

How NBC's *This is Us* breaks Stereotypes in Media

Overview

This Is Us is a prime time dramatic comedy that aired on NBC in 2016. It is the story of the Pearson family, who have children of their own and end up adopting an African American child after he was left at the fire station at birth. *This Is Us* defied the norms of a typical television show with its unique format which alternates between flashbacks and present day.



Kate doesn't fit the traditional female body image

Kate's characterization and development is heavily influenced by her lifelong struggle with her weight and body image.

- She is one of the few prominent characters in a television show that does not necessarily fit into the "ideal" body image of what a female is supposed to be.



Breaking the stigma of adoption

Adoption is a key plot point twice throughout the series

- Unlike most media programs where the adopted child is usually portrayed as rude, disrespectful, and someone who acts out, Randall is portrayed as a well-rounded, intellectual individual, and is treated just as the Pearson's biological children.
- In the present day, Randall and Beth adopt Deja, a teen who lives a troubled life as her mother is in and out jail and unable to care for her. While Deja's origin story may be considered as a stereotypical negative portrayal of children in the foster care or adoption system, her character arc and development can be cited as a positive portrayal.

Two Parent Household & A Position of Power

This Is Us portrays a two-parent African American household. This is often considered to be taboo in media entertainment.

Both of the parents, Beth and Randall each hold a steady income-paying job. Unlike most portrayals of African American families, the Pearson's live in a nice house inside of a nice neighborhood, drive nice cars, and their daughters go to a decent school. Randall holds a position of power as a City Council Man. African American characters are usually not found in positions of power within the entertainment media.

Mixed Race Families

This is Us features a mixed family on two separate occasions within the same family, both of which are positive

- The Pearson family adopts Randall, a black child after they lose their third triplet in childbirth, and he is found at a fire station and is brought to the hospital.

- Post-Jack's death, Rebecca remarries their family friend Miguel, who is Hispanic. While there are some tensions surrounding Miguel and Rebecca's relationship from the children, *This Is Us* again sheds a rather positive light on step-parents and their roles in the children's lives.

This Is Us and Diversity

This Is Us defies traditional television stereotypes and representations in a few different ways such as:

- Challenging African American household representations in media
- Breaking the traditional family unit stereotypes
- Defying common media portrayals of body image and its effects on the female audience

