

The Cultivation Theory and Reality Television: An Old Theory With a Modern Twist

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The Cultivation Theory

The cultivation theory is a widely regarded theory spanning across the communications realm. It analyzes the long term effects of television on people. The theory states that what people may view on television will determine their outlook on reality in the world. The theory was developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross in 1975. Their research started off in the 1960s, where they analyzed people's perception of what they saw on television, and compared it to everyday life. The theory has covered other types of media but television was the first motion visual type of media, igniting a new era of technology and media. Television erupted during this time period, as more and more Americans were transitioning from radio to television. This switch led to heavy amounts of visual media, which has demonstrated a huge mass of people confusing what they see on television and the real world. Gerbner was intrigued to find out that television formed a bond between people and television. TV was becoming an American staple, and as more and more people started watching it, a steady string of effects arose. People's real world attitudes were changing. Visually speaking, people's emotions and opinions were connected with what they saw on TV. The cultivation theory arose as a project titled the Cultural Indicators Project. It was commissioned by former president Lynden B. Johnson. It represented the then newly developed National Commission on the Causes and prevention of Violence. The 1960s saw the rise of violence, especially racial injustice with the likes of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The political turmoil also brought about the shootings of Robert F. Kennedy and John F. Kennedy. America was experiencing a harsh climate of violence that was

being broadcasted on television nationwide, sparking much public opinion. Television violence in movies, shows and real life matter was becoming a hot topic, and Gerbner was intrigued to figure out how this is influencing and affecting people in America. His Cultural Indicators study was chosen by Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior. This committee viewed and analyzed data from television broadcasts, mostly prime time, that included any violence and how it was demonstrated. Gerbner later found in the study that violence was shown more greatly in prime time television than any time of the day. This time slot was favored by Americans due to it being after work, and during a time where families came together for dinner and other family activities around the television. His findings showed that violence was demonstrated more on television than compared to the real world.

To start off, different strings of emotions and opinions were varied across people as they watched TV. To dig in further, topics of the white vs. black issue, women being in public alone, the amount of education you possess to follow one's opinion, and gender roles were all common situations during the theory's progression. "It is also true that race is related to such things as alienation, and it is possible that it is related to fear of walking alone at night in one's neighborhood. The same is true for income, which can provide opportunities for cultural exposure both in and away from the home, and constrain the amount of time available to watch television" (Hughes, 1980). Racial tensions were at an all-time high and gender roles were in full swing. Working men at the time did not stay at home for long periods of time like women. Women were more prone to seeing violence on television, prompting fear within them. Hughes also suggested that income had a big part of the cultivation theory. Some people did not own televisions in their homes. These people were typically part of the lower class, and were mostly black. The levels of violence exposed were varied throughout the population.

Moving on, the cultivation theory delivers three assumptions. The first deals with the medium, which is that television is fundamentally different from other forms of mass media. At the time, the television was the first visual media device, allowing people to listen and view content. While the television was indeed revolutionary, it came with costs, and not every family could afford it. This gave lower income families a rather difficult time obtaining and maintaining a television in their home. The purpose of the television was to be engaging and creative for viewers. The radio allowed the viewer to hear other people. However, the television allowed people to hear and see people, which garnered more creative content for audiences alike. “Television is also full of representations of consumption (DeFleur 1964), many involving members of social classes and spheres very different from those of most Americans (Comstock et al. 1978; Hennigan et al. 1982). Television commonly uses consumption symbols as a means of visual shorthand; what television characters have and the activities in which they participate mark their social status with an economy of explanatory dialogue. Viewers see and hear what members of other social classes have and how they consume, even behind closed doors” (O’Guinn, Shrum 1997). The television gave people the ability to view all types of people, but some of those types of people did not have televisions to start with. The second assumption is television shapes the way individuals within society think and relate to each other. Television may have a way of showing real life scenarios, but the assumption process and way people perceive it is based on speculation. Based on this assumption, people are given a higher ability to judge what and who they see in the real world due to long periods of television exposure. The final assumption is television’s effects are limited. The effects of television are growing and gradual. For the cultivation theory to come alive, people would have to consume enough hours watching it to start to have some perception of reality in the real world. Exposure to television in

the 1960s was very new and fresh for people. However, the effects could only go up and down gradually in order for people to make some type of association. The 1960s only had limited channels and selections, but it was enough to keep people entertained. Today however, we see a rise in what to watch and how much we watch. “The increasing access to television programming and advertising throughout the globe becomes apparent when one takes note of the rising number of television sets in place. The average US citizen was shown to spend approximately 15% of their waking lives watching television (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)” (Speck & Roy, 2008).

Within the theory lies the cultivation differential. It is the line between light and heavy viewers of television. The four step process demonstrates the creation of media and how it is portrayed for people. Step one is the message system analysis. Gerbner dubbed this step as a way to track awareness of what one was watching on TV. His findings suggested that violence was consistent, but not equal amongst age, race and income groups. Due to the ongoing racial tensions of the 1960s, Gerbner noted that violence involved and targeted minority groups such as African Americans and Hispanics on that were happening in real life, and being broadcasted on television. “In the United States, the ethnic group most affected by violence is also the one most affected by poverty. African American youth are the ethnic group most exposed to violence, followed by Hispanic Americans, and Whites” (Crouch, Hanson, Saunders, Kilpatrick & Resnick). Women and blue collar workers were also deemed to be involved in more violence. This pattern was heavily influenced by cultural and gender trends that America was experiencing during that time. The next step involves questions regarding viewers’ social realities. This involves the normal day a viewer might experience in their life and Gerbner used this to understand their perceived realities. Step three surveyed the audience. This was a simple practice

of asking the audience of their lives and analyzing television consumption levels. Gerbner wanted to make a connection between the audience, their daily lives and how much television they watched to appropriately calculate what and how much media they were consuming. The final step in this process is the cultivation differential. This is the percentage of everything that Gerbner has calculated in the study. Gerbner's goal was to distinguish people based on high and low TV viewings. This helped put topics such as race, gender, and income into the equation while adding in violence demonstrated on television.

As Gerbner's studies progressed, the cultivation theory was becoming more sophisticated. People's perception of violence on television was broadening. His main argument suggested that Americans who spend more time watching television were exposed to higher amounts of crime. Therefore, their perception of safety and crime was very different compared to Americans who spent less time watching television. This brings back the point about gender roles Gerbner focused on. Women spent more time at home, while men were away at work. This suggests that women saw more violence on television than men, prompting some type of fear when encountering certain scenarios such as walking down a street alone. This did not mean that the amount of violence shown on television meant that everywhere in America was filled with violence, but it created perceptions of violence. Gerbner took matters further in 1968 by conducting a survey on television viewing. He split viewers into three categories: labels consisting of light viewers, medium viewers and heavy viewers. His findings suggested that heavy viewers were more connected to violence shown on television than what was actually happening in the real world. With that being said, heavy viewers were openly expressive of depression, anxiety and loneliness due to the fear being implemented by what they were watching on TV.

While the cultivation theory heavily analyzed violence on television, it also attributed to other different demographics such as queer and LGBT viewership. The 20th century typically had a more negative view on the queer society. It was not favored or accepted by many. The transition into the 1970s and 1980s saw a historical health issue. Gross wrote, “The media were quick to point out that the causes of the epidemic were to be found in the so-called sexual revolution: Health officials say that genital herpes become a growing problem only during the mid-1970s, after sexual codes had loosened in American society” (New York Times Magazine, February 21, 1982, 94, Gross 1994). The herpes epidemic only grew larger when the AIDS epidemic came into full blast in the 1980s. People were starting to feel inclined as to how something like this was happening. It was discovered through gay men’s sexual encounters. It was all thanks to media coverage that people found out the routes of this mass hysteria. Heterosexuals began to see and feel this as a threat to society and public health. “Media coverage of AIDS is very likely to reinforce hostility to gays among those so predisposed – there is abundant evidence of growing anti-gay violence in many parts of the country” (Gross, Aurand, and Addessa 1988; Comstock 1991) – and to further the sense of distance from strange and deviant “subculture” (Gross). Gay men were perpetuated as dirty and people felt the need to keep distance from them in fear they may pass the disease on to them. The constant stories and follow ups of the epidemic put gay men in great danger. Hostility, mobbing and death threats swarmed the gay community. Heterosexuals did not possess the education of the disease, causing a stigma that affected thousands of people. While that stigma as died down and new medical breakthroughs have given HIV/AIDS people a new chance at life, the gay man was America’s target and punching bag during the course of the epidemic.

Television also greatly impacted children. Violence on television was primarily associated with children of color, low income children, or the combination of low income children of color. Home life for these children typically experienced an increase of violence and fear, and it followed them in their communities. Violence on television and violence in their communities implanted a sense of fear into children. Topics such as racism and class gave certain demographics a bad portrayal, causing children of these families to live and grow up with warped ideas and thoughts. "...children's exposure to media violence is related to increased aggression, the prevalence of symptoms of psychological trauma, and other psychological and behavioral sequelae" (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1995; Gentile & Walsh 2002; McCann, Sakheim & Abrahamson 1988; Rosenthal, 2000; Sanders-Phillips, 1997; Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999). Children's constant exposure to television and the ongoing repetition of violence caused children of color and low income children to have false beliefs, social and mental issues as they grew older. The violence and acts being portrayed on television when watched by white children or higher income families was different. Television favored these types of people by making them look "good" in a world full of bad people and violence. Children were learning through screens that violence is in certain communities caused by certain people. When children of color and low income children were watching high amounts of television, it affected their behavior, values and self-awareness as they grew up. They were more likely to be violent to other people in their demographic, their decision making skills were not logical, and they viewed the world in a more negative manner. While certain types of media portrayed excessive amounts of violence, so children programming did the opposite, and provided good standards. "...Shows considered prosocial, such as *Mr. Rogers*, resulted in decreases in aggression, greater tolerance, persistence and obedience" (Friedrich & Stein 1973). Depending

on the medium, certain child programming made children either more aggressive or empathetic. Programs that taught morals, values and had little to no violence allowed children to grow up with a healthier set of standards, as compared to heavy amounts of watch time that included violence. While television was the main catalyst of these behaviors, other forms of media shaped children. Music, video games and movies were also influencing the youth. Exposure to violence from these platforms offered similar results compared to television viewership. Certain genres across all media types have shaped the way children act, think and process information as they grew up to be adults. Whether it included violence, cursing or portraying negative acts to society, it shaped how children would later act and think as adults. The more media consumed, the worse the effects for colored children and low income children.

Similar to the children group, the cultivation theory yielded different results for men and women. For most of the 20th century, gender roles were in full swing. Men went to work, while women stayed home and attended to the house and children. Gender roles played an important part of television consumption between men and women. Women were more prone to watch television than men due to time spent home. As America became more affluent with the television, so did watch time. DeFleur and Signorielli bring up a key example of this. “Nurses on television are almost all female, and they have little power (DeFleur, 1964; Signorielli, 1993). Medical professionals are shown in hospital settings; they treat pathology more than they engage in prevention...” (Turow & Coe, 1985). Most doctors on television were portrayed by men, and exemplified strength and heroism. Women were mainly seen as side objects, who do not support the cause as much as men do on screen. Gender roles were not only in the real world, but also on television. Heavy viewership of this kind of material often made women as objects, and assistance to men strictly. Not only did women have a negative sense of belonging in society, but

it also increased their fear. Constant portrayal of violence in communities through news, movies and TV shows made women believe that what they watched was not only real, but in their community as well. This made women fear going out into public at night alone, crossing into new neighborhoods and their ability to fight back was reduced. Violence and fear were not the only aspects that affected women. Materialism eventually made its way onto television. The idea of “keeping up with the Jones” made women feel the need to compete with their neighbors and idolize material things. TV shows portraying beautiful and put together women, commercials featuring “must have products” Post WWII allowed men and women to have an easier sense of buying products due to growing income. Due to many women being the homemakers and caretakers of the children, the heavy use of television sparked a sense of materialism and competition. “Consumers low in materialism are more satisfied with their socioeconomic status than are those who place a higher value on material things” (Richins, 1987; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Television’s constant push for must have items shown on commercials and television programming made women feel like they had to have more, to be more. Television gave women a visual display of what is “perfect”, thus sparking materialism.

To summarize, the cultivation theory is a widely known and heavily influential theory in the field of media and communication. . Stemming back from the 1960s, George Gerbner and Larry Gross have created a refined theory that is still being practiced today. The television today still reigns as a popular media device for people. “Watching television is the greatest single use of ‘free time’ not only in post-industrial societies such as the U.S., but also in industrial and many preindustrial societies” (Szalai 1972, Ch. 6; Lull 1988). The time spent watching television has given people different perceived realities. The influx of television watch time throughout the 20th and 21st centuries have affected how people see reality. Some many have benefited over this

while others have had to live a life full of fear and violence. The TV's use to bring content in a visual form was currently a groundbreaking revolution in the media world. The radio only did so much. The TV gave viewers a look into life and they were able to determine what may be real, or what is exaggerated. With new media revolutions today such as social media, we are experiencing a new way of perceived reality, just through different devices. The cultivation theory has made its mark on television, and can even be seen in new technological advancements today. We live in a society where we must trust our judgment and make good decisions for us, and future generations to come. Screen time may either help us grow, or give us problems, old and new.

The Cultivation Theory in the 21st Century

Gerbner's findings were predominantly centered around the very controversial era that is the 20th century. Topics such as racism, gender roles, LGBT issues and feminism were stirred up on television screens across America. Since television use was high, as families gathered around the television, people's perceptions of society began to form, and it was not the same for everyone. America has battled and fought over these issues through the remainder of the 20th century. People began to wake up, and minds began to open. Representation on television began to widen, and new television programs sprouted up. One genre of television crossed boundaries, and intrigued people. Within this genre lies a program that mixes many of Gerbner's findings, in a setting that is stunning and entertaining, yet scandalous.

A Look Into *Below Deck*

As the cultivation theory was heavily regarded in studying hot topic concepts such as age, race, gender, racism, and sexuality through television, the theory is still a profound concept in today's age. Television has continued to boom over the remainder of the 20th century and into the 21st century. The rise of reality TV, born in the late 1990s, has given TV watchers a new view and inside look of different scenarios and people's lives through television. In 2013, Bravo, a popular television network known for its reality television programs, aired a new and exciting program titled *Below Deck*. The premise of the show follows the captain and crew of a mega yacht that charters high profile and wealthy guests in desirable areas of the world such as the Caribbean, South Pacific and Southeast Asia. While the show gives us a sneak peek of how the wealthy vacation, the show is set around the crew primarily. The captain, Lee Rosbach, has been in the mega yacht industry for years and has starred on the show from season 1 onwards. Kate Chastain, the show's beloved chief stew and Bravo icon, has starred on the show since season 2 up until her departure post season 7. Both Rosbach and Chastain have shaped the program with their outgoing personalities' and loveable traits. The two have gained a strong fan base over the course of the 7 years the show has aired. Other cast mates have filled in for the remainder of the interior crew, and deck crew over the course of the show. Most have starred on the show for one season, while others have 2-3 seasons under their belt due to popularity on the show. The show features many different plots such as onscreen drama, romance, work life, and tending to demanding charter guests. Using the cultivation theory, I will examine three primary themes: perception of the wealthy, crew drama, and crew relationships and responsibilities. While it is

the crew's responsibilities to film for the show while working, it comes down to the viewer and how they may perceive these concepts to determine whether it may have an effect on them or not over the time of the show.

Perceptions of Wealth

A large majority of programs on Bravo TV focus on wealth, drama and outgoing personalities. While not all shows cover some of these areas, *Below Deck* appears to cover them quite well. Focusing on wealth will be the first theme. In real life, chartering a mega yacht can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. The show wants the viewer to not only take a look into how the wealthy vacation, but "come along" on the charters. Each primary charter guest has made some sort of name for themselves. Charter guests' career roles include people in the medical fields, models, entrepreneurs, tech professionals, and even in some cases, other "Bravolebrities" from other Bravo programming. What strikes my interest about these professions are the viewers who also have the same professions as the charter guests. Do they question their colleagues' use of money and how they use it? Do they feel they share common personality traits as those who are shown on television? Gerbner's priority during cultivation theory studies was to analyze people's perceptions on an array of demographics and violence shown on television. When looking into the demographic of wealth in today's age, it can easily be identified on television, and in this case, reality television. Bravo's main demographic are people ages 18-54, and they tailor to a female and LGBTQ demographic. Some viewers, such as the 18-24 demographic specifically, may not have the best feelings towards the wealthy and their

reoccurring antics. Even without personally knowing *Below Deck's* charter guests, there may be a negative association with the rich. The idea that wealthy charter guests are demanding, pompous and self-absorbed can be a common feeling amongst the younger demographic, even without the viewers knowing the charter guests personally. *Below Deck* gives sufficient camera time to charter guests for viewers to get a closer look at these wealthy charter guests, but it is the crew interactions with the charter guests and their take on them that makes the show what it is today. In their confessions, the crew are allowed to make as much commentary as camera time allows, and most of the time, they do not associate good feelings with the wealthy and their behavior. Viewers may resonate and connect with the crew more than they will with the charter guests.

Crew Perception of the Wealthy

The crew's perception, especially Rosbach and Chastain's, is quite notable throughout the years. While it might be their jobs to serve these charter guests, the crew practically reach some type of breaking point individually. During season 2 of the show, Chastain's first season, she became very unhappy with one of the charter guests after he made negative comments towards her. In retaliation, she made towel art in the shape of a penis. After the charter guest notices the inappropriate art displays, he alerts Captain Lee about the incident. Lee has a talk with Chastain to address the issue and she denies it, telling him she made it into the shape of a rocket. She gets a stern warning from Captain Lee, apologies were in order and as a matter of fact, the charter guest found it hilarious. The breaking point of Chastain with the charter guest is

a strong example of dealing with the wealthy. Viewers watching could have gone two ways: sympathize with Chastain and make the wealthy charter guest look obnoxious, or criticize Chastain for her lack of professionalism. Either way, viewers had a chance to gaze at not one, but many different breaking points in future seasons of dealing with wealthy charter guests. What the show does best is isolating a trait in the wealthy, which is demanding tastes. They have certain expectations, such as dietary requests, cuisine tastes, high class excursions, lavished nighttime parties and impeccable services from the crew. If none are met, surely there would be a problem. Viewers may look at this as a sense of entitlement of the wealthy, claiming that they are already on a charter yacht, what's not to like? Paying thousands of dollars to charter a yacht has its expectations. However, oftentimes the crew are often looked at as items, and not humans. There are many counts of disturbing actions taken on the crew. In season 7, second stew Simone Mashile was met with extremely inappropriate comments by one charter guest. Mashile, a woman of color from South Africa, was targeted with sexual comments by a wealthy white male charter guest. A lot of times, the wealthy on the show believe they have a sense of power that does not limit their words or actions. Unfortunately, this was disturbing to watch as she was a main target, and millions of people got to see it unfold. Captain Lee was not aware of the incident, however, Chastain removed her from service and moved her to laundry. If Lee was aware of the situation, the event would have gone down differently. As a viewer, I thought this was handled in the best way possible, but it did stir up negative feelings towards the wealthy, as it did with other viewers as they sounded off on social media after the episode aired. The use of social media, cameras following around people, and strong opinions have allowed the cultivation theory to truly modernize when scrutinizing different groups. This has been greatly beneficial to pointing out flaws with society, but on the flip side, it has given more power to allow viewers to

have greater negative associations to all groups, good or bad. The crew are challenged each charter to deliver high quality services, and while they may do that for the most part, as viewers, we become more sensitive to the recurring trends of the wealthy. The wealthy seen on *Below Deck* are often portrayed as privileged and overly demanding, which cultivates that way of thinking in viewers.

Relationships Onboard *Below Deck*

Following the wealthy is another major theme that makes *Below Deck* unique: crew relationships. Television has often displayed relationships on television, and most of the time, they are paired by demographic, not so much by personal interest. Television has become more forward and diverse when it comes showcasing couples. Back in the mid 20th century, viewers would not find diversity in relationships, which cultivated a certain mindset in people. Today's television has made improvements, and *Below Deck* is an example of this. The pursuit of romance always begins in some type of setting. *Below Deck* typically films for about 6 weeks, as that is a standard charter season block. Before going into crew relationships, there is something to note. Bravo does not hire just any "yachty" to star on the show. There are certain guidelines producers follow to ensure each season is successful. The crew has to possess some physical attraction, but also possess good personalities. Young, built and beautiful are three ways of describing the crew of *Below Deck*. The men are usually tall, bulky and very masculine. The majority of the crew are deck crew or the chef position. The women have certain body types, and have some sort of feminine construct. Watching the show, viewers may experience body

dysmorphia, toxic masculinity and body shaming. They may believe what they see on TV goes for all yachties, and that they have to look a certain way.

The crew often mingled together whether they were on the yacht or on land out on the town. It was natural for friendships to form such as Chastain with Skippon, Pienaar and the male crew, and crossing boundaries with Geber and Chastain and Mashile. Romantic relationships were bound to happen and cameras caught that too. Sterback took a liking to Chastain and Mashile simultaneously and encountered a sexual relationship with Mashile. Chastain failed to reciprocate back to Sterback. Pern and Skippon were exclusive throughout the season until Pern's habits with drinking and behavior caused Skippon to pull away. Crew romance is quite common on *Below Deck* and throughout the seasons, temporary couples have been formed. Romance in this sense takes the lust route rather than love. If we circle back to Gerbner's findings, we see traditional marriages or budding romances on television minus the crude behavior and constant drunk hookups that is shown on the show. Along with that, you would rarely see interracial or homosexual relationships featured on television back then. This was considered taboo, and it wasn't until in the late 20th century we maybe got to see more diverse relationships. In today's television, there is a strong openness about love and lust. It has significantly become desensitized and people at a younger age are being exposed to love and lust on television more often. Considering how liberal relationships have become on television over the years, there is a big shift from Gerbner's findings to now, and *Below Deck* showcases some positive effects of sexuality and relationships that are happening in society today.

Perceptions of Race

Race appears to be an underlying factor on *Below Deck*. Most seasons, the crew is always almost entirely white. People of color may feel that they don't belong in the yachting industry, or that they may feel isolated from television programming. This is in fact not how it is outside of the show, and the industry is diverse, but *Below Deck* sometimes neglects diversity when casting the crew. Gerbner heavily focused on race during his studies in the 1960s-70s. African Americans were portrayed very negatively on television, and were deemed "a threat" by viewers. While the times have changed in the present day, *Below Deck* has made some attempt to feature minorities on the show. Surely, each season may have one person of color, but it does not add up to a diverse program.

Typically, the relationships of the interior crew are either best friends or mortal enemies. Chastain has had her blossoming friendships with some stews, but not all. In some seasons, she has leaned more towards one stew over another. Many different factors such as quality of work, communication and friendliness have determined her liking for her colleagues on the yacht. Looking at the season 7 for example, the latest season aired, Chastain worked with Courtney Skippon, a young white and sarcastic stew from Canada along with Simone Mashile. In the beginning of the season, she had no issue with the two. However, as the season progressed, she became frustrated with Mashile due to her poor service skills and lack of communication. This led Chastain's view of Mashile to be negative, while Skippon was highly praised throughout the season. Viewership took note of this, and there could be some underlying reasons as to why this occurred that is deeper than work quality. If you look close enough, the viewer may look at this as racist, due to Mashile being isolated. Here we have Chastain favoring Skippon, chatting with her more, establishing a friendship outside of work, and she even promoted her to second stew from third stew. Chastain has been a chief stew for many years now, so she has the power to

promote stews up to a higher rank for future charter seasons. Stews usually have an array of roles such as laundry, cleaning up the interior, and service. Mashile, although a second stew, was primarily on laundry and cleaning duty. Skippon was primarily focused on cleaning and service. Mashile wanted to do service more to practice her skills but Chastain got frustrated with her and limited her service role. Isolating the one minority on the crew this way is somewhat of indirect racism. Gerbner's studies found more varieties of blatant racism, while today it is subtler, but equally still an issue faced today.

Perceptions of Gender

Continuing on, season 7 featured an overwhelming battle between the male crew and female crew. While the interior consisted of mostly females, excluding the chef who was a male, the exterior consisted of all males. Ashton Pienaar was the bosun, which is one step below captain. He was featured on the previous season in Thailand, and has established relationships with Rosbach and Chastain. Deck mates included Brian de Saint Pern, Tanner Sterback, Abbi Murphy, who left after a few episodes, and one of the most notorious crew on Below Deck, Rhylee Gerber. Gerber was also featured on last season, and fought enormously with Pienaar and the previous crew. There is a blatant detail that is shown here, and that is Gerber was the only female deckhand. Gerber clashed heads with all of her male counterparts when she arrived halfway through season 7 after replacing Murphy. Boundaries were crossed several times, as Rhylee demonstrated hard work, but was verbally aggressive at her male colleagues. Why she was like this is because her colleagues did not give her enough work or valued her work, as she

thinks. Both Gerber and the other deckhands clashed with her to the point where she had to speak with Rosbach about her behavior. A feminist uproar was sparked throughout the season, saying that Gerber was mistreated and not taken seriously because she was a woman. Social media was split between either supporting Geber or being totally against her. Feminist revolutions sprouted in the mid 20th century when women did not have as much power today. Gerbner's findings suggested that women were only designated to certain roles on television, and that society itself is dangerous for all women alike in real life, due to heavy cultivation of violence presented on television. In the present day, we see women take on stronger leadership roles in society, however season 7 essentially set us back in time with the constant clashing of female characters.

Perceptions of Workplace Drama and Behavior

Finally, tying all of the prime points within *Below Deck* is none other than drama. The show would not be a reality television program if it did not feature drama. Drama on reality TV either appears to be very scripted, or a natural occurrence. Of course producers inorganically set the mood for shows like these, and cast people with strong personalities, but once you put them behind camera, it is up to them to perform to the producer's liking. The crew of *Below Deck* are carefully picked each season. With the exception from the reoccurring crew such as Rosbach and Chastain, the remainder spots are filled by cast that possess some level of work ethic and a personality that is fit for TV.

Season 3 for example featured a very notorious stew: Raquel "Rocky" Dakota. Her eccentric and feisty attitude made her perfect for reality TV. She clashed heads with Chastain

constantly, citing that Chastain was very rude and not supportive of her. Dakota made an effort to complete her work, but she often got distracted by others on board, and she would exchange words with Chastain almost every episode. In one episode, she became so frustrated with the constant drama on board, she jumped off the ledge of the yacht and went for a swim during a break between charters. Rosbach and Chastian thought it was quite extreme and very uncalled for. Dakota was a professional diver, so she did not hurt herself, however it was not appropriate yacht behavior, but it was appropriate television behavior. Viewers would not tune in if there weren't any shocking moments or revelations on the show. Drama featured on television during the 20th century was focused on real life issues, society and real people with no script. Gerbner's findings were very real world and quite serious. Fast forward to now, we view drama in the same way, but perhaps in a lighthearted, less serious way. Reality TV can be serious, but in this case, *Below Deck* features drama that entertains. Dakota's dive off the yacht was important in *Below Deck* society, but perhaps not so outside of the reality TV world.

Circling back to deckhand Rhylee Gerber, her two seasons were perhaps the most two dramatic seasons on the show in general. Season 6, set in Tahiti, was a big change from previous seasons set in the Caribbean. Not only was the location a big change, but the crew experienced an intense amount of drama. It was Gerber's first season, and she did not hold back on her feelings and words. The deckhands included bosun Chandler Brooks, Ross Inia, Ashton Pienaar, and Tyler Rowland. Brooks and Gerber immediately had at it with each other, fighting about Brooks' leadership role, and Gerber's attitude. The show made it seem like Brooks had it out for Gerber, however, the remainder of the crew found Brooks' leadership skills to be very poor. He was later let off and Inia replaced his role, and Rowland came into the picture. The interior also featured a high amount of drama. Chastain was accompanied by Josiah Carter, the show's first

male steward, Caroline Bedol, and Laura Betancourt. Chastain and Carter formed an easy connection at the beginning, and it singled out Bedol greatly. Bedol had anxiety, and was a frantic worker. She became very overwhelmed by the work she had to do, and she felt isolated from Chastain and Carter's cliquish behavior. One episode, Bedol had a very bad day and took a longer than usual break. Chastain became frustrated, and she took a speaker and blasted music into her room. This was clearly unprofessional behavior on Chastain's part, and ultimately Bedol ended up quitting, and being replaced by Betancourt. We can determine whether drama is work stress induced, personality induced, or set up by producers. Most of this behavior on the show would not be acceptable in the real world, and even on a yacht. This image of drama may cultivate the perception of workplace behavior, and whether this behavior would be acceptable in society. Since the cast of the show is contained on the yacht, and there are cameras rolling, it is deemed entertaining. However, examples mentioned would not be accepted outside of the reality television world. The issue that lies with this type of drama on the show is that people may perceive it themselves as acceptable, when in actuality it really is not. Young viewers who may watch the show with their parents may have a warped perception of how to act and professionalism on the job, with manners and respect flying out of the window most times. *Below Deck* may slightly glorify the yachting industry, but the show itself does not represent the industry as a whole, which may cultivate wrong perceptions.

There seems to be a reoccurring trend in the interior. One steward gets isolated. This is a habit that Chastain seems to practice, but it does provide entertainment for viewers. Viewers may compare her to the "mean girl" in high school, and this might be negative for teen viewers to watch. They may question whether grown adults bully or isolate individuals, whether it is for television or not. Bullying and singling individuals based off of their demographics was a real

issue during the 20th century. Most of the time, your demographic determines where you fit in society, and how you were perceived by others who may possess more privilege than other individuals. Chastain's "bullying" behavior may not make her a suitable role model for some, but for others, they may look up to her no nonsense behavior. This is an issue with gender, because people may view Chastain as someone who is professional and serious, however, she may be labeled as a bully, which is a common occurrence amongst women more than men. Women in leadership roles are continuing to grow, and television has done more to feature women in these types of roles today. However, specifically with Chastain, she gets called out more, compared to the other male crew on board who hold head positions. Chastain may be great for reality TV, however, her position as chief stew gets undermined by the show, which can pose a problem to some viewers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is imperative to recognize reality TV's cultivation of its audience. A generally newer type of television, it has taken the television world by storm. In this case, *Below Deck* has been a popular program on Bravo. Debuting in 2013, cameras have followed an industry that has been kept hidden from television, and exposed the world to fascinating wealthy charter guests, crew drama and crew relationships. Looking back at Gerbner's findings in the mid 20th century featuring the ideas of racism, gender roles and feminism, they were blatantly presented for the world to see. People had extreme ideas, and narrow thought perceptions that have affected a large majority of some generations. Fast forward to today, people have become

more open minded perhaps due to the shifts of culture and society on television. Younger generations are learning more about life on television, influencing and cultivating their perceptions of the world. *Below Deck* is a modern program that may feature these hot topic issues, but are presented in the form on reality TV. People are intrigued by the lives of other people, and *Below Deck* perfectly mixes the lives of the wealthy, and lives of once normal people turned Bravolebrity. We can determine that society has come a long way since Gerbner's findings, due to the openness of people on television. As a very popular form of media, television captures the era quite nicely. *Below Deck* delicately takes these controversial issues, and turns it into a programming that is entertaining from all. Gerbner's findings are still present in today's age, and television continues to shape our thoughts and viewers in some way, shape or form.

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