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Family Ties: A Profile of Television Family Configurations, 2004–2013

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ABSTRACT

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This study provides a content analysis of television families portrayed in family-focused programs aired between 2004 and 2013. The analysis focuses on family configuration type, parent type and marital status, and the frequency and gender of children characters, as well as each program's genre, channel type, and target audience. The study uses cultivation theory as the basis of understanding and aims to anticipate television's potential effects and raise important questions that should be addressed in future studies.

Results indicate that the traditional nuclear family configuration held the largest portion of the television family landscape. The study found an increase in single-parent families and a decrease in reconstituted families portrayed on television. Significantly, the content analysis revealed a new family configuration type that had not been identified in previous studies: nuclear with same-sex parents. The study found more single mothers than single fathers and discovered that single mothers had significantly fewer male children, pointing out a potential issue in terms of single-parent gender. The content analysis found more male children than female children; however, four years of data included more females than males, indicating possible movement toward equal representation of both genders.

This study calls out the importance of educating young television audiences regarding the increasing complexity of the modern-day television family. The potential cultivation effect of family-related television programming could affect society's views of the importance of family—an issue that should be explored in future research. Other areas for future studies include trends related to television families with same-sex parents and extended family member dynamics as portrayed on television.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In 1990, Hustan, Wright, Rice, Kerkman, and St. Peters found that American children

"spent more time watching television than in any other activity except sleep" (p. 409).

Television's role in children's upbringing was also emphasized by Signorielli and Bacue (1999),

who stated that children start watching television before they even learn to talk and walk.

Children's exposure to and consumption of television is but one example of how television has

become the world's "most common source" of entertainment and information (Signorielli &

Bacue, 1999, p. 527).

Researchers have measured television's pervasiveness according to the sheer number of

American homes that contain a television. Lemish (2007) stated that the "rapid diffusion" of

television "reached a saturation point" when, in the 1990s, it was found that 98% of homes in the

United States had at least one television (p. 15), a fact that solidified television's status as a

"commonplace household appliance" (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999, p. 527). More recent statistics

(Media Trends Track, 2010) reveal that this figure has increased slightly: 98.9% of homes in

America had at least one television, with an average of 3.3 televisions per home. At least one

television in each home is turned on for an average of over eight hours per day (Media Trends

Track, 2010). The typical American family clearly prioritizes the activity of television-watching

and spends a significant amount of time—probably on a daily basis—in front of a television.

Television's presence in the American home and position as "the most pervasive

medium" (Butsch, 1992) has led researchers and others to consider the role it plays in society.

Signorielli and Bacue (1999) called it the "common storyteller" whose world tells and shows

viewers about various aspects of life and even teaches about judging between good and bad (p.

528). An earlier study by Signorielli (1982) defined television as "the wholesale distributor of

images," "the mainstream of our popular culture," and "our nation's most common, constant, and vivid learning environment" (p. 585). Further, Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) asserted that television is the "tireless and pervasive purveyor of images" whose portrayals and patterns need to be analyzed on an ongoing basis (p. 206). Studies have explored direct connections between television viewing and audiences' perceptions and behavior (e.g. Pearl, Bouthilet, & Lazar, 1982; Steeves & Smith, 1987; Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Johnson & Schiappa, 2010; Dudo, Brossard, Shanahan, Scheufele, Morgan, & Signorielli, 2011; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011; Shrum, Lee, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2011; Shrum & Lee, 2012; Ward & Carlson, 2013).

The fact that television is so prevalent in American society has led to concern, or at least interest, about the effects that the themes, patterns, and outright messages communicated through television have on viewers. The overall effect of television on children has been particularly studied (e.g. Huston, Wright, Rice, Kerkman, & St. Peters, 1990; Moore, 1992; Fingerson, 1999; Morgan, Leggett, & Shanahan, 1999; Ex, Janssens, & Korzilius, 2002; Gentile & Walsh, 2002; Krcmar & Vieira, 2005; Zimmerman & Christakis, 2005; Comstock & Scharrer, 2007; Wilson, 2008; Setliff & Courage, 2011; Martins & Harrison, 2012; McPharlin, 2012). Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010) pointed out that television dominates young Americans' media lives despite the introduction of many other new media forms and technologies over the previous decade. Lemish (2007) stated that television—a major agent of socialization for children—provides role models in the form of television characters and influences children's understanding of their cultures' values and belief systems. Some have argued that "television is a source of vicarious learning competing with parents, teachers, and other socializing agents in providing models for children to emulate" (Moore, 1992, p. 42) and that children and young adults are particularly apt to cultivate perceived realities of the world around them, as defined by television (Morgan et al.,

1999). Some feel that even "a single exposure" to certain values on television can change a child's perception and acceptance of those values (Wilson, 2008, p. 91).

In the past, both Dan Quayle (Wainryb & Turiel, 1993; Morgan et al., 1999) and George Bush (Douglas & Olson, 1996) referred to the alleged decline of the American television family as responsible for the corrosion of the American family in society. However, television cannot be accused of neglecting the theme of family and related values. Morgan et al. (1999) found that 85% of television programs utilized the themes of home and family, while in prime-time television "over 50 percent of the moral messages focused on three moral themes: family, civility, and civilization" (Krijnen, 2005, p. 370). Krijnen (2005) asserted that prime-time shows supported family values "as the cornerstone of society" (p. 370), while Morgan et al. (1999) found that the conventional family was still well represented even as nontraditional family structures gained representation in television. However, the same study also concluded that television was in some way "contributing to the fraying of traditional family values" (p. 58). Contradictions may exist as to the positive or negative effects projected onto television audiences, but regardless of opinion, television programs do have at least a potential impact on children and others.

This potential impact of television's patterns, messages, and themes has led to thorough discussion and exploration of their effects and related issues. Cultivation analysis (which will be discussed in more detail below) has been used in hundreds of studies to ascertain such effects, in subjects ranging from violence to gender portrayals, all with the goal of understanding the connection between television and the perceived reality of viewers. Many cultivation-based studies employ the method of content analysis to describe what those patterns, messages, and themes are or may be, often comparing across programs, between genres, or over time. Although

these studies do not ascertain or explore the actual cultivation effects of the television programs

on audiences, they do bring a greater understanding of the themes that television is

communicating—which may, in fact, cultivate certain ideas or values in audiences when those

audiences are exposed to television over long periods of time. An important step in developing a

thorough knowledge of cultivation is to accurately measure what messages are or may be

disseminated on television.

　　　　To contribute to this knowledge of cultivation, this thesis will describe and measure what

themes and patterns are shown on television with regard to the television family. This study's

basis of understanding is cultivation theory, which posits that television's themes, patterns, and

messages could potentially impact television audiences (although that impact will not be directly

measured in this study). Through content analysis, this study will determine which of the

television shows aired between 2004 and 2013 employed a family (or families) as the primary

story vehicle, and then measure and analyze those families based on a number of variables,

including each family's configuration type. This will provide a comprehensive view of what the

television world portrayed and communicated in terms of different types of families simply

based on the frequency of each configuration and parent type—among other variables—during

this time period. This study was inspired by and used a number of the same measures as Skill

and Robinson's (1994) content analysis of television families from 1950 to 1990, as well as the

same authors' later book chapter that extended their content analysis to 1995 (Robinson & Skill,

2001).

　　　　To provide a foundation for the current study, the previous literature connected with this

topic will be reviewed. This will include sections examining the original study by Skill and

Robinson (1994), the American television family in general, and gender roles connected with

families on television. This will be followed by an examination of the literature on cultivation

media effects in order to provide this study with a solid theoretical foundation. Cultivation theory

will be described and discussed, especially with regard to family-related messages and portrayals

on television.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The Original Study

As mentioned, the current study was inspired by a seminal study on television families by Skill and Robinson (1994), who carried out a content analysis of television families from the 1950s to the 1980s. As stated by Skill and Robinson, their study built upon Moore's (1992) by including all network series featuring a family (as opposed to excluding certain ones based on particular parameters), expanding the classification system for family types, and comparing the statistics to those in the U.S. Census. This comparison to real-world statistics aimed to shed "some long overdue light on the collateral changes in both fictional and real-life families" (Skill & Robinson, 1994, p. 452).

Skill and Robinson's analysis (1994)—which used each television program as the unit of analysis—included 497 television series total, with 71% being situation comedies (sitcoms) and 29% being dramas. The percentage of sitcoms decreased slowly over time. The number of shows that featured families steadily increased each decade, from 85 in the 1950s to 175 in the 1980s. The number of programs that featured families with children increased over time, as well, with the average number of children per family jumping from 1.8 in 1950 to 2.4 in the 1970s. The 1950s saw a total of 120 children characters, the 1960s saw 150, the 1970s saw 255, and the 1980s saw 316, leading the researchers to conclude that "the 1980s was truly the decade of the child-oriented family" (p. 455). In terms of race, Skill and Robinson plainly stated that "families on television are not ethnically or racially diverse" (p. 456), with 97% of families being white in the 1950s and 1960s, 84% being white in the 1970s, and 87% being white in the 1980s. The 1970s featured black families in 14% of family portrayals, a number that dropped by more than half in the 1980s.

One dimension measured in the study was head of household type. Skill and Robinson (1994) found that married couples (including parents) were the predominant leaders of the household in all of the decades analyzed, though the percentage led by married couples decreased in the 1980s. In the 1950s, a total of 24% of television families were led by single parents and 68% were led by married couples, while in the 1980s, 34% were led by single parents and 50% were led by married couples. In terms of the marital status of the heads of household, 69% were married in the 1950s, a figured that dropped to 52% in the 1980s. No separated or divorced household heads appeared on television until the 1970s.

Skill and Robinson also measured another dimension, family configuration, which was measured using eight possible categories: multiple-portrayal, extended, reconstituted, nuclear, single-parent, empty-nest, childless, and guardian. They found that there was "no dominant configuration that characterizes the way families live on television" (p. 458), with only 38% of television families defined as nuclear in the 1950s, a figure that decreased to 25% in the 1960s and then stayed somewhat consistent in the 1970s and 1980s. Three configuration types showed significant changes over the four decades. First, childless married couples comprised 23% of television families in the 1950s but only 7% by the 1980s. Second, the percentage of extended families increased over time, comprising only 18% of television families in the 1950s but 27% or more in subsequent decades. Third, single-parent families, which were "always employed… as a major story vehicle" on television (p. 459), increased steadily from 14% in the 1950s to 22% in the 1980s.

With regard to gender, two measures were considered: the number of male and female single parents and the number of male and female children. During the 40 years covered by the study (Skill & Robinson, 1994), more than 16% of all of the television families were led by a

male single parent, while less than 13% were led by a female single parent. This was not

consistent with the U.S. Census data: for every single father household, there were almost eight

single mother households. Skill and Robinson pointed out that the reason for this may have been

that "images of fathers going it alone might be appealing for dramatic purposes" (p. 457). In

terms of child characters, prior to 1970, a higher percentage of children characters were boys,

with 56% male in the 1950s and 55% male in the 1960s. By the 1970s, the percentage decreased

to 52%, and in the 1980s, there was an equal number of girls and boys.

In the discussion of their results, Skill and Robinson (1994) pointed out a number of

implications. They stated that "television is an unlikely source for information about innovations

in family organization" because television families tended to "lag" behind real-life families when

it came to single motherhood, separation, and divorce (p. 463). In addition, their results indicated

that family structure and configuration on television underwent little change over the four

decades covered in the study. The researchers also stated that their data did not offer support for

the idea that television programs promote certain family configurations, concluding that

"television has been and remains clearly out of sync with the structural characteristics of real-

world families" (p. 463).

The same authors later published a book chapter (Robinson & Skill, 2001) that reported

the same data and extended the content analysis by five years, covering September 1950 to

August 1995. They reported 630 television programs that featured a family (or multiple families)

and again focused on shows that aired on the main broadcast networks. The first half of the

1990s included 133 shows, with the authors predicting that the 1990s would eventually include

more than 265 family-focused shows by the end of the decade. Robinson and Skill (2001)

reported a decrease in childless families during the first five years of the 1990s (only 2.3% of

family-focused programs featured childless families during those five years), calling the decrease

"one of the most dramatic changes in family configuration over the past 45 years" (p. 147). In

addition, the study pointed out that more than 55% of the children portrayed in programs during

the first half of the 1990s were male, similar to the gender proportions they found for the 1950s

and 1960s. By the 1990s, the average number of children per television family had increased

slightly to 2.45.

In terms of ethnicity and race, Robinson and Skill (2001) found an increase in African

American television families, which comprised almost 14% of the total during the first five years

of the 1990s. The 1990s also saw changes in head of household types: 38.3% of the families

were led by married couples or parents, 32.3% by single parents, 5% by relatives, and 2.2% by

guardians. In addition, 14.3% of the families were headed by single mothers while 18% were

headed by single fathers. Only 39.8% of television households were led by married characters,

16.5% of households were led by a divorced or separated parent, and the number of households

headed by widows increased to 3.8%. The study also found a decrease in the number of extended

families (22.6%) and an increase in the number of television families with multiple family

configurations by the first half of the 1990s. Robinson and Skill's (2001) book chapter contained

similar conclusions to their 1994 journal article.

This seminal study of television families was designed to be used as an anchor for future

researchers looking at the same topic. Skill and Robinson (1994) emphasized the historical

aspect of their data, which covered a span of 40 years. This thesis aims to build upon their

study's basic principles and strengthen the foundation Skill and Robinson set for future studies.

That said, it is necessary to point out some limitations regarding their unit of analysis and other

measures—limitations that are partially due to changes in family portrayals on television since

the time of their study. These limitations and resulting changes to the current study will be explained below.

First, the current study needed to reevaluate how to define the unit of analysis. Even in their book chapter (2001), Robinson and Skill pointed out that by the later part of their study (the first half of the 1990s), more and more television programs featured more than one type of family configuration. This trend has continued into the 2000s and 2010s. As television families became more likely to portray multiple configurations, a study such as this one needed to be updated to match this trend. For this reason, the current study changed the unit of analysis from one television program to one television family. Therefore, if a show featured more than one main family, rather than defining it using Skill and Robinson's (1994) "multiple portrayal" category—a measure that does not take into account each family's particular configuration and other characteristics—each family was broken down into a separate unit that was analyzed individually. This way, if a television show featured both a single-parent family and a nuclear family, for example, the data would reflect each separate family's configuration rather than grouping them together into a separate, more generic "multiple portrayal" category.

Because of this change to the unit of analysis, the current study unfortunately lost its ability to directly compare data with Skill and Robinson's (1994), which would have been a great benefit due to their data covering more than 40 years of television. However, the limitations involved with the television program unit of analysis needed to be resolved. The current study's use of the television family unit of analysis paints a more accurate picture of what types of families were portrayed in television programs during the 2004–2013 decade, therefore clarifying the potential cultivation and impressions left on television audiences regarding the television family landscape.

Second, the current study replaced Skill and Robinson's (1994) head of household dimension with a "parents" dimension instead. This dimension included the parent type and parent marital status variables, which measured specifically for the parent characters in each television family—whether or not they were the head of household. Under the guidelines of Skill and Robinson and the head of household dimension, if a television program focused on a single mother who lived in her parents' home, her parents would be classified as the head of household and their type and marital status would be measured. Because of this, however, the single-mother status of the central family would not be accounted for. In order to include all parent characters in the data and accurately measure this aspect of television families, this limitation needed to be resolved. Therefore, the current study measured the type and marital status of the parents rather than the heads of household.

Third, the U.S. Census data comparison aspect of Skill and Robinson's (1994) study was removed in the current study. Skill and Robinson had added the census component when building upon Moore (1992), who did not compare his data with the census or any other real-world statistics. The use of census data may send the message that television should or is supposed to reflect reality and that program creators should map their television families to match that reality. Instead, the data found in the current study stands alone and simply describes what was portrayed on television from 2004 to 2013. This allows others to interpret those representations—including any patterns, themes, messages, or "collected consciousness" (Gerbner, 1998, p. 339) those portrayals may support—and to decide for themselves whether or not those representations reflect reality with regard to the American family. Comparing the television family data to real-world data, such as that of the U.S. Census, should be considered in a future study.

Fourth, just as Skill and Robinson (1994) expanded Moore's (1992) classification system for family types, the current study further expanded Skill and Robinson's classification system. This was done in order to reflect changes in television families since Skill and Robinson's study, mainly by adding clarification between heterosexual and homosexual couples and parents in television families. In addition, extended family members were coded as a sub-variable rather than as a separate family configuration type. (These changes to the family configuration categories are explained further in the Method section under the "Variables of Interest" subtitle.)

Fifth, the current study expanded its view to include more than the main broadcast networks that were examined by Skill and Robinson (1994). By adding both basic cable/satellite networks (e.g. Disney Channel and ABC Family) and premium cable/satellite networks (e.g. HBO and Showtime), the current study covered a greater variety of channels and channel types—and, therefore, a greater variety of television programs and a more complete view of all television families. This change also reflects the growth in popularity of cable and satellite television networks since the decades covered in Skill and Robinson's study.

Two other changes are important to note. First, in defining the genre of each television program in their study, Skill and Robinson included only sitcoms and dramas. The current study expanded the genre options to also include comedy/dramas because there were a number of family-focused television shows that fell within this genre classification. Second, for the sake of simplicity, the variable of ethnicity/race was removed in the current study. Ethnicity and race were not the focus of this study and were excluded because the study is focused on family structures instead. Ethnicity and race will be left for further examination in a future study.

The American Television Family

A number of additional studies reveal how the portrayal of families on television has changed and how it is portrayed at present. Statements regarding the television family's position as a socializing agent will first be shared, followed by a review of previous studies of family portrayals on television.

Several researchers have pointed out the significance of the television family in terms of general media content studies as well as potential media effects. Signorielli (1982) stated that marriage and family have been identified as consistent, important themes since the beginnings of television content research. As an example, she cited Katzman (1972), who found that in television serials, 32.8% of conversations included the home and love as dominant themes.

Because family is a significant theme in television content, family portrayals on television are considered to be socializing agents that implicitly teach what is and is not appropriate in family life and that influence how audiences consider family and marriage (Douglas & Olson, 1996). Researchers have argued that the television family exercises significant influence on real-life families (Singer & Singer, 1984) and that television family depictions are often perceived as accurate when compared to real life (Douglas, 2003; Stiffler, Webb, & Duvall, 2013). Robinson and Skill (2001) asserted that television families were "one of our most enduring benchmarks" for assessing the status of real-world American families, as well as a "primary source for what is good or bad about the family institution" (p. 139). Pehlke, Hennon, Radina, and Kuvalanka (2009) stated that sitcoms, in particular, may influence how individuals understand family roles and "may serve as points of reference for viewers working to construct their own family lives" (p. 118). One article asserted that television's ability to shape a viewer's conception of family is "not trivial" (Signorielli & Morgan, 2001, p. 333), while

another pointed out that television families are a source of learning for children, in particular,

regarding family roles, rules, and relationships, potentially leading them to compare their own

families to those shown on the television screen and to set expectations for how their own

families should be (Callister, Robinson, & Clark, 2007). Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli

(1980b) stated,

> As the mass media have come to absorb many socializing functions of the family, they
>
> have offered us images of the family which may act as touchstones by which we gauge
>
> our own experiences. The seductively realistic portrayals of family life in the media may
>
> be the basis for our most common and pervasive conceptions and beliefs about what is
>
> natural and what is right (pp. 3–4).

A more specific example of this concept (Buerkel-Rothfuss, Greenberg, Atkin, and Neuendorf,

1982) found that young, heavy viewers of television were more likely than others to feel that

families in real life showed support and comfort.

Some feel that this influence of the television family is negative. Skill and Robinson

(1994) referred to these individuals, stating that "on more than one occasion, fictional television

has been cited as a major contributory influence to the apparent destruction of the nuclear

family" (p. 449). As quoted in Douglas and Olson (1995), George Bush encouraged American

families to emulate the Waltons more so than the Simpsons—"reflecting a popular belief that the

state of the family in America has declined and that such a decline is, in some way, tied to decay

in the American television family" (p. 236).

One report released in 1980 stated that family-related images in media tended to be

traditional, stereotypical, conventional, and narrow in scope (Gerbner et al., 1980b). This report

contrasts with a more recent article (Skill & Robinson, 1994) pointing out that television is often

blamed for promoting non-conventional families (such as those led by a single parent) and

ridiculing conventional nuclear families. The same article stated that this implied that the

television industry endorses the desirability and viability of non-conventional family structures

by emphasizing the positive side of such arrangements but ignoring the negative side, which may

include social isolation or economic difficulties.

The value of research that considers these ideas and examines characteristics of and

changes in television family portrayals is highlighted by Skill and Robinson's (1994) statement:

"If televised portrayals of family are looked upon as social learning opportunities, information

regarding the quality and context of family interaction are of central concern and importance"

(pp. 463–464). As a socializing agent, the television family's potential influence on society

should be thoroughly considered and analyzed. This thesis aims to provide a complete view of

certain aspects of television family portrayals from 2004 to 2013 in order to contribute to this

gathering and analysis of information.

Television family portrayals in general.

To more thoroughly consider what has been studied and discovered with regard to

television family research, previous studies on this topic will be reviewed. Some researchers

analyzed television programs airing during one particular season or year, while others examined

programs over a period of time to show changes over years and even decades. These articles will

be reviewed in chronological order by publication date.

Thomas and Callahan (1982) explored how social class related to happiness in families in

television programs during the late 1970s and early 1980s. They found an inverse relationship

between class and happiness, with families of lower socioeconomic status displaying more

harmony, stronger relationships, more pleasant personalities, better problem-solving abilities,

and higher levels of goodwill among family members compared with those of higher

socioeconomic status. The researchers concluded, "For the families portrayed on television,

money clearly does not buy happiness and..., in fact, relative poverty does" (p. 186).

Akins (1986) investigated interpersonal interactions and other themes as portrayed in

families on television during the 1960s and in 1980. The researcher found that the child

characters in the 1980 programs were more likely than adult characters to initiate interaction and

conflict and to seek information. Television family members in 1980 were more supportive of

and loving toward each other compared with those in the 1960s, although they also tended to

oppose and ignore each other more often. Akins (1986) also found that family structures changed

between the two time periods, with the 1980 programs featuring more families formed through

remarriage and adoption as well as more racial minorities and families of mixed races. The

researcher stated that "traditional family roles have been replaced on television by more diverse

family structures" (p. 62) and that television "seems to reflect the changing societal acceptance

of minority groups in its programs" (p. 63).

In 1987, Skill, Robinson, and Wallace analyzed television family configurations on

prime-time network television from 1979 to 1985. They found that conservative to moderate

models of family life were reinforced in these programs, with more than 65% of the television

families having a conventional, nuclear-oriented configuration. Non-conventional family types

on television were very diverse and tended to be portrayed in comedies—a genre that the authors

stated was less threatening and more comfortable for family portrayals that were less standard

and conservative.

Skill and Wallace (1990) focused on prime-time television families' behaviors such as

conformity, assertive power, and rejection in programs that aired during 1987. These interactive

behaviors were analyzed on two levels: by family type and by family role. The researchers found that intact families participated in the most acts of conformity and the fewest acts of assertive power and rejection, and tended to use power in a compassionate way. Mixed families—programs that included both intact and non-intact families—were most likely to use power in an abusive manner.

Moore (1992) similarly examined family structures and configurations as portrayed on popular television series during a longer period of time, from 1947 to 1990, covering 115 series total. He found that 63% of all of the series featured a conventional, traditional family configuration, a figure that decreased steadily over time: 79% were conventional in the 1950s, while only 58% were conventional in the 1980s. Moore (1992) also found that single-parent families portrayed on television were more likely to be headed by males and that most of those families were in a single-parent situation as a result of the death of a spouse.

In 1995, Douglas and Olson investigated family portrayals in sitcoms airing from 1954 to 1992, aiming to assess the television family's evolution over time. They focused on prominent television families in top-rated shows, showing specific episodes to study participants who shared their views regarding different family dynamic aspects, including stability, satisfaction, and distribution of power. The researchers found that spousal relationship satisfaction, as well as positive and negative emotional expression within television marriages, increased over time, while parent-child relationships became less cohesive over time. Douglas and Olson's (1995) analysis also revealed four distinct "generations" of television families (1950–1956, 1957–1970, 1971–1983, and 1984–1990) based on significant shifts with regard to husband-wife and parent-child relationship portrayals.

Douglas and Olson (1996) later studied parent-child and sibling-sibling relationships in television families in programs airing from 1950 to 1994. They found that conflict in sibling relationships was significantly greater than that of parent-child relationships and that "the experience of television children appears to have deteriorated across time" (p. 92). Their study revealed that the more recent programs featured less-cohesive families whose environments had more conflict and were less stable and supportive.

Douglas (1996) examined eight popular domestic comedies airing from 1984 to 1994, again asking participants to evaluate the television families in these programs based on particular episodes that were shown to them. Overall, he found that relationships between spouses and between parents and children seemed to be supportive and friendly. However, sibling relationships caused a "relatively hostile relational environment," though their parents tended to offer a "compensatory effect" (p. 675).

In 1997, Olson and Douglas focused on spousal relationships in 10 popular sitcoms airing from 1954 to 1993. Study participants completed in-depth questionnaires assessing their perceptions of the television families portrayed in the programs, especially with regard to satisfaction and interaction. The researchers found that the level of gender stereotyping fluctuated during the 40-year period. They stated that more recent programs included more negative family life depictions, including less stability and satisfaction and more dominance between spouses.

Portrayals of interpersonal relationships.

In general, research focused on gender portrayals on television has concluded that women remain at least somewhat marginalized in importance and frequency. (See below for a more complete literature review concerning media portrayals of gender.) When women are cast as

parents, however, this may not be the case. Studies show that women have actually made strides

in the television family. The last decades of the 20th century saw a rise in the status of women in

the home, at least as portrayed on television. Reep and Dambrot (1994) noted that mothers

appeared more independent on sitcoms, working outside the home and making decisions without

necessarily speaking to their husbands first, while fathers were more involved domestically than

they had been in earlier television shows. Reimers (2003) found, in an examination of the father-

mother roles from the 1960s to the 2000s, that fathers became more likely to bow to their wives'

wishes and that mothers had become more often the problem-solvers in the home. Ex, Janssens,

and Korzilius (2002) cited research from Cantor (1990) and Douglas and Olson (1996) that

found that "women are more independent, and that mothers are more often seen outside the

home. Mothers also have professions, and fathers are more caring and domesticated" (p. 957).

Research has found that as mothers have gained authority in the family, respect for

fathers has decreased. Scharrer (2001) concluded that this corrosion of respect and reverence for

fatherhood found its source in the fact that women have infiltrated the workplace in real-life

society, providing for themselves and for their families. While mothers used to be portrayed as

much more feminine and submissive to their husbands, fathers more recently appeared less wise

and dignified, and with less authority, than they did during the era of Ward Cleaver and his

television counterparts (Callister et al., 2007).

Scharrer's study (2001) likewise focused on the portrayal of mother/father power levels

through the use of comedy in television. He noted that mothers in sitcoms are "enjoying stronger

and more powerful positions in humorous interactions with sitcom fathers in television

programming" (p. 27). The father was the butt of more jokes per episode than was the mother in

sitcoms, while the mother made jokes "at the expense of the father much more" (p. 35), thus also

contributing to the lessened importance of the father role in modern television. While the importance of women outside the home has progressed more slowly, women inside the home enjoy a new sense of independence and authority, undermining the traditional power structure of not-as-recent television families.

As an extension of this shift of power in gender relationships in modern television, the relationships between parents and children have also changed over the years. During the 1980s, television parents were portrayed as "superparents—rational, loving, wise, nurturing, and active" (Reep & Dambrot, 1994, p. 13). The surly examples of the Bunkers and Sanfords were exceptions to this rule in a decade in which the family structure was "reminiscent of the 1950s television family in which parents construct and maintain an affectively positive home environment and function to moderate relatively mild sibling conflict" (Douglas & Olson, 1996, p. 75).

However, the more modern family has become "less able to provide affection and companionship and has lost authority over family members… [and is thus] less able to rear children effectively" (Douglas & Olson, 1996, p. 79). This may be influenced by the role of children in more modern television shows. Signorielli (1987) found that children and adolescents were marginalized on television and that they occupied mainly minor roles that complemented the adult character plotlines, while Douglas and Olson (1996) found that "the real American family has become more child-centered" (p. 92). Thus, the role of children and adolescents has increased in television.

This increased role, however, comes at a price, particularly to the internal structure of the family and its cohesiveness among members. Comstock and Strzyzewski (1990) found that sitcoms presented the most instances of conflict on prime-time television, and Douglas and

Olson (1996) found that "whereas spousal relationships in general were seen to be highly

satisfying… relationships involving siblings are generally unfriendly" (p. 93) and that "parent-

child relationships seem to have become more hostile and less supportive" (p. 94). Douglas

(1996) found that children projected a negative influence where "socialization in television

families" was concerned both against parents and siblings, and characterized the modern

American television family as having "high levels of conflict, low supportiveness, low relational

satisfaction and stability, and low ability to socialize children effectively" (p. 694).

Douglas (1996) also cited the modern television family's tendency to be evasive within

its membership, more so than previous television families. These findings agree with those of

Douglas and Olson (1996), who concluded that "the general relational environment" in television

families "was rated more conflictual and less cohesive—that is, less supportive, less satisfying,

and less stable—in modern families than it was in earlier television families" (p. 92), which were

more likely to be a "comparatively conflict-free, supportive, and stable version of the American

family" (p. 94).

Though modern television families may appear fraught with discord, recent research

shows that there may still be plenty of family affection to go around. Callister and Robinson

(2010), who studied children's programming during the 2006–2007 season, found that a display

of affection occurred 4.4 times per episode analyzed. The study also found that more than half of

the instances of nonverbal affection extended among family members was intended to "nurture,

love, reassure, offer protection, and communicate psychological closeness and togetherness" (p.

166). Likewise, parent-child nonverbal affection was more likely to be extended than spouse-

spouse nonverbal affection, an improvement from the results submitted by Douglas and Olson

(1996).

Family-related issues.

Aside from matters of familial closeness and loyalty, the subject of basic societal morals, first learned in the family, and how they are portrayed (or not) on television, also begs consideration. As cited earlier, public figures such as George Bush and Dan Quayle have cited the decline of the traditional family structure and support system, both in society and television, as responsible for the decline in moral responsibility in American culture (Douglas & Olson, 1996; Wainryb & Turiel, 1993). With regard to television and cultivation analysis, perhaps this is an area of concern.

Studies have shown that people's moral reasoning, particularly that of children, is influenced by their exposure to television (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Krcmar & Vieira, 2005). Comstock and Strzyzewski (1990) attributed this to the fact that humans fill in social/moral areas wherein they lack direct experience with the experience they perceive vicariously, notably on television. Krcmar and Vieria (2005) stated that children include in their "moral schemas" the "differing perspectives of people in their immediate social environment" (p. 268). Television programs can be included as a part of that immediate social environment.

What messages does television communicate about morality, work ethic, and profanity? Krijnen (2005) found that moral messages varied according to the genre of television program, but Fingerson (1999) asserted that "family sitcoms do indeed send moral messages" (p. 414) and that children and adolescents indeed cultivate those messages. Previous research explains various areas of moral judgment.

First, the status of marriage and fidelity to spouse has taken on a less traditional, even less favorable portrayal on television during the last few decades. Signorielli (1991) stated that prime-time television gave marriage important status but also dealt heavily in extramarital

affairs, divorce, and marriage problems. Her study found that high school seniors who watched

prime-time television viewed marriage as a desirable institution but differed on their opinion

about whether marriage was hard, whether living with someone before marriage was advisable,

and whether monogamy was too restrictive. Signorielli concluded in an earlier study (1982) that

prime-time television portrayed marriage in an ambiguous fashion: in some ways it is convenient

and happy, but in other ways it is confining.

Outside of the marriage-satisfaction question, television also portrays some pronounced

results on adolescents' views of sex before marriage. A study by Callister, Stern, and Coyne

(2011) found that adolescents who watched "more sexually explicit programs" tended to more

freely "engage in intercourse and other sexual activities" (p. 457). Likewise, Rivadeneyra and

Lebo (2008) surmised that television "may give adolescents the idea that sexual activity is

common, casual, and trouble-free, with specific gender roles to fulfill—all of which are potential

factors in sexual risk" (p. 293). In the same study, the researchers found that heavy television

viewers tended to have more liberal views concerning sex outside of marriage and traditional

dating behavior.

Second, the portrayal of work ethic is affected by television's definition of success,

which is termed by the economic level at which characters live and the type and amount of work

they do. Signorielli & Morgan (2001) found that, on television, families with lower

socioeconomic status tended to be less functional than were middle-class or upper-class families.

Signorielli (1993) found that prime-time television on average showed an overrepresentation of

"prestigious" jobs while showing much less of the actual job market that exists in American

society. Likewise, the important jobs were not portrayed as involving very much hard work to

accomplish. Signorielli's same study found that adolescents exposed to these types of shows

were more likely to aspire to prestigious jobs while not desiring the hard work or busy schedules

that come with them. Signorielli & Lears (1992) also found that television has an impact on

children's attitudes concerning chores that should be labeled "girl" or "boy" chores, thus

potentially creating a selectivity about household work.

Third, profanity use has seen a definite rise on prime time. Coyne, Stockdale, Nelson, and

Fraser (2011) found that "exposure to profanity in video games and television was associated

with more normative attitudes concerning profanity and increased profanity use among

adolescents" (Coyne, Callister, Stockdale, Nelson, & Wells, 2012, p. 362). Kaye and Sapolsky

(2004) found that during the 1980s, sexual profanity and double entendres became more

acceptable on sitcoms, and the level to which offensive language was prevalent on television

offended people to the extent that in 1997 the television ratings system was established. Kaye

and Sapolsky (2004) also found that from 1997 to 2001, ABC, CBS, and Fox rose in profanity

use, while NBC declined. Kaye (2009) found that mild profanity made up half of the profanity

present in prime time and that "each of the first two hours of prime-time contains more profanity

than the later 10–11 p.m. hour" (p. 33).

In addition to television themes regarding the family in general, this study also considers

gender-related issues, including a content analysis of the gender of single parents as well as

children in television families. Therefore, the literature on gender portrayals on television will

also be discussed.

Gender Portrayals

Within the realm of academic research on television portrayals, the topic of gender is

often addressed. Wood (2013) stated that the media has played a role in either maintaining or

challenging various gender stereotypes, pointing out that communication and media are "the

heart of social life and social change" (p. 10). Lemish (2007) also called out the media's role in society's understanding of gender differences and which behaviors and characteristics are seen as masculine or feminine, stating that television's role in this social "construction of gender schemas is particularly important" (p. 103). Signorielli and Bacue (1999) asserted that television is an agent of socialization that teaches viewers the meaning of being a man or woman. They also declared that "until women are shown frequently and in numerous roles representing the full gamut of their capabilities and experiences, the effects of television on conceptions of gender roles will remain deleterious to true social equality of the genders" (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999, p. 543).

Researchers have identified sitcoms, in particular, as having a unique influence on viewers' understanding about gender (Pehlke et al., 2009), and others have pointed out that, though fictional, television families and their examples of family interactions provide a historical record of changes in society's attitudes regarding gender roles (Olson and Douglas, 1997). Signorielli (1982) stated, "While television is only one of many factors which may influence people,… it may well be the single most common and pervasive source of certain sex-related conceptions and actions for large segments of the population" (p. 585).

As stated previously, though Gerbner (1981; 1998) originally focused on television violence, researchers have since expanded cultivation theory to include gender roles among other topics such as marital status, family, and minority issues (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). A significant number of articles have used cultivation and other theories as their foundation to research television's portrayals of gender and the impact of those portrayals on viewers' understanding of gender. Whether the articles focused on a particular television genre, programs airing during the popular prime-time slots, or particular types of television characters, all aimed

to provide a deeper understanding of what gender-related messages were being portrayed before television viewers.

Gender roles on television.

The concept of gender roles on television over the last several decades has changed based on depictions of the roles of men and women and how often those roles appear. Studies showed that gender roles have progressed from the stilted, black-and-white parameters exhibited in older shows like "Leave it to Beaver," but perhaps not as much as one would think when considering a lengthy half-century time lapse, particularly with regard to the roles of women. The following studies focusing on gender portrayals on television will be examined chronologically.

First, McNeil (1975) examined the gender, employment, family-related status, focus of action, and household tasks of television characters in 1973. Women were "severely underrepresented in series programs": Male characters outnumbered females by more than two to one (pp. 261–262). The family-related status of female characters was much more apparent than that of male characters. For example, 53% of males did not have a clear parental status, compared with only 19% of females. McNeil (1975) stated,

> Whether a man is married or single, childless or the father of ten, is often irrelevant to his dramatic function. A woman's marital and parental status, on the other hand, is usually deemed worthy of note. This suggests a focus on women's traditional family role… The widespread re-examination of marital roles, an integral part of the feminist movement, has not penetrated the world of the television series (p. 263).

The researcher did not find any feminist characters in the study, concluding that the television programs focused on traditional images and lacked alternative views. McNeil (1975) also noted

that female workers lacked prestige and power and often performed jobs as subordinates to males.

In 1982, Signorielli explored television characters that were single, married, and formerly married, as portrayed during prime-time network dramas from 1975 to 1979. She stated that television's world was fairly traditional and stereotyped: Female characters were generally married and shown in family- and home-related settings, contributing to the idea that a woman's domain focuses on marriage, family, home, and romance. Women struggled to balance and succeed at both family and career while men did not. Females were portrayed as more sociable, fair, warm, and attractive, and males were shown to be more rational, smart, and strong. In addition, Signorielli (1982) found that male characters outnumbered female characters by a three-to-one ratio.

Steeves and Smith (1987) found that the top prime-time programs during the 1985–1986 season showed "an imbalance in gender portrayals in favor of men" (p. 56). They found that scenes taking place in domestic settings were few and far between, and that in most professional situations, women were subordinate to men. Women either attained high positions in the workplace through marriage or held lower positions with less control and power than men. The authors called these gender representations "inaccurate and disturbing," calling out the need for more empirical work on this subject (p. 58).

Another article (Vande Berg & Streckfuss, 1992) looked at prime-time television programs during the 1986–1987 season, finding that men outnumbered women by a ratio of two-to-one. They confirmed that in the previous 40 years of prime-time television, little had changed in the portrayal of female characters' occupations: Working women were limited in their depictions in work-related settings and typically shown as having less status and power than

working men. Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) stated, "Television's working women continue to be portrayed significantly less often than working men as decision-makers, as assertive corporate politicians, and as socially and economically productive working persons" (p. 205).

Butsch (1992) looked at television families in sitcoms over the course of four decades, with a particular focus on class and gender. He found that middle-class television families displayed traditional gender roles, while television's few working-class families inverted them, "with the men failing as men and the wives filling the vacuum" (p. 387). In working-class families, the humor was built around the man's immaturity, ineptitude, or stupidity (traits indicating less masculinity), while his wife and children were typically more rational, responsible, and intelligent, leading him to conclude that in these shows, "Mother, not father, typically knows best" (p. 391). In contrast with working-class fathers, Butsch's study found that middle-class fathers were competent, successful, and rarely acted like buffoons, with both fathers and mothers portrayed as sensible, mature, and working together well as a team.

Olson and Douglas (1997) studied the representation of gender roles in television families from 1950 to 1996, focusing on gender equality between spouses and children. Their research included an experiment in which participants were asked to share their perceptions of the television families shown to them. The highest levels of perceived stability and satisfaction in television families were found in the 1950s and the mid-1980s. Families portrayed in programs in the 1990s displayed less satisfaction and stability along with more dominance (i.e. instances when a character tried to control another character, win favor, gain approval, or have the upper hand). The 1950s programs showed the lowest levels of similarity and equality between husbands and wives, while spouses in more contemporary programs (in the 1990s) were perceived as more equal and similar.

A later study (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999) analyzed respect and recognition among leading and supporting characters in prime-time network dramas from 1967 to 1998. *Recognition* was measured through representation (the number of male and female characters), while *respect* referred to the depth and type of roles played by women, measured by looking at program genre and each character's age and occupation. To address *recognition*, the researchers reported basic gender representation: 28% of the characters were female in the 1960s and 1970s, increasing to 34% in the 1980s and 39% in the 1990s. The increase in each decade was significant and showed greater representation of women; however, women were still underrepresented with regard to the U.S. population, leading Signorielli and Bacue (1999) to state that "the television world is over-populated by men" (p. 540). In contrast, the degree and amount of *respect* given to women did improve starting in the 1980s and, by the 1990s, women's occupations were less gender-stereotyped than they had been previously. There were, however, significantly more male occupations than female and neutral occupations: "Television is largely a man's world" (p. 542). The researchers found that the female persona on television was strongest in sitcoms, with a weaker presence in drama- and action-genre shows. With regard to conflict, the stereotype of the hen-pecking female still seems to thrive. Signorielli and Bacue (1999) concluded, "Gender images and representation during prime time have been remarkably stable during the past 30 years" (p. 540).

Callister et al. (2007) performed a content analysis of television families as portrayed on children's programming during the 2005–2006 season. They found that of the families led by single parents, 83% were led by mothers. Female caregivers tended to be mature and competent, while male caregivers were more often shown as immature and displaying buffoon-like behavior. The researchers also considered parenting styles, finding that preferred styles were similar

among fathers and mothers, though mothers leaned toward authoritarian parenting and fathers leaned toward permissive parenting. Callister et al. (2007) analyzed the gender of children in these television families, as well. Of the 59 families they identified who had children, 73% had at least one daughter and 81% had at least one son. Overall, the number of male children was only slightly larger than the number of female children. The researchers stated that this fact communicates to young children the idea that girls are equally represented and involved, not marginalized.

Overview of gender roles, late 20th century.

To summarize, studies undertaken during the last decade of the 20th century (Elasmar, Hasegawa & Brain, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Signorielli, 1990; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999) found that women tended to be portrayed more often on television as compared to the 1960s, 1970s, and even 1980s, with as much as 40% of the characters on prime time being females in 2001, a rise from 18% in the 1970s (see in particular Elasmar et al., 1999; Glascock, 2001). However, studies have also shown that women appeared more often in minor roles; if they played major roles, those roles were comically based. Women likewise tended to be younger and dress more provocatively than men, supporting Harrison's (2008) statement that the ideal female in media is young and very thin. Female characters were also portrayed as more affectionate but also more verbally aggressive than the male characters.

Likewise, the studies showed that, largely, women were often employed in stereotypical female jobs (secretarial, nursing, entertainment-oriented) and unlikely to have a career if they were married. If they did have a career, the prime-time shows focused more on the women's family roles than on their career lives, projecting that the characters could not be successful career women and homemakers at the same time (Signorielli, 1990). Independent women seemed

just as shackled to the male-dominant projection of American society as the homemakers, gravitating toward men in television shows and spending significant effort and time trying to attract them. Further, youth-focused media tends to show girls and women taking part in grooming, shopping, and being emotional, in addition to domestic activities (Walsh & Ward, 2008).

Signorielli & Bacue (1999) found that employed women in prime time held more gender-neutral jobs at the turn of the century, which showed progress from Signorielli's 1990 study. However, Signorielli's 2009 study found that, to date, men held prestigious jobs more frequently on television than did women, thus putting into question the actual ground covered by prime-time television in the progression of gender roles. Signorielli's conclusion (1989) that prime-time television simply created an ambivalent gender role for women because often the roles are cast ambiguously still holds true, it seems: Women have made progress, but that progress is still stunted. On the other hand, the men portrayed on prime-time television tend to be aggressive, serious, independent, competent, powerful, and confident (Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Walsh & Ward, 2008). These traditional masculine stereotypes tend to limit the definition of what a man should be like, similar to how the female stereotypes mentioned above may limit the definition of a woman. However, as pointed out by Wood (2013), there have been some media portrayals that do offer a more complex definition of what it means to be a man.

Although this thesis' gender component will not thoroughly examine all of the gender-related issues described above, the study will provide a comprehensive look at how often each gender appeared in television families with regard to single parents and children. The sheer frequency of gender over the ten years that will be studied (2004–2013) will shed light on these

issues by plainly describing the numbers of male and female single parents and children in television families and how those numbers changed over time.

Now that the literature regarding the television family and gender roles has been reviewed, the theoretical foundation will be explained and examined.

Cultivation Theory

Television has been referred to as "the central cultural arm of American society" in modern times (Hughes, 1980, p. 299). Gerbner's 1998 study asserted that the television was on at least seven hours every day in a typical household, and that television influenced people's worldviews even if they were not conscious of the change in outlook. He called television "a significant source of general values, ideologies, and perspectives as well as specific assumptions, beliefs, and images" (Gerbner, 1998, p. 185).

Because people are so involved with television, a group of scholars, among them Gerbner, formulated theories to study and measure the effect of television on viewers' conception of reality (termed *perceived reality*). Their Cultural Indicators project consisted of three branches, one of which was called *cultivation analysis*, the study of "relationships between institutional processes, message systems, and the public assumptions, images, and policies that they cultivate (Gerbner, 1970, p. 71)" (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010, p. 338).

Cultivation analysis' premise is that over time, immersing oneself "in a symbolic environment in which certain types of institutions with certain types of objectives create types of messages, tends to cultivate (support, sustain, and nourish) certain types of collected consciousness" (Gerbner, 1998, p. 339). Television's influences are complex, subtle, and intermingled with other influences (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2009). The theory draws upon the belief that audiences do not consciously think to "reject television representations as

entirely unreal" (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997, p. 279). In addition, it posits that people watch

television not solely for information or for entertainment, but to find support for their own

systems of belief (Hughes, 1980; Shrum, 1999).

Cultivation research was defined by Signorielli and Morgan (2001) as a theory that

studies the "repetitive patterns of images and representations to which entire communities are

exposed—and that they absorb—over long periods of time" through the medium of television (p.

334). The longevity of study provided by the theory differentiates it from other theories and

allows it to expose deep-seated world attitudes developed in people over prolonged exposure to

television, rather than whimsical, transitory notions among audience members (Hughes, 1980;

Gerbner, 1998). Though originally criticized for its failure to take into consideration outside

variables that could also lead to audiences' world perspectives (Hughes, 1980), cultivation

analysis has been used extensively over the years. According to Morgan and Shanahan (2010),

the theory has been used in more than 500 studies since it was first conceived.

Gerbner's primary interest with regard to cultivation analysis rested with heavy television

viewers, or those who watch four or more hours of television per day. He argued that the world

perceptions of heavy television users, as opposed to light viewers, are more moldable to the

"realities" depicted on television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980a; Hughes, 1980;

Gerbner, 1998; Shrum, 1999). Gerbner found that heavy television viewers tended to give

"television answers" to real-life questions more often than did light or moderate viewers

(Hughes, 1980, p. 287). As stated by Shrum, there is "a positive relation between frequency of

television viewing and social perceptions that are congruent with the world as it is portrayed in

television" (Shrum, 2009, p. 57). Light and medium viewers were also influenced by the

"cultural imagery" portrayed on television (Hughes, 1980, p. 287); however, while the entire

audience demographic was influenced by television's depiction of "social reality" (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010, p. 339), the perceived realities of heavy television viewers were the most pronounced. Therefore, many studies have dealt with that sample group.

Though Gerbner's career dealt mostly with violence on television, other researchers have expanded cultivation theory to study viewers' attitudes about gender roles, marital status, politics, religion, body image, family, economics, and minority issues (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Researchers have found that some topics covered on television become so widely encultured by the public that they lead to a change in social reality or socially perceived reality, a phenomenon known as *mainstreaming*. Mainstreaming, as defined by Gerbner et al. (1980a), serves as "a relative commonality of outlooks that television tends to cultivate" (p. 15). Large groups, even entire social groups, tend to shift their outlook to television's perception of life because, according to Gerbner and Gross (1976), television is the most extensive source of "common background of assumptions not only about what things are but also about how they work, or should work, and why" (p. 179).

Assuming that television is one of society's prime sources of commentary on and depictions of social reality, it is noteworthy to determine what television communicates about the family unit. Morgan and Shanahan (2010) found that television continues to contribute to "traditional images and aspirations [with regard to] gender and family roles" (p. 346). This can be explained, as Gerbner (1998) stated, by the fact that television stations want to project and appeal to the largest possible audience, and thus their "messages are designed to disturb as few as possible" (p. 186). Gerbner (1998) found that heavy television viewers labeled themselves as "moderate" in their views and that, in general, viewers tended to be conservative—leading to the idea that television stations will straddle a middle line in portrayal of social customs.

Since Gerbner's study, however, the parameters for conservatives and moderates have widened perceptively. Signorielli and Morgan's cultivation study on the American family and television (2001) found the following results: 1) family and home issues dominated network drama programs; 2) families were most often seen on sitcoms; 3) families on television tended to be more conventional in makeup even though the portrayal of nonconventional families had increased; 4) higher economic status equaled higher family coherence and functionality; 5) marriage tended to be portrayed more positively in sitcoms than in dramas or soap operas; and 6) families had become more child-centered rather than parent-centered, as portrayed on some of the early family television shows.

This study seeks to understand and describe television portrayals of the American family unit and its standing in society—potential messages that viewers may cultivate. As outlined above, cultivation theory provides a lens for recognizing how television may affect viewers' perceptions of reality over time by repeatedly exposing them to patterns and ideas. According to the theory, this impact—which is strongest among heavy television viewers—can cause mainstreaming, or changes in social reality, with regard to particular aspects of society such as family roles and what families "should" be like. Considering the cultivation theory perspective, how television shows portray the American family may affect how audiences view various family configurations and "ideal" family types, among other factors. In short, the impact of family-related messages as communicated on television may have a significant impact on audiences over time. While this study is not a direct test of cultivation theory, it does use cultivation theory to anticipate the potential impact of television with regard to the family.

Research Questions

In order to build upon the literature reviewed, this thesis will focus on the following research questions:

RQ1: How many of the television programs that aired between January 2004 and December 2013 featured a family as the primary story vehicle, and how many belonged to each genre (sitcom, drama, and comedy/drama), channel type (broadcast, basic cable/satellite, and premium cable/satellite), and target audience (children, teen, and adult)?

RQ2: How many of the identified television families fell within each family configuration type (childless, empty-nest, guardian, nuclear, nuclear with same-sex parents, polygamist, reconstituted, and single-parent)?

RQ3: How many television families included at least one extended family member? How many extended family members were included, what were their positions in the family (aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent, etc.), and how many extended family members lived in the same home as the main television family?

RQ4: How many of the identified television families' parents fell within each type (father, mother, n/a, not present, and parents), and what percentage of single-parent television families was led by mothers versus fathers? How many of the identified television families' parents fell within each of the marital status types (divorced, married, n/a, partnership, separated, unclear, unmarried, widow, and widower)?

RQ5: How many children did each television family have on average, and how many of the children characters were male versus female?

RQ6: How did the number of extended family members compare over time and across each genre, family configuration type, parent type, and parent marital status?

RQ7: How did the number of children (total as well as the number of each gender) compare over time and across each genre, channel type, target audience, family configuration type, parent type, and parent marital status?

Chapter Three: Method

Content Analysis

This study used the quantitative method of content analysis to answer the above research questions. The questions, which started with phrases such as "how many" and "what percentage," lend themselves to a quantitative approach in which the data is measurable and numerical. The strengths and weaknesses of the content analysis method will now be reviewed.

In terms of strengths, studies that use content analysis tend to be less expensive, less obtrusive, and less time-consuming than other methods, such as qualitative interviews. The objectivity of quantitative methods leads to less bias, less subjectivity, and a more accurate interpretation of results, as well as potentially fewer flaws and complications since research participants are not involved. Content analyses tend to use larger samples—at times even the entire population—which allows the data to be generalizable and replicable. The resulting data also tends to be more useful for future studies covering longer time periods. In addition, the data generated from the content analysis method can typically be collected and analyzed at any time without having to work around multiple schedules and other factors. For all of these reasons, the method of content analysis is popular in the field of mass communications research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

Weaknesses of content analyses include the inability to measure intangibles, to examine themes and patterns, or to provide exploratory results—all of which lend themselves to qualitative research instead. Rather, the content analysis method provides results that are only descriptive and are simply based on observations, without explaining possible reasons for the results found. The method may generate very large amounts of data that could take a longer period of time to organize and analyze, and it can be hard to predict the amount of data that a

particular study will generate. Despite these weaknesses, a content analysis was the best way to answer the research questions for this study, which are quantitative in nature.

Population

The population used for this study was determined by identifying all television shows that were centered around "an identifiable family configuration as the primary story vehicle" on a regular basis (Skill & Robinson, 1994, p. 453), and then by identifying each main, primary family that was featured in those shows. This study only included those programs that aired during the time period covering January 2004 to December 2013 because it represented the most recent 10-year period at the time of the study. The unit of analysis was one television family, each of which was analyzed based on a number of variables. If a particular television show equally featured more than one primary family, all of those main families were included in the population as separate units.

In order to identify family-centered television programs and their primary families—as well as verify any related facts and details regarding those programs and families—three primary online sources were used: Wikipedia.org, Internet Movie Database (IMDb.com), and TV.com. In particular, Wikipedia's pages, "List of American television programs by date" (2014) and "List of American television shows currently in production" (2014), provided comprehensive lists of television shows in order by the dates of their first broadcasts in the U.S. with hyperlinks to each individual television program's respective Wikipedia page. The television shows were first identified on one of these two Wikipedia pages and then verified using the other two websites (IMDb.com and TV.com). The information regarding each television family was checked on all three websites in order to ensure accuracy. [Note: These primary sources contrast with the four non-digital sources used in Skill and Robinson's original study (1994). The three online sources

were used instead due to their depth of information and convenience of access. The author

considered using the three volumes of *Encyclopedia of Television Shows, 1925 through 2010*

(Terrace, 2011), but the encyclopedia did not cover television shows after 2010 and did not

contain the type and depth of information needed for this study.]

For clarification, data was collected by reading descriptions of the television programs—

not by watching the programs themselves. Because the information being collected was basic

and demographic in nature, the text-based, online sources were sufficient and there was no need

to view the actual shows. Most of the programs' Wikipedia pages contained more than enough

information to complete this study's data collection, so for the sake of time and simplicity, the

three websites were the only sources of data.

To ensure that the programs included in the study were shown on television for a

substantial length of time, only the shows that aired for at least one full season—as defined by

each program's television network and the primary online sources described above—were

included. Consequently, all of the programs included in the study aired for at least 10 episodes.

Each television program was categorized based only on the first episode of the first season of the

series. Any changes that took place during the course of each series—including changes to the

existing television family's configuration type, the parents' marital status, etc.—were not taken

into account in this content analysis. Also, any program that aired during the 2004–2013 time

period but that began prior to 2004 was included in this study and was also categorized based on

the first episode of the first season, even if it aired before 2004.

This study only included live-action television programs—in both present-day and

historical contexts—that featured human families because such families are more relatable and

applicable to television audiences. Since families in animated shows tend to be less realistic and

more exaggerated (Pehlke et al., 2009; Henry, 2003), no animated series were included in the

current study. If a television family featured humans with some kind of supernatural power, such

as witches and wizards, it was included since the characters were still portrayed as human or

human-like. In addition, this study only included scripted television shows and, therefore,

excluded any programs that belonged to the reality genre. Television audiences may identify

with reality series on a different level due to their depictions of "real life," regardless of whether

the content is preplanned and edited (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007; Barton, 2009; Nabi,

Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003; Ward & Carlson, 2013). This study also excluded television

programs belonging to the soap opera genre since such shows contain especially unrealistic

themes and character demographics (Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Perse, 1986) and follow a

distinct and different style of storytelling compared with other genres, including never-ending

plots and a lack of conflict resolution (Kuhn, 1984). Animated, reality, and soap opera programs

should be examined in future studies. Because of these omissions, the current study covered only

the following genres: sitcom, drama, and comedy/drama. In order to provide a complete view of

basic descriptors of each television program studied, channel type and target audience were

measured in addition to genre. This provided some baseline information to determine whether

certain types of shows or channels had a greater impact on the study's outcomes.

This population included a total of 162 television families (see Appendix B for a

complete list). This study did not employ any kind of sampling procedure since the entire

population was included, making this a census of television families featured in family-centered

television programs aired between January 2004 and December 2013.

Variables of Interest

The operational definitions of the variables are provided below.

Family.

As stated above, the television programs in this study employed, "on a regular basis, an identifiable family configuration as the primary story vehicle" (Skill & Robinson, 1994, p. 453). The concept of a "family" basically referred to any social unit that included either an adult with children (young or grown) and/or a cohabitating (married or unmarried) couple. Skill and Robinson's (1994) full definition applies to this study:

> A family configuration was defined as a social unit characterized by one or more of the following elements: an adult head of household with dependent children; married couples with dependent children; married couples with adult children, married couples without children; or adults with dependent children sharing domicile with others. The definition of family was not limited to a legal marital arrangement, nor was the dependent children definition limited to natural or adopted statuses. Adults who performed parental duties as a head of household were coded as a portrayal of family regardless of legal status (p. 453).

The definition above stated that families did not have to include a legal marriage. To further clarify this, the current study referred to any unmarried, cohabitating couples as "partners" or "partnerships." In addition, it was necessary to extend Skill and Robinson's (1994; 2001) definition in order to accommodate and reflect changes in family portrayals on television since the 1990s. Therefore, the current study included both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. As an example, the dimension of family configuration—as defined below—was updated to include the category of "nuclear [family] with same-sex parents." (Note: Sexual

orientation was defined for couples but not for single family members. For example, if a single

parent was identified as homosexual, this was not accounted for.) Robinson and Skill (2001)

stated, "It is clear that the configurations of families are changing" (p. 161). Since the television

world's portrayals of families have changed, it was necessary to reflect those changes by

updating the categories in this study, as described.

Skill and Robinson (1994) argued the importance of only including family-centered

programs, as they are defined above. They referenced Greenberg, Buerkel-Rothfuss, Neuendorf,

and Atkin (1980), who stated the importance of programs that featured recurring family

characters: "Learning should be most facilitated by those shows which permit vicarious

experience with known and familiar characters over time" (p. 162). To further develop this point,

Skill and Robinson (1994) stated the following:

> Likewise, it was hypothesized that if television was to have any impact on public
>
> conceptions of how families organize themselves, it would arise from the regular,
>
> ongoing portrayal of families cast as protagonists. Those momentary glimpses of a family
>
> situation presented as a minor sub-plot in some larger, unrelated story would not have the
>
> same symbolic power and presence as would a family that served weekly as the primary
>
> story vehicle for a program (p. 453).

Based on this reasoning, this study also only included family-centered programs. It is also

important to note that the "primary story vehicle" (Skill & Robinson, 1994, p. 453) refers to the

main family or families that were at the center of each television program—that is, the television

families consisting of main characters that were present in the show's main home or living

environment. This study did not include any additional families that may have been shown in the

television shows as side storylines or secondary story vehicles. The data instead focuses on only

the primary, central family unit(s) featured consistently in each television show.

Descriptive variables.

Many of the variables and descriptive items measured for each television program were

self-explanatory: television program name, family name, program genre (sitcom, drama, or

comedy/drama), the year the program first aired, the numbers of seasons and episodes, episode

length, channel name, channel type (broadcast, basic cable/satellite, or premium cable/satellite),

target audience (adult, teen, or children), and the number of children of each gender in the

family. The television families were also coded on two dimensions that are explained below.

Family configuration type.

The first dimension for classifying the families in this study was family configuration

type, which measured each television family's household situation (Skill & Robinson, 1994).

Families were classified according to eight different configurations (in alphabetical order):

childless, empty-nest, guardian, nuclear, nuclear with same-sex parents, polygamist,

reconstituted, and single-parent. Six of these configurations were used and defined by Skill and

Robinson (1994) (childless, empty-nest, guardian, nuclear, reconstituted, and single-parent).

Please note that two of Skill and Robinson's original configurations were omitted in this study:

multiple-portrayal (instead, each primary family was categorized separately) and extended (this

was categorized separately as a sub-variable and will be explained below). Each of the eight

configurations used in the current study will be defined, followed by a description of how the

author accounted for and measured the presence of extended family members in these television

families.

Childless refers to married or cohabitating couples (partnerships) without children. For example, the television show *The King of Queens* features Doug and Carrie Heffernan, a married couple that does not have any children.

Empty-nest refers to families "comprised of married couples whose adult children… do not live in the same home" (Skill & Robinson, 1994, p. 454). For example, one of the main families in the sitcom *'Til Death* consists of Eddie and Joy Stark, a married couple with an adult daughter who had since moved out of their home to attend college.

Guardian refers to households led by "males, females, or couples who are responsible for one or more minor children *and* are not the parent or parents of the children" (p. 454). For example, *The Bernie Mac Show* featured three children being raised by their aunt and uncle, the McCulloughs. A later show, *Melissa & Joey*, focused on Mel Burke, a single woman raising her niece and nephew. Any television families designated as the *guardian* type were also characterized according to whether the guardian was male, female, or a couple.

Nuclear refers to families living in households that include two parents and their children, including the Camdens in *7th Heaven*, the Barones in *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and the Wilkersons in *Malcolm in the Middle*. The parents in nuclear families are not necessarily married. This *nuclear* category refers to traditional families led by two heterosexual parents, a mother and a father. Those led by homosexual parents were designated using the next category.

Nuclear with same-sex parents refers to families living in households that include two parents—ones who are part of a same-sex relationship, so two mothers or two fathers—and their children. For example, the Pritchett/Tucker family in the sitcom *Modern Family* consists of two fathers and their adopted daughter, Lily. The parents in these types of families may or may not be married.

Polygamist refers to families that are led by more than two parents, all of whom are married or cohabitating. This category was created to accommodate the program *Big Love*, in which the character Bill Henrickson is married to three different women.

Reconstituted refers to "families that result from the merging of members from previous marriages through a new marriage" (Skill & Robinson, 1994, p. 454). This configuration is separate from nuclear because reconstituted families do not "reflect the traditional characteristics of the nuclear family" (p. 454). For example, *Drake & Josh* features two boys who become stepbrothers when Drake's mother marries Josh's father.

Single-parent refers to families living in households that include only one parent and his or her child or children. Examples include Michael Bluth and his son George Michael in *Arrested Development*, Lorelai Gilmore and her daughter Rory in *Gilmore Girls*, and Reba Nell Hart and her three children in *Reba*.

Instead of listing *extended* families as their own category, the presence of an extended family member was indicated in a separate sub-category. Each television family was characterized as including or not including the presence of one or more extended family members, defined as grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives. Extended family members were included if they were main characters in the television program and if they were present in the main, primary family's home/living environment, whether or not they lived in that home/living environment. In addition, the number of extended family members present was indicated for each family, as well as the type (grandparents, etc.) and whether or not the extended family member(s) lived in the home/living environment of the main, primary family.

Parents.

The second dimension focused on the parents, whether or not they held the position of head of household. This dimension only applied to those television families that included children (a total of 147 television families). The television families fell into five categories (in alphabetical order): father, mother, n/a (if the family did not include children), not present, and parents. It should be noted that the "parents" category included both married and unmarried couples, whether heterosexual or homosexual. The only requirement was that the parent characters lived together and held the position and responsibilities of parent.

Three sub-categories were included in this dimension, as well. First, if the parent type was "parents," the parents were designated as either heterosexual or homosexual. Second, if the parent type was "not present," the reason for their lack of presence was designated (for example, if the parents were deceased or had a drug problem). Third, the parent marital status was designated using nine categories (in alphabetical order): divorced, married, n/a (if the family did not have children), partnership, separated, unclear, unmarried, widow, and widower. (For clarification, the "unmarried" category referred to single individuals who had not previously been married and were not currently a part of a partnership or marriage.)

Coding Procedures

The coding was completed using a coding sheet that listed all of the variables above (see Appendix A). The data was stored in a spreadsheet document. The details and variables were coded in two different ways. First, the following items were open answer: television program, family name, year first aired, numbers of seasons and episodes, episode length, channel name, and numbers of male and female children. Second, the following items were multiple choice with the option to write an alternate answer in the open space: genre, channel type, target audience,

family configuration type (along with guardian type and presence of extended family members, if applicable), parent type (along with sexual orientation and reason for lack of presence, if applicable), and parent marital status. The data was collected and then analyzed using the software program SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) in order to generate statistics and answer the research questions.

Two independent coders examined 15% of the population (25 television families) in order to assess intercoder reliability. One hour of coder training was implemented for this study and included an explanation of operational definitions for each variable. Cohen's (1960) Kappa formula was applied in order to determine intercoder reliability. Reliabilities were greater than 70.0% for all variables: family configuration type (94.1%), presence of extended family members (73.3%), parent type (93.3%), parent marital status (93.8%), number of male children (94.5%), and number of female children (100.0%). The coders resolved all coding discrepancies, and the remaining 85% of the population was coded by one of the coders.

Chapter Four: Results

Television Families Overall

In response to the first part of RQ1 (How many of the television programs that aired between January 2004 and December 2013 featured a family as the primary story vehicle?), this study found a total of 137 family-focused programs that aired during the 10-year period. These programs included a total of 162 television families (see Appendix B), which indicates an average of 1.2 television families per family-focused program (*SD* = 0.57). A total of 35 of the television families were in programs that started airing prior to 2004. The remaining 127 television families—those in programs that began between 2004 and 2013—are included in Figure 1, which shows the numbers of television families in programs that started during each year. As shown, these numbers varied from 10 to 19 per year with the exception of 2008, which only included five television families.

Figure 1

Number of Television Families Over Time*
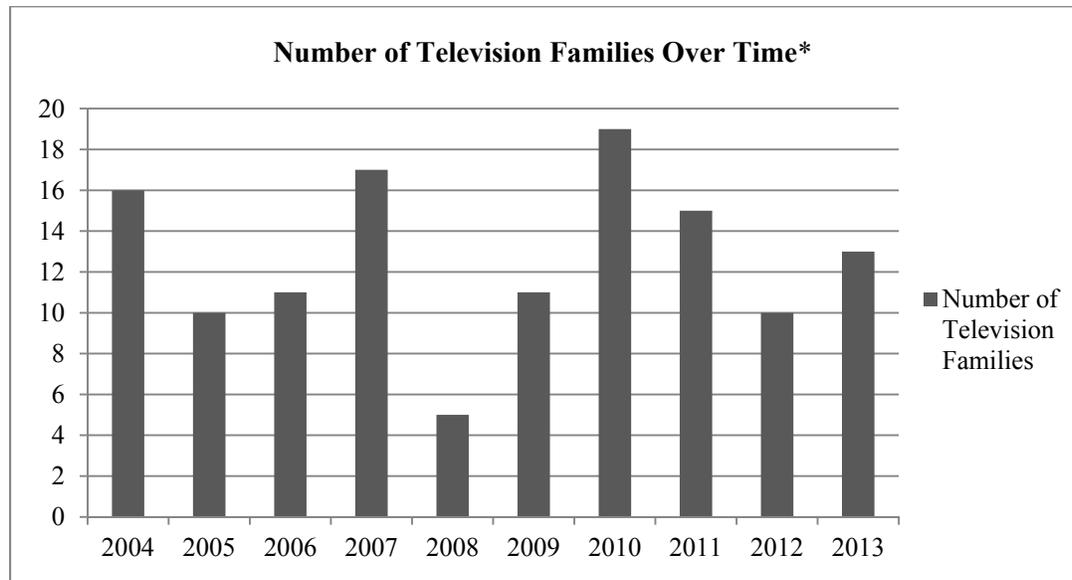
*This excludes the 35 television families from programs that started prior to 2004.

Genre, channel type, and target audience.

In response to the second part of RQ1 (How many family-focused television programs belonged to each genre?), this study found the following: 13 comedy/drama programs (9.49%), 34 dramas (24.82%), and 90 sitcoms (65.69%).

The second part of RQ1 also asked how many family-focused television programs belonged to each channel type. According to this study, 54.01% of family-focused television programs that started between 2004 and 2013 aired on broadcast networks ($n = 74$), 37.23% aired on basic cable/satellite networks ($n = 51$), 8.03% aired on premium cable/satellite networks ($n = 11$), and 0.73% aired via syndication ($n = 1$).

In addition, the second part of RQ1 asked how many family-focused television programs were targeted at each audience type. According to this study, 78.83% of family-focused

television programs that started between 2004 and 2013 were targeted at adults ($n = 108$),

17.52% were targeted at teens ($n = 24$), and 3.65% were targeted at children ($n = 5$).

Family Configuration Type

In response to RQ2 (How many of the identified television families fell within each

family configuration type?), the figures are included in Table 2: 8.02% of the television families

were childless ($n = 13$), 1.23% were empty-nest ($n = 2$), 4.32% were guardian ($n = 7$), 48.15%

were nuclear ($n = 78$), 1.23% were nuclear with same-sex parents ($n = 2$), 0.62% were

polygamist ($n = 1$), 6.79% were reconstituted ($n = 11$), and 29.63% were single-parent ($n = 48$).

For the seven families that fell within the guardian family configuration type, two were led by

couples, one was led by a male, and four were led by females.

Table 2

Frequency of Family Configuration Type

Family Configuration Type	*f*	% of total
Childless	13	8.02
Empty-nest	2	1.23
Guardian	7	4.32
Nuclear	78	48.15
Nuclear with Same-sex Parents	2	1.23
Polygamist	1	0.62
Reconstituted	11	6.79
Single-parent	48	29.63
Total	162	100.00

Extended family members.

In response to the first part of RQ3 (How many families included at least one extended family member?), 61 of the television families included the presence of at least one extended family member (37.65%). (This excluded any families whose only extended family member or members were acting in the role of guardian in the guardian family configuration type.) A total of 184 extended family members were found for all of the television families in the study. Each television family had an average of 1.14 extended family members ($SD = 2.26$).

In response to the second part of RQ3 (How many extended family members were included?), Figure 3 shows the frequency of each number of extended family members. The percentages are as follows: 62.35% had no extended family members ($n = 101$), 14.20% had one extended family member ($n = 23$), 9.88% had two extended family members ($n = 16$), 4.94% had three extended family members ($n = 8$), 4.32% had between four and six extended family members ($n = 7$), and 4.32% had between seven and twelve extended family members ($n = 7$). Most of the television families that had seven or more extended family members came from the television shows *Modern Family* and *Parenthood*, each of which featured multiple, related main families.

In response to the third part of RQ3 (What were the extended family members' positions in the family?), 20.99% of the television families included one or more of an older generation (grandparents of children or parents of grown adults) ($n = 34$), 30.86% included one or more of a middle generation (aunts or uncles of children, siblings of grown adults, or children of grandparents) ($n = 50$), and 11.73% included one or more of a younger generation (cousins of children, nephews or nieces of grown adults, or grandchildren of grandparents) ($n = 19$).

In response to the fourth part of RQ3 (How many extended family members lived in the same home as the main television family?), 12.96% of the television families had at least one extended family member living with them ($n = 21$). The television families that had at least one extended family member present—but did not have any who lived with them—comprised 19.75% of the population ($n = 32$), while 4.94% of the television families had at least one extended family member present, but their living arrangements were unclear ($n = 8$).

Figure 3

Number of Extended Family Members
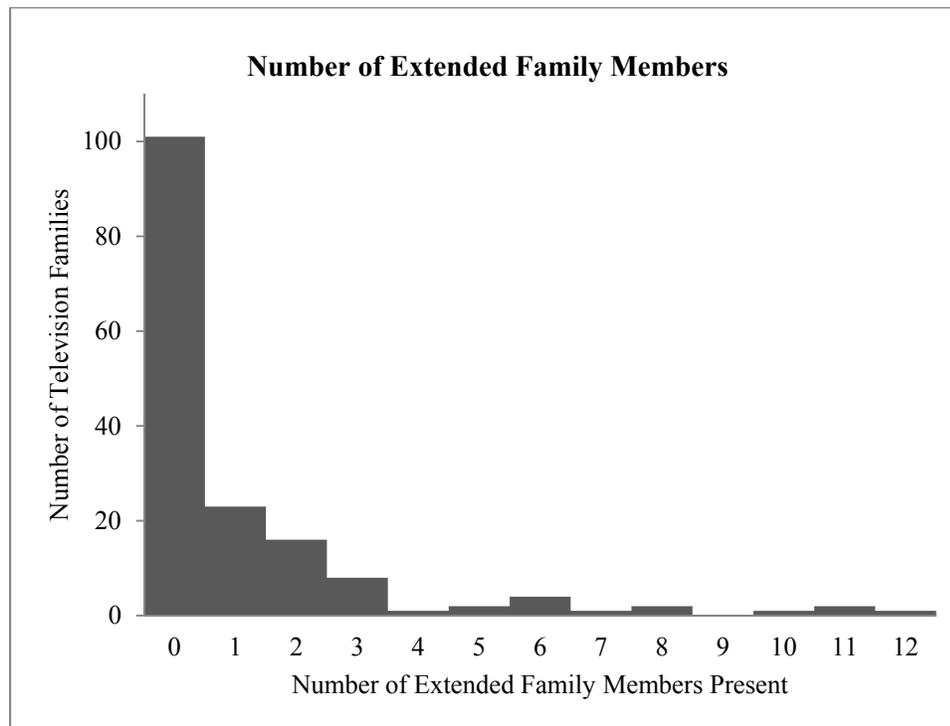
Parent Type

In response to the first part of RQ4 (How many of the identified television families' parents fell within each type?), the figures are included in Table 4: 12.35% of the television

families had a father as the parent (n = 20), 17.28% had a mother as the parent (n = 28), 4.32%

had parents who were not present (n = 7), 56.79% had multiple parents (all of these had two

parents except for the family in *Big Love*, which had more than two) (n = 92), and 9.26% did not

have any children and therefore did not have any parents (n = 15). In terms of television families

with multiple parents, 55.56% of the population had heterosexual parents (n = 90) and 1.23% had

a homosexual couple as parents (n = 2). [The remaining portion, 43.21%, did not have multiple

parents (n = 70).] The two sets of homosexual parents were portrayed in the television shows

Modern Family (two fathers, Mitchell Pritchett and Cameron Tucker) and *The Fosters* (two

mothers, Lena Adams and Stef Foster). In terms of television families with parents who were not

present, the reasons included the following: deceased (n = 3), drug problem (n = 2), job in

another country (n = 1), and a scandal that led to a jail sentence (n = 1).

Table 4

Frequency of Parent Type

Parent Type	f	% of total
Father	20	12.35
Mother	28	17.28
Not Present	7	4.32
Parents	92	56.79
n/a (no children)	15	9.26
Total	162	100.00

Gender of single parents.

This study found a total of 48 single-parent television families. In response to the second part of RQ4 (What percentage of single-parent television families was led by mothers versus fathers?), 41.67% of single-parent families were led by a father ($n = 20$) and 58.33% were led by a mother ($n = 28$).

Parent marital status.

In response to the last part of RQ4 (How many of the identified television families' parents fell within each of the marital status types?), the figures are included in Table 5: 13.58% of the television families' parents were divorced ($n = 22$), 54.94% were married ($n = 89$), 1.85% were in a partnership ($n = 3$), 8.64% were unclear ($n = 14$), 6.17% were unmarried ($n = 10$), 1.23% were widows ($n = 2$), and 4.32% were widowers ($n = 7$).

Table 5

Frequency of Parent Marital Status

Marital Status	f	% of total
Divorced	22	13.58
Married	89	54.94
Partnership	3	1.85
Unclear	14	8.64
Unmarried	10	6.17
Widow	2	1.23
Widower	7	4.32
n/a (no children)	15	9.26
Total	162	100.00

Children in Television Families

This study found a total of 330 children characters in the television families. In response to the first part of RQ5 (How many children did each television family have on average?), each television family had an average of 2.04 children (*SD* = 1.36). Most of the television families included children (90.74%; *n* = 147). Each family had an average of 1.10 male children (*SD* = 1.00) and 0.94 female children (*SD* = 0.80). In response to the second part of RQ5 (How many of the children characters were male versus female?), 53.94% of the children were male (*n* = 178) and 46.06% were female (*n* = 152). Table 6 lists the percentages of male versus female children over time. One year, 2013, included an equal number of each (50.00% male and 50.00% female). Three years included more female children than male: 2008 (37.50% male, 62.50% female; *n* = 8), 2010 (48.15% male, 51.85% female; *n* = 27), and 2012 (40.00% male, 60.00% female; *n* = 25).

Table 6

Percentages of Male versus Female Children in Television Families Over Time

Year Program Started	*n*	% Male	% Female
pre-2004	77	54.55	45.45
2004	35	65.71	34.29
2005	21	52.38	47.62
2006	20	55.00	45.00
2007	29	58.62	41.38
2008	8	37.50	62.50
2009	24	58.33	41.67
2010	27	48.15	51.85
2011	30	56.67	43.33
2012	25	40.00	60.00
2013	34	50.00	50.00

Comparisons: Number of Extended Family Members

In response to RQ6 (How did the number of extended family members compare over time and across each genre, family configuration type, parent type, and parent marital status?), the number of extended family members per television family increased over time but not significantly. The statistical analysis revealed no significant difference in the number of extended family members among different family configuration types, parent types, and parent marital statuses.

However, the analysis for genre revealed that the television families in comedy/dramas had significantly more extended family members per family compared with the other two genres. The one-way ANOVA test indicated statistical significance among all genres ($F = 9.467$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.000$), with an average of 3.31 extended family members in comedy/dramas ($SD = 4.70$),

1.00 in sitcoms ($SD = 1.75$), and 0.67 in dramas ($SD = 1.49$). In addition, the number of extended family members in television families in shows aired on broadcast networks ($M = 1.63$; $SD = 2.80$) was significantly higher than those in shows aired on basic cable/satellite networks ($M = 0.48$; $SD = 0.99$) ($p = 0.006$). There was also a significant difference between television families in shows targeted to adults versus teens, with an average of 1.39 extended family members in adult-focused programs ($SD = 2.45$) and 0.11 in teen-focused programs ($SD = 0.42$) ($p = 0.019$).

Comparisons: Number of Children

In response to RQ7 [How did the number of children (total as well as the number of each gender) compare over time and across each genre, channel type, target audience, family configuration type, parent type, and parent marital status?], the number of children per television family increased slightly over time but not significantly. The number of female children increased slightly, and the number of male children decreased slightly. No significant difference was found among the three television genres. However, television families in programs geared toward children ($M = 3.00$; $SD = 1.00$) and teens ($M = 2.48$; $SD = 1.19$) had significantly more children than those geared toward adults ($M = 1.91$; $SD = 1.37$) ($p = 0.036$). In addition, television families in shows that aired on premium cable/satellite networks ($M = 2.82$; $SD = 2.64$) had more children than those that aired on broadcast networks ($M = 1.80$; $SD = 1.25$) ($p = 0.046$). Similarly, the number of male children was significantly higher for premium cable/satellite networks ($M = 1.91$; $SD = 1.51$) compared with broadcast networks ($M = 0.95$; $SD = 0.95$) ($p = 0.006$).

In terms of family configuration types, single-parent families ($M = 1.69$; $SD = 1.01$) had significantly less children on average than nuclear ($M = 2.44$; $SD = 1.09$) and reconstituted families ($M = 2.82$; $SD = 0.98$). The one-way ANOVA test indicated statistical significance

among all family configuration types ($F = 14.854$; $df = 6$; $p = 0.000$), with the post hoc indicating

statistical significance for the comparison between single-parent and nuclear families ($p = 0.005$)

as well as single-parent and reconstituted families ($p = 0.039$), per the averages above. [As a

side-note, guardian-type families had an average of 2.00 children each ($SD = 1.00$).] In addition,

single fathers had slightly more children per family ($M = 1.80$; $SD = 1.36$) than single mothers

($M = 1.61$; $SD = 0.69$), though the difference was not statistically significant. Reconstituted

families ($M = 1.82$; $SD = 0.75$) tended to have significantly more male children than single-

parent families ($M = 0.88$; $SD = 1.02$) ($p = 0.033$).

In terms of parent types, television families with multiple parents ($M = 2.55$; $SD = 1.28$)

had significantly more children than those with only a father ($M = 1.80$; $SD = 1.36$) or only a

mother ($M = 1.61$; $SD = 0.69$). The one-way ANOVA test indicated statistical significance

among all parent types ($F = 18.050$; $df = 4$; $p = 0.000$), with the post hoc indicating statistical

significance for the comparison between parents and father ($p = 0.060$) as well as parents and

mother ($p = 0.002$). In addition, television families with multiple parents ($M = 1.41$; $SD = 0.93$)

tended to have significantly more male children than those with only a mother ($M = 0.71$; $SD = 0.81$) ($p = 0.004$). With regard to male children, no significant relationship was found between

families with multiple parents versus only a father ($M = 1.10$; $SD = 1.25$). In terms of female

children, no significant relationships were found: Television families with multiple parents had

an average of 1.14 female children ($SD = 0.83$), families with only a father had an average of

0.70 ($SD = 0.66$), and families with only a mother had an average of 0.89 ($SD = 0.63$).

In terms of parent marital status, television families with married parents ($M = 2.54$; $SD = 1.27$) had significantly more children than those with divorced ($M = 1.68$; $SD = 0.95$) or

unmarried ($M = 1.00$; $SD = 0.00$) parents. The one-way ANOVA test indicated statistical

significance among all parent marital statuses ($F = 11.686$; $df = 7$; $p = 0.000$), with the post hoc

indicating statistical significance for the comparison between married and divorced ($p = 0.033$)

as well as married and unmarried ($p = 0.002$). In addition, married parents tended to have

significantly more male children ($M = 1.42$; $SD = 0.90$) than unmarried parents ($M = 0.30$; $SD =$

0.48) ($p = 0.006$). No such significant relationship was found for female children. There was no

statistically significant difference between the number of children for heterosexual ($M = 2.56$; SD

$= 1.27$) and homosexual ($M = 2.50$; $SD = 2.12$) couples.

Another finding revealed a slightly negative relationship between the number of children

in each television family compared with the number of extended family members in each

television family ($p = 0.004$; $r = -0.225$). If a particular family had more children, it tended to

have less extended family members present, and vice versa.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to measure family portrayals on television from 2004 to 2013 through a content analysis, using cultivation theory as the basis of understanding. The television families were identified and described, followed by an analysis of those families' configurations, parents, and children. This was done in order to paint a picture of how the family was portrayed in the television world during this 10-year period. The findings of this research are explained and discussed below. The subsections include basic interpretations of the data, comparisons to previous research in the literature review, topics that should be explored further in future research, and a deeper look at what these results mean for families and society today. Although the current study does not measure the cultivation effect on actual audiences, it does describe the television content and raise important questions for researchers to address in the future, as described below.

Television Families in General

The large number of television families (see Appendix B) and family-focused programs airing between 2004 and 2013 supports previous research that identified family as a prevalent theme on television (Signorielli, 1982; Morgan et al., 1999; Krijnen, 2005). The number of family-focused programs is comparable to Skill and Robinson's (1994) data for the previous decades. The number found for 2004–2013 was slightly higher than the average number of programs aired during the earlier decades, yet lower than their findings for the 1980s and 1990s (Robinson & Skill, 2001). This may indicate a decrease in family-focused television programs from the 1990s to the 2000s—a potential trend that should be monitored. In terms of television families over time, the decrease in television families during 2008 may be explained by the

significant increase in reality genre television shows during that year, since reality programs were not included in the current study.

Whether or not family-focused television programs hold a significant or dominant portion of television airtime could be a reflection of society's view of the importance of the family unit. Whether family-focused shows are popular or not could be determined by audiences' view of whether the family is a worthwhile subject for entertainment and whether they prefer to spend their time watching families in their home environments versus other types of characters and settings. On a similar note, whether television airs many or few family-focused programs could send a message to audiences regarding whether the family unit is an important aspect of communities and society or not.

Monitoring the number of television families and family-focused shows being aired on television is a necessary part of understanding how television may be contributing to viewers' opinions of the concept of family. If cultivation theory rings true, then television could influence those viewers' opinions and potentially change how society views the basic unit of the family. This change would happen gradually and over a long period of time, which highlights the need for ongoing research that covers longer time periods.

Influence over such a topic as societal views regarding the family is worth the time and attention of researchers and the general public, especially those who advocate for prioritizing the family unit and family-related values in modern-day society. Parents who may wish to teach the importance of family to their children may also value information regarding how much of the content shown on television portrays families as opposed to individuals and other groups. This empowers parents to better understand the potential cultivation effect that may occur in their homes if they and/or their family members are heavy television viewers. Data such as that

presented in this study may help families and individuals make smarter and better-informed decisions regarding their television-viewing habits.

As stated above, the number of television families per decade has stayed somewhat consistent over time. However, if the potential drop in family-focused programs from the 1990s to the 2000s continues or gains momentum, this signifies a change that could impact television audiences, according to cultivation theory. Such information should be monitored and shared both in academia and with the general public to help them better understand how television is portraying (or not portraying) the family and how that may affect viewers and their families.

Genre, channel type, and target audience.

In terms of genre, the majority of family-focused television programs fell within the sitcom genre. Similarly, Skill and Robinson (1994) found more sitcoms than dramas among family-focused shows during the 1950 to 1989 time period. These findings support previous research that pointed out that television families tended to be included in sitcoms more so than in other genres (Signorielli & Morgan, 2001; Fingerson, 1999). In addition, Pehlke et al. (2009) pointed out that sitcoms may have a greater influence on television audiences' understanding of family roles—as well as gender—compared with other genres.

If this assertion (Pehlke et al., 2009) is true, the fact that sitcoms were the predominant genre for television families may indicate a potentially higher level of cultivation. If sitcoms are the favored genre for family-focused television programs, then they could have a greater influence on audiences compared with other types of shows that may favor other genres. This highlights the importance of studying families as portrayed on television, especially in sitcoms, in order to understand how they may impact audiences' views of gender, family roles, etc., per the statement from Pehlke et al. (2009) above. This also highlights the fact that the data

presented in this study is worth consideration and attention as it provides insight into which family types are being portrayed on television, especially in sitcoms, which may hold greater sway with audiences.

As mentioned, the current study expanded channel types to include both basic and premium cable/satellite networks. Broadcast networks still dominated with more than half of family-focused television programs, but basic cable/satellite networks aired more than a third of all of the programs and the number of basic cable/satellite programs increased toward the end of the decade. This potential trend should be followed. The fact that premium networks aired the smallest portion of programs is not surprising since there are fewer premium networks and, therefore, fewer premium programs. In addition, premium channels tend to focus on adult themes rather than family-related themes. Understanding which types of channels are airing the most family-focused programs—and considering the popularity and other characteristics of those channel types—offers additional insight into family-related trends on television and their potential cultivation effect. This should be looked at in a future study.

In terms of target audience, most family-focused television programs were focused on adults, with a much smaller percentage focusing on children. This contrast may be due to this study's omission of animated programs, which tend to be tailored to children. Target audience was not measured by Skill and Robinson (1994) or in the other previous studies that were reviewed.

Family Configuration and Parent Type

The prevalence of the nuclear family configuration—comprising almost half of all television families from 2004 to 2013—supports previous research that found that conventional, traditional family structures were well-represented on television (Morgan et al., 1999; Gerbner et

al., 1980b; Skill et al., 1987; Moore, 1992). The parent type variable indicated a similar finding, also supporting that statement from previous researchers: The largest portion of television families had multiple parents (usually two) who were married.

The current study's single-parent family percentage seemed higher than those found by Skill and Robinson (1994) for all four previous decades in their study, pointing out an increase from the 1980s to the 2000s. The results for the parent type variable offer additional insight: For 2004–2013, there were twice as many television families with divorced parents compared with unmarried or widowed parents, indicating that divorce was most often the reason for single-parent family situations on television. This study's finding that single-parent television families had significantly fewer children than multiple-parent families is logical. Single-parent families may have fewer children because their marriages or relationships ended before having more children, so they may tend to have fewer children than couples who are still together. However, television may be sending a message regarding whether multiple-parent families are more capable of caring for more children than single-parent families.

The low percentage of reconstituted families in the current study contrasts with findings from Akins (1986), who found an increased emphasis on diverse family configurations—especially reconstituted—in 1980 programs. This may signify a potential decrease in reconstituted television families from 1980 to the 2000s. The current study also witnessed the introduction of a new family configuration type that was not mentioned or measured in previous studies: nuclear with same-sex parents. This configuration type will be addressed in more depth below.

While the traditional nuclear family unit continued to dominate family-focused television programs during the 2004–2013 time period, the current study also found an increase in single-

parent families compared with previous decades. The possible decrease in reconstituted families may point to more single parents deciding to stay single rather than get remarried, possibly sending a message regarding whether marriage is important. The increasing prevalence of single, divorced parents on television may indicate that divorce situations are seen as more and more accepted, offering a reflection of real-world attitudes regarding divorce. On the other hand, the increasing number of single, divorced parents in television programs may lead television viewers to believe that divorce is common and accepted, showing television's potential cultivation effect. Both possibilities raise an important topic in terms of society's views regarding this family type.

Regardless, the ever-changing and diversifying list of possible family configuration types needs to be addressed. The increase in single-parent family portrayals and addition of same-sex parents to the television family landscape both serve as examples of the ongoing changes occurring in family-focused television content. Children who watch television may need guidance in order to understand these changes and to avoid confusion. The parents and other adults who are well-informed regarding the changing family configurations on television will be better equipped to educate those children and answer any questions they have about the families they are watching. The current study offers some data to help those parents and leaders to stay informed regarding these changes and empower them as they assist children in making sense of the media they are consuming, and researchers need to continue to provide such information on an ongoing basis. In addition, such changes in family configurations portrayed on television may serve as a source of cultivation for audiences of all ages, changing how they view families in the real world and further supporting the need for ongoing research on this topic.

Same-sex parents.

The inclusion of two television families with homosexual parents—belonging to the nuclear with same-sex parents configuration—is groundbreaking even though they made up a small percentage of the television family population from 2004 to 2013. Previous studies did not identify any families with same-sex parents or even include it as a potential category, which signifies that this is a new family structure that had not been shown on television before. This family configuration has been introduced to television only in the years since those previous studies identified in the literature review, making this a significant finding.

This noteworthy addition to the list of family configuration types portrayed on television should be considered in future research and measured over time to identify potential trends. No trends were defined in the current study because there were only two families with same-sex parents. This study simply points out this new configuration type and serves as a starting point for identifying future trends. Perceptions of the prevalence of such families in the real world could be impacted, according to cultivation theory, which makes this an important area for future research.

Although heterosexual couples had slightly more children on average than homosexual couples, the difference was not statistically significant and did not seem to indicate any message being sent about whether sexual orientation played a role in ideal family configuration types or parenting skills and capabilities. If the number of television families with same-sex parents increases over time, it would be important to measure the number of children portrayed within such families and compare that number to how many children are portrayed within television families with heterosexual parents. Any differences should be highlighted to shed light on society's views regarding the impact of parents' sexual orientation on their children, adoption by

same-sex couples, etc. Perhaps the messages being portrayed on television regarding this "new"

family configuration will reflect or conflict with whether society has an opinion about ideal

parent situations with regard to sexual orientation.

Extended family members.

Extended family members were measured differently from previous studies and could not

be compared. The low percentage of television families with a live-in extended family member

seemed to indicate that living arrangements may not have a significant effect on whether the

presence of extended family members carries comedic or dramatic value. Future studies should

consider the topic of extended family member characters and their unique roles in television

family dynamics, including positive and negative effects on characters in the main, primary

families. Perhaps only a qualitative study would be able to accurately capture and describe these

characters and how they vary across television programs and over time. A better understanding

of portrayals of extended family members could help to identify ideas and patterns shown on

television that may be cultivated by television audiences.

The fact that television families in comedy/dramas had significantly more extended

family members than in the other genres may indicate that extended family members brought

more entertainment value to this type of program. The findings also indicated that programs

aired on mainstream, broadcast networks—as well as shows focused on adults—may rely on the

concept of extended family member characters more so than other programs. As mentioned

above, the presence of extended family members in television families should be explored

further in future studies, especially those that may explain qualitative elements such as their role

within the families' dynamics and what value they bring to family-focused television programs.

This could shed light on what family-related messages may be communicated on television—and

cultivated by viewers—with regard to the value and impact of extended family member relationships in the American family's home environment.

Parent gender.

More single-parent television families were led by mothers than by fathers, which contrasts with the previous studies by Moore (1992) and Skill and Robinson (1994), who found more single fathers than mothers. However, the current study's finding falls in line with a more recent study by Callister et al. (2007) who found an even larger percentage of single mothers. According to the U.S. Census figures reported by Skill and Robinson, having more single mothers than fathers is more consistent with the real world. The current findings indicate that later television families may portray a more accurate representation of single-parent gender. An actual comparison to U.S. Census statistics should be explored in a future study.

Single fathers in television families had slightly more children per family than single mothers, possibly suggesting that single fathers are more capable parents than single mothers. This may, however, simply support the statement made by Skill and Robinson (1994) that single fathers—"images of fathers going it alone"—may be more entertaining to watch than single mothers (p. 457), and perhaps having a higher number of children increases that dramatic or comedic appeal. Regardless, these results lead to a potential statement on gender, an idea that will be further developed below.

On a similar note, multiple-parent families had significantly more male children than those led by single mothers, while no significant relationship was found between multiple-parent families and those led by a single father. This begs the question of whether television families were communicating the message that single mothers are less capable of raising and caring for sons. Although there was a similar finding for female children (single mothers had slightly more

female children than single fathers), it was not statistically significant, adding to the idea that

gender may play a role in what television defines as an ideal or typical single-parent situation, as

well as which genders of children can or should be raised by a certain gender of single parent.

If these types of gender-related messages are being communicated through the television

family, these messages could be cultivated by audiences, having a potentially significant impact

on their views of men and women and fathers and mothers—and, therefore, a potential impact on

society's views—over a long period of time. This subject is important to understanding how our

culture values each gender, at least in how gender is displayed in one of our most popular forms

of entertainment, and deserves further attention. As younger generations decide how to view

gender-related issues and make sense of various perspectives and opinions, they could be

impacted by these television family portrayals. Parents, teachers, and other adults who play a

role in children's upbringing would be empowered by data that analyzes how television portrays

family types and parent gender so that they can more appropriately help to lead the youth of our

society.

It would seem outlandish for a person to assert that one gender would be more capable of

or better at raising a particular gender of child, and yet the data presented in this study seems to

indicate that television family portrayals may be suggesting such an assertion. If cultivated by

television audiences, this generalization could have a negative impact on perceptions of gender

when it comes to single parents and even, perhaps, mothers and fathers in general, threatening

the basic concept that the genders should be treated fairly and considered equally with regard to

skills and abilities. This idea should be explored further to confirm or reject the notion that

television families depict favoritism toward either mothers or fathers being "better" parents to

sons or daughters. Future research can determine whether this is, indeed, a message being sent to

television audiences and, if so, whether that message is being absorbed by viewers as indicated by cultivation theory.

Children: Frequency and Gender

The number of children characters in television families between 2003 and 2014 is higher than the numbers found by Skill and Robinson (1994) for each previous decade, indicating an increasing focus on children in family-focused programs. This may lead to television audiences cultivating the view of children as important or significant parts of the family unit and of married couples valuing the idea of having children and expanding their families. The cultivation of these views may be seen as potentially strengthening society's opinions of the importance of children and family in general. On the other hand, the percentage of childless families during 2004–2013 seemed consistent with that found for the 1980s (Skill & Robinson, 1994) though higher than that found for the first half of the 1990s (Robinson & Skill, 2001), indicating an increase from the 1990s to the 2000s. An increase in childless families on television may signify less of a focus on children and growing families, which would have a potentially negative effect on audiences' and possibly society's views of children and the family.

The fact that television families in programs aimed at children and teens had more children characters than those aimed at adults was not surprising. Audiences enjoy being able to relate to the characters portrayed in television shows (Hoffner, 1996; Cohen, 2001; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005), so children and teen shows would logically include more characters close in age to their target audiences. The higher number of children per television family on premium cable/satellite network programs would need to be investigated further to determine if and why premium shows may tend to include more children.

The fact that there were slightly more male children than female is consistent with previous research from Callister et al. (2007) and most of the figures found by Skill and Robinson (1994). The four years of data that included more females than males—or an equal number of each—may indicate movement toward more equal representation of both genders when it comes to children characters. This data and the concept of gender representation could comprise a message being sent to television audiences regarding not only the frequency but the importance and significance of each gender. If representation is becoming more equal and fair over time, the genders may be seen by television audiences as, perhaps, having similar value and worth—which could be considered a positive outcome from a gender equality perspective. The actual portrayals of gender in television families should be investigated further in both quantitative and qualitative studies.

The negative relationship between the number of children and the number of extended family members makes sense in terms of balancing the number of characters in each television family and each family-focused program. If a program had more children, there was less of a need to add extended family members to fill time or add comedic or dramatic value—and vice versa. The show creators may have simply been controlling the number of main characters in each program.

Conclusion

When it comes to family configuration type, parent type, and parent marital status, it is clear that even into the 21st century, the traditional nuclear family unit—with a married father and mother—holds the largest portion of the television family landscape. Even the smaller but still significant number of television families that are led by single parents bring with them a "traditional" aspect since they have been portrayed on television for decades. Single-parent and

reconstituted television families may have been a new idea in the 1970s, but during the 2000s and 2010s, such nontraditional ideas have been replaced with family structures such as nuclear families with same-sex parents. These nonconventional families may have only comprised a few of the many television families studied, but their presence indicates the beginning of a potential trend that should be followed.

This study's findings also revealed gender-related issues in terms of the portrayal of single mothers. Television families with single mothers tended to have fewer children—especially male children—than single fathers or multiple parents. The idea that single mothers could, perhaps, not handle as many children as single fathers could indicate that television is sending a message regarding the capabilities of a woman who is raising her children on her own. At the very least, this trend in portrayals could be interpreted as showing how television defines a typical or ideal family situation, especially in terms of single parent gender.

With more family configurations and complexity added to the typical modern-day television family, children and adolescents may need more guidance to understand what the word "family" means and to decide whether they will value family-related concepts in their own lives. The definition of family is rapidly changing and may lack clarity, presenting a need for better education to allow individuals to make sense of these changes as presented on television and other media. Family has traditionally played a significant role in society—some would argue even a central, foundational role as society's basic unit and backbone (e.g. "Family and Marriage," 2014)—and any entertainment or influence that could alter individuals' view of the concept of family could, over time, impact the role it plays. This is especially true for younger generations that will be leading society in the future.

The youth, and the adults who lead them, are empowered through having a greater understanding of what television is portraying and how it may be influencing their thoughts and beliefs. The data in this study is meant to contribute to that greater understanding and allow for more and better education of television audiences. Media literacy education may include formal programs in a school setting as well as informal discussions at home and can have a significantly positive impact on society's understanding of media effects and the messages on television that they may be cultivating.

The results of this study are important to the growing body of knowledge that builds upon the foundation of cultivation theory and attempts to describe the family configurations being portrayed on television. These depictions of fictional family configurations and situations potentially impact a large number of viewers in ways they may or may not recognize—thus possibly shaping those viewers' perceived reality. Content analyses of the family structures conveyed on popular television provide media users—including parents—with some of the tools they need in order to discern which material they want to consume and allow into their homes. By understanding basic descriptions of the content that is being shown on television, such as the data provided in this study, media consumers are brought one step closer to becoming better educated and more aware of the messages they—and others around them—could potentially cultivate when watching television.

While it is beyond the scope of the current study to offer a direct test of cultivation or to examine in depth which messages are conveyed by these family configurations, the current study does present valuable data, anticipate television's potential effects, and raise issues and questions that should be addressed in future studies. Using this data as a starting point, researchers may investigate this topic further, test for actual cultivation effects, and offer a deeper level of

information to those individuals wanting to be more aware of the messages they are consuming when they watch television and the impact those messages may be having on society as a whole.

Limitations

The current study included a number of limitations. The quantitative nature of the content analysis method did not allow for interpretation or deeper analysis of the television families, including character dynamics and gender roles. On a similar note, the current study used only text-based, online sources and did not take into account the television shows' actual scripts and content. This study included just 10 years of data and was not directly comparable to Skill and Robinson's (1994) study due to the change in unit of analysis, limiting its use in terms of historical data and trends. The study was limited to the television families as represented in the first episode of the first season, rather than including changes that occurred over the course of each program. In addition, the study did not take into account each show's longevity, length, or popularity. Programs that were animated or belonged to the reality or soap opera genres were not included, and the data was not compared to any real-world statistics such as the U.S. Census.

Future Research

Future studies should consider the following ideas. First, a different type of content analysis could build on the current study, adding depth by considering the actual content and/or scripts of the family-focused television programs. The data could also be analyzed over time, finding whether television family configurations are stable or changing significantly. Further, qualitative research methods such as textual analysis would allow researchers to interpret the shows on a deeper level and analyze dynamics between various character types—such as adults versus children or men versus women. In particular, this study highlighted extended family members as a potential research area for future studies. The dynamics involved with extended

family member characters in television families are better suited to a qualitative study of some

kind. This study also highlighted single-parent gender and families with same-sex parents as

other research areas that can identify future trends. In addition, audience studies examining the

actual effect of television family portrayals on study participants would shed light on the

question of whether cultivation theory applies to this subject.

Second, future studies could expand the data to cover a longer period of time, beyond the

10 years included in the current study. Researchers could also consider changes that took place

over the course of each television program and add animated, reality, and soap opera shows to

the population. Also, some television shows ran for longer periods of time than others or were

more popular and attracted more viewers. These programs may have been seen by more people

and had a greater potential influence in terms of cultivation. Future research could somehow

account for each show's number of seasons and/or popularity ratings, as well as the types of

channels on which they were aired. Similarly, future research could take into account whether

each television show was 30 or 60 minutes long. Since 60-minute shows last longer, they could

catch more viewers and/or have a potentially larger influence on audiences due to longer

exposure compared with 30-minute shows.

Third, researchers should consider studying quasi-family units such as groups of friends

who take on the characteristics of a family. Examples include the casts of *How I Met Your

Mother* and *New Girl*. Since these shows did not focus on a family as defined in this study, they

were not included in the current study; however, the quasi-family concept could be interesting

for a future study, either standing alone or in comparison with more traditional television

families. Fourth, a comparison to real-world data such as the U.S. Census would provide an idea

of whether the television world is mirroring or contrasting with real life. Fifth, the ethnicity/race

variable could be added back to examine changes in those characteristics of television families

and to compare the data to Skill and Robinson's (1994) and/or to the U.S. Census.

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Appendix A: **Coding Sheet**

Television program name:	Family name:

Genre (circle one):   Sitcom   Drama   Comedy/Drama

Year first aired:	Number of seasons:	Number of episodes:	Episode length in minutes:

Channel name:	Channel type (circle one): Broadcast Basic Cable/Satellite Premium Cable/Satellite Other	Target audience (circle one): Children Teen Adult

Family configuration type (circle one):

      Childless   Empty-nest   Guardian (M / F / Couple)   Nuclear

      Nuclear with same-sex parents   Polygamist   Reconstituted   Single-parent

Extended family member(s) present?   Yes   No

    If yes: How many?   Type?   Live in family's home? Yes No Some Unsure

Parent type (circle one):

      Father   Mother   n/a (no children)   Not present   Parents

  If couple: Heterosexual   Homosexual   If not present, reason:

Parent marital status (circle one):

        Divorced   Married   n/a (no children)   Partnership

           Unclear   Unmarried   Widow   Widower

Number of male children:	Number of female children:

Appendix B: **List of Television Families, 2004–2013**

	Program Name	Family Name	Genre
Started Airing Prior to 2004			
1	7th Heaven	Camden	drama
2	8 Simple Rules	Hennessy	sitcom
3	According to Jim	(no last name)	sitcom
4	All of Us	James	sitcom
5	American Dreams	Pryor	drama
6	Arrested Development	Bluth, George/Lucille	sitcom
7	Arrested Development	Bluth, Michael	sitcom
8	Arrested Development	Fünke	sitcom
9	Everwood	Brown	drama
10	Everybody Loves Raymond	Barone	sitcom
11	George Lopez	Lopez	sitcom
12	Gilmore Girls	Gilmore	comedy/drama
13	Grounded for Life	Finnerty	sitcom
14	Hope & Faith	Shanowski	sitcom
15	Judging Amy	Gray/Cassidy	drama
16	Malcolm in the Middle	Wilkerson	sitcom
17	My Wife and Kids	Kyle	sitcom
18	One on One	Barnes	sitcom
19	One Tree Hill	Roe	drama
20	One Tree Hill	Scott	drama
21	Reba	Hart	sitcom
22	Romeo!	Miller	sitcom
23	Six Feet Under	Fisher	comedy/drama
24	Still Standing	Miller	sitcom
25	That '70s Show	Forman	sitcom
26	That's So Raven	Baxter	sitcom
27	The Bernie Mac Show	McCullough	sitcom
28	The King of Queens	Heffernan	sitcom
29	The O.C.	Cohen	drama
30	The Sopranos	Soprano	drama
31	Two and a Half Men	Harper	sitcom
32	What I Like About You	Tyler	sitcom
33	Wild Card	Busiek/Woodall	comedy/drama
34	Yes, Dear	Hughes	sitcom
35	Yes, Dear	Warner	sitcom
Started Airing During 2004			
36	Complete Savages	Savage	sitcom
37	Darcy's Wild Life	Adams	sitcom
38	Darcy's Wild Life	Fields	sitcom
39	Drake & Josh	Nichols/Parker	sitcom

40	Huff	Huffstodt	comedy/drama
41	Jack & Bobby	Benedict	drama
42	Jack & Bobby	McCallister	drama
43	Kevin Hill	Hill	drama
44	Listen Up!	Kleinman	sitcom
45	Phil of the Future	Diffy	sitcom
46	Quintuplets	Chase	sitcom
47	Rodney	Hamilton	sitcom
48	Second Time Around	Muse	sitcom
49	Summerland	Gregory/Westerly	drama
50	The Big House	Cleveland	sitcom
51	Unfabulous	Singer	sitcom
Started Airing During 2005			
52	Beautiful People	Kerr	drama
53	Everybody Hates Chris	(no last name)	sitcom
54	Freddie	Moreno	sitcom
55	Living With Fran	Reeves	sitcom
56	Medium	Dubois	drama
57	Related	Spencer	comedy/drama
58	South of Nowhere	Carlin	drama
59	The Suite Life of Zack & Cody	Martin	sitcom
60	The War at Home	Gold	sitcom
61	Weeds	Botwin	comedy/drama
Started Airing During 2006			
62	Big Love	Henrickson	drama
63	Brothers & Sisters	Laurent/Whedon	drama
64	Brothers & Sisters	Walker, Kevin	drama
65	Brothers & Sisters	Walker, Tommy/Julia	drama
66	Friday Night Lights	Taylor	drama
67	Hannah Montana	Stewart	sitcom
68	Kyle XY	Trager	drama
69	The New Adventures of Old Christine	Campbell	sitcom
70	'Til Death	Stark	sitcom
71	'Til Death	Woodcock	sitcom
72	Tyler Perry's House of Payne	Payne	comedy/drama
Started Airing During 2007			
73	Aliens in America	Tolchuck	sitcom
74	Army Wives	Burton	drama
75	Army Wives	Holden	drama
76	Army Wives	LeBlanc	drama
77	Army Wives	Moran	drama
78	Army Wives	Sherwood	drama
79	Cory in the House	Baxter	sitcom
80	John from Cincinnati	Yost	drama

81	Just Jordan	Lewis	sitcom
82	Life is Wild	Clarke/Weller	drama
83	Lincoln Heights	Sutton	drama
84	Notes from the Underbelly	Stone	sitcom
85	Rules of Engagement	Bingham	sitcom
86	Rules of Engagement	Rhodes/Morgan	sitcom
87	The Bill Engvall Show	Engvall	sitcom
88	The Riches	Malloy	drama
89	Wizards of Waverly Place	Russo	sitcom
Started Airing During 2008			
90	Delocated	(no last name)	sitcom
91	Gary Unmarried	Brooks	sitcom
92	Kath & Kim	Day/Baker	sitcom
93	Rita Rocks	Clemens	sitcom
94	Under One Roof	Hill	sitcom
Started Airing During 2009			
95	10 Things I Hate About You	Stratford	sitcom
96	JONAS	Lucas	comedy/drama
97	Meet the Browns	Brown	sitcom
98	Modern Family	Dunphy	sitcom
99	Modern Family	Pritchett	sitcom
100	Modern Family	Pritchett/Tucker	sitcom
101	Ruby & the Rockits	Gallagher	sitcom
102	Surviving Suburbia	Patterson	sitcom
103	The Good Wife	Florrick	drama
104	The Middle	Heck	sitcom
105	United States of Tara	Gregson	comedy/drama
Started Airing During 2010			
106	$h*! My Dad Says	Goodson	sitcom
107	Are We There Yet?	Persons/Kingston	sitcom
108	Better with You	Putney	sitcom
109	Better with You	Putney/Coles	sitcom
110	Blue Bloods	Reagan, Danny/Linda	drama
111	Blue Bloods	Reagan, Erin	drama
112	Caprica	Adama	drama
113	Caprica	Graystone	drama
114	Good Luck Charlie	Duncan	sitcom
115	Life Unexpected	Cassidy/Bazile	drama
116	Melissa & Joey	Burke/Scanlon	sitcom
117	No Ordinary Family	Powell	comedy/drama
118	Parenthood	Braverman	comedy/drama
119	Parenthood	Braverman/Holt	comedy/drama
120	Parenthood	Braverman/Trussell	comedy/drama
121	Parenthood	Graham	comedy/drama

122	Raising Hope	Chance	sitcom
123	Running Wilde	Kadubic	sitcom
124	The Big C	Jamison	drama
Started Airing During 2011			
125	Episodes	Lincoln	sitcom
126	I Hate My Teenage Daughter	Miller	sitcom
127	I Hate My Teenage Daughter	Watson	sitcom
128	Jessie	Ross	sitcom
129	Last Man Standing	Baxter	sitcom
130	Let's Stay Together	Whitmore	sitcom
131	Let's Stay Together	Woodson	sitcom
132	Retired at 35	Robbins	sitcom
133	Shameless	Gallagher	comedy/drama
134	Switched at Birth	Kennish	drama
135	Switched at Birth	Vasquez	drama
136	The Borgias	Borgia	drama
137	The Protector	Sheppard	drama
138	Tyler Perry's For Better or Worse	Williams	comedy/drama
139	Working Class	Mitchell	sitcom
Started Airing During 2012			
140	Baby Daddy	Wheeler	sitcom
141	Ben and Kate	Fox	sitcom
142	Crash & Bernstein	Bernstein	sitcom
143	Dog with a Blog	James/Jennings	sitcom
144	Lab Rats	Davenport/Dooley	sitcom
145	See Dad Run	Hobbs	sitcom
146	The First Family	Johnson	sitcom
147	The Neighbors	Weaver	sitcom
148	The Soul Man	Ballentine	sitcom
149	Touch	Bohm	drama
Started Airing During 2013			
150	Instant Mom	Phillips	sitcom
151	Liv and Maddie	Rooney	sitcom
152	Love Thy Neighbor	Harris/Love	sitcom
153	Mom	Plunkett	sitcom
154	The Americans	Jennings	drama
155	The Fosters	Foster	drama
156	The Goldbergs	Goldberg	sitcom
157	The Haunted Hathaways	Hathaway	sitcom
158	The Michael J. Fox Show	Henry	sitcom
159	The Millers	Miller	sitcom
160	The Thundermans	Thunderman	sitcom
161	Trophy Wife	Harrison	sitcom
162	Witches of East End	Beauchamp	drama