

Where is the Authenticity? Analyzing and Creating Representation and Inclusion of Marginalized Voices in Television and Film

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Abstract

There is a disconnect between who we see on screen and the viewer. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how representation on screen has changed over time and in what ways it can be improved. My main research questions included :

- 1) How has representation of marginalized voices changed over the past decade in television and film?
- 2) What are the ways in which the entertainment industry can be more inclusive behind the screen and on screen?
- 3) In what ways can programs for children improve behind the screen and on screen?
- 4) What are the positive effects of representation and the negative effects of misrepresentation?
- 5) Why is representation so important and necessary?

A component of this literature review is composed of interviews I conducted with professionals in the children's media field to investigate how their companies operate and make decisions in order to provide the most beneficial content for children and families. Based on their insights, I implemented their advice to help me create scripts for an original television series focused on the issue of lack of representation.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Introduction/Problem Statement	5
Literature Review	7
Representation of Marginalized Voices on Screen	8
Portrayals of Latinx Characters on Screen	13
Writing for Children’s Media	18
Why Representation Matters?	23
Methodology	26
Discussion	28
References	30
Bible	available upon request
Scripts	available upon request

Introduction/ Problem Statement

Research Questions

In this thesis I addressed various questions that relate to marginalized voices in media, television, and film. The stories in Hollywood are usually dominated by White males as they are in high positions of power where important decisions are made which has been a problem since the beginning of the entertainment industry. This has never been a secret, but lately it is finally getting the attention that it deserves. Everyone loses when only one narrative is given the chance to be heard. This is why I decided to work on a thesis that addressed issues in media and the ways in which we can work towards making a change.

Guiding questions that I addressed in this literature review included:

- 1) How has representation of marginalized voices changed over the past decade in television and film?
- 2) What are the ways in which the entertainment industry can be more inclusive behind the screen and on screen?
- 3) In what ways can programs for children improve behind the screen and on screen?
- 4) What are the positive effects of representation and the negative effects of misrepresentation?
- 5) Why is representation so important and necessary?

Before beginning my research and conducting interviews these were the questions that I had been thinking about but never had the opportunity to conduct formal research. These questions helped shape the topics and sections around which my literature review is organized.

Themes

I explored various themes throughout the academic and creative portion of this thesis.

The themes and topics include:

- 1) Representation of Marginalized Voices on Screen
- 2) Portrayals of Latinx Characters on Screen
- 3) Writing for Children's Media
- 4) Why does Representation Matter?

The purpose of studying these topics is to get a better understanding of why there is a lack of authentic storytelling, the process of creating children's media, and how a viewer benefits from stories they are unfamiliar with. I decided to break down my literature review into these sections because they each cover an aspect necessary for accurate narratives.

Significance

I am doing research in order to understand the data that has already been collected and found about the lack of representation of people of color and other marginalized voices, and to understand the effects that detrimental stereotypes can have on a young audience and how it can impact their perspective and mindset on people different from them. Although there has been improvement in representation, the work and fight is by no means over- it has just begun. I am passionate about representation of marginalized voices because I do not want the next generation of children to see themselves misrepresented in the media. As technology advances and the number of media outlets and streaming services rise there is opportunity to fall into the traps of continuing with the use of stereotypes. There is also the opportunity for change by creating authentic stories and creating inclusive writers' rooms and production teams.

This thesis holds personal significance for me. Growing up, I loved to use media, specifically television and film to escape and go on adventures with the protagonist of whichever program I was viewing at the time. As a Latina who grew up in a predominantly Latinx low-income community, it was clear to me at a young age that we weren't getting the same amount of screentime as others. And when our stories were being told we were rarely portrayed in a positive manner, but instead we were portrayed as stereotypes- gang members, maids, violent, angry, or hypersexualized. From a young age, I did not understand why my community that was full of inspiring stories, beautiful, kind-hearted people, and hard workers was being reduced to stereotypes. I would think, is this how people see us? Why isn't the beauty of our culture, values, and work ethic being shown?

My original series allowed me to be in control of the plots and characters that will have a voice. I used this creative freedom to create complex characters and plotlines that will make the viewer proud, feel seen, and be able to have a connection with the characters. This work is especially necessary because the political climate in the United States continues to marginalize and diminish communities of color.

Literature Review

This review covers various topics, academic research, and literature about television, film, and media. Specifically, this review presents the research that has been done on the lack of marginalized voices on screen. Throughout this literature review when the term "marginalized voices" is mentioned, it is used to reference people who do not identify as White and Male. This term can be used to reference racial and ethnic minorities, people of color, women, or those who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

For this literature review, the statistics and academic research focused on television programs and films that were created and released for viewers in the United States. Second, there are sections of this literature review dedicated to taking a closer look at the Latinx (nonbinary term to refer to those with Latin ancestry) community and their portrayals on screen for the past several decades. The next section covers the effects of seeing one's racial or ethnic group being represented, misrepresented, or not seeing one's self represented at all. And lastly, I conducted a series of interviews with writers and producers to further understand the components that go into writing children's media.

Representation of Marginalized Voices on Screen

At the present time, there have been numerous studies done to research the state of representation in television and film. These studies collected data on representation of minoritized people in front and behind the camera. (i.e. actors, directors, producers, writers, etc.) In the UCLA Diversity Report (an audit conducted by researchers at UCLA), Hunt, Ramón, and Tran (2019) concluded that in 2017 “2 out of 10 lead actors in film were people of color”, and “2.2 out of 10 lead actors in broadcast scripted television are people of color” (pp.14,15). The data collected on positions behind the camera were even more disappointing, “1.3 out of 10 film directors are people of color” and “1.3 out of 10 film directors are female” (p. 29). These statistics suggest that there is a disconnect between those who are creating content and those who are consuming it. If Hollywood only allows White men to have the final say in the entertainment industry then that can allow for other narratives to not have the opportunity to get screen time (Hunt, Ramón & Tran, 2019).

Symbolic Annihilation and the Social Identification Gratification Perspective

Underrepresented people want representation in front of the camera and behind the camera. This would benefit those who identify with a marginalized group as well as those who identify with a dominant and constantly represented group. When someone identifies with a group that has faced prejudice in their society or has been constantly silenced, the impacts of seeing someone similar to themselves on screen can impact how they see themselves for the better. Gerbner and Gross (1976) argued that representation allows for one to feel heard, seen, and important. They also argued that "representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation" (p.182). The viewer experiences symbolic annihilation because they don't see a reflection of themselves or someone they can connect with on screen. They internalize this and begin to believe that if they are not part of the dominant group who gets screen time then their existence and contributions to society do not matter.

Programs on television and films can have a role in the lives of adolescents who are trying to understand their identity. A resource that adolescents might use to help them shape their views is media, through finding models of behavior (Ellithorpe, M.E. & Bleakley, A. J, 2016). These authors also suggested that adolescents choose programs with casts that are of the same groups (racial and/or gender) they identify with which can ultimately lead to the viewer attaining a higher self-esteem. This is part of the social identification gratification perspective which they describe as people actively looking to watch characters that reflect themselves. They explained that viewers who do not have trouble finding characters that represent them or viewers who live in a homogenous community can benefit from characters they may not relate to or perspectives they may not be familiar with.

Media as a Catalyst for Change

If a viewer is located in a community that lacks diversity and different walks of life then media can be a way that they can inform themselves on different lifestyles. It is necessary to point out that if the viewer is learning other perspectives through stereotypes and harmful stories about other cultures then the viewer can learn the wrong message. Graves (1999) argued that lack of diversity on screen has implications that those voices not frequently seen or heard from might be interpreted by audiences -- particularly children of color -- as meaning that they are not as important. Graves stated that "Television could influence children by providing examples of people with or without prejudice, diverse social groups that stimulate positive or negative affect, and settings in which racial discrimination is endorsed or rejected" (p. 708).

Although television and film can be used as a catalyst for change, it needs to be done properly. Mastro (2009) noted that exposure to a stereotype can influence the viewer's perspective on minoritized voices. If the media condones stereotypes then there will be a negative influence on the majority group members' viewpoint. Mastro related this to cultivation theory where the more that a person consumes television, the more the audience's view will match those presented. Again, depending on the way that stories are told and if detrimental stereotypes are diminishing a character then the program is not being used for positive change.

Garretson (2015) referenced various media theories to explain how and why they can impact adolescents. First they described the Parasocial Contact Theory (PCT) which in the context of television, allows for the viewer to form a "relationship" with the character they see which can help a viewer develop social tolerance when watching a character who belongs to a group or minority they may not have known much about before. Next, Garretson referenced Cultivation Theory, which "suggests that the more television exposure viewers have, the more

television can ‘cultivate’ alternative viewpoints and attitudes” (617). Lastly, Garretson referenced Exemplification Theory, which is when positive examples are shown instead of stereotypes that can help viewers develop positive attitudes about others and can eradicate prejudices they may have held prior. Garretson also emphasized how these theories are more likely to impact adolescents because younger people have more liberal attitudes than older generations.

Possible Solutions

Earlier on it was noted that increasing the number of marginalized voices can’t be the only solution to the problem of representation, but the quality of representation is just as important. Erigha (2015) described quality representation in front of the screen as roles that allow actors to play characters that are multidimensional and complex instead of stereotyped and limited. Behind the screen, directors and producers do not want to be put in a box and want to have the opportunity to work on various genres. Erigha (2015) also suggests that in order for films with female protagonists to succeed the way that ones with males do, studios must support those films in the same way financially. They need to be given the same budget and shown on as many screens.

The purpose of this literature review is to not only acknowledge the issues, problematic history, and current state of television and film in their lack of having more perspectives. Another purpose of this literature review is to also mention the suggestions that have been made about the steps that can be taken towards fixing these issues.

The USC Annenberg (2016) report on diversity in entertainment (a study conducted by researchers at the Annenberg School in California) not only acknowledged where the

entertainment industry was failing but also gave suggestions about what could be implemented in order to help marginalized voices attain equity in the industry. For example, they stated that having clear target inclusion goals in order to have others hold companies accountable for what they state they will do. When a company sets a goal for itself and makes it public they will have something to strive for and will have outside forces as well making sure that they are working towards their goal. The report also proposed that companies implement counter stereotypes before a script is finalized which would allow the company to combat stereotypical characters on screen. In another USC Annenberg (2019) report which focused on inequality in popular films from the past decades, they also made suggestions for improvement that pertained to improving the film industry. On screen, they suggested having more opportunities for marginalized people to play leading roles on screen. For casting directors specifically, the report's authors urge them to beat implicit biases when casting and not limiting who can play a role. Behind the camera, they emphasize the importance of hiring women- they have identified that studios lack in rehiring female directors and finding new female talent.

Portrayals of Latinx Characters on Screen

Analysis of Positive Portrayals of Latinx Characters:

This section will be divided into multiple parts. The first section will focus on children's television programs from the 1970s to early 2000s that had successful representations of Latinx character. I have compiled literature about why these shows were a success and had an impact on its viewers at the time they aired. The programs that I chose were televised on English language networks such as PBS and Nickelodeon, not from networks that are Spanish language only such

as Telemundo or Univision. The programs I have chosen to include are; *Carrascolendas*, *Villa Alegre*, *Dora the Explorer*, and *Maya & Miguel*.

Before I get into the individual programs, I want to reference a piece from Casanova's (2007) research done on the Spanish language and the Latinx ethnicity being incorporated in children's shows. She wrote, "Television shows designed for pre-schoolers introduce cultural ideas and values before many children encounter other agents of socialization, such as school and peers. In an increasingly diverse society, television presents children with perspectives on ethnic difference, in most instances drawing on some form of multi-culturalism" (456). As the Latinx population continues to grow in the United States, there is a need for this population to see their traditions and language celebrated on screen. It is also necessary that non-Latinx children are also exposed to the different cultures within the Latinx community at a young age in order to be welcoming of other perspectives.

According to Kinsky (2009), *Carrascolendas* was monumental in the 1970s as it was one of the first bilingual programs to air on PBS and fundamental for other bilingual programs that were created afterwards. In Natalicio and Williams' (1972) evaluation, *Carroscolendas* was created to show Mexican-American children a reflection of their culture and language. The program was developed under the Bilingual Education Act in Texas. Instructional objectives included:

- “1. Multicultural Social Environment-knowing why it is good to speak both Spanish and English, talking about family and relatives using English or Spanish vocabulary. 2. Language Skills-knowing certain vocabulary, syntax, and sound features of Spanish and English. 3. Numbers and Figures-counting; picking out pairs, sets of three; recognizing

numbers and figures. 4. Physical Environment-recognizing certain items in immediate environment, names of animals, foods, transportation items. 5. Concept Development-recognizing size and differences, causes of hot and cold, weight differences.” (p.301)

The program was developed with a team effort between educators and a television team who incorporated the educational aspects into scripts. The show taught these objectives by a cast who all spoke English and Spanish with the exception of one of the characters.

Similar to *Carrascalendas*, a program with an emphasis on bilingualism and education was *Villa Alegre* which aired on PBS from 1973 to 1981. In Neuman and Pitts’ (1983) review of programs for bilingual children they noted that the show acknowledged themes such as “human relations, natural environment, food and nutrition, energy, and man-made products’ (Elwell,1974)” (p. 258). The show used a blend of live action and cartoon segments to teach these themes, while also encouraging cognitive skills, reading, and being an active member of one’s community.

Moving on to more recent and animated programming Ryan (2010) chose Dora from *Dora the Explorer* as a role model for children, girls, and Latinas. She makes this argument because Dora engaged with her audiences and spoke to them which built a trusting relationship between her and the viewer. She invited the viewer to help her along her journey by asking them questions to help her on her adventure. When it comes to gender, she was a female heroine who broke stereotypes as she was not passive, took the lead on her adventures, and refused to be a damsel in distress. When it comes to embracing her Latinidad, she was a female Latina heroine

who took pride in her culture and bilingualism. Rarely has there been an animated Latina heroine with brown skin who speaks Spanish and English.

Similar to *Dora the Explorer*, *Maya & Miguel*'s protagonists embraced their Puerto Rican and Mexican culture. In Casanova's (2007) examination of the show, they noticed that *Maya & Miguel* featured Spanish and English- where the Spanish is used to educate the viewer on customs and traditions. The storyline was created in an inclusive way that allowed viewers of all backgrounds to learn and appreciate the Spanish language and the Latinx community. This show demonstrated biculturalism, especially with Maya and Miguel's grandmother who introduced her grandkids to her Mexican traditions as they implemented them into their lives.

After doing this analysis and reading the findings of other scholars, it became clear to me that although Latinidad is celebrated in these shows and they have been successful at teaching viewers about Latinx traditions, it is important to note that the physical appearance of the protagonists did not range greatly. Specifically, these programs failed at highlighting Afro-Latinx.

Issues and Effects of Stereotypical Latinx Portrayals:

I was not able to find recent data on Latinx television representation, but found an in-depth study done by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP). In this section I will be analyzing the data collected on the film industry from the past ten years with regard to Latinx portrayals. In this study done by Case, Choueiti, Clark, Hernandez, Martinez, Pieper, and Smith (2019) on the top 100 grossing movies each year from 2007-2018, they found that only 4.5% of the 47,268 characters were Latinx. Common stereotypes found included; criminal, low-income, immigrant, religious, and

temperamental. When it comes to behind the screen, the numbers continue to decrease, only 4% of directors were Latinx and only 3% of producers were Latinx. The data continued to disappoint for LGBTQ+ Latinx representation and disabled Latinx characters. Specifically, in the past five years only five films of the 500 top-grossing films in that time span had a Latinx LGBT character. In the past four years there were only thirteen Latinx characters who had a disability.

It's also necessary to note that the buying power of the Latinx community is currently \$1.7 trillion for consumer spending and purchase 23% of movie tickets sold (Case, Choueiti, Clark, Hernandez, Martinez, Pieper & Smith, 2019). However, the support the Latinx community provides for the film industry is not reciprocated. My reasoning for including these numbers and data is not to sound discouraging or hopeless. It's necessary to acknowledge these problems because although there has been some improvement over the years, but there is more work to be done. We must acknowledge that there is a disconnect between the screen and Latinx representation. Although the study focused on the problems the Latinx community faced on film, they also provided solutions to work towards equity in the film industry. They suggested that casting directors find emerging Latinx talent and have them audition for more roles. They suggest that film festivals and non profits support initiative for Latinx filmmakers. They suggest that corporations have Latinx creators work behind the camera for campaigns that are made for Latinx audiences.

Mastro, Morawitz, and Ortiz's (2007) conducted a study in which they tried to find a correlation between viewer relation with television among White college students and their views on the Latinx community. These students gave information on their viewing habits and their perceptions of the Latinx community in the United States. The researchers found that the

small amount of Latinx representation on television, at the time about 3%, can have a correlation with the students' perceptions. When students did not have much contact with the Latinx community in their lives, they relied on the messages they viewed on television to shape their perception.

When studying the way that Latinx youth view themselves after watching portrayals on television, the results were disappointing as well. For Rivadeneyra, Ward, and Gordon (2007), Latinx adolescents' perceptions of self were impacted by who they saw on television. They found that Latinx students had lower self-esteem if they had a greater television intake. This is not surprising as they noted at the time of this study that Latinx characters were more likely than characters of other ethnicities to have jobs of low-status, be in stories related to crime or violence, and less articulate.

Another issue that needs to be discussed is the issue of whitewashing Latinx roles. Merodeadora (2017) defines whitewashing as "the erasure of people and characters of color from media" by "taking a pre-existing character or person of color and making them white" (p.1). There are various ways of whitewashing in the media including "having a white person pretend to be a person of color" or "centering white characters in narratives that should be about characters of color" (p. 3-4).

Writing for Children's Media

I'd like to preface this section by saying there has not been much published literature on the topic of writing children's media. That being said, this section will consist of the literature I did find as well as interviews I conducted with professionals who work in children's media at WGBH and FableVision. These interviews allowed me to have a better understanding of how

producers and writers in children's media approach projects and programs created for young viewers.

In Lemish's (2010) study, she found multiple common and guiding principles that are used by producers when creating quality children's television. First, she found that programming should prepare children by advancing them mentally and socially, while also entertaining them. Next, programs should affirm a child's identity by showing a reflection of their culture and language on screen. Programs need to recognize that all children are not the same and are at different stages in their development, have different interests, personalities, and environments.

Lemish (2010) continued to provide more principles that are used to evaluate children's programs from a production perspective. The first criterion is, are kids introduced to new ideas they have never seen before? Next, is there a good plot to the story and does the audience care about the characters that are telling the story? Next, the program should not talk down to children or try to ruin the trust between a child and a parent. Also, the program should not use humor at the expense of exploiting someone.

When discussing producing children's television, London (2007) points to the ingredients that studios look for when developing pre-existing properties into television shows. The first is brand awareness, meaning that there will be an audience who is already familiar with the characters which will help build an audience. The next is relatable characters whose story arc is developed well throughout the series and keeps the viewer entertained and interested. Another factor that can be very effective in animated shows is the element of fantasy where plots that can't happen in our world take place. Finally, the last ingredient London suggests is characters

who empower the viewer because children feel fulfilled when they see a protagonist who is in control or goes through a transformation like a superhero.

London (2007) also mentioned the assumptions that producers have during the process of developing a pre-existing property into a show. One of the theories included that children between the ages of four and eight want to watch programs that are targeted for older age groups because they want to envision themselves more grown. Another theory is that children older than seven do not watch shows that are educational because they are trying to use television as a break from time at school. The last theory mentioned was that boys would not watch shows targeted at girls but girls would watch a show targeted for boys. Although these theories and ingredients were from more than a decade ago, it seems to me that in children's media many of these factors are still applied to content targeting kids today.

I interviewed Mia Olufemi (2019), producer of WGBH children's show *Molly of Denali*. She described how WGBH ensures that the characters and stories are true to the Alaskan Native experience. From the start of this project, WGBH partnered with Alaskan Natives who would serve as an advisory group for the show as well as cultural advisors and a creative producer, Princess Daazhrai Johnson, who is an Alaskan Native who identifies with the *Molly of Denali* stories. These advisors and producer have a say from the start of the story and are constantly providing feedback, making notes, and reviewing content to create an authentic show. The development process can be difficult since everyone on the team is not in one location, but that just means finding other ways of communication to have the team located in Alaska be in constant contact with the team located in Boston. WGBH is willing to put more time and work

into their project because they want to portray the protagonist's culture accurately and with respect.

I also interviewed Kathy Waugh (2019), writer and co-creator of *Molly of Denali*, who acknowledged that prior to writing for the show she did not know what it meant to live in Alaska or be an Alaskan Native. When the show was picked up, writers took a trip to Alaska to get immersed in the culture they would be writing about and to learn about the values that are prominent in Native communities. She emphasized the collaborative effort necessary when writing for the show and that she must be accepting of getting feedback from experts on topics that she may not know as much on. And she acknowledged that although it can be in a writer's nature to be protective of their art, the writer must learn to incorporate the feedback that will allow the story and plot to speak truth to the Alaskan Native experience.

I interviewed Peter Stidwell (2019), executive producer at FableVision, who shared how FableVision measures the success of the content they create for children. He mentioned that they measure success in multiple ways which can include if the client decides to return to the company to continue working on other projects with them. He also mentioned that metrics including number of views, clicks, length of playtime, number of monthly plays, and repeat plays are used as a measure. Aside from metrics, he noted that industry recognition such as awards can also be used as a measurement for success of a project. When Mia Olufemi spoke on this topic she made similar points to those of Peter Stidwell. She recognized that WGBH is a nonprofit, but it is still a business. In order to justify funding for projects and shows, there are research and analytic teams at WGBH that will provide metrics on shows. They are able to provide metrics for information such as number of streams, ratings for certain age groups, number of low income

households being reached. The demand and contributions of funders allows for the creation of more content.

All of my interviewees shared their views on mistakes that have been made in children's media, specifically the ways in which it has failed in representation. Mia Olufemi emphasized that "inclusion requires more effort than diversity" (2019). She has seen programs where there will be characters of color on screen but they are side characters and not being heard. She went on to explain that not only do characters of color need to be heard on screen, but professionals of color need to be in the rooms where decisions are being made about children's media. Likewise, Kathy Waugh made similar points, but also has seen that children's media can sometimes be too cautious in how characters are portrayed and some programs create a narrow universe which can deprive children of learning from different experiences. In addition, Peter Stidwell explained that representation can't be approached in a check box method because that lacks authenticity. He also acknowledged that creators face a challenge when trying to get a point across to the viewer as quickly as possible because they may rely on harmful stereotypes when trying to send a message which is detrimental for the child absorbing this information.

At the end of these interviews, each interviewee gave their suggestions on how children's media can be improved. Mia Olufemi emphasized working towards inclusion when creating a production team by ensuring the team is composed of people from various walks of life and that work is required on the company's behalf to ensure that they are comprised of inclusive teams. In terms of working with clients, Peter Stidwell advised engaging in a dialogue with the client and being transparent about how FableVision wants to tell an authentic story without misrepresenting cultures and stories. Kathy Waugh suggests that another way in which improvement can happen

is by going to the location one is going to write about and in a respectful manner learn from locals about their values. As well as not cutting contact after that trip, but continuing to have cultural advisors input on storylines and getting their feedback. These interviews allowed me to get insight on how decisions are made in 2019 at media companies whose missions are to teach, entertain, and push the minds of youth.

Why Does Representation Matter?

After presenting the statistics, literature, and studies conducted on stereotypical representation, lack of representation, and the perspectives of professionals in the children's media field, this section will focus on the importance of representation. Martins and Harrison (2012) conducted a study to examine the effects that television use has on elementary school aged children in relation to race, gender, and self-esteem. They stated that factors that have an effect on self-esteem include peer and family relationships, and how the media has a bigger role than it once did. Before conducting their study they found that screen time limits the amount of time adolescents spend on activities that have an impact on self-esteem like reading, sports, and other hobbies.

In their study, they found that between the White and Black children, everyone except for the White boys had their self-esteem decrease due to television viewing. Martins and Harrison had numerous explanations for this, the first being that television exhibits gender and race stereotypes such as males being powerful and females being weak and helpless. In addition to this, the Black male protagonists on screen have been shown in positions where they are causing trouble and Black female protagonists are sexually exploited. They connected this to social identity theory because it "would predict that exposure to these messages serve to bolster the

self-concept of White boys because their basis for comparison reveals that prestige, power, and wealth are commonplace and easily achievable for White males on television" (p. 352).

Another explanation for their findings is that children use the messages that the media sends and use them as a basis to compare and evaluate themselves. For their final explanation for their findings, they pointed to television viewing limits the messaging and images that a child sees because they are missing out on real life interactions. Therefore, if a child continues to see problematic messaging on screen they will internalize the limited messages they see. Martin (2008) makes similar arguments to Matins and Harrison (2012) regarding how minoritized youth self perception is affected when internalizing messages they see on television. Martin pointed out that a potential risk that can occur when Black viewers are watching negative portrayals is stereotype threat. She defines stereotype threat as "the fear that one will confirm an existing stereotype of a group with which one identifies" (p.340). The viewer should not have to fear that they are going to live up to stereotypes that are being portrayed on screen. If there were more multidimensional characters on screen then this would not be a fear because stereotypes would not be consuming media.

Cohen (2006) presented the power of identification between the viewer and character they are watching. He explained that "identifying with a character means feeling an affinity toward the character that is so strong ... and come to an empathic understanding for the feelings the character experiences, and for his or her motives and goals" (184). He also mentions that when the viewer does this it helps the viewer develop a perspective on the story, understanding what motivates the character, and connecting with them. If the viewer is not presented with characters that they can identify with then they may lack creating a connection with those they

see on screen. Trepte (2006) added that media should be delivering characters that one can identify with, but if media relies on inaccurate portrayals of minoritized communities then that can influence the perception of viewers whose only exposure to marginalized communities is through television. Trepte emphasized that mainstream entertainment has the ability to make an impact and instill a change in influencing the viewer, but if the characters are represented in a stereotypical manner than the positive societal change that it could have instilled is no longer possible. Focusing on the vulnerability of young viewers, Van Evra (2004) explained that viewers who depend on messaging from media can develop stereotypical attitudes. Interestingly, she noted that these attitudes can develop from as early as the preschool years into adulthood.

During the interviews I conducted, I asked my interviewees how all children benefit from representation. Mia Olufemi spoke on how all children benefit from watching an Alaskan Native protagonist on screen even if they do not come from the same background. Kids are able to connect with Molly over their love of animals, family, and the environment. Kids find Molly's story different, interesting, and cool if they had never known someone like Molly. Olufemi said the goal at WGBH is to try and "incite a sense of curiosity and wonder into children who watch the show" (2019). She also noted that young viewers are open minded and it's usually the adult who thinks that a child cannot learn from other children who don't look like them. Similarly, during my interview with Peter Stidwell, he also mentioned how kids benefit from seeing themselves and being exposed to characters not like them. He referenced the idea of windows and mirrors describing mirrors as the viewer seeing a reflection of themselves and windows as the viewer learning about different types of people. He explained that seeing things that are familiar and relatable are necessary, but it's also necessary to discover things that are new and interesting.

Kathy Waugh emphasized that "we are so benefitted by realizing we're not the only people in the world". (2019) She referenced her personal experience growing up and how she felt she was clueless as a kid when she did not learn about people who were unlike her. She went on to explain that as an adult she had to unlearn things because she didn't "see representations of different kinds of people in the spectrum of humanity" (2019). As a writer she wants to make sure that youth don't have to encounter what she did, and can learn to celebrate their differences.

Methodology

Approach #1: Interviewing Professionals who work in Children's Media

I interviewed content creators from WGBH and Fablevision in regards to what it means to fail and succeed in representation. Their responses were woven throughout my literature review in the section prior to this. The purpose of these interviews was to get the perspectives and opinions of those who have dedicated their careers to creating media for youth. They shared the obstacles they encounter when trying to create the best programming for children and how they face it. They acknowledged that the minds of youth are being molded, and media has the power to help shape their minds.

Approach #2: Creating a Television Script

The interviews I conducted with media professionals were used to inform me about how content creators are thinking about inclusion. I used what Olufemi, Waugh, and Stidwell shared about their processes and approaches and incorporated it into my own creative process. In my script, my goal was to create a television show whose target audience is teenagers and whose protagonist is a young Latina with a passion for media. The cast was a majority of people of color and others who have been minoritized in our society. This script was a way to create stories

and characters who are complex and are not just defined by their zip code, skin color, or background.

During the process of writing my scripts, I worked with Tufts screenwriting professor, Khary Jones, and Encantos co-founder, Steven Wolfe Pereira, who provided feedback on the scripts. Their suggestions helped me create a story arc that allowed for a good balance between character development and drama. During the writing process I also kept in mind what my interviewees told me about how the viewer is affected by what they are watching as well as techniques to stay away from in the development process. In developing my own television script, I also looked at sitcoms and dramedies that have exemplified complex characters that viewers connect with. I analyzed the techniques that these programs use in order to ensure that they are not minimizing characters. I also looked at programs that have exemplified problematicness in inclusion because I find it necessary to not only look at programs who have succeeded in inclusion but also study the failures as well.

Discussion

Change cannot be expected to happen overnight. Representation requires those who traditionally have their voices heard to be allies to those who do not have the same platform. When looking for literature and research on representation on screen, I could not find research that explained why studios and companies have failed at on screen and off screen representation for so long. Everyone would benefit from a more inclusive Hollywood so why has it taken so long for studios to try and work towards inclusion and equity? When putting the literature together, to me it seems that it is this way because when a dominant group holds power and sees

themselves on screen they may not be cognizant that there is an issue. If a studio's board room and final decision makers only include White men then they will have a limited perspective.

Going forward in order to succeed those in power cannot ignore the past and how the failures of the past were created. If those failures are ignored then the cycle will continue. If television Latinx characters continue to portray stereotypes or are inaccurate representations of the community the viewer may begin to believe these stereotypes and depend on them to form a perception since they do not have other exposure. I recommend moving forward that those who hold the power to make decisions and have a platform use it by creating seats for others to join them at the table. There are numerous ways to approach this, one can be starting an initiative or program to help underrepresented voices start a career at a company. Another way is when it comes to developing a piece of work, making sure that the characters of color are not reduced to stereotypes. Also, assuring that the writers room does not consist of people who all share the same background or story. In order to be successful and create an authentic narrative there needs to be representation both in front and behind the camera. It is also necessary to point out that those who have been in the media industry for a long time or who identify with society's majority need to understand their privilege. In order to be an ally one must use that privilege by fighting for equity and having those underrepresented voices heard. Examples of this include not having one person dominate the conversation who historically has. In order to combat this they must take a step back and let those who haven't had an opportunity to contribute as much, take the lead.

I acknowledge that I am not an expert and I am only just starting out in the media industry. Based on my research and personal experience I have found that these practices can

allow for a project to function better and reach equity by practicing inclusivity. I look forward to the stories that will be told on screen and the change that will be made.

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