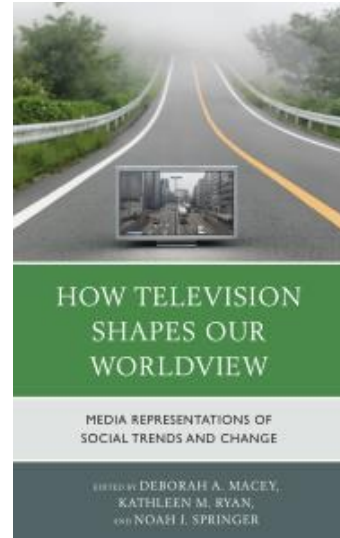


Deborah A. Macey, Kathleen M. Ryan, and Noah J. Springer (Eds.), **How Television Shapes Our Worldview: Media Representations of Social Trends and Change**, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014, 436 pp., \$126.00 (hardback).

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This edited volume begins with a short introduction to television studies thus far. The collection focuses on how television now reflects broader diversity in society and provides more choice to viewers, mainly due to changes in the delivery of television and the development of new television delivery technologies. The increase in television choice comes with both positive and negative consequences. Television allows us to see the tragedies that unfold thousands of miles away, through increased coverage of worldwide news, but it also allows us to self-select into a narrow interpretation of the news based on our worldview. Today's inclusion of diversity on television marks a change from the middle-class white families of the 1950s and the economically advantaged white characters of the 1990s that dominated television dramas. However, it still comes with limitations that are explored in depth in a section entitled "The Voice."



Television has become the center of our home life (Tichi, 1992) and even our identities (Hakanen, 2007). It would make sense, then, that it would help shape our worldview and the social trends and changes that bring meaning to our lives. The editors do not attempt to explain this, but instead allow those effects to unfold over several chapters.

The authors use diverse methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and genres of television to enhance the scholarly application of this book. The editors succeeded in organizing an array of essays on the ways in which television both influences and is influenced by social trends. It depicts television as neither monster nor savior, but allows each author to come to separate conclusions about how much television influences its viewers and whether this influence is positive or negative. The mixture of both quantitative and qualitative methods aided the overall purpose of the book: to demonstrate television's influence on social trends.

The first section focuses on the news, starting with an explanation of how news fragmentation led to greater polarization. In the past, news was centered around three major networks, which offered limited choice to viewers and set the agenda for the issues of the day. As more niche news programs were created, viewers began to choose news programs and reporters who agreed with their worldviews. This self-selection of news sources led to confirmation bias, even as national tragedies such as the shooting at Sandy Hook unfolded. News programs crafted news by inserting opinion alongside fact, further polarizing

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the news industry. News programs reinforce this divide by emphasizing conflict and drama to increase viewership. This chapter, though written long before the 2016 presidential election, still holds true. It does not, however, leave us with any answers about how to remediate the situation.

The second section focuses on gender and sexual orientation and how representation on television can be both helpful and harmful, depending on how a character is portrayed. Janak's chapter explores how television characters can set the stage and allow young teachers to emulate the inspirational teachers they find in film and television. His autobiographical essay looked at how Gabe Kotter, the lead in *Welcome Back, Kotter*, influenced the author's perception of male teachers and inspired his career. As an education professor, he encourages students to look at media portrayals of educators and find inspiration.

Lehman demonstrates in a chapter on queer identity how representation can increase visibility in positive ways but also be limiting when character development defaults into stereotypes. Her in-depth look at the show *Glee* explores both the show's attempts to represent gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans youth and fans' responses to those portrayals. We learn that fans are drawn to the show because it portrays queer character but also are angry at how the show leans on tropes to deliver characters that do not reflect the entirety of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans experiences. In addition, the show's choice to depict two non-gender-conforming sports teachers as heterosexual was viewed as a missed opportunity. Lehman briefly compared the show with previous portrays including *Ellen* and *Will and Grace*.

Section 3 shows us how television narratives shape our responses to the world—for example, how we deal with failure or how we see the criminal justice system and the military. Proposed hypotheses on how viewers of criminal justice shows perceive crime rates were fascinating and warrant further investigation. In addition, these shows may have real-world ramifications as viewers become jurors and decide the fates of defendants. Viewers of criminal justice shows often hold false beliefs about the types of evidence that are needed to convict, which could influence jury deliberations.

Section 4 looks at depictions of social movements on television and how these shape attitudes toward vegetarianism, environmentalism, and health care. Section 5 considers voice as related to unrepresented populations including Native American and African American writers, producers, and directors. It looks at erasure by white directors and theorizes next steps toward making shows more inclusive throughout the entire process—from concept to script to editing. It also includes a chapter on the overrepresented population of affluent, white teens in *Beverly Hills 90210*, which seems out of place after reading about Tyler Perry's success in creating films targeted toward an African American audience.

The book ends with a section on how television influences our worldview—whether our taste in home décor, which is influenced by the homes we see portrayed on television; our attitude toward Mexicanness in *Bordertown*; or our own cynicism reflected by *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. The discussion of *Bordertown: Laredo* explains how promotion affects worldviews. To increase viewership, advertisements for the show picked scenes that depicted violence in a way that offered a negative portrayal of the town's inhabitants. The misrepresentation of the town of Laredo further emphasized viewer notions of white superiority and marked Spanish speakers in the United States as other rather than mainstream. It helps reinforce the idea that success is predicated on speaking English. While *Bordertown*:

*Laredo* is hardly alone in its portrayal, television shows reinforce viewpoints. We see this reinforcement in shows like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, which aims to take the power away from politicians and put it in the hands of its viewers by teaching them how to access information.

Chapters vary in terms of rigor and what they add to the conversation about television's influence. Overall, the chapters combine in such a way as to reflect a diversity of viewpoints and reflect on both fictional and nonfictional accounts of the world. All chapters focus predominantly on American television and movies as well as American audiences; a further examination of television in other countries would serve the topic well. The book successfully explored social trends and change, but did not come to definitive conclusions about how much television shapes our worldview.

This book would be a helpful addition to a course on mass media, the history of television, or diversity in the media. A few chapters already appear out of date, but still offer a historical viewpoint that helps mark how attitudes have shifted over time. The variety of methods and theoretical frameworks used make the book helpful for a class that is exploring ways to approach the study of media and communication.

### References

- Hakanen, E. A. (2007). *Branding the teleself: Media effects discourse and the changing self*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Tichi, C. (1992). *Electronic hearth: Creating an American television culture*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.