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# Gender Representation and Occupational Portrayals in Primetime Television

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Gender Representation and Occupational Portrayals in Primetime Television

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Journalism

by

Brittany Smith  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, 2012

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

This study examined gender representation and occupational portrayals on primetime television, in order to determine if gender-role stereotypes are still present throughout programming, and what progress, if any, has been made in comparison to previous studies. A content analysis was done on primetime programming airing during the fall of 2013 on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, and the CW, and analyzed gender, major and minor character, genre, occupation, and marital status. The findings of this study reveal that women are still underrepresented on-screen, as well as in prestigious occupations, especially when compared to their real world representation. This study also examined the five broadcast networks individually and found gender representation and occupational portrayal differences between the networks, revealing which networks have made progress towards equal and accurate representation, and which have not. The results of this content analysis suggest that stereotypical representations of men and women are still frequent on primetime television. Furthermore, these findings were examined in relation to social cognitive theory to determine the potential effect these portrayals could be having on viewers' gender role beliefs. While some improvements have been made in comparison to previous studies, progress still needs to be made among all primetime programming to represent female characters in a wide variety of occupations and roles that are more consistent with reality.

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## **Introduction**

The present study analyzed gender, major and minor character, occupation, marital status, and genre in current primetime programming. The purpose of this content analysis is to examine current findings in comparison to previous content analyses that found women are underrepresented, as well as frequently shown in limited roles and occupations, in order to see what progress, if any, has been made for equal gender representation on primetime programming. The findings of this study were examined in relation to social cognitive theory, which suggests that people use character portrayals on television as models of appropriate gender roles and behaviors, and potentially adopt and accept these portrayals in their own lives (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Signorielli, 2009; Collins, 2011). Thus, it is important to examine the types of gender models and behaviors that people are viewing and potentially acquiring.

Gender roles on primetime television have been frequently studied by researchers (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a; Glascock, 2003b; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004; Signorielli, 2009; Smith, 2009) because of the potential gender-role stereotypes, such as male characters having a higher occupational status than female characters, (Glascock, 2001; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004; Signorielli, 2009) that are being depicted. These roles are being reinforced among primetime viewers (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008) as a result of these character portrayals, and the implications these portrayals are having, in terms of social cognitive theory, suggest that people are learning from and potentially adopting these models of behavior (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Scharrer, Kim, Ke-Ming, & Zixu, 2006; Signorielli, 2009).

Previous content analyses have found that women are frequently underrepresented among overall and major characters in primetime television (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a; Signorielli, 2009; Smith, 2009), males are more likely to have more prestigious

jobs than females (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2003a; Signorielli, 2009), and female characters who are married are less likely to have a professional occupation, if they are depicted as working at all (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Glascock, 2003a). Furthermore, female characters appear more frequently on comedy shows (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Glascock, 2001) than any other genre, which suggests they aren't being taken seriously, as well as not being cast in significant roles on shows. In addition, according to Lauzen (2003), "women account for the majority of prime-time viewers" (p. 38); and women spend almost 40 more minutes a day watching television than men do (Lunden, 2012); this makes their frequent underrepresentation and low occupation status even more perplexing and ironic.

This study builds upon past research (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a; Glascock, 2003b; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004; Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008; Signorielli, 2009; Smith, 2009) by examining current primetime programming in order to establish differences and similarities in current findings about gender, major and minor character, occupation, and marital status, compared to findings from previous content analyses (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a, Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008; Signorielli, 2009; Smith, 2009). Furthermore, this study differs from past content analyses (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a; Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008) by looking at gender, major and minor characters, occupation, and marital status findings from each individual network, in order to determine differences among the five networks studied. All network shows were analyzed as a whole with the purpose of studying all primetime programs in their entirety, as well.

The average age of each network's viewers rises each year, with the live television audience continuing to get older. In 2011, the average age of viewers for each network were as follows: ABC – 51, CBS – 54.9, NBC – 49.4, Fox – 46.1, and the CW – 41 (Rice, 2011). Similarly, the median age of viewers for each network in 2015 was: ABC – 54, CBS – 59, NBC – 54, Fox – 49, and the CW – 44 (Sternberg, 2015). The networks that have been around longer, ABC, CBS, and NBC, have an older audience than the newer networks of Fox and the CW. Based on age of viewers, as well as when the networks were established, the older networks were analyzed in comparison to the newer networks.

According to the 2010 United States Census, 50.9% of the population is female, while the other 49.1% is male (Howden & Meyer, 2011). While males and females are considerably equal in the real world, primetime television does not reflect this reality. As for women in the workforce, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics stated that 57.2% of women were in the labor force in 2013 and “women accounted for 51 percent of all workers employed in management, professional, and related occupations” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Additionally, men's overall unemployment rate (7.6%) was slightly higher than that for women (7.1%) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). These findings signify that women in the real world hold just as many professional and white collar occupations as do men, but their on-screen counterparts do not portray them in this capacity.

A content analysis was conducted examining major and minor character status, occupations, and marital status for male and female characters on 70 primetime shows airing on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, and the CW. This study aimed to explore gender representation, by looking at the frequency of male and female characters, and characters' occupations, such as professional, white collar, blue collar, domestic, etc., as they are portrayed on current primetime



television. The goal is to compare and contrast current programming with past studies and content analyses, as well as to establish portrayal differences among each individual network. Furthermore, the significance and implications of these character portrayals were examined in relation to social cognitive theory in order to establish the potential effects they are having on viewers' perceptions of appropriate gender roles and behaviors (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Scharrer, et al, 2006; Signorielli, 2009; Collins, 2011).

### **Literature Review**

Social cognitive theory posits that people use the observation of models as a means of learning appropriate gender norms, behaviors, social norms and more (Bandura, 1969; Bandura, 1986; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Bandura, 2009). The theory predicts that people have the “advanced capability for observational learning that enables people to expand their knowledge and skills rapidly through information conveyed by modeling influences without having to go through the tedious and hazardous process of learning by response consequences” (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, p. 68). Bandura (2009) also stated that people are more likely to model observed behavior if the behavior they observe receives positive outcomes or benefits. One of the main models that people observe is characters on television. “Through observation of characters in programs and commercials, individuals can learn norms and expectations regarding ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ roles within the home for men and women” (Scharrer, et al, 2006, p. 215), as well as outside the home. Furthermore, Collins (2011) stated that viewers are more likely to learn from television characters they share similarities with, such as the same age, race, or, in this case, gender. Therefore, the representation of gender roles, the frequency of male and female characters and the various occupations portrayed by men and women on primetime television are

important to study because they could be serving as models of behavior for viewers, while also reinforcing stereotypical views about appropriate gender roles and behaviors.

Bussey and Bandura (1999) argue that social cognitive theory explains how attitudes and beliefs about gender roles are developed: “repeated modeling of gender-typed behavior in the home, in schools, in workplaces, and in televised portrayals serves as a major conveyor of gender role information” (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, p. 688). The authors address media representations of gender roles and how gender stereotypes in television can be influential because of the amount of television people are exposed to, beginning in the early-preschool years. They found that: “Males are generally portrayed as directive, venturesome, enterprising, and pursuing engaging occupations and recreational activities. In contrast, women are usually shown as acting in dependent, unambitious, and emotional ways” (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, p. 701). In addition, they found that men are more likely to be shown in control of situations, while women are shown to be at the mercy of others. As for occupational portrayals, “Men are shown pursuing careers often of high status, whereas women are largely confined to domestic roles or employed in low-status jobs” (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, p. 701). Furthermore, they continued to state that in the modern workplace men were often shown as managers and experts, while women were shown as secretaries or simply attractive attendants at computers.

Signorielli (2009) also used social cognitive theory to explain the potential effects gender portrayals on television can have on viewers’ gender beliefs. One of the main premises behind social cognitive theory is that people learn by observing others. Because of this, watching television shows where women are least likely to have professional jobs, or they have no job at all, can influence viewers, particularly children, on what their occupation should be. “Consequently the schemas that might be developed and reinforced from watching television

will be limited in terms of occupations” (Signorielli, 2009, p. 348). Similarly, this theory extends to other gender role beliefs that are portrayed on television, such as male characters outnumbering female characters (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a; Signorielli, 2009; Smith, 2009) and married female characters’ unlikeliness of having a professional job or any job at all (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Glascock, 2003a).

Collins (2011) identifies another facet of social cognitive theory: “similarity to those portrayed in media is important to learning from behaviors” (p. 292). This raises an interesting question when it comes to girls identifying with female characters, because female characters are frequently underrepresented. If identifying with a television character influences learning from their behaviors, and there are few female characters to observe, are young girls able to have female role models or are they resorting to learning from male characters? Collins (2011) suggested that “Perhaps those who are represented less often in the media adapt by more easily identifying with dissimilar others, allowing them to be involved viewers even though they do not see themselves reflected in terms of gender” (p. 292). Perhaps the answer to the previous question could be yes, girls have to adjust who they observe and learn from because there aren’t enough female characters for them to watch and relate to. This is a primary reason why equal representation on television is so important.

Although social cognitive theory is commonly used to describe gender development in children and adolescents, researchers have posited that it can also be used to describe the reinforcement of gender role beliefs on older viewers as well. “Individuals young and old look to the television screen to help determine which gender-related roles are likely to be met with social approval, and which may incur social penalties” (Scharrer, et al, 2006). Older viewers are becoming more frequent and Chozick (2011) stated that the average age of a primetime

television viewer was 51 in 2011. In addition, Nielsen found that viewers ages 47 to 65, were watching an average of five to six hours of television a day, compared to an overall average of four hours and 49 minutes (Chozick, 2011). While social cognitive theory can still be used to describe the reinforcement of gender stereotypes on viewers of all ages, cultivation theory is also applicable in describing the potential effects television has on older viewers.

Cultivation theory states “those who spend more time “living” in the world of television are more likely to see the “real world” in terms of the images, values, portrayals, and ideologies that emerge through the lens of television” (Bryant & Oliver, 2009, p. 35). In other words, the more viewers watch television, the more they start to relate what they see on television to their perceptions of the world, as well as their own lives. Cultivation is commonly used in describing the potential effects television has on adult viewers, because of the amount of time adults spend watching television, as well as the idea that by the time viewers reach adulthood, they have been exposed to an immense amount of television throughout their lives.

Signorielli (2009) also stated that when people “have limited day-to-day exposure or interaction, [they] may be dependent upon those television images that are most readily available” (p. 348). This idea suggests that people use television to learn about situations or other types of people they may not be familiar with, because television might be the only opportunity they’ll have at being exposed to a certain situation. This is another aspect of social cognitive theory that underlines the importance of gender portrayals on television. Viewers are learning from television characters, whether they are aware of it or not, and consequently, their gender role values are being shaped. Unfortunately, they are being shaped in stereotypical ways that make women seem less important than men because of their frequent underrepresentation (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004; Lauzen, Dozier, &

Cleveland, 2006; Signorielli, 2009) and portrayal as having lower status jobs than men (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004; Signorielli, 2009). These ideas, and more, are common messages in primetime television, which is confirmed in the following content analyses.

Elasmar, Hasegawa, and Brain (1999) found in their content analysis of primetime programs airing on ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox, during the 1992-1993 television season that among 60 programs, there were 3,005 speaking male characters and only 1,903 speaking female characters. Among major characters, only 17.7% were female while 80.2% of all female characters were defined as minor characters. Female characters were also more frequent on comedy shows (69.2%) than drama shows (15.4%). Because of women's frequent occurrence on comedies, as opposed to dramas, the authors stated "there has been little change in the fact that women are portrayed in less serious and less significant roles than men" (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999, p. 30). They also found that female characters were more likely to have a blue-collar occupation (19.1%), no job at all (15.7%) or be a homemaker (11.3%) than they were to have a professional occupation (9.9%). In addition, about a third (30.4%) of female characters' occupations was unknown. They also performed cross-tabulation tests to analyze any existing relationship between marital status and occupation. Their results showed that "twice as many unmarried females as married females were found in professional white collar positions (11.7% compared with 5.4%)" (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999, p. 29) and they found the differences were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). The majority of female characters who did have a professional occupation (75.9%) were classified as having a minor role in the program. "The majority (38.5%) of women with major roles were portrayed as not having any job" (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999, p. 30). Elasmar, Hasegawa, and Brain (1999) argued that

there needs to be more progress made on primetime programming that portrays women as being capable of being working wives and mothers.

Lauzen and Dozier (1999) examined one episode of every top rated primetime program airing during the 1995-1996 television season. They found that 37% of all characters, 43% of major characters, and 34% of minor characters were female. Male characters outnumber female characters in “situation comedies in domestic settings (54% to 46%), situation comedies in school or workplace settings (62% to 38%), dramas in school or workplace settings (62% to 38%), other dramatic settings (57% to 43%), and action-adventure series (70% to 30%)” (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999, p. 9).

Signorielli and Bacue (1999) conducted a content analysis of television characters appearing on primetime programs on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, UPN and WB from 1967 to 1998. They coded a total of 8,293 characters and found that only 34.5% were females. Across three decades they found that the proportion of female characters with professional occupations was “21.3% in the 1970s, 22.2% in the 1980s, and 29.6% in the 1990s” (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999, p. 539). They also found that nearly a fourth (24.2%) of all female characters’ occupations in all three decades was unknown, which was more than double the amount (11.2%) of male characters whose occupations were unknown. Furthermore, female characters were more likely to be depicted as not working (19.4% in the 1970s, 6.1% in the 1980s, 20.9% in the 1990s) than male characters (6% in the 1970s, 4.8% in the 1980s, 12.3% in the 1990s) in every decade. Interestingly, the highest percentage of female characters portrayed as not working occurs in the 1990s, which suggests that the depiction of females on primetime television may not be consistent with their progression in society.

Glascoek (2001) sampled one episode from every primetime series airing on ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox during the 1996-1997 television season. He found that out of 1,269 characters, females comprised only 37% of all characters and males made up 63%. Similarly, among major characters, only 40% were females and 60% were males. The results of this study also showed that 42% of major characters in comedy shows were females, which, according to Glascock (2001), “has remained consistent over time” (Glascock, 2001, p. 666). Additionally, he found that females had more speaking time in comedy shows (41%) than they did in drama shows (33%). As far as occupational status, “females were generally depicted in lower-paying, less prestigious occupations” (Glascock, 2001, p. 666). Males were commonly portrayed as police officers, lawyers, doctors, and judges. Females were commonly portrayed as police officers as well, but also nurses, secretaries, and waitresses. Furthermore, “males (17.6%) were twice as likely to be depicted as bosses as females (8.7%)” (Glascock, 2001, p. 664). He also found that male characters’ occupations were more likely to be known than female characters’ occupations. Glascock (2001) concluded that female characters remain underrepresented and have a lower work status than male characters.

Glascoek (2003a) examined one episode of every primetime series airing on Fox, WB and UPN during the 2001 television season. Females represented 36.7% of all the characters coded, 45.8% of major characters, and 29.9% of minor characters. In comparison to Glascock’s 2001 content analysis, female representation in major roles increased from 40% to 45.8%, but for overall characters, female representation slightly decreased from 37% to 36.7%. He also found that married female characters were more likely to be shown as not working (81.5%); only a small percentage of married women was portrayed as working (18.5%). A greater percentage of female characters’ (46.7%) occupations were unknown compared to male characters (33.9%)

whose occupations were also unknown. Male characters were more likely than females to have law enforcement (15.1% to 4.7%), owner/manager (5.6% to 4.7%), doctor (2% to 0%), and college professor (1.6% to 0.7%) occupations. Female characters were more likely than males to have lawyer (4% to 3.6%), teacher (4% to 2%), waitress (4% to 0.8%), housewife (3.3% to 0%), secretary (2% to 0%), and nurse (1.3% to 0%) occupations. “Similar to previous analyses of network programming, female characters were depicted as having lower job status than males” (Glascock, 2003a, p. 97).

Lauzen and Dozier (2004) examined one episode of every primetime series airing on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, UPN, and WB during the 2002-2003 television season. They found that only 38% of all characters were female and 62% were male. A greater percentage (70%) of all male characters was more likely to hold jobs with power over others, such as a judge, business owner, or CEO, than were all female characters (52%). Furthermore, they found that males were more than twice as likely (15%) than females (6%) to be in leadership roles. “Male characters were more likely than females to work as lawyers, doctors, detectives, high government officials, and business owners. Female characters, on the other hand, were more likely than males to work as secretaries, waitresses, and entertainers” (Lauzen & Dozier, 2004, p. 496).

Lauzen, Dozier, and Cleveland (2006) conducted a content analysis of one episode from every reality and scripted primetime program that aired on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, UPN, and WB during the 2004-2005 television season. They found that on scripted programs, female characters made up 37% of total characters. However, television production teams that included women had higher percentages of female characters (39%) in their shows, as opposed to all-male production teams (34%).



Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan (2008) examined one episode of every primetime series airing on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, UPN and WB during the 2005-2006 television season. They explored social roles of television characters and how they relate to gender stereotypes. The authors suggested that “the basic social roles enacted by characters contribute to viewer expectations and beliefs about gender” (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008, p. 202). Among major characters, 40% were female and 60% were male. Male characters were more likely to enact work roles ( $M = .74$ ) than female characters ( $M = .60$ ) and exhibited “more agentic goals including ambition and the desire for success” (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008, p. 211). Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan (2008) defined agentic qualities as those associated with self-assertion, self-expansion, and the urge to master, and the opposite, communal qualities, are those associated with selflessness, concern with others and a desire to be at one with others. They also found that female characters were more likely to enact interpersonal roles ( $M = 1.18$ ), such as familial and romantic roles, in which they were more focused on relationships and concern for others, than male characters ( $M = .89$ ). This suggests that while men are focused on work and achieving success, women are more focused on their personal relationships. “Such portrayals illustrate the ongoing tendency of network television to paint characters in the broadest of gender strokes” (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008, p. 211).

Signorielli (2009) examined major and supporting characters featured on primetime programming airing on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, UPN, WB, and CW from 1997 to 2006. (Signorielli noted that during the study the UPN and WB stopped broadcasting and the two companies merged to make the CW network, which was added to the study in 2006.) The results showed that among all characters, 42% were female and 58% were male. She also found that female characters were more likely to be portrayed as not working or have an unknown

occupation (42%) than male characters (26%). In addition, “men are more likely than women to be cast as professionals (32% of the men compared to 26% of the women)” (Signorielli, 2009, p. 341), and law enforcement (18% - men, 7% - women). This content analysis also examined occupational prestige, which was determined by projected income and status of a certain occupation. Signorielli (2009) defined household and service worker occupations as not prestigious, secretarial, clerical, nurse, teacher, and similar occupations as neutral in prestige and doctors and lawyers as prestigious. The results showed that, again, males are more likely to have more occupational prestige (28.9%) than females (25.9%) and females were more likely to be portrayed in not prestigious occupations (20.6%) than males (13.3%). An important finding from this study is, while female character representation is increasing, women are still underrepresented in professional occupations such as doctor, lawyer and teacher. Their occupation is more likely to be unknown, and females have less occupational prestige than male characters.

In a more recent content analysis Smith (2009) examined the same primetime broadcast networks as Signorielli (2009), ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox and the CW, during 2008 and found that among all characters, 39.9% were female and 60.1% were male. This is an interesting finding because the content analysis previously mentioned found a greater percentage (42%) of female characters by analyzing the same networks over a greater time span. This content analysis was conducted more recently than other studies, suggesting that women are still being underrepresented on the major broadcast networks. Smith (2009) also explored portrayals of gender and occupation and found that 60% of male characters were portrayed as working, whereas only 40% of female characters were. In addition, men were more likely to have more authority in their jobs (63.9%), by being order-givers, than women (36.1%).

Collins (2011) analyzed previous content analyses of gender roles in media that appeared in *Sex Roles* to provide potential directions for future research. Nine of the 18 articles analyzed measured the number of male and female characters in various forms of media and every study found that women are underrepresented in at least one content category, such as primetime television, advertisements, news content, and films. The author also addressed the differences in the media's representation of women in the workplace compared to their actual representation in the real world. In 2008, there were 1.2 males participating in the U.S. paid labor force for every one woman. "While women have progressed to nearly representative rates of participation in the working world, the 'reel' and print worlds have continued to overlook them" (Collins, 2011, p. 292). In regards to these various forms of media, Collins (2011) stated that male sources appear nearly twice as often as female sources in local television news coverage, males outnumber females three to one in music videos, and the ratio of males to females in top-grossing general audience films was 2.57 to 1. Through Collins' (2011) examination she found that, while the analyses studied don't document women's underrepresentation in any one medium or all forms of media, "the relative absence of women in this diverse set of media is striking, suggesting a media world closer to the working-world reality of 1950 than to 2010 society" (Collins, 2011, p. 292). As previously stated, 57.2% of women were working in 2013 and women represent slightly more than half (51%) of all workers employed in management and professional-related occupations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014), but the media world rarely mirrors this reality.

The literature review suggests that gender roles on television remain stereotypical by portraying men and women in traditional and limiting roles. Furthermore, social cognitive theory

suggests that viewers are observing these characters and using them as models of behavior, which may lead to stereotyped beliefs and attitudes about gender roles.

### **Hypotheses/Research Questions**

Social cognitive theory proposes that people can potentially learn and adopt gender roles and behaviors by watching character portrayals on television (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Scharrer, et al, 2006; Signorielli, 2009; Collins, 2011). Consequently, as a result of observing gender stereotypical behaviors, viewers have the capability to adopt these same stereotypical views about gender appropriate roles. Therefore, gender representation and depiction on primetime television are significant because of the possible stereotypes they may be instilling in viewers.

Previous content analyses suggest that for total characters, female representation has increased slightly over time from 37% in 1995 (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999) to 39.9% in 2008 (Smith, 2009). For major characters, female representation has actually decreased from 43% in 1995 (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999) to 40% in 2005 (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008). Minor female characters haven't been as frequently researched but there has been a decrease from 34% in 1995 (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999) to 29.9% in 2001 (Glascock, 2003a). In contrast, females made up roughly half (50.9%) of the U.S. population in 2010 (Howden & Meyer, 2011). Based on previous content analyses and census data, the following hypothesis has been predicted.

H1: Among all the broadcast networks, females will be underrepresented among total characters, major characters, and minor characters.

Female characters are more common on comedy shows (69.2%) than dramas (15.4%) (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999), and also have more speaking time on comedies (41%) than

dramas (33%) (Glascock, 2001). Based on these findings the following hypothesis has been predicted.

H2: There will be more female characters on comedies than dramas.

Males are more likely to have professional occupations (32%) than females (26%) (Signorielli, 2009). Signorielli and Bacue (1999) found similar results with males having more professional (26% to 25.8%) and white collar (13.7% to 12.1%) occupations than females. Males are also more likely to have owner/manager positions (5.6%), than females (4.7%) (Glascock, 2003a). (Note: For purposes of this study “owner” would be coded as a professional occupation and “manager” would be coded as a white collar occupation.) Based on these findings the following hypothesis has been predicted.

H3: Male characters will have more professional and white collar occupations than female characters.

Unmarried females were more than twice as likely (11.7%) to have professional white collar occupations than married females (5.4%) (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999). Single females were also more likely to be shown as working (59%) than married females (18.5%) (Glascock, 2003a). Based on these findings the following hypothesis has been predicted.

H4: Single female characters will be twice as likely to be shown as working than married female characters. Married female characters will have half as many professional and white collar occupations than single female characters.

In addition, several content analyses have examined all primetime broadcast network television shows in their sample as a whole (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a) and few studies have looked at gender representation across individual networks. Lauzen and Dozier (2002) looked at gender

representation across different networks but grouped the big three networks (ABC, NBC, CBS) into one category, Fox in one category, and UPN and WB in one category. This study explored gender representation across individual networks in order to compare each network's portrayals against the other networks to see how much progress has been made for equal representation. This led to the following research question.

RQ1: Are there differences in gender representations and occupational portrayals across different broadcast networks?

## **Methods**

A content analysis was conducted by randomly selecting one episode of every primetime series that aired on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox and the CW during fall of 2013 (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004; Lauzen, Dozier, & Cleveland, 2006; Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008). The goal of the study was to analyze fictional portrayals of men and women, as well as their occupations; therefore, sports programs, news programs, reality shows, and movies were excluded from the sample (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a; Glascock, 2003b; Smith, 2009).

Primetime programming was chosen because not only have several content analyses examined it (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a; Glascock, 2003b; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004; Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008; Signorielli, 2009; Smith, 2009) but also because, according to Nielsen (2013), viewers spend almost two hours a day watching primetime television, which is more than any other daypart. Primetime programming consists of shows airing Sunday through Friday from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Every primetime series that aired at least three episodes (Glascock, 2003b) during the fall of 2013 was included in the sample, representing 70 total shows. All eligible dates for each primetime show were determined and each coded episode was randomly chosen. (See Appendix A for full schedule of every networks coded episode's air dates.) Every episode was coded for genre (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Smith, 2009) and number of major and minor characters (Barner, 1999; Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Glascock, 2003a; Signorielli, 2009). Each major and minor character was coded for gender (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Signorielli, 2009; Smith, 2009), occupation (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a; Signorielli, 2009; Smith, 2009), and marital status (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a). (See Appendix B for variable definitions and Appendix C for a detailed look at the coding sheet that was used.)

Each major and minor character's occupation and marital status was coded as present (1) or absent (0) for each male and female character. Such variables were measured nominally because the study measured the frequency of each character's traits for each category (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

The two categories of genre were comedy and drama (Glascock, 2001) (See Appendix B for definitions of each genre). Genre was determined after the show was watched. Shows that were light-hearted and dealt with misunderstandings and situations in humorous ways were classified as comedies. Shows that focused on serious or darker situations were classified as dramas. If the genre of each show was unclear after watching the show, the genre of each show was determined by information provided by the network's website or by on-screen information about the show. The gender of each major and minor character was coded as male or female.

Major and minor characters were established by looking at cast information for the show (See Appendix B for definitions of major and minor characters). Characters who were credited as series regulars and whose personalities and characteristics are most developed within the program were classified as major characters. Characters who were credited as guest starring or recurring and didn't play a significant role throughout the series were classified as minor characters (Barner, 1999). In order to be coded as a minor character, the character has to have a speaking role and appear in at least two scenes throughout the episode.

The nine categories of occupations were professional, white collar, blue collar, law enforcement, military, domestic, other, unknown, and no occupation (Smith, 2009; See Appendix B for definitions of each occupational category). The five categories of marital status were married, divorced, widowed, single, and unknown (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999). Occupation and marital status were coded by observing the character's behavior, if he/she had a title such as Dr. Smith or the last name of the spouse, what the character was wearing such as a wedding band or scrubs for a nurse (Stern & Mastro, 2004), or the things he/she said or others said to the character such as "how is your wife" or "how are things at the law firm." An important note for marital status is that only the current marital status of a character was coded. Therefore, if a character has been divorced, but is remarried, his/her marital status was classified as married. (See Appendix B for detailed definitions of all variables that were coded.)

If occupation and marital status could not be determined from the episode that was coded, information was gathered from outside sources, such as the show's network website, in order to determine the character's occupation and marital status. The premise behind the study was to determine the character portrayals that regular viewers of these programs are seeing. Therefore,



regular viewers of these programs would already know the occupations and marital status of the characters.

A separate coder coded 20 percent (14 shows) of the entire sample. Training for the coder was spread throughout a three-day period and consisted of the explanation of coding schemes and variables, as well as watching and coding episodes that were not included in the study's sample, in order to familiarize coder with the appropriate processes and procedures. The author coded the test shows as well, in order to compare findings with trained coder. Instances in the pilot study when the coders disagreed, there was discussion about the episode and differences were resolved.

Episodes were selected to ensure there would be a reasonably equal amount of hours spent on comedies and dramas. As a result, there were nine comedies (4.5 hours) and five dramas (five hours) in the coder's sample. The shows selected were: *2 Broke Girls*, *Castle*, *The Crazy Ones*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Last Man Standing*, *The Middle*, *Mike and Molly*, *Modern Family*, *New Girl*, *Once Upon a Time*, *Parenthood*, *Parks and Recreation*, *Scandal*, and *Two and a Half Men*.

Intercoder reliability was calculated for male occupations, female occupations, male marital status, and female marital status using Scott's Pi. Scott's Pi intercoder reliability for male occupations was .948, female occupations .904, male marital status .967, and female marital status .944.

Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 3, Hypothesis 4, and Research Question 1 were analyzed by using the means and percentages of results found for total male and female characters, and each characters' coded occupation and marital status. Chi-squares were also used to analyze all hypotheses and the research question. Where the sample had sufficient data, t-tests were used to analyze the means of male and female characters in Hypothesis 1, as well as the

comparison between the old (ABC, CBS, NBC) and new (Fox and the CW) networks for Research Question 1. A One-Way ANOVA was used to analyze male and female representation and occupational status for each network to answer Research Question 1. If the sample size was too small to conduct statistical tests, only means and standard deviations were reported.

## **Results**

Hypothesis 1 predicted that among all the broadcast networks, female characters would be underrepresented in total characters, major characters, and minor characters. Hypothesis 1 is supported as this study found a total of 829 characters, with male characters making up 60.3% (500) and female characters making up 39.7% (329). There was a total of 495 major characters, with males making up 56.8% (281) and females making up 43.2% (214). The biggest discrepancy was found in minor characters. There was a total of 334 minor characters, with males making up 65.6% (219) and females making up 34.4% (115). In terms of total female characters, there has only been a .2% increase since a 2008 content analysis (Smith, 2009) and there is more than a 10% difference between women in primetime (39.7%) and women in the real world (50.9%). However, there has been a 3.2% increase for major female characters since a 2005 content analysis (40%) (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008) and a 4.5% increase for minor female characters since a 2001 content analysis (29.9%) (Glascock, 2003a).

Hypothesis 2 predicted there would be more female characters on comedies than dramas. Hypothesis 2 is unsupported as this study found 60.5% of all female characters were in dramas and only 39.5% were in comedies. These findings are interesting because the results were opposite of what was expected. In addition, there were more major (drama – 36.8%, comedy – 28.3%) and minor (drama – 23.7%, comedy – 11.2%) female characters in dramas than

comedies,  $X^2(1, N=829) = 3.99, p = .046$ . These findings appear to be a major improvement from previous research that found only 15.4% of female characters in dramas.

Hypothesis 3 predicted male characters would have more professional and white collar occupations than female characters. Hypothesis 3 is partially supported because there were more males (198) with professional occupations than females (104) with professional occupations,  $X^2(1, N = 829) = 5.47, p = .019$ . Hypothesis 3 is partially unsupported because there more females (22) with white collar occupations than males (15) with white collar occupations,  $X^2(1, N = 829), = 6.33, p = .012$ . Furthermore, 39.6% of all male characters had professional occupations, but only 3% had white collar occupations. Out of all female characters, 31.6% had professional occupations, and 6.7% had white collar occupations. Although males still have the lead in professional occupations, female characters appear to be making progress when compared to past research that found only 25.8% were depicted in professional occupations from 1967 to 1998 (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999) and 26% from 1997 to 2006 (Signorielli, 2009). This is encouraging because it appears that primetime television is starting to show more women in higher prestige occupations. However, this represents progress in only one category of occupations. Progress is needed in depictions among all occupation categories because the mean for male characters depicted in any occupation ( $M = .768, SD = .423$ ) was significantly higher than for female characters depicted in any occupation ( $M = .690, SD = .463$ ),  $t(827) = 2.50, p = .013$ .

Hypothesis 4 predicted single female characters will be twice as likely to be shown as working than married female characters, and married female characters will have half as many professional and white collar occupations than single female characters. The first part of Hypothesis 4 is supported as there were 164 single female characters who had an occupation, and only 47 married females who were shown as working. Furthermore, out of all female characters

almost half (49.8%) were unmarried and working, while only 14.3% were married and working. Among only married women, this study found that although their total number (47) was low, 67% were depicted as working. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), in 2013 the labor force participation rate for married women was 58.9%. Therefore, in this study, married women in the workforce were actually overrepresented. However, it should be noted that married women made up less than a quarter (21.3%) of total female characters, but it appears there are positive steps being taken to match on-screen portrayals with reality.

The second part of Hypothesis 4 was supported because this study found there were 90 unmarried female characters with professional and white collar occupations and only 31 married female characters with the same occupations. In addition, out of all female characters who have professional occupations, 71.2% are single and only 26% are married. There were significantly less married female characters (27) with professional occupations,  $X^2(1, N = 829) = 4.10, p = .043$ , than unmarried female characters (74) with professional occupations. For those with white collar occupations, 72.7% are single and only 18.2% are married. There were only 15 single female characters with white collar occupations,  $X^2(1, N = 829) = 6.68, p = .01$ , but even less for married female characters (4). As previously stated, women account for over half of all workers in management, professional, and other related occupations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). However, this study revealed that out of all characters, women only account for 37% of professional and white collar occupations, which suggests that women in the real world workforce are still not being accurately portrayed on primetime television.

Research Question 1 asked if there were any differences in gender representation and occupational portrayals of characters among each individual network and this study found several differences. As expected, there was a higher number of male characters ( $M = .768, SD =$

.423) than female characters ( $M = .690$ ,  $SD = .463$ ) across all networks. The network with the highest average of male and female characters was CBS, however, ABC had the highest actual number of female characters. Refer to Table 1 for a detailed look at each network's numbers and means for male, female, and total characters.

Table 1

*Characters by Network*

| <u>Characters</u> | <u>ABC</u> |             | <u>CBS</u> |             | <u>NBC</u> |             | <u>Fox</u> |             | <u>CW</u> |             |
|-------------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
|                   | <u>N</u>   | <u>Mean</u> | <u>N</u>   | <u>Mean</u> | <u>N</u>   | <u>Mean</u> | <u>N</u>   | <u>Mean</u> | <u>N</u>  | <u>Mean</u> |
| Male Characters   | 117        | .624        | 141        | .851        | 105        | .810        | 83         | .819        | 54        | .704        |
| Female Characters | 87         | .724        | 80         | .750        | 59         | .678        | 51         | .686        | 52        | .558        |
| Total Characters  | 204        | .667        | 221        | .815        | 164        | .762        | 134        | .769        | 106       | .632        |

The CW had the smallest discrepancy between the number of male and female characters, while CBS had the largest. NBC was next, followed by Fox, then ABC. It's interesting to note that while ABC is just above the CW, the CW only had two more male characters than female characters, while ABC had a difference of 30. The CW did have the smallest number of shows (9) in the sample, and consequently, the lowest number of characters, but it appears that the newest network is the most evenly balanced.

These findings reveal that there are differences in gender representation across each individual network; however, there is also the continuing trend of male characters outnumbering female characters, which all networks share.

There were also differences found for occupational portrayals for each network. ABC had the highest number of females with professional occupations (34) while the CW had the lowest

with only 11. CBS had the highest number of males with professional occupations, which is not surprising, considering they had the largest amount of male characters, while the CW again had the lowest (17). NBC had the highest number of females in white collar occupations with 2.4%, which is three times more than that of the highest percentage of males with white collar occupations, which was 0.8% for both ABC and Fox.

CBS had the highest number of females with blue collar occupations (8) and unknown occupations (12). CBS had the highest average of female characters so it is interesting that they have so many female characters yet are limiting their occupations. The CW was next behind CBS with seven females in blue collar occupations and nine females with unknown occupations. However, while the CW had the most evenly balanced number of male and female characters, the network was more likely to portray female characters in less prestigious occupations. NBC, on the other hand, only had one female character in a blue collar occupation. Although NBC had the second lowest average of female characters, when NBC shows portrayed female characters, many were in prestigious occupations.

This study found a low number (7) of domestics among all major and minor female characters. Compared to the 11.3% of women having domestic occupations in 1992 (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999), finding only 2.1% in this study suggests that networks are finally improving female depictions for this occupation category. Furthermore, only two networks (ABC and Fox) portrayed female characters with domestic occupations. This suggests that networks recognize female characters are moving away from the stereotypical homemaker occupation, either eliminating this stereotypical role in programs or depicting women in new occupational fields outside of the home. Refer to Table 2 and Table 3 for a more detailed look at male and female character's occupations by individual network.

Table 2

*Male Characters Occupations by Network*

| <u>Occupation</u> | <u>ABC</u> |          | <u>CBS</u> |          | <u>NBC</u> |          | <u>Fox</u> |          | <u>CW</u> |          |
|-------------------|------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|
|                   | <u>N</u>   | <u>%</u> | <u>N</u>   | <u>%</u> | <u>N</u>   | <u>%</u> | <u>N</u>   | <u>%</u> | <u>N</u>  | <u>%</u> |
| Professional      | 51         | 10.2     | 54         | 10.8     | 45         | 9        | 31         | 6.2      | 17        | 3.4      |
| White Collar      | 4          | .8       | 2          | .4       | 2          | .4       | 4          | .8       | 3         | .6       |
| Blue Collar       | 4          | .8       | 8          | 1.6      | 4          | .8       | 6          | 1.2      | 4         | .8       |
| Law Enforcement   | 2          | .4       | 41         | 8.2      | 22         | 4.4      | 18         | 3.6      | 5         | 1        |
| Military          | 1          | .2       | 1          | .2       | 3          | .6       | 0          | 0        | 0         | 0        |
| Domestic          | 0          | 0        | 0          | 0        | 0          | 0        | 0          | 0        | 0         | 0        |
| Other             | 11         | 2.2      | 14         | 2.8      | 9          | 1.8      | 9          | 1.8      | 9         | 1.8      |
| Unknown           | 15         | 3        | 12         | 2.4      | 10         | 2        | 1          | .2       | 7         | 1.4      |
| No Occupation     | 29         | 5.8      | 9          | 1.8      | 10         | 2        | 14         | 2.8      | 9         | 1.8      |

Table 3

*Female Characters Occupations by Network*

| <u>Occupation</u> | <u>ABC</u> |          | <u>CBS</u> |          | <u>NBC</u> |          | <u>Fox</u> |          | <u>CW</u> |          |
|-------------------|------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|
|                   | <u>N</u>   | <u>%</u> | <u>N</u>   | <u>%</u> | <u>N</u>   | <u>%</u> | <u>N</u>   | <u>%</u> | <u>N</u>  | <u>%</u> |
| Professional      | 34         | 10.3     | 25         | 7.6      | 20         | 6        | 14         | 4.2      | 11        | 3.3      |
| White Collar      | 5          | 1.5      | 3          | .9       | 8          | 2.4      | 4          | 1.2      | 2         | .6       |
| Blue Collar       | 5          | 1.5      | 8          | 2.4      | 1          | .3       | 5          | 1.5      | 7         | 2.1      |
| Law Enforcement   | 3          | .9       | 15         | 4.5      | 5          | 1.5      | 5          | 1.5      | 3         | .9       |
| Military          | 1          | .3       | 0          | 0        | 0          | 0        | 0          | 0        | 0         | 0        |
| Domestic          | 4          | 1.2      | 0          | 0        | 0          | 0        | 3          | .9       | 0         | 0        |
| Other             | 11         | 3.3      | 9          | 2.7      | 6          | 1.8      | 4          | 1.2      | 6         | 1.8      |
| Unknown           | 8          | 2.4      | 12         | 3.6      | 8          | 2.4      | 3          | .9       | 9         | 2.7      |
| No Occupation     | 16         | 4.9      | 8          | 2.4      | 11         | 3.3      | 13         | 3.9      | 14        | 4.2      |

The comparison of female characters between the older networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) and newer networks (Fox and the CW) revealed that both the newer networks ( $M = 4.68$ ,  $SD = 2.36$ ) and older networks ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ) had a similar average of female characters. However,

the older networks had a slightly higher average of male characters ( $M = 7.56$ ,  $SD = 2.65$ ) than the newer networks ( $M = 6.23$ ,  $SD = 2.05$ ). The older networks had more professional female major ( $M = 1.13$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) and minor ( $M = .52$ ,  $SD = .772$ ) characters than the newer networks (major –  $M = .77$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ; minor –  $M = .36$ ,  $SD = .492$ ). There was also a significant difference in professional  $t(68) = .876$ ,  $p = .011$  and white collar occupations  $t(68) = 1.22$ ,  $p = .009$ , for minor female characters. The older networks had a higher percentage of female characters in both professional (24% to 7.6%) and white collar (4.8% to 1.8%) occupations than the newer networks. In addition, the older networks had more than triple the number of females with professional occupations (79) than the newer networks (25). The newer networks also had more female major ( $M = .36$ ,  $SD = .79$ ) and minor ( $M = .18$ ,  $SD = .395$ ) characters in blue collar occupations than the older networks (major –  $M = .15$ ,  $SD = .412$ ; minor –  $M = .15$ ,  $SD = .412$ ). These results suggest that the older networks could actually be moving towards more counter-stereotypical portrayals of female characters than the newer networks.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that women are still fairly underrepresented on primetime television (39.7%), especially compared to their real world representation (50.9%). There are only .2% more female characters compared to a previous content analysis conducted in 2008 (Smith, 2009). Although some progress has been made, women are still shown in fewer and more limited roles than men, particularly in terms of occupation. Male characters were more likely to have professional (39.6% to 31.6%), law enforcement (17.6% to 9.4%), and military (1% to .3%) occupations than female characters, while female characters were more likely to have blue collar (8% to 5.2%), unknown (12.2% to 9%), and no occupation (18.8% to 14.2%) than male characters. Furthermore, while marital status does not seem to play a role in men's



occupations, it does appear to play a role in women's occupational status. Married and single male characters are regularly shown as working, usually in a professional or white collar occupation, while only single female characters are typically depicted in these roles. The implications of these findings, based on social cognitive theory, suggest that stereotypical beliefs about gender roles are being reinforced among viewers, specifically in regards to men and women in the workplace. Even though women represent a little more than half (51%) of professional and white collar related occupations in the real world (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014), primetime television portrays women as comprising only 37% of characters with these occupations.

Interestingly, recent content analyses sampling the same networks found higher percentages of total female characters. Signorielli's (2009) content analysis from 1997-2006 found female characters represented 42% of all characters and Smith's (2009) 2008 content analysis found 39.9% of total female characters. Although this study found a slightly lower percentage (39.7%) for total female characters than recent content analyses, the results for major female characters (43.2%) were somewhat higher than Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan's (2008) 2005-2006 content analysis that found only 40% of major characters were female.

The fact that female characters are becoming more frequent on dramas suggests they are not as likely to be regarded as less serious or less significant than male characters, as suggested by Elasmr, Hasegawa, and Brain (1999). This is not to say that there is more prestige in dramas than comedies, it merely means that females are no longer being simply cast in the roles of attractive, non-speaking secretary or the air-headed waitress. In addition, Signorielli and Bacue (1999) found that 29.6% of female characters in the 1990s had professional occupations while

31.6% of all female characters in this study had professional occupations. It appears that television shows are starting to depict more and more women in professional occupations.

Male characters also had more law enforcement (major -  $M = .81$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ; minor -  $M = .44$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) occupations than female characters (major -  $M = .36$ ,  $SD = .743$ ; minor -  $M = .09$ ,  $SD = .329$ ). As for shows that focused on law enforcement in particular (19 shows), there were more than double the amount of males (71) with law enforcement occupations than females (28) with law enforcement occupations. Out of all characters with law enforcement occupations, 26% were women and 74% were men. In 2013, 21.1% of all protective service workers, 20.1% of detectives and criminal investigators, 13.4% of police and patrol officers, and 38.5% of private detectives and investigators were women. In addition, 15.3% of supervisors of police and detectives were women as well (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Other than the percentage of private detectives and investigators that were women, in this study women were actually overrepresented in law enforcement occupations on television. This finding is encouraging for women in television because law enforcement has typically been a male-dominated profession.

However, four of the 19 shows that focused on law enforcement did not feature any female law enforcement characters. While these four shows did have female characters, occasionally in prestigious occupations, it just demonstrates how some programs still underrepresent females in law enforcement, despite their real world progress.

Unsurprisingly, female characters outnumbered male characters in domestic occupations. There were only seven female characters with domestic occupations and no male characters. Surprisingly, one of these seven female characters was in the show *Modern Family*. The two female characters in the main cast who were wives and mothers weren't depicted as very modern

at all, at least in regards to their occupations. In the show's previous seasons, both women had domestic occupations. However, for the duration of this study, only one of the women, Gloria, had a domestic occupation. The other female character, Claire, only went back to work after her youngest child started high school. Meanwhile all of the male characters who were not children had professional occupations. These portrayals suggest that the depiction of modernity in gender roles does not extend beyond the show's title.

In addition, a higher percentage of female characters (12.2%) had unknown occupations than male characters (9%). This is consistent with previous findings that female characters are more likely to have unknown occupations (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003a; Signorielli, 2009). Similarly, there was also a higher percentage of female characters (18.8%) than male characters (14.2%) with no occupation.

Although there was a higher percentage of married female professionals, it's important to note that out of all female professionals, more than twice as many were single rather than married. As for white collar occupations, there were more than three times as many single females than married females. In addition, male professionals were less likely to be portrayed as single (47% of males versus 65% of females) and more likely to be portrayed as married (31.3% of males versus 26% of females) than female professionals. Female characters with higher occupational prestige are still more likely to be single than married, which potentially limits gender roles by implying women must be single in order to have a prestigious career. In contrast, married male characters are frequently portrayed as having professional and white collar occupations while successfully maintaining career and family demands.

While not as frequent as they should be, there are strong female leads in a number of shows that are portrayed as having both a successful career and personal life. In the show, *Grey's*

*Anatomy*, the main character, Meredith Grey, is a prominent surgeon, as well as one of the owners of the hospital where she works. She also maintains a happy home life with her husband and children. Likewise, shows such as *Castle*, *The Good Wife*, *Bones*, *Parks and Recreation*, *The Mindy Project*, and *Hart of Dixie*, all have strong female characters in their main cast whose occupations are doctors, lawyers, detectives, and even a governor. While there needs to be more strong female characters, it is promising to see influential female leads like these on primetime television.

Although this study accomplished its goal in analyzing gender and occupational portrayals on primetime television, there were several limitations. First, the sample size was not large enough to use statistical tests for some variables. Second, the definitions of variables, while based on and used in previous research, were not always clarified in depth. Third, while a content analysis can provide a snapshot of current portrayals, results are not always directly comparable to past research, and results here may represent indirect or general comparisons, at best. Fourth, while this content analysis can document current portrayals, it cannot demonstrate what viewers are actually thinking or doing as a result of seeing these portrayals.

## **Conclusion**

The results of this content analysis reveal that the networks are making small steps of progress to counteract stereotypical portrayals even though there are still stereotypical portrayals of male and female characters throughout primetime television. Female characters are now more frequent on drama shows, which indicates they are being taken seriously in the industry and being portrayed in more significant roles. Female characters outnumbered male characters in holding white collar occupations, which is an encouraging move towards television shows portraying more women in prominent occupations.

Female characters still need to be shown holding prestigious occupations, while successfully maintaining a marriage and home, because they are currently portrayed as able to have only one or the other. “Until women are shown frequently and in numerous roles representing the full gamut of their capabilities and experiences, the effects of television on conceptions of gender roles will remain deleterious to true social equality of the genders” (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999, p. 543).

Future research should examine the perceptions people have about these stereotypical portrayals and how they feel about shows that contradict these stereotypes or portray females accurately. Are characters on primetime television still depicted in stereotypical ways because viewers prefer these stereotypical depictions? Would shows that portray counter-stereotypical behaviors be as successful as shows depicting stereotypical behaviors? Since the primary goal of a television show is to attract an audience, are show creators simply giving the viewers what they want? Or are viewers so accustomed to stereotypical shows and characters they don't feel the need for change? The answer to these questions could provide compelling revelations for future gender studies on television, as well as providing insight on the kind of gender-role beliefs society currently possesses.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Network Episode Schedule**

#### **ABC**

Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D – Tuesday, October 1<sup>st</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Back in the Game – Wednesday, November 20<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m.

Betrayal – Sunday, October 20<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

Castle – Monday, October 21<sup>st</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

The Goldberg's – Tuesday, November 12<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Grey's Anatomy – Thursday, October 3<sup>rd</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Last Man Standing – Friday, September 20<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

The Middle – Wednesday, December 4<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Modern Family – Wednesday, December 11<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Nashville – Wednesday, October 23<sup>rd</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

The Neighbors – Friday, October 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m.

Once Upon a Time – Sunday, November 17<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Once Upon a Time in Wonderland – Thursday, October 10<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Revenge – Sunday, October 6<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Scandal – Thursday, October 31<sup>st</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

Super Fun Night – Wednesday, November 13<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 p.m.

Trophy Wife – Tuesday, October 29<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 p.m.

#### **CBS**

2 Broke Girls – Monday, September 30<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m.

The Big Bang Theory – Thursday, November 14<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Blue Bloods – Friday, September 27<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

The Crazy Ones – Thursday, October 10<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Criminal Minds – Wednesday, September 25<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation – Wednesday, November 27<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

Elementary – Thursday, December 5<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

The Good Wife – Sunday, October 13<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Hawaii Five-O – Friday, October 4<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Hostages – Monday, November 4<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

How I Met Your Mother – Monday, October 14<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

The Mentalist – Sunday, October 27<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

Mike & Molly – Monday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

The Millers – Thursday, October 31<sup>st</sup> at 7:30 p.m.

Mom – Monday, September 23<sup>rd</sup> at 8:30 p.m.

NCIS – Tuesday, September 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

NCIS: Los Angeles – Tuesday, November 5<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Person of Interest – Tuesday, November 19<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

Two and a Half Men – Thursday, October 24<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 p.m.

## **NBC**

The Blacklist – Monday, November 25<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

Chicago Fire – Tuesday, December 10<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

Dracula – Friday, November 1<sup>st</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

Grimm – Friday, October 25<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Ironside – Wednesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

Law & Order: SVU – Wednesday, October 16<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

The Michael J. Fox Show – Thursday, December 12<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 p.m.

Parenthood – Thursday, October 3<sup>rd</sup> at 9:00 p.m.

Parks and Recreation – Thursday, September 26<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Revolution – Wednesday, October 30<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Sean Saves the World – Thursday, November 21<sup>st</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Welcome to the Family – Thursday, October 17<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m.

### **Fox**

Almost Human – Monday, November 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

American Dad – Sunday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> at 8:30 p.m.

Bob's Burgers – Sunday, November 10<sup>th</sup> at 7:30

Bones – Monday, October 7<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Brooklyn Nine-Nine – Tuesday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> at 7:30 p.m.

Dads – Tuesday, October 15<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Family Guy – Sunday, September 29<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Glee – Thursday, November 28<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

The Mindy Project – Tuesday, September 17<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 p.m.

New Girl – Tuesday, November 26<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Raising Hope – Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

The Simpson's – Sunday, November 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Sleepy Hollow – Monday, September 16<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

### **The CW**

Arrow – Wednesday, October 9<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Beauty and the Beast – Monday, November 11<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

The Carrie Diaries – Friday, November 8<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Hart of Dixie – Monday, October 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

The Originals – Tuesday, October 8<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Reign – Thursday, December 5<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

Supernatural – Tuesday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

The Tomorrow People – Wednesday, November 6<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

The Vampire Diaries – Thursday, November 7<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

## Appendix B

### Variable Definitions

- Gender (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Smith, 2009)
  - Male – Characters of the male sex
  - Female – Characters of the female sex
- Genre (Glascock, 2001; Smith, 2009)
  - Comedy – A generally light-hearted program which features characters having to deal with odd or uncomfortable situations or misunderstandings.
  - Drama – A program that focuses on serious/darker situations.
- Major/Minor Character (Barner, 1999; Glascock, 2003a; Signorielli, 2009)
  - Major Character – A series regular, who is part of the main cast, has a recurrent role in the program and whose personalities and characteristics are most developed within the program.
  - Minor Character – A character who is recurring or a guest star in a particular episode or for a select number of episodes but doesn't play a significant role throughout the series. In order to be coded as a minor character, the character has to have a speaking role and appear in at least two scenes throughout the episode.
- Occupation (Smith, 2009)
  - Professional – Doctor, lawyer, teacher, entertainer, etc.
  - White Collar – Managerial, secretarial, clerical, etc.
  - Blue Collar – Service, repair, labor, etc.
  - Law Enforcement – Police, detective, investigator, etc.
  - Military – Any Armed Forces Occupation
  - Domestic – Homemaker
  - Other – Occupation doesn't fall in a specific category, please specify occupation.
  - Unknown – Occupation cannot be inferred from episode or determined from outside information.
  - No Occupation – The character does not have an occupation.
- Marital Status (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999)
  - Married – Character is married.
  - Divorced – Character is divorced from spouse.
  - Widowed – Characters' spouse died while they were married.
  - Single – Character is single.
  - Unknown – Marital status cannot be inferred from episode or determined from outside information.

**Appendix C**  
**Coding Sheet**

**Major/Minor Character Coding Sheet**

Name of Show Character is on \_\_\_\_\_

Network \_\_\_\_\_ Genre of Show \_\_\_\_\_ Date Episode Aired \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Character \_\_\_\_\_ Gender of Character \_\_\_\_\_

Place a 1 in the blank next to the category of occupation and marital status that corresponds with the character being coded and a 0 next to all categories that do not correspond with the character being coded. Write any necessary additional comments about the character at the bottom of the page.

Occupation of Character

Professional \_\_\_\_\_

Military \_\_\_\_\_

White Collar \_\_\_\_\_

Domestic \_\_\_\_\_

Blue Collar \_\_\_\_\_

Unknown \_\_\_\_\_

Law Enforcement \_\_\_\_\_

No Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_ Specify Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status of Character

Married \_\_\_\_\_

Single \_\_\_\_\_

Divorced \_\_\_\_\_

Unknown \_\_\_\_\_

Widowed \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments about the Character \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_