LEADING THE WALKING DEAD: PORTRAYALS OF POWER AND AUTHORITY

IN THE POST-APOCALYPTIC TELEVISION SHOW

by

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ABSTRACT

This multi-method analysis examines how power and authority are portrayed through the characters in *The Walking Dead*. Five seasons of the show were analyzed to determine the characteristics of those in power. Dialogue is important in understanding how the leaders came to power and how they interact with the people in the group who have no authority. The physical characteristics of the leaders were also examined to better understand who was likely to be in a position of power. In the episodes in the sample, leaders fit into a specific demographic. Most who are portrayed as having authority over the others are Caucasian, middle-aged men, though other characters often show equivalent leadership potential. Women are depicted as incompetent leaders and vulnerable, and traditional gender roles are largely maintained. Findings show that male conformity was most prevalent overall, though instances did decrease over the course of five seasons. Instances of female nonconformity increased over time, while female conformity and male nonconformity remained relatively level throughout.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A day that starts out like any other can be quickly transformed by the addition of a war, revolt, or virus. Fictional apocalypses typically occur on an average afternoon to an unassuming group of people who are then forced to survive the unthinkable. In an instant, families are torn apart and survivors must make decisions they never thought themselves capable of. With the fall of society and structure, a hero must emerge to save humankind.

While doomsday scenarios date back at least to the Bible, the past few years have seen a rise in popularity for such apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic plots. Audience interest in series such as *The Hunger Games, The Mazerunner, Divergent,* and other texts have helped solidify the place of similar storylines in popular culture. These popular plots have also made their way onto television, with *The Walking Dead* is an example. AMC's fictional, post-apocalyptic television show follows a group of people trying to survive in America in the aftermath of an unnamed pandemic virus. Many deaths and mass evacuations lead to the abandonment of many parts of the country, and the dissolution of most institutions, including the government and law enforcement. Despite the fall of structured society, *The Walking Dead* still portrays the characters as largely maintaining many traditional hegemonic power arrangements and ideologies from present day society. While leaders are no longer elected to positions of power in the post-apocalyptic society, informal authority figures still emerge to guide the survivors and enforce norms.

The following research examines how power and authority are distributed among the characters in this program, and what traits are deemed appropriate for a good leader. How leaders are chosen, who holds positions of power, and how those authority figures

treat those who follow them were all examined to understand the influence of leadership in a world with no established institutions. Furthermore, an analysis of the characters who belong to an established group but hold no decision-making power was conducted in order to better understand the demographic breakdown of main characters on the show, as well as understanding how different groups such as African Americans, Asian Americans, and women are represented.

The storylines of *The Walking Dead* largely revolve around the idea that life as the survivors knew it no longer exists. The point is often made by the characters that the world is entirely different following the outbreak of the virus. Because of the risk of attack and subsequent infection by those already infected, the survivors are no longer able to live in their homes, go to work and school, or even visit a grocery store to buy necessities. However, despite how drastically the world has changed, the structure of authority and leadership in society maintains certain modern elements, such as a single leader making decisions for a group. Analyzing this maintenance of hegemonic power structures that so closely resemble modern America is important in order to understand the emphasis society places on the idea of a specific ruling class, as well as some of the ways the media reflect concepts and social structure that exist in reality.

Theoretical Framework

The media theory of cultural hegemony describes the way a dominant group manipulates and influences the ideas and actions of others by imposing the ruling culture on society without force. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1976) argued that those who have control of a society's material means also have control of that society's intellectual means, since "those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to

it" (Marx & Engels, 1976, p. 31). In terms of race and gender, hegemony is often evident when the ruling class is comprised of a particular demographic. Antonio Gramsci also looked at the ruling class's structure by acknowledging those who do not agree with the ideas, values, and perceptions of those who make up the dominant group. The subaltern class, as he called them, fails to make their own culture the worldview of those around them because they are not united. In order to overtake the ruling class, members of a subaltern group would need to be viewed as a "state" with the same ideas (Gramsci, 1985, p. 34).

While hegemony initially addressed the divide between socioeconomic classes, stereotyping, which Lippmann first described as "a very partial and inadequate way of viewing the world," shows that people are often placed into distinct categories based on predetermined perceptions of their characteristics and abilities (p. 72). Instead of attempting to gather new information from every individual, people often rely to some extent on stereotypes. Dyer (1984) describes seeing people in certain "roles" and "thinking of them purely in terms of certain actions" (p. 275). Dyer primarily discusses stereotypes in films; he examines the way characters are stereotyped in order for audiences to understand their role in a movie. However, such stereotypes can be perpetuated through any form of media. A person's occupation, skin color, sex, and sexual orientation, among other things, can be used to place that person in a specific, narrow role. Hall (1997) refers to stereotyping as "central to the representation of racial difference" and uses the example of seeing a table and categorizing it as such without having ever seen that type of table before (p. 257). In this way, stereotyping can be used

to assess a person based on what is seen instead of what is actually know. While stereotypes are often used to better understand people, they can also be very limiting.

Focusing more specifically on media's impact on audiences, Gerbner's theory of cultivation asserts that the more time someone spends watching television, the more likely they are to perceive their own environment as being reflective of what they see on TV (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2009). While cultivation theory generally addresses audiences' perception of danger, television consumption can also reinforce stereotypes, such as affecting how ethnic groups are perceived by heavy television viewers (Lee et al., 2009). Recurring themes on television may be understood as accurate representations of society, and perceptions of violence, danger, marriage, careers, and family can all potentially be affected by heavy television viewing (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2009). The theories of hegemony and stereotyping were applied to this study to examine the interactions on portrayals of characters in *The Walking Dead*, while the theory of cultivation helps understand how these depictions might influence audiences.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Many previous studies have been conducted to examine stereotyping, hegemony, and cultivation on television. The following literature review focuses on gender and race as portrayed in fictional television shows, stereotypes in the media, and the role of post-apocalyptic plots and the horror genre in the media.

Representation of Gender and Race on Prime Time TV

In order to understand how media products perpetuate stereotypes, it is important to examine the representation of certain groups, such as women. While television programs have always included female characters, women's depictions on TV have varied greatly over time, and they are usually portrayed differently than their male costars. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970 – 1977) is often praised for showing a single woman with a career and a fulfilling life, which helped shape future depictions of women on TV (Dow, 1996). However, despite the seemingly feminist theme, Dow (1990) argues that the show still puts forward a stereotypical view of a woman as part of family dynamic. Specifically, the author critiques Mary Richards' relationship with her boss, Lou Grant, saying she "consistently seeks Lou's approval" and classifying her actions as "submission" (Dow, 1990, p. 265). Similarly, Mary "nurtures" Lou and Dow (1990) describes her as being "the ideal mother-surrogate" (p. 266). Furthermore, Dow (1990) argues that Mary's fostering nature and tendency to concern herself with other people's problems positions her own issues as less important. Ultimately, a closer examination of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* revealed that some of the plot situations and actions of the characters limited Mary's role as an independent woman, and that she was a successful, single woman "only at the expense of conforming to traditional expectations" (Dow,

1990, p. 271). Like many other television shows, *The Mary Tyler Moore* show had many opportunities to depict a female character in a progressive way, and though it was progressive for the time, hegemonic expectations of power and gender roles ultimately shaped the message of the show.

Programming in the 1980s also introduced a number of women on television who were powerful, but their overall depiction was problematic. Referring to soap operas such as *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, and *Falcon Crest*, Dow (1996) argues that many of the female lead characters during this period did not defy "the power of the patriarchy" because their power was often gained through their association with men (p. 97). Powerful women in these programs were also often depicted as evil, particularly towards other women (Dow, 1996). In another genre from the same period, the professional serial drama, such as *L.A. Law* (1986 – 1994), introduced capable, professional women with respectable jobs at which they excel. Still, the stars of these shows were often portrayed as being unable to cope with balancing a high-powered career and a fulfilling personal life, and issues with romantic relationships, family, and personal well-being were prevalent (Dow, 1996). However, family programming portrayed women as having it all; they successfully worked outside the home and managed a household without any issue. While one depiction showed women as being unable to maintain a balance between professional and personal life, another depiction showed that women only needed to add a career on top of their roles as wives and mothers in order to be successful (Dow, 1996).

Murphy Brown (1988 – 1998) also depicted the postfeminist woman as being largely unable to balance personal and professional satisfaction. Though Murphy had a successful career as a journalist, she struggled to maintain romantic relationships because

of the demands of her job (Dow, 1996). Dow describes Murphy as a "victim of conflicting expectations that continue to be enforced by a patriarchal culture" (p. 150).

Gender differences still exist among characters on prime-time television programs. Using 275 prime-time television programs from 2012, Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, and Pieper (2012) found that hypersexuality measures, such as wearing revealing clothing, appearing on screen partially nude, and being physically attractive, were higher among women. Women were also less likely to hold jobs, with only 34.4% of all on screen jobs being held by women (Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2012, p. 12). In terms of occupation, women were less likely than men to be depicted in management positions, but gender distribution in other occupations was more balanced (Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2012).

Along with occupational differences, women are also more likely to be portrayed as victims of crime, according to Parrott and Parrott (2015). The authors' quantitative analysis of victim and perpetrator stereotypes examined crime-based dramas, such as *Law & Order, CSI, NCIS, Criminal Minds,* and their spinoffs, between 2010 and 2013. Ultimately, the examination of focal characters found that overall there were more male characters than female, with Caucasian men being the most predominant. Caucasian women were the second largest demographic depicted, followed by African American men, the African American women. Of all these characters, the Caucasian women were most likely to be victims of crime such as assault, rape, and murder. Offenders, however, were not portrayed according to stereotypes, and "these programs do not endorse the ideal offender stereotype in which minority men are linked with violence and crime" (Parrott, 2015, p. 80). Despite not gaining a better understanding of the portrayal of

perpetrators, studying representation in crime dramas still provides a better understanding of gender roles in popular prime-time television.

Gender differences are also evident with examining horror and action genres specifically. Gilpatric (2010) analyzes women who have major roles in action movies and partake in violence against other characters, referring to them as Violent Female Action Characters (VFACs). The researcher coded for romantic involvement with a male character such as the main hero or villain, since women in action and horror films are likely to be romantically involved with a powerful male character. Other interactions with the male hero, such as assisting him or being protected by him, were also coded. Findings showed that only "15.3% of women were depicted as the main heroine," while 58.6% were depicted in a secondary role, such as being assisted by the male hero (Gilpatric, 2010, p. 739). Furthermore, 70% of VFACs were portrayed in a romantic relationship, with over 60% involved with male hero (Gilpatric, 2010). Results also showed that VFACs were overwhelmingly Caucasian and in their 20s or 30s with high status jobs (Gilpatric, 2010). Gilpatric argues that VFACs operate inside socially constructed gender norms and the depiction as sidekicks or girlfriends is not conducive to the idea of a strong female action character, despite their acts of violence.

Cowan and O'Brien (1990) examine the differences between men and women in slasher films in terms of which gender, if any, is more likely to kill or be killed. They used chi-square tests to compare female nonsurvivors vs. male nonsurvivors, female survivors vs. male survivors, female nonsurvivors vs. female survivors, and male nonsurvivors vs. male survivors (Cowan & O'Brien, 1990). The researchers coded such aspects as provocative clothing worn by the victim, promiscuity of the victim, and other

sexual factors. Traits of victims who survived their attack were also coded. In finding

surprising to the author, women were not more likely to be victims of violence in slasher

films; they were, however, more likely to survive the attacks when they were victims

(Cowan & O'Brien, 1990). Women who were coded as less sexual—less promiscuous,

not wearing revealing clothing, not engaged in a sexual act during or immediately before

the attack—were more likely to survive than those female victims who were portrayed as

being more sexual (Cowan & O'Brien, 1990). Female survivors were often more

androgynous and less attractive. There were few differences between female and male

survivor' traits, but males who were attacked and did not survive often possessed

negative traits such as being arrogant or mean, or having participated in illegal or

immoral activities (Cowan & O'Brien, 1990).

Brooks (2015) examines African American female characters in contemporary

zombie narratives through Michonne in the television series *The Walking Dead* and

Selena in the film *28 Days Later*. While it is significant that these women are portrayed

in major roles, they are still subject to certain horror genre tropes and race and gender

stereotypes (Brooks, 2015). Michonne is portrayed as "the strong African American

woman" who has suffered losses similar to or more devastating that her fellow survivors,

but she accepts her fate stoically, appearing to need no real assistance or reassurance

from those around her (Brooks, 2015, p. 469). Furthermore, Michonne's "African

Americanness is implicitly associated with a certain masculinity" as she is seen expertly

wielding a katana and protecting herself—something the other women in the group are

largely incapable of (Brooke, 2015, p. 469). The stereotypical strong African American

woman appears again in Selena, a character in the film *28 Days Later*. Selena is

portrayed as unyieldingly willing to kill anyone in her way, and even informs those around her she will have no problem taking their lives should they become a threat (Brooks, 2015). However, Selena also represents another stereotype often associated with African American women; she is forced into the role of a mother figure for her fellow survivor Jim (Brooks, 2015).

While both Michonne and Selena were created with certain stereotypes of African American women in mind, they are also both relatively multidimensional characters who serve a principle purpose in their respective plots. Because of this, and despite the negative results of the obvious stereotypes, Brooks (2015) argues that their existence in zombie fiction is a positive development towards more inclusion for both post-apocalyptic characters and audiences.

While it is becoming increasingly common for television shows to feature a female lead character or an ensemble cast made up of women, women still appear less often on television than men do (Collins, 2011). Though this discrepancy is not new, it is surprising given the shift in other aspects of entertainment media, such as the increase in available media and the growing audience who is exposed to it. This lack of female characters on television also differs from reality, since women now make up a nearly equivalent percentage of the workforce in the United States (Collins, 2011). While underrepresentation is arguably the most significant issue surrounding women and television, there are other disparities that lead to unequal portrayals of women in entertainment media. Even when the men-to-women ratio on TV is more equal, women are not always portrayed in roles that are equivalent to their male colleagues. The studies Collins (2011) analyzed found that even when women were depicted on television, it was

often in "sexualized or subordinated roles" (pp. 293-294). This can be problematic when advocating for more roles for women on television, since all roles are not positive or realistic representations.

While men and women are often represented differently in the media, depiction also varies widely based on race. The predominance of Caucasians as television characters places limitations on other racial minorities regarding casting and representation, and when it comes to prime-time TV, many racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented.

Extensive research has focused on the sitcom *Julia* (1968-1971), one of the first programs to feature an African American woman as the lead. In this show, Julia, a widow and mother to a young son, worked as a nurse in a clinic under a Caucasian, male doctor. Most of the show focused primarily on her social interactions and personal life, instead of her work as a nurse. This "sanitized" version of life as a single, working African American woman in the 60's and 70's drew criticism for a variety of reasons (Warner, 2015, p. 634). Some viewers disapproved of the "race-neutral" character of Julia, and they felt the show should not make such an effort to appeal Caucasian viewers. Aniko Bodroghkozy (1992) describes the storylines in *Julia* as being "extraordinarily out of touch" with the reality of middle-class African Americans in 1970's America (p. 414). Not only did the show portray Julia and her son Corey as living a life well beyond the actual means of a nurse and single mother at the time, it also avoided the issue of race almost entirely. Warner (2015) described Julia as fitting into the stereotypical television trope of the "Caucasian Negro," which was created to appeal to Caucasian audiences (p. 634).

This race neutralization was obvious to many viewers, as evidenced by audience response letters to the creators of the show. One Caucasian viewer noted "an unwillingness to allow the program to be 'African American'" (Bodroghkozy, 1992, p. 417). Other letters, which were mainly from Caucasian, middle-aged, suburban women, had similar responses to the show and expressed disappointment that *Julia* was not doing more to correct misconceptions about African Americans. Other viewers were excited at the prospect of social change through television. A mother from Chicago hoped the program would help people to "understand each other" (Bodroghkozy, 1992, p. 415). Still, some Caucasian viewers still felt African American lead characters did not belong on TV. There was a fear that featuring an African American woman as a protagonist would be too empowering for African Americans. *Julia* might encourage integration and equality, essentially providing African American Americans with the opportunity to occupy a new place in society. Some viewers simply were not ready for African Americans on television, regardless of their role. Bodroghkozy's analysis of audience letters shows that a portion of TV viewing audiences in the 1960's and 1970's felt television was a medium meant for Caucasian viewers. Many letters commented on the ever-growing amount of programming featuring African Americans; while *Julia* was unique as a fictional television show featuring an African American woman, documentaries and special series were increasingly focusing on the stories of African American Americans. One anonymous writer said the programming was "enough to make a person sick," while another vowed not to purchase any product which featured an African American in its advertisement (Bodroghkozy, 1992, p. 420).

Many African American audience members also noticed the blatant "whiteness" of the show, but many viewers who wrote in were less interested in criticizing the show and more interested in suggesting potential changes. Julia was a show with great potential for realistic and positive representations of African Americans, but that potential was seldom met because of self-imposed restrictions by the creators to appeal to a Caucasian audience.

Tukachinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi (2015) examined the representation of race in prime-time television from 1987 to 2009. Findings showed great disparity between racial and ethnic groups on television, with Caucasians accounting for 78 – 88% of regular characters, and African American characters only making up about 10 – 21% of regular characters over the course of two decades; Latino, Asian, and Native American characters each constituted less than 3% of regular characters (Tukachinsky, Mastro, Yarchi, 2015). In general, findings showed that all ethnic minorities were depicted in "highly positive ways"; however, Asian characters, were portrayed as "less likable," and Latinas characters were more likely to be sexualized (Tukachinsky, Mastro, Yarchi, 2015, p. 26). Since only regular characters were coded, non-recurring characters, such as criminals in *Law & Order*, were not analyzed, which might explicate the overall positive portrayal.

Mastro and Robinson's (2008) conducted a content analysis of primetime television that features fictional police officers and perpetrators of crimes. The study specifically examines the representation of minorities as criminals and their subsequent treatment by police officers on TV. Using cultivation theory, the authors discuss the impact of portraying certain groups of people as being more likely to commit crimes, especially violent ones. The use of force by fictional officers was also examined.

Findings showed that fictional police officers were disproportionately Caucasian, but so were the perpetrators. However, Mastro and Robinson (2008) also found that those minorities who were depicted as criminals were more likely to be subjected to excessive force by the police officer, perpetuating the idea that minority offenders were more dangerous or harder to subdue.

Overall, Caucasians are represented more often than African Americans on TV, but Latino characters were even less prevalent that African Americans on prime time television (Monk-Turner et al., 2010). After analyzing two weeks of prime time television shows and coding variables such as race, age, income, and role prominence, Monk-Turner et al. (2010) also studied characters on more specific attributes, such as appearance and personality. Their results showed that 74% of the characters in the sample were Caucasian, while 16 percent were African American and 5% were Latino; this showed a 2% increase in Latino character from the previous Mastro and Greenberg study a decade earlier (Monk-Turner, 2010, p. 105). While Monk-Turner (2010) found that African American representation on television is reflective of the African American population in the United States, Latino representation on prime time television still does not provide an accurate depiction of the Latino population in the U.S.

An increase in the number of characters does not translate into equal representation on television, though it is a positive first step. For minorities to achieve equality on American television, major roles need to be filled by minority actors, and characters portrayed by minorities need to be written in inclusive and nondiscriminatory ways.

The Impact of Stereotypes on TV

Stereotyping, just like under-representation, can be damaging for the perception of minorities among television audiences. Given and Monahan (2005) studied the effects of stereotypical imagery on viewers by showing them one of three video clips from a film: 1) The control—showed a Caucasian male character instead of any African Americans, 2) Imagery of a stereotypical "mammy" figure, and 3) A stereotypical representation of the "Jezebel." Participants then watched a short clip of a mock interview featuring either an African American female applicant or a Caucasian female applicant (Givens & Monahan, 2005, p. 92). After the clips, participants were to select adjectives that they felt best described the applicant whose interview they had watched, along with statements about qualifications and good employment options. All of the adjectives and statements identified aligned with positive or negative stereotypes and "Jezebel" or "mammy" stereotypes (Givens & Monahan, 2005). Ultimately, the researchers findings indicated that participants who were shown the interview with the African American applicant "responded significantly faster to negative adjectives than positive ones" (Givens & Monahan, 2005, p. 97-99). They also found that respondents who viewed the clip with the "Jezebel" prime made "faster associations to stereotype-consistent adjectives" (Givens & Monahan, 2005, p. 99). Overall, Givens and Monahan (2005) concluded that watching a female African American applicant participate in an interview "was a necessary and sufficient cue for the application of racial schemas" (p. 101). In fact, they argue that negative associations with African Americans are so strong that other African Americans might respond similarly, which implies "not only reflect knowledge of stereotypes but belief in them as well" (Givens & Monahan, 2005, p. 101).

Racial stereotypes are not the only stereotypes that exist in the media. Engstrom and Valenzano (2010) looked at the issue of hegemonic portrayals of religion and religious figures in the fictional television show *Supernatural*. An examination of the first three seasons of the show produced several findings, such as Catholicism being portrayed in a positive light and other religious beliefs being portrayed negatively (Engstrom & Valenzano, 2010). This is important because while the show "holds the potential to introduce other religions, it still conveys the implicit acceptance of the familiar" (Engstrom & Valenzano, 2010, p. 81).

Bond (2013) examined the representation of disability on television, looking specifically at programming for children. Only about 4% of the 407 analyzed episodes featured a character with a physical disability, making the number of characters with a disability only 0.4%, compared to 14% of the United States population (Bond, 2013, p. 412). When a character with a disability was portrayed, however, it was often in a positive way, and they were likely to be older men whose disabilities were unrelated to the storyline (Bond, 2013).

Like members of other minority groups, characters who identify as gay are portrayed on television less often than characters who are not gay, and they are often portrayed differently. Raley and Lucas (2010) conducted a content analysis of prime-time television shows to examine the representation of gay and lesbian characters. Findings showed that gay and lesbian characters were the subject of 84 jokes throughout the sampled episodes, but many of those jokes were actually made by the gay and lesbian characters, as opposed to being made by the heterosexual characters (Raley & Lucas, 2010). Gay and lesbian characters were also portrayed as displaying affection, such as

holding hands, but "kissing and implications of sexual activity were unlikely to be shown" (Raley & Lucas, 2010, p. 32). Over time, depictions of characters who are gay on television has increased, but even shows that feature several gay or lesbian characters often avoid addressing issues specific to the gay community, which is a limiting representation.

Background: Post-apocalyptic Pop Culture

Post-apocalyptic fiction has a tendency to maintain certain societal norms and in order to be appealing and understandable to modern audiences, post-apocalyptic fiction needs to feature certain aspects of the "past" (which is actually current society). For post-apocalyptic fiction to succeed with audiences, the plot needs to express that, despite the devastation of an apocalyptic event, "human nature would survive" (Tuttle, 2014, p. 30). So while many post-apocalyptic narratives revolve around the idea that the world as humans knew it is forever changed and nothing is the same, post-apocalyptic fiction also appeals to audiences by providing them with something familiar.

Despite the desire for familiarity in pop culture, supernatural and science fiction narratives have enjoyed immense popularity over the past decade. While vampires, werewolves, and ghosts have all had their moment, zombies have also been prevalent, particularly when the plot follows a post-apocalyptic theme. Platt (2013) theorizes that zombies make good subject matter because however unreal they might be, they are still relatable to some extent for many people. For example, zombies "address fears that are both inherent to the human condition and specific to the time of their resurrection" (Platt, 2013, p. 547). Like any other fictional monster, zombies are an "industrial production of their culture" and should be examined to study the ethos, events, and even fears of the

society that created them (Platt, 2013, p. 548). Given the booming popularity of zombies in the media, it makes sense for them to be an object of study and a metaphor for greater societal concerns, rather than simply reanimated corpses.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Research Questions

This study used a multi-method approach and analyzed the way power is

constructed in *The Walking Dead.* In order to conduct this research, the following

questions were asked:

RQ1: Who holds leadership positions in this program?

RQ2: How are those who are not in power depicted?

H1: There will be a positive correlation between number of seasons and instance of male

conformity.

H2: Instances of female conformity will increase over time.

Because this study examines hegemony, ideologies, and power struggles, a

discourse analysis was used. Norman Fairclough (1999), in his essay *Discourse and*

Social Change describes discourse analysis as "involv[ing] an interest in properties of

texts, the production, distribution, and consumption of texts, sociocognitive processes of

producing and interpreting texts, social practice in various institutions, the relationship of

social practice to power relations, and hegemonic projects at the social level" (p. 226).

The social roles and power inequalities that exist in *The Walking Dead* are best examined

through a discourse analysis of the actions and interactions of the characters in the show,

as well as who is present on the show and how different groups are represented.

The actions of the characters were also analyzed quantitatively to determine

gender conformity and non-conformity among both male and female characters. A

content analysis was used, which Krippendorff (2013) describes as "a research technique

for making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 24).

Sample

All episodes of *The Walking Dead* through the season five finale were analyzed, for a total of 67 episodes. A qualitative discourse analysis was conducted to see who is depicted in a position of power and how leaders interact with their followers and outsiders. For the purpose of this study, characters were considered to be in a position of power if they had more than two fellow adult survivors, who were not immediate family members, who depended on them to make decision. Once it was determined which characters are authority figures, the actions and words of those figures were analyzed. The other characters reactions' to the leaders were examined, as were their other behaviors. Understanding the role of those not in a position of power was important to better understand the portrayal of power. Furthermore, a broader look at the characters and how they were represented was studied, since certain demographics seem to hold certain roles within the show.

A quantitative content analysis was also conducted to better understand gender roles and gender conformity among the characters. Each episode was analyzed and instances were coded for male conformity, male non-conformity, female conformity, and female non-conformity displayed by living human characters only. Male conformity included the use of physical force to protect the group, the use of physical force to maintain power, keeping watch over the group, and using a weapon to kill or threaten a person, animal, or "walker," which is how characters often refer to those infected with the virus. Male non-conformity included providing comfort to other members of the

group, carrying out domestic tasks such as cooking or cleaning, and staying behind during a mission to rescue people or kill zombies. Female conformity included cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, as well offering comfort or reassurance for members of the group and diffusing situations. Female non-conformity included keeping watch of the camp, using a weapon to threaten another person, and using physical force to protect someone.

The Walking Dead was chosen for this analysis for several reasons. The show is popular; the latest season opened with 14.6 million viewers tuning in live, and an additional 5 million viewers streaming the episode after the premier. It is consistently Sunday night's number one show, even beating out Sunday Night Football (Kissell, 2015). Audience composition is also important, with most viewers being 18 and 49 years old. Demographics on the show are important as well, and the show has even received criticism from fans for having a lack of diversity within the cast, and inequivalent roles for characters (Berry, 2015). Finally, the post-apocalyptic plot make *The Walking Dead* ideal for analysis of hegemonic power structures because it all takes place after the fall of structured society and establishment government or law enforcement agencies. Dialogue on the show even reinforces this idea of disbanded order, saying things like "the world we know is gone" (Kang, 2012). Knowing the storyline encourages the idea of new or different world, this analysis will attempt to determine whether the role of power and authority is portrayed in *The Walking Dead* differently than how it occurs in reality.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

From an analysis of the episodes, several shifts in leadership were identified. The protagonist maintains his position of authority throughout every episode, but other survivors both in and out of his group threaten his power. Three major successful leaders emerge, as well as others who are less effective in their roles. Throughout the analyzed seasons, instances of gender conformity are present, but contradicting roles and nonconformity were also identified.

Leadership in *The Walking Dead*

Typical Leaders. Following the outbreak of the virus, society's governing bodies largely disbanded. While some National Guardsmen are seen briefly in season three, there is no indication that laws are being enforced for the survivors. This lack of order and regulations means there is no need for established law enforcement agencies, which provides the survivors with the opportunity to create their own hierarchy.

The Walking Dead features several characters who hold positions of power over organized groups of other survivors with varying levels of success. Successful leaders— those who are able to maintain their authority, influence the group that follows them, and implement decisions without being questioned—all fit into a narrow demographic description. Consistently throughout the show, the leaders who are portrayed as competent in their roles are Caucasian men of approximately the same age. Rick Grimes, the central character of the show, is one example of this typical leader. This former sheriff's deputy leads the main group of survivors. Rick is Caucasian and appears to be about 40 years old in the beginning of the series. Having been shot and in a coma in the hospital when the outbreak began, Rick is unaware of the virus and its effects for the first

few weeks. His awakening results in the first glimpse of the post-apocalyptic world, and viewers' see the aftermath for the first time along with Rick. Before leaving the hospital, Rick puts on his sheriff's deputy uniform, which he continues to wear for the first few seasons of the show, despite his position in law enforcement no longer existing.

Early on in the first season, Rick takes on a leadership role within his group despite having just joined them. After subduing and handcuffing Merle, a blatantly racist Caucasian male in his late 40s, and a member of the group who tried to declare himself the boss, Rick insists that "things are different now" and the survivors should be fighting the walkers, not each other (Darabont, 2010). He also positions himself as someone to follow, not defy, since "anyone who gets in the way is going to lose" (Darabont, 2010). A short time later, Rick devises a plan to get past some walkers unnoticed, which involves covering Glenn and himself with walker blood and guts. Even though they have just met Rick and his idea is risky for many reasons, the members of the group decide to follow his plan (Darabont, 2010).

Likewise, Philip (a.k.a. The Governor) also exemplifies these characteristics: Caucasian, male, in his 40s, and authoritarian as he runs the community of Woodbury, a small, organized society protected by a wall, in season three. He easily rises to power and is able to dominate those around him. While viewers are not given much information about the Governor's pre-apocalypse life, he does reveal to Andrea that he held a job he was not proud of and lived a largely unsatisfying life (Gimple & Attias, 2012). Despite this seeming lack of pre-apocalypse esteem, the Governor is responsible for the safety and operations of Woodbury, and the survivors who live there trust him and they are willing to risk their own lives to help him solve his dispute with Rick's group.

Other leaders also emerge who are demographically similar to Rick and the Governor, but less prominent, such as Joe in season four. Older than some of the other successful leaders on the show, but also a Caucasian man, Joe is the leader of the Claimers, a loosely organized group of roaming survivors. While the Claimers are arguably less organized than communities like Woodbury and Terminus, Joe is still able to exercise control over his followers. While Joe has relatively few rules for the Claimers to abide by, he is strict in their enforcement and willing to kill those who break them. The members of the Claimers who are shown are all men of approximately Joe's age who could likely survive on their own. Still, the men choose to stay and follow Joe's orders, demonstrating once again the survivors' desire to be part of an organized group with a single person in charge.

Gareth, though younger than Rick and the Governor, is also a Caucasian man who is in charge of the community of Terminus, whose residents depend on him to make decisions and keep them safe. Terminus is a protected compound that is promoted by its inhabitants as being a safe place for all survivors in season five. While it is implied that Gareth's mother, Mary, formed Terminus as a sanctuary for survivors, Terminus and its residents are portrayed on the show as being under the rule of Gareth instead of Mary. While Gareth is seen making decisions about who to let into Terminus, how to protect the group, and how to deal with perceived enemies, Mary is often seen cooking and preparing meals to feed Terminus residents and guests (Gimple, Kang, & Maclaren, 2014).

While the Governor, Joe, and Gareth are all antagonists who are eventually overthrown and killed by members of Rick's group, they are all successful in influencing

and making decisions for their respective groups while still alive. Their followers never seriously question their authority and, before encountering Rick, these leaders are able to independently make judicious choices that help their group maintain its lifestyle and survival.

Other Leaders. Throughout the series, other leaders emerge who successfully hold positions of power at some point, even if they do not remain in leadership. For example, Hershel, a Caucasian man who is approximately 70 years old, makes many decisions regarding his own family and friends while still on his farm. He enforces his rules, such as not using weapons on the property, for both his group and Rick's. However, once his family escapes the herd of walkers on the farm and joins the other survivors on the road, his inclusion in Rick's group quashes Hershel's decision-making power regarding his daughters, Maggie and Beth, and himself. While Rick occasionally consults Hershel when making a tough decision, the ultimate choice is consistently made by Rick alone.

Tyreese, an African American male in his early 40s, and his group face a similar outcome several times during season three when they are taken in by various groups. Upon finding the prison where Rick's group is staying in season three, Tyreese convinces the group they should follow Rick's rules, thus giving up his own implied leadership. Then, after leaving the prison and being welcomed into Woodbury, Tyreese is once again stripped of his power over the others in his group. Finally, after returning to the prison, Tyreese, Sasha, Karen, and the others all accept Rick as the leader of the group and Tyreese permanently loses his position of power over his original companions.

Another Caucasian male in his mid-40s, Abraham was also the leader of his own group before being introduced to Rick. Abraham's small group was composed of only two other survivors, Eugene and Rosita, who are introduced in season four. When Eugene is introduced, it is believed he is a scientist who can help find a cure for the virus, and Abraham and Rosita are escorting him to Washington, D.C. While Eugene and Rosita are portrayed as being relatively independent and capable of making their own choices, such as when they choose to go with Glenn and Tara after their truck is damaged, Abraham does make some crucial decisions on behalf of his group regarding safety and survival. He is particularly cautious about what he will allow Eugene to do, since he believes Eugene is a scientist and the key to ending the epidemic. Abraham will not allow his group to travel through a group of walkers in a train tunnel while with Glenn and Tara, forcing them to head back the other direction (Beattie &Nicotero, 2014). He continues to make decisions for his group even after spending some time with Rick and the others. Abraham and Rick are uncompromising in their ideas about where to go after escaping Terminus, and Abraham is insistent that he, Eugene, and Rosita continue heading toward Washington, D.C., along with Tara, Maggie, and Glenn. However, they encounter numerous obstacles along the way and eventually end up reuniting with the rest of Rick's group in Atlanta, and Abraham adjusts to his new role as a member of the group instead of the leader.

Alexandria Safe-Zone is a sustainable community just outside Washington D.C. that was developed before the walker outbreak and is led by Deanna, a Caucasian woman in her 50s who is largely successful at managing the sizeable community in the sample episodes. Pre-apocalypse, Deanna was a Congresswoman from Ohio, and as a leader she

depends greatly on delegating tasks to the members of her community, thus allowing them to make some of their own decisions while she focuses on larger issues such as who to allow in and how to best protect the residents. Deanna is confident in her ability to lead and enforces the rules she has put in place; when Rick approaches her about how to handle Pete, the abusive husband of another Alexandrian, she tells Rick she will handle it her own way and they cannot kill him because "this is civilization" (Kang & Satrazemis, 2015). However, she later relents and asks Rick to kill Pete after Pete kills her husband, Reg (Gimple, Hoffman & Nicotero, 2015).

Failed Leaders. Some leaders make the decisions to renounce their powered and defer to someone else who is in charge, but they were still respected as authority figures while in power. Other leaders, however, do not gain the deference or the followers they want, and they are often defied or doubted by the people they are attempting to lead.

Shane is presented at the same time as Rick in the show's pilot episode, and he is portrayed as Rick's approximate equal; they are both Caucasian men of approximately the same age. Both were sheriff's deputies before the beginning of the epidemic, and both are physically strong and mentally capable of leading a group. However, they cannot co-exist as equal authority figures. Rick questions Shane's ability to lead and refuses to let Shane make decisions on his own for the group, despite Shane having been with the majority of the group slightly longer than Rick. Shane's lack of authority is evident in the fifth episode of season one, "Wildfire," when the group must decide where to go for the best chance of survival. Shane believes that their best bet is the head toward Fort Benning, a military base about 100 miles away. Rick, however, dismisses this idea under the assumption that the base has likely been swarmed by walkers, and insists that the

group head toward the Centers for Disease Control headquarters in Atlanta. There is no discussion or compromise; the group goes to the CDC (Mazzara, 2010).

While the majority of the people in power portrayed on the show are Caucasian, middle-aged men, Dawn, the leader of a group of former police officers at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, is Caucasian woman in her late 30s. She is considered unfit for a position of power. She is not respected as a leader, and the members of her group believe she is cracking under the pressure of being in charge. They do not always follow her orders well and some even disregard her decisions or ignore her efforts to communicate with them, such as when she is trying to reach the other officers by radio and no one chooses to answer. Some of the officers compare her Captain Hanson, her male mentor who was previously overthrown. Officer O'Donnell, a member of the team that Dawn leads, has similar plans to end Dawn's reign. He demands that she start being honest with the group or he will reveal the secrets she has been trying to hide regarding the death of Officer Gorman, a corrupt former police officer who wanted Dawn overthrown and was killed by a member of Rick's group who knew he often assaulted the survivors brought in by Dawn. O'Donnell goes so far as to attack Dawn, and he almost defeats her, but Beth pushes him down an elevator shaft at the last minute, killing him.

Alternative Leaders. Other various characters throughout the seasons display leadership potential, but are never allowed to hold a leadership position. Theodore, a.k.a T-Dog, is an African American man in his 30s who is very compassionate and willing to help people. When members of the group are forced to quickly leave the city and head back to camp, T-Dog accidentally drops and loses the key to the handcuffs holding Merle on a rooftop. T-Dog repeatedly apologizes and barricades the rooftop door in an attempt

to protect Merle from walkers. He even returns to the site later to try and save Merle. T-Dog consistently joins the group in major tasks such as removing a walker from the well, providing firearms training on the farm, and killing the walkers that had been kept in the barn. Still, despite his willingness to protect and assist the group, T-Dog is never given a position of power, or even many opportunities to speak.

Andrea, a Caucasian woman in her mid-30s, displays an inclination to have a larger role within the group, but she is rarely given the opportunity. After expressing her desire to stay behind at the CDC when it explodes, Dale, a survivor with a strong relationship with Andrea, takes is upon himself to ensure she does not kill herself. Rick and Shane agree with Dale that Andrea should not have a weapon, and Dale takes her gun from her. Still, she receives shooting lessons from Shane and is eventually given a chance to keep armed watch, despite others teasing her about her "Annie Oakley routine" (Johnson, & Ferland, 2011). Her desire to work as a guard is met with similar resistance once she gets to Woodbury, and while the Governor pretends to give her a certain degree of power within the community, he secretly has his closest aid, Milton, monitoring all of her decisions and activities (Kang & Nicotero, 2013).

Glenn is an Asian American man in his late 20s, who shows promise of becoming a leader in his own group before Rick's arrival. He is very resourceful and earned the trust of the group to go on supply runs, even leading some of the other survivors into the city. However, once in the city, they meet Rick, who immediately starts making decisions. Glenn is content to follow Rick for a while, but he eventually begins to question Rick's leadership, and he and Maggie consider going off on their own, but decide to stay, which solidifies Glenn's place as Rick's follower. When he is away from

Rick, however, Glenn still displays an adeptness as a leader, with meeting Tara then encountering Abraham's group as an example.

After rescuing Andrea in the woods, Michonne emerges as a strong character with leadership potential who is never allowed to hold power. Michonne is an African American woman in her mid-30s. Before meeting Andrea, Michonne survived on her own with two walkers, whose arms and bottom jaws had been removed, as a means of protection from other walkers. She is very independent and does not trust the Governor or want to stay in Woodbury upon their arrival. She is not immediately welcomed into Rick's group upon finding them, but she does prove to be very useful and willing to defend the group. She assists in the fight against the Governor and even stabs him before he can kill Rick (Hoffman & Dickerson, 2013). Still, she is given very little power until season five when Deanna makes her a constable of Alexandria, but even that position just calls for peace-keeping.

Obtaining and Maintaining Power

Maintaining Power in the Group. A discourse that becomes evident early on is the perceived necessity of absolute power. The person in power maintains his or her role by being the only one in charge; leaders are unwilling, or perhaps unable, to relinquish control to, or even share rule with, anyone else. To ensure power is not divided, leaders often resort to violence to maintain control.

Early in the show, Rick often feels his power is threatened by Shane. He repeatedly asserts his position as leader and demands that Shane step down and conform to his choices, which leads to a fight between the two. They have a more peaceful discussion later and Rick once again insists that he, not Shane, is in charge. He tells

Shane that if he wants to stay with the group, "you gotta follow my lead" (Gimple, Mazzara, & Dickerson, 2012).

Rick and Shane's power struggle continues to culminate in violence when the two must make a decision with an injured man they think might pose a threat to their group. Shane wants to kill the man; Rick wants to bring the man back to the farm to think about what to do. Rick insists "it is my call, man," and when Shane expresses his doubt that Rick is capable of keeping the group safe, Rick attacks him (Gimple, Mazzara, & Dickerson, 2012). The two engage in a fist fight and wrestle with a gun before Rick declares Shane "doesn't get to make these calls anymore" (Gimple, Mazzara, & Dickerson, 2012). Shane then throws a large wrench at Rick, and their fight ends when he shatters a window and releases some walkers.

Several episodes later, Rick and Shane revisit their conversation about which one of them is a better choice to be in charge. Despite trying to overcome the conflict created by such authoritative personalities, Rick and Shane are once again at odds regarding decision-making and control. Rick feels disrespected and particularly threatened by the thought of Shane taking over his role as Lori's wife and Carl's family, and he suspects that Shane is going to kill him. Shane confirms this when he gets him alone in a field, telling Rick he "ain't got this first clue on how to fix" the problems within his own family (Reilly, Mazzara & Ferland, 2012). Rick moves slowly toward Shane, explaining that they can still work out their differences and head back to the farm; however, when he gets close enough, Rick stabs Shane in the chest, killing him and ending the struggle for power that existed between them for so long.

Rick also ensures that the rest of the group realizes he is the one in charge. The farm has been invaded by walkers and the herd was too large for the group to fight, so they were forced to flee. Losing a few members in the process, the group escapes the farm and reconvenes a safe distance away. Once they have reunited and established a temporary camp, Rick explains that if anyone wants to leave they can, but those who stay will be under his rule. "If you're staying, this isn't a democracy anymore," he says, officially establishing himself as the group's sole leader (Kirkman, Mazzara & Dickerson, 2012).

Once the group has decided to stay and follow Rick, they move into an abandoned prison where they discover it is inhabited by a group of men who had been imprisoned there before the outbreak. Rick finds the group of men to be untrustworthy and he is particularly wary of the men's apparent leader Tomas. Unwilling to risk the safety of his group or his position of power, Rick quickly makes plans to isolate the prison group in their own cell block away from the others. He also takes half the prisoners' food supply as part of the deal (Beattie & Gierhart, 2012). Having already invaded the prison and taken over the space that was once used by the prisoners, Rick ignores the authority of Tomas, the leader of the prisoner, and makes demands that he expects all the people in the prison to follow.

When the group makes it to the prison and helps the other inhabitants eliminate the walkers from the cell block the prison group will soon move into, one of the prisoners is bitten. He begs for the others to spare him and insists he is okay, but Tomas kills him immediately (Beattie, 2012). While this supported Rick's theory that Tomas posed a threat, Tomas' biggest offense occurs just moments later when walkers converge on them

and Tomas sets Rick up to die. He survives, but confronts Tomas; Tomas tried to explain and Rick says, "I get it. Shit happens," before killing Tomas (Beattie, 2012).

Rick feels similarly threatened by the Governor in season four when the Governor comes to take the prison and tells Rick if does not leave he and his group will be killed. In an effort to end the escalating situation, Rick and Hershel both ask the Governor to reconsider his takeover of the prison and move in with the existing group instead. Co-existing groups does not appeal to the Governor and he threatens both Hershel and Michonne in an attempt to get Rick to surrender and leave. When Rick encourages the Governor's army to ignore their leader's orders and not attack the prison, the Governor kills Hershel. He then directs his men to destroy the prison and all the members of Rick's group. The Governor attempts to strangle Rick to death to finally end their feud and he almost succeeds before Michonne stabs him, simultaneously leaving the Governor to die and saving Rick's life (Hoffman & Dickerson, 2013).

After Gareth and some other residents of Terminus kidnap and maim a man from Rick's group, Rick knows they are no longer safe if Gareth is around. Shortly after Gareth and his followers arrive at the church where Rick's group is staying, Rick ambushes Gareth and kills him. His group proceeds to kill members of Gareth's group until only Rick's people are left alive (Kang, Reed, & January, 2014). Joe meets a similar fate in the same season when he and his group attack Rick, Michonne, and Carl in the middle of the night, seeking revenge for the member of their group who was killed by Rick. Joe threatens Rick with a gun, encourages his men to beat Daryl to death, and allows one of his followers to deal with Carl, whom he attempts to rape. Joe pins Rick against the ground and thinks he has won the fight, but Rick manages to rip out his throat

and kill him while Michonne and Daryl kill the others (Gimple, Kang & MacLaren, 2014).

Along with the leaders of opposing groups, various individuals who are perceived as a threat throughout the series are often killed or injured by Rick and other survivors. Negotiations between enemies and attempts at solving problems without violence are usually unsuccessful, and force is typically depicted as the only effective solution for maintaining power. While there are instances of newcomers being welcomed into a group and supposed enemies becoming allies, strangers and outsiders are routinely seen as a threat to the group and the leader's power.

Dealing with Outsiders. Occasionally, Rick's group encounters strangers who they must then decide how to deal with. Early on, Rick lacks a plan for dealing with outsiders, and some of his decisions had disastrous consequences, such as throwing Andrew, a member of the prison group who tried to kill Rick, out of the prison. Assuming Andrew would be killed by walkers, the group forgot about him until he secretly made his way back into the prison and set off the alarms which attracted walkers, resulting in T-Dog's death.

Knowing that outsiders have to be treated with caution, Rick is unsure what to do after discovering Michonne outside the prison fence. Because she is wounded and carrying supplies, Rick and Carl bring her into the prison, but Rick is not welcoming and he keeps her locked in a cell. He tells her they will treat her wounds, but then she has to leave. Michonne ends up proving her worth through her knowledge of Woodbury, dislike of the Governor, and connection with Andrea, so she is eventually welcomed into Rick's group.

A decisions must also be made regarding Merle (seasons after Rick and T-Dog leave him handcuffed on a rooftop), who has seemingly abandoned the Governor's group and would like to rejoin Rick and the rest. This decision is hard for Rick because Merle and Daryl are brothers, and Rick values Daryl. Daryl bluntly tells Rick multiple times, "No him, no me," regarding Merle (Reilly & Glatter, 2013). Merle is allowed to stay to keep Daryl happy, but he goes against Rick's wishes when he decides to turn Michonne over to the Governor as part of a deal.

Merle is ultimately killed and Michonne reunites with Rick, but Rick realizes that allowing outsiders always has consequences, both positive and negative, and he must be better prepared in the future when faced with the decisions of accepting new member. This results in him developing a series of questions that he and the others can ask when meeting someone new. To determine if a stranger is a good fit for the group, they must answer the following: How many walkers have you killed? How many people have you killed? Why? (Gimple & Nicotero, 2014).

Rick asks Clara, a woman found wandering around the woods, these questions after she begs to join his group, but she dies before she can go back with him. Daryl asks these questions of Bob, another wanderer, when they first meet, and he gives satisfactory answers and is allowed to join the group. Father Gabriel is also asked these questions by Rick before the group joins him in his church. Every person who is questioned gives obviously different answers, but they are all accepted by Rick and his group. Correct answers that would disqualify a person from becoming a part of the group, are never revealed, but the questions are still used to gauge an outsider upon first meeting to determine if they are fit to join the group.

Gender Roles in *The Walking Dead*

Conformity and Nonconformity. Despite the dissolution of traditional society, many traditional gender roles are still maintained by the survivors. While staying in a makeshift camp immediately following the evacuation of the city, the group takes on tasks to make life as comfortable and ordinary as possible. Responsibilities such as hunting, going on supply missions, keeping watch, protecting the group, cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children are divided quite cleanly down gendered lines. While the men are more likely to head out of camp and keep an armed watch, the female members of the group are more often seen washing clothes, preparing food, or taking care of Carl, Sophia, and the other children in the group. Particularly in the early days of the apocalypse, women are depicted as very domestic, and they are consistently shown as caring for the others. Carol washes and irons the group's clothing while Shane goes out on a mission to collect water. When a walker approaches Carl and Sophia in the woods, Lori, Carol, and the other women in the group rush to comfort the children while Rick, Shane, Dale, and the other men head into the woods to kill the walker. Shane and Carl go to the water to catch frogs, but mostly they end up playing in the water and gather no food. On the other side of the quarry, Andrea, Carol, Amy, and Jacqui are all busy washing clothes. Jacqui questions the division of labor and asks why the women are the only ones working. Amy jokes, "The world ended, didn't you know?" but Carol insists, "That is just the way it is" (Eglee & LoGiudice, 2010).

The men, however, are just as likely to perform tasks based on gendered expectations. Glenn is designated by the group to go on dangerous supply runs away from the camp. He routinely goes into the city, often by himself, while other members of

the group remain back at camp. In fact, he is more successful on his runs when he is alone, and, after bringing along T-Dog, Merle, Andrea, and Jaqui, he insists "The first time I bring a group, everything goes to hell" (Darabont & MacLaren, 2010).

After the group settles into the prison in the third season, Lori, Carol, and Maggie all begin to prepare for Lori to deliver her baby. Carol suspects Lori will need to have a cesarean section, since she had one with Carl, so she practices performing the operation on a female walker. However, Carol is ultimately not with Lori when she gives birth, and it is Maggie there assisting her. Shortly before Lori goes into labor, the prison is breached by walkers, which the rest of the group is busy fighting off (Kim & Ferland, 2012). Though this is likely the reason neither Lori's husband, Rick, nor any of the men in the group were there for the delivery, this does not explain why they were not involved in prepping for the baby's arrival, with the exception of Glenn who went out to get supplies at Lori's request.

Other instances of gender conformity include the frequency of violent acts, particularly for the sake of protection and defense, carried out by the male characters. When walkers breach the prison fence, Rick, Daryl, and Glenn stay outside to fight them off while Lori, Maggie, and Carl flee. Carol and T-Dog also face the invading walkers, and when they are overcome by them, T-Dog placed himself between Carol and the walkers, ultimately taking a bite to protect her. He even insists on escorting her back to safety before he turns.

Violence is not as likely to be carried out by women, particularly in the first few seasons, though there are some successful instances of women killing walkers. However, some of the early attempts at violence are also failures, such as when Andrea attempts to

shoot a walker she sees coming across a field from atop the RV. Andrea has been eager to test her shooting skills and prove she can help defend the farm, but her initial effort to prove herself does not go well. She takes a shot at the walker and nearly misses. She barely grazes his head only to learn it was not a walker at all. It was Daryl (Johnson & Ferland, 2011). Not only did she fail in killing her target, she also failed at identifying the threat, making her seem like a poor choice for a guard.

In later seasons when the group is on the road and in Alexandria, similar gender divisions persist. When Rick, Michonne, and Carl are attacked by the Claimers in the middle of the night, Rick and Daryl, who was travelling with Joe's group, kill Joe and the rest of his men, while Michonne comforts Carl and ensures he is not hurt. At Alexandria, walkers and outsiders are less of a threat, but the tasks necessary to make the community work are divvied up by gender; Aaron is their assigned recruiter who heads out beyond the wall to find new survivors. Reg and some of the other men are responsible for the infrastructure and they spend their days reinforcing the wall that surrounds the community. A few women within the community keep watch along the wall, but they are more likely to be assigned jobs like caring for the children, managing the town pantry, and giving haircuts to other members.

Though men and women begin taking on more equal roles in later seasons, overall gender conformity is relatively apparent throughout. While men are more likely to protect themselves and members of their group, kill enemies, and go on missions to gather supplies or save people, it is more probable that women will carry out any domestic tasks that need to be done and provide others with physical and emotional comfort. For some

of the characters, these roles are challenging to fill, but they remain a part of the daily routine for the survivors.

Women as Vulnerable. Women who are attempting to survive alone or with another woman as a companion have a hard time taking care of themselves. In the case of Andrea, she is alone in woods after escaping the farm for only a short time before a walker attacks her. Fortunately, Michonne saves her and they decide to travel together from then on. Even together, however, Andrea and Michonne manage poorly on their own and Andrea is very sick when they are kidnapped by Merle and taken to Woodbury, where Andrea quickly assimilates as part of the Governor's group.

Beth and Daryl get separated from the rest of the group, and while Beth is not alone, she is depicted as being incapable of caring for herself. She seems to constantly need Daryl to save her, despite insisting that she can take care of herself. Daryl rescues her from a walker after she angrily goes into the woods without him and is nearly attacked. Daryl even expresses his doubt in her ability to survive the apocalypse, telling her she is just a "dumb college girl" (Kang & Ramsay, 2014).

Though she is only seen briefly, Clara is another example of a woman who did not do well on her own post-apocalypse. Clara meets Rick in the woods and begs him to help her and her husband. She is very dirty, malnourished, and appears frantic to get help for her husband, Eddie. Rick reluctantly follows her back to her camp so he can meet Eddie and decide if he will allow them to join his group. Upon arriving at the camp, Clara tries to attack Rick and ultimately commits suicide when she realizes she has failed to get food for her husband, who Rick soon discovers is just a walker head.

Contradicting Roles. While most of the women effectively maintain

stereotypical gender roles, some choose to stray away from pre-apocalypse domestic

duties and take up other jobs instead. Andrea, in particular, expresses an interest in

keeping watch, protecting the group, and carrying a weapon to defend herself and others.

This is met with much protest from other members of the group who feel that she might

not be capable of using the weapon responsibly. Some members of the group even

confiscate her gun even though it was her personal firearm that was a gift from her father

before the outbreak.

Andrea's other actions are met with objection as well. Beth, a member of the

family that lives on the farm where the group is living, expresses her intentions to commit

suicide. She lost her mother and other family members to the virus and she is uninterested

in surviving to see her own fate. Lori, Carol, and Beth's sister Maggie all insist on

keeping watch of Beth to ensure she does not harm herself. Andrea, conversely, thinks

Beth should be allowed to make her own decisions regarding her own life. Lori

challenges this assertion, citing Andrea's own recent suicidal thoughts. Andrea is

offended by Lori bringing this up and tells her she has moved past that. Lori retorts by

saying, sarcastically, "And you've become such a productive member of this group"

(Gimple & Mazzara, 2012). Andrea replies by telling her, "I contribute; I help keep this

place safe," but Lori insists, "The men can handle this on their own. They don't need

your help." Andrea is confused by Lori's opposition to Andrea keeping watch and

accuses her of having poor priorities given the current state of society. She reminds Lori

that the outbreak has put them all in serious danger, yet Lori is "in [her] face about

skipping laundry" (Gimple & Mazzara, 2012). Lori insists that Andrea has put a burden

on her and the other women who are busy taking care of chores around the house. Andrea says, "I am on watch against walkers. That is what matters, and Lori replies by saying of herself and the other women in the group, "We are providing stability" (Gimple & Mazzara, 2012).

Carol, despite often acting domestic and vulnerable, defies traditional gender roles after the death of her abusive husband and loss of her daughter. When the conflict between Rick's group and the Governor escalates, Carol provides Andrea with a knife and insists that she kill the Governor in his sleep to end the feud, though Andrea does not go through with it. Carol is also capable of killing people herself, which she does when some of the survivors in the prison fall ill and she worries that they will infect others. She even kills a young girl, Lizzie, after Lizzie becomes obsessed with walkers and kills her own sister in the hopes she will reanimate. Knowing that Lizzie is a danger to herself and other, Carol shoots her in the head, but she also makes an effort to ensure Lizzie's last moments are peaceful and not scaring, tell her to "just look at the flowers" that are growing nearby (Gimple & Satrazemis, 2014). Carol also kills to protect others when she invades Terminus, blowing up a gas tank and killing its residents so Rick's group can escape, despite having previously been exiled from the prison by Rick.

While Carol goes to rescue the group at Terminus, Tyreese stays back at the cabin, keeping watch over a Terminus resident, Martin, who they discovered in the woods. He is also taking care of baby Judith, which is a common task for him. Tyreese is willing to hurt others, as evidence by him beating Martin after he tries to take Judith, but he is much more discerning about violence than some of the other men. In another example of his nurturing approach, Tyreese stays with Bob, who has been bitten by a

walker and had his leg cut off by Gareth, while Bob's girlfriend Sasha goes out to avenge him. When Rick, Sasha, and some of the others ambush Gareth's group, killing them all, Tyreese only watches; he does not participate. As a large African American man, Tyreese is an ideal character to serve as a violent, protective force in the group, but he consistently chooses a more peaceful approach.

Pearson's Correlation

Hypothesis 1, which stated that there would be a positive correlation between the number of seasons and the number of instances of male conformity, was not supported ($r = -.249$, $p < .05$).

Hypothesis 2, which stated that instances of female conformity would increase over time, was supported ($r = .281$, $p < .05$).

A Pearson's Correlation was used to test the relationship between season number and conformity and nonconformity count. These results are in Table 1. Overall, 124 instances of female nonconformity and 160 instances of female conformity were identified. There were 377 instances of male conformity and 66 instances of male nonconformity. The male nonconformity count remained relatively even throughout, as did the female conformity count. Female nonconformity increased fairly steadily. These results can be seen in Chart 1. Instances of male conformity increased through season three, then began to decline over the course of the next two seasons.
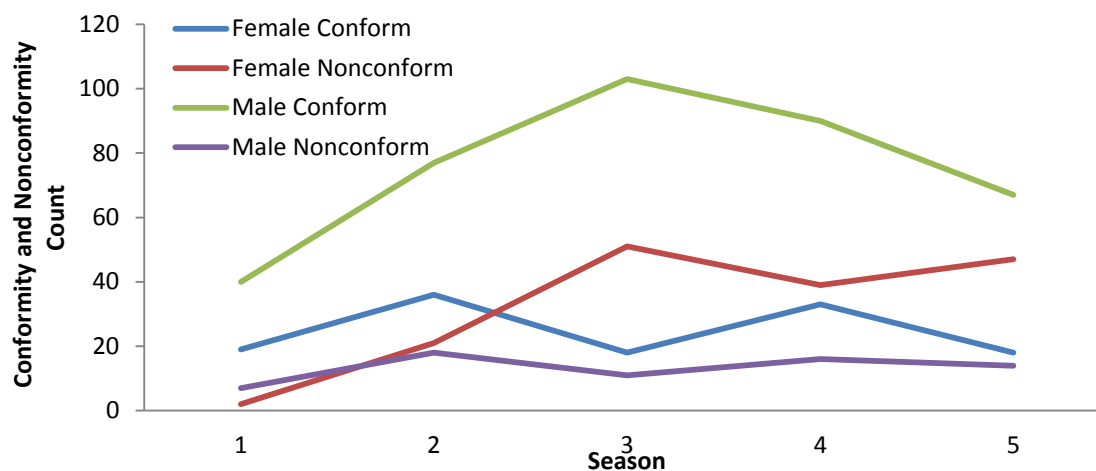
Figure 1

Conformity and Nonconformity Count Across Seasons

Table 1

Pearson's Correlation Results

		female conform count	female non conform count	male conform	male non conform count	season number
Female conform count	Pearson Correlation	1	-.111	.254	-.008	-.318
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.373	.038	.949	.009
	N	67	67	67	67	67
female nonconform count	Pearson Correlation	-.111	1	.044	.074	.397
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.373		.722	.554	.001
	N	67	67	67	67	67
male conform count	Pearson Correlation	.254	.044	1	.008	-.241
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.722		.948	.049
	N	67	67	67	67	67
Male nonconform count	Pearson Correlation	-.008	.074	-.008	1	-.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.949	.554	.948		.376
	N	67	67	67	67	67
season number	Pearson Correlation	-.318	.397	-.241	-.110	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.049	.376	
	N	67	67	67	67	67

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study examined the way power and authority are depicted in *The Walking Dead* in order to better understand the role of race and gender in the post-apocalyptic and horror genres of television. Because the sixth season of the show had not aired in its entirety when the research was conducted, the first five seasons were used for the analysis. An explanation of the findings and their real-world implications follows.

According to the Pew Research Center, the United States' current Congress is the most diverse Congress in U.S. history, 17% of members identifying as non-Caucasian, and 19% of members identifying as female (Krogstad, 2015). While more women and people of color are being elected to Congress today than ever before, these numbers are not representative of the population of the United States as a whole. However, this discrepancy is evident in many different leadership roles in various sectors. For instance, only about 5% of CEOs of major Fortune 500 companies are women ("Women and Leadership," 2015). This lack of minorities in leadership roles is reflected in *The Walking Dead.*

Little diversity exists among people in power on the analyzed episodes of *The Walking Dead* and those who do not have the characteristics of the typical leader are often killed or absorbed as a subordinate member of another leader's group. Though the routine depiction of middle-aged, Caucasian men as authority figures is largely representative of the actual division of power in the United States, this portrayal is still limiting in that it perpetuates stereotypes, especially since they are more likely to be portrayed as leaders regardless of their capability or past experience. In fact, those characters with great leadership potential are only able to contribute to the group in

meaningful ways when the hegemonic leader of the group falters. Ho (2016) discusses Glenn, the only Asian American character on the show, and his value to the group. Ho (2016) classifies Glenn as a "model minority" who has valuable skills and is loyal and respectful of established authority. She describes him as "a loyal servant fighting for his friends' survival," and while Glenn often devises and executes successful plans to help or even save the group, he does so in a way that does not infringe on Rick's position as the leader (Ho, 2016, p. 66). Instances of minority characters, such as Glenn, in a leadership role are indicative of only limited progress because such instances typically serve as a way to help the established leader maintain power, thus perpetuating the model minority stereotype.

Other stereotypes exist in the representation of the survivors who are not in power, such as the women who are tasked with cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children despite the chaos of the outbreak. The depiction of decision-making as a singular role and necessary for survival is also detrimental to the shift toward more equal power across different demographic groups.

The portrayal of power is important to study in *The Walking Dead* because of its position in the horror genre. Specifically, the show follows a post-apocalyptic plotline and, following the epidemic outbreak of disease, the characters' new world is very different from modern society. Because of this, the show, like other post-apocalyptic fiction, has the opportunity to show power and people in authority in a way that is not reflective of today's traditional structure. Despite several survivors displaying impressive leadership characteristics, regardless of age, race, or gender, they were overshadowed by Rick or the Governor or doubted by the others in the group. This hegemonic portrayal of

power and stereotyping of subordinate survivors is very limiting considering the

characters' insistence that the world has changed.

Other works within the horror genre depict power and authority in similar ways,

such as *The Hunger Games*, with the antagonist of President Snow. *The Divergent Series*

also features Caucasian, middle-aged men as leaders, as does *The Maze Runner.*

However, these films also include more diverse characters, usually young women, who

challenge and even overthrow the stereotypical leader. Reflecting modern power

structures is not common in the post-apocalyptic genre, and science fiction movies and

television have included progressive characters for decades. The original *Star Trek*

television series, which first aired in 1966, had a diverse main cast that included two

women, Majel Barrett and Nichelle Nichols, who is African American. It also featured

George Takei, whose parents were Japanese Americans ("George H. Takei," 2015).

Fans have noticed the lack of diversity among leaders on the show and much of

the commentary surrounding the show makes mention of the way the Caucasian male

characters are featured so prominently (Berry, 2015). Creators of the show have taken

notice of this criticism and showrunner Scott M. Gimple spoke out about the issue last

year, simply saying they strive to cast best actors for the job regardless of race (Ross,

2015). While problems with depictions of race and gender persist throughout the seasons,

some progress is evident when comparing the comic book and the television series. For

example, the leader of Alexandria in the show, Deanna, does not exist in the comic

books. Instead, Alexandria is run by a man, Douglas, who was the basis for Deanna's

character (Venable, 2015).

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

A few limitations exist for this study. First, not all of the current seasons of the show were examined. Later in the series, the leadership among the survivors does undergo significant changes as they become more adept at surviving in the new society. The increase in all four counts—female conformity and nonconformity and male conformity and nonconformity—can be explained, at least in part, by season length at the beginning of the series. Season one has only six episodes and season two has thirteen, while the rest have sixteen episodes. Fewer episodes provided fewer instances of any type of conformity. Next, only one coder was used for the quantitative content, thereby lacking inter-coder reliability. Agreement among additional coders using the same definitions for conformity and nonconformity and the same sample would increase objectivity.

The increase in female nonconformity takes place in the series around the same time that male conformity begins to decrease, suggesting that there may be some relationship between the two. Because male conformity is strongly categorized through violence and female nonconformity is categorized through nonviolence, it is possible that the violence on the show becomes more evenly distributed as the series progresses, as opposed to becoming more frequent in general. It is also important to note the contrast between the Pearson's correlations and the fluctuations seen in the line graph. The product of Z-scores, which are used to calculate a Pearson's r, do not result in a directly linear correlation.

Opportunities also exist for analysis of power and authority in other post-apocalyptic narratives. For example, other popular post-apocalyptic fiction could be

examined, such as *The Hunger Games, Divergent,* and *The Maze Runner*. These films are set in the future, which would make them a good candidate for analysis of how power is depicted beyond the current decade or century.

Finally, as this study focused on textual analysis, additional research could explore audience interpretations of post-apocalyptic storylines. Such reception work could shed light on how viewers interpret and internalize discourses of power and authority in these narratives.

Currently, *The Walking Dead* is monopolizing the post-apocalyptic horror genre on television, but it continues to portray leaders in largely stereotypical and hegemonic ways with current society's view of power reflected in the characters selected to lead. The idea of the ruling class imposing its views on others can be seen both within the plot of the show—with characters who insist on their followers conforming to their ideas about post-apocalyptic life—and in the production of the show in the views of the creators. Robert Kirkman, who created the comics the show is based on and who works as a producer for the show, told *The Comics Journal* in a 2009 interview that he feels "women are physically weaker" and that thought influences his decisions on who to put in power (Beck, 2013). The many physically strong male characters and weaker women reflect this view; being a successful leader on the show depends greatly on physical strength. However, the creators of the show have the opportunity to defy such stereotypical views and portray any character in a position of power.

The Walking Dead's large, loyal fan base means they reach many viewers and the post-apocalyptic storyline offers the chance to depict society in different ways. As the nation moves forward by electing and promoting more diverse leaders into positions of

political and corporate power, it is necessary to replicate that shift on fictional prime-time television as well. Offering audiences progressive portrayals of leaders in fictional television will not only increase representation of women and people of color as strong characters, it will also better reflect the real-world opportunities for viewers who watch *The Walking Dead.*

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