

# Forside

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The role of the media for children and youth: Social construction of everyday practices of watching television

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The role of the media for children and youth:  
Social construction of everyday practices of watching  
television

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this bachelor thesis is to discuss how television depicts themes such as violence, identity, family, alcohol, and drugs in relation to children and youth. The method used to narrow the amount of television to analyse, were to cross reference and analyse articles and blog post from film and television critics and their recommendation towards what shows were noteworthy to watch in 2020. A qualitative method where used to get a comprehensive overview and understanding of the themes of interest. In addition, it was to see how children and youth analyse a show given their cognitive development differ from that of adults. The results found were that how the media portray social reality is dependent on norms and ideologies in the society, as those who produce the media product exist within. This is taken from the social constructionism theory that states the media and its users work together to create and use it and the corresponding technology. In addition, it was found that television watching does not operate in a vacuum and children and youth will have their primary socialisation from those around them, and hence how they behave, or think, will be largely affected by those in their closest social circles.

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## **Introduction**

Media provides various platforms for shaping and expressing different themes. Some argue that media have become a “[...] dominant social institution in contemporary society, supplanting the influence of older institutions, such as schools, religion, and sometimes even the family.” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p.5). It sets frameworks that provide “tools” on how to particularly think about a certain topic. The impact media has can be attributed to the fact that it provides the biggest platforms for mass communication, which results in greater outreach for sharing ideas. This is fuelled further by the internet and social media, where anyone can share their opinions and views. However, the media is not a set singular entity, it seems to either reflect or introduce new ideas within its own world and in our society. Media seems to be changing in relation to society, while also holding on to certain old ideas and stereotypes. In this way certain ideas are normalised, while others are vilified.

Then how will an individual navigate this? It will be interesting to look at how children and teenagers navigates this vast landscape of information and impressions, finding their path in life, while figuring out their own standpoint on what’s ethically and morally wrong or right. They also tend to be in a precarious position to take things to heart given their cognitive development is not fully completed as those of adults. Because if the media truly reflects society, what do we want our youngest to see and carry fourth? In this way I believe it is important to discuss how the younger audience are presented with ideas, and whether they provide progress or setbacks. With the introduction of streaming platforms of film and TV, it is easier to gain access to a great variety of genres to explore. Therefore, to be able to discuss further how they could potentially be affected in terms of mental and physical well-being or provide frameworks, a question of interest could be:

*In what way does media - specifically television - depict different themes such as thoughts on family, violence, drugs and alcohol, and identity in children and youth?*

## **Methodology**

Firstly, a method on cross referencing articles made by film and television shows were applied to narrow the scope of what television shows to analyse. As some shows would pique my interest rather than be considered “a good show” by film critics, I would use their recommendations to control for a potential bias on picking television shows. My reasoning for choosing television shows rather than films, was that it could provide broader material to work with and going more into depth. Secondly, to make a more comprehensible analysis I used a qualitative method in finding relevant literature and analysed the shows in relation to the social constructionist perspective.

As mentioned, the method applied to find a limited number of shows to analyse was further narrowed down by using Norwegian articles and web pages. With the method of cross-referencing multiple articles about television shows in 2020 or recommended to watch in 2020, by film critics of newspapers or film and TV related webpages I would further limit my options by choosing a particular year. To get an overview of all the TV shows, they were placed in an excel spreadsheet. Limitation also occurred by setting specific criteria: they had to vary in age ratings, consist of different genres, contain one of the themes of interest and at least mentioned once in one of the articles as shown in Table 1. This could hopefully cover more of a varied audience than being limited to one age group or one genre. Variation in audience could also be attributed to the fact I chose two different streaming platforms which attract different viewers: Netflix and Disney+. However, shows with a mature rating or above 16+ was excluded as they did not fit my intended audience criteria. In addition, shows were excluded if I did not have access to the streaming platform. Furthermore, I would only look at the first season of each series. As I began analysing the shows, I would make a note of a particular scene, then make a code relating to the theme I would analyse. For example, I could observe ten different forms of violence, and would reference each code with the relevant scene.

Name of show	Criteria			Theme				
	Age	Genre	Mentioned in an article	Family	Drugs and alcohol	Identity (types)	Violence	Access to platform
The Queen's gambit	16+	Drama	3x	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Michael Jordan: The Last Dance	7+	Documentary	2x	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (threat of)	Yes
The Mandalorian	14+	Sci-fi	3x	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
The Boys	18+	Action, Comedy, Crime, Sci-fi	3x	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Schitt's creek	14+	Comedy	1x	Yes	Yes	Unsure	Yes	No

Table 1.

To support my claims and provide meaning to what I observed while watching the television series, I used social constructionism as the theoretical framework especially focusing on Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) theories. The assumption then, when making the analysis of the themes depicted in media, is that they are inherently linked to the social reality (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p.35). In other words, I am stating that through the use of media one can see our social reality as those involved in the production of the media, therefore television, use their own societal understanding to create the product. Therefore, media can be used to legitimise certain values and stereotypes, which means not only established ideas, but also those required for societal change.

For the analysis I took notes as I watched the television shows. Often, I would observe stereotypes regarding different identities, relations to drugs and alcohol, family bonds and violence. As I identified each stereotype, I would find a relevant research paper or article that would support my arguments and gain deeper understanding of the topic in question. This would also have a snowball effect where I gained knowledge and would dig deeper into certain aspects. As for limitations it can be clear that when reading articles and analysing them, I do apply my own biases. My various identities and background factors will influence my opinion on different subjects. Hence, this could be a contributor to why I choose certain articles or pick out certain quotes. However, though I acknowledge this bias, it is hard to completely rid myself of them. Still, I believe my methods constitute a framework of further discussion about how television shows can be looked at and what messages it sends.



## **Theoretical framework**

This paper bases itself on social constructionist theory as used by Berger and Luckmann (1966). This theory believes that human agents do not only develop technology, but also by using it will be able to bring forth social change by applying it, as technology can enable social change (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p.35). Hence, it is more dynamic than technological determinism that believes technology it's the causal effect for social change (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p.28). Underlying, social constructionism is built on the sociological perspective that all social reality is a social construction. This is done through human interaction, relating to internalizing social behaviour in the form of norms and moral values. There is no objective reality that states why something is as it is. However, the internalisation process of media or technology will be seen as something objectively real and beyond human control. Which is to be questioned given it was constructed by humans in the first place, according to social constructionism. Though the technology can have some influence over its user, as it can limit action, but with human ingenuity can be overcome or transformed. Hence, humans have agency as consumers have a connection to the outside world while simultaneously forming their identity through technology (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p.15, 35 - 36).

Hence, social constructionism is a great way to look at how the media, in this case television, reflects the social world. This given social notions of people and situations presented are taken from each producer/director/writer's interpretation of the social reality. In this way, social constructionism can be used to explain the occurrences of stereotypical imagery, as these are the reference points taken. It can be easier to "cut corners" in storytelling if you wish to give a clear storyline without delving too much into social commentary. This indicates that humans make conscious/unconscious decisions in how they present and form different entertainment media. It suggests that the greatest influences outside the media sphere makes it hard to control further stereotyping. However, continuing negative and positive images of a social occurrences will offer a certain idealized image that again will reflect on society. This means that when shown alternatives repeatedly to an audience a new understanding can be found. In other words, there is an interplay of media reflecting society as well as reinforcing a certain social reality given those who produce media have limited societal knowledge and experience. This can be altered if showcased alternatives to the norm over a longer period as it can engage interest,

especially if discussed or explored in our closest social circles. This could result in social change given enough time. To what degree is yet to be determined (Lemish, 2015, p. 135- 137, 140, 149).

## **Is television inherently bad for children and youth?**

The question of whether television is bad for children and youth, one will want to look at the harmful aspects. Negative effects taken into consideration are factors such as behavioural issues, health et cetera. Studies have shown that negative effects could occur when the time spent on television is over a prolonged and excessive period (Nakamuro, Inui, Senoh & Hiromatsu, 2015, p.30). This consumption is outside the norm, and more reminiscent of deviant behaviour. However, it is hard to determine whether this would occur regardless or if there are other factors explaining the overconsumption of media (Nakamuro et al., 2015, p. 30). For example, it should be to some degree obvious that sitting still for a long time, in comparison to being active, will have a negative effect on someone's health, such as weight. Also, it would be wise to investigate why the child spends so much time in front of the TV. Background factors could potentially be a dysfunction in the child's life or parental involvement. (Nakamuro et al., 2015, p.35 -36). If this is the case, then the negative effects television has on children and youth are small and would not be the main factor for worsened health or behavioural problems.

If we are to follow that the logic is indeed only that a few will face negative effects, and there are other underlying explanations for why the overconsumption happens, it is hard to state that television is inherently bad for children and youth. Hence, it would be more productive to look at the framework or ideas that are placed to create a reference point them. This given that some television programmes are made with informational topics, such as the children's programme "The Super body" ("Superkroppen") that talks about the human body that easier explain concepts (Lie, 2021). This also provides a platform for parents and other caretakers (like educators et cetera) to discuss different topics. This given that children and youth have yet to develop cognitive and informational processing skills needed for critical thinking (Verhellen, Oates, De Pelsmacker & Dens, 2014, p.236). In this section, through the study of various television shows, I will be discussing themes of interest being violence, alcohol and drugs,

identity and family. This will be done by applying my own analysis of various scenes portraying these themes, while applying relevant research material for a better understanding and in-depth discussions. Then I will have a brief discussion on the role of parental figures in relation to the media. The shows discussed will be: *The Mandalorian*, *The Queen's Gambit* and *Michael Jordan: The Last Dance* as they vary in age ratings and genres.

## **Violence in media**

### *The discussion of violence in the media*

The use and depiction of violence in the media have been a discussion for quite a while in many social arenas. This discussion has led to implementation of age restrictions, parental outrage, and exploration of societal consequences in the larger social world (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 129-134). The common societal notion has been that the media has shown exaggerated scenes of violence, and that they would lead to a negative impact on children and youth that engage with it (Nakamuro et al., 2015, p. 29). A negative impact could be behavioural problems, such as becoming more violent. The research done has been looking into if this impact has occurred, and to what extent. The question implied is: does television amplify or create more violent tendencies with its viewers?

If the answer were to be explained simply, mostly considering the general public, the answer would be no. Research says there is not a large correlation between behavioural issues and media consumption. However, as mentioned earlier, there could be some negative effects if the exposure is to a larger extent, but other factors occurring could explain this as it appears to not be normal nor the standard (Nakamuro et al., 2015, p. 30). Overconsumption could result in negative consequences. For example, overconsumption of sweets could lead to health problems, such as diabetes. Limiting the consumption, however, could have little impact on the general health and be seen more as a temporary enjoyment. Regardless of this, there is still something that could be explored in more detail, as in what *kind* of violence exists in the media? No theme is depicted in one way, nor could it have one singular meaning. Hence, it could be of interest to

see how violence is depicted and how it could correlate with justifications made in the real world.

### *The justification of the use of violence*

In this section I argue that *The Mandalorian* provides examples of certain justifications of the use of violence. The most prominent theme throughout the series development was in what way and form it depicted violence. Further analysis could recognise several forms, and all had different justifications or functions for the story. Some were showcased negatively, where others were deemed as a necessity or instinct. The underlying message within this context is that violence is bad in certain forms but could be considered good or natural in others. This is interesting as most people during their adolescence are told that violence is bad, and it is more important to use your words to communicate. However, here viewers are met with something that would contradict this statement and would be more in line with what I experienced with martial arts rhetoric. You are only to use your abilities outside the training hall if absolutely necessary and preferably to only escape the situation so as to not engage further. Otherwise, fighting should be limited to the training hall with willing participants. However, it can be noted that even if we are taught that violence is bad, there are some justifications in society that would deem certain acts of violence necessary or “acceptable”. For example, many such justification is found during wartime as protecting the country or removing dictators to save that countries’ citizens. In this way you are “simply” protecting someone or yourself.

*The Mandalorian* presents scenarios where it can be coded as an act of self-defence or the protection of another, but there seems to be a fine line between that and retaliation. The question then is, how do these justifications occur? Here it is important to note that we are often made to emphasise with the main character. Emphasising happens when the narrative is focused around how the main character and those around them react or express their approval or disapproval of what is occurring within the story. It is strengthened further when the action that occurs is not especially heinous that would completely break with our moral ideas. In other words, justifications often occur by the fact that either we have an affinity with the main character, that is coded as good (but could have some “questionable morals”), or that the characters around normalise or justify why the action occurs (Coplan, 2004, p. 142- 143, 148 -149).

As mentioned above, there needs to be an affinity to the character, even if the morals are shifty at best. This can be seen in the series *The Mandalorian* argued that the main character “Mando”<sup>1</sup> falls under the so-called antihero trope prominent in the media (Triana, 2018, p. 1016 ,1018). By coding Mando as an antihero, it would be easier to excuse certain actions that he will take as our expectations of his moral aptitude is shifted somewhat. It is easier to accept the actions of someone that does not claim to be the “good guy”, as our standards of their moral capacity are altered to that of our own. Many of the justified violent tendencies displayed in *The Mandalorian* often boils down to two forms of violence; using violence to protect themselves or to protect another. The story in its simplest terms is about how Mando feels guilt about turning in a child to a client, simply known as “The Child”<sup>2</sup>, which shifts our previous understanding of Mando as a bounty hunter that would simply hand in anybody for money (Favreau, Lucas & Chow, 2019, 16:17-18:16 ). Though Mando show affection towards the small creature, it is also displayed in the way he is willing to go to extremes to protect it, including murder (Favreau, Lucas & Famuyiwa, 2019, 02:53-03:23). The sentiment presented here could reflect that people would be willing to defer some of their own morals if left with no choice to protect who they care about.

## **Alcohol and drugs in the media**

### *The negative, positive and nonchalant portrayal*

As with almost any entertainment or messages it is important to look for its *intent*. What is meant here is that, especially for the media, a subject is wished to be shown in a certain way to have an impact on its viewer, an ideology. Either by making them strengthen their already established ideas of society, or to challenge this view by providing an alternative narrative (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 191- 195). In this analysis three forms of depiction of drugs and alcohol were identified. The first one was how it was observed to be positive for the person or

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<sup>1</sup> The character has another name, but for simplicity the nickname occurring the most will be used.

<sup>2</sup> “The Child» is revealed to have another name in later seasons, but only the first season is analysed hence this name will be used.

character's life. The second was how alcohol or drugs were portrayed negatively as in it was causing harm or simply morally coded in society as something bad. Lastly, the third depiction was quite interesting. It did not show alcohol or drugs in neither a bad nor a good light. As something the person or character simply had a habit of doing or treated nonchalantly. Below will be provided examples of these types of portrayals, and a further discussion on how they would be interpreted.

For this I studied the TV series *The Queen's Gambit* and *Michael Jordan: The Last Dance*. Note here that the first series is a fictional drama, and the second a documentary about the retired NBA basketball star Michael Jordan. In *The Queen's Gambit* we are introduced to the main character Beth. It depicts her life from when she is orphaned to her becoming a professional chess player. This is the main story line, but it can be argued that it is also about her mental health journey and drug abuse from a young girl to her adult years. The documentary *Michael Jordan: The Last Dance* is about Jordan's basketball career and some of his teammates from The Chicago Bulls until his last season with the team in 1998. Here it depicts certain important moments in their lives, including stories about their families, relations to drugs and mental health amongst others. Both shows tackle various themes, but for these paragraphs the exploration will be done on how they portray alcohol and drugs.

When it comes to how the shows tackle depicting drugs in a positive way, do note that *The Queen Gambit* is seen from the perspective of Beth, which means that the portrayal is positive *to her*. On the other hand, with the Jordan documentary, here I argue that the positive depictions are mainly aligning with normative societal ideals. To specify, most alcohol or drugs shown in *The Last Dance*<sup>3</sup> are in relation to celebrating a win or enjoy some relaxation and having fun (Hehir, 2020, 36:02- 36:30). This often correlates with societal ideas that drinking alcohol to party and having an occasional cigar is okay when done in social settings often to celebrate. The portrayal of Beth's drug use is not viewed in the same way, nor does it coincide with societal ideas of how these types of drugs should be used. For this series positive portrayal mainly falls under how Beth uses it to envision a chess board on the roof where she plays out games for her benefit (Frank, Scott, A. & Tevis, 2020, 56:13-56:47). This is mainly shown as a

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<sup>3</sup> Here the documentary *Michael Jordan: The Last Dance* will be shortened to *The Last Dance* going forward for simplicity.

positive for her as she seems to function normally beyond this. She does well in school and creates meaningful bonds with those around her (Frank, Scott & Tevis, 2020, 4:41-5:01,7:41-8:15). However, as the show progresses this will soon change to a dependency, that will be discussed further.

The negative connotations seem to be multifaceted, given that sometimes it appeared that one drug was less of a problem than alcohol. Almost all negative connotations to drugs was that of overuse, and its detrimental effects it would have on the person and their relation to others and responsibilities. This can be seen when for example Mr. Rodman, teammate of Mr. Jordan, going away to party to “let off steam” with the use of drugs and alcohol, are then late for training, and almost do not make it in time for a game. This upsets his coach and Mr. Jordan who had previously put a lot of faith in him. The result could have been catastrophic as Mr. Rodman greatly depended on his team for emotional support (Hehir, 2020, 44:45-46:57, 00:00-2:23). When it comes to Beth it is similar in a way when she is late and facing negative consequences of drug use when she is up against Borgov. A match she deemed very important as she sees him as a prominent rival (Frank, Scott, & Tevis, 2020, 30:10-33:27, 33:38-33:47).

However, what I found peculiar was the third factor, in the way sometimes drugs and alcohol were depicted in a somewhat neutral and nonchalant way. Here those who engaged with it simply used it in a habitual way. Hence, this is also a bit of an alarming message to give the most impressionable audience. These types of substances are to be taken seriously, especially considering prescription medicine is to be taken in a particular manner. This is especially pointed out by the pharmacist in *The Queen's Gambit* when he gives a judgmental comment towards Alma's (Beth's adoptive mother) use, not knowing that it is Beth who has been stealing the pills (Frank, Scott & Tevis, 2020, 31:28-31:38). Another example is when Mr. Rodman drinks a beer before driving off on his motorcycle, very nonchalant (Hehir, 2020, 46:36-47:07).

## **Different identities**

### *What is an identity?*

An identity can be defined as “the distinguishing character or personality of an individual” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Identity formation occurs throughout an individual’s life but is more prominent and malleable for change as the brain is still developing in childhood and teenage years (Verhellen, Oates, De Pelsmacker & Dens, 2014, p. 236). Regarding youths one must consider the significance of experiencing puberty, which is a contributor to intensity of feelings and the instability of them (Norsk Helseinformatikk AS, 2019). Hence, many feel a lot, with great ups and downs, fuelled by various insecurities, as they try to find their place in society given the many social pressures they have to endure (Lemish, 2015, p. 142). Many youths must think about their future, for example regarding education. Hence, trying to claim an identity to align themselves with or have a reference point to explore would be of interest. In the three shows we are faced with many different people and characters that do provide certain identities that will be used as examples.

### *The antihero identity*

Earlier I mentioned that the character in *The Mandalorian* known as Mando could be considered an antihero. This identity that children and youth will meet in various forms of media, has gained popularity in TV and film since the 1960s and 70s (Triana, 2018, p.1019). The antihero would also make an additional breakthrough in TV during the 21<sup>st</sup> century with characters such as Walter White in *Breaking bad* (Triana, 2018, p. 1016, 1019). An antihero is someone that possesses tendencies outside social norms. These tendencies could be rejection of certain values, morals and “acting out” of distinguished roles and other behaviours we would see in “normal people” (Triana, 2018, p.1018). These certain criteria would make the antihero seem more human, and hence would be more relatable to the average viewer. This given that the antihero shows a more emotional range and human flaws. They do not have overtly strong morals as found in the traditional hero and would rather show conflicting ideas and follow-



through with setting certain morals aside to attain a specific goal (Triana, 2018, p.1018, 1024). This is more in line with human nature that has the tendency to push their moral boundaries if necessary. Hence, the antihero would be seemingly more appealing as they are more relatable and believable.

It is of interest to consider that *The Mandalorian* primarily is an American show which makes Mando fall in line with an American audience views how antiheroes “[...] balance their recognizable flaws with redemptive acts in order to present more identifiable and, ideally, more likeable versions of the Greek tragic hero” (Triana, 2018, p. 1018). By this it is meant that you do not want the antihero to be too “far off the ledge” moral wise otherwise they would no longer be likable, and fall more under the villain aspect of storytelling (Triana, 2018, p.1018). Keep in mind that boundaries can be pushed very far, but they still acquire this likability factor. Also, unlike the hero they are given consequences for their negative actions, accordingly, showing that they do not get a free pass for merely doing “something” right, which falls in line with an idealised image of karma being dealt (Triana, 2018, p. 1030). The moral ambiguity is also relevant in that “modernist authors used antiheroes to confront ambiguity and shifting societal norms.” (Triana, 2018, p. 1018). Hence, this reminds of how teenagers are often the driving force in questioning and altering what society should think and act like. In this way, the antihero could be a bridge between what is old (the hero) and what is new (the anti). Also, the antihero could be used as a way of justifying extreme behaviour, such as violent tendencies or ideals given their moral ambiguity and drawing a thin line between what is right and wrong.

What could be a worrisome is to heavily focus on morally ambiguous characters such as the antihero, as young kids and teenagers could take what they do at face value. Given that they are still underdeveloped in understanding abstract consequences and impulse control, which could result them in not thinking critically of how the antihero functions (Norsk Helseinformatikk AS, 2019). Antiheros are to explore the limits of moral bounds. On the other hand, the teenager or child might find solace in a character acting as they do if they have the tendency to push limits that are set. Especially considering those who consume a lot television shows behavioural problems. However, this identification would only occur if they think the punishment is too soft or hard on the character given the questionable act taken by the antihero. For example, as Mando first gives The Child to his client, he would later be punished by this. As

he tried to redeem himself by getting the child back, one of the consequences where the death of his friend Kuuil (Favreau, Lucas & Chow, 2019, 35:35- 35:45). The increased appearance of this identity type makes it worthwhile to study forward, as there is also an increased curiosity with media scholars (Triana, 2018, p. 1019). Also, the antihero provides a framework to see how the identity type reflects society at large, and how it is the near opposite of a true hero with their strict morals and wishing to do good (Triana, 2018, p.1024).

### *Representation, does it matter?*

A clear celebrity identity was found in the documentary *Michael Jordan: The Last Dance*. As the documentary progresses, we are met with a section within the series where it is discussed how Michael Jordan was becoming a cultural icon both in the United States (US) and internationally. It was apparent that his influence was so great that it was even related to an identity known as “Be like Mike”. This identity was closely linked to “living clean”<sup>4</sup>, working hard and other terms related to the idealised image people had of Michael Jordan (Hehir, 2020, 38:50-39:09). It is clear to see here that he had a big impact on people. However, as Mr. Jordan himself would state, this was not really a reflection of who he really was, as those who had pushed this image and those who followed did not truly know him (Hehir, 2020, 45:36- 46:10). The media had a way to construe his every move, and he was put on a pedestal he had no interest in. This was especially apparent when a governmental election took place in his home state between an overtly racist representative Jesse Helms over a Black contender Harvey Gantt. Mr. Jordan explained why he did not talk publicly about it, as he had no interest in politics and did not feel competent to make an endorsement. However, he did give a donation to Mr. Gantt as his mother wanted him to endorse (Hehir, 2020, 41:33- 41:44). Regardless, how did he end up on this pedestal and how was it constructed in the first place? There are various ways to tackle this question, but I will be discussing stereotyping narratives and how to be successful as a minority.

Firstly, I will be discussing the article *The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black*. It tackles the essence of how Black people (in the US in particular) have framed themselves after slave liberation. To briefly summarise the article, it is about how

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to not doing drugs or other illegal substances.

some Black people meant how to best represent themselves for the majority, without necessarily looking at the *how* and the *why* (Gates Jr.,1988). As they wished to be taken seriously, they delved into what in this paper is considered highbrow culture such as poetry, literature et cetera (Larsen, 2019, p. 85-86). It was in this way they would reframe and (according to the author) undermine their ethnicity, while ironically being “out popularised” by cultural endeavours made by lowbrow cultural artists such as jazz musicians (Gates Jr.,1988, p. 148). In the quest for finding a good representative to be taken seriously by the majority, they would be undermined by something seen as less than or a simple enjoyment provided by lowbrow culture.

This relates to the stereotyping made in the media and Black representation. Do note that the media does relay idealised images of reality and topics will not be fully fleshed out (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 191). As discussed by Aisha Thomas, it seems that to be considered successful as a Black person you must pick between three identities: the actor, the athlete, or the criminal. This came into a conversation she had with a teenager in a juvenile institution that saw this lack of possibilities and did not see his talent beyond criminality. Also, the lack of representation would have effects on her young son not wishing to have his skin colour given all the negative connotation in society about Black people (TEDx Talks, 2020, 6:30- 8:08,3:17-3:35). It could also be seen when Mr. Jordan did not engage in politics as he did not believe in his competence and fell into the same fallacy. Hence, limiting himself into a narrow framework of Black people in public spheres. The same stereotyping is also prevalent in young Black girls' perception of self in school, and what they perceive as “ladylike”. (Carter Andrews, Brown, Castro & Id-Deen, 2019, p.2544). Therefore, it seems that representation will affect perceived self-image and confidence for not only older people, but also the young. Then it could be of interest to study if new and varied representations would better the perceived image of an ethnic minority. It could also perhaps be applicable to other minorities.

### *Intersection and the life of Jolene*

Here I will talk about intersection by using the life of the character Jolene, Beth's Black best friend, from *The Queen's Gambit*. The reason to bring up Jolene's ethnographic difference in comparison to Beth's whiteness, is to better discuss the intersectional descriptions that Jolene provides within the show. This will also help further the discussion on how the media portray

Black women. We meet Jolene in two sequences during the show, her and Beth growing up together at the orphanage, and then later when they are grown up in concurrence with the death of Mr. Shaibel, that was the orphanage's janitor and a father figure to Beth (Frank, Scott & Tevis, 2020, 2:40-2:47). We are faced with multiple tropes regarding Jolene's character such as, the "Black best friend"- trope, hyper sexualisation and other relevant common tropes relating to Black women.

Firstly, let us tackle the "Black best friend" trope found in television and film. Easily explained this best friend is "[...] the one who's slightly left of centre in the frame, the one who appears to be indispensable but remains somehow invisible." (Bero, 2020). In other words, storylines are never fully explored as their white counterparts are fully fleshed and complete characters (Bero, 2020). The Black girl here is only there to fulfil the needs of the white character bringing certain qualities and support to provide a better life for the white main character. However, the Black friend will never be anything more than the simple stereotype, a shell of a person, that is nothing more than the narrow narrative provided. What does this image then relay to society at large? Clearly it again falls under the belief that Black people are to be overshadowed and only exist to provide something for the white majority, rather than exist for themselves. However, there are some newer television shows starting to turn this trend, but there are still only a few (Bero, 2020).

Secondly, the "white as innocent" pertains the idea that certain behaviour perpetrated by white young girls have different connotations compared to when a Black girl does it (Carter Andrews et al., 2019, p. 2538 -2539). This can be seen throughout the show as Jolene is often punished more openly than Beth at the orphanage even though both do mischievous things, including the time when Beth did something that could be considered a lot worse. Beth breaks into the medicine office, steals pills, and is still "rewarded" by being adopted (Frank, Scott & Tevis, 2020, 53:25-53:34, 4:23-5:42). Jolene is punished by having her mouth "washed with soap" and often grabbed by the attendant Mr. Ferguson (Frank, Scott & Tevis, 2020, 14:30-14:35). However, Jolene reasons that she is not adopted because of her skin colour (Frank, Scott & Tevis, 2020, 17:33- 17:50). The way she talks back to authorities could fall into the stereotype of the "sassy Black girl". Always got a sharp tongue, and an attitude. However, as Cooper states

“Black women turn to sass when rage is too risky - because we have jobs to keep, families to feed, and bills to pay.” (Cooper, 2018).

Furthermore, even though this is more hidden, an argument made is that Jolene is faced with the hyper sexualization many Black girls experience (Carter Andrews et al., 2019, p.2533). The reason this argument is stated relates to her sexual relation with the married man in the law firm (Frank, Scott & Tevis, 2020, 7:28-7:34). Even though Beth does sexually engage multiple times with different men, Jolene is still in a more “scandalous” relationship. This representation of Jolene could easily fall into the Jezebel stereotype, of a sexy seductress of men that can only achieve what they want by using their bodies (Al Jazeera English, 2020, 1:11-1:19). It is also her status as a Black girl that she got the job at the law firm to appeal to modern times post segregation<sup>5</sup> (Frank, Scott & Tevis, 2020, 7:47-7:57). This is seen as tokenism is to blur differences rather than inclusion (Lemish, 2015, p.150). This representation hence feel shallow, as one are included in social spaces based on ethnicity rather than skills.

### *The challenges of sexism faced by Beth and their repercussion of today*

For this part I will discuss women in male dominated professions, and the nature of sexism in sports which is unique compared to sexism in other arenas. This given that sport’s sexism is more outwardly and more apparent than elsewhere and receives less backlash (Fink, 2016, p.2). The reason why sexism of sport is relevant to discuss within the context of *The Queen’s Gambit* is that chess is recognised as a sport by the International Olympic committee, and Beth as a professional chess player must navigate this domain (International Olympic Committee, 2021). Throughout the series development Beth is challenged by being a woman in the 1960s in a male dominated profession. Certain sexist remarks are thrown her way, and perhaps it could be justified as a normality as the show is set in the 60s. However, even though certain remarks are more hidden, you can still find blatant sexist remarks in sports today.

Often Beth receives a compliment relating to how she is extraordinary *despite* her gender rather than her accomplishments in itself. She is shown to display dismay by this as she makes a comment about it regarding an interview about her, where they seem to talk more about her

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<sup>5</sup> The show is set in the 50s-60s, right at the end of segregation in the U.S.

being a woman rather than her accomplishments compared to men (Frank, Scott & Tevis, 2020, 17:55-18:10). This idea of being good *despite* their gender can be seen even in modern day through sport commentators' remarks, athletes' comments et cetera (Fink, 2016, p. 2-3). This type of overt sexism does deter from everyday sexism that involves more jokes, "playful" comments, and similar language (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016, p. 5 ,7). It is important to discuss, given that this type of "hidden sexism" often leads young girls and women to downplay their painful experiences, as these sexist remarks are merely seen as something childish and temporary (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016, p. 7). Interestingly, there is a trend where men are being more brought into the idea of experiencing sexism, but seemingly their situation is often just talked of as hypotheticals while girls can provide actual lived experiences (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016, p. 3- 4, 6). Hence, it seems that sexism is not gone, it is plainly either constrained to one area of society or mostly hidden and altered. By providing language and frameworks for children and youth how sexism occurs, it will be easier to see what fallacies that occur. Therefore, the topic of sexism is still very much relevant.

## **The family**

### *The pseudo family*

The definition of a pseudo family is sort of blurred and goes by other names such as made family and play families. However, in this section this phenomenon will go by pseudo family in which pseudo is defined as "being apparently rather than actually as stated" (Merriam- Webster, 2021). A pseudo family occurs when more than one person defines their dynamic as more than friends and shares a particular emotional bond. This relates to that they define their roles within the group more like that of family structures, such as clear roles like parent and child (Kolb & Palys, 2018, p.683 -684). One thing that separates a pseudo family from a "normal" family is that they do not share a biological connection. The pseudo family will then depend on another connection to keep the group collected, which would then be an emotional bond, as those who lack the biological bond will search for others to fill this need (Kolb & Palys, 2018, p. 680, 684). When reflecting over the concept of family, many think of a "core" family that consists of a

biological family that includes parents and their child(ren). This is often an idealised reality or a societal convention. However, the pseudo family often reflects this where certain members can be coded into adopting certain features people associate with corresponding family members, as mentioned earlier. Otherwise, some individuals extend their belief in what a family should consist of by including aunt, uncles, grandparents etc., which could in turn open more of the possibility to widen the concept of a pseudo family. For example, good friends of parents can often be thought of as aunts and uncles.

The reason why it is important to talk about pseudo families considering children and youth, is to show them that a family does not necessarily have to be based on blood relations. For example, it can show them that you can find comfort in other people in your life if your blood relatives may not be able to. This can be seen in *The Queen's Gambit* when Jolene states that her and Beth are not simply friends, but a family (Frank, Scott & Tevis, 2020, 23:20-23:42). Given their status as orphans, and considering Jolene was never adopted, they found a deep connection to each other and obtained a close relation to fulfil their emotional needs. Hence, we are shown that there are other forms of bonding to be gained, rather than being expected to *only* rely on your biological family. Another example of finding a pseudo family relation is the father-child bond between Mando and The Child in *The Mandalorian*. Throughout the show you can see how Mando takes care of The Child by reprimanding him when he does something wrong, while keeping him entertained at times as when he gives him the bulb to play with in the ship in season 1 episode 6 (Favreau, Lucas &, 2019, 37:39-37:53). This could be read as someone showing great care and responsibility for another being. In other words, it gives the perspective of how a family *should* function, rather than accepting whatever you are dealt with.

### *Family bonds and dysfunctions*

Portrayal of family bonds can be seen throughout all three series analysed both in the biological sense and the pseudo depiction. They show all aspects of a family with positive bonds of support and care, and the more dysfunctional one in parent-child relation and marital problems. Depictions found in the documentary *The Last Dance* where individual team members of the Chicago Bulls tell stories about their family relations. Mr. Jordan's family for example was very supportive of their son and brother's athletic career, especially his mother. She would

encourage him when he failed try-outs to improve instead (Hehir, 2020, 25:57-26:19). However, it also depicted the dysfunctional relationship between Mr. Rodman and his mother, in which his mother kicked him out and he ended up homeless for some years (Hehir, 2020, 6:54-7:07). This could also explain Mr. Rodman's need for emotional bonding from teammates, and his strong emotional connection with various trainers throughout the years of his career as seen in season 1 episode 3. One prevailing depiction of family dysfunction in *The Queen's Gambit* was found in the marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Wheatly which resulted in Mrs. Wheatly's deteriorating health at times, which later improves as Mrs. Wheatly finds solace in being Beth's mom (Frank, Scott & Tevis, 2020,17:27-17:51).

To refer to the previous subheading, it seems that the people and characters that do not find solace within their family or significant other must find it with other interpersonal relations. This as to obtain inner peace or a place for themselves within society. In this way, teenagers and children can easily be shown how to spot healthy relations versus unhealthy ones not providing emotional necessities. Also, what was great about Mr. Jordan's depiction of his family bonds was that you could see the positives, but a realistic approach was also shown how as certain behaviour from his dad was damaging (Hehir, 2020, 25:10-25:31). Therefore, showing a more rounded and realistic view of how a family functions to viewers, and not only depicting the idealised form.

## **The social circle and the media**

As media is being consumed and analysed by the younger audience, it needs to be understood that they are not isolated in the way they watch television. This is because research shows that children's views on topics, such as stereotypes, are strongly formed through what they are experiencing or told in social settings (Lemish, 2015, p.140). In this way, those in the closest social circle of the child plays a far more significant role in shaping their thought patterns. However, a complete break with stereotypes shown on television will provide a newfound interest with the child. Regardless this will have little effect if it is only a small part where most television shows portray stereotypes (Lemish, 2015, p.140). Whether the newfound interest is maintained is hard to determine, as it can be given their social background constituting



of being more open minded (Lemish, 2015, p.140). It is at this moment it can be most fruitful to talk to a child about a topic as they are vividly interested, either condoning the new behaviour or encouraging it. The conclusion here being that it is people in the closest immediate family and social circles that provides main influences on behaviour and opinions, as no studies have determined if long term effects stem from television (Lemish, 2015, p.140, 151).

Interestingly, more vulnerable groups are more inclined to see media as a social reality. This is seen with immigrant children as they are more likely to look at television as an objective reality as something to refer to, and hence have a more idealised image of the real world (Lemish, 2015, p.152). Also, in recent years with the invention and popularity of social media and platforms like YouTube, youth that are not finding support elsewhere will try to explore identity here. This probably stems from a need to belong, as seen with immigrant children and those possessing different social identities like in the LGBTQIA+ community (Lemish, 2015, p. 146, 152). This is as “[...] media do not operate in a social vacuum, but as part of complicated social contexts that work sometimes cooperatively, sometimes in conflict, but always within a process of negotiation of meaning.” (Lemish, 2015, p.157).

## **Reflections on social constructionism and the media**

This thesis was an attempt to illustrate how media can portray ideologies (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p.191). This was done via the use of social constructionism theory. This theory states that our social reality is constructed through social interaction and the internalisation of social behaviour as in norms and morals. This internalisation process makes it seem that the socially constructed reality is objective, and hard to change (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 35). However, one can see that the social norms are continuously shifting and culturally dependent (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 190). Therefore, this research argues that one cannot observe a media product in one way, as there is no true objective meaning for why something is depicted in a certain manner. It further argues that one should in fact look at how the media continuously shapes the social reality (Lemish, 2015, p.146). I do acknowledge that television and the media is only a representation of ideas and depictions, however they should provide more accurate representation as its needed in the media landscape (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 226).

My analysis revealed that that television is a part of our social reality, and therefore is continuously changing. Hence, one must understand where these changes comes from. The depictions of television come from the creator's perception, as of today is overrepresented by white people (UCLA, 2020, p.15-17). If presumed that television is a limited reflection of social reality, the internalisation process occurring can be interpreted as an objective truth, even though it is from a narrow perspective limited by socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. This is where stereotypes occur, and if viewed continuously over a prolonged period be interpreted as a social reality. Especially, if the knowledge of the social group is limited as seen with Black women. This is significant as if one has limited experience with Black women and come across certain behaviour coded into a certain trope; one could assume it to be true for all. This internalisation process could also be extended to how one view topics in general. This is because norms and morals are used to legitimise something, even if there is no apparent logic. For example, alcohol in certain settings are approved, but not in others. In addition, there seems to be a "drug hierarchy" where some are socially accepted, others not. This double standard is also found in violence, sometimes viewed as "good" or "wrong" even though the action itself is the same. This as one has constructed the idea that sides are "good" or "bad". Regardless, the dynamics of human agency influence the media through various actions as codes can change, and messages given new meanings. This can be seen with demands for more inclusivity and a growing audience preferring it (UCLA, 2020, p.26-27). Therefore, my findings support the research question by showing how the way television depicts themes in a way is reflected in the social world. In other words, youth and children can identify and learn about societal norms and the legitimising occurring within the context of television. Therefore, generating thoughts on what a family is, different identities available, the occurrence of violence and alcohol and drugs, and how to feel about each depiction.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, measuring the effects of media is difficult, and where studies have tried to research media's influence on youth and children it has shown little effect. However, this is looking at the effects of television in itself and not how class, gender, ethnicity and education is more important in how someone analyse television portrayals (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p.15).

Television is of importance regardless as it gives a platform that conceptualises ideas and ideology that makes discussion easier (Crenshaw, 2006, p.17). By having a reference point children and youth reflections comes easier as images represented are either conflicting with established norms, or it can keep confirming the ideals that the young audience are faced with. This could result in questioning the reason it was framed that way. As mentioned, some groups are especially vulnerable to television's ideals of society, as they have no reference point to confirm or deny. This is where television ideology has the greatest effect, and where I believe it to be of importance to show a critical view of the topics discussed as to criticise idealised images of television. In this way certain aspects could be more delved into and discussed openly. As parents and other social interactions will have a greater influence on the younger generations, it cannot be ignored how media can or will not build on preconceived ideas (Lemish, 2015, p. 135, 140). This can be seen with gender roles for example. Though a break with stereotypes in media can engage interest this will only sustain itself if those in the child or teenagers social circle keeps the interest going (Lemish, 2015, p.140).

The interplay between media, society and the closest social circles is what truly shapes an individual. This is to say that even though some factors have more influence over a person's thought process, it seems hard to exclude the media completely out of it as individuals find themselves identifying with the characters presented (Lemish, 2015, p. 140, 144). Identification can factor into how many people's emotional need is to feel that they belong (Kold & Palys, 2018, p. 684). Hence, it is often a discussion how some social groups feel excluded, ridiculed, or placed into strict social notions of stereotyping. As many believe it is our young that challenges and changes our social world they are still influenced by outside factors. Media, and therefore television, must be understood as a platform providing conceptualisation of ideas as it can reflect the essential ideas of society. As social constructionism states, the social reality can be altered through human interaction and social norms and morals. The media are therefore reflexive rather than static, as there are differences in communication both within the social world and the media (Croteau & Hoynes, p. 10). As the media reflects some part of the social world, one can see how it changes with time through the influence of new creators and viewers alike. Therefore, alterations of how television presents themes could lead to a more in-depth understanding of the social reality, and with the interplay between the media and its user one could challenge that which is established.

## Further research

As this topic could be covered in many ways, I make suggestions here on what could be investigated further. Firstly, I would encourage looking at how children affect their parents viewing habits as it could comment on parent-child relations. Also, it could provide a more in-depth discussion on media consumption. A study done by Eiji Yamamura they concluded that the older the parent group were, the more they were influenced by their child's viewing habits in relation to watching anime<sup>6</sup>. Bringing this to a larger scale could be of interest as looking into how younger generations can challenge the older generations (Yamamura, 2014). Secondly, with the rise of social media and new consumption forms it is interesting to further investigate peer effects (Escardíbul, Mora & Villarroya, 2013). Especially, since a lot of social interaction occurs on digital platforms with many different influences. Thirdly, looking into how the concentration of ownership would influence what is being produced and perpetrated in the media. By this I mean that even though there is a plethora of media companies, they are still connected to a few sets of parent companies. This means they are not fully detached from the core ownership as they have the final say (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p.67- 68). Also, prevalent for these traditional media conglomerates is that they are acquiring other production companies and platforms to secure a larger audience which also perpetrates their consolidation of creative output and ideologies (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 78). Hence, it would be of interest to investigate the criticism of this for further research. Lastly, even though I covered some topics in this paper they could be explored more in depth and some topics were not covered here. For example, the character Townes in *The Queen's Gambit* could go under what is called queer coding as we see certain coded behaviours indicating he is not straight, but it is not stated otherwise (McGuire, 2020). Queer coding has a troublesome past and present in the media and would be an interesting topic to tackle (Ennis, 2020). In addition, by looking more independently into themes over a period, it could be interesting to see how ideas and logic can be reframed.

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<sup>6</sup> Anime is the name of Japanese animation

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