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## Lawyers, Doctors, and Cops ... oh my!: Exploring Racial and Gendered Labor Divisions on Television

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## **Lawyers, Doctors, and Cops... oh my!: Exploring Racial and Gendered Labor Divisions on Television**

### **Overview and Rationale**

In a 2013 interview with Salon magazine *Grey's Anatomy* creator, Shonda Rhimes, quoted that she “doesn’t understand why people don’t understand that the world of TV should look like the world outside of TV” (Paskin, 2013). Rhimes’ work is best known for having women and individuals of color in positions of power. Similarly, there has been a deluge of television shows starring women and people of color as lawyers, doctors, and detectives. Yet despite these roles, women and individuals of color fall behind in terms of equal representation and equitable pay (US Department of Labor, 2013).

Douglas (2010) contends that this is primarily due to the postfeminist rhetoric that the media reinforces. This rhetoric suggests that society does not need feminism anymore because there is full gender equality. Moreover, since equality has been reached, women are now able to reprise retrograde sexism through the illusion of choice (Douglas, 2010). Furthermore, these scholars have also pointed to how postracism operates similarly in that it assumes that we are now “beyond” race because men and women of color are given similar opportunities as White individuals.

Douglas’ book *Enlightened Sexism* posits that women are deceived into believing that they are empowered by following the traditional feminine scripts set forth in the media. Analyzing a variety of television shows from the past decade, she illustrates how contemporary media depicts powerful women as overly-sexualized, beautiful, white, thin, and with a high-paying job. This illusion, suggests Douglas, is noxious because women do not possess equal representation in real life. Women dominate the television space as doctors and lawyers. Yet, this is far from the truth. For example, despite the push for women in the medical industry, women still represent a minority of those enrolled in medical school (Feminist Majority Foundation, 2013). Moreover women who do obtain high-paying jobs still do not have equal labor distribution between work and home. The disparity between postfeminist media and reality demonstrates how important feminist discourse is despite the general media’s depiction that women are equal to men.

Similar to Douglas, Wilson, Guitiérrez, and Chao (2013) unpacks the complexities of representation in the media. Centrally focusing on race, Wilson et al.’s book *Racism, Sexism, and the Media* is a great text for students in the nascent stages of exploring media representations of race. Their position is cautionary. The media generally depicts individuals of color in stereotypical ways. This book gives a brief historicization of these stereotypes while discussing their contemporary re-imaginings. Yet, despite pervasive negative imagery, the authors are careful in encouraging postracial media — media that ignores the materializations of everyday racism while touting equal representation and diversity of casting. They give a variety of examples while examining the complex consequences of having a diverse cast that is colorblind.

Yet, despite the more positive representations, one might question: what are the socio-cultural effects of having full representation? These two articles argue that the media gives a false representation of the material racism and sexism that exists in the real world — especially in terms of employment. As Douglas (2010) notes, often students fail to realize the enormity of employment discrimination. Students tend to believe that women are equal to men in the workforce. Moreover in the postracial milieu, it is commonplace to hear that individuals of color are now equal because the United States' President is a person of color (Wilson et al., 2013).

The US Department of Labor serves as a valuable pedagogical resource in educating students about the realities of employment discrimination. An exploration of the Department of Labor, Women's Bureau's website (<http://www.dol.gov/wb/>) illustrates the seriousness of the wage gap and lack of diversity in certain occupational categories. For example, if we were to use Shonda Rhimes' *Grey's Anatomy* as a case study, one would see a hospital with a large amount of diversity. The majority of the cast is a woman or other minority. Yet, the US Department of Labor (2013) shows that of the 934,000 physicians and surgeons, only 35.5% are women. Moreover, 73.4% of physicians and surgeons are White, and only 5.4% are Black or African American, 21.6 % are Asian, and 3.8% are Hispanic or Latino. Notably, this data does not reflect that actual number on *Grey's Anatomy* where over half the cast are women and about half the cast are people of color.

Due to the fact that the media often creates a false illusion of equality, the primary goal for this assignment is to unveil the realities of the wage gap and divisions of labor in terms of gender and race through research. Students are to watch their favorite primetime television show based on an occupational category (political/legal, medical, corporate, and crime). Appendix A lists the four occupational categories and various television shows that fit each group. This list is by no means exhaustive and can be easily adapted.

Using the readings as a guide, instructors should ask students to critically engage with a television show by looking at its representation of race and gender. The readings include Douglas' introduction to *Enlightened Sexism* and Chapter 5 on "Race, Gender, and Culture in the New Media Age" in Wilson et al.'s book *Racism, Sexism, and the Media*. Both Douglas and Wilson et al. set up the conceptual framework for this project but do not give examples of their methods. Thus, in addition to these two texts, students will be asked to read two studies done by Cox (2012) and Lauzen, Dozier, and Cleveland (2006) to give students an understanding on how research confirms these theories.

Cox's (2012) piece examines how women are portrayed in police reality shows. Drawing from early feminist work in the 1970s and 1980s, Cox applied this research to more contemporary media texts like TLC's *Police Women of Broward County*. Her work examines how this reality television show subverts traditional gender roles while reinforcing them. She argues that postfeminist television often normalizes the second shift for women with children and underscores the ill distribution of labor for women. This article is a good resource for this project because it adds the extra layer of reality television while examining how immaterial labor is still feminized.

Lauzen et al.'s (2006) work is a content analysis of prime-time network television shows and its relationship between representation of women on the screen and off the screen. Cross-comparing between reality and scripted television shows, their findings exhibited a positive relationships between women behind the scripted television scene and the character portrayed. Interestingly, the scholars found an inverse relationship between women behind the scene and on screen in reality television shows. The more women behind the scenes of reality television, the more negatively portrayed the women were. The authors speculate that reality television is often hosted in a more masculine and competitive environment thus giving way to minimal feminine scripts. This article opens a dialogue of representation of women in the television industry both as actors and behind the scenes. Finally, Cox's and Lauzen et al.'s work are good examples of how scholars code television shows, an activity they will partake in during this project.

On the first day of the project, students will come together during class to compare and contrast their findings with others who have viewed different shows from the same category. Through a juxtaposition of each show, an overall trend is created by the students. Finally, their media trends are compared the actual labor trends from the US Department of Labor and a group presentation is given.

After this activity students should be able:

- To define postfeminism and postracism and identify its portrayals in media
- To define what a wage gap is a give examples
- To identify how women and men are portrayed differently on television
- To identify how White individuals and people of color are portrayed differently on television
- To identify the disparities between television and actual labor statistics

### **General Timeline**

This project takes 1-2 weeks depending on class level and size. To prime their learning, students will need to read Chapter 5 from Wilson, et al. (2013) and the introduction from Douglas (2010) on the first day. Before class, students will be assigned a television show to analyze. The groups will come together on day one to discuss their findings. On day two, students will look up employment statistics, earnings, and wage gaps for their designated occupational category. In addition, students should read Cox (2012) and Lauzen et al, (2006) to learn how contemporary scholars are evaluating primetime television in terms of gender roles. Finally, on day three, students will present overall findings to the class.

### **Detailed Lesson Plan**

#### **Day 1**

Prior to class:

- 1) **Read:** Chapter 5 from Wilson et al. (2013), and the introduction from Douglas (2010)
- 2) **Watch:** One pilot episode from your assigned occupational category and fill out Worksheet One (Appendix B)

Class activities:

- 1) Discuss class readings (~ 30 minutes)
- 2) Using Worksheet One as a guide, have students get into previously assigned groups to discuss findings and draw out common themes between each member's notes (~ 30 minutes)
- 3) **Turn in:** Worksheet Two (Appendix C)

## Day 2

Prior to class:

- 1) **Read:** Cox (2012) and Lauzen et al. (2006)
- 2) **Bring:** Laptop or mobile device

Class activities:

- 1) Have students explore the US Department of Labor's, Women's Bureau website: <http://www.dol.gov/wb/> \*Note – you may need to help students extrapolate the website's tables and figures depending on education level
- 2) **Turn in:** Worksheet Three (Appendix D)

## Day 3

Present findings to the class

- 1) Have each group present their overall findings. This should include the themes drawn from watching the show, the data discovered on the DOL's website, comparisons between the themes and the data, and a conclusion. \*Note- presentations may take two days depending on class size (Appendix E)
- 2) As a class, discuss over all themes based on gender and race (discussion questions are listed in Appendix F)

Appendix A  
Genre and Television Show List

**Political/Legal**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Creator(s)</i>	<i>Network</i>	<i>Year</i>
Scandal	Shonda Rhimes	ABC	2012 - present
House of Cards	Beau Willimon	Netflix	2013 - present
The Good Wife	Robert & Michelle King	CBS	2009 - present
Homeland	Howard Gordon & Alex Gansa	Showtime	2011 - present
How to Get Away with Murder	Shonda Rhimes	ABC	2014 - present
Veep	Armando Iannucci	HBO	2012 - present
Damages	Todd A. Kessler et al.	FX	2007 - 2012
Parks and Recreation	Greg Daniels & Michael Schur	NBC	2009 - present

**Medical**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Creator(s)</i>	<i>Network</i>	<i>Year</i>
Grey's Anatomy	Shonda Rhimes	ABC	2005 - present
Scrubs	Bill Lawrence	NBC	2001 - 2010
ER	Michael Crichton	NBC	1994 - 2009
House	David Shore	Fox	2004 - 2012
Nip/Tuck	Ryan Murphy	FX	2003 - 2010
Nurse Jackie	Liz Brixius et al.	Showtime	2009 - present

**Corporate**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Creator(s)</i>	<i>Network</i>	<i>Year</i>
The Office	Greg Daniels	NBC	2005 - 2013
Ugly Betty	Silvo Horta	ABC	2006 - 2010
Mad Men	Matthew Weiner	AMC	2007 - present
30 Rock	Tina Fey	NBC	2006 - 2013

**Crime**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Creator(s)</i>	<i>Network</i>	<i>Year</i>
The Closer	James Duff et al.	TNT	2005 - 2013
Dexter	James Manos, Jr.	Showtime	2006 - 2013
Law and Order: SVU	Dick Wolf	NBC	1999 - present
Castle	Andrew W. Marlowe	ABC	2009 - present
Bones	Hart Hanson	Fox	2005 - present
CSI	Anthony E. Zuiker	CBS	2000 - present

Appendix B  
Worksheet One: TV Show Evaluation

Based on your designated occupational category (political/legal, medical, corporate, or crime), watch one pilot episode from the list given (Appendix A). Fill out the following worksheet and bring it to our next class for group discussion. \*Note- Each member of your group is to watch a different show.

**Occupational Category (Circle one):** Political/Legal      Medical      Corporate      Crime

**Television Show Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of **main characters:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Total female characters \_\_\_\_\_
- Total male characters \_\_\_\_\_

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*Who are the main female characters, what are their perceived races, and what are their occupations?*

**Female Character (race):**

**Occupation:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

*How do these female characters reinforce traditional gender roles?*

*How do these female characters subvert traditional gender roles?*

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*Who are the main **male** characters, what are their perceived races, and what are their occupations?*

**Male Character (race):**

**Occupation:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

*How do these male characters reinforce traditional gender roles?*

*How do these male characters subvert traditional gender roles?*

Appendix C

**Worksheet Two: Group Analysis of Occupational Categories**

*After watching your selected television show, group back up with others that are in your occupational category. Answer the following questions:*

**Group Member Names:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Occupational Category (Circle one):** Political/Legal      Medical      Corporate      Crime

**On average, how many women are main characters in the show** (Add up each student's count and divide by the total shows viewed)? \_\_\_\_\_

**On average, how many men are main characters in the show** (Add up each student's count and divide by the total shows viewed)? \_\_\_\_\_

**On average, how many main characters in the show are white** (Add up each student's count and divide by the total shows viewed)? \_\_\_\_\_

**On average, how many main characters in the show appear to be a person of color** (Add up each student's count and divide by the total shows viewed)? \_\_\_\_\_

**What are some commonalities between each show in terms of:**

*Female characters reinforcing traditional gender roles:*

*Female characters subverting traditional gender roles:*

*Male characters reinforcing traditional gender roles:*

*Male characters subverting traditional gender roles:*

**How does the gender of the creator relate to protagonist's gender role portrayal in terms of occupation?**



Appendix D  
**Worksheet Three: Exploring US Labor Statistics**

Please go to the Department of Labor, Women's Bureau website: <http://www.dol.gov/wb/> and answer the following questions **based on your occupational category** (Hint: a lot of your information can be found here- <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsraceme2012.pdf>)

**Occupational Category (Circle one):** Political/Legal      Medical      Corporate      Crime

1. Total number of people employed in your occupational category?
2. Demographics of people employed in this occupational category:
  - a. Percentage of women employed?
  - b. Percentage of Black or African American individuals employed?
  - c. Percentage of Asian individuals employed?
  - d. Percentage of Latino or Hispanic individuals employed?
3. Median weekly earnings for:
  - a. White women?
  - b. White men?
  - c. Black or African American women?
  - d. Black or African American men?
  - e. Asian women?
  - f. Asian men?
  - g. Hispanic or Latina women?
  - h. Hispanic or Latino men?
4. What is the wage gap (i.e. women's earnings to men's earnings – 1:1.5 etc...) for:
  - a. White women to white men?
  - b. White women to women of color?
  - c. White men to men of color?
  - d. White men to women of color?
5. How does representations in real life compare to representations on television?

## Appendix E Final Presentation

For your final presentation (the following class), you will be giving a **ten minute** PowerPoint presentation that showcases your group's findings for *Worksheets 1-3*.

Presentations should include:

- The name of your occupational category and the television shows selected to watch.
- Your group's overall themes drawn from viewing your occupational category's shows.
- The data you found on the DOL website in terms of frequency of women and people of color in your occupational category.
- The median earnings and wage gap for women and people of color in your occupational category.
- Analysis: Does this match the representations depicted on television?
- Conclusions: What does this mean in terms of gender and race representation on television? How do the readings inform your conclusions?

## Grading Rubric

### Worksheet 1:

Completion: 10%

Thoughtful evaluation: 15%

### Worksheet 2:

Completion: 5%

Synthesis: 5%

### Worksheet 3:

Completion: 25%

### Final Presentation:

Synthesis of findings: 30%

Professionalism: 10%

**Total = 100%**

Appendix F

**Final Question Prompts for Entire Class**

*The following question prompts are adapted from Gaw's (1979) "Processing Questions: An Aid to Completing the Learning Cycle."*

Experiencing:

1. What did you observe?
2. How did this project make you feel?

Sharing:

1. What did you find in terms of labor division, race, and gender in your occupational category?
2. Were there any surprises?

Interpreting:

1. How did race shift the wage gap while looking at gender?
2. How different is the real life data different than the media's representation of labor in terms of race and gender?

Generalizing:

1. What did you learn about the television industry?
2. How does this relate to other areas of media?

Applying:

1. How does this relate to our readings this past week?
2. What might you do to help the educate people about gender wage gaps and labor division?

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