

Representation on TV

GOAL FOR TODAY: Think about who you see on TV. Who is shown/whose stories are told on TV? Who is not?

Context: From the 1950s - early 1980s, TV was dominated by white, heterosexual actors and storylines. We've come a long way in terms of diversity on TV, but have not yet achieved diversity in TV that is representative of all people.

WATCH EPISODE: *Fresh Off the Boat*

Constance Wu, actress who plays Jessica Huang on *Fresh Off the Boat*, said: "We're not here to do the taxes of the white person, or to be the chipper best friend to the white person. It's important to see Asians in those leading roles because it changes what I'm calling the anglo-heteronormative status of TV. [Imagine] that a producer says, "Guy and girl meet-cute at an ice skating rink. They fall in love, but then she has to move away." If you say that to anyone, including an Asian person, you picture a white person because that's what's become normative to us. If it's "Asian-American meet in a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown," that's the only time you picture it. We need to have a picture of Asian Americans."

What is Constance Wu saying is wrong with representation in television?

EPISODE

If you think about TV as a form of storytelling, what story is *Fresh Off the Boat* attempting to tell?

Why is this an example of progress on TV for Asian-Americans?

If You Want To See Diversity Onscreen, Watch Netflix. And Amazon. And Hulu. Celebrate diversity & chill. (By Sara Boboltz and Brennan Williams)

Across the whole [TV] landscape there's an "epidemic of invisibility" for women, people of color and queer people.

1. What does it mean when it says there is an "epidemic of invisibility" for women, people of color and queer people in TV?

Netflix, Amazon and Hulu are frequently praised for the diverse, high-quality stories they tell. Where else can you find an original series about a family whose patriarch decides to become a matriarch, or about a Colombian man who runs a cocaine empire, or about a women's prison and its inmates?

Hollywood studios and major television networks have been around since the first quarter of the last century, giving them decades to form biases on what "works" and what "doesn't work." Part of the business — no small part — is making safe bets on movies with people you know. But streaming services don't seem to carry as many preconceived ideas of what a show should look and sound like.

2. When the reading talks about network television vs. streaming television, what do they mean?
 - a. What is network TV?
 - b. What is streaming TV?

Netflix began as a place to stream old television shows or movies you saw in theaters ten years ago, only shifting into original shows and films within the past few years. Hulu and Amazon, too, have only recently begun their aggressive push to offer people the same high-quality entertainment they're used to finding through traditional mediums.

[The difference with] Netflix, Amazon and Hulu [is that they] don't *need* to play by anyone else's rules, because all have their own means of distributing whatever they make to potentially massive audiences. Their executives, then, are taking a chance by doing something revolutionary: letting the creatives run the show without so much interference.

[Unlike network television,] Netflix puts up few creative roadblocks in developing original series. In a 2015 interview with *Variety*, Cindy Holland, the company's vice president of original content, explained that part of Netflix's commitment to producing "diverse" and "eclectic" shows stems from its aim to serve "an increasingly global audience." (The company has service in 190 countries.) Netflix executives, along with the producers and directors they hire, must be "reflective of the audience we serve," Holland said.

Roy Price, head of Amazon Studios, boiled his company's green-lighting process down to the underlying humanity of the characters, regardless of how they look. Price's argument stands in stark contrast to one of Hollywood's longest held assumptions: that black, Asian and female characters will only appeal to black, Asian and female people.

Diversity on-screen is improving, but everyone — Hollywood studios, streaming studios, and network and cable television — should be trying to do better. If more inclusive stories are working for Netflix, Amazon, Hulu (and any of the other networks airing them) we can only hope other executives are taking note.

3. Why are streaming platforms more open to telling more diverse stories?

WATCH EPISODE: *Master of None*

What is Aziz Ansari's point in the episode "Indians on TV"?