Normative Assessments, Part 2

Types of Normative Assessment

- We will discuss two:

- Ethical Theory Based Assessment &
- Ideological Critique

Ethical Theories

The best-known ethical theories are Utilitarianism, Deontology, and Virtue Theory.

We are going to focus on the third, Virtue Theory, as it is the most obviously relevant to popular media & fan culture.

Virtue Ethics

- Theory that defines ethics as striving to act as a moral character.
- Can be traced back to ancient Greeks:
- *Dikê*, Goddess of Justice; defined as action (reward/punish)
- *Dikaiosynê* (quality of being just)
- *Dikê* - Justice as an abstract concept.

Thomas Scanlon's Contractualism

- Most detailed account in *What We Owe to Each Other*. (Fans of *The Good Place?*)
- Less about government than about moral interpersonal relationships.
- A rational theory based on mutual recognition of shared respect, interests, and reasons.

Different Versions of Virtue Ethics, but similar themes

- Judgments made based on the motivational & dispositional states of actors.
- Doing the Right Thing for the Right Reasons.

How Apply to Popular Media/Fan Culture?

- Could argue that a particular character or set of characters are positive models for praiseworthy virtues.

- Dr. Who, Harry, Hermoine, Rey, Luke, Mulan, Buffy, Ripley, Katniss, assorted superheroes (but not all).

More Common is Ideological Critique

- Ideology = a set of political ideas.
- Usually modified to talk about subsets: economic ideology, gender ideology, race-related ideology, etc.
- HOW a particular set of beliefs or practices are advanced by a pop culture text/fan culture needs to be explained .

Cultivation Analysis & Gender Roles

- Most roles on TV demonstrate "traditional" gender roles, even though the *professions* women represent on TV has changed dramatically since the 1950s.
- Children's programming, especially, remains dominated by gender stereotypes. Studies show kids *are* influenced by such portrayals.
- HVs tend to believe/support in such traditional roles more than MVs and LVs.

Recall: "Vicarious Operant Conditioning" (= Social Learning Theory)

- Behavior rewarded is likely to be repeated; behavior punished is likely to decrease.
- "Vicarious" operant conditioning is a form of social learning: You see behavior rewarded or punished via mass media, you learn from that and increase or decrease your behavior accordingly.

Gender Roles

- Children learn about what is appropriate for Boys & Girls from many sources, including Mass Media.
- There are various lists of gender-related behaviors: the Bem Sex Role Inventory is the most famous.
- Many personality qualities are seen as "appropriate" for one gender *or* another. "Men are from Mars, Women from Venus" = Polarization.
- Note: Bem's research is from the early 1970s, but there is ample evidence that many of these norms continue to be perceived by those who believe in "traditional" gender roles.

Bem's (1970s) examples of Traditional Norms

- Masculine = self-reliant, defends beliefs, independent, athletic, assertive, strong personality, forceful, analytical, leader, willing to take risks, makes decisions easily, self-sufficient, dominant, willing to take a stand, aggressive, competitive, individualistic, ambitious.
- Feminine = gentle, loves children, avoids harsh language, childlike, gullible, tender, sympathetic, sensitive to others' needs, understanding, compassionate, soft spoken, soothes hurt feelings, loyal, yielding, affectionate, flatterable.

Notes about Bem SRI

- Can score Highly Masculine, Feminine, Both (androgynous), or Neither (undifferentiated).
- Subsequent research notes that most people no longer see particular traits as masc/fem. Most would agree that the qualities listed are gender-neutral.
- *However*, it is still quite common to criticize specific behavior as "unmanly" or "unfeminine."
- Children, especially, are very sensitive to differentiating boys' from girls' behavior, and an enormous amount of cultural messaging reinforces this.

Gender Roles & TV

- A great deal of social learning taking place about gender roles: Who is reinforced or punished by violating gender roles?
- Overwhelming amount of research documents that most TV reinforces traditional gender roles, especially thru advertising.
- TV influences children's beliefs about occupations & career goals, along with certain traits & behaviors.
- TV especially influential at young ages when kids are learning gender norms at school.
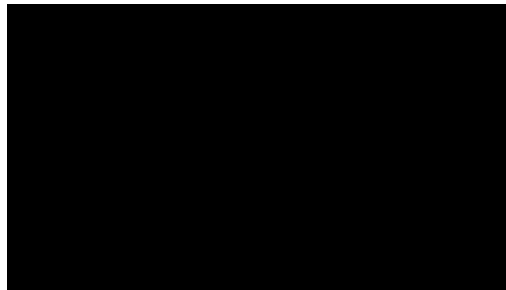
Influence Works Both Ways

- Nontraditional roles are influential: Children exposed to nonstereotypical career more likely to accept them. Girls who see women in professional roles such as cops, principals, leaders, etc., will alter perceptions about RW options.
- Parents Matter: "Active mediation" (co-watching) can reinforce or challenge perceptions.
- For kids under 7 especially, a parent should be watching TV with them and comment actively, or at least prescreen content. Minimize commercial TV.
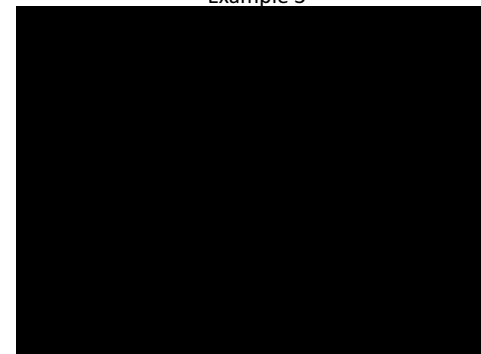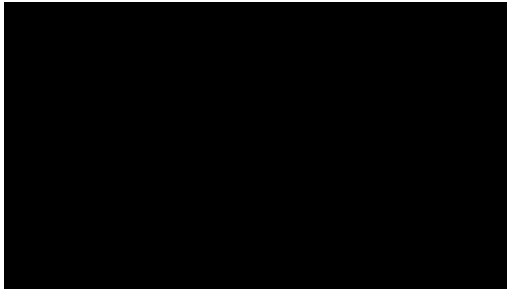
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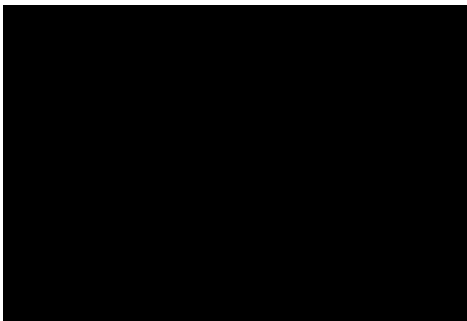
Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

Example 5: Challenging Dominant Norms

Miss Representation

RM, leader of the South Korean group BTS, on the band's trend of challenging and redefining masculinity in an interview with Amazon Music. #HealthyMasculinity #MaskYouLiveIn

Example 6: The "Scully Effect"

Dana Scully was a role model on *X-Files*—both a doctor and an FBI agent who was competent, brave, and compassionate.

Research funded by The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media suggests this influenced young women viewers.

The "Scully Effect"

The "Scully Effect"

- **"When it comes to attitudes toward STEM, regular viewers of *The X-Files* have far more positive beliefs about STEM than other women in the sample. Moderate/heavy viewers place a higher priority on encouraging girls and women to go into STEM than non/light viewers, and nearly two-thirds of regular viewers say that Scully increased their belief in the importance of STEM."**

https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/x-files-scully-effect-report-geena-davis-institute.pdf

Example 7: Challenging Dominant Norms

Intergroup Attitudes

- **As noted previously, our attitudes about other groups of people is influenced both by direct contact and mediated contact.**
- **Such groups can include different racial, national, and ethnic groups, and people with different sexual orientations or gender identifications.**
- **Often, ignorance → prejudice and negative stereotyping, especially if one's sources of information is minimal.**

We Learn from Media Representations

- **Both the Cultivation Theory and Social Learning Theory state that we learn about people from media portrayals.**
- **This not only includes the categories of girls & boys and gender norms, but about any and all categories (professions, age groups, sports fans, plus all the groups previous identified).**
- **Again: The less contact in the real world, the more we depend on mediated contact, also known as "parasocial contact."**

The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis

- **As social learning suggests, we can learn about other groups through mass media. Contact is "parasocial" or "mediated." Learning = reduced stereotyping.**
- **Multiple studies (Schiappa et al., 2005, 2006) show that intergroup prejudice can be reduced thru mediated contact.**
- **TV shows like *Queer Eye* and *Will & Grace* reduce prejudice toward gay men, for example.**
- **Eddie Izzard study = decreased prejudice toward transvestites accompanies learning about the category (remember Allport quote about categories).**

Eddie Izzard, Transvestite Comic

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (original)

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (original)

Considerable Research on PCH

- Since our work in 2005, many scholars have done research on PCH or "mediated contact" and found reductions in prejudice (1000+ citations).
- Research done in Communication, Health Education, Social Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, & Gender Studies.

Even TikTok
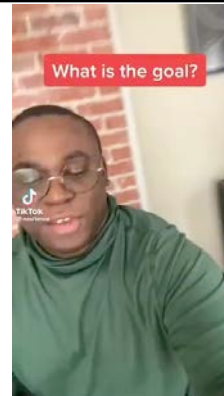
Recent Examples: Immigrants, Mental Health

Studies have been done on how positive portrayals can reduce prejudice toward undocumented immigrants and those with certain mental health challenges.

Superstore & Monk content & effects analyzed.

Recent Example: Transgender

--The number of transgender people is quite small, so mass media provides an opportunity to influence attitudes.

--Li (2019), who conducted an experiment using short clips from the reality show *Becoming Us* that support the contention that a positive narrative involving a transgender character can result in a modest improvement in attitudes toward transgender people as a whole.

Caitlyn Jenner

Research in the aftermath of Caitlyn Jenner coming out as transgender also suggest that such media coverage increased acceptance of transgender people.

Meta-Analysis (79 studies)

Published in 2020, Banas, Bessarabova, & Massey (*Human Communication Research*) reported that positive parasocial contact decreased prejudice ($r = -.23$), and negative parasocial contact increased prejudicial attitudes ($r = .31$).

Movies, too

Peterson & Thurston did a series of studies published in 1933: *Motion Pictures & the Social Attitudes of Children*.

Found prejudice reduction toward Germans from *Four Sons* **and Chinese-Americans from** *Son of the Gods* **that persisted months later.**

Schiappa (2008) also documents prejudice reduction from a movie class on gender.

Relevant Research Approaches

- **Content Analysis.** Pick a widely consumed TV show, comic book/manga, movie, animated series/anime, and provide an analysis of the content from the standpoint of demographic representation. That is, who is in it? What demographic groups are represented and which ones neglected? And how are the demographic groups and professions represented?
- **Conjecture Effects based on PCH or relevant theory.**

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