycle of systemic oppression and



white supremacy. The media - intentionally or not - is teaching the Asian Youth the role society wants them to play.

The Typical Latinx character is defined by the three s's, Sassy, Sexual and Slothful. Although they are all different, in combination with one another they perfectly describe the societal view of the Latinx community, especially the women. Although in children's media, because of the audience, it is not likely the characters would be as sexual or promiscuous as they are in adult media - like Sofia Vergara's character on *Modern Family*. In youth media, Latinas especially are categorized similarly to Black Females, with plenty of attitudes. In addition to their ability to make a quick comeback, these characters also exhibit the stereotype of laziness that aligns with the societal perception of the community as a whole. In another Disney Channel hit show, *Austin and Ally*, the main character Ally's Latina best friend Trish De La Rosa, encompasses both the feisty attitude and the pure laziness associated with her community. The show follows the two white leads and their rise to musical stardom. Trish, unlike her quirky best friend, is not gifted with the talent of music in any capacity and gets her money from working odd jobs. But in every episode, those jobs rotate, either because she quit or got fired for her horrible work ethic. Throughout the show, it is revealed she has had three hundred and seven jobs, all of which were obscure retail jobs at their local mall. How does one person in their life work so many different jobs? Throughout the show, Trish exclaims several times that she hates working, and putting in the effort for her paychecks. This aligns with the stereotype that all Latinos are lazy and a detriment to society. Here is yet another Latino taking American jobs, to do what? Quit in a couple of days? Although comedic, this is a sly interjection of a widely spread stereotype and works to reinforce societal expectations of different racial groups. In this case, the white hardworking best friend sees the fruit of her labor with a successful songwriting career, while the Latina best friend is essentially too lazy to truly apply herself to anything but bossing everyone around. This supports the notion that while the white community is working hard for their pay, the Latinx community is just leeching off of them, unwilling to do work. In conjunction with her "spicy" Latina attitude, makes Trish De La Rosa a poster child for the interjection of stereotypes in the creation of character profiles, and youth media. Overall, the usage of this stereotype is only increasing the superiority complex of white viewers, and the inferiority complex of a minority - more specifically a Latinx - viewer.

Another core issue in the representation of the Latinx community as a whole that is not necessarily based on stereotypes is the replacement of Latin actors for white ones. As stated before, being Latin is not a race and does not define your appearance. Some members of the Latinx community are extremely dark, while others are white-passing. The versatility of this community has allowed major TV networks to hire white people to *act* Latin. As though being Latin is simply just a part to play, something you could be taught through method acting. *George Lopez* is one of the most significant Latin shows, being credited with paving the way for modern Latinx representation in television. George Lopez, the actor, starred in and produced the sitcom following a Mexican family and their growing pains as their children become adults, and life throws hurdles their way. It is similar to any other American family sitcom like *Full House* or *The Goldbergs*. But even the pioneer of Latinx representation was using white actors to fill the roles of Latinx characters. (Lynch, 2020) The family consisted of George and his wife Angie, and their two children Max and Carmen. George Lopez, Constance Marie Lopez - the actress who played his wife - and Luis Armand Garcia - the actor who played his son - are all Hispanic, specifically of Mexican descent. The daughter, however, played by Masiela Lusha, is the only one with no Latin background at all, as she is Albanian. Although Albania is a Balkan country that is

historically looked down upon by Western European countries for its non-traditionalism, its people still fit under the racial category of white. Lusha in particular is a white Albanian, cast to play the role of a Mexican teenager. This can be found in several other children's television programs like Disney's *Stuck in the Middle*, where the eldest sister, Rachel Diaz is listed as "bicultural Hispanic" but the actress who plays her, Ronni Hawk, is white American. Miranda Sanchez in another Disney channel show, *Lizzie McGuire*, is supposed to be Mexican but the actress, Lalaine Vergara-Paras is Filipino. And when called out for their repeated misrepresentation of the Latinx community, Disney has tried to cover their tracks, especially with the character Gabriella Montez from the High School Musical Trilogy. Famously played by Vanessa Hudgens, most people assumed the character and actress were Hispanic because that was how Disney pedaled the character to raise diversity. When the public found out that Hudgens is ethnically Filipino, they were confused as to why she played a notable Hispanic character, and in turn, Disney released a statement saying that Gabriella Montez was never Hispanic, she was always Filipino. With a little bit of research, you can see this was a blatant lie. The actress who played Gabriella's mother, Soccoro Herrera, is a proud Latina. The other actresses being considered for the role, like Naya Rivera, were also Latinas. The character was originally supposed to be Hispanic, but to counteract the backlash, Disney tried to make her character Filipino. Overall, by making the Latin people substitutable for white people out of convenience, you are showing Latin children that they are replaceable. The whole point of diverse television is that children get to see people "like them" reflected in their favorite shows and movies. If it turns out these people are not actually "like them" but rather imposters, the point is mute. The relatability and connection that television shows are trying to foster between kids at home and the characters on the screen are broken, all to favor white actors who already have more opportunities in Hollywood. This is not only a disservice to Latin consumers, but Latin actors who are being passed over for these roles.

The black side character is probably the most famous of them all, dating back to the early days of Vaudeville and television. The media has always loved using black characters as a crutch or support for the white lead because in a sense that is what society wants the black community to do. The Black best friend is typically a true ride-or-die, always ready with an unwelcome attitude. More so than any other racial group, the black character is typically type-casted into deuteragonist - a secondary character whose purpose is to be a constant companion to the protagonist or someone who continues actively aiding a protagonist. Take Ivy Wentz from Disney's *Good Luck Charlie*, whose character profile is centered around her white best friend. In the official *Good Luck Charlie* wiki, Ivy is described as loving "fashion and is always telling Teddy she needs to go shopping. She likes to go to the mall, and she also likes to text." (Wiki Targeted (Entertainment), n.d.-b) The first thing a consumer could describe this character is that she likes fashion, and is trying to get her best friend to go shopping with her. "Teddy is a kind, intelligent, creative, responsible, teenage girl, who cares about her family and friends... Teddy gets excellent grades and excels in English, math, and science." (Wiki Targeted (Entertainment), n.d.-a) Meanwhile, Teddy's description is all about her intelligence, how family-oriented she is, and her dedication. Throughout the show, Ivy is Teddy's sounding board, confidant, and fighter. When Teddy's boyfriend cheats on her, it is Ivy who pushes him against a locker, threatening his life. Ivy has no character development or plotline that does not involve Teddy because the sole purpose of her character - as the deuteragonist - is to aid Teddy and her plotline. This can also be seen in the famous *High School Musical* Trilogy, with Gabriella's best friend Taylor Mckessie. Although Gabriella isn't white, Taylor still aligns with the black side



character archetype. Before Gabriella comes to East High, the school is segregated by “high school social classes,” basically just Popular Kids vs. Nerds. Taylor only becomes relevant in the social scene once she befriends Gabriella, and even then her character is pushed into the background the entire time. She was the smartest of her class, getting into Yale with dreams of being the president, yet the storyline barely covered her academic success opting to focus more on Gabriella’s Stanford acceptance and Troy’s college decision dilemma. Out of all the characters, Taylor was the only one not to have a solo or a remotely important storyline. Another component of the black “angry and sassy” stereotype within youth media, is how these characters are dressed. In contrast to the impeccably dressed, fashionable white character, the black character is typically dressed in obnoxiously loud colors and patterns. The purposeful juxtaposition of the black character and the white character is reflective of how society views the black community and the stereotypes that have been created. In the eyes of society, Black people have always been the “opposite” of White people, in terms of skin color, demeanor and purpose. By integrating these societal expectations and archetypes of black characters into youth media, production companies are just reinforcing society’s beliefs. It has been continuously proven that youth media causes a drop in self-esteem in black children, because of how characters “like them” are being portrayed. It is teaching them that they are destined to be the side characters in the lives of their white counterparts, only to be heard when they are contributing something funny or sassy. Even the smartest ones are pushed to the side so others can shine. Unless you have a rude remark or abrasive attitude to share, keep it to yourself. By pushing these ideas on black children, the media is also pushing the agenda of society and how they want black people to conduct themselves.

A pattern that can be found throughout the majority of youth television shows, is that while the minority characters are being degraded, the white characters are being uplifted. At the beginning of the episode, they are presented with a dilemma, and by the end, it is solved because every character is bent over backward to make the white character’s life easier. At the end of the day, they will always have a happy ending. Unlike the other archetypes, the “white character” archetype is typically positive, mainly because the media is still largely controlled by the white population, and it is reflected in what it produces. Take Zach from *Saved by the Bell*, he was charming, handsome, and popular. All of his schemes were considered “cute” and “clever,” because he was the white main character. By virtue of his pretty privilege and popularity, he could get away with whatever he wanted. If any minority characters were to act the way Zach did, they would have been ridiculed and painted as villains. Characters like Emma Ross from *Jessie*, and Serena Van der Woodsen from *Gossip Girl* showed white girls that intelligence is not a priority if you are pretty and rich. Both being blonde with perfect style, they set impossible expectations for the white youth, all while setting them above minority youth. The presence of white supremacist ideals within the media has been established, and it is used not only to put down minorities but uplift the white audience.

Modern stereotypes have been embedded deep into society for the past century, but the real question is do these stereotypes have a place in modern media - especially children’s media? As previously stated, research proves that there is a connection between television content and younger consumers. The adolescent mind is built to absorb and learn, what a child consumes during the developmental stages can impact them until adulthood. Therefore, the inclusion of pernicious stereotypes into media created for younger viewers will scar them for years to come. These characters might be entertaining to watch, but the lasting impact on children’s perceptions of themselves and society is much more important. If minority child has



only seen themselves through false representation that perpetuates negative archetypes, they will begin to internalize these stereotypes and incorporate them into their lives. Television is conditioning minority youth to act according to the standards of a white-dominated society. Even in today's progressive age, the white, heterosexual man has superiority and with the archetypes being bolstered by the media, it will continue to be this way. We as a society not only need to recognize the influence of white supremacy on the media but work towards a solution to rectify the damage this influence has caused minority communities. Collectively, we need to understand that not all jokes, storylines, and character profiles need to be centered around minority identities and stereotypes. Youth media should be both entertaining and educating our children, not reinforcing society's damaging views on minorities.



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