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# Network vs. Netflix: A Comparative Content Analysis of Demographics Across Prime-Time Television and Netflix Original Programming

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Network vs. Netflix: A Comparative Content Analysis of Demographics  
Across Prime-Time Television and Netflix Original Programming

by

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Bachelor of Arts  
Coker College, 2014

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## DEDICATION

I sincerely dedicate this thesis to my parents, Loraine and Gary Corfield. I am forever grateful for all you have done for me, I genuinely would not be where I am today without your kind love and unwavering support. Thank you both for being my role models, catapults, cheerleading squad, and sounding boards throughout my seemingly NEVER-ENDING journey away from home. I love you!

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Of course, my gratitude towards my dear family is beyond words.

## ABSTRACT

This content analysis examines how prime-time television and Netflix original programming represent and portray ethnicity, age, occupation, criminality, gender and sexuality. More specifically, this study provides an updated study from previous television research, comparing various demographics across multiple television platforms and genres. Findings revealed that there has been an increase in the sheer number of minority and female characters in prime-time television and Netflix programming, however, the roles in which these marginalized groups are cast is still less assertive and meaningful than those roles held by White and male characters. Overall, the findings in this study can be used to further contribute to current experimental and survey effects studies by providing important and updated background information about the quantity and quality of these television demographics across prime-time and Netflix television.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

For the past half-century and more, a significant amount of literature has attempted to understand the relationship between television audiences and the content that they consume. Prime-time television research has provided perhaps the most fruitful insight into media representations and the inherent consequences for their audiences (Collins, 2011; Gerbner & Gross, 1976, Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1979, 1980a, 1986; Glascock, 2001; Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008; Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi, 2015a). In addition, a variety of other scholars investigating media demographics and behaviors have also made significant contributions to the literature in other areas such as children's programming (Martins & Harrison, 2011; Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995), television advertising (Ganahl, Prinsen, & Netzley, 2003; Mastro & Stern, 2003) and music videos (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Turner, 2010; Wallis, 2011).

Television is often thought of as a significant socializing agent in contemporary society, by engaging the average American viewer for more than 5 hours per day (The Total Audience Report, 2016). The introduction of and advancements in online video streaming such as Netflix and Hulu present alternative platforms for television viewership, however, the content itself is still being consumed and it is largely more accessible than ever (Tukachinsky, 2015b). It is with this readily accessible content that researchers have suggested that it is not '*what*' is being broadcast on prime-time

television today, but rather ‘*how*’ the content is being presented and the ramifications that it can induce (Bilandzic, 2006; Hobert, Shah, & Kwak, 2003).

Previous content analyses have examined stereotypes of race, crime, and gender throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century prime-time television (e.g., Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Oliver, 1994). More recent content analyses have identified misrepresentations of females along with a lack of diversity in prime-time television programs airing between 2000 and 2012 (Anderegg, Dale, & Fox, 2014; Gerding & Signorielli, 2014). The breadth of the literature has also largely focused on shows within one specific genre, most commonly situational comedies, limiting potentially important findings that could prove significant in other genres (Lampman, Rolfe-Maloney, David, & Yan..., 2002; Robinson, Callister, & Jankoski, 2008). With limited scholarship pertaining to current television shows and their significance across a multitude of genres within prime-time television and Netflix programming, there is a gap in the literature that this study proposes to fill.

With modern society continually evolving, different values and mores are adopted to reflect these social changes. Prime-time television has struggled historically to keep up with the changing face of society, tirelessly under representing minorities statistically and culturally (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). Demographics such as gender, race, occupation, age, and sexuality are continuously misrepresented in relation to U.S. census bureau figures, resulting in inaccurate depictions of today’s society and potentially damaging messages regarding audience socialization and identification (Lauzen et. al., 2008; Signorielli, 2004).

Prime-time television’s persistent role in shaping and contributing to social reality has been met with caution by researchers explaining the effects of television as a

socializing agent (Bandura, 1986, 2009; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). Theoretical frameworks such as social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986) and cultivation theory (Gerbner et. al., 2002), dominate the vast majority of television literature by offering “a way to frame the area of investigation and as a lens with which to understand the findings” (Gerding & Signorielli, 2014, p. 45).

The purpose of this study is to examine the television portrayals and representations of ethnicity, age, occupation, criminality, gender and sexuality across multiple television platforms and genres. As such, this work provides a current perspective of television demographics, investigating the relationship between the main variables (ethnicity, age, occupation, criminality, gender and sexuality) within prime-time television and Netflix original programming. In addition, this study also explores other relevant literature pertaining to genre and theoretical frameworks, the method for operationalizing this study, before presenting and discussing the findings, conclusions, limitations, and directions for contributions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Genre**

The concept of genre has been defined and redefined by prominent scholars across a variety of academic disciplines (e.g., Derrida & Ronell, 1980; Devitt, 1993; Miller, 1984). Genre is fluid; it shapes existing genres and builds from previous ones. Most texts identify more firmly with one genre than another, occasionally combining genres and forming their own sub-genre, for example romantic comedy (romcom). Theorists within and across academic disciplines have expressed broad interpretations of genre, analyzing style and form, grouping story content and text, and more commonly categorizing genres by “setting (westerns), some by actions (crime shows), some by audience effect (comedy), and some by narrative form (mysteries)” (Mittell, 2001; p. 6). With such a large variety of possibilities it is often found that one theorist’s genre is interpreted as another theorist’s sub-genre and vice versa.

The categorization of genre has moved towards a reciprocal interaction between genre and its audience. Increases in marketable genres and subgenres reflect historical and sociological trends desired by the user, allowing the emergence of new genres to be reshaped and reinvented as a result of audience demand (Miller, 1984). Postmodern genres are multi dimensional. While past definitions of genre has seen evaluations of text, form, and content, more recent conceptualizations have incorporated the impact that contextual events have on genre. Present accounts of genre have extended this initial

focus to the degree in which audience viewership and motivations influence and impact the notion of genre (Mittell, 2001).

Viewing genre as cultural categories and a reflection of the different interests of society helps to gain a more “comprehensive understanding of how genres work and shape our media experiences, how media work to shape our social realities, and how generic categories can then be used to ground our study of media texts” (Mittell, 2001; p. 20). The notion of a reciprocal recurrent whereby sociological events influence media texts, which in turn reflect our social realities, helps to understand the concept of genre as being a cultural and relatable practice.

Audience demands has indeed altered the way in which genres are created and analyzed, shifting the classification from a theoretical definition to a more practical and cultural emphasis. The definition and categorization of genre in modern society is increasingly more “fuzzy” as media texts are “routinely classified (e.g. in television listing magazines) as ‘thrillers’, ‘westerns’, and so on – genres with which every adult in modern society is familiar” (Chandler, 1997, p. 1, 3). Mittell (2001) presents the most accurate approach to understanding genre with an emphasis on “audience practices” and “historical turning points” that lead to genre creation and expansion. Just as traditional genre theorists analyzed literary and rhetoric texts, Mittell (2001) proposes an analysis of media texts and genres, isolating historical and sociological influences such as “representations of minorities on sitcoms” to focus on the evolution of genre (p. 17).

### **Genres of Representation**

With respect to various communication and sociological scholars who have contributed to the understanding of content-based media analysis and social effects (e.g.,

Gerbner et. al. 2002; Glascock 2001, 2003a, 2008; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Oliver, 1994), it is important to differentiate between the multiple categories of television entertainment use (Holbert et. al., 2003). Various television genres offer significantly different messages to their viewers about race, ethnicity, and gender; depending on what genre of show they are watching, ultimately producing varying effects for the audience (Egbert & Belcher, 2012). Three common genres of prime-time television are identified based on previous scholarship.

**Comedy.** The situational comedy genre (sitcom) provides perhaps the largest amount of scholarship to the area of prime-time television analysis (Birthisel & Martin, 2013; Kimbro, 2013; Rabinovitz, 1989). Some of the most notable contributions have been studies highlighting the historical under representation of minorities, and in particular the portrayal of female characters (Butsch, 2005; Elasmr, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999). While this under representation is a common theme throughout all prime-time television genres, sitcoms have traditionally been the most progressive genre in terms of female representation, more so than dramas or action/crime programming (Davis, 1990; Glascock, 2001; McNeil, 1975).

Early studies (McNeil, 1975) reported a 60% male – 40% female ratio for comedies compared with 74% male – 26% female ratio for dramas, while notable later studies (Davis, 1990) found similar ratios of 58% males – 42% females (comedies), 64% males – 36% females (dramas), and 71% males – 29% females (action). Recent scholars have identified today’s sitcom genres as having more progressive and strong-minded female characters who are continuously “trying to balance career and family,” in addition

to “real-life problems such as racism, poverty, and abortion that were non-existent in 1950s and 1960s sitcoms” (p. 49; Butsch, 2005, p. 7).

The bevy of scholarship, however, suggests that females are still severely sexualized, rarely shown in positions of leadership or power, and are on average younger than their male counterparts (Attebery, 2009; Birthisel & Martin, 2013; Signorielli, 2004, 2009a). Moreover, many cultivation studies have examined the social implications as a result of gender-biased sitcom television, with research focusing predominately on the adverse effects on female viewership and negative social perspectives towards females (Lotz, 2001).

Additionally, sitcom studies have also provided significant insight into portrayals of racial minorities and influences on audiences. It has been noted that African Americans are most frequently shown in situational comedies and specifically programs that encompass all-Black casts (Children Now, 2004; Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002). Exposure to sitcoms (not dramas) has also been found to have a correlation to viewer’s perceptions of African American income levels and educational attainment (Busselle & Crandall, 2002). Representations of other racial minority groups such as Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans are remote within the sitcom genre and are typically found in crime and action genres with more racially diverse casts (Signorielli, 2009b).

Television sitcom scholar Brett Mills (2004) posits that the sitcom genre “is one which foregrounds the aspects of its own performance, offering pleasure in the presentation of verbal and physical comic skill” (p. 66). An additional distinguishing feature to the sitcom genre is the inclusion of laughter tracks found in the majority of shows, for instance *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984-92) and *Seinfeld* (ABC, 1990-99).

While there are instances where laughter tracks are not used, *The Office* (NBC, 2005-2013) and *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009 - present), the tracks are still considered to be a significant point of difference for sitcoms when compared with drama and crime television shows.

**Crime.** The television crime genre has been largely broken up into two different entertainment categories: fictional and non-fictional programming. Scholarship indicates that both categories are vastly different in the way that they depict minorities. Portrayals of race, crime, and aggression in non-fictional television shows such as *COPS* (CBS, 1989-present) has been considerably more negative towards minorities with African Americans more frequently shown as suspects and criminals while Caucasians are most often seen as police officers (Mastro & Robinson, 2000; Oliver, 1994). Alternatively, fictional crime shows within this genre depict African Americans as less aggressive or criminal in relation to Caucasian characters (Dominick, 1973) while Latino characters are shown to be more positively associated with income, intelligence, physical bulk, and cleanliness in contrast to their historically negative representation of being “greasy bandits and illegal immigrants” (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000, p. 700).

Portrayals of race on crime television shows has been significant for cultivation research that suggests extensive television viewing leads to associations between facts from television and social reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorelli, 2009a; Potter, Vaughan, Warren, Howley, Land, & Hagemeyer, 1995). Cultivation scholarship regarding portrayals of crime and violence is also conducive to viewer’s increased fears and perceptions of danger, associating the criminal activity with the race or ethnicity of those depicted (Signorielli, 2009b).



Previous research such as this helps illuminate the significance of continued content analysis within television platforms and the crime genre specifically as the extensive consumption of these negative media images can subsequently increase viewer's fear levels and influence their conceptions of social reality (Mastro & Robinson, 2000).

This study focuses solely on the fictional television shows within the crime genre as they possess similar structural characteristics as comedy and drama shows, for instance reoccurring characters and scripted storylines. Traditional characteristics of the fictional crime genre involve a number of aspects. Oliver (1994) notes that there is an exaggeration of severe criminal activity such as murder and robbery, and that Potter and Ware (1987) reported assault and murder at a rate of approximately 8.6 times per hour during their content analysis. The fictional crime genre also exhibits a high proportion of "successful resolutions" during each show and that "it is important to recognize that television crime drama almost always features the triumph of justice" (Zillmann & Wakshlag, 1985, p. 148). The emphasis on criminal activity and its resolution distinguishes the fictional crime genre not only from its non-fictional associate but also from other genres such as comedy and drama.

**Drama.** Like the television crime genre, the drama genre is also comprised of two categories of entertainment: progressive dramas and traditional dramas. The differences of each category can be best exemplified through the portrayal and representation of the show's characters, in particular females. Progressive dramas are frequently set in urban environments and address modern concerns through their female characters such as divorce, abortion, equal pay, and sexual harassment (Arthurs, 2003; Holbert et. al., 2003). These issues are often the driving storylines behind current progressive dramas, reflecting

cultural shifts in norms and opinions, while also marketing towards the increasing female viewership (Glascock, 2001). Scholarship on this genre has primarily investigated the cultivation effects of these issues for heavy drama television viewers and their attitudes regarding progressive social and political issues (Anderegg, 2014; Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Livingstone, 2013).

Alternatively, traditional dramas offer a more conservative approach to gender and social issues. Previous research has found that males are more likely to be found in positions of power and leadership while females are presented in domestic, care-giving roles with little or no occupational status outside of their homes (Holbert et. al., 2003). Traditional dramas are also set in rural environments and “therefore reflect certain heartland values and norms” which ultimately create barriers for women in society (Holbert et. al., 2003, p. 49). Early research into traditional drama shows (Peevers, 1979) revealed an under-representation of females and more physically aggressive depictions of males than in other genres such as comedies. (Signorielli, 1991) also found that dramas are more likely to focus on the negative aspects of romantic relationships such as divorce and adultery than other genres.

While other social demographics such as race, age, and job occupation feature in the drama genre, gender representations appear to be the most significant area of scholarship when defining drama. Zillmann (1994) distinguishes the drama genre from the likes of sitcoms and crime shows through its mechanisms of emotional involvement, allowing the show’s real world likeness to manipulate the viewer’s emotions and empathy in order to produce a closer connection and attachment (Feng & Qi, 2014). The drama television genre provides a more realistic presentation of cultural issues than other

television genres, promoting female characters to positions of equal status in the workplace unlike sitcoms, and portraying minorities in diverse roles rather than as criminals or suspects as is the case with crime shows.

### **Demographic Representation**

Media scholarship continues to study the representation and portrayal of gender, race, age, occupation, and sexuality demographics on television in relation to the greater U.S. population (Glascock, 2001; Signorrelli, 2009a; Tukachinsky, 2015a). The changing face of television provides a valuable area of research for understanding culture shifts in society as well as viewer conceptions of social reality. This study aims to expand upon previous scholarship relating to demographic representations by examining their most recent portrayals across Netflix programming and prime-time television, analyzing the three most popular broadcasting networks (CBS, NBC, and ABC) during the 2015-2016 season (Schneider, 2015). Accordingly, due to the prevalence of television in modern society, it is imperative to discover which television networks and genres offer the best reflection of these demographics in relation to today's society.

**Prime-Time Television.** Prime-time refers to the hours during which viewership is at its highest for television consumption. With respect to previous content analysis on prime-time network television (Glascock, 2008; Lauzen et. al., 2008; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000), this study employs the prime-time television definition presented by Anderegg et. al. (2014) stating, "Prime-time television was defined as programming that aired between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m., Monday through Sunday" (p. 739). For the purpose of this study, prime-time television shows were attained from the three most popular television networks throughout 2015-2016, NBC, CBS, ABC (Schneider, 2015) in order

to accurately represent the majority of prime-time television viewership. Television characters within their respective genres and shows were defined based on Sink and Mastro (2016), “main characters were defined as recurring, regular characters who were central to the storyline and consistently appeared on the show. Minor characters were infrequent, semi regular, or one-time characters who played a supporting role in the episode. Background characters were non-central characters with at least two lines whom one would not expect to appear in future episodes. Characters who had fewer than two lines were not coded and therefore are not represented in this study” (p. 8).

**Netflix.** For the better part of half a century, television shows in the United States have largely been broadcast on major television networks such as NBC, ABC, and CBS. These traditional mediums of television viewing have long restricted audiences to single screens limited by time, place, and content, dictated by television networks and advertising agencies. The introduction of online entertainment services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon are changing not only the way that television shows are consumed but also who is creating them.

On August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1997, in Scotts Valley, California, Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph had the foresight of creating Netflix, a company founded on the concept of renting movies and DVDs through a subscription service (Keating, 2012). Unlike most other DVD rental services at the time, Netflix offered subscribers the opportunity to rent DVDs with no set return date and with no late fees, innovating the industry and taking their first step towards a consumer-first driven service. In 2007, Netflix moved towards its Instant Viewing service, offering subscribers the ability to watch films and television over the Internet on multiple electronic devices (Keating, 2012). From here, Netflix has

continued to grow both financially and in their total number of subscribers. According to CNN, the video streaming service now has 93.8 million members, having added a record 19 million members in 2016, up from 17.4 million in 2015 (Fiegerman, 2017).

However, additional demographic information including age, ethnicity, and gender regarding Netflix subscribers has not yet been shared, limiting valuable literature pertaining to the company and their viewership figures. Alternatively, when information is gathered, companies such as Nielsen Holdings PLC are unable to gage the popularity of a show the same way they are able to with those broadcast on network television, “either because there are no ads attached (Netflix) or because the ads are not exactly the same as the ones that appeared on the original TV broadcast (Hulu) (Stelter, 2013, p. 1),” ultimately skewing the raw data of the popularity of the show. Despite the lack of Netflix data available, media scholars continue to analyze the television streaming service and its impact on the audience.

Unlike the increase of online streaming services and subscribers, literature pertaining to the prevalence of these online platforms and their content has been scarce. Recent scholarship (Feijter, Khan, & Van Gisbergen, 2016; Jenner, 2016; Matrix, 2014) has focused on the phenomenon of binge-watching television programs, “watching between 2-6 episodes of the same TV show in one sitting” (Spangler, 2013, p. 1), but rarely address what is being consumed or how the content differs from that presented on traditional television networks. Alternatively, scholarship has also addressed Netflix’ business model (Ojer & Capapé, 2013) algorithmic culture (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016), and the extinction of the ‘water cooler’ movement, which is “hardly gone as viewers are

still likely to discuss their viewing experiences, despite the fact that these are not synchronized (Jenner 2016, p. 268-269).

Given prime-time television's role in shaping and contributing to society, Netflix has emerged as a leading source of entertainment that offers the ability to stream unlimited episodes of the audiences favorite shows, making this platform even more important to study with regards to the effects of television as a socializing agent. Such as the demand by the viewer for new genres to be reshaped and reinvented as previously mentioned, online television streaming platforms such as Netflix are user driven whereby audiences dictate what shows are being created and what characters are being represented. Just as prime-time television has shaped society for decades, the emergence of Netflix has seen the development of more shows and new characters in an attempt to reflect and appeal to its rapidly growing audience.

**Gender.** Television has a rich history of under representing female characters and portraying them in stereotypical ways (Atkin, Moorman, & Lin, 1991; Collins, 2011; Glascock, 2001; Holbert et. al., 2003). Rena Rudy and colleagues (2010), along with other feminist and media scholars (Hill, 2010; Rabinovitz, 1989), attribute real-world social developments to the liberation of women on television, suggesting that “the historical roots of the analysis of gender-related content lie in the practical agendas of a sociopolitical movement, and they illustrate one of the primary objectives for analyzing content involving gender roles” (p. 705).

Studies through the 1970s and the 1980s, repeatedly found women on television to be heavily under represented in relation to their presence in the U.S. population (Elasmar, 1999; Gerbner & Signorielli, 1982; Glascock, 2003a). The expansion of

females entering the workforce during the early 1980s, along with the rise of the Third wave of feminism, demanding all types of women to be given a voice, established a more equal showing of male and female television characters (Attebery, 2009; Elasmr, 1999). Signorielli (1989) found a significant decrease in the amount of male characters on television between the 1960s and the mid 1980s, resulting in a more equal balance between the genders on television.

It has been widely noted that an “increase in television characters stems from an increase in the creation of women roles and the hiring of television actresses,” and that past researchers have suggested that the “lack of female representation in front of the camera may be due to the scarcity of females behind the scenes” (Elasmr, 1999, p. 24, Glascock, 2001, p. 658). Stern (1999) also suggests, “the major task of early feminist researchers across disciplines was to document the assertion that images of women in western culture have generally been created from the male perspective” (p.2).

Lauzen et al. (2008) asserts, “prime-time television has a long history of under representing women in powerful behind-the-scene roles,” noting that women in 2006 comprised only 28% of writers, 20% of creators, 11% of directors, 33% of producers, 18% of editors, and 3% of directors of photography (p. 204). While the statistics serve to address the prime-time television industry in general, they also highlight the significance of male dominance throughout television programming and the influence on gender representations and portrayals. In relation to the under representation of females in front and behind the camera, this study posits the following:

**H1:** Among characters in prime-time television and Netflix programs, female characters will be under represented relative to male characters.

**H2:** The proportion of females on prime-time television and Netflix programs will differ from the proportion of women in the United States population.

**Occupation.** Literature pertaining to race and job occupations on television is of a scarcity, with the bevy of research examining the representation of minorities on television rather than the jobs in which they hold (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2009a; Tukachinsky, 2015b). Mastro & Tukachinsky (2011) acknowledge the under representation of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans, along with their negative and narrowly set roles as “buffoons, criminals, or hypersexual nonprofessional individuals,” aiding longstanding social stereotypes and increasing the social groups’ feelings of self-consciousness, harming their collective self esteem (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015).

Signorielli & Kahlenberg (2001) identified a disparity between Caucasian characters and other minority characters in relation to job occupations. It was reported that Caucasian characters were more likely to be shown as professionals and less likely to be shown as blue-collar workers than minorities and women. In addition, Hunt (2005) found that Caucasian and African American television characters were more likely to have high-status occupations such as lawyers or doctors, while Latino characters had lower status occupations.

Television and occupational research during the past five decades has largely explored gender and the misrepresentation of female characters in the workplace. Signorielli (1989) noted only 37% of working females compared to 68% of males, while Glascock (2001) found an increase of working female characters at 56% in addition to a greater variety of jobs than males, but only in lower-paying occupations. The evolution of



a more progressive female character entering the job market is suggested to be in accordance with television networks “trying to appeal to a mostly female audience” as a result of “many male viewers having been lured away by cable’s offerings of sports and news” (Glascock, 2001, p. 659).

Aside from early television representations of women as homemakers and housewives, their presence in the workforce has typically been attributed to “secretaries, teachers, and nurses” while men have been shown as “professionals, managers, or law-enforcement officers” (Glascock, 2001, p. 658). Television journalist Ann Oldenburg (2004) submits that women today have “torn off their aprons and thrown them out the window” as a new wave of independence has emerged and the presence of females in the labor force has increased from 36% in 1960, to 58% in 2000 (p. 1).

Recent literature has re-cast the investigation of female and male employment in terms of power dynamics between character occupations rather than analyzing gender roles from an employment versus homemaker vantage point. Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, & Pieper (2012) investigated the prevalence of male and female characters in popular media, the nature of those portrayals (e.g., demography, domesticity, sexualization), and most importantly the “occupational pursuits of characters and the degree to which males and females are shown working in a variety of prestigious industries and STEM careers (e.g., science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) (p. 2).” Smith et. al. (2012) found that male characters significantly outnumber women in high-status positions on prime-time television as “females are portrayed as 14% of corporate executives, 42.9% of investors/economic officials, 27.8% of high level politicians, 29.6% of doctors/hospital managers/CMO's, 38.5% of academic administrators” (p. 18). These findings are

significant as the primary role of women on prime-time television is something other than being a homemaker or housewife. Due to almost all characters having an occupation in television today, the focus is now on the measurement of authority and power of the occupation, rather than the explicit professional title the character holds (Sink & Mastro, 2016).

Modern office-based shows of the 2000s are still found to be guilty of punishing successful portrayals of women in the work place. Birthisel (2013) argues that in addition to the difficulties faced by female characters to break into the misogyny and ignorance of the corporate “locker room,” they are also subject to exclusion and disdain from other female coworkers (p. 76). Conversely, less ambitious and nonthreatening female characters are rewarded with flourishing personal lives and strong rapports with their coworkers, serving to “quietly reinforce patriarchal behaviors,” and “reflecting real world tendencies” that are evident in modern office settings (p. 73, 74). Thus, with the glaring problems of under representation of females and minorities in the workforce, this study asks the following:

**RQ1:** Across prime-time television and Netflix programs, are there differences in the level of high-level occupational roles held by female characters relative to male characters?

**Race/Ethnicity.** Television representations of race and ethnicity have significantly improved since the early 1980s with recent research even finding an over representation of African Americans on screen (Hunt & Ryder, 2002; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000a; Tukachinsky et. al., 2015a). Despite a lack of Latino, Asian, and Native American presence on prime-time television, “Blacks constitute between 14%-

17% of the prime-time population and approximately 13% of the U.S. population,” overall reflecting a significant change to the television landscape (Tukachinsky et. al, 2015a. p. 19).

These positive demographic shifts cannot be said for other minority groups. Mastro (2009) found that Latino characters only make up 4-6% of prime-time television programming, significantly below their 17.6% stake hold in the U.S. population (Population Estimates, 2015). The same disproportion can be found for Native Americans and Asian Americans, often resulting in their presence being removed altogether from content analysis studies. Asian Americans account for 5.6% of the current U.S. population, however, they only make up 3% of prime-time television characters (Children Now, 2004; Tukachinsky et. al., 2015a). Native Americans are even further removed from the television landscape, making up “between 0.0% and 0.4% of the characters in prime-time television” compared with their national population average of 1.2% (Population Estimates, 2015; Tukachinsky et. al, 2015a, p. 19).

**H3:** Across prime-time television and Netflix programs, minority characters will less likely than Caucasian characters to be cast in high-level occupational roles.

**RQ2:** Across prime-time television and Netflix programs, what is the relationship between the distribution of minority characters and Caucasian characters?

**RQ3:** Among characters in prime-time television and Netflix programs, will the hypothesized under representation of female characters vary based on ethnicity?

In addition to cultivation literature that express concerns for television audiences and their perception of social reality, social cognitive research has also stressed television's role in developing scripts and schemas about different people (Bandura, 1986). Racial and ethnic representations on television have become even more important to viewers who do not have frequent interactions with these groups, as the basis of their judgments come from the characters that they have engaged with on television (Greenberg et. al., 2002). The misrepresentation of minorities across prime-time television presents a challenge to abandoning preexisting stereotypes as "the television landscape segregates racial groups, viewers' conceptions about their own interaction or lack of interaction with people of color may be cultivated or reinforced by what they experience when viewing" (Signorielli, 2009b, p. 324). Based on the racially skewed landscape of prime-time television, this study asks the following:

**RQ4:** Across prime-time television and Netflix programs, what is the relationship between ethnicity and characters depicted as criminals?

**RQ5:** Does the ethnicity of characters depicted as criminals differ by genre? If so, is this consistent across prime-time television and Netflix programs?

**Age.** The majority of prime-time television studies pertaining to age and the portrayal of the elderly have come during the 1970s (Beck, 1978; Rubin, 1982) with scholarship deteriorating during the 1980s (Dail, 1988; Davis, 1990), 1990s (Fouts & Burggraf, 1999; Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Robinson & Skill, 1995), and even fewer studies today (Lauzen & Dozier, 2005; Signorielli, 2004). Perhaps the most pronounced area of difference when discussing age on prime-time television comes from the different representations of males and females. Initial findings by Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, &

Morgan (1980) have proved reliable throughout the past four decades with current research supporting initial biases found between genders in relation to age. Signorielli & Bacue (1999) found that during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, only 3.0% of male and 2.6% of female characters were categorized as elderly.

Gerbner et. al. (1980) found that more than half of the female characters on prime-time television were under 21, compared with only 28% of male characters. The study also revealed that female characters were most likely to fall between 20-34 years of age (45-47%), while men were found to fall between 35-39 years of age (37-47%). In addition, female characters have also been depicted as subordinate and dependent while male characters are typically mature and active in their lives. The character's roles are also heavily reliant on their age, "as female characters age, they become less significant to the stories, and when older characters do appear they typically do not have clearly defined roles" (Signorielli, 2004, p. 295).

There have also been limited contributions in scholarship regarding race and age portrayals in prime-time television. Signorielli (2004) found identical patterns of under representation for minority characters with "age distributions of minority male characters more closely aligned with those of White females and minority females more likely to be cast in younger than older roles" (p. 295). The youthful representation of minority characters is perhaps most noticeable between the age of 16 and 21. Minorities are more likely to be cast as children or adolescents while Caucasian characters are depicted as young adults. These younger representations are significant as prime-time television criminals and suspects are frequently younger than Caucasian characters and therefore more likely to portray minorities in these negative roles. In response to the severe under

representation of elderly characters and misrepresentation of females, this study asks the following:

**RQ6:** Across prime-time television and Netflix programs, what is the relationship between high-level occupational roles and character age?

**RQ7:** Across prime-time television and Netflix programs, are there differences in age with how males and females are represented?

**RQ 8:** Across prime-time television and Netflix programs, what is the relationship between age and major, minor, and background characters?

**Sexuality.** One of the most under-represented demographics on prime-time television is that of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual community (LGBT). According to the annual “Where Are We in TV (2015)” report provided by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), “of the 881 regular characters expected to appear on broadcast prime-time programming in the coming year, 35 (4%) were identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual. There were an additional 35 recurring LGBT characters.” In accordance with their current under-representation, LGBT characters have also been negatively stereotyped since the 1960s, often portrayed as “funny clowns, flaming queers, queens, fairies, fags, flirts; villainous criminals, mental patients, child molesters, and vampires; or victims of violence, HIV/AIDS, and gender/sexual identity disorder” (Raley & Lucas, 2006 p. 23).

While there has been limited literature devoted to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual representations on prime-time television (Dow, 2001; Fisher, Hill, Grube, & Gruber, 2007; Moritz, 1994a&b), specific research examining the sitcom television genre and gay characters has been significant (Hart, 2000; Steiner, Fejes, & Petrich, 1993).

Homosexual and bisexual comedy characters are marginalized on current sitcom shows, often shown as no more than the show's comic relief (Raley & Lucas, 2006). Raley (2006) denotes that "gay males and lesbians on situational comedies are seen as jokesters and jesters whose funny antics make them an ideal target for ridicule" (p. 24). This representation has evolved from previous stereotypical depictions where males were seen as effeminate and females were contrasted as butch (Steiner, Fejes, & Petrich, 1993).

While present representations of LGBT characters are significantly more positive than past portrayals, they are still heavily under represented according to the national population average (Hantzis & Lehr, 1994). Cultivation scholarship would suggest that this lack of representation distorts the audience's perception of the LGBT community through the way that they are depicted. From a social cognitive perspective, prime-time television provides very limited models and sources for schemas that could be critical for viewers who have limited day-to-day contact with the LGBT community. Given the importance of LGBT characters and their representation on prime-time television, this study asks:

**RQ9:** Across prime-time television and Netflix programs, what proportion of characters are explicitly LGBT characters?

**RQ10:** What is the relationship between genre and the proportion of LGBT characters? Is this relationship consistent across prime-time television and Netflix programs?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

In continuing to understand the ever-changing landscape of television, this study provides the result of a comparative content analysis of Netflix original television programming during 2015 – 2016 and prime-time television programs (8p.m. – 11p.m.) broadcast during the 2015 – 2016 season. As arguably the most widely used method of measurement in communication and sociological research, content analysis provides valid inferences from all kinds of verbal, pictorial, symbolic, and communication data, affording the researcher the ability to ascertain the meaning and probable effect from its contents (Krippendorff, 2004).

#### **Sample**

A sample of Netflix original programs and prime-time television fictional shows for three major networks were recorded during September 2015 to August 2016. The prime-time television constructed week was built through randomly selecting television programs broadcast by the NBC, CBS, and ABC networks during their weekly prime-time slot (Monday – Sunday). The constructed week provides a fair and equal representation of each weekday without the risk of cyclical bias trends. In accordance with other prime-time content analyses (Glascock, 2001; Signorielli, 2009) reality shows, game shows, sports, news, and movies were excluded from the sample. All weekday prime-time television shows, including syndication, broadcast during the network's 2015 – 2016 season (e.g. Monday shows, 8p.m. – 11p.m., September 2015 to August 2016)



were eligible for selection in the constructed week. Netflix original programs that were available for streaming during September 2015 to August 2016 within the comedy, drama, and crime genres were eligible for selection in the Netflix constructed week.

The most recent year of prime-time programming and Netflix streaming was chosen for the comparative content analysis for multiple reasons. Firstly, a largely portion of today's prime-time television shows have multiple seasons available for analysis (e.g. Big Bang Theory, Criminal Minds, Law & Order), unlike the Netflix original shows available for streaming which are mainly in their first season of production (e.g. Sense8, Stanger Things, The Ranch). By focusing the comparative content analysis strictly on the most recent season of shows broadcast on prime-time television and streaming on Netflix, each show has the same possibility of being selected as opposed to analyzing multiple years of programming where long running shows could be available for selection but Netflix original shows with only one or two seasons would be disadvantaged.

In all 50 episodes from 43 different shows (16 half-hour comedies and 2 one-hour comedies, 16 one-hour dramas, and 16 one-hour crimes) were recorded across prime-time and Netflix during the 2015 – 2016 television season, representing 42 total hours of programming. Programming was categorized as comedy, drama, or crime, as Glascock (2001) has noted additional subcategories such as science fiction and action/adventure can prove problematic when trying to distinguish between these categories and the likes of drama. For instance, television shows such as Criminal Minds (CBS, 2005 – present) or Quantico (ABC, 2015 – present) have the ability to combine elements of the crime genre and the drama genre, or have the potential to be apart of a separate genre all

together - “crime drama.” Programming such as *Criminal Minds* and *Quantico* were classified as crime shows.

The prime-time television sample yielded 25 episodes from 23 different shows (8 half-hour comedies and 1 one-hour comedy, 8 one-hour dramas, and 8 one-hour crimes), representing 21 total hours of programming. The Netflix original programs sample yielded 25 episodes from 20 different shows (8 half-hour comedies and 1 one-hour comedy, 8 one-hour dramas, and 8 one-hour crimes), representing 21 total hours of programming. As programs from Netflix and prime-time television had the opportunity to be selected more than once within each respective sample, some shows appear more than once in their constructed week. For the total shows selected within each constructed week see tables one and two.

### **Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis for this study was the television characters shown in their respective prime-time television and Netflix original programs. The characters coded in this analysis included background characters, minor characters, and major characters (previously defined by Sink & Mastro, 2016), with the exclusion of characters with fewer than two lines of dialogue e.g. “people passing on the street, groups on the dance floor, a waiter asking for orders, a policewoman greeting a colleague” (Mastro et. al., 2000, p. 693). Background, minor, and major characters were assessed on several demographic characteristics, such as ethnicity, age, occupation, criminality, gender and sexuality. This evaluation was made using only the information provided directly by the television show and all prior background information about the show or the characters was ignored by the coders.

**Variables.** Each television character was coded for ethnicity based on categories established by Mastro & Robinson (2000) and Tukachinsky et. al. (2015a). These include: White (European), Black (African American, Jamaican, Haitian), Latino (Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Central American, South American), Asian (East Asians, Pacific Islanders), Native American, or mixed minority ethnicity (both of the character's parents are Black/Latino/Asian/Native American, but the parents are not of the same group), and Middle Eastern (Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, United Arab Emirates), all other racial categories were collapsed to allow for further analyses. When the character's ethnicity was ambiguous it was coded as 'cannot code.'

Background, minor, and major characters were evaluated on their age and occupation as previously defined by Signorielli & Bacue (1999). Age was measured by social categorization according to stages in the life cycle. Characters were categorized as "(1) children or adolescents, (2) young adults with few responsibilities, (3) settled or middle-aged adults who had career and/or family responsibilities, or (4) elderly" (p. 534). In addition a "character that was seen in more than one phase of the life cycle, for example as a child and as an adult" was classified as 'cannot code' for these two variables (p. 534).

Due to almost all characters having a job on television today (Smith et. al., 2012) occupation was coded based on the measurement of authority and power of the occupation as apposed to the title of the job itself. Occupation was grouped based on job classification: position of power/prestige (e.g., manager, boss, sergeant, principle, doctor), traditional/average job (e.g., teacher, laborer, policeman), and position of no power (e.g., student, intern, waitress).

Criminality was evaluated on whether the character type was depicted as a criminal or a non-criminal. Criminality was coded from the following terms, “criminal, crime-related activity, criminal/ gang member, crime and gangs, criminal drug cartel, and convict,” used by Mastro (2003) in her study understanding the impact of television messages on audiences and characters depicted as criminals.

Gender was categorized as either male, female, or transgender as per conventional standards established by the majority of previous scholarship. In instances where gender could not be categorized based off a character’s or program’s ambiguity the classification was ‘cannot code.’ Finally, sexuality was coded based on Neuendorf (2000) and the categorization of a character’s primary sexual orientation. A heterosexual character was coded as, “an individual whose primary sexual orientation is an attraction toward members of the opposite sex. If a character is married and does not express a homosexual orientation, code as heterosexual.” A homosexual character was coded as, “an individual whose primary sexual orientation is for members of the same sex.” A bisexual character was coded as “an individual whose sexual orientation includes a desire for members of both genders” (p. 2).

**Intercoder Reliability.** Two coders were trained by conducting a content analysis of the previous year’s prime-time television season (2014 – 2015). A total of 20% percent (8.5 hours of programming) of the constructed prime-time week was tested for intercoder reliability in order to conform to Krippendorff’s (2004) alpha (hereafter,  $\alpha$ ). The two coders viewed the programs independently with separate notes of each other. An early check of intercoder reliability revealed some discrepancies, and adjustments were made to the coding protocol. Intercoder reliability was carried out by two graduate students by

double-coding a random subsample ( $n = 8.5$  hours or 20%) of the data. Once intercoder reliability was established the remaining content was coded by the study's principle investigator.

Reliability analysis indicated the level of internal consistency between the coders in identifying the character's type ( $\alpha = .85$ ; simple agreement = 90.8%), ethnicity ( $\alpha = .93$ ; simple agreement = 96.6%), age ( $\alpha = .86$ ; simple agreement = 92.4%), position of power ( $\alpha = .88$ ; simple agreement = 94.1%), criminal status ( $\alpha = .96$ ; simple agreement = 98.3%), gender ( $\alpha = .98$ ; simple agreement = 99.2%), and character sexuality ( $\alpha = .94$ ; simple agreement = 99.2%) exceeded the recommended criteria delineated by Krippendorff (2004). Similarly, intercoder reliability coefficients for the type of television show, genre, and network were all exemplary (each yielding an  $\alpha = 1.0$ , respectively). Taken together, this indicates that the measures employed in this study were coded consistently and therefore acceptable for use in subsequent analyses.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

Across the two representative weeks of programming, a total of 42 hours of shows were analyzed, 25 prime-time television episodes (21 hours) and 25 Netflix original programming episodes (21 hours). The sample gathered between 2015 and 2016 consisted of 945 characters – 417 characters from prime-time television programming and 528 characters from Netflix original programs. Of these characters, 61.0 % ( $n = 576$ ) were male, 38.9% and were female ( $n = 368$ ). There was however, 0.1% transgender ( $n = 1$ ) in the sample and therefore this character was excluded from the analysis. Prime-time television characters accounted for 58.8% ( $n = 245$ ) males and 41.2% ( $n = 172$ ) females, with no transgender characters identified. Netflix television characters accounted for 62.7% ( $n = 331$ ) males, 37.1% ( $n = 196$ ) females, and 0.2% ( $n = 1$ ) transgender.

As expected, the results from the Chi Square tests provide support for **H1**, revealing that characters on prime-time and Netflix television programs were not equally represented based on gender,  $\chi^2(1) = 45.83, p < .001$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.1. When compared to the government census figures in the U.S. (see Population Estimates, 2015) women were under represented in accordance to their national average, providing support for **H2**: the proportion of female characters (38.9%) in prime-time television and Netflix programs was significantly smaller than the proportion of females in the U.S. population (50.8%),  $z = -7.44, p < .001$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.2.

## Gender and Power

**RQ1** investigates the differences in high-level occupational roles held by female characters relative to male characters across prime-time television and Netflix programs. Using Chi Square tests to analyze characters that had power across both television platforms, significance was found in the distribution of power based on gender. Male characters ( $n = 136$ ) attributed to 76.8% of all characters that held power compared with female characters ( $n = 41$ ) that made up 23.2% of characters with power. The results from the Chi Square tests reveal that characters on prime-time television and Netflix programs were not equally represented in positions of power based on gender,  $\chi^2(1) = 22.91, p < .001$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.3.

Prime-time television characters attributed 73.4% ( $n = 58$ ) of power to male characters and 26.6% ( $n = 21$ ) of power to female characters. As was the case with overall television platform analysis, the results from the Chi Square tests reveal that characters on prime-time television programs were not equally represented in positions of power based on gender,  $\chi^2(1) = 8.64, p < .01$ . Netflix television characters attributed 79.6% ( $n = 78$ ) of power to male characters and 20.4% ( $n = 20$ ) of power to female characters. The results from the Chi Square tests reveal that Netflix television programs attribute more power to male characters than female characters, and also had a greater level of power separation between genders,  $\chi^2(1) = 14.51, p < .001$ .

**H3** posited that across prime-time television and Netflix programs, minority characters would be less likely than Caucasian characters to be cast in high-level occupational roles. Across both television platforms, the results from the Chi Square tests revealed that characters within each race holding positions of power were 17.4% ( $n =$

113) White, 17.9% ( $n = 30$ ) Black, 25.7% ( $n = 18$ ) Latino, 28.6% ( $n = 16$ ) Asian, and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Middle Eastern. Analysis across both platforms did not yield any significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 7.29, p = .121$ , and not offer support for **H3**. Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.4.

**H3** was also not supported for the prime-time television platform, as results from the Chi Square tests revealed that characters within each race holding positions of power were 19.2% ( $n = 63$ ) White, 20.3% ( $n = 13$ ) Black, 14.3% ( $n = 1$ ) Latino, 12.5% ( $n = 2$ ) Asian, and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Middle Eastern. Analysis for the prime-time television platform did not yield any significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 1.09, p = .896$ . **H3** was also not supported for the Netflix television platform, as results from the Chi Square tests revealed that characters within each race holding positions of power were 15.6% ( $n = 50$ ) White, 16.3% ( $n = 17$ ) Black, 27.0% ( $n = 17$ ) Latino, 35.0% ( $n = 14$ ) Asian, and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Middle Eastern. However, analysis for the Netflix television platform did prove counter-hypothetical and yielded significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 12.49, p < .05$ . Within the Netflix platform, Black, Latino, and Asian characters were more likely to be shown in positions of power than characters of the same ethnicity in prime-time television.

### **Race and Representation**

**R2** explores the representation of minority characters and Caucasian characters across prime-time television and Netflix programs. The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that characters within each race that were represented in the prime-time television platform consisted of 78.7% ( $n = 328$ ) White, 15.3% ( $n = 64$ ) Black, 1.7% ( $n = 7$ ) Latino, 3.8% ( $n = 16$ ) Asian, and 0.5% ( $n = 2$ ) Middle Eastern. The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that characters within each race that were represented in the



Netflix television platform consisted of 60.6% ( $n = 320$ ) White, 19.7% ( $n = 104$ ) Black, 11.9% ( $n = 63$ ) Latino, 7.6% ( $n = 40$ ) Asian, and 0.2% ( $n = 1$ ) Middle Eastern. Analysis for the representation of minority characters and Caucasian characters across prime-time television and Netflix television platforms yielded significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 52.73, p < .001$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.5.

To further assess the third hypothesis regarding under representation of minorities across prime-time television and Netflix programming, **RQ3** investigates female representation across both platforms based on character ethnicity. The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that female characters represented in prime-time and Netflix television were 67.9% ( $n = 250$ ) White, 17.4% ( $n = 64$ ) Black, 6.5% ( $n = 24$ ) Latino, 7.3% ( $n = 27$ ) Asian, and 0.8% ( $n = 3$ ) Middle Eastern.

As was the case with overall television platform analysis, the results from the Chi Square tests reveal that female characters on prime-time television programs were under represented across ethnicities: 76.2% ( $n = 131$ ) White, 16.3% ( $n = 28$ ) Black, 1.7% ( $n = 3$ ) Latino, 4.7% ( $n = 8$ ) Asian, and 1.2% ( $n = 2$ ) Middle Eastern. Netflix television found similar but more equally distributed female characters based on ethnicity with Chi Square tests yielding 60.7% ( $n = 119$ ) White, 18.4% ( $n = 36$ ) Black, 10.7% ( $n = 21$ ) Latino, 9.7% ( $n = 19$ ) Asian, and 0.5% ( $n = 1$ ) Middle Eastern. Analysis for the representation of female characters based on ethnicity across prime-time television and Netflix television platforms yielded significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 18.40, p < .001$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.6.

## **Ethnicity and Criminality**

**RQ4** explores the relationship between characters depicted as criminals and their ethnicity across prime-time television and Netflix programs. The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that across both platforms 15.2% ( $n = 144$ ) of all characters were depicted as criminals. Within each ethnicity, characters depicted as criminals were 12.2% ( $n = 79$ ) White, 16.7% ( $n = 28$ ) Black, 40% ( $n = 28$ ) Latino, 14.3% ( $n = 8$ ) Asian, and 33.3% ( $n = 1$ ) Middle Eastern. Analysis for the representation of characters as criminals based on ethnicity across prime-time television and Netflix television platforms yielded significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 38.95, p < .001$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.7.

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout prime-time television, 10.6% ( $n = 44$ ) of all characters were depicted as criminals. Within each ethnicity, characters depicted as criminals were 11.3% ( $n = 37$ ) White, 9.4% ( $n = 6$ ) Black, 14.3% ( $n = 1$ ) Latino, 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Asian, and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Middle Eastern. Analysis for the prime-time television platform did not yield any significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 2.51, p = .644$ . The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout Netflix television 18.9% ( $n = 100$ ) of all characters were depicted as criminals. Within each ethnicity, characters depicted as criminals were 13.1% White ( $n = 42$ ), 21.2% ( $n = 22$ ) Black, 42.9% ( $n = 27$ ) Latino, 20.0% ( $n = 8$ ) Asian, and 100% ( $n = 1$ ) Middle Eastern. Analysis for the Netflix television platform yielded significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 35.16, p < .001$ .

**RQ5** investigates whether the ethnicity of characters depicted as criminals differs by genre, and if so, whether this is consistent across prime-time television and Netflix programs. The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout the comedy

genre in prime-time television 3.4% ( $n = 4$ ) of characters were depicted as criminals.

Within each ethnicity, characters depicted as criminals were 4.3% ( $n = 4$ ) White, 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Black, 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Latino, 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Asian, and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Middle Eastern.

Analysis for the comedy genre in the prime-time television platform did not yield any significance,  $\chi^2(3) = 1.11, p = .774$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.8.

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout the drama genre in prime-time television 10.4% ( $n = 18$ ) of characters were depicted as criminals. Within each ethnicity, characters depicted as criminals were 11.4% ( $n = 16$ ) White, 7.7% ( $n = 2$ ) Black, 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Latino, 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Asian, and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Middle Eastern.

Analysis for the drama genre in the prime-time television platform did not yield any significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 1.18, p = .882$ .

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout the crime genre in prime-time television 17.5% ( $n = 22$ ) of characters were depicted as criminals. Within each ethnicity, characters depicted as criminals were 17.9% ( $n = 17$ ) White, 16.0% ( $n = 4$ ) Black, 25.0% ( $n = 1$ ) Latino, 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Asian, and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Middle Eastern.

Analysis for the comedy genre in the prime-time television platform did not yield any significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 1.09, p = .896$ . Analysis for the crime genre in the prime-time television platform did not yield any significance,  $\chi^2(3) = 2.51, p = .889$ .

Across the Netflix television platform, the results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout the comedy genre 18.4% ( $n = 29$ ) of characters were depicted as criminals. Within each ethnicity, characters depicted as criminals were 11.3% ( $n = 13$ ) White, 25.0% ( $n = 6$ ) Black, 58.3% ( $n = 7$ ) Latino, 33.3% ( $n = 2$ ) Asian, and 100% ( $n =$

1) Middle Eastern. Analysis for the comedy genre in the Netflix television platform yielded significance,  $\chi^2(4) = 22.67, p < .001$ .

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout the drama genre in Netflix television 16.4% ( $n = 36$ ) of characters were depicted as criminals. Within each ethnicity, characters depicted as criminals were 16.2% ( $n = 21$ ) White, 21.3% ( $n = 10$ ) Black, 15.4% ( $n = 2$ ) Latino, 10.0% ( $n = 3$ ) Asian, and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Middle Eastern. Analysis for the crime genre in the Netflix television platform did not yield any significance,  $\chi^2(3) = 1.73, p = .630$ .

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout the crime genre in Netflix television 23.3% ( $n = 35$ ) of characters were depicted as criminals. Within each ethnicity, characters depicted as criminals were 10.7% ( $n = 8$ ) White, 18.2% ( $n = 6$ ) Black, 47.4% ( $n = 18$ ) Latino, 75.0% ( $n = 3$ ) Asian, and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) Middle Eastern. Analysis for the crime genre in the Netflix television platform yielded significance,  $\chi^2(3) = 25.46, p < .001$ .

### **Age and Representation**

**RQ6** investigates the relationship between high-level occupational roles and character age across prime-time television and Netflix programs. The chronological age of prime-time television characters accounted for 6.2% ( $n = 26$ ) children, 34.8% ( $n = 145$ ) young adult, 47.7% ( $n = 199$ ) middle-aged, and 11.3% ( $n = 47$ ) elderly. The chronological age of Netflix television characters accounted for 5.1% ( $n = 27$ ) children, 31.4% ( $n = 166$ ) young adult, 53.8% ( $n = 284$ ) middle-aged, and 9.7% ( $n = 51$ ) elderly.

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that across both platforms 18.7% ( $n = 177$ ) of all characters were depicted as holding positions of power. Using Chi Square

tests to analyze characters that had power across both television platforms, significance was found in the distribution of power based on age. Within each age category, characters depicted with power were 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) children, 8.5% ( $n = 15$ ) young adults, 72.9% ( $n = 129$ ) middle age, and 18.6% ( $n = 33$ ) elderly. Analysis of both platforms yielded significance revealing that characters were not equally represented in positions of power based on age,  $\chi^2(3) = 86.30, p < .001$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.9.

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout prime-time television, 18.9% ( $n = 79$ ) of all characters were depicted as holding positions of power. Using Chi Square tests to analyze characters that had power throughout prime-time television, significance was found in the distribution of power based on age. Within each age category, characters depicted with power were 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) children, 3.8% ( $n = 3$ ) young adults, 73.4% ( $n = 58$ ) middle age, and 22.8% ( $n = 18$ ) elderly. Analysis of prime-time television yielded significance revealing that characters were not equally represented in positions of power based on age,  $\chi^2(3) = 57.92, p < .001$ .

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout Netflix television, 18.6% ( $n = 98$ ) of all characters were depicted as holding positions of power. Using Chi Square tests to analyze characters that had power throughout Netflix television, significance was found in the distribution of power based on age. Within each age category, characters depicted with power were 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) children, 12.2% ( $n = 12$ ) young adults, 72.4% ( $n = 71$ ) middle age, and 15.3% ( $n = 15$ ) elderly. Analysis of Netflix television yielded significance revealing that characters were not equally represented in positions of power based on age,  $\chi^2(3) = 32.10, p < .001$ .

**RQ7** explores whether there are differences in age with how female and males are portrayed across prime-time television and Netflix programs. Using Chi Square tests to analyze how characters are represented according to age across both television platforms, significance was found in the distribution of age based on gender. Within each age category, female characters depicted were 6.5% ( $n = 24$ ) children, 39.7% ( $n = 146$ ) young adults, 43.8% ( $n = 161$ ) middle age, and 10.1% ( $n = 37$ ) elderly. Likewise, within each age category, male characters depicted were 5.0% ( $n = 29$ ) children, 28.6% ( $n = 165$ ) young adults, 55.7% ( $n = 321$ ) middle age, and 10.6% ( $n = 61$ ) elderly. Analysis of both platforms yielded significance revealing that male and female characters were not equally represented based on age,  $\chi^2(3) = 15.55, p < .001$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.10.

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout the prime-time television platform, significance was not found in the distribution of age based on gender. Within each age category, female characters depicted were 7.6% ( $n = 13$ ) children, 40.1% ( $n = 69$ ) young adults, 42.4% ( $n = 73$ ) middle age, and 9.9% ( $n = 17$ ) elderly. Likewise, within each age category, male characters depicted were 5.3% ( $n = 13$ ) children, 31.0% ( $n = 76$ ) young adults, 51.4% ( $n = 126$ ) middle age, and 12.2% ( $n = 30$ ) elderly. Analysis of the prime-time platform did not yield significance,  $\chi^2(3) = 5.44, p = .142$ .

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout the Netflix television platform, significance was found in the distribution of age based on gender. Within each age category, female characters depicted were 5.6% ( $n = 11$ ) children, 39.3% ( $n = 77$ ) young adults, 44.9% ( $n = 88$ ) middle age, and 10.2% ( $n = 20$ ) elderly. Likewise, within each age category, male characters depicted were 4.8% ( $n = 16$ ) children, 26.9%

( $n = 89$ ) young adults, 58.9% ( $n = 195$ ) middle age, and 9.4% ( $n = 31$ ) elderly. Analysis of the Netflix platform did yielded significance revealing that male and female characters were not equally represented based on age,  $\chi^2(3) = 10.74, p < .05$ .

**RQ8** investigates the relationship between age and major, minor, and background characters. The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that across both platforms 30.2% ( $n = 285$ ) of all characters were major, 33.5% ( $n = 317$ ) were minor, and 36.3% ( $n = 343$ ) were background. Within each age category, major characters depicted were 7.7% ( $n = 22$ ) children, 27.4% ( $n = 78$ ) young adults, 54.7% ( $n = 156$ ) middle age, and 10.2% ( $n = 29$ ) elderly. Within each age category, minor characters depicted were 2.5% ( $n = 8$ ) children, 31.2% ( $n = 99$ ) young adults, 52.1% ( $n = 165$ ) middle age, and 14.2% ( $n = 45$ ) elderly. Within each age category, background characters depicted were 6.7% ( $n = 23$ ) children, 39.1% ( $n = 134$ ) young adults, 47.2% ( $n = 162$ ) middle age, and 7.0% ( $n = 24$ ) elderly. Using Chi Square tests to analyze how characters are represented according to age across both television platforms, significance was found in the distribution of age based on character type,  $\chi^2(6) = 24.78, p < .001$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.11.

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout prime-time television 27.1% ( $n = 113$ ) of all characters were major, 35.5% ( $n = 148$ ) were minor, and 37.4% ( $n = 156$ ) were background. Within each age category, major characters depicted were 13.3% ( $n = 15$ ) children, 23.0% ( $n = 26$ ) young adults, 49.6% ( $n = 56$ ) middle age, and 14.2% ( $n = 16$ ) elderly. Within each age category, minor characters depicted were 3.4% ( $n = 5$ ) children, 35.8% ( $n = 53$ ) young adults, 46.6% ( $n = 69$ ) middle age, and 14.2% ( $n = 21$ ) elderly. Within each age category, background characters depicted were

3.8% ( $n = 6$ ) children, 42.3% ( $n = 66$ ) young adults, 47.4% ( $n = 74$ ) middle age, and 6.4% ( $n = 10$ ) elderly. Using Chi Square tests to analyze how characters are represented according to age in prime-time television, significance was found in the distribution of age based on character type,  $\chi^2(6) = 24.10, p < .001$ .

The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that throughout Netflix television 32.6% ( $n = 172$ ) of all characters were major, 32.0% ( $n = 169$ ) were minor, and 35.4% ( $n = 187$ ) were background. Within each age category, major characters depicted were 4.1% ( $n = 7$ ) children, 30.2% ( $n = 52$ ) young adults, 58.1% ( $n = 100$ ) middle age, and 7.6% ( $n = 13$ ) elderly. Within each age category, minor characters depicted were 1.8% ( $n = 3$ ) children, 27.2% ( $n = 46$ ) young adults, 56.8% ( $n = 96$ ) middle age, and 14.2% ( $n = 24$ ) elderly. Within each age category, background characters depicted were 9.1% ( $n = 17$ ) children, 36.4% ( $n = 68$ ) young adults, 47.1% ( $n = 88$ ) middle age, and 7.5% ( $n = 14$ ) elderly. Using Chi Square tests to analyze how characters are represented according to age in Netflix television, significance was found in the distribution of age based on character type,  $\chi^2(6) = 20.10, p < .01$ .

### **Sexuality and Representation**

**RQ9** explores the proportion of characters that are explicitly LGBT characters across prime-time television and Netflix programs. The results from the Chi Square tests revealed that across both platforms 97.5% ( $n = 921$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 2.5% ( $n = 24$ ) were LGBT. Within prime-time television, 98.8% ( $n = 412$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 1.2% ( $n = 5$ ) were LGBT. Within Netflix television, 96.4% ( $n = 509$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 3.6% ( $n = 19$ ) were LGBT. Analysis of both platforms yielded significance, revealing that heterosexual and LGBT



characters were not equally represented across platforms,  $\chi^2(1) = 5.42, p < .05$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.12.

**RQ10** investigates the relationship between genre and the proportion of LGBT characters represented across prime-time television and Netflix programs. Across both platforms, results from the Chi Square tests revealed that within the comedy genre 93.8% ( $n = 259$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 6.2% ( $n = 17$ ) were LGBT. Within the drama genre 98.2% ( $n = 386$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 1.8% ( $n = 7$ ) were LGBT. Within the crime genre 100.0% ( $n = 276$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) were LGBT. Analysis of both platforms yielded significance, revealing that heterosexual and LGBT characters were not equally represented across genres,  $\chi^2(2) = 22.72, p < .001$ . Detailed results of these variables are shown in Table 4.13.

Throughout prime-time television, the results from the Chi Square tests revealed that within the comedy genre 95.8% ( $n = 113$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 4.2% ( $n = 5$ ) were LGBT. Within the drama genre 100.0% ( $n = 173$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) were LGBT. Within the crime genre 100.0% ( $n = 126$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) were LGBT. Analysis of the prime-time television platform yielded significance, revealing that heterosexual and LGBT characters were not equally represented across genres,  $\chi^2(2) = 12.82, p < .01$ .

Throughout Netflix television, the results from the Chi Square tests revealed that within the comedy genre 92.4% ( $n = 146$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 7.6% ( $n = 12$ ) were LGBT. Within the drama genre 96.8% ( $n = 213$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 3.2% ( $n = 7$ ) were LGBT. Within the crime genre 100.0% ( $n = 150$ ) of all characters were heterosexual and 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) were LGBT. Analysis of the Netflix

television platform yielded significance, revealing that heterosexual and LGBT characters were not equally represented across genres,  $\chi^2(2) = 12.98, p < .01$ .

Table 4.1 Total distribution of characters according to gender

<u>Platform</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Prime-Time	58.80%	41.20%
Netflix	62.70%	37.10%

*Note.*  $\chi^2(1) = 45.83, p < .001$ . This indicates that the distribution of gender among characters being compared did differ across television platforms, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.

Table 4.2 Total distribution of characters according to gender compared with U.S. estimates

<u>Platform</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Prime-Time	58.80%	41.20%
Netflix	62.70%	37.10%
U.S. Census	49.20%	50.80%

*Note.*  $z = -7.44, p < .001$ . This indicates the proportion of female characters in the full sample was significantly smaller than census data on gender found within the U.S. population.

Table 4.3 Total distribution of characters holding power according to gender

<u>Platform</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Prime-Time	73.40%	26.60%
Netflix	79.60%	20.40%

*Note.*  $\chi^2(1) = 22.91, p < .001$ . This indicates that the distribution of power among male and female characters being compared did differ across television platforms, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.

Table 4.4 Total distribution of characters holding power according to ethnicity

<u>Platform</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Latino</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Native U.S.</u>	<u>Middle Eastern</u>
Prime-Time	19.20%	20.30%	14.30%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%
Netflix	15.60%	16.30%	27.00%	35.00%	0.00%	0.00%

*Note.*  $\chi^2 (4) = 7.29, p = .121$ . This indicates that the distribution of power among character ethnicity being compared did not differ across television platforms, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.

Table 4.5 Total distribution of characters according to ethnicity

<u>Platform</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Latino</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Native U.S.</u>	<u>Middle Eastern</u>
Prime-Time	78.70%	15.30%	1.70%	3.80%	0.00%	0.50%
Netflix	60.60%	19.70%	11.90%	7.60%	0.00%	0.20%

*Note.*  $\chi^2(4) = 52.73, p < .001$ . This indicates that the distribution of ethnicity among characters being compared did differ across television platforms, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.

Table 4.6 Total distribution of female characters according to ethnicity

<u>Platform</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Latino</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Native U.S.</u>	<u>Middle Eastern</u>
Prime-Time	76.20%	16.30%	1.70%	4.70%	0.00%	1.20%
Netflix	60.70%	18.40%	10.70%	9.70%	0.00%	0.50%

*Note.*  $\chi^2 (4) = 18.40, p < .001$ . This indicates that the distribution of ethnicity among female characters being compared did differ across television platforms, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.



Table 4.7 Total distribution of criminal characters according to ethnicity

<u>Platform</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Latino</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Native U.S.</u>	<u>Middle Eastern</u>
Prime-Time	11.30%	9.40%	14.30%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Netflix	13.10%	21.20%	42.90%	20.00%	0.00%	100.00%

*Note.*  $\chi^2(4) = 38.95, p < .001$ . This indicates that the distribution of criminal characters among ethnicity being compared did differ across television platforms, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.

Table 4.8 Total distribution of criminal characters within genre according to ethnicity

<u>Genre</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Latino</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Native U.S.</u>	<u>Middle Eastern</u>
Comedy	Prime-Time	4.30%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Netflix	11.30%	25%	58.30%	33.30%	0.00%	100.00%
Drama	Prime-Time	11.40%	7.70%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Netflix	16.20%	21.30%	15.40%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Crime	Prime-Time	17.90%	16.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Netflix	10.70%	18.20%	47.40%	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%

*Note.*  $\chi^2 (3) = 1.11, p = .774$ . This indicates that the distribution of criminal characters within ethnicity being compared did not differ across genre, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.

Table 4.9 Total distribution of occupational roles according to character age

<u>Platform</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Young Adult</u>	<u>Middle Age</u>	<u>Elderly</u>
Prime-Time	0.00%	3.80%	73.40%	22.80%
Netflix	0.00%	12.20%	72.40%	15.30%

*Note.*  $\chi^2(3) = 86.30, p < .001$ . This indicates that the distribution of occupational roles according to character age being compared did differ across television platforms, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.

Table 4.10 Total distribution of age according to character gender

<u>Platform</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Young Adult</u>	<u>Middle Age</u>	<u>Elderly</u>
Prime-Time	Male	5.30%	31.00%	51.40%	12.20%
	Female	7.60%	40.10%	42.40%	9.90%
Netflix	Male	4.80%	26.90%	58.90%	9.40%
	Female	5.60%	39.30%	44.90%	10.20%

*Note.*  $\chi^2(3) = 15.55, p < .001$ . This indicates that the distribution of age according to character gender being compared did differ across television platforms, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.

Table 4.11 Total distribution of age according to character type

<u>Character Type</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Young Adult</u>	<u>Middle Age</u>	<u>Elderly</u>
<u>Major</u>	Prime-Time	13.30%	23.00%	49.60%	14.20%
	Netflix	4.10%	30.20%	58.10%	7.60%
<u>Minor</u>	Prime-Time	3.40%	35.80%	46.60%	14.20%
	Netflix	1.80%	27.20%	56.80%	14.20%
<u>Background</u>	Prime-Time	3.80%	42.30%	47.40%	6.40%
	Netflix	9.10%	36.40%	47.10%	7.50%

*Note.*  $\chi^2(6) = 24.78, p < .001$ . This indicates that the distribution of age according to character type being compared did differ across television platforms, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.

Table 4.12 Total distribution of characters according to sexuality

<u>Platform</u>	<u>Heterosexual</u>	<u>LGBT</u>
Prime-Time	98.80%	1.20%
Netflix	96.40%	3.60%

*Note.*  $\chi^2 (1) = 5.42, p < .05$ . This indicates that the distribution of characters according to sexuality being compared did differ across television platforms, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.

Table 4.13 Total distribution of character sexuality according to genre

<u>Genre</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>Heterosexual</u>	<u>LGBT</u>
Comedy	Prime-Time	95.80%	4.20%
	Netflix	92.40%	7.60%
Drama	Prime-Time	100.00%	0.00%
	Netflix	96.80%	3.20%
Crime	Prime-Time	100.00%	0.00%
	Netflix	100.00%	0.00%

*Note.*  $\chi^2 (2) = 22.72, p < .001$ . This indicates that the Total distribution of character sexuality according to genre being compared did differ across television platforms, which is depicted across the columns in the table reported above.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Examining the ubiquity and quality of television representations of minorities and female characters across prime-time and Netflix programming is significant for multiple reasons. Firstly, there is a social importance to understand the extent to which the current television landscape depicts minorities and females, and whether these portrayals have changed from the previous misrepresentations of the past half-century. Secondly, in accordance with previous studies highlighting the role of television as a socializing agent (Bandura, 2009; Gerbner et. al., 2002) and its ability to influence audience perceptions of society (Bandura, 1986; Greenberg et. al., 2002; Signorielli, 2009b), examining the current representations of television demographics lends support to these areas of importance. The overall results from this study reveal that while there are still differences in how minorities and female characters are represented across television in general, recent television shows created by Netflix is reducing this distortion and providing more diverse and meaningful roles for those previously forgotten.

#### **Quantity**

With regards to overall gender representations, female characters followed the traditional trend of being significantly under represented, accounting for 41.2% of characters on prime-time television and 37.1% of characters on Netflix programming. These figures closely align with previous content analyses by Glascock (2003b), finding female characters attributed to just 36.7% of all characters coded during their constructed



week of prime-time programming during the early 2000s. The prime-time and Netflix data also significantly contrasts recent national census figures that reveal women make up 50.8% of the U.S. population (Population Estimates, 2015). While some television scholarship has suggested a positive shift in the favor of female characters (Oldenburg, 2004), findings across both television platforms provide support for the familiar rhetoric that routinely notes that females are under represented comparatively both on television and nationally.

Analysis of ethnicity representations within each television platform provides significant findings in relation to improved equality for minority characters. While prime-time television mirrored previous findings of racial bias of television characters; 78.8% White, 15.3% Black, 1.7% Latino, 3.8% Asian, and 0.2% Middle Eastern, the Netflix television platform reduced this margin substantially with their characters accounting for 60.6% White, 19.7% Black, 11.9% Latino, 7.6% Asian, and 0.2% Middle Eastern. Despite the prime-time data resembling previous content analysis findings for ethnicity bias on television (Mastro, 2009), the Netflix platform more accurately reflected U.S. population estimates of Latinos 17.6% and Asians 5.6%. In addition to previous scholarship suggesting an over representation of Black characters on television (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000a; Tukachinsky et. al., 2015a), both prime-time and Netflix television found similar results with Black characters in relation to their national estimate of 13.3%. Alternatively, White characters on Netflix television fell short of their national average of 77.1% as a result of the increase in minority representation and redistributed of equality.

In keeping with the underrepresentation of minorities and female characters, prime-time television was also significant in disproportionally representing the ethnicity

of female characters compared to Netflix programming. Prime-time television females accounted for 76.2% White, 16.3% Black, 1.7% Latino, 4.7% Asian, and 1.2% Middle Eastern, while the distribution of female Netflix characters resembled 60.7% White, 18.4% Black, 10.7% Latino, 9.7% Asian, and 0.5% Middle Eastern. Prime-time television has indeed made notable advancements from studies in the late 1990s regarding ethnicity and gender portrayals (Elasmar et. al., 1999) where 85% of females were White, 8.9% were Black, and just 3.1% were Latino. However, the Netflix television platform offers a more equal distribution in accordance with U.S. consensus figures that estimates the female population as 61.7% White, 12.7% Black, 17.1% Latino, and 5.5% Asian, almost mirroring the Netflix data set.

Predictions made by the annual “Where Are We in TV (2015)” report suggesting that 4% of prime-time characters would be identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual was not supported through the prime-time findings, however it was more accurately resembled within the Netflix platform. Prime-time television accounted for 98.8% of heterosexual characters and 1.2% of LGBT characters, while Netflix characters were 96.4% heterosexual and 3.6% LGBT characters. While the under representation of the LGBT community does not come as a surprise, the disparity between platforms is of significant interest.

One possible reason for the LGBT disparity across platforms is through the selection of the shows themselves. Selecting the 2015-16 season of prime-time television and Netflix original programming allows for the most recent representation of characters to be analyzed. However, while characters on current Netflix original shows have been molded in the likeness of today’s society, several long-running prime-time shows have

been created with characters reflecting society's image from five or even ten years ago. Major and minor characters on prime-time television shows have less LGBT and minority characters than Netflix original shows, which could partly be due to prime-time television characters being cast almost a decade earlier.

Analysis of LGBT characters across the comedy, drama, and crime genres also produced varied results based on the specific television platform. Across prime-time television, LGBT characters were only found within the comedy genre, accounting for just 4.2% of the characters represented. Conversely, across Netflix programming LGBT characters made up 7.6% of the comedy genre and 3.2% of the characters within the drama genre. No LGBT characters were represented on either platform within the crime genre. Following along with previous LGBT television scholarship (Hart, 2000; Steiner et. al., 1993), these findings coincide with prior notions that LGBT community representations have been scarce and largely limited to the comedy genre. While the representation of the LGBT community has improved with the introduction of Netflix programming, their presence is still predominantly limited to the comedy genre and almost non-existent within the more serious genres of drama and crime, across both television platforms.

Cultivation theorists (E.g. Gerbner et. al., 1980b; Bandura, 1986), argue that the lack of equal representation of demographics such as gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, demands examination in subsequent effects studies. Under representation of these social groups on television reflects their importance and respect in society, allowing audiences to develop scripts and schemas about different groups and people who they may have little to no contact with in their everyday lives. However, the under representation of

these marginalized groups is only part of the issue plaguing television, and more specifically prime-time television. The way in which these marginalized groups are being represented is also important, as viewers who do not have frequent interactions with these groups base their judgments from the characters that they have engaged with on television (Greenberg et. al., 2002). Therefore the importance lies not only in the quantity of minority characters being represented but also the quality in which they are being portrayed.

### **Quality**

The quality of how female characters are represented was also significantly skewed in relation to male characters. Of the total number of characters who held power in prime-time television, only 26.6% were female; almost three times fewer than the 73.4% of male characters. The Netflix platform yielded an even greater number of male characters that held power with 79.6%, however, only 20.4% of characters with power were female. While previous scholarship has focused on the increase in quantity of females in the workforce (Signorielli, 1989; Glascock, 2001), this study serves to support previous findings of under representation of female characters in quality television roles (Smith et. al., 2012), highlighting that while there has been an increase of female characters on television over the past decade, there is still a languishing equality with how each gender is portrayed when shown in positions of power.

On a positive note, there was no support for H3 – minority characters were not less likely to be cast in high-level occupational roles within their own race than White characters. In fact, for the Netflix platform, H3 proved counter-hypothetical with 15.6% of all White characters holding positions of power, 16.3% of Black characters, 27.0% of

Latino characters, and 35.0% of Asian characters holding positions of power. While there were more White characters in power overall simply due to there being more White characters represented across both television platforms, minority characters on Netflix did not follow the trend of under representation that is seen with gender. Given the limited quantity of minority characters on television, the strong quality of those who are shown provides a small consolation if any. As mentioned by Signorelli (2004), “those occupations in which television character’s are cast provide distinct messages about vitality in regard to who works and who doesn’t as well as messages about value and importance as seen in who is cast in the most prestigious occupations (p.297).”

Nevertheless, there is still evidence that minority characters are over represented as criminals within prime-time television and Netflix programming. Although some race, crime, and aggression literature has found African Americans to be less aggressive or criminal in relation to Caucasian characters (Dominick, 1973), results in this study coincide with the vast majority of research (Eschholz, Mallard, & Flynn, 2004; Mastro & Robinson, 2000; Signorelli, 2009a&b) that find minority characters are shown as criminals more frequently than White characters. Minority characters within prime-time television were more likely to be cast as criminals than White characters, as while there was a fewer total number of minority characters, 9.4% of Black and 14.3% of Latino characters were depicted as criminals. With literature suggesting that television portrayals of minorities is linked to audience knowledge and perceptions (Greenberg et. al., 2002), it is with greater importance that minorities are accurately and honestly depicted in their television roles.

These numbers were exacerbated within Netflix programming, as characters depicted as criminals within each race were, 13.1% White, 21.2% Black, 42.9% Latino, 20.0% Asian, and 100.0% Middle Eastern. While there were a fewer total number of minorities in Netflix programming, an alarming percentage of each ethnicity was represented as criminals, unlike the most heavily represented ethnicity (White) constituting just 13.1% of all criminals. The Netflix platform depicts one in every five Black and Asian characters as criminals, and more than one in every three Latino characters as criminals. This overrepresentation of criminals based on ethnicity allows audiences to falsely associate a significant proportion of characters with criminal activity, creating an inaccurate bias towards certain races that can be damaging to the audience's understanding of society and its criminal population.

The ethnicity of characters depicted as criminals within the comedy, drama, and crime genres also produced varied results based on the specific television platform. Within the comedy genre of prime-time television, White characters were the only ethnicity depicted as criminals, accounting for just 4.3% of all characters. The more serious genres of drama and crime revealed an increase in the percentage of minority characters depicted as criminals with the drama genre representing criminal characters as 11.4% White and 7.7% Black, while the crime genre found criminal characters to be 17.9% White, 16.0% Black, and 25.0% Latino. The increase in minorities portrayed as criminals within more serious genres relays a more significant message to audiences than characters that are shown in lighthearted genres, providing a greater impact on audience perceptions about the relationship between criminality and ethnicity.

The Netflix television platform produced similar findings based on genre, significantly over representing minorities as criminals within the comedy and crime genres. Within the comedy genre, just 11.3% of White characters were seen as criminals while 25.0% of Blacks, 58.3% of Latinos, and 33.3% of Asians were represented as criminals. The drama genre more closely distributed criminal activity based on ethnicity with all races making up 10% - 22% of criminal characters. The crime genre, however, revealed the greatest amount out ethnical bias, with criminal characters represented as 10.7% White, 18.2% Black, 47.4% Latino, and 75.0% Asian. With almost half of the Latino characters and three quarters of all Asian characters depicted as criminals the Netflix platform expands upon the racial bias of the prime-time platform, encouraging and normalizing attitudes about minorities and their on-screen reputation as criminals.

A lack of quality representations is not just limited to minorities and females; elderly characters are also subject to second-string television roles. In comparison to the 14.9% of elderly persons in the U.S. (see Population estimates, 2015), elderly characters account for merely 11.3% of prime-time television characters and 9.7% of Netflix television characters. As Signorelli (2004) highlights, “the message of aging on prime-time television is one that celebrates youth while relegating the elderly to a smaller percentage of available roles,” not only under representing elderly characters in accordance with other age groups but also disenfranchising them in meaningful roles and positions of power (p. 295). Elderly characters within prime-time television were three times less likely to be represented in a position of power than a middle-aged character, and more than four times less likely than a middle-aged character to be shown in a position of power within the Netflix television platform. The significant under

representation of elderly characters across both platforms goes hand-in-hand with previous research (Lauzen & Dozier, 2005), while additionally finding noticeable differences with male and female characterizations.

Television scholarship has been largely consistent with findings pertaining to the representation of gender in relation to character age, suggesting that females are more often than not, sexualized and cast in younger roles than their male counterparts (Attebery, 2009; Birthisel & Martin, 2013; Signorelli, 2004, 2009a). Results from this study closely mirror these findings across both television platforms. Female characters within prime-time television were represented most noticeably as young adults (40.1%) and middle-aged characters (42.4%), while male characters within the same platform were less likely to be depicted as young adults (31.0%), and more likely to be seen as middle-aged characters (51.4%). The Netflix platform produced even more separation with female characters being represented as young adults (39.3%) and middle-aged characters (44.9%), while male characters were seen as young adults (26.9%) and middle-aged characters (58.9%). These results continue to prove significant as they underline the bias towards aging representations for male and females. In accordance with cultivation theory, these messages provide audiences with false ideals about female vitality, presenting women as primarily young adults who are irrelevant or non-essential as they become older.

Within the limited television literature pertaining to age representation, there are even fewer studies recognizing the types of characters that elderly are cast. While the quantity of elderly characters has improved upon previous years, only 29.6% of all elderly characters are presented as major characters, limiting both their screen time and



their significance. The prime-time television platform presents just 14.2% of its elderly characters as major, while almost half (49.6%) of its major characters are presented as middle-aged. While elderly characters are twice as likely to be presented in prime-time television as a major character than a background character (6.4%), the Netflix platform presents nearly the same amount of elderly characters as major (7.6%) as it does background characters (7.5%), while still heavily over representing middle-aged characters (58.1%). Overall, elderly characters are more equality represented in today's television landscape than previously noted, but the significance and quality of their roles has not improved.

Representations of minorities, females, and elderly characters have remained stagnant for more than a decade. The advancement of streaming services such as Netflix presents new opportunities for LGBT characters to fight for and establish equality alongside the other marginalized groups. Cultivation studies in particular shine a light on the importance of diverse character representations as fewer and fewer people today have exposure to groups like the LGBT community and elderly citizens (Signorelli, 2004). Television has the power and ability to recognize marginalized groups through positive exposure both in on-screen positions of power and shared equality of major characters. Just as Greenburg et. al. (2002) suggests that television shapes society's idea about minorities, the same could be said about their perceptions of other groups who are often left out of the television landscape.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

In continuing to further discuss the findings, it is necessary to mention some of the limitations of this study. First, this was a content analysis, not an effects study;

therefore the ramifications for audiences exposed to the television content are completely speculative. However, the findings in this study can be used to further contribute to current experimental and survey effects studies by providing important and updated background information about prime-time and Netflix television. Secondly, another limitation to this study is the rather narrow selection of prime-time television networks. While the selection of the three most popular television networks throughout 2015-2016 is an acceptable number for this study, other studies have included Fox, UPN, and WB, in their analysis (Mastro & Stern, 2003; Signorelli, 1999, 2009a&b). The inclusion of these additional networks would provide more strength to the findings and a more diverse range of television programming.

Another limitation with this study is the small sample size. While the selection of 50 episodes from 43 different shows is an appropriate amount of programs for this study, additional shows and multiple episodes from each show could strengthen the sample and provide a more accurate analysis of prime-time and Netflix programming. In addition, other limitations to this study include the difficulty in accurately categorizing characters based on some variables. For example, estimating the age of certain characters proved challenging as the four categories of children, young adult, middle-aged, and elderly was too broad in some circumstances. Additional age categories as well as numbered age ranges could help eliminate future issues with character age classifications. Furthermore, coding the variables of sexuality and gender was also difficult for certain characters. Accurately coding characters based on heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual behavior was problematic as some characters interchanged between the variables throughout multiple scenes and even episodes of the show. Further research should include more

strenuous coder training and give more detailed definitions and directions for coding these variables.

Throughout a television show's lifetime, whether it is prime-time or Netflix, the reoccurring major and minor characters are unlikely to change with any significance as a result of the shows popularity and success. This however, means that prime-time shows with multiple seasons still producing new episodes during 2015-16 may not accurately reflect today's population the same way that a new show does that was produced within the last year. This is potentially a limitation to the study as comparisons have been made between prime-time shows that have multiple seasons and Netflix shows that are in their first season of production. In order to minimize this issue, the most recent seasons of both Netflix original shows and prime-time shows were selected in order to focus more heavily on today's current representation of characters across both platforms and any possible new introductions of LGBT and minority characters.

With these and other shortcomings in mind, the character representations discussed bear important implications sociologically and for future media effects research understanding the role of television in our lives. Findings in this study are perhaps more significant for younger television viewers as they often use television, both intentionally and unintentionally, to understand society and the persons who are represented. In accordance with cultivation literature and findings that suggest younger audiences are heavier television viewers than adults, results in this study could induce notions of female incompetence, male dominance, and strong associates between ethnicity and criminality among other issues. While these implications are potentially concerning, they are only

speculations as previously mentioned, as experimental methods and further cultivation studies are needed in order to address these and other plaguing issues.

While there has been an increase in prime-time television shows (Supergirl, Undatable, Rush Hour) and Netflix programs (Narcos, Sense8, Orange is The New Black) with minority and female characters in more assertive and meaningful roles, shows in general have not made any significant advancement since *Home Improvement* and *Everybody Loves Raymond*, which were broadcast during the 1990s. The Netflix platform offers more promise with the increased quantity of characters from marginalized groups; however, it is the quality of their representation that is in need of improvement. Perhaps additional updated research like that of Lauzen et. al. (2008) pertaining to the growth of females and minorities behind the camera could be useful in determining whether there is any association between television employment and the increase of characters represented on-screen. Ultimately, this study hopes to contribute to future media effects studies and inspire further research on Internet based streaming platforms that are becoming more and more prevalent for audience viewership and the creation of new television shows.

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## APPENDIX A – CODE BOOK

### **I. Introduction**

This study, “Network vs. Netflix: A Comparative Content Analysis of Demographics Across Prime-Time Television and Netflix Original Programming” aims to determine if and how the characters from historically marginalized groups are portrayed in shows from different television platforms and genres.

### **Method**

Content analysis involves the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to definitions and rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories.

### **II. Procedure**

Please see below for specific coding instructions and operational definitions of key variables relevant to this study.

#### **Episode ID**

Fill in the ID number of the content being coded (e.g., the TV episode), as indicated on the Episode ID list in tables A1 and A2 below.

#### **Coder ID**

Coders should be identified by the following numbers:

1. James Corfield
2. Joon Kim (graduate student coder)

#### **Date of Coding**

Indicate the date of coding, using the convention mm/dd/yy.

#### **Unit of Analysis**

Coding for main, minor, and background characters is operationalized from Sink & Mastro (2016). Main characters are defined as recurring, regular characters who are central to the storyline and constantly appear on the show. Minor characters are infrequent, semi regular, or one-time characters who play a supporting role in the episode. Background characters are non-central characters with at least two lines that one would not expect to appear in future episodes. Characters who have fewer than two lines are not coded and therefore will not be represented in this study.

## **Other Coding Instructions**

Do not code the opening or closing credits. For all coding, use only the information available to you as a viewer (e.g., do not use information you might have as a fan of the show, a fan of a particular actor, etc.).

### **1. Network**

The network of each program (each program's network is indicated on the Episode ID list) should be identified by the following numbers:

1. ABC
2. CBS
3. NBC
4. Netflix

### **2. Genre**

The genre of each program (each program's genre is indicated on the Episode ID list) should be identified by the following numbers:

1. Comedy
2. Drama
3. Crime

### **3. Character ID**

Characters pertaining to prime-time television shows should be coded starting from 101 and progress in increments of one (e.g. 101, 102, 103). Characters pertaining to Netflix programming should be coded starting from 201 and progress in increments of one (e.g. 201, 202, 203).

### **4. Character Type (Background, Minor, and Major)**

Indicate whether the character is a background character, a minor character, or a major character within the episode. A list of minor and major characters is provided in appendix two.

1. Background characters: non-central characters with at least two lines whom one would not expect to appear in future episodes.
2. Minor character: Infrequent, semiregular, or one-time characters who play a supporting role in the episode.
3. Major character: Recurring, regular characters who are central to the storyline and constantly appear on the show. (e.g., a waiter, manager, or bartender) or who came to the restaurant as part of their job (e.g., a police officer or detective investigating a case there).

### **4. Race**

Write in the number corresponding with the apparent racial identification of the character.

1. White (European, Asian Indian, Middle Eastern)
2. Black (African American, Jamaican, African, Haitian)
3. Latino (Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Central American, South American)
4. Asian (East Asians, Pacific Islanders)

5. Native American, or mixed minority ethnicity (both of the character's parents are Black/Latino/Asian/Native American, but the parents are not of the same group)
6. Middle East (Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, United Arab Emirates)
9. When the characters ethnicity is ambiguous code as cannot code.

### **5. Social Age**

Estimate the stage at which the character operates in his/her interactions with others.

1. Children or adolescents
2. Young adults with few responsibilities
3. Settled or middle-aged adults who had career and/or family responsibilities
4. Elderly

### **6. Occupations**

Grouped by job classification:

1. Position of power/prestige (E.g. manager, boss, sergeant, principle, doctor)
2. Position of no power (E.g. student, intern, waitress)

### **7. Criminal**

Report where the character is depicted as a criminal or non-criminal

1. Criminal
2. Non-Criminal

### **8. Gender**

Report the biological sex of the character.

1. Male
2. Female
3. Transgender

### **7. Sexuality**

Report the primary sexual orientation of the character, if this is discernable.

1. Heterosexual: An individual whose primary sexual orientation is an attraction toward members of the opposite sex. If a character is married and does not express a homosexual orientation, code as heterosexual.
2. Homosexual: An individual whose primary sexual orientation is for members of the same sex.
3. Bisexual: An individual whose sexual orientation includes a desire for members of both genders.
4. Cannot code.

## APPENDIX B – CODE SHEET

Episode/Film ID \_\_\_\_\_ Coder ID \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Coding \_\_\_\_\_

Network	<u>ABC</u>	<u>CBS</u>	<u>NBC</u>	<u>Netflix</u>			
Genre	<u>Comedy</u>	<u>Drama</u>	<u>Crime</u>				
Character ID							
Character Type	<u>Background</u>	<u>Minor</u>	<u>Major</u>				
Race	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Latino</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Native American</u>	<u>Middle Eastern</u>	<u>Cannot Code</u>
Social Age	<u>Children</u>	<u>Young Adult</u>	<u>Middle-Age</u>	<u>Elderly</u>			
Occupation	<u>Position of Power</u>	<u>No Position of Power</u>					
Criminal	<u>Criminal</u>	<u>Non-Criminal</u>					
Gender	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>		<u>Trans Gender</u>			
Sexuality	<u>Heterosexual</u>	<u>Homosexual</u>		<u>Bisexual</u>		<u>Cannot Code</u>	

Table A.1 Description of Prime-time Television Shows

<u>Episode ID</u>	<u>Show Title</u>	<u>Genre</u>	<u>Network</u>
101	Castle	Crime	ABC
102	NCIS: Los Angeles	Crime	CBS
103	Super Girl	Comedy	CBS
104	The Big Bang Theory	Comedy	CBS
105	Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.	Drama	ABC
106	Quantico	Crime	ABC
107	NCIS	Crime	CBS
108	The Goldbergs	Comedy	ABC
109	Criminal Minds	Crime	CBS
110	Law & Order: SVU	Crime	NBC
111	Law & Order: SVU	Crime	NBC
112	Life In Pieces	Comedy	CBS
113	Grey's Anatomy	Drama	ABC
114	The Blacklist	Crime	NBC
115	Dr. Ken	Comedy	ABC
116	Dr. Ken	Comedy	ABC
117	Last Man Standing	Comedy	ABC
118	Blue Bloods	Drama	CBS
119	Undateable	Comedy	NBC
120	Aquarius	Drama	NBC
121	Rush Hour	Comedy	CBS
122	Angel From Hell	Comedy	CBS
123	Blood & Oil	Drama	ABC
124	Once Upon A Time	Crime	ABC
125	The Good Wife	Drama	CBS

Table A.2 Description of Netflix Original Shows

<u>Episode ID</u>	<u>Show Title</u>	<u>Genre</u>	<u>Network</u>
201	Narcos	Crime	Netflix
202	Narcos	Crime	Netflix
203	Dare Devil	Crime	Netflix
204	Dare Devil	Crime	Netflix
205	Jessica Jones	Crime	Netflix
206	Luke Cage	Crime	Netflix
207	Stranger Things	Crime	Netflix
208	Stranger Things	Crime	Netflix
209	Sense8	Drama	Netflix
210	Sense8	Drama	Netflix
211	House of Cards	Drama	Netflix
212	House of Cards	Drama	Netflix
213	Hemlock Grove	Drama	Netflix
214	Bloodline	Drama	Netflix
215	The Get Down	Drama	Netflix
216	Marco Polo	Drama	Netflix
217	Orange Is The New Black	Comedy	Netflix
218	Fuller House	Comedy	Netflix
219	Grace and Frankie	Comedy	Netflix
220	Master of None	Comedy	Netflix
221	Flaked	Comedy	Netflix
222	Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt	Comedy	Netflix
223	Love	Comedy	Netflix
224	The Ranch	Comedy	Netflix
225	Lady Dynamite	Comedy	Netflix