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DEFINE AMERICAN

The Norman Lear CENTER
FOR THE STUDY OF ENTERTAINMENT, MEDIA & SOCIETY

Change the Narrative, Change the World

How Immigrant Representation on Television Moves Audiences to Action

September 2020

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

In 2018, Define American began a research partnership with the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project (MIP) that sought to identify and contextualize all immigrant characters on TV. As described in the report ***Immigration Nation: Exploring Immigrant Portrayals on Television***, the study found that one-third of immigrant characters on TV were associated with crime in some way, and 11% were associated with incarceration.

Building upon the 2018 study, we conducted a follow-up **content analysis** examining depictions of 129 unique immigrant characters across 97 episodes of 59 scripted narrative TV shows that aired between August 2018 and July 2019. This study supplements the earlier research by using a more systematic sample representing the entire population of shows with immigration-related content or immigrant characters.

We also conducted a **survey** to measure the impact of three key immigration storylines on immigration-related knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. The sample consisted of 940 American adults who were at least occasional viewers of one or more of three shows that featured prominent immigration storylines in the 2018–2019 season: *Madam Secretary* (CBS), *Orange Is the New Black* (Netflix), or *Superstore* (NBC).

CONTENT ANALYSIS

129

unique immigrant **characters** across

97

episodes of

59

scripted narrative TV shows airing Aug '18–Jul '19

SURVEY

940

American adults who occasionally viewed one or more of

3

TV shows with prominent immigration storylines:

Madam Secretary

Orange Is the New Black

Superstore

SURVEY

940 American adults who occasionally viewed one or more of

3 TV shows with prominent immigration storylines:

Madam Secretary

Orange Is the New Black

Superstore

GENERAL FINDINGS

1 **DIVERSITY** For all three shows, there was **substantial ideological, racial, and geographic diversity among survey participants.**

2 **STORIES DRIVE ACTION** For each of the three shows, those who saw the immigration storyline were **more likely to take certain actions related to immigration and had more inclusive attitudes toward immigrants** than those who did not.

3 **INCREASED EXPOSURE, INCREASED ACTION** The same was true of cumulative exposure to other immigration-related stories and shows featuring immigrant characters. The more of these participants saw, the **more likely they were to have taken immigration-related actions.**

RESPONSES TO IMMIGRATION STORYLINES

Across **all three** storylines:

1   **EMOTIONS** Participants who saw the storyline most often felt empathetic, angry, sad, or disgusted while watching.

2   **NEGATIVE EMOTIONS, INCREASED ACTION** Those who **felt negative emotions** had more inclusive attitudes and were **more likely to take immigration-related actions**; this was due in part to being **transported into, or immersed in, the story world.**

3   **POSITIVE EMOTIONS, HIGH-INVESTMENT ACTION** Those who **felt positive emotions** were more likely to take **high-investment immigration actions.**

4   **CONSERVATIVE VIEWERS FEEL MANIPULATED** Ideologically conservative or religious viewers were **more likely to experience reactance**—the feeling that the storyline was trying to manipulate them or take away their freedom. These feelings were associated with less inclusive immigration attitudes, knowledge about immigration, and immigration behaviors.

For those exposed to the ***Madam Secretary*** storyline:

1   **RURAL VIEWERS** Attitudes toward immigrants were more inclusive than unexposed participants, but only among viewers who were not very religious, and **particularly for those living in rural settings.**

2   **EMPATHY** Those who felt empathy had greater immigration knowledge and more inclusive attitudes, particularly among those for whom pleasure and fun was not the primary driver of entertainment choices.

3   **PLEASURE-MOTIVATED VIEWERS** However, for viewers whose entertainment *was* motivated by pleasure, experiencing fear was associated with support for more inclusive policies.

For those exposed to the **Superstore** storyline:

1   **A SENSE OF FRIENDSHIP** Viewers who experienced a sense of friendship with Mateo (Nico Santos) were more likely to support an increase in immigrants coming to the U.S., particularly among those who had little or no real-life contact with immigrants.
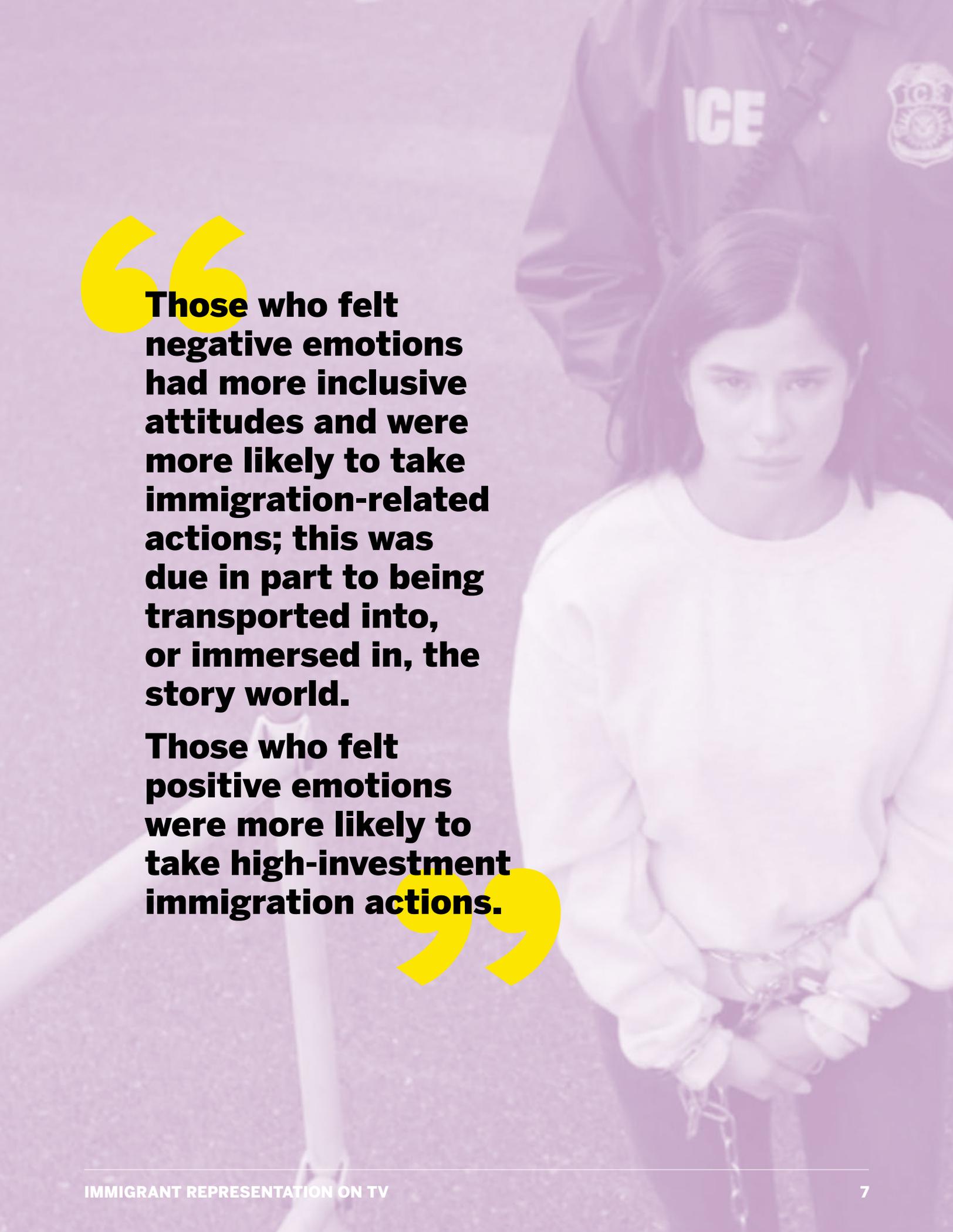
"Those who felt negative emotions had more inclusive attitudes and were more likely to take immigration-related actions; this was due in part to being transported into, or immersed in, the story world.

Those who felt positive emotions were more likely to take high-investment immigration actions."

CONTENT ANALYSIS RESULTS

129
unique immigrant
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CHARACTER DEMOGRAPHICS

- **GENDER AND AGE** The majority (57%) of immigrant characters were men. Nine percent of characters were children or teenagers, which is more than double the 4% of child immigrants on TV in 2018. Only 3% of TV immigrants were over the age of 65, much lower than in reality.

- **RACE** Half of all immigrant characters were judged to be Latinx, consistent with reality. Asian/Pacific Islander (API) immigrants were under-represented and Middle Eastern immigrants were over-represented, relative to reality.

- **LGBTQ AND DISABILITY** The number of LGBTQ immigrant characters was consistent with reality, but there were no transgender immigrants depicted. Two percent of immigrant characters were depicted as having a disability.

- **RELIGION** Only a small percentage of immigrant characters had an explicitly identified religion, but nearly a third of these were Muslim, largely due to the role religion plays in *Ramy* (Hulu).

- **LANGUAGE** About half (47%) of immigrant characters had an accent, and over half (56%) spoke a language other than English.

- **EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION** Over three quarters (76%) of working-age immigrant characters with identified job status were employed. Very few characters had an explicitly identified education level, but when they did, they were very likely to have at least a bachelor's degree.

DRUGS, CRIME, OR INCARCERATION

1 **DRUGS** Nine percent of immigrant characters had a drug-related reference or depiction.

2 **CRIME** Twenty-two percent of immigrant characters were associated with a crime, a major drop from the 34% of TV immigrant characters associated with a crime in 2018, though still disproportionate with real-world numbers.

3 **INCARCERATION** Ten percent of TV immigrants were connected with incarceration.

IMMIGRATION

1 **STATUS** Of the characters with an identified immigration status, 63% were undocumented immigrants or asylum seekers. This number is much higher than in 2018 or in reality.

2 **DETENTION** Twenty-four percent of immigrant characters were in detention centers and 8% were either shown being detained by immigration authorities or were involved in an ICE raid.

3 **ISSUES** At the episode level, the most commonly represented immigration issues included deportation (29% of episodes), ICE (25%), and mentions of the terms "illegal" (22%) and "undocumented" (17%).

4 **LANGUAGE** Both inclusive and exclusive language were used in dialogue to convey narratives of inclusion. Themes of abundance were evident primarily in the use of scarcity-based language.

IMMIGRATION STORYLINE VS. IMMIGRANT CHARACTER EPISODES

STORYLINE EPISODES

Characters in **storyline episodes** (included because of immigration content) were more likely to:

- **RACE** Be Latinx (61% in storyline episodes vs. 36% in character episodes) or Middle Eastern (14% vs. 6%).

- **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Come from Latin American countries (59% vs. 40%).

- **STATUS** Be undocumented (62% vs. 45%).

- **INCARCERATION** Be currently incarcerated (20% vs. 5%).

- **DETENTION** Be held in a detention facility (34% vs. 3%) or involved in the immigration court system (8% vs. 2%).

CHARACTER EPISODES

Characters in **character episodes** (included because of regular or recurring immigrant characters) were more likely to:

- **RACE** Be White (31% in character episodes vs. 14% in storyline episodes) or Asian/Pacific Islanders (18% vs. 7%).

- **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Come from Europe (21% vs. 13%).

- **STATUS** Be naturalized citizens/permanent residents (45% vs. 27%).

> **Ideologically conservative or religious viewers were more likely to experience reactance—the feeling that the storyline was trying to manipulate them or take away their freedom. These feelings were associated with less inclusive immigration attitudes, knowledge about immigration, and immigration behaviors.**

Introduction

The relationship between news coverage of immigrants and public opinion has been the topic of much research.[1,2] However, the impact of mainstream entertainment depictions of immigration on attitudes has rarely been explored. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on portrayals of undocumented and documented immigrants in mainstream media. In 2018, Define American and the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project (MIP) began a collaboration to fill these gaps in the research.

The first phase of this collaboration produced the 2018 report ***Immigration Nation: Exploring Immigrant Portrayals on Television***, which aimed to identify and contextualize all immigrant characters on TV.[3] In 143 episodes from 47 TV shows, we analyzed the perceived race, age, gender, job category, and education level of each immigrant character. The results were compared with government statistics on immigrants, providing evidence that women, Asian/Pacific Islander, and undocumented Black immigrants were all underrepresented on TV compared with reality. The study also found that an excessive one-third of immigrant characters were associated with crime in some way, and 11% of characters were associated with incarceration.[4]

Building upon that report, we again endeavored to identify all immigrant characters on TV with a content analysis, but we also dug deeper into immigration content beyond characters. For this research, we utilized the Norman Lear Center Script Database to find each mention of an immigration-related keyword in TV shows from the 2018–2019 season. This allowed us to identify episodes for inclusion that had either an immigrant character or immigration content.

We also expanded our analysis of interactions with the immigration system to explore the stories being told about detention centers, family separation, ICE raids, immigration court, and more.

[1] Ndulue, E., Bermejo, F., Ramos, K., Lowe, S.E., Hoffman, N., & Zuckerman, E. (2019). *Normalizing vs. Watchdogging in a Nativist Age.* A report of Define American and MIT Center for Civic Media. https://www.defineamerican. com/journalismreport

[2] USC Norman Lear Center & Brookings Institution. (2012). *A Report on the Media and the Immigration Debate.* https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/0925_immigration_dionne.pdf

[3] Blakley, J., Rogers, A.A., Saucier, C., Watson-Currie, E., & Trotta-Valenti, L. (2018). *Immigration Nation: Exploring Immigrant Portrayals on Television.* A report of the Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project and Define American. https://learcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Immigration-Nation.pdf

[4] Sun, R. (2018). Study: Immigrant TV Characters Are More Criminalized, Less Educated Than Reality. *The Hollywood Reporter.* https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/study-immigrant-tv-characters-portrayed-as-criminals-educated-1152939

VIEWER SURVEY

As detailed in this report, we analyzed numerous depictions of interactions with the immigration system, but three storylines stood out as particularly nuanced and in-depth. We supplemented the 2018–2019 content analysis with a survey to examine the impact of these three storylines on public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration.

Madam Secretary

In a two-episode arc titled "Family Separation," *Madam Secretary* depicted a mother being separated from her young son after crossing the southern border of the United States to seek asylum. Secretary of State Elizabeth McCord, played by Téa Leoni, was arrested by Arizona police for trespassing when she toured a children's immigrant detention center.

Orange Is the New Black

Much of the seventh and final season of *Orange Is the New Black* focused on an immigrant detention center that opened near the show's main Litchfield Penitentiary. Immigration storylines included the conditions of the detention center and the realities of immigration court for both adults and children.

Superstore

In previous seasons, *Superstore* has explored immigration storylines pertaining to Mateo, a series regular character who is an undocumented immigrant from the Philippines. In the season four finale, ICE conducts a raid of the store and the employees try to shield Mateo from the ICE agents. They are unsuccessful and Mateo is ultimately detained.

PARTICIPANTS

All participants were at least occasional viewers of one or more of the three shows.

269   537   299

We recruited 940 television viewers from Qualtrics Panels, a third-party aggregator of market research panels. The survey was administered in December 2019. Survey participants were required to be **at least occasional viewers** (defined as watching at least one episode from the 2018–2019 season) of one or more of the three shows:

- *Madam Secretary*: **269** occasional or more
- *Orange Is the New Black*: **537**
- *Superstore*: **299**

Participants were not required to have seen the immigration storyline depicted in the show and may have seen more than one of the shows of interest.

<mark>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</mark>

In addition to examining the impact of each of the three key storylines on audiences, we were interested in the cumulative effects of exposure to 20 different shows with regular or recurring immigrant characters and 10 additional shows with prominent immigration storylines. We looked at differences in how the storylines affected various segments of viewers, such as religious and rural audiences. Finally, we examined the role of a variety of theoretical variables including emotional responses to the storyline, transportation (or immersion) into the storyline, psychological reactance, parasocial interaction with major characters, and motivations behind entertainment choices.

PARASOCIAL INTERACTION The Mateo storyline on *Superstore* presented an opportunity to test the parasocial contact hypothesis.[5] This model proposes that parasocial interaction, or imagined friendships, with fictional characters who are members of a marginalized community can reduce prejudice, particularly among those who have little or no real-life contact with members of that community.

ENTERTAINMENT MOTIVES The Norman Lear Center's 2019 study ***Are You What You Watch?***[6] found the most commonly cited motivation behind entertainment choices was being put in a good mood. Seeking out entertainment to inspire one's thinking about meaningful issues or for moments of sadness or poignancy were less common, particularly among the "Reds"—those whose ideological values lean more conservative. In the present study, we sought to build on prior research by examining the emotional effects of exposure to immigration storylines within the pleasure-driven "fun-seeker" audience.

[5] Schiappa, E., Gregg, P., & Hewes, D. (2005). The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis. *Communication Monographs*, 72(1), 92-115. DOI: 10.1080/0363775052000342544

[6] Blakley, J., Watson-Currie, E., Shin, H., Valenti, L. T., Saucier, C., & Boisvert, H. (2019). *Are You What You Watch? Tracking the Political Divide through TV Preferences.* A report of the Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project and Future Perfect Labs. https://learcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/are_you_what_you_watch.pdf

CONTENT ANALYSIS

129 **97** **59**

unique immigrant characters across

episodes of

scripted narrative TV shows airing Aug '18–Jul '19

[7] Series regular characters typically appear in all or most episodes of a show. Recurring characters return to the show sporadically and have appeared in more than two episodes.

We analyzed a total of **97 episodes** from **59 scripted narrative TV shows** that aired between August 2018 and July 2019. The sample included shows on broadcast, cable, and streaming platforms. Shows and episodes were selected for analysis either because of known immigration content (69 episodes) or an identified regular or recurring immigrant character (28 episodes).[7]

Immigrant characters were defined as foreign-born individuals who are physically in the United States with the intent of staying in the country. People visiting the country on vacation or business were not included. Storylines not involving immigrants to the U.S. (e.g., Americans seeking asylum in Canada on *The Handmaid's Tale* [Hulu] and *The Simpsons* [Fox], space aliens emigrating to Earth on *Supergirl* [The CW]) were not included in the sample.

The 97 episodes included 129 unique immigrant characters (184 total immigrant characters including duplicates across multiple episodes).

For shows with identifiable immigration content, we coded each relevant episode. *Orange Is the New Black* had the most episodes coded, with seven.

For shows with regular immigrant characters (but not necessarily immigration content), we randomly selected one episode to code.

Survey Results

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

For all three shows, there was **substantial ideological, geographic, and racial diversity among survey participants** (occasional or more viewers of that show).

- **POLITICAL PARTY** While **Democratic voters accounted for nearly half of participants** for each show (43–47%), there were also **substantial proportions of Republicans** (24–31%) and those who identified as **"other" or no party preference** (20–24%).

- **IDEOLOGY** For each show, **participants tended toward a moderate ideology** (36–39%) as opposed to very liberal (13–18%) or very conservative (6–8%).

- **URBAN/RURAL** Participants were **roughly equally divided between living in a large city (28–36%), suburbs (31–35%), and rural areas (18–24%).** Fewer participants lived in small cities with populations less than 100,000 (11–20%).

- **RACE** While most participants were White/Caucasian (79–82%), a substantial proportion identified as Hispanic/Latino (11–15%) or Black/African American (10–12%). Participants could select multiple races/ethnicities when answering this question.

- **GENDER** The majority of participants for all three shows were women (67–79%).

CUMULATIVE EXPOSURE

The more often participants watched other shows featuring immigrant characters, the more likely they were to have inclusive immigration attitudes and take immigration-related actions.

- In addition to the three primary shows of interest (*Orange Is the New Black*, *Madam Secretary*, and *Superstore*), participants were asked if they remembered seeing 20 other shows featuring regular or recurring immigrant characters, like *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS) (74%), *Modern Family* (ABC) (60%), and *Shameless* (Showtime) (46%).[9]

- The majority of participants said they at least occasionally watched other shows featuring immigrant characters. The more often participants watched these shows, the more likely they were to believe that the number of people immigrating to the U.S. should be increased and take more immigration-related actions.

Beyond immigrant characters, the more immigration storylines participants had seen in the 2018–2019 season, the more likely they were to take immigration-related actions.

- Participants were asked if they remembered seeing 10 other recent immigration storylines, in addition to the three primary storylines of interest.[10] The most watched storylines were *Law and Order: SVU* (NBC), when Olivia Benson (Mariska Hargitay) arrests an immigration officer (23%), and *How to Get Away with Murder* (ABC), when Annalise Keating (Viola Davis) defends a Muslim woman facing deportation (14%).

- Participants who had seen more of these immigration storylines took more total immigration related actions than those who had seen fewer of these storylines. This includes both lower-investment actions (such as seeking information) and higher-investment actions (such as making a donation in support of a charity).

[8] Ranges indicate variation across the three shows of interest.

[9] See Appendix A for a list of shows with immigrant characters included in the survey.

[10] See Appendix B for a list of other immigration-related storylines included in the survey.

STORYLINE IMPACT

Within each of the three primary shows of interest, participants—those who indicated they watched occasionally or more—were split into two groups:

- **Exposed:** Occasional or more viewers who saw the specific immigration storyline on that show.
- **Unexposed:** Occasional or more viewers who *did not* see the specific immigration storyline.

The precise criteria for segmenting participants from each show into exposed and unexposed groups are described in the methodology section. Sample sizes for each group are shown below.

	All Participants Watched the show at least occasionally	Exposed Participants who saw the immigration storyline	Unexposed Participants who *did not* see the storyline
Madam Secretary	269	**143** (53%)	**126** (47%)
Orange Is the New Black	537	**405** (75%)	**132** (25%)
Superstore	299	**157** (53%)	**142** (47%)

All participants, regardless of exposure, were asked about any immigration-related actions they may have taken, knowledge and attitudes about immigration, exposure to immigration issues in the news, personal contact with immigrants, motivations for consuming entertainment, and more.[11]

Before examining how exposure to the specific storylines might be associated with outcomes of interest, we needed to control for pre-existing demographic differences between exposed and unexposed participants for each show. Exposed participants were younger (for *Superstore* and *Orange Is the New Black*), more politically liberal (*Orange Is the New Black*), and more likely to be female (*Superstore*). For *Madam Secretary*, we did not find any pre-existing differences between exposed and unexposed participants. For all three shows, we also controlled for how much participants had heard about immigration-related topics in the news.

IMMIGRATION ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES

For each show, exposed participants were more likely to take certain actions related to immigration than unexposed participants.[12]

- For *Superstore*, exposed participants took more immigration-related actions overall than unexposed participants. They were also more likely to:
  - Speak to a friend about immigration issues (48% vs. 32%).
 - Write an immigration-related social media post (16% vs. 7%).

- For *Madam Secretary*, exposed participants were more likely to:
  - Attend an immigration rally (15% vs. 3%).
  - Go to an immigration-related community event (12% vs. 2%).

- For *Orange Is the New Black*, exposed participants were more likely to:
  - Comment on a social media post about immigration (17% vs. 7%).

[12] Findings related to storyline exposure are only reported in this section if there was a significant relationship (using ANCOVA or logistic regression models) when controlling for exposure to immigration in the news as well as the demographic variables associated with exposure for that show.

Comparing Exposed and Unexposed Groups
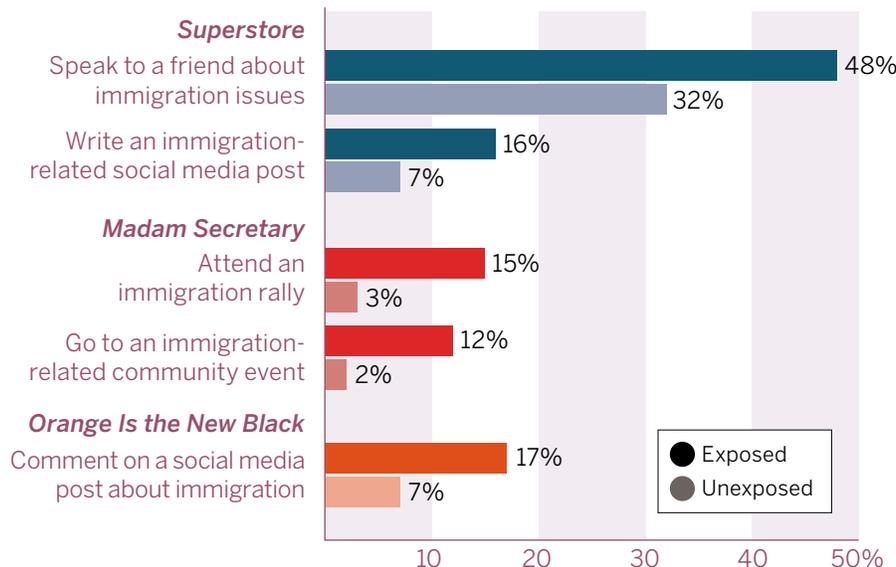
Superstore

Speak to a friend about immigration issues: 48% / 32%

Write an immigration-related social media post: 16% / 7%

Madam Secretary

Attend an immigration rally: 15% / 3%

Go to an immigration-related community event: 12% / 2%

Orange Is the New Black

Comment on a social media post about immigration: 17% / 7%

● Exposed
● Unexposed

10 20 30 40 50%

Exposed participants **had more inclusive attitudes toward immigrants** than unexposed participants.

- For *Madam Secretary* and *Orange Is the New Black*, exposed participants were more comfortable meeting an undocumented immigrant than unexposed participants.

- For *Madam Secretary*, exposed participants were:
  - More strongly opposed to charging parents as criminals when they enter the country without permission.
  - Less inclined to support a decrease in the number of people immigrating to the United States.

> "Exposed participants had more inclusive attitudes toward immigrants than unexposed participants."

RELIGIOUS AND RURAL PARTICIPANTS

For **Madam Secretary**, exposed participants had lower prejudice toward immigrants than unexposed participants, but only among those who were not very religious.

- For participants who were not very religious (shown on the left of the below graph), seeing the *Madam Secretary* immigration storyline was associated with lower prejudice toward immigrants.

- For participants who were moderately or very religious, there was no relationship between storyline exposure and prejudice toward immigrants. These participants had higher levels of prejudice than those who were not very religious, regardless of exposure.

Prejudice Towards Immigrants by Religiosity
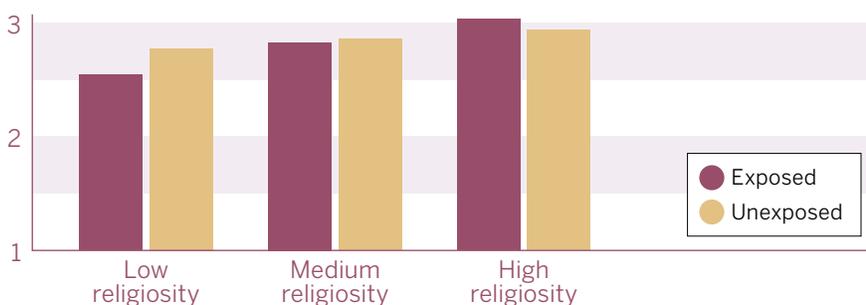
For ***Madam Secretary***, exposed participants had more inclusive attitudes toward undocumented immigrants than unexposed participants—particularly among rural viewers.

- The association between exposure to the *Madam Secretary* storyline and comfort meeting undocumented immigrants was most pronounced for rural participants.

- Among those who were not exposed to the storyline, rural participants were much less comfortable meeting an undocumented immigrant than non-rural participants. Among those who did see the storyline, rural participants' comfort meeting an undocumented immigrant was greater, such that there was no difference between exposed rural and non-rural participants.

Comfort With Undocumented Immigrants by Rurality
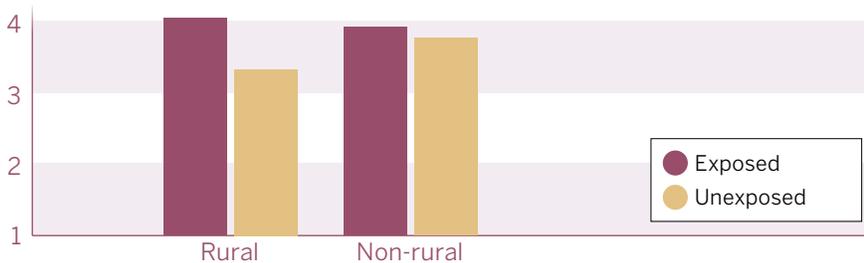
- This same pattern was evident **in support for a policy that would charge parents who enter the country without permission as criminals.** Unexposed rural participants were much more likely to support this policy than non-rural unexposed participants. Among exposed rural participants, support for this policy was decreased to the level of non-rural viewers.

These findings suggest that immigration-related entertainment content may have limited impact on religious viewers. However, such content has the potential to decrease prejudice and support for criminalization policies among rural viewers.

"These findings suggest that immigration-related entertainment content may have limited impact on religious viewers. However, such content has the potential to decrease prejudice and decrease support for criminalization policies among rural viewers."

RESPONSES TO STORYLINES

For each of the three key storylines, exposed participants were asked a series of questions about the emotions they experienced while watching, transportation (or immersion) into the story, and immigration-related actions they may have taken specifically as a result of watching the storyline.[13]

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

Across all three shows, exposed participants most often felt negative emotions while watching the storylines, such as angry, sad, and disgusted, as well as empathetic.

Frequency of Emotions Experienced, by Show
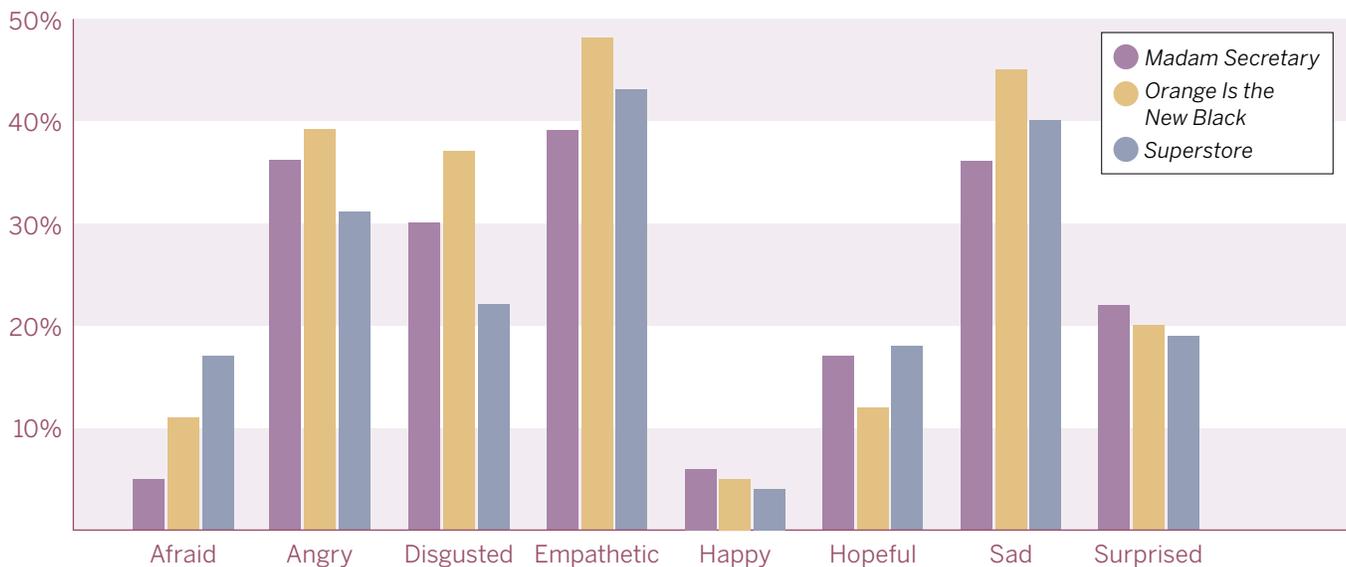
- **Empathy** was the most common emotion felt for those exposed to *Madam Secretary* (39%), *Superstore* (43%), and *Orange Is the New Black* (48%).
- Participants also often felt **angry** (31-39%), **sad** (36-45%), and **disgusted** (22-37%) while watching these storylines.
- **Relatively few participants felt positive emotions**, such as happy (4-6%) or hopeful (12-18%).

Experiencing negative emotions while watching the storylines was associated with more inclusive immigration attitudes and taking relatively low-investment actions.

- Across all three shows, those who felt negative emotions like sadness, anger, or fear while watching had more inclusive immigration attitudes and were more likely to take relatively low-investment immigration actions, such as seeking more information, talking with a friend about immigration issues, commenting or posting on social media, or signing a petition.

- These actions are termed "low-investment" because they require relatively little time and effort and thus tend to be more common.

13 See Appendix D for a list of key survey questions asked only to the exposed group of participants.

PLEASURE-DRIVEN VIEWERS

For **Madam Secretary** and **Orange Is the New Black**, feeling empathy was associated with greater immigration knowledge and more inclusive attitudes—particularly among those whose entertainment choices were NOT driven by a need for pleasure and fun.

- Those who felt empathy while watching the storyline were more comfortable meeting documented immigrants (*Madam Secretary*), supported more immigration to the U.S. (*Orange*), and had more inclusive attitudes toward immigration (*Orange*), but only for viewers with low levels of pleasure-driven motivation.

Support for More Immigration to the U.S. by Pleasure-Driven Viewing

Legend: No Empathy, Empathy

Pleasure-Driven Viewing (Low, Medium, High)
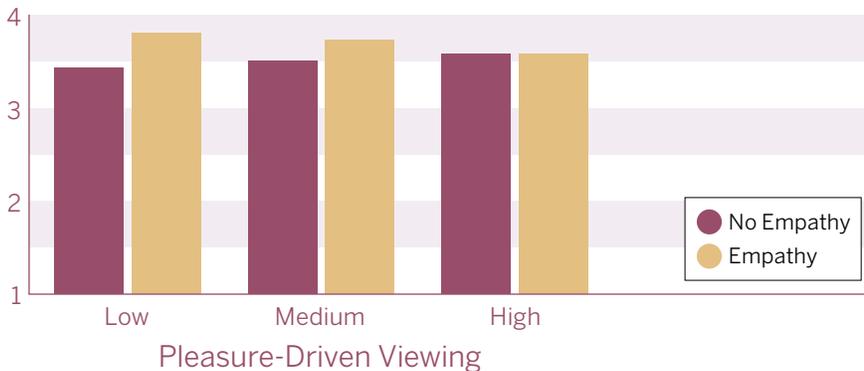
- Those who experienced empathy while watching the *Madam Secretary* storyline were more likely to know that legal U.S. residents, including native-born Americans, commit more crime than immigrants. However, this relationship was less pronounced among fun-seeking viewers.

For *Madam Secretary* storyline viewers whose entertainment WAS motivated by pleasure, experiencing fear was associated with support for more inclusive policies.

- Among participants whose entertainment was motivated by pleasure, those who felt fear while watching were less likely to support charging parents as criminals when they enter the country without permission.

- For those whose entertainment was NOT motivated by pleasure, the opposite was true. *Madam Secretary* storyline viewers who experienced fear were more likely to support criminal charges.

Anti-Immigration Policy Support by Pleasure-Driven Viewing
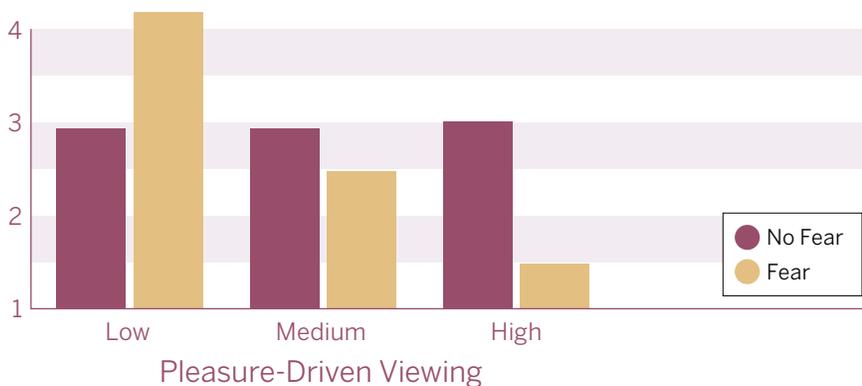
For those whose entertainment choices are driven by a need for pleasure—the fun-seekers—fear may be a more effective motivator than empathy when it comes to shifting attitudes and policy support.

> "Those who felt empathy were more likely to be transported into the story. In turn, those who experienced transportation into the story were more likely to take immigration-related actions, and have lower amounts of prejudice toward immigrants."

TRANSPORTATION INTO THE STORY

Viewers of all three immigration storylines often experienced the sensation of being **transported into, or immersed in, the story world**. In this state, viewers may feel as though the events are happening to them directly.

- About half of exposed participants felt they could **picture themselves in the events in the storylines** (45-51%), **lost track of activity going on around them while watching** (46-55%), or **found themselves thinking of how the storyline could have turned out differently** (55-61%).

As described previously, those who felt negative emotions or empathy while watching had more inclusive attitudes and were more likely to take immigration-related actions; this was due in part to being transported into the story.

- **Those who felt empathy were more likely to be transported into the story.**
- In turn, **those who experienced transportation into the story were more likely to take immigration-related actions, and have lower amounts of prejudice toward immigrants.**
- The same pattern was present for other negative emotions, such as anger.
- **This transportation effect was not present for positive emotions such as happiness**.

TV storylines that evoke strong negative emotions may influence attitudes and behavior through the mechanism of transportation into—or immersion in—the story world.

> "It is important to avoid heavy-handed immigration storylines that make viewers feel pressured or manipulated. Such storylines may backfire, particularly with more conservative or religious audiences.

REACTANCE TO STORYLINE

For each of the three shows, **exposed participants generally did not experience psychological reactance—the feeling that the storyline was trying to manipulate them or take away their freedom.**

- **Less than a quarter of viewers felt like the show was trying to manipulate them** (20-22%), pressure them (20-22%), or tried to make a decision for them (21-24%).
- Those who were ideologically conservative or religious were more likely to experience reactance in response to the immigration storylines.

For all shows, when participants did experience feelings of reactance, these feelings were negatively associated with inclusive immigration attitudes, knowledge about immigration, and immigration behaviors.

- Feeling psychological reactance when watching the storyline was associated with less inclusive attitudes, such as believing the number of immigrants coming to the U.S. should be decreased, stronger prejudice toward immigrants, and feeling less comfortable meeting documented and undocumented immigrants.
- Participants who felt reactance were also less likely to know that legal U.S. residents commit more crime than immigrants, and were less likely to speak to a friend about immigration issues.

It is important to avoid heavy-handed immigration storylines that make viewers feel pressured or manipulated. Such storylines may backfire, particularly with more conservative or religious audiences.

PARASOCIAL INTERACTION

Those who saw the *Superstore* storyline commonly experienced parasocial interaction—feelings of imagined friendship—with the immigrant character Mateo, who was detained by ICE and taken to a detention center.

- The majority of *Superstore*-exposed participants saw Mateo as a natural, down-to-earth person (74%) and thought Mateo made them feel comfortable, like they were with a friend (69%).

Those who experienced this sense of friendship with Mateo were more likely to support an increase in immigrants coming to the U.S. This association was particularly pronounced among those who had little or no real-life contact with immigrants.

5

Support for More Immigration to the U.S. by Real-Life Contact
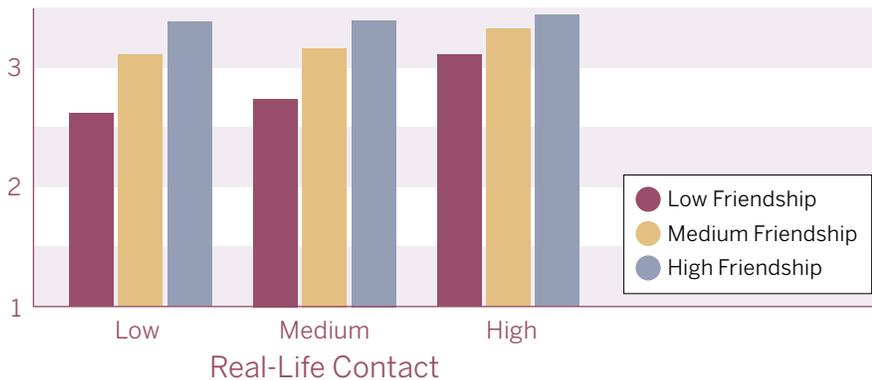
- Participants who experienced strong feelings of friendship with *Superstore*'s Mateo were more likely to support an increase in the number of immigrants coming to the U.S. than those who experienced these feelings less strongly.

- Among those who had a great deal of real-life contact with immigrants (as shown on the right of the graph), feelings of friendship with Mateo were not associated with their immigration attitudes. They already held supportive attitudes.

- However, among those who had little or no real-life contact with immigrants (as shown on the left of the graph), feelings of friendship with Mateo were strongly associated with supporting an increase in the number of immigrants coming to the U.S.

Attachment to regular immigrant characters can compensate for the absence of real-life contact with immigrants, reducing support for restrictive immigration policies.

Content Analysis Results

IMMIGRANT CHARACTERS

In the 2018–2019 television season, we content analyzed 129 unique immigrant characters appearing in 97 episodes of 59 TV shows.

129 unique immigrant characters across

97 episodes of

59 scripted narrative TV shows airing Aug '18–Jul '19
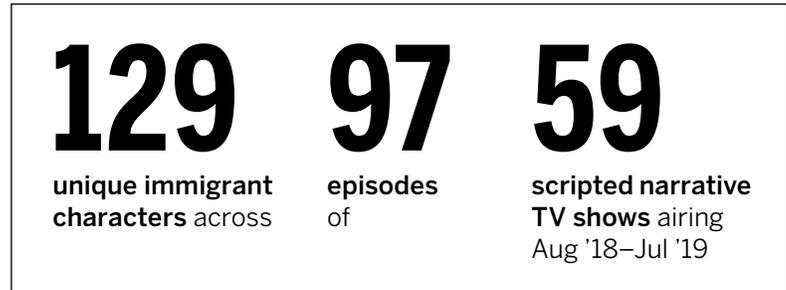
ROLE SIZE

Sixty percent of immigrant characters appeared in five or more episodes (during the lifetime of their TV show), which categorizes them as series regulars or recurring characters. The remaining 40% of immigrant characters appeared in under five episodes. The majority of immigrant characters (also 60%) had 10 or more lines.

Immigrant Character Role Sizes

60% immigrant characters who were series regulars or recurring characters

40% immigrant characters who appeared in under five episodes
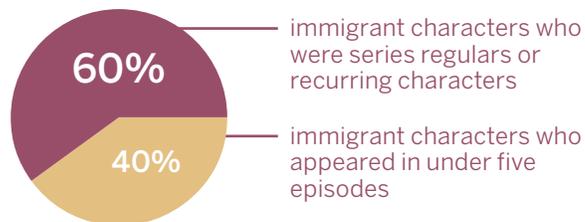
GENDER

The majority (57%) of immigrant characters were identified as men, consistent with our 2018 finding of 60% men. In reality, 52% of immigrants are women, indicating women immigrant characters continue to be underrepresented on TV.[14] No non-binary immigrant characters were identified.

Immigrant Men Were Over-Represented on TV

2017-18 (TV)	2018-19 (TV)	Reality
60%	57%	48%

Men
Women
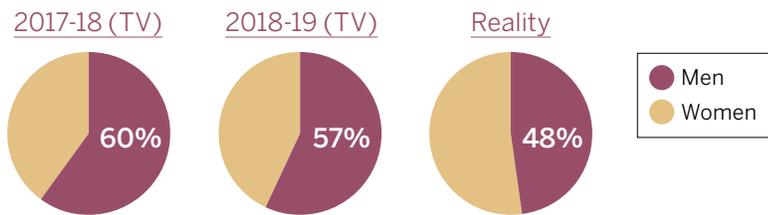
RACE

Race of Immigrant Characters on TV vs. in Reality
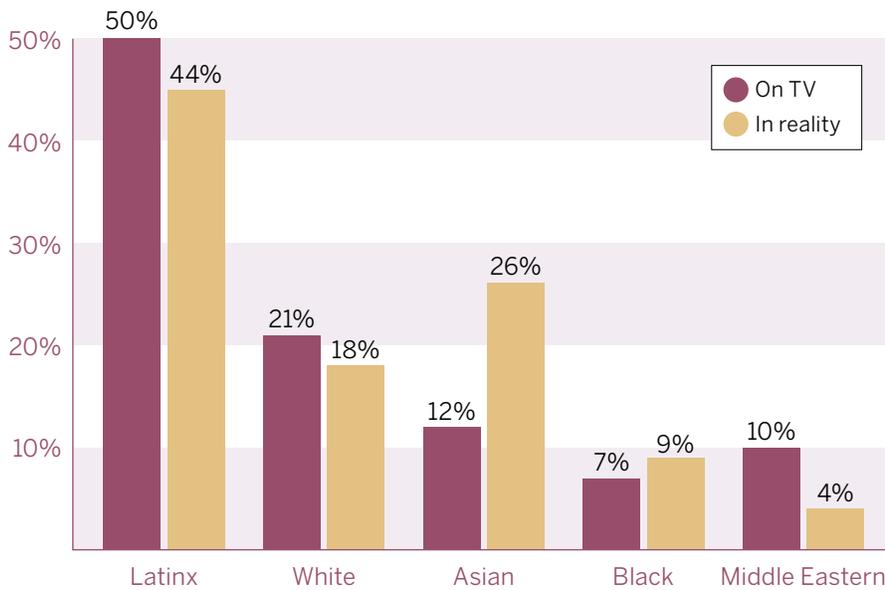
[15] Batalova, J., Blizzard, B., & Bolter, J., (2020, February 14). Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States. Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states

[16] Radford J. and Budiman A. (2018, September 14). Facts on U.S. Immigrants, 2016. PEW Hispanic. https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2018/09/14/2016-statistical-information-on-foreign-born-in-united-states/

■ **LATINX** **Half of all immigrant characters were judged to be Latinx** — compared with 40% in 2018. Many immigration storylines focused on immigrant detention along the Southern border, which predominantly involved Latinx immigrants. The largest proportions of immigrant characters were identified as having come from Mexico (16%) or Guatemala (11%). In reality, 44% of immigrants are Latinx and Mexicans represent 25% of the immigrant population in the U.S.[15]

■ **WHITE** **Just over one-fifth of immigrant characters were judged to be White (21%).** This is consistent with reality, in which 18% of U.S. immigrants are White.[16] Our 2018 analysis found 24% of immigrants on TV were White. On TV, many of the White immigrants have emigrated from Canada or the United Kingdom.

■ **ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER** **Asian/Pacific Islander (API) immigrants continue to be underrepresented on TV.** API immigrants comprised 16% of immigrants on TV in our 2018 study and 12% of immigrants on TV this year, but in reality, API immigrants represent 26% of the U.S. immigrant population.[17]

■ **MIDDLE EASTERN** **One out of 10 immigrants on TV were judged to be Middle Eastern**, consistent with 2018 when they comprised 11% of immigrants on TV. Middle Eastern immigrant characters are over-represented on TV relative to 4% in reality. Many Middle Eastern immigrants on TV were from *Ramy*, which focuses on the Egyptian and Palestinian diaspora in New Jersey.

■ **BLACK** On TV, 7% of immigrants were judged to be Black, compared with 8% in 2018. This is close to reality, in which 9% of U.S. immigrants are Black. **However, there were no undocumented Black characters on TV in this sample. In reality, there are over 600,000 undocumented Black immigrants in the U.S., and Black immigrants make up 20% of those facing deportation on criminal grounds.**[18] Black immigrants were also absent from the uptick in TV storylines on immigration issues near the southern border of the U.S., where a record number of over 5,800 African migrants are interacting with the immigration system.[19]

[17] Ibid.

[18] Raff, J. (2017, December 30). The 'Double Punishment' for Black Undocumented Immigrants. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/12/the-double-punishment-for-black-immigrants/549425/

[19] Solis, G. (2019, December 8). Record number of African migrants at U.S.-Mexico border. The San Diego Tribune. https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/story/2019-12-08/record-number-of-african-migrants-at-u-s-mexico-border

AGE

The vast majority (88%) of immigrant characters were judged to be adults between the ages of 18-64. **Nine percent of characters were children or teenagers, which is more than double the 4% of child and teen immigrants on TV in 2018.**[20] This uptick includes credited child characters from family separation storylines on shows like *Into the Dark* (Hulu) and *Madam Secretary*. **Only 3% of TV immigrants were over the age of 65, whereas in reality, 16% of immigrants are seniors.**[21]

Immigrant Character Ages

3% senior
7% child
2% teen

88% adult

[20] For a character to be included in the sample, they needed to be credited in IMDB for the role, so background actors like the children in immigration court on *Orange Is the New Black* and children in immigration detention on other shows were not included in this number.

[21] U.S. Census Bureau (2018). Selected characteristics of the foreign-born population by period of entry into the United States, 2018 American Community Survey 1-year estimates. https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S0502&tid=ACSST1Y2018.S0502&vintage=2018
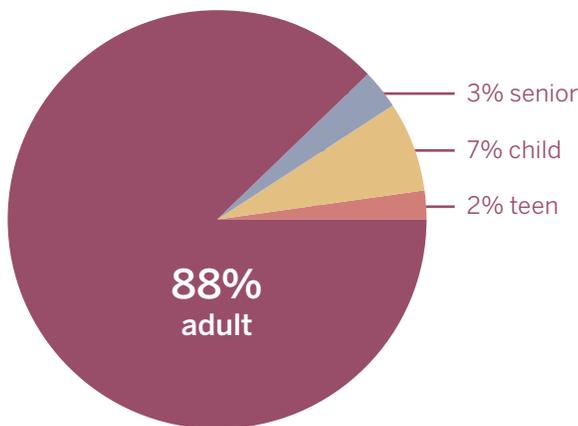
> "There were no undocumented Black characters on TV in [the 2018–2019 television season]. In reality, there are over 600,000 undocumented Black immigrants in the U.S. and Black immigrants make up 20% of those facing deportation on criminal grounds."

LGBTQ

The number of lesbian, gay and bisexual immigrant TV characters was 6%, compared with 5% in 2018. This percentage remains consistent with the estimated 4.5% of adults who identify as LGBTQ in reality.[22]

LGBTQ immigrant characters who were series regulars included Petra (Yael Grobglas) from *Jane the Virgin* (The CW), Laurel (Karla Souza) from *How to Get Away With Murder* (ABC), Mateo from *Superstore*, Adena (Nikohl Boosheri) from *The Bold Type* (Freeform), Jaime (Arturo Castro) from *Broad City* (Comedy Central), and Sam (Rafael de La Fuente) from *Dynasty* (The CW).

How to Get Away With Murder featured the trial of Nanda Hashim (Ramona DuBarry), an immigrant accused of killing her wife because she would have lost her green card if she got a divorce. The show also made several references to Simon Drake (Behzad Dabu)—a gay DACA student who was deported to Pakistan in a previous season.

In reality, LGBTQ immigrants are 97 times more likely to be sexually assaulted in immigration detention. **Transgender migrants in particular face widespread persecution in ICE facilities, but for the second straight year, there were no transgender immigrant characters on TV.**[23]

[22] Newport F. (2018, May 22). In U.S., Estimate of LGBT Population Rises to 4.5%. Gallup. https://news.gallup.com/poll/234863/estimate-lgbt-population-rises.aspx

CHARACTERS WITH DISABILITIES

For the second straight year, **2% of immigrant characters were depicted as having a disability.** In reality, an estimated 4% of recent immigrants are people with disabilities.[24] The depicted disabilities included dementia, an amputated leg, and an amputated hand.

ACCENT AND LANGUAGE

About half (47%) of immigrant characters had an accent, which is a **major drop** from the 77% of immigrant characters who spoke with an accent in 2018. An accent was defined as a noticeably different mode of pronunciation than the other characters on screen.

Over half (56%) of immigrant characters spoke a language other than English in the episodes. Spanish was the most common non-English language in the sample, followed by Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, and French.

[23] Moreau, J. (2018, June 6). LGBTQ migrants 97 times more likely to be sexually assaulted in detention, report says. *NBC News.* https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/lgbtq-migrants-97-times-more-likely-be-sexually-assaulted-detention-n880101

[24] Huang, C. et al. (2010). Region of Birth and Disability Among Recent U.S. Immigrants: Evidence from the 2000 Census. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 30(3), 399-418. DOI: 10.1007/s11113-010-9194-x

<mark>RELIGION</mark>

On TV, 14% of immigrant characters (18 characters) had an explicitly identified religion. Religion was only coded if it was explicitly mentioned in the script or evident by visual religious symbols like a cross or a Star of David necklace.

Among the characters with an explicitly identified religion, the most common depicted religion was Islam (28%), largely due to the exploration of Muslim identity on *Ramy*. There are an estimated 3.45 million Muslims in the U.S.[25] Buddhism (22%) was the second most common explicitly depicted religion, largely because of characters from *Fresh off the Boat* (ABC).

[25] Mohamed, B. (2018, January 3). New estimates show U.S. Muslim population continues to grow. PEW Research. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/

JOBS AND EDUCATION

Seventy-nine percent of characters (102) had an identified employment status. **Of these, 68% were employed and 22% were unemployed.** The rest were retirees or children.

Most immigrant TV characters had no explicitly identified education level. **For the 24 characters with identifiable education levels, one-third had a postgraduate degree and 17% had a Bachelor's degree.** In reality, 17% of U.S. immigrants attained a Bachelor's degree and 13% of U.S. immigrants attained a postgraduate degree.[26]

[26] Department of Homeland Security (2018). Immigration Data & Statistics. https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics

Most Immigrant Characters Are Not Depicted With an Identifiable Education Level

19%

immigrant characters with an identifiable education level

Education Level

On TV*
In reality

Bachelor's — 17% / 17%
Postgraduate — 33% / 13%
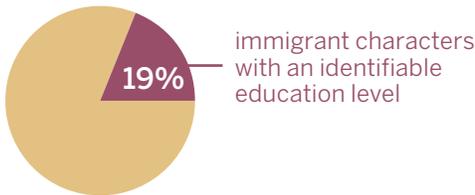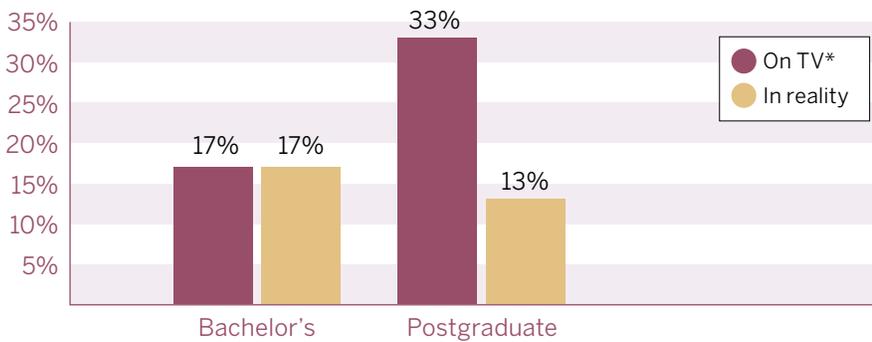
*Only includes immigrant characters with an identifiable education level.

DRUGS, CRIME, AND INCARCERATION[27]

DRUGS

Nine percent of immigrant characters had a drug-related reference or depiction. These depictions range from Schneider (Todd Grinnell), an immigrant from Canada on *One Day at a Time* (Netflix) who struggled with alcoholism, to depictions of immigrant drug dealers on *Better Call Saul* (AMC).

CRIME

Twenty-two percent of immigrant characters were associated with a crime, meaning they either committed a crime, witnessed a crime, or were a victim of a crime. This is a **major reduction** from the 34% of TV immigrant characters who were associated with a crime in 2018. However, 2018 studies by the CATO Institute and the Marshall Project reiterate what several studies have found: both undocumented populations and immigrants in general commit less crime than native-born Americans.[28]

Immigrant Characters Associated With Crime on Television

2017-18 (TV) 2018-19 (TV)

34%   22%

- Immigrant characters associated with crime
- Not associated with crime

[27] For a subset of variables that may change from episode to episode, including drug involvement, crime involvement, and incarceration, we analyzed all coded characters (N = 184). This includes some duplicate characters who appeared across multiple episodes.

[28] Ingraham, C. (2018, June 19). Two charts demolish the notion that immigrants here illegally commit more crime, *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/19/two-charts-demolish-the-notion-that-immigrants-here-illegally-commit-more-crime/

INCARCERATION

Ten percent of TV immigrants were connected with incarceration, meaning either they were depicted as currently incarcerated or there was a reference to previous or future incarceration. Incarceration explicitly did not include immigration-related detention. We were unable to locate reliable data on the percentage of immigrants who are incarcerated, but **research from the CATO Institute shows that undocumented immigrants "are 47 percent less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans** and legal immigrants are 78 percent less likely to be incarcerated than natives."[29]

[29] Nowrasteh, A. (2018, June 12). Another Confusing Federal Report on Immigrant Incarceration. CATO. https://www.cato.org/blog/another-confusing-federal-report-immigrant-incarceration

IMMIGRATION STATUS

Half of all TV immigrant characters did not have an explicitly stated immigration status. Of the 65 characters who did, 63% were undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers. This represents a substantial increase over the 41% undocumented immigrant characters with an explicitly stated immigration status in 2018. In reality, only 24% of immigrants in the U.S. are unauthorized,[30] so undocumented immigrants are heavily overrepresented on TV. This is likely because of the large number of storylines depicting immigrant detention and ICE raids, as described in the next section. The remaining 37% of characters with an identified immigration status were naturalized citizens, permanent or conditional residents, or refugees.

30 Department of Homeland Security. (2018). Immigration Data & Statistics. https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics

Immigration Status of Immigrant Characters
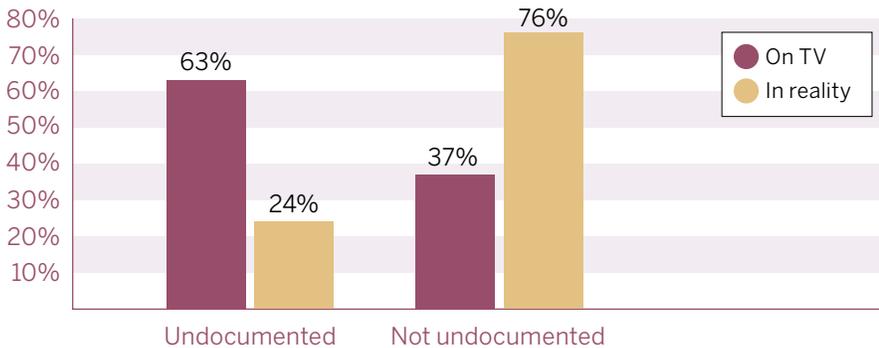
IMMIGRATION SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT[31]

Consistent with a real-world focus on the U.S. immigration system, many of this year's TV immigration storylines involved immigrant characters' interactions with this system. Several storylines featured immigrant characters arrested or detained by ICE or navigating the immigration court system.

IMMIGRANT DETENTION FACILITIES

Immigrant detention facilities garnered significant news coverage, with about 500,000 people booked into ICE detention facilities in 2019, including many families traveling together.[32] Journalists have reported inhumane facility conditions,[33] migrant deaths in facilities[34] and thousands of sexual abuse accusations.[35] **On TV, 24% of immigrant characters were detained by immigration authorities.**

Much of the seventh and final season of *Orange Is the New Black* took place in an immigrant detention center. The show made news when fictional characters talked about the obstacles involved in making a phone call and obtaining legal representation while in detention. The fictional inmates passed around a *real-life* National Immigration Detention Hotline number, which was subsequently shut down by ICE in reality after being

[31] For a subset of variables that may change from episode to episode, including immigration system involvement, we analyzed all coded characters (N = 184). This includes some duplicate characters who appeared across multiple episodes.

[32] U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. (2019). U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Fiscal Year 2019 Enforcement and Removal Operations Report. https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2019/eroReportFY2019.pdf

[33] Sergent, J., Lawrence, E., Aspegren, E., & Sanchez, O. (2019, July 17). Chilling first-hand reports of migrant detention centers highlight smell of 'urine, feces,' overcrowded conditions. https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/politics/elections/2019/07/16/migrant-detention-centers-described-2019-us-government-accounts/1694638001/

[34] Define American. (2019, June 4). Migrant Deaths, Abuses Continue to Mount. https://www.defineamerican.com/blog/migrant-deaths-abuses-continue-to-mount/

[35] Owens, C., Kight, S.W., & Stevens, H. (2019, February 26). Thousands of migrant youth allegedly suffered sexual abuse in U.S. *Axios*. https://www.axios.com/immigration-unaccompanied-minors-sexual-assault-3222e230-29e1-430f-a361-d959c88c5d8c.html

[36] Strause, J. (2019, August 25). Immigration Detention Hotline Shut Down After 'Orange Is the New Black' Inclusion. *The Hollywood Reporter*. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/immigration-detention-hotline-shut-down-orange-is-new-black-1234370

featured on the show.[36]

Madam Secretary depicted a child detention center where children were separated from their families behind chain-link fences. When Secretary of State Elizabeth McCord saw a baby crying on a cement floor, she asked an ICE officer what he was going to do about it:

> **ELIZABETH:** Hey, excuse me? Are you gonna change that boy's diaper? I mean, I'm assuming he has one.
>
> **ICE OFFICER:** Child aides make rounds every three hours.
>
> **ELIZABETH:** Three hours. So you're just gonna leave him like that? 'Cause, I mean, where are his clothes? I'll change him myself.
>
> **ICE OFFICER:** Ma'am, that's not procedure.

IMMIGRATION RAIDS AND ICE ARRESTS

In August 2019, 600 ICE officers raided three Mississippi poultry plants, where they apprehended 680 people they believed to be undocumented.[37] This ICE raid was part of a more aggressive strategy that resulted in over 143,000 ICE arrests in 2019.[38] ICE raids were also common in television shows this year. **Eight percent of immigrant characters were arrested by immigration authorities or involved in an ICE raid.**

On *The Conners* (ABC), Dan Conner (John Goodman) warned his daughter Becky (Lecy Goranson) that ICE had been raiding local restaurants for undocumented immigrants. Becky checked her phone and heard a voicemail from her boyfriend Emilio (Rene Rosado) saying he was caught in an ICE raid and deported to Mexico.

On *Superstore*, undocumented character Mateo Liwanag was hidden by his coworkers during an ICE raid of the Cloud 9 superstore. Despite their best attempts to protect him, Mateo was apprehended by ICE and taken into detention.

[37] Jordan, M. (2019, August 7). ICE Arrests Hundreds in Mississippi Raids Targeting Immigrant Workers. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/07/us/ice-raids-mississippi.html

[38] Sands, G. & Alvarez, P. (2019, December 11). ICE arrests dropped in the past year amid southern border crisis. *CNN*. https://www.cnn.com/2019/12/11/politics/ice-deportation-fiscal-year-2019/index.html

IMMIGRATION COURT

Six percent of immigrant characters were depicted in immigration court. In reality, there is a backlog of over one million pending immigration court cases.[39]

Bull (CBS) featured an immigration court case for Gabriel (E.J. Bonilla), an undocumented heart surgeon who overstayed his work visa by seven years. Gabriel faced an anti-immigrant judge, so he unsuccessfully tried to marry his American girlfriend before ultimately gaining asylum in Germany.

Orange Is the New Black showcased immigration court scenes with both adults and children in which no one was provided legal representation. The young children were questioned directly by the judge about their immigration status.

OTHER IMMIGRATION SYSTEM INTERACTIONS

**Eleven percent of immigrant characters had other interactions with the immigration system.** These included applying for a visa, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), or being detained by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP).

[39] Alvarez, P. (2019, September 18). Immigration court backlog exceeds 1 million cases, data group says. *CNN*. https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/18/politics/immigration-court-backlog/index.html

IMMIGRATION TOPICS

Seventeen immigration terms and phrases were tracked at the level of each of the 97 episodes, as opposed to each individual character. Among these, "deportation" themes were the most common—present in 29% of episodes. "ICE" was mentioned in 25% of episodes, **variations of "illegal" or "illegal immigrant" were mentioned in 22%, "undocumented" appeared in 17%,** and immigrant detention centers for adults were mentioned in 16%.

Episodes With Immigration Themes
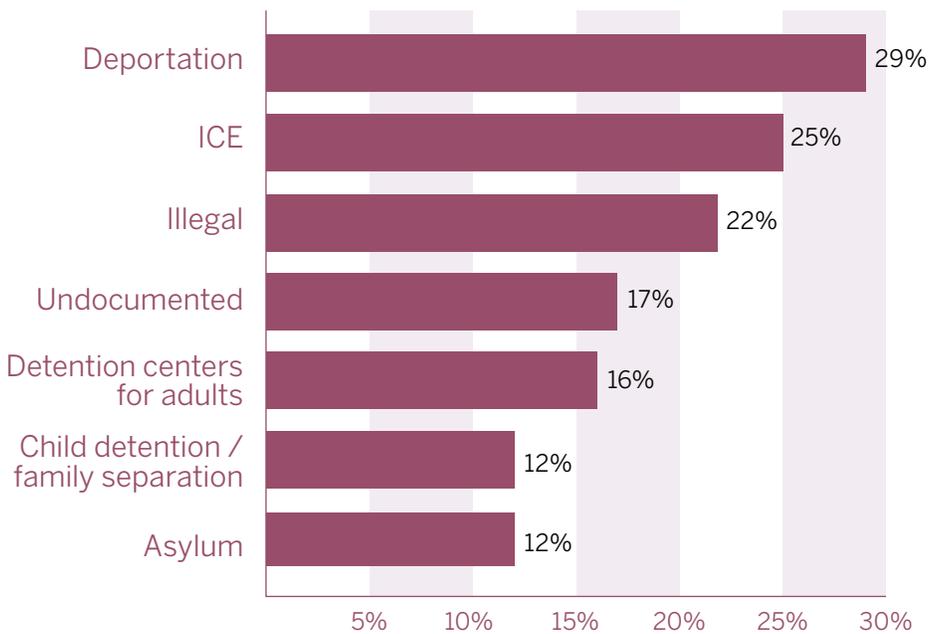
STORYLINE VS. CHARACTER EPISODES

Episodes were selected for inclusion in the sample for one of two reasons:

■ **Storyline episodes:** Selected because of identified immigration content but may also include regular and/or recurring immigrant characters (71% of episodes).

■ **Character episodes:** Selected because of an identified regular and/or recurring immigrant character, such as Raj Koothrappali (Kunal Nayyar) from *The Big Bang Theory* or Gloria Delgado-Pritchett (Sofía Vergara) from *Modern Family*. These are characters who exist as immigrants in the show's universe, but rarely have storylines that center around immigration issues (29% of episodes).

Of the 129 **unique characters** in the sample, 43% came from character episodes, and 57% came from storyline episodes.
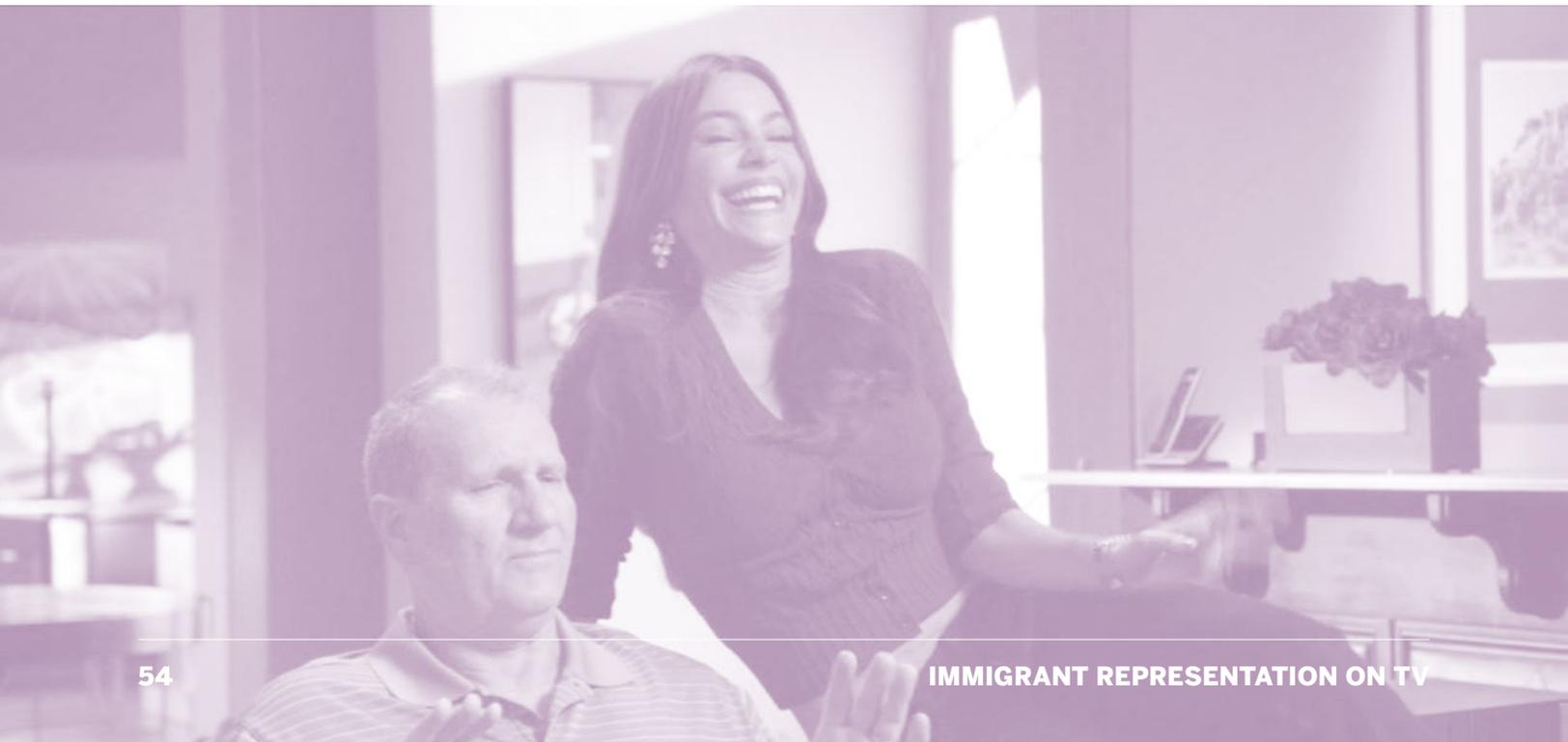
DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

The race of immigrant characters differed significantly between the two episode types. Characters from storyline episodes were more likely to be Latinx (61% in storyline episodes vs. 36% in character episodes) or Middle Eastern (14% vs. 6%). On the other hand, characters from character episodes were more likely to be White (31% in character episodes vs. 14% in storyline episodes) or Asian (18% vs. 7%).

Characters in storyline episodes were more likely to speak a language other than English (63% vs. 49%). Those in character episodes were more likely to have a country of origin explicitly stated (95% vs. 72%). Characters in storyline episodes were more likely to come from Latin American countries (59% vs. 40%), whereas those in character episodes were more likely to come from Europe (21% vs. 13%).

Race of Immigrant Characters by Episode Type
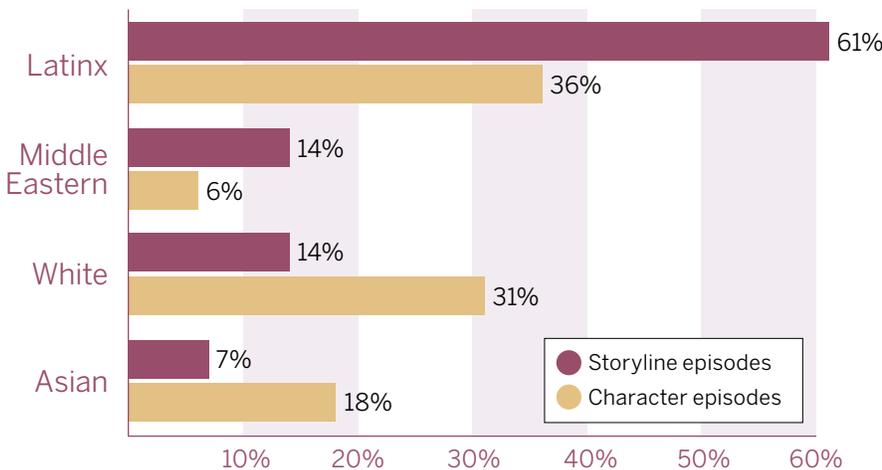
OTHER DIFFERENCES

Of the **184 total immigrant characters**, which includes multiple episodes for some characters, 33% were from character episodes, and 67% were from storyline episodes.

- **STATUS EXPLICITLY STATED** An immigration status was explicitly stated for 62% of the characters in storyline episodes, but only for 37% of those in character episodes.

- **IMMIGRATION STATUS** When an immigration status was stated, characters in character episodes were more likely to be naturalized citizens/permanent residents (45% vs. 27%), and less likely to be an undocumented immigrant (45% vs. 62%).

- **DRUGS** More characters in storyline episodes had a drug-related reference or depiction (96% vs. 80%).

- **CRIME** Characters in storyline episodes were less likely commit a crime in the episode or in the past (7% vs. 16%), and less likely to be otherwise associated with a crime (3% vs. 13%).

- **INCARCERATION** Characters in storyline episodes were more likely to be currently incarcerated (20% vs. 5%).

- **DETENTION AND IMMIGRATION COURT** Characters in storyline episodes were more likely to be held in a detention facility (34% vs. 3%) and be involved in the immigration court system (8% vs. 2%). All of the depictions of being detained by Customs and Border Patrol occured in storyline episodes.

Storyline episodes were more likely than character episodes to mention or portray a variety of immigration issues, including: deportation (38% vs. 7%), detention centers for adults (20% vs. 4%), family separation (16% vs. 4%), ICE (32% vs. 7%), the term "illegal" (29% vs. 4%), and the term "undocumented" (22% vs. 4%).

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Content coders were instructed to identify episode quotes that exemplified the following themes:

- **Immigrant Inclusion vs. Exclusion:** "Inclusion" refers to language describing immigrants as an integral part of American communities. "Exclusion" refers to language treating immigrants as outsiders or invaders.

- **Abundance vs. Scarcity:** "Abundance" refers to language describing immigrants making a contribution to the economy or having much to offer their communities. "Scarcity" means language treating immigrants as competition for scarce resources.

The following episode quotes do not necessarily reflect the tone of the immigration storyline—in most cases, quotes exemplifying exclusion were part of a larger inclusive storyline. These quotes are isolated examples of the above themes.

IMMIGRANT INCLUSION VS. EXCLUSION

Some dialogue incorporated themes of **inclusion** directly:

DESIGNATED SURVIVOR (NETFLIX)

"[An undocumented immigrant] became a part of what makes this country great, and isn't that the story of immigration?"

"What am I supposed to say? That I'm sorry for bringing a contributing member of society into our country filled with natural-born entitled assholes that take their citizenship for granted?"

THE TWILIGHT ZONE (CBS ALL ACCESS)

"We are all immigrants from somewhere, be it another city, another country, or another dimension."

"You don't owe me anything. Of course you can use our address. You're part of our family, Anna."

SUPERSTORE

"The point is, Sayid, you're home now. And on behalf of everyone in America, we welcome you."

NEW AMSTERDAM (NBC)

When Diego reveals he's undocumented to Dr. Bloom, Dr. Bloom tells him, "We treat everyone here."

THE CONNERS (ABC)

After finding out about an ICE raid, Darlene says, "This is ridiculous. These people are just trying to have a better life."

STAR (FOX)

"It's up to U.S. cities to push back on ICE to protect low-priority, nonviolent immigrants from deportation. That's why I'm working on my connections. I believe, with the right push, maybe Atlanta's city council will make Atlanta a sanctuary city."

Other episodes demonstrated the need for inclusivity by highlighting anti-immigrant, **exclusion-based** rhetoric:

RAMY

In an entire flashback episode that focuses on how Muslim life in New Jersey immediately changed after 9/11, a young Ramy is confronted by his teenaged friends:

> **Boy 1:** Are you a terrorist?
>
> **Ramy:** What?
>
> **Boy 2:** He means, like, Is your family terrorists? Like you are Arabic and stuff.
>
> **Boy 3:** We were just wondering because you're from the Middle East and everything, we thought maybe you guys are terrorists.
>
> **Ramy:** You guys, I'm from Egypt, that's not even the Middle East. Egypt's in Africa! If anything, I am Black.

BULL (CBS)

"Why should we welcome someone in, no matter what he has to offer, if he has proven he is unwilling to follow our laws [by residing in the country undocumented]?"

ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK

"She could be a terrorist...I don't understand why we let all these Muslims into the county when we know all they wanna do is destroy our way of life."

ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO (THE CW)

"There's bricks through the windows that say 'go back to your own country.' [...] Ever since the mayor started pushing his anti-immigrant agenda, there've been a lot of convenient witnesses showing up."

VEEP (HBO)

"And how do these diseases get into America? [...] Immigrants."

SHAMELESS (SHOWTIME)

"They came to Chicago to escape violence? I don't see what the big deal is. They got some hot meals, somewhere to sleep. It's kind of like a summer camp for them. It's gotta be better than where they came from."

FAMILY GUY (FOX)

"Crime is way up, and you know why? 'Cause of immigrants. I say, as Americans, we should all take a pledge to kick 'em out."

ABUNDANCE VS. SCARCITY

Other episodes addressed themes of abundance vs. scarcity, primarily through the use of scarcity-based language. Themes of abundance were entirely absent:

WARRIOR (CINEMAX)

"The Chinese have depleted their own resources, and now they're swarming across the ocean to deplete ours."

SHAMELESS

"I shall be saving the South Side from the endless caravan of immigrants […] to bring the jobs back to the working people in the South Side, the people whose parents and grandparents built this city!"

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

"[The housekeeper] came to us and wanted health insurance. And we're like, 'Do you watch the news?' Legal Americans can't get health insurance."

INTO THE DARK

"Our border crisis continues to worsen, with more illegals than ever coming into our country, claiming American jobs, draining precious resources, and committing an increasing number of violent crimes."

DESIGNATED SURVIVOR

"Now you and your illegitimate president want to shove our kids further down the waiting list so some undocumented parasite can jump the line!"

STAR

"Half of this city is in fear that immigrants will take what's theirs. The other half is in fear that we are changing the open door policy that this country was built on."

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to broaden our understanding of the nature of immigration-related content on fictional television and the impact it has on audiences.

For each of three key immigration storylines that aired in the 2018–2019 TV season, those who saw the storyline had more inclusive attitudes and were more likely to take certain immigration actions than show viewers who did not see the storyline. We teased apart the effects of each storyline on specific audiences. For *Madam Secretary* at least, immigration-related content had little impact on religious viewers, but was able to reduce prejudice and support for criminalization policies among rural audiences. We also examined the psychological processes through which these fictional storylines achieve their persuasive power. For example, we found TV storylines that evoke negative emotions or empathy may influence attitudes and behavior through the mechanism of transportation into—or immersion in—the fictional story world.

Our content analysis found many of the same trends from 2018 were still evident, such as ==overrepresentation of Middle Eastern immigrants and underrepresentation of Asian/Pacific Islander immigrants.==

In addition, ==specific at-risk immigrant communities were largely invisible,== including those with disabilities, transgender immigrants, and undocumented Black immigrants.

Regular or recurring immigrant characters were frequently depicted as "model" immigrants: Asian/Pacific Islanders or Europeans with high levels of education. On the other hand, characters featured in immigration-related storylines continue to be heavily overrepresented as being involved in crime or incarcerated, though these numbers have decreased somewhat since 2018.
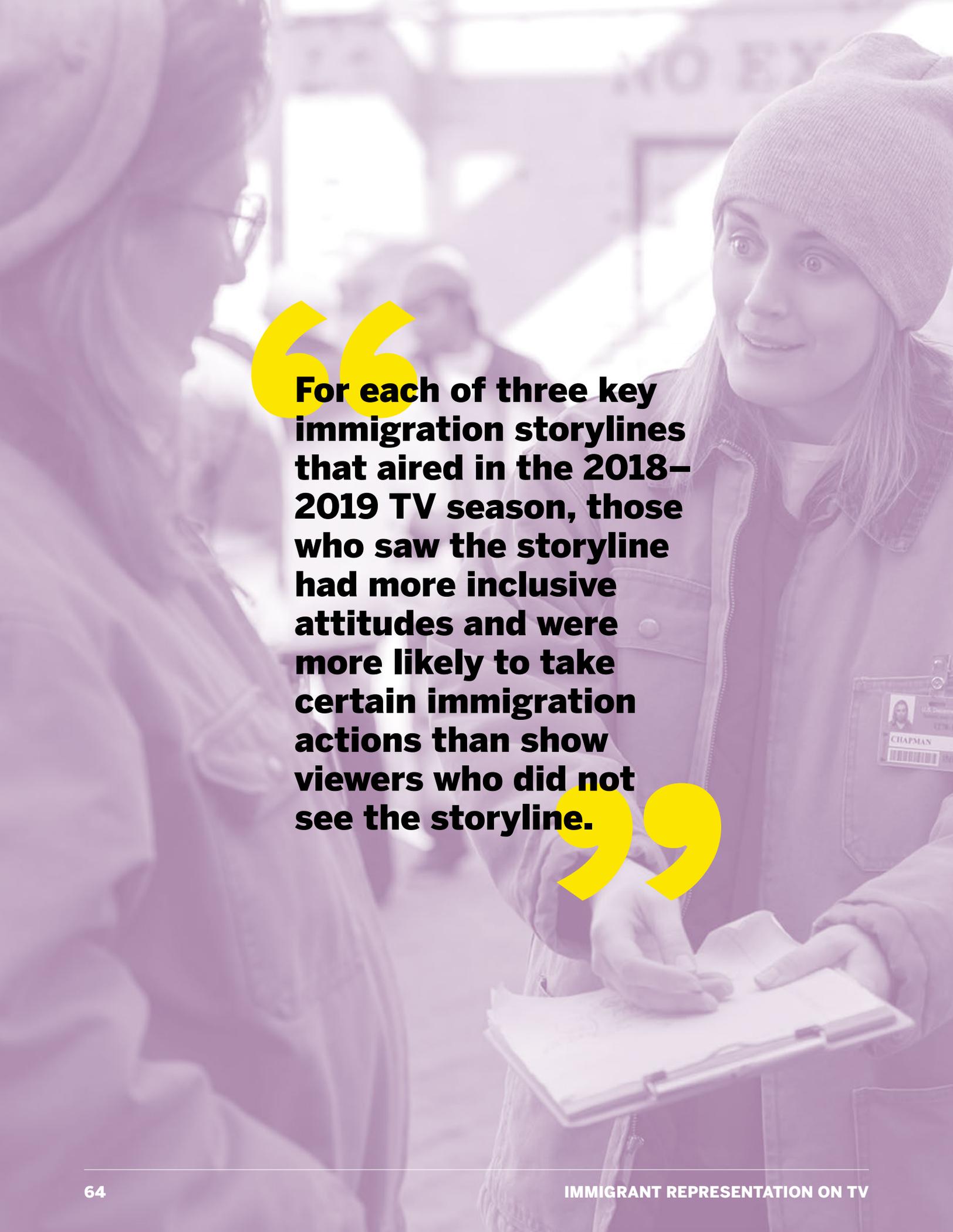
> For each of three key immigration storylines that aired in the 2018–2019 TV season, those who saw the storyline had more inclusive attitudes and were more likely to take certain immigration actions than show viewers who did not see the storyline.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STORYTELLERS

The research described in this report highlights a number of opportunities and strategies for storytellers who seek to change the dominant narrative about immigrants and immigration:

1 **INVOLVE IMMIGRANTS IN THE PROCESS AND TELL UNTOLD STORIES**

Tell more authentic stories by hiring more immigrants as writers and consulting with the immigrant community. In particular, seek out opportunities to tell compelling stories about underrepresented immigrant communities, such as: LGBTQ immigrants, older immigrants, immigrants with disabilities, and undocumented Black immigrants.

2 **TRANSCEND STEREOTYPES**

Integrate more immigration-related stories into content with regular or recurring immigrant characters. Broaden immigration-related content beyond U.S.-Mexico border issues, including stories about the challenges faced by authorized immigrants. Avoid perpetuating myths of immigrants as criminals.

3 **MODEL ABUNDANCE**

Beyond having characters reject scarcity-based language, **consider what a narrative of abundance might look like,** and how dialogue choices can model such narratives.

4 **CONSIDER YOUR AUDIENCE**

Carefully consider the emotions your story may evoke in relation to your audience's motivations. A fear-based narrative can engage a passive audience who watch purely for pleasure, but fear can also backfire. However, empathy-based storylines can motivate a measurable attitude shift in an audience that seeks more than just fun from their entertainment.

5 **DRIVE CHANGE THROUGH EMOTION**

Whereas negative emotions may drive attitude change, **immigration stories that evoke positive emotions (such as happiness) may be more effective at motivating viewers** to take high-investment immigration actions.

> **Our content analysis found many of the same trends from 2018 were still evident, such as overrepresentation of Middle Eastern immigrants and underrepresentation of Asian/Pacific Islander immigrants. Additionally, specific at-risk immigrant communities were largely invisible, including those with disabilities, transgender immigrants, and undocumented Black immigrants.**

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

We still have a lot to learn about what types of immigration-related messages will be most persuasive with different audience segments, under what conditions, and the processes through which they work. Future research could address these gaps through:

1 **LONG-TERM TRACKING**

Long-term tracking of immigration content and immigrant characters to assess the impact of entertainment industry outreach programs. This would enable content creators and program facilitators, like Define American, to target those programs more effectively for maximum impact on attitudes and behavior.

2 **EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE**

Retrospective research tracking the evolution of immigration-related language in TV and film scripts over the last 10 years. For example, comparing the frequency of terms such as "illegal immigrant" and "undocumented worker" over time.

3 **BEYOND SCRIPTED TV**

Further research examining how immigrants and immigration issues are represented in TV news coverage, unscripted entertainment content, and film.

4 **POSITIVE / NEGATIVE PORTRAYALS**

Comparative research assessing the impacts of "positive" and "negative" depictions of immigrants and immigration.

5 **MESSAGE FRAMES**

Experimental research looking at the effects of different message frames related to immigration on audiences' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. For example, how do audiences respond to protagonists modeling abundance-based versus scarcity-based messaging?

By harnessing the power of entertainment, we can engage audience members, empower them to take action on immigration-related issues, and inspire a cultural redefinition of what it means to be American.

Detailed Methodology

SURVEY

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment and data collection for this study were administered online by Qualtrics Panels. Participants were recruited through various market research panels with which Qualtrics maintains partnerships. To qualify, they were required to be U.S. adults who were occasional or more frequent (defined as watching at least one episode in the 2018–2019 season) viewers of at least one of the three shows of interest. They were not required to have seen any of the relevant immigration storylines. We recruited at least 300 participants per show, and to maximize the likelihood of enough participants who did not see each storyline, we imposed quotas per show of approximately 200 participants who had not seen *most* or *all episodes*. The study was reviewed by the University of Southern California's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and deemed exempt.

SEGMENTATION PROCEDURE

Participants were first asked how often they watched each of the three shows in the 2018–2019 season: never, occasionally (at least one episode), regularly (more than half the episodes), most episodes, or all episodes. If participants had never watched any of the three shows' seasons, they were screened out of the survey entirely.

The chart on the following page presents a visual representation of the segmentation procedure. For each show, if a participant watched at least *occasionally*, we asked if they remembered seeing the specific immigration storyline that appeared during the 2018–2019 season. If they watched the show *occasionally* or *regularly*, but did not remember seeing the storyline, they became part of the **unexposed group** ● for that show. That is, occasional or regular viewers of the show who were not exposed to the relevant content.

If participants had watched *most* or *all of the episodes* in the season, but did not remember seeing the immigration storyline, their responses were not included in that show's analysis. This was because we could not trust responses from participants who said they had seen most or all episodes of the season, but who did not remember a very prominent storyline from that season (often across multiple episodes).

For all participants who said they remembered seeing the immigration storyline (regardless of frequency of viewing), we asked two recall questions about the storyline to confirm their exposure.[40] If participants answered at least one of the questions correctly, they became part of the **exposed group** ● for that show. If they answered both questions incorrectly, their responses were not included in that show's analysis. If they said they saw the storyline, but did not accurately remember the events that occured, we could not ensure the legitimacy of their responses.

[40] See Appendix D for the knowledge/ recall questions that we asked for each storyline.

Figure 1. Group Segmentation Procedure

How often did you watch each of the following shows in the 2018–2019 season?: (a) *Madam Secretary*, (b) *Orange Is the New Black*, (c) *Superstore*

Never (for all shows) → **SCREENED OUT**

Occasionally or Regularly (for 1+ show) ↓

Most Episodes or All Episodes (for 1+ show) ↓

Do you remember seeing [storyline] on [show]?

Do you remember seeing [storyline] on [show]? → No → **SCREENED OUT**

Yes ↓ | No ↓

Yes ↓

Two Storyline Recall Questions

UNEXPOSED GROUP

Two Storyline Recall Questions

1–2 correct ↓ | 0 correct ↓

1–2 correct ↓ | 0 correct ↓

EXPOSED GROUP | **SCREENED OUT**

EXPOSED GROUP | **SCREENED OUT**

MEASURES AND ANALYSIS

We asked all participants about their attitudes and knowledge about immigration, any immigration-related actions they had taken, and their entertainment preferences. In addition, only the exposed group for each show was asked about their reactions to the immigration storyline.[41]

Data were downloaded from Qualtrics into SPSS v25 for analysis. We used analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and logistic regression to compare the exposed and unexposed groups controlling for how much they had heard about immigration topics in the news and any demographic differences between the groups. Descriptive findings (means and percentages) are reported only when there was a significant effect of exposure. To analyze the exposed groups' reactions to the storylines, we used bivariate correlations and chi-square analyses. Finally, we used the SPSS PROCESS Macro42 to conduct moderation analysis (whether effects differ between subsets of participants) and mediation analysis (mechanisms by which effects occur).

[41] See Appendices C and D for a list of all questions asked in this survey.

[42] Hayes, Andrew. http://processmacro.org/index.html

CONTENT ANALYSIS

SAMPLE

Episodes were selected for inclusion in the sample either because of identified immigration content (71%) or an identified regular and/or recurring immigrant character (29%).[43] Only scripted narrative television shows that aired between August 2018 and July 2019 were included in the study.

■ **EPISODES WITH IMMIGRATION CONTENT**

Episodes with immigration content were identified through a search of popular media. Initial searches were conducted through reviews of television critic articles in *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety,* and other popular entertainment publications. Reviews also included television summaries listed on IMDb and other content summary platforms.

We also searched through 9,635 television episode scripts from the Norman Lear Center Script Database for the following keywords: *immigrant, immigration, asylum, asylee, refugee, undocumented, deported, deportation,* and *citizen*. Every episode with identifiable immigration content was coded and included in the sample, so a series like *S.W.A.T.* (CBS) with one individual immigration storyline had one episode coded and a series like *Orange Is the New Black* with a season-long immigration storyline had seven episodes coded.

■ EPISODES WITH IMMIGRANT CHARACTERS

Many immigrant characters are featured in TV shows with little or no immigration content. For example, characters like Gloria Pritchett on *Modern Family* and Raj Koothrappali on *The Big Bang Theory* are immigrants but no discernable immigration-related content appeared in our investigation of 2018–2019 episodes. In order to capture these characters, we identified each immigrant character from our 2018 study who appeared in at least one episode this season and then we searched popular media content, episode recaps, and character synopses to identify additional immigrant characters. Series with immigrant characters but no known immigration content each had one randomly-selected episode included in the sample.

Immigrant characters were identified as foreign-born individuals who are physically in the United States with the intent of staying in the country. People visiting the country on vacation or business were not included. Additionally, storylines involving immigration-type activities not involving immigrants in the U.S. (e.g., Americans seeking asylum in Canada on *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Simpsons*, space aliens emigrating to Earth on *Supergirl*, and immigration content on shows that are based in other countries, such as: *Kim's Convenience* [CBC, Netflix], *Chimerica* [Channel 4], *Wild Bill* [ITV], *Years and Years* [BBC One, HBO]*, and *Tijuana* [Netflix]) were not included in the sample.

■ OTHER INCLUSION CRITERIA

Only scripted narrative television shows that aired between August 2018 and July 2019 were included in the study. Immigrant characters and content on reality shows like *The Real World* (Facebook Watch) and *RuPaul's Drag Race* (VH1) and TV documentary series like *The Case Against Adnan Syed* (HBO) were not included in the study. Scripted fictional anthology series where characters change each episode like *The Twilight Zone* and *Into the Dark* were included, but comedy sketch shows where there is no narrative throughline within the episode like *Alternatino* (Comedy Central) were not.

CODING AND ANALYSIS

◼ CODING PROCEDURE

Items coded at the episode level (N = 97) included episode related variables (show title, episode title, airdate, network), the presence of 17 immigration-related issues, and themes of inclusion vs. exclusion and abundance vs. scarcity. Another set of variables were coded for each of the identified immigrant characters (184 total characters across all episodes; 129 unique characters), including: character demographics, country of origin, immigration status, language/accent, disability, crime, and immigration system involvement.[44]

Content coders used a variety of measures to judge the perceived race of each of the 129 unique immigrant characters. In most cases, the character explicitly conveyed their racial identity through dialogue or their country of origin. If a character's race was not explicitly stated, secondary online research of episode recaps and articles about the character were used to identify the perceived race of the character.

For those variables assumed to remain consistent across episodes (e.g., character demographics), one episode was selected for each unique character. If the character appeared in an episode coded for reliability, that episode was selected. If not, the first episode in alphabetical order was selected. If the character appeared in more than one reliability-coded episode, the first in alphabetical order was selected.

◼ CODER TRAINING AND RELIABILITY TESTING

Ten graduate and undergraduate University of Southern California students completed episode coding between August and October 2019. The coding period followed a two-month training timeline that included several rounds of testing and refining the codebook and the training procedures.

In the middle of coder training, a preliminary sample of 17 episodes was double coded to measure reliability. Codebook items that achieved high reliability continued on unchanged in the training process. The training process was further refined to better train coders on codebook items that had a borderline or poor reliability score. An additional round of reliability checks took place after 10% of the episodes were coded in order to ensure coder agreement.

For live coding, 25 episodes from the full sample were randomly selected to be double-coded for inter-rater reliability. For codebook items that exhibited borderline or inadequate reliability, the items were either revisited in each episode to recode or the item was not included in the reported analysis.[45]

[45] See Appendix G for the results of the reliability analysis.

CONTACT US

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