NETFLIX CONSUMERS: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Content

It feels as thought the content on Netflix is never ending, with countless different TV series and films to choose from. Since there so many options to choose from on the popular streaming platform, one might expect to see a variety of representations. There is a lack of representation in the TV and film industry, but how does Netflix compare to this? Analyzing underrepresented groups such as racial minorities, the LGBTQ+ community, and even representations of women, Netflix does seem to set itself apart from other media outlets by featuring characters who represent a minority role; such as Ellie Chu, the main character in Netflix's' "The Half of It", who an Asian American female, and comes out as lesbian during the film. Although Netflix is making some progress as far as increasing the representation on the screen, the current algorithm Netflix uses pushes this effort a step back. In 2017, Netflix shifted from the use of a star rating to a thumbs up or down rating system. Although it isn't obvious when scrolling through suggested films to watch, the algorithm is creating a personalized experience for each user, instead of creating a "shared world" (Brinker 2021). This might not seem negative at first, what could be wrong with tailoring the viewing experience to each individual? The issue is that, even when Netflix used the star-rating algorithm, the ratings were not based upon a collective star-rating- Netflix itself gave the rating based on what the user has previously watched to determine how much the user would like it, which was deceptive to viewers. Although the switch to the thumbs up and down ratings are less deceiving, the algorithm is still basing it's suggestions off of a generated match percentage based on what the viewer has previously watched. All together, this results in a less disruptive organization of content that creates an experience for viewers that can be introducing a lack of representation. In summary, although there is a variety of representation on Netflix, the way in which an individual user finds it can be distorted.

Production

As consumers, why does the amount of representation Netflix includes in content and production even matter? Why break down the types of characters we see on- screen, or the people who contribute to producing it? In other words, why does it matter if Netflix consumers know all this? As media consumers living during a time where media consumption is nearly non-stop and unavoidable, our perception of the media we consume has a great effect on our lives and how we view society and those in it. Our media literacy (or our ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate with a variety of different media messages) creates the framework for which we understand the world and society (Center for Media Literacy, 2022). We build our skills for self expression by consuming media and interpreting representations of people who are similar to us, as well as understanding other groups that are outside of one's self-identifying group. Therefore, the type of media we are consuming and watching has an impact upon our real lives. Being that Netflix has created a platform in which binge-watching has become even more accessible, consumers carry a considerable amount of weight when it comes to what they decide to watch, and how much it disrupts their perception of society. To tie it all up, Netflix consumers need to know that what they decide to watch on Netflix comes full circle in the progression of representation, and the level to which Netflix is disruptive in making a dent in the changing shape of media. We need to become conscious Netflix consumers in order to continue seeing more positive and effective change within the film industry (or disruption) in our media selections. Without this power of conscious consumerism and media literacy in the hands of Netflix consumers, we wouldn't have the same perspectives and perceptions of both society and who we are, as well as have the ability to adapt these perceptions.

Consumption

In recent years, Netflix has prided itself on the amount of representation behind the scenes in their production. Netflix makes a good effort at hiring women and minorities, in fact, in the 2019-2020 season more than a third of TV episodes were directed by women, and just under a third were directed by people of color. Netflix has announced that within their hiring process they have integrated bias-spotting training, are choosing their candidates in less-traditional ways, and are even hiring managers whose jobs are to specifically search for missing perspectives in production. However, having the amount of TV episodes that are directed by women and non-white directors hover around ⅓ in just the 2019-2020 season is not hat impressive in the grand scheme of things when compared to the percentage of white male directors. Not only that, but women of color are still at the largest disadvantage even at Netflix, with just 10% of directors during the 2019-2020 season being minority female (DGA, 2021). Netflix is putting forth an effort to open doors for underrepresented directors and producers, some of the efforts they have announced in order to help them do so include bootcamps for emerging creators in the Black community and constructing more diverse networks by having partnerships with organizations that help them hire outside of the mold. The conscious effort is a step in the right direction, and something that helps the cause are the benefits and support that Netflix provides for their employees. They share that it's important to them that everyone feels belonging reflected at their workplace, which is why they have a total of 15 different Employee Resource Groups including groups for minorities such as Natives, Blacks, people with disabilities, people who belong to the LGBTQ+ community, and more. An article published in 2021 introduces Netflix's "Inclusion Lens" that encourages embracing difference and diversity, keeping an eye out for biases, and a more considerate outlook on how a decision can impact a marginalized community. So it seems Netflix does stand out by comparison to other media outlets that they care about the amount of representation that goes into making their content.

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