

Introduction

The most popular programs on Netflix are a part of the Fantasy genre (i.e.: Stranger Things, Wednesday). Fantasy is seen as a tool for escapism, inclusion, and creative world building (Siikilä, 2017). Given its prevalence in media, Fantasy should be recognized as a genre that dominates our culture, especially since fantasy utilizes over the top depictions of violence (Shaikh, 2022). Heavy and repetitive viewing of violence and social aggression in media has been linked to aggressive thoughts and behaviors (Atkin, 1983). As fantasy continues to grow as a genre, so too does fantasy tropes featuring female characters. These female characters are then often depicted on an extreme end of the gender binary spectrum and present hyper-feminine characteristics (Barbini, 2017). This research looks into the frequencies of acts of physical and social aggression, as well as the gender breakdown of the perpetrators and victims within the top fantasy programs on Netflix.

Research Questions

1. How frequently is physical aggression depicted in fantasy shows on Netflix?
2. How frequently is social aggression depicted in fantasy shows on Netflix?
3. What is the distribution of characteristics such as age, race, and gender in terms of physical aggression and social aggression?

Methods

A list of the most popular fantasy shows on Netflix was compiled through cross-referencing Netflix's own data as well as viewer opinions on Ranker

20 different shows were selected, a handful of episodes of each program, for a total of 56 episodes (N = 56).

A content analysis was conducted to record acts of physical and social aggression within each show, along with the demographics of the perpetrators and victims.

Four undergraduate research assistants were trained for approximately 40 hours until coders were coding consistently enough to begin working on the sample. Reliability coefficients (Fleiss' Kappa) were between .51 and 1.0 for the final sample coding.

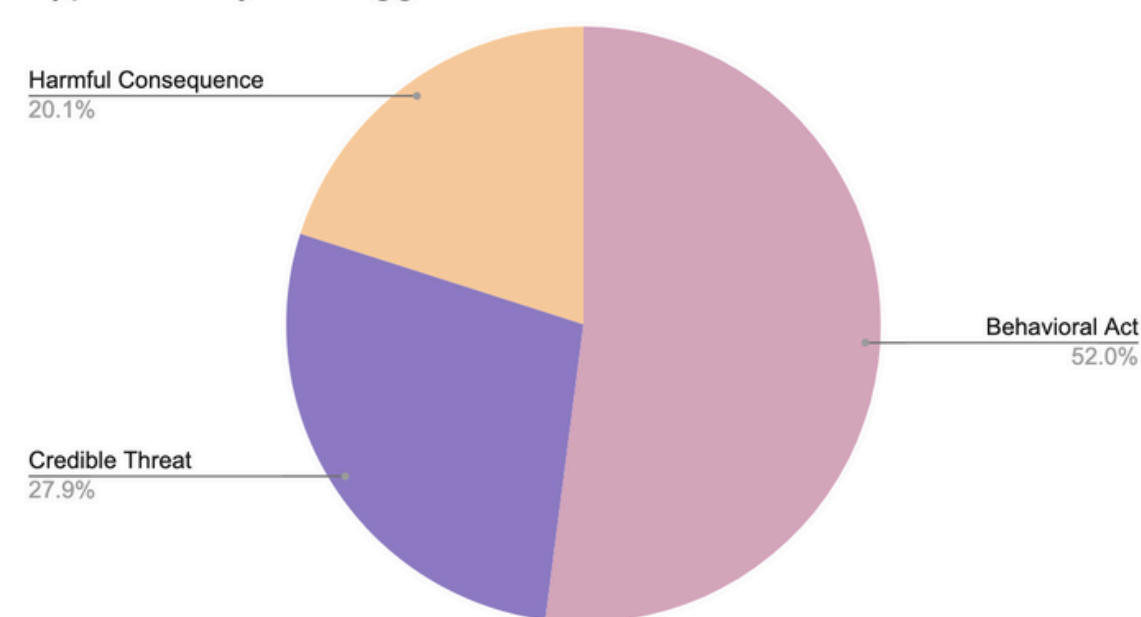
Results

- For both types of aggression, the majority of the characters involved, no matter the situation, identified as predominately white, male, aged young adult (20-39), and heterosexual

Physical Aggression:

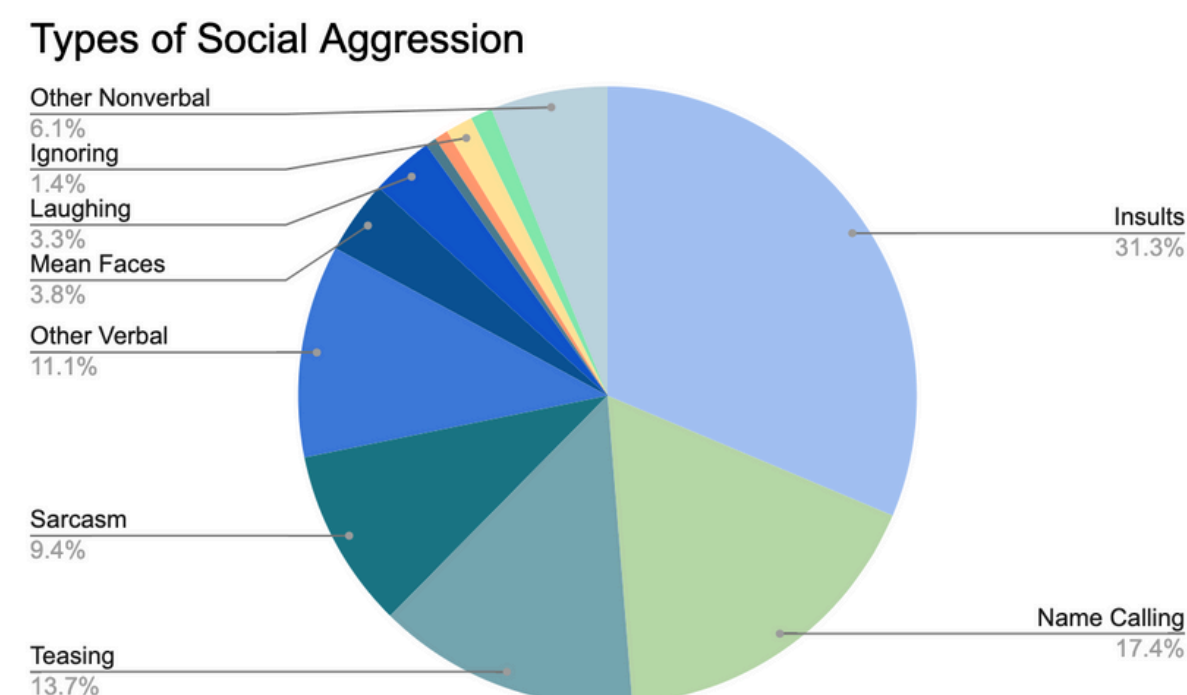
- Men (n = 186) more likely than women (n = 89) to be physically aggressive perpetrators, $\chi^2(4) = 388.08, p < .001$.
- Men (n = 192) more likely to be and targets of physical aggression compared to women (n=87), $\chi^2(4) = 405.81, p < .001$.

- In order of most to least common (total occurrences): Behavioral Acts (254), Credible Threats (136), Harmful Consequences (98)



Social Aggression:

- A significant difference emerged with men (n = 178) more likely than women (n = 138) to perpetrate social aggression, $\chi^2(4) = 361.10, p < .001$.
- Men (n = 156) are also more likely to be the targets of social aggression compared to women (n = 138), $\chi^2(4) = 324.42, p < .001$.
- In order of most the least common (total occurrences): Insults (220), Name Calling (122), Teasing (96), Other Verbal (78), Sarcasm (66), Other Nonverbal (43), Mean Faces (27), Laughing (23), Ignoring (10), Staring (8), Finger Pointing (5), Eye Rolling (4), Sticking Tongue Out (0)



Discussion & Conclusions

As the data showed, men were often the ones having more screen time as characters so they have more opportunities to be perpetrators and victims of aggression in these programs than any other gender.

Programs also depicted men as being more aggressive in general, but when women were aggressive it tended to be socially rather than physically based on the frequencies. Each episode that was coded was 45 minutes to roughly an hour long, meaning about every 2 minutes audiences are seeing something aggressive physically or socially depending on the show.

There is also a limitation placed on on sexual identities as often times watching the whole show can provide more information about a character that cannot be found in just a few episodes of a program.

Popular Fantasy may not yet be the creative and inclusive playground that many believe it to be, at least not with television on streaming platforms

References

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