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RISK AND QUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. TELEVISION

By

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Contents

List of Figures **5**
Introduction **7**

Chapter One

What is Quality Television and Risk? **11**
The Quality Aesthetic 12
Quality as Highbrow Television 16
Quality as an Industrial Practice 20
What is Risk? 21

Chapter Two

HBO and Content Risk in Television **27**
HBO: 1965-TVIV 27
HBO and Risk 31
Nudity, Violence and Profanity 31
Other Risky Content 34
Case Study: *Game of Thrones* 36

Chapter Three

Netflix and Cinematch: Managing Risk in Quality Television **45**
Case Study: *House of Cards* 46
Commissioning Risk in House of Cards 47
Distributing Risk in House of Cards 50
Post *House of Cards:* Netflix's Relationship to the Television Industry 53

Chapter Four

The CW, Representational Risk and Changing Quality Demographics **59**
Broadcast Advertising and The CW's Target Demographics 59
Case Study: *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* 62

Conclusion **71**

References **75**
Bibliography 75
Filmography 93

List of Figures

1. Sociocultural hierarchy of art forms……..18
2. Subcategories of risk…….24
3. Excessive negative risk……...……...……...38

Introduction

This dissertation explores the terms quality and risk within the TVIV era (2007-present) of United States (U.S.) television. It asks how quality and risk are used in television discourse and industry, mapping the overall relationship between the two concepts. As industry is a broad term that encompasses many different eras, it is important to note that the term is used in this dissertation to focus on industry executives, writers or showrunners in an exploration of why quality television programmes include risk. Overall, the project focuses on three different contexts of U.S. television of the premium network HBO, the video-on-demand (VOD) company Netflix and the broadcast network The CW. The settings are used to outline the different risks that are related to quality programmes and what they reveal about the relationship between quality and risk. Answering how television discourse and industry use risk and quality, this project will aim to define the two elusive concepts and examine the relationship between quality and risk. Overall, it will argue that risk is a fundamental aspect of quality television. Due to the nature of the terms quality and risk, it is also important to clarify that the purpose of this dissertation is not to provide complete, absolute or simple definitions of the terms quality and risk. Instead, this project will understand how quality and risk are known and used in quality television, as well as the fluid and complex relationship between the two terms.

Peter Dunne states that ‘the basis for determining quality' (2007: 98) cannot derive from a comparison of past quality with contemporary works. Therefore, to get a better understanding of quality television, the dissertation narrows its explorations of quality within the particular time frame of the TVIV era. Using the date of Netflix's on-demand streaming service as the starting point for this timeframe, the TVIV era runs from 2007-present and follows the previous TVI-TVIII eras of television. TVI is the Classical Network period in U.S. television lasting from roughly 1948-1975, TVII (1975-1995) is the emergence of other and cable networks, and lastly, TVIII (1995-2007) which is television entering a digital and global era (Nelson, 2007b: 7). Although TVIV is not a widely-used term within television literature, Mareike Jenner states that the period is seen through a ‘move away from the [television] medium, its branding strategies, associated viewing patterns, technologies, industry structures or programming' (2004: 3), particularly from the emergence of VOD companies. This era was chosen for the dissertation to fulfil a project aim to update and extend quality literature with contemporary

television discussions, but also explore what effect VOD companies such as Netflix have had on quality television and risk.

This dissertation uses a mixture of textual analysis and a media industries approach to investigate the relationship between quality and risk. The mixed approach will identify different ways that risk can be represented within the programming content of a show as well as within specific aspects of the company's business model, including the commissioning and distribution of a show, its level of internal or external regulation and its targeted demographics. This combined research method approach explores how the concepts of quality and risk emerge not only from the content itself but also from the economic and industrial creation, commission and distribution of the content. Before exploring different risks within quality television contexts, this dissertation outlines what quality television and risks are in the first chapter 'What is Quality Television and Risk?'. For quality television, a literature review approach is used to discuss how quality television has been defined in academic discourse, breaking its definition into three categories: as an aesthetic, an industrial practice, and as a high-brow form of television. In Chapter One, the small amount of existing sociological literature on risk is briefly explored and used to define risk in one of two ways, the first as a probability of something being a success or failure, the second as a danger or something potentially harmful. Finally, the discussion of risk outlines different subcategories of risk, based on its location in a show's production or connotation, such as positive or negative risk.

The second chapter, 'HBO and Content Based Risk in Quality Television' focuses on the premium cable company HBO and how the company has marketed itself on the notions of quality and risk through the case study of *Game of Thrones* (2011-). HBO was chosen as the premium cable company in this dissertation because of its perceived perception of leaders in quality television and its prominence within existing quality literature. This chapter uses *Game of Thrones* as a case study due to its status as the most watched television shows in popular culture (Rich, 2015) and its labelling by critical discourse and industry as quality and risky programme. The case study explores risk within the content of the programme, discussing elements such as its inclusion of profanity, violence and nudity, sociocultural taboos and instances where the risk went 'too far', termed excessive negative risk. It suggests that if the levels of risk in a programme extend beyond an implied acceptable level, it threatens the show's status of quality. Overall, the case study in Chapter Two details how positive and negative perceptions of risk are dependent a show's association with quality.

The third chapter, ‘Netflix and Cinematch: Managing Risk in Quality Television' involves a discussion of the commissioning and distribution risks associated with VOD service Netflix and the case study of *House of Cards*. In Chapter Three, the case study is used to analyse how risk has become associated with the company, whether they have a positive or negative bias and how risk can be applied to a company to serve a specific purpose. Also, the chapter contains the exploration of how Netflix uses its data and Cinematch algorithm to manage risk. By using this data, Netflix transforms its perception of negative commissioning and distribution risk into managed risk, showing the possibility of altering risk. Finally, Chapter Three is used to illustrate the complex relationship between quality and risk, showing how aspects of risk can be are used as an attraction, selling point and identification of quality within one context while potentially damaging a different company and its quality programmes within another.

The last chapter ‘The CW, Representational Risk and Changing Quality Demographics' focuses on quality and risk within the context of the broadcast network The CW, which has changed its demographics in the TVIV era to target the quality demographic. Outlining the typical relationship between broadcast networks and advertisers and how networks will usually avoid risk, the analysis of The CW also explores how, and why the network takes content risks within the case study of *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* (2015-). For content risk, the case study will predominantly examine representational risks of bisexuality, female and Filipino representation, which contrasts with the predominantly white, male characters in quality television. Overall, the chapter is used to argue that the content risk is used to attract an alternative, female, non-white and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender)[1] audiences and suggests that these audiences are becoming a more prominent part of the quality demographic.

Overall, this dissertation will explore the complex and fluid relationship between quality and risk and their use in industry and discourse. In quality literature, there is a predominant trend of focusing the discussion on just premium network channels (particularly HBO), basic networks or the ‘quality divide' (Kelso, 2008: 49) between the two. Basing the study in the TVIV era, this dissertation extends research on quality television by incorporating an analysis

[1] The acronym LGBT has different variations, including LGBTQ (with the additional Q standing for Queer) or LGBTQA (with the additional A standing for asexual). For simplicity, this dissertation will use the common acronym LGBT to encompass all minority gender and sexuality groups.

of the VOD company Netflix into this field. By arguing that risk is a fundamental part of quality television, this dissertation also contributes new knowledge and areas of discussion to the literature on both quality television and risk by bridging the gap between the two fields of study. Overall, this dissertation outlines the importance of risk within quality television and the complex relationship between the two terms, arguing that quality and risk must exist in tension with each other for a programme to be classified as quality television.

Chapter One
What is Quality Television and Risk?

Before discussing how the terms quality and risk are related to each other, it is necessary to understand what the terms mean. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to define quality and risk in U.S. television. Through a literature review, this chapter explores and assesses how two terms have been discussed and defined within academic discourse. By grouping common schools of thought, the literature review breaks the discussion and definition of quality into three categories: as an aesthetic, an industrial practice, and as highbrow television. The overall argument of this chapter is that each definition of quality relies on television's position within a sociocultural hierarchy as a form of low-class entertainment. In addition, the literature review also explores existing sociological literature on risk, defining the term in two main categories, as a probability or as a danger. Following this discussion, risk is further broken down into different subcategories dependant on its location or connotation. Overall, the chapter provides the grounding definitions of quality and risk for this dissertation.

Robert J. Thompson attributes the origins of quality television (1996: 12) to the 1980s police drama *Hill Street Blues* (1981-1987). Jane Feuer also applies quality to earlier 1970s sitcoms such as *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983) or *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), exemplified by the first key text on quality MTM: *'Quality Television'* (Feuer et al., 1984), which attributed the company MTM with the production of quality television. Since quality's origins, its definition has remained largely ambiguous and subjective. A part of the term's unclear definition results from quality's linguistic use, which implies a judgment of taste. The process of making a judgement is highly subjective and is, as Feuer writes, situated from many positions, including aesthetic, political or moral (2007: 145). Therefore, a judgement of quality can never be an objective absolute (Feuer, 2007: 146). The definition of quality is also made ambiguous by its constant evolution. Thompson alludes to the evolution of quality's definition, stating that it would have been difficult to find a drama that would not fit into the category of quality television defined within the 1980s (2007: xvii-xviii). In addition, Jenner comments that quality also overlaps with similar concepts such as cult and thus 'need to be viewed as not always separate' (2015: 10) from these terms, making its definition more complex. Therefore, definitions of quality are further made elusive due to its overlap with and relationship to other

concepts and is challenging to explore as a single, isolated notion. Despite quality's ambiguity, a vast majority of the literature sought to identify and define quality television based on its visual style and content, which has formed the basis of the first category of definition: the quality aesthetic.

The Quality Aesthetic.

An analysis of content, such as visual style, narrative and thematic elements, dominates the literature surrounding quality television. Sarah Cardwell comments that to label a programme as quality is akin to making a generic classification (2007: 7). Fundamentally, genre offers a way of making sense of the world by putting things into categories (Creeber, 2008: 1). Genres serve as a way for the audience to make sense of what is happening on the screen, including aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, characters, dialogue and narrative (Neale, 2000: 31). Genres are established through repetition and exist through a set of systems of expectation and hypothesis that audiences bring with them as they watch (Ibid. 2000). Although genres help the audience understand what they are watching, they are not definitive categories. No single principle that can define genres, as it is dependent on the cultures in which it is produced and received and altered by each addition of text (Cohan, 1986: 204). Despite the subjectivity associated with genres, viewing quality as a genre can be useful by identifying the conventions that create the quality aesthetic.

One convention of the quality aesthetic identified within the literature is the use of serious themes in the programme's content. To Cardwell, quality programmes explore serious themes ‘rather than representing the superficial events of life' (2007: 26). Although she outlines the serious themes in quality as death, dying, life and living (Cardwell, 2007: 28), it is challenging to discern what content would not fall into fall into these ambiguous themes. In addition, there is no comment of how to distinguish the themes of death, dying, life and living as serious rather than superficial, nor if they are limited to quality television. Thompson also comments on the serious themes of quality television, stating that quality programming has a tendency towards representing controversial social issues from a liberal humanist perspective (1996: 15). Tony Kelso states that although the representation of controversial social issues featured in television's infancy, the social issues posed a potential threat to a loss of advertising revenue (2008: 47). The potential loss in advertising revue came from the danger that the representation

of social issues would evoke ‘disturbing emotions in the audience' (Ibid. 2008) that would contrast against the products that advertisers would be selling in the commercials. Therefore, representing social issues in the content of quality programming can be viewed as a risk due to the potential loss of advertising revue it causes. By viewing the representation of social issues as a risk, this convention identifies one aspect of risk located within programming content of quality television programmes.

In addition to the representation of social issues, the content of quality television is repeatedly remarked to have a literary focus (Thompson, 1996: 15; Bianculli, 2007: 35; Bignell, 2007: 162; DeFino, 2014: 116). Dunne claims the importance of the literary focus convention, arguing that it is the writing that creates the best quality series in the world (2007: 99). Television critics often praise the literary focus in quality programming. For example, praise for *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) included comparisons to Homer by James Bowman (A. Smith, 2012), Greek tragedies (Ostrow, 2007) and works by Émile Zola and Honoré de Balzac (James, 2001). Despite the praise, an analysis of content is needed to identify the literary focus convention of quality television. In addition, there is no mention of how literature adaptations fit a literary focus within the quality literature, and the convention holds the implication that non-quality programmes cannot be literary based. Therefore, the literary focus convention does not reveal much information about the quality aesthetic.

Thompson claims that attention to detail is ‘most celebrated characteristics of the quality drama' (1996: 35). Part of the attention to detail convention relates to the idea of a reward value for the viewers of a quality audience. The reward value comes from the concept that the audience is encouraged to invest a high amount of time and attention in quality programming (Mulgan, 1990: 14). To Cardwell, finding ‘greater symbolic or emotional resonance within the details of the programme' (2007: 27) is a reward for the audience that interprets and evaluate quality television. However, attention to detail is also a fundamental aspect of mystery genres, as the viewers can find clues in the show's details to solve the mystery before its conclusion. Therefore, the attention to detail convention is not limited to the quality aesthetic and can be problematic to use as a marker of quality.

Robin Nelson comments that the most evident feature of quality television is its ‘visual style' (2007a: 48), yet a distinct definition of this visual style is missing from quality literature. Michael Z. Newman and Elena Levine comment that critics routinely praise quality

programming for 'being cinematic' (2012: 5). With this praise, cinematic style is a visual convention of the quality aesthetic. Stating that cinematic is ‘too frequently and loosely applied' to television, Nelson defines the term as a move towards an ‘enhanced visual style' (2007b: 11). Although the definition of enhanced visual style is ambiguous, the cinematic style represents a shift away from the ‘outmoded' television studio and multi-camera setup, to more flexible and creative single camera shots similar to the film industry (Nelson, 2007b: 14). Cardwell also echoes the loose definition of the cinematic style, stating that quality programming exhibits a glossy visual style ‘created through careful, even innovative camera work and editing' (2007: 26). However, it requires a larger budget to capture and achieve the great variety of careful shots and compositions of a single camera in contrast to cheaper alternatives such as a fixed multi-camera setup. Therefore, the cinematic style of quality programmes reveal can more about the production budget attached to quality television than its visual style and could be related to a convention of ‘expensive production values' (Mulgan, 1990: 8) instead.

Another convention of the quality aesthetic listed within the literature is the quality of acting. To Cardwell, the quality of acting convention includes naturalistic style performances from esteemed actors (2007: 26). Using Cardwell’s definition, it is possible to measure prestige of actors through industrial praise or awards. For example, the winners of the Golden Globe or Emmy award[2], which was which was respectively won in 2016 by Billy Bob Thornton for *Goliath* (2016-) and Courtney B. Vance for *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story* (2016). However, acting is a largely subjective characteristic that involves a judgement of taste and thus would be difficult to measure in quality programming objectively. Like quality of acting, Marieke Jenner also outlines the difficult to measure convention of ambiguous endings as a characteristic of quality television (2015: 10). For Jenner, *The Sopranos’* ‘notoriously ambiguous ending' set the convention for ambiguous endings (2015: 10). However, ambiguous endings cannot be used as a marker of quality as the convention is impossible to identify until the show has finished its completion. Overall, these conventions are ambiguous and difficult to recognise as a part of quality programming.

[2] The Golden Globe award was for Best Actor in a Television Series Drama and the Emmy award was for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Limited Series or Movie.

Alongside the ambiguous quality aesthetic conventions, Thompson identifies the more easily recognisable convention of large ensemble casts (1996: 14) as a characteristic of quality television. Large ensemble casts give television programmes potential room to accommodate a variety of viewpoints and plots (Ibid. 1996). Large ensemble casts are also closely related to other characteristics such as serial formats and complex/flexi-narratives, which scholars such as Dean J. Defino (2014: 110), Elliott Logan (2016: 148), Cardwell (2007: 27) and Jenner (2015: 10) have identified as conventions of quality. However, the conventions of a large ensemble cast, serial formats and complex/flexi-narratives are not limited to quality programming. Many genres and non-quality programmes also use these characteristics, including soap operas which have used the three conventions for decades. Therefore, it can be problematic to use the conventions of large ensemble casts, serial formats and complex/flexi-narratives as defining characteristics of the quality aesthetic as they are widely used across television and not limited to the quality programme.

Like the large ensemble casts, serial formats and complex/flexi narratives, there are numerous conventions identified by scholars that are problematic when used to define the quality aesthetic. For example, Nelson outlines that quality television has ‘hybridity at every level' (2007b: 120). Thompson also lists generic hybridity as a convention of quality television, stating that quality programming ‘creates a new genre by mixing old ones' (1996: 15). Generic hybridity is common across several television programmes and is also not limited to quality programming. In addition to generic hybridity, the convention of self-reflexivity (Thompson, 1996: 15) also poses a problematic definition of the quality aesthetic. Although Thompson states that quality references both high and popular culture, as well as television itself (Ibid. 1996), this convention is more commonly associated with the comedy genre rather than quality television. Therefore, the generic hybridity and self-reflexive characteristics are also ambiguous conventions that do not lead to a clear definition of the quality aesthetic.

As wider commercial television shows use conventions of the quality aesthetic, the conventions are not limited to quality television. Many of the conventions are also ambiguous and are often unexplained by the scholars. For example, Thompson's 11th characteristic of quality television is a tendency towards realism, which he offers with no further elaboration (1996: 15). In Thompson's claim, he does not identify what type of realism quality television has a tendency towards, such as physiological, social or emotional realism, nor the representation of the realism in the content. In any case, realism is a subjective judgement and is challenging to

measure without an analysis of content. Overall, the outlined conventions reveal very little about the quality aesthetic. Alongside the conventions, quality literature only defines the quality aesthetic through ambiguous statements. For example, Nelson comments that the quality aesthetic can be perceived as not ‘a single style but a tendency towards production values which aspire to depth, complexitivity and visual interest traditionally associated with cinema' (Nelson, 2007b: 112). Although the ambiguous conventions did not reveal a clear visual style as a genre, certain common traits, such as cinematic shots or a literary focus indicate a tendency to view quality programmes as something other to television. Combined with one of the most common, yet equally ambiguous, definitions that quality is something that you know when you see it (Thompson, 2007: xx), the common traits form the basis of the next definition of quality television, in which quality is defined by being unlike ordinary television.

Quality as Highbrow Television.

A common approach in literature is to define quality by what it is not. This approach has taken the widely quoted statement ‘I know it when I see it' from U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart when he was unable to give a definition a pornography (Mittell, 2004: 1). Originally adapted by Thompson as his first defining characteristic of quality television (1996: 13), Stewart's statement has created a category of quality as something that the audience can ‘know' when they see but are similarly unable to define. Although writing of genre more broadly, Jason Mittell comments that as genres are so common within a culture, their definitions become givens. With common genres, that audience will presumptuously will ‘agree on a basic understanding' of the genre, so no further elaboration is needed (2004: 1). By viewing quality as a genre, Mittell's comments can be applied to elaborate how a basic understanding of quality is agreed on within popular culture that its definition has become a vague and elusive given. Although predominantly associated with TV dramas (Dhoest, 2014: 1), scholars such as David Bianculli apply the quality label to shows from several different genres, including comedy, documentary and animation (2007: 35). With no absolute similarities between the range of programmes and genres that fall under the quality label, this category of definition relies on the implied understanding that quality is simply not like other television.

The concept that quality programming is not like other television implies an assumed understanding of what is meant by other television. With no specifically referenced genre or

type of show, this dissertation looks at the concept of ordinary television as the other to quality programming. Coined by Frances Bonner, ordinary television is typically summarised as a nonfiction genre made to be entertaining but could also provide the audience with information (2008: 175). Ordinary television is associated reality, cooking, game or quiz shows, DIY (do it yourself, health or specific interest programmes that maintain a concern with the ordinary, mundane and domestic (Ibid. 2008). Newton Minow's famous speech in which, as FCC (Federal Communications Commission) chairman, he referred to television as a 'vast wasteland' (Thompson, 1996: 25), demonstrates television's status as a form of lowbrow entertainment. As ordinary television maintains a concern with the ordinary and mundane, is perceived as programming that constitutes and maintains the sociocultural perception of a lowbrow form of entertainment. If ordinary television is the other to quality, then quality programming can be interpreted as television that opposes or aims to distinguish itself from the sociocultural perception of television as a lowbrow form of entertainment.

Thompson reinforces the idea that quality programming opposes the sociocultural perception of television as a lowbrow form of entertainment through his statement that in 'a medium long considered artless, the only artful TV is that which isn't like all the rest of it' (1996: 13). Thompson's statement implies that the television medium is considered not only a form of lowbrow entertainment but also is not art. Other art forms such as film are more accepted as art and receive a greater form of esteem than television (Nelson, 2007: 39). The perception of different media forms as more highbrow forms of entertainment than television indicates a socio-cultural hierarchy of art forms, of which television holds a low position. Newman and Levine state that the 'historically low position of television has been the product of distinctions between the more legitimated culture of elites and the more denigrated culture of less powerful social groups' (2012, 6). Therefore, the sociocultural hierarchy is constructed and aligned with the tastes of elite social classes or the middle-class[3] (Jenner, 2015: 9) as argued within quality literature.

In addition to creating the sociocultural hierarchy of art forms, the middle-class taste structures also create divisions within specific media. For example, Newman and Levine write that there is a cultural division of taste between a Hollywood blockbuster and an art-house film within cinema, with the arthouse film socio-culturally perceived a higher form of art. Although

[3] This dissertation uses the British definition of middle-class as an upper-wealthy social class.

television holds a low position in the sociocultural hierarchy, there are also divisions of taste within the medium. Newman and Levine give examples of the taste divisions within television as ‘multi-camera versus single-camera' and ‘soap operas versus prime-time serialized dramas' (2012: 6). As quality programmes use single-camera setups and serialised formats, the alternative way of writing the taste division is as quality programmes versus ordinary television. Shown in figure one, this means that although both quality programmes and ordinary television belong to the same lowbrow media, quality television has a higher position in the sociocultural hierarchy than ordinary television. Quality literature also indicates the taste divide between quality programming and ordinary television. For instance, despite soap operas sharing several quality conventions such as large ensemble casts and flexible and complex narratives, soap operas are not classified as quality and are instead considered a form of lowbrow entertainment. Andrew J. Bottomley argues that because of soap opera's status as a low form of art, few scholars and critics openly acknowledge the genres shared characteristics with quality (2015: 486). Some scholars argue that the shared characteristics between quality and soap operas serve a different purpose within quality programmes to further distance quality from lowbrow tastes. For example, Cardwell argues that *The West Wing* (1999-2006) uses the shared conventions to provide a more intricate, eloquent and ambiguous exploration that is ‘profoundly affected by bigger things' (2007: 27) than soap operas. Geoff Mulgan additionally argues that the audience internalise middle-class taste structures, as they felt as if they needed to criticise the quality of the soap opera *Dallas* (1978-1991) despite their enjoyment of it (1990: 7). Therefore, quality is television programming that aligns with middle-class taste structures.

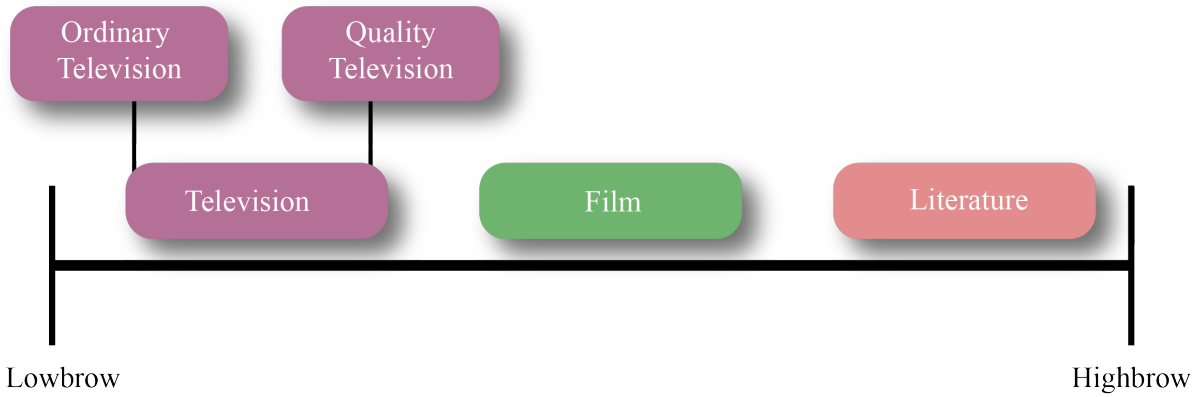

Figure 1: Sociocultural hierarchy of art forms.

Since quality television's origins, the programmes have been praised by academics and critics for invoking practices of higher art forms on the sociocultural hierarchy, such as a literary

focus. Examples of this include the literary comparisons made to *The Sopranos* outlined in The Quality Aesthetic section, as well as how critics praised *Northern Exposure* (1990-1995) by claiming that watching it was akin to reading a good book (Thompson, 1996: 164). Anthony N. Smith states that the comparison of quality programmes to other media serves to legitimise their esteem for the programme, rather than the television media (2012: 37). Anthony Smith continues to explain that by praising a show as an excellent television programme is insufficient as it would infer that it still belongs to the lowbrow television medium (Ibid. 2012) and thus implies a similar judgement of the show. Therefore, television programmes are only considered as art if 'extracted from the context of television' (Ibid. 2012) and are associated with a higher position on the sociocultural hierarchy. Alexander Dhoest and Thompson also echo this argument through statements that 'television was defined as good when it was not 'only' TV' (Dhoest, 2014: 2) and that television can 'only aspire to art when it's pretending to be something else' (Thompson, 1996: 20). From Dhoest and Thompson's comments, quality programmes are television that elevates the status of the medium from its low position in the sociocultural hierarchy by evoking comparisons to higher art forms.

In addition to praising quality television by comparing it to higher art forms on the sociocultural hierarchy, several practices may be used by quality television to further draw comparisons to higher art forms. An example of such a practice is the association of 'big names' (Thompson, 1996: 14) with quality programmes. Referred to as a 'lack of anonymity' by John Thornton Caldwell (1996: 14), this is used to refer to the use of high profile names from other media within the production of quality programmes. As there is no official term for this concept, 'transmedia talent' will be used to label it for ease of use. The most common examples of transmedia talent within quality television was from individuals from the film industry working on television programmes as creators, directors or actors. For example, David Lynch's creation of *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991), Matthew McConaughey's role of Detective Rustin Cole in *True Detective* (2014-2015) and Baz Luhrmann's creation and direction of *The Get Down* (2016-2017). It is worth noting that transmedia talent is used in different media and is not limited to quality television. However, transmedia talent can be viewed as a tool to further elevate quality television into a higher medium in the sociocultural hierarchy by drawing closer comparisons between the two art forms. Overall, the by what it is not category defines quality as programming that is other to ordinary television and aligns with middle-class taste structures by evoking elements of higher art forms on the sociocultural hierarchy. The definition of

quality will be used further in Chapter Two, which will explore HBO and its branding of being ‘not TV'.

Quality as an Industrial Practice.

During TVI, which lasted roughly from the mid-1950s to mid-1980s (Curtin and Shattuc, 2009: 7), the networks faced little competition. Consequently, there was a focus on avoiding risk with Least Objectionable Programming (LOP), a term named for its goal of offending as little of the audience as possible, therefore aiming for mass appeal (Ibid. 2009). Broadcasters also conformed to successful formulae and a focus on mass appeal, rather than targeted demographics. However, with an expansion of audience choices from three channels to thousands of options, the networks faced increasing competition (Ibid. 2009: 11). In response to increasing competition, networks had to offer programmes of higher interest and quality to attract audiences, as the growing number of programming options made the audiences harder to target. The networks moved away from formulaic and LOP programming to experimental formats and targeted demographic programming to attract audiences, therefore using more risk in the shows. Michael Curtin and Jane Shattuc state how the networks were ‘eager to experiment with storytelling because of their desire to brand the network as ‘quality" (2009: 110). Therefore, quality television is defined as an economically-driven move away from LOP and formula via the use of risks to prevent audiences from turning towards a competitor.

The increased competition that networks faced in the TVII era showed not only a move away from LOP programming, but also a move towards niche and targeted audiences. As advertising is the main support of commercial television (Hilmes, 2003: 26), its programmes serve as bait for the audiences, which are sold to the ‘highest possible bidders' (Mittell, 2003: 46). During this era, advertisers additionally moved towards targeted demographics instead of mass appeal. The move to targeted demographics came from the understanding that by focusing advertising on the audiences more likely to buy into their product, they would achieve a higher profit. By moving towards targeted demographics, the audiences were positioned at the ‘centre stage' (Mulgan, 1990: 11) by the networks during TVII, as they were funded to create programmes with the aim of appealing to specific advertising demographics. As the programmes target specific audiences, quality is, therefore, an industrial practice to target the quality demographic. Referred to as ‘intellectual liberals' (Feuer, 1984: 56) or ‘blue chip demographics' (Thompson,

1996: 14) the quality audience is defined in the literature as wealthy, well-educated, 18-49 years old living in urban areas (Bottomley, 2015: 485). The quality audience is highly desired by advertisers as they bought more than the average viewer and were early adopters of new products (Ibid. 2015: 486). Because the quality demographics buy premium products (Logan, 2016: 148), the demographic is not only valuable to advertisers, but also to premium cable networks and video-on-demand services such as HBO and Netflix. However, Bottomley's states that despite being the most valuable demographic, the quality audience 'watch relatively little television' (2015: 486) and are therefore one of the hardest demographics to reach.

Logan states that the quality demographic is also 'more likely to be concerned with distinguishing themselves through "elevated" cultural pursuits' (2016: 148). Logan's statement implies that the quality audience is reported to watch little television due to its low sociocultural status and thus more likely to distinguish themselves by engaging with higher art forms. Therefore, practices that elevate quality programming into a higher position in the sociocultural hierarchy can be used to target and attract the quality demographic. Overall, an industrial definition of quality television is a programme created with the aim of targeting the quality demographic. This definition provides a useful perspective, which is explored in more detail in Chapter Four through the investigation of how the broadcast network The CW use risk to target the quality demographic.

What is Risk?.

Before exploring a relationship between the terms quality and risk, it is important to define what risk is. However, defining risk is not a simple task, as the term is elusive as quality with 'no consensus as to what constitutes risk' (Denney, 2005: 191). The word risk was developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Western explorers for sailing in uncharted waters (Ibid. 2005). Linguistically, two principal categories define risk. The first is the probability of something becoming a success or failure. The second is similar to probability risk but relates to danger risks of hazardous, threatening or harmful events such as a risk of terror attack or becoming infected with a disease. Danger risk is an exclusively negative term, while probability risk can be both a negative and positive term depending on its context, use and what specifically labelled as a risk.

Risk is one of ‘the most lively areas of theoretical debate' in sociocultural literature (Lupton, 1999: 1) and as Dean Mitchell writes, is used as a set of ways for ordering reality into a calculable form (1999: 131). Risk literature predominantly studies risk using one of three different approaches. The first approach is naïve realism[4], which looks at what risks exist and how they are measured, recognised and managed within society. Naïve realism explores how individuals ‘hold different risks and manage them differently' according to specific social and cultural logic (Arnoldi, 2013: 2). For example, this approach may look at why some individuals fear the risk of global warming over terrorism, and what has caused these beliefs. Explored by scholars such as Ulrich Beck (1999), the second sociocultural approach to risk is risk society. The risk society approach details how industrialised democratic societies consist of institutions that monitor and protect people from risk. In this approach, risk is a ‘constitutive component of private and public life that can be sold, pooled and reconfigured' (Miller and Kraidy, 2016: 111). This approach may explore how some dangers are named as risk when others are not, and the relationship of risks to sociocultural structures and processes. Overall, the risk society approach relates risk with the hazards and dangers that are mediated and sold through sociocultural institutions and structures (Lupton, 2013: 50). Micheal Foucault's notion of governmentality inspires the third approach to risk in sociocultural literature. The governmentality approach details how the knowledge of risk is used to govern people. It suggests that nothing is a risk but is the products of ‘historically, socially and culturally contingent "ways of seeing"' (Lupton, 2013: 50). By associating and promoting a knowledge of risk with certain social groups, the governmentality approach is also used to explore how these groups become others in society (Ginsburg, 2012). In addition, using risk as vehicles to govern citizens and maintain social and political orders makes risk comparable to taboos (Arnoldi, 2009: 40) in the governmentality approach.

The three sociological approaches to risk provide different ways of looking at risk. This dissertation does not focus on a specific sociological approach to risk but instead uses a combined approach to identify what is a risk in quality television, how risks are used and perceived in their contexts and what the risks reveal about the relationship between quality and risk. As risk covers a range of different elements in television, this dissertation breaks risk down into several subcategories. Predominantly, the subcategories of risk are broken down into

[4] The Naïve realism title is taken from Deborah Lupton’s table of epistemological approaches to risk (2013: 49).

stages of production for the television show. In this dissertation, these subcategories are commissioning risk, production risk, content risk, distribution risk and renewal risk, as indicated by Figure One. Content risk is the largest subcategory of risk that is explored and relates to all risks that are in or associated with the content of a programme. As the biggest subcategory of risk, content risk also consists of subcategories such as genre risk, which relates to the genre of the show, and narrative risk which includes risks associated with the narrative such as pace. Content risk also includes the subcategory representational risk, which includes both diverse and negative images of elements such as race, gender, sexuality and disability. In addition, there are also subcategories of risk that are limited to a single stage of production such as economic risk, which is the probability of the show making or losing money or managed risk, which is risk that appears to be controlled by the company. The different perceptions of risk also form subcategories of positive and negative risk in this dissertation. Additionally, Chapter Two also uses a concept of excessive negative risk, which is defined as the increasing levels of content risk within a show until they cross an implied accepted level of risk.

Insecurity and risk avoidance is a deep part of the television industry because of economic concerns (Kelso, 2008: 46). Due to these concerns, the TVI era predominantly avoided risk through formulaic, mass audience LOP, programming. With little competition, the networks had no reason to take risks, and so they did not (Mittell, 2003: 47). Increased competition brought a move away from industry stability and towards risk as a strategy to achieve success and profitable target audiences. Examples of these risks include serial formats and shorter season lengths. Although serial formats are a common convention of television, this format poses more risk than an episodic format (DeFino, 2014: 111). The higher risk is due to the 'unpredictable nature of television' in which a story may be cancelled or even expanded before its proposed completion due to unexpected season cancellation or renewal, thus holding the threat of alienating viewers unable to follow the programme (Ibid. 2014: 110). Networks also began experimenting with shorter season lengths in the 2000s, lowering the average season length from 22 episodes to 10 for quality television programmes predominantly in premium network and video-on-demand companies (Curtin and Shattuc, 2009: 111). The shorter season length carried the expectation that the audience would remember something that happened at the beginning of the season and carry it through to the end (DeFino, 2014: 123). Using risk as

a strategy for quality television begins to indicate a relationship between the two terms, in a certain amount of risk is used to create quality television.

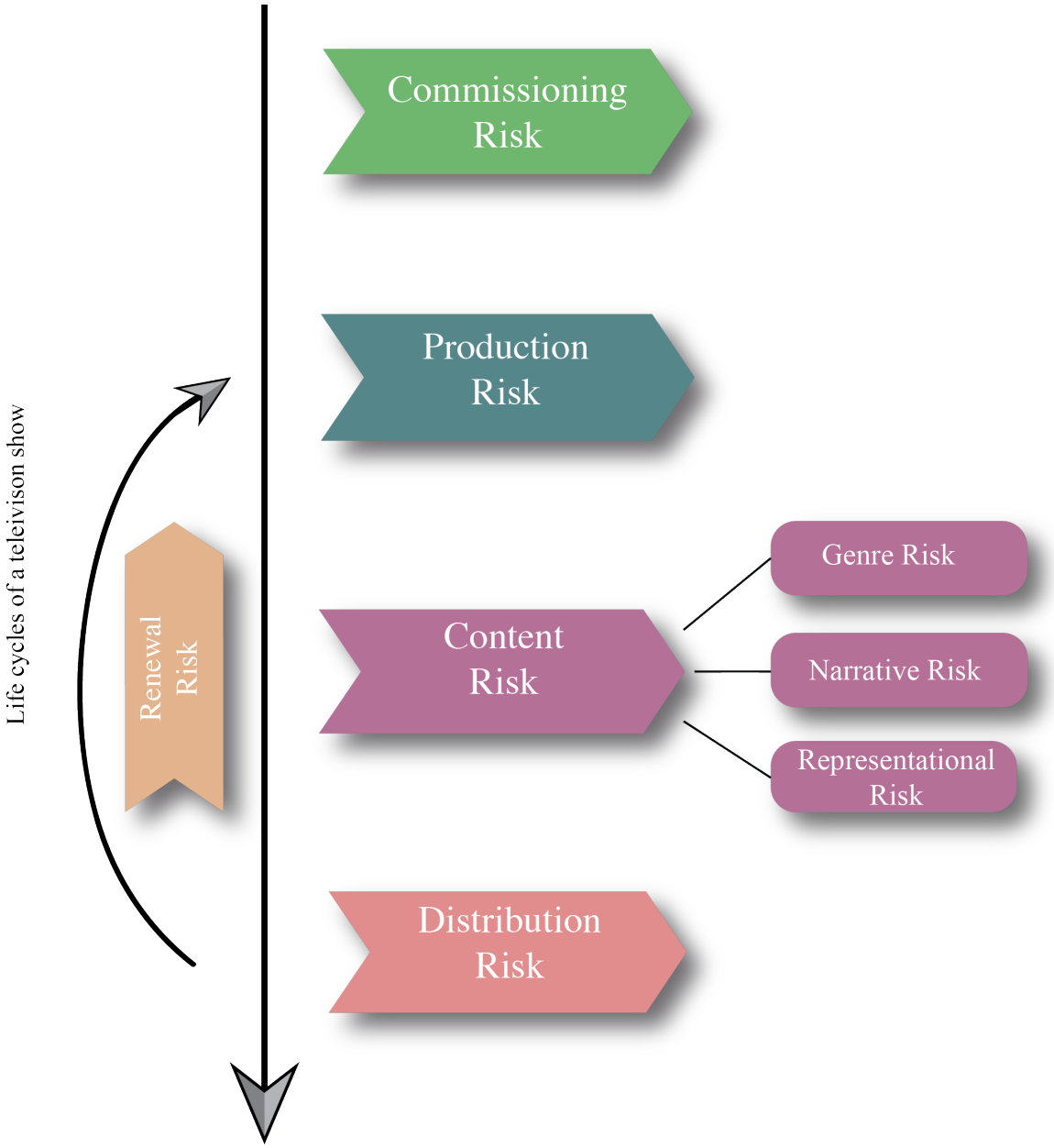

Figure 2: Subcategories of risk

One of the most common inclusions of risk in quality television is content risk. Paisley Livingston theorises three reasons that an audience would want to watch content risks (2012: 91). The first reason summarises that the risks could provide an aesthetic experience, while the

season reason proposes a learning experience for the viewer to ‘learn about the dangers without occurring an actual loss' (Ibid. 2012). The third reason is hedonic motivation, in which the viewer can gain pleasure from watching ‘transgressive things that, if carried out in real life, would likely occur punishment or moral condemnation' (Ibid. 2012: 92). Alternatively referred to under the synonym of ‘edgy' (Nelson, 2007b: 63), content risk in quality programming can include social issues or certain elements such as nudity that the FCC or advertisers would ban in U.S. broadcast television. During television's infancy, programmes ‘often featured contentious themes and scenarios that highlighted social issues' (Kelso, 2008: 47). To Kelso, these social issues included topics such as racism, working-class struggles, third wave feminism featured in *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), drug addiction in *The Corner* (2000) and death in *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005). The inclusion of these elements was short-lived, as they evoked ‘disturbing emotions in the audience' (Ibid. 2008), which contrasted against the advertising sold to the viewers. Although this is a hard statement to evidence, it conforms to the idea that the programmes ‘bait the audience' into watching commercials (Ibid. 2008), and fulfil an appetite that ‘pacifies and placates, rather than shocks and unsettles' (Ott, 2008: 98). The needs of the advertisers were put before the desires of the audiences (Kelso, 2008: 47), as the advertisers can exert pressure on networks for a change in management, scheduling or production if a programme does not perform well or deliver the desired markets (Wickham, 2007: 28). As premium networks rely on subscribers instead of advertisers, they can include socially demanding subjects or issues (Nelson, 2007b: 18) without fear of ‘upsetting' advertisers (Kelso, 2008: 49). Premium networks are also able to bypass FCC regulations, such as its rules on profanity, nudity and violence (Wickham, 2007: 11). In addition, quality television on premium networks is reported to also include risk through the portrayal of challenges to and a transgression of sociocultural taboos (McCabe and Akass, 2008a: 89). Chapter Two's *Game of Thrones* case study explores content risk in further detail and expands on how risks are used to create quality television.

Conclusion.

Quality television is broken into three defining categories, as an aesthetic, as highbrow television and as an industrial practice. From these categories, this dissertation has generated two key definitions of quality. The first as quality as highbrow television, which evokes elements of other media to elevate its status on the socio-cultural hierarchies of art forms. The

second definition of quality television is programming targeted at the desirable quality demographic, namely wealthy, well-educated, liberal 18-49-year-olds living in urban areas. For risk, the term forms two main definitions, probability risk and danger risk. For use in this dissertation, risk has also been divided into several subcategories depending on the risks location within a programmes stage of production, such as content or distribution risk, or the way it is perceived such as positive or negative risk. Overall, this chapter stated how quality programmes need to take risks to move away from LOP programming and be successful amongst heavy competition, therefore arguing that risk is a fundamental aspect of quality television. By focusing on content risk within a premium network in the following chapter, this dissertation will continue to investigate and outline the relationship between quality and risk, suggesting a complex and fluid relationship between the two terms.

Chapter Two

HBO and Content Risk in Quality Television

HBO have built its channel and brand on associations of quality and risk. Critical and industry discourse regularly praises the company for its production of quality programmes, for instance, Michael Paull[5] states that 'HBO has produced some of the most ground breaking, beloved and award-winning shows in television history' (C. Smith, 2016). In academia, the scholars Marc Leverette et al. not only associate HBO with quality but also perceive it as leaders within quality television production as the company sets quality standards and continually 'redefine[s] television as we know it' (2008: 1). HBO's association as leaders in quality television in quality television is also evidenced by claims that the channel has influenced other networks and companies to imitate 'the HBO "quality" formula', creating what Leverette et al. term as the 'HBO effect' (2008: 1-2). Reinforcing the HBO effect, Thompson states that the phrase 'an HBO-style series' has replaced quality television as a marker of prestige (2007: xvii). Articles from Ron Duwell and Roberto Baldwin also reinforce the HBO effect through statements that *Castlevania* (2017) is aspiring to an HBO and *Game of Thrones* level of quality (Duwell, 2017), or how other television providers such as Netflix are 'gunning for the HBO original-content legacy' (Baldwin, 2012). It is unclear when the praise and association of HBO with quality television began. By looking at a brief history of the channel, this chapter explores when and how HBO gained its reputation for quality television. Following this, the chapter then focuses on how the content of its quality programming use risk. Using *Game of Thrones,* the case study questions what is a risk for HBO and the changing connotations of the term. Overall, this chapter further highlights the complex and fluid relationship between the terms quality and risk.

HBO: 1965 – TVIV.

In 1965, Charles Dolan won the right to lay the first underground cable in Manhattan to limit television disruptions caused by blocked signals and severe weather conditions. With Dolan's win, he founded HBO under the initial name Sterling Manhattan Cable. Using this underground cable, HBO made its first broadcast on November 8th, 1972, showing a hockey game between

[5] Michael Paull is Vice President of video at Amazon.

the New York Rangers and Vancouver Canucks and the film *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1970)[6]. After its initial broadcast, the premium cable service ran from 3.00PM to 12.00AM[7], predominantly offering sports and films. With no advertisers, HBO directly gains funding through its subscribers. With only 20,000 customers in its first year of broadcasting, the channel was losing money (Leverette et al., 2008: 2). Acquired by Time Inc. in 1973, the company bet its future on a five-year satellite contract and became the first company to broadcast via satellite on September 30th, 1975 with the 'Thriller in Manila' boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier. The satellite contract was a success and ensured HBO's continued future. Known as a first-run movie service (Edgerton, 2011: 10) throughout the 70s and 80s, the channel had a reputation for quality films rather than quality television in these decades.

In 1989, HBO's parent company Time Inc. merged with Warner Brothers to form Time Warner, providing HBO with an infusion of money in the 1990s (Curtin and Shattuc, 2009: 136). During the same year, HBO launched its first national image campaign and slogan of 'Simply the Best', creating an image of excellence and premium quality for the channel. The merger and slogan mark the start of HBO's transition into quality television, with the Time Warner merger providing the funding needed to move the channel towards original programming and quality television in the 1990s. Using the funding from Time Warner, HBO launched HBO Independent Productions (HBOIP) in 1990. HBOIP was founded as the production house for broadcast and basic networks, creating shows such as *Everybody Loves Raymond* (1996-2005) for CBS and *Down the Shore* (1992-1993) for the FOX network. The original programme *Dream On* (1990-1996) launched in 1990. Created for and broadcast on HBO, *Dream On* marked the start of the channel's focus on producing original content to attract viewers, rather than to fill gaps in the schedule. The programme signalled a focus on creating original programming at HBO, as the static shown on the television towards the end of *Dream On*'s opening credits has become a part of HBO's opening credits for every original production created since. Through original programming, HBO set out to define itself on the notions of risk and quality in the 1990s. In Chris Albrecht's[8] first company-wide HBO meeting in 1995, he asked in his speech 'Do we really believe that we are who we say we are? This distinctive,

[6] HBO's first broadcast is commemorated by a plaque in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.
[7] The channel switched to 24-hour broadcasting in 1981.
[8] At the time, Chris Albrecht was the Programming Chief at HBO and later became CEO from 2002-2007.

high-quality, edgy, worth-paying-for service?' (quoted in Carter, 2002), showing the company's self-definition on the terms of risk and quality. Following this meeting, HBO grew its original programming from 25% in 1996 to 40% of HBO's entire schedule in 2001 (Edgerton, 2011: 8), under a dedication to producing quality and risky programming.

On the 20th of October 1996, HBO revealed the slogan 'It's Not TV, It's HBO', which has since become HBO's most recognisable and widely quoted slogan. There are three ways of interpreting this slogan. Firstly, by asserting that HBO is not TV, it separates the channel and its programming from the rest of television. As outlined in Chapter One, this separation implies that HBO's programming has a higher position in a sociocultural hierarchy of art forms than lowbrow ordinary television, therefore classifying it as quality. Secondly, the slogan redefines the measure of quality television by distancing its programming entirely from television. Rather than 'striving to meet some standard of quality television' (DeFino, 2014: 12), the slogan sets its programming as something more elite than quality and ordinary television. In other words, the slogan translates to 'it's not just quality television, it's HBO'. Lastly, the distinction between HBO and television creates an exclusiveness for its programming, suggesting that that programming cannot be received anywhere but HBO. Its reluctance to sell reruns to other networks[9], 'preferring to keep the program for eternal replay on its various multiplex channels' (Dempsey, 2001) also promotes the exclusiveness of its programmes. Other elements of the channel, such as its sports events can also fall into the exclusiveness. As Newman and Levine write, high art is often perceived as such when it becomes less accessible for the masses (2012: 6). Therefore, the exclusiveness of this slogan additionally reinforces its association with quality television.

The 1990s at HBO saw an increase and focus on original programming and its association with quality, through the release of quality programmes such as *Oz* (1997-2003), *Sex and the City* and *The Sopranos*. These programmes were widely praised by critics, illustrating that HBO's association with quality television began in the late 1990s. The quality association is especially present after the launch of *The Sopranos*, which Gary R. Edgerton marks as 'tipping point' of HBO's success (2011: 11). Critical response to these shows remarked on their popularity and

[9] Although HBO has a reluctance to selling reruns, it does not prohibit it. For example, it sold reruns of shows, including *The Sopranos* to A&E for $2.5 million per episode (Johnson, 2012: 34).

success, such as Alan James Frutkin's statement that ‘the whole world seems to be buzzing' (1999: 40) about them. Kendall Hamilton also states that:

> There are first-rate shows on broadcast TV, of course. But HBO has managed to combine the inherent advantages it has as a pay network with a keen creative eye to produce something of a new genre. […] HBO shows are qualitatively different from most broadcast TV. On the whole, they're smarter, edgier, better written and better acted. And, perhaps most importantly, they march boldly into places the networks fear to tread. (Hamilton, 1999).

Hamilton's statement not only shows the quality status of the shows and HBO but also implies a level of risk within them. In addition, the programmes also changed industry perceptions of HBO, as former NBC head Warren Littlefield states that ‘We used to think HBO were small piranhas, now they look like full-grown sharks' (quoted in Hamilton, 1999). Other television companies were also compared to HBO or reported to aspire to its success. For example, Showtime was said to hope to ‘generate the same water cooler buzz that accompanied HBO's two breakout series, *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City'* (Frutkin, 2000: 11). Although the concept of water cooler buzz can be just a symbol of popularity, the quote's reference to *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City* implies an aspiration to the show's quality association. Therefore, the late 1990s not only marks the start of HBO's connection with quality but also its position of quality television leaders.

In the 2000s, HBO's association with quality continued to grow. The perception of HBO as leaders in quality television also extended overseas, with British Film Institute artistic director Eddie Berg suggesting that the BBC could learn from HBO (Akbar, 2010). In addition, the channel also made television history in 2004 by winning 32 Emmy Awards and receiving a record of 124 nominations (Edgerton, 2011: 7). By 2005, ‘TV professionals and critics alike were expecting HBO to create one breakout hit after another' (Ibid 2011.). The 2000s also saw HBO's transformation into the digital age and TVIV. In 2001, it became the first premium subscription on-demand service in the US through the launch of HBO On Demand and in 2010, HBO allowed its subscribers to view video-on-demand content anywhere with the launch of HBO Go. In TVIV, programmes such as *Westworld* (2016-), *Girls* (2012-), *The Young Pope* (2016-) and *Game of Thrones* are used to understand HBO's recent associations of quality and

risk. As *Game of Thrones* is arguably HBO's biggest program, it is the case study in this chapter to discuss HBO's use of risk and quality in the TVIV era.

HBO and Risk.

In addition to quality, HBO has a strong association with risk, with Albrecht boldly stating, ‘we must continue to take risks, we've built our success on risk' (Bart, 2003). DeFino's states that HBO profited because of its willingness to take risks and ‘give its subscribers something they could not find elsewhere' (2014: 16), showing that HBO's programming content creates the channel's connection to risk. Similarly, Keith Brown and Roberto Cavazos also state that risk is employed in HBO programming content by ‘darker themes, more conflict, and more complex storylines to consciously differentiate themselves from network television' (2005: 20). In addition, Janet McCabe and Kim Akass also state that the programming risks are where the pleasure and esteem of HBO originate from, as it creates a perception of how the channel ‘defies, resists and scandalises' through its programming content (2008b: 66). The rest of this chapter focuses on and explores what content risks HBO take in its programming.

Nudity, Violence and Profanity.

As premium cable television is purchased rather than freely distributed like radio and broadcast television, the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that it has protection under the First Amendment (Santo, 2008: 25). This ruling meant that HBO, and other cable networks, are not subject to the same FCC regulation as broadcast television. To attract subscribers that would pay for HBO's services, it had to ‘offer something different that subscribers cannot get on free TV (the networks) or for the price of basic cable, and which viewers believe is superior to those cheaper alternatives' (Ibid. 2008: 20). The easiest way for HBO to achieve this distinction was through explicit content (DeFino, 2014: 5), such as nudity, violence and profanity. Put simply, ‘HBO realised it could do what it pleased, and pretty much did' (Thompson, 2007: xvii). HBO's inclusion of nudity, violence and profanity, alternatively dubbed the ‘cocksucker, motherfucker and tits' programming by Leverette (2008b), have since become ‘cultural markers' of the network (Ibid. 2008b: 125) because of their inclusion in almost all of HBO's original programming. There is no definitive way of marking what level of these elements is excessive or normal, nor which words or acts are more offensive or risky than others. The FCC also acknowledge this difficulty and advise people to make a complaint if they found something

objectionable, rather than outline a set of guidelines for acceptable or unacceptable inclusions of these elements (FCC, 2016). However, profanity is relatively easier than nudity and violence to measure by simply counting the number of words that can be deemed profane or offensive. For example, *Deadwood* (2004-2006) had '1.56 f-words per minute' (Sapolsky et al., 2010: 51), which is comparably high to the average of 10 objectionable words per hour on broadcast television in 2005 (Kaye and Sapolsky, 2009: 1). Therefore, this section focuses on profanity to summarise the different arguments surrounding explicit content.

Discussion of nudity, violence and profanity predominantly falls under opposing arguments for censorship on television. On one side, the elements could hold a level of sociocultural risk, as they could influence behaviours such as aggression and sexual violence within the audience. In addition, some scholars argue that offensive language and images can be unconsciously internalised and can produce physiological self-hatred and internalised ego-destructive discrimination (Benshoff and Griffin, 2003: 12) or 'long term self-concept damage' (Sapolsky et al., 2010: 48). Oppositional groups that are in favour of censorship (predominantly parental, conservative and watchdog groups) also believe that profanity will 'lead to more cursing in everyday conversation and to a general breakdown in civility and personal values' (Kaye and Sapolsky, 2009: 46). The contrasting argument poses that these elements are used for realism purposes as they offer a more 'convincing picture of real life' (Wickham, 2007: 11) that commercial networks are unable to achieve without them. The utilitarian moral theory also poses that these elements could act as moral lessons or be classified as a moral obligation if they will bring more good consequences over an extended period (Arp and Watson, 2011: 274). Therefore, a utilitarian perspective will believe not censoring television as the elements can bring pleasure to an audience. For example, *Alpha House* (2013-2014) creator and executive Garry Trudeau stated that they were aiming for an HBO level of quality with the inclusion of sex and violence, questioning 'who's gonna watch a show about four middle-age guys with no sex and violence' (quoted in Deadline, 2013). For HBO, McCabe and Atkass state that oppositional groups have an acceptance that 'HBO is only available to those viewers willing to pay for the premium cable service' (2008b: 66), reducing their impact on the company and danger of HBO losing subscriptions. As oppositional groups do not have a significant impact on HBO, this also showcases how censorship arguments are not the best way to frame the inclusion of nudity, profanity and violence in HBO's programming content.

Although HBO has become associated with nudity, violence and profanity, it is not the only channel to feature the taboo content. In recent years, these elements have increased in frequency across other programming, including broadcast television. Recent studies have also shown that from 2005 to 2010 alone, 'overall incidents of scripted profanity on broadcast and basic cable television increased by nearly 70 percent' (DeFino, 2014: 5). With increasing frequency, the inclusion of such elements become less of a risk as they became more commonplace and accepted within society (Sapolsky et al., 2010: 48). The increasing frequency of these elements is also evidenced by the cable channel A&E's purchase of the syndication rights to *The Sopranos* in 2005, as the executive vice president Bob Debittetto admitted that there was little need to edit the show because of the increasingly explicit nature of television (Edgerton, 2011: 15). Recent studies on profanity have also indicated that the audience may be less offended by these elements if shown on a premium network. For example, one of the data collections ranked the offensiveness of words according to their context. The words were ranked on a scale from 1-7, with one being not at all offensive and seven being extremely offensive. The most offensive word in this data collection, 'cunt', received a score of 5.42 for broadcast networks, but only 4.43 for premium networks (Sapolsky et al., 2010: 61). The rest of the data followed the same pattern of receiving lower offensive scores for premium networks, suggesting that the elements are accepted more on HBO than broadcast networks. In addition, there is also an increased 'expectation from subscribers that they will have access to certain films or types of product' (Ulin, 2010: 318) and hence expect HBO to continue providing programming with these elements. The expectation, therefore, suggests a demand for content risk in quality television.

Instead of risks, Defino states that the elements of nudity, violence and profanity are just a simple tactic to exploit the 'freedom [HBO] enjoys from the censorship restrictions of the FCC' (2014: 35). In addition, McCabe and Akass discuss these elements as less of a risk because they are 'enclosed within a discourse of quality' (2008a: 87). In contrast, Dana Polan states that although the elements are 'a strong aspect of the channel's success' (2007: 266), they have not always been a part of the quality formula. Therefore, the inclusion of nudity, violence and profanity have become a part of the quality formula within the context of HBO's quality programming. However, despite increasing frequencies of these elements across broadcast television, they are often referred to in terms such as crude or crass rather than quality. For example, the CBS show *2 Broke Girls* (2011-2017), which received many complaints about the sexual content and profanity depicted on the show (Atkinson, 2013). Overall, this indicates

that the quality framing of a show makes the content risk more likely to be perceived as positive. Without the quality framing, the content risks are instead perceived negatively, showing how the relationship between quality and risk influences the way risk is perceived.

Other Risky Content.

HBO's content risks in its programming have founded its status for 'its edgy, envelope-pushing series' (Polan, 2007: 281). In addition to nudity, violence and profanity, this subsection explores what else is classified as a content risk in HBO's programming, focusing on examples of the case study Game of Thrones. One of the first content risks is through the narrative. With Game of Thrones, critics reported that its narrative was 'just too big and too complicated to work' (Meslow, 2012), hence highlighting size and complexitivity as a narrative risk. Scott Meslow expands on this risk in *Game of Thrones*, citing the numerous noble families with unique totemic symbol and slogan, at least four religions and fictional languages, one of which has 14 different words for horse (Ibid. 2012). Charlie Jane Anders also states that the narrative confusion comes from 'a million characters', most of whom are introduced in the first episode (2011). With narrative risk, there is a danger that the audience would not be able to follow and understand it, creating a worry that many 'people will tune in for the first hour, to see what the fuss was about — and then not come back for week two' (Anders, 2011).

Another content risk for HBO is representational risk, which includes many issues, such as gender, sexuality and disability. For this chapter, this section focuses on race as an example of representational risk. Writing about *Insecure* (2016-), Kristen Warner praises HBO for its racial diversity in the programming following *Girls*, which Kareem Abdul-Jabber criticises for being so white that 'watching a full season could leave a viewer snow blind' (2013). Warner identifies racial diversity as a risk for HBO, stating that 'in an era of network programming that flagrantly excluded people of colour from leading and supporting roles […] HBO and other cable networks offered a risky alternative: racial diversity' (Warner, 2016). Expanding on racial diversity, Warner describes how HBO, alongside other channels, would reduce or cancel the amount of diverse programming in favour of 'crafting a creative space for "quality" dramas that excluded Black characters or showrunners, all the while keeping Black audiences subscribed' (2016). Assuming the quality audience (namely 18-49, urban and educated) is widely made up of white people who would not watch diverse shows, racial diversity is a risk for HBO's white-dominated programmes. Understanding quality through the quality demographic, an increase

in representational risk can lose the quality status of the programme, indicating a complex relationship between the two concepts. Critics such as Anders have also identified the representation of the Dothraki race[10] as a risk for the case study *Game of Thrones*, writing that viewers may be uncomfortable with the Dothraki representation, as 'the ambiguously brown Dothraki horse lords may feel like too much of a "noble savage" stereotype' (2011). Adam Serwer also echoes this concern, writing that the 'decision to make the Dothraki miscellaneous brown people rather than model them directly after the Mongol warriors on whom they seem to be based reinforces the problematic "noble savage" stereotype' (2011). These statements indicate that the quality audience can also feel uncomfortable with representations of racist stereotypes or images. Therefore, representational risk in HBO's content consists of both diverse programming and images of negative representation.

McCabe and Akass imply that HBO 'stake their reputation on consciously violating codes policing the illicit' (2008b: 69), therefore alluding to a danger based risk of transgressing illicit codes. Leverette additionally comments on this risk, stating that HBO's viewers cross 'the boundary of what is taboo' (2008b: 126). The limits of what is taboo can be used to keep people within societal and cultural norms. In western society, societal and cultural norms are to be monogamous, heterosexual, bourgeois, and patriarchal capitalists. Those who are outside of these standards become the Others in society. In Robin Wood's theory of repression, he outlines how the societal borders are used to control the Others, keeping them subjugated to the dominant order through a process of surplus repression (1984: 166). Therefore, the transgression of taboo in HBO's programming is a content risk. As outlined in Chapter One, Livington states that there is a pleasure in watching a transgression of taboos (2012: 92). This pleasure can account for its success, as the risk has since spread across broadcast television within quality programmes (McCabe and Akass, 2008a: 89). Therefore, content risk can be incorporated into and become a part of the quality formula, further indicating a complex and fluid relationship between the quality and risk.

[10] Dothraki are a fictional tribal race from the eastern country Essos, described as horse lords. Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia Clarke) becomes a part of and Khaleesi (queen) of this tribe by marrying Khal Drogo (Jason Momoa).

Case Study: *Game of Thrones.*

Using *Game of Thrones* as a case study, this section explores some of the shows content risk. It is worth noting that this section does not provide an exhaustive list of all the content risks that HBO has taken with the show. Although this section focuses on content risk, critics have also commented on the production risk attached to *Game of Thrones*. For instance, Meslow states that '[e]ven on HBO, *Game of Thrones* shouldn't have worked, and until recently, it couldn't have worked' (2012). In addition to content risks, there are also production risks associated with the show. For example, the show's $60 million per season budget[11] and filming difficulties such as the numerous locations around the world, the simultaneous filming crews and additional levels of CGI (computer-generated imagery) and set building to create the fictional world (Meslow, 2012). Another production risk associated with *Game of Thrones* was its status as an adaptation of the *A Song of Ice and Fire (ASOIAF)* novels, which George R. R. Martin intentionally wrote in a way that would be almost impossible to adapt on television:

> I had spent years pitching, writing, and developing concepts for television, all eminently doable for TV budgets. Now I wanted to put all that behind me, to pull out all the stops. Huge castles, vast dramatic landscapes, deserts and mountains and swamps, dragons, dire-wolves, gigantic battles with thousands to a side, glittering armour, gorgeous heraldry, swordfights and tournaments, characters who were complicated, conflicted, flawed, a whole imaginary world and a cast of thousands. Absolutely unfilmable of course. No studio or network would ever touch a story like this, I knew. These would be good books, maybe great books but that was all they'd ever be (Martin, 2012: 5).

For content risk in *Game of Thrones*, critics such as Nick Baumann highlight a form of genre risk in the show through its fantasy genre. Although fantasy has appeared on television, HBO has never produced a fantasy or shown an interest in it before *Game of Thrones*. Author Martin also had disbelief that the show could happen because it was a fantasy, stating that although HBO was the only channel that wouldn't 'choke on all the sex and violence in the novels' it had never taken the risk of fantasy before (2012: 5). The fantasy genre of *Game of Thrones* also provided a risk of appealing to an audience that was too niche, as critics speculated whether

[11] The $60 million figure is based on the show's first season and is reported to increase with each passing season.

the show ‘can gain an audience beyond fanboys and fangirls' of the ASOIAF novels (Baumann, 2011). Despite the genre risks associated with making the show, the trade press magazine Variety outlined why HBO needed to produce *Game of Thrones* to fill in the gap in quality television left by *The Sopranos*, and thus appeal to wider audiences beyond the fans of the source novels (Lowry, 2011). The framing of HBO and quality television alters the genre risk of *Game of Thrones*, as the channel's associations and expectations of quality television, the show is perceived not as a fantasy, but as one of HBO's quality programmes. The generic reframing by HBO generated a larger appeal than a niche audience, drawing 8.9 million viewers during the season six finale (Prudom, 2016) and is the most watched and pirated television shows in popular culture (Rich, 2015).

There are many ways of recognising risk with the content of *Game of Thrones*. Firstly, the show includes many portrayals of the violence, nudity and profanity that has become associated with HBO. The first episode ‘Winter is Coming' (1.01) can be used as an example for measuring these instances, as this episode sets the expectations for the viewer on the type of content the rest of the episodes will contain. In this episode, there are 17 instances of profanity[12] and six violent instances, including four on-screen deaths[13], an off-screen arrangement of dismembered body parts and someone pushing a child from the top of a tower window. This episode also has five instances[14] of nudity or sexual scenes, where the males are clothed, and the females are wholly or partly nude, bar the exception of Cersei Lannister (Lena Headly). With *Game of Thrones,* there is a repeated concept amongst critics that the show has taken a risk with these elements by going ‘too far’ with their portrayal, evidenced by a string of articles that share similar titles asking ‘has *Game of Thrones* gone too far?[15]. The articles particularly relate the idea of going too far with acts of violence, nudity or sexual abuse in the show. For example, the Prince Oberyn Martell (Pedro Pascal) choosing a prostitute from a line of naked ladies in a brothel (4.01; Cox, 2014), or other various rape scenes. When discussing the concept

[12] The instances of profanity includes 8 uses of the word ‘Bastard’, 3 uses of ‘Fuck’ (or its variations of), 3 uses of ‘Whore’, two uses of ‘Prick’ and one ‘Piss’.
[13] The deaths include two beheadings and two men being stabbed in the stomach. There is also an implied murder of Jon Arryn (John Standing), and portrayals of a dead stag and dire-wolf which are excluded from this count.
[14] The instances of nudity or sexual scenes includes Tyrion Lannister’s (Peter Dinklage) visit to a brothel, Daenerys Targaryen being stripped and inspected by her brother, and later raped by her husband Khal Drogo, various couples publicly having sex at a Dothraki wedding and incest between Cersei and her twin Jaime (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau).
[15] For further examples of articles asking if *Game of Thrones* has gone too far, see Cox (2014), Henry (2015), Seemayer (2015) and Vincent and Hawkes (2015) in the bibliography.

of going too far with risk, the concept is termed 'excessive negative risk' to avoid using the subjective and colloquial terms. The critical notion of excessive negative risk indicates an acceptable level of risk within a shows content. As shown in figure three, if the amount of content risk crosses the implied limit and goes 'too far', the risk is perceived by critics and audiences as a negative element, indicating that the relationship between risk and quality is fluid and changeable.

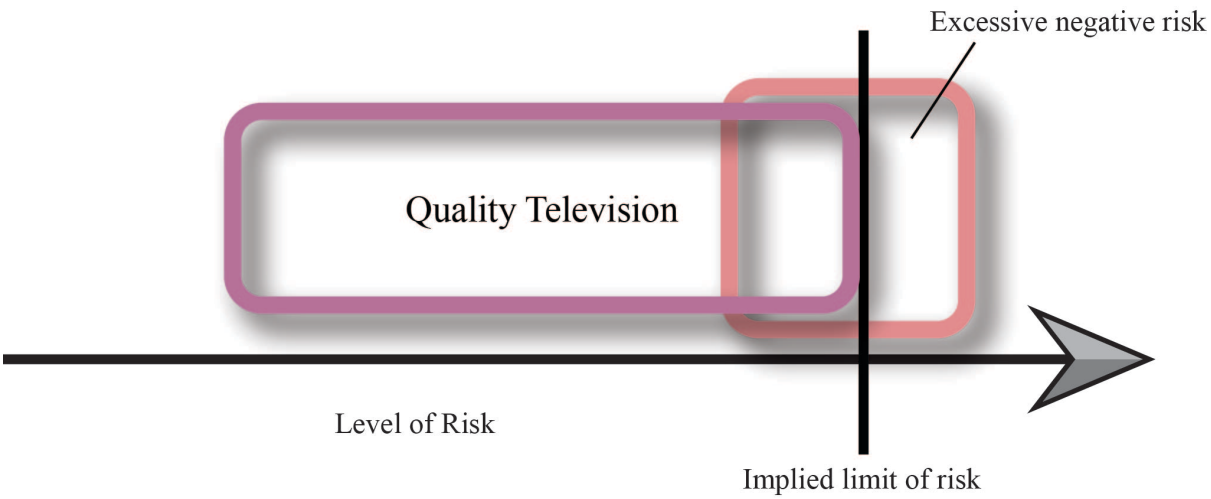

Figure 3: Excessive negative risk.

One of the first examples of HBO excessive negative risk in *Game of Thrones* is through critic Myles McNutt coining the term ‘sexposition' (2011) to describe the frequent type of nudity within the show. Sexposition is used to describe how the show provides exposition against a backdrop of sex or nudity, to grab and retain the audience's attention. The example McNutt uses is Petyr ‘Littlefinger' Baelish's (Aiden Gillen) monologue at his brothel (1.07). In this scene, Petyr talks about his past, his unrequited feelings for Catelyn Stark (Michelle Fairley) and grudge against her husband Ned (Sean Bean), foreshadowing his later betrayal of them. While delivering this monologue, two prostitutes are loudly having sex with each other. Therefore, sex is used to in the scene as an attraction to make the viewers pay attention to Petyr's monologue. Although McNutt coined the term sexposition concerning *Game of Thrones*, it can also be retrospectively applied to other HBO shows such as *The Sopranos*, which often set mob meetings in strip clubs. Sonia Saraiya argues that HBO created the original character Ros (Esmé Bianco) for the show ‘as to set as many scenes as possible in brothels' (Saraiya, 2014). The network has also encouraged directors to include sexposition and nudity, as director Neil Marshall revealed he was repeatedly urged to add more full-frontal nudity

during the filming of the second season (*Empire*, 2012). McNutt views sexposition as a failure to build a cohesive narrative as the audience must rely on long sequences of exposition that use nudity as its only appeal (2011). The practice is also criticised for insulting the viewer's intelligence, as they ‘couldn't be trusted to pay attention' without the nudity (Ibid. 2011). Overall, sexposition can be classified as lowbrow practice to lure the audience's concentration and poses a danger of losing the show's status of quality. The loss of status results from how the practice can tip the perception of the show from highbrow to lowbrow, thus lowering its position on the sociocultural hierarchy of art forms.

Another example of excessive negative risk in *Game of Thrones* is the sexually explicit scene between the twins Cersei and Jaime (4.03). This scene takes place in the Great Sept of Baelor[16], where Cersei is mourning the death of her son Joffrey Baratheon (Jack Gleeson). After finding Cersei next to Joffrey's body, he sexually forces himself on her. This scene is an example of risk within the show's content, as it invokes many sociocultural taboos, such as incest. The incest taboo is also exaggerated through the characters being twins and through the placement next to Joffrey's dead body, who was born out of their incestuous relationship. By setting the scene in Great Sept, the act also violates a sacred and holy space, thus transgressing religious taboos. In addition, the act also includes taboos surrounding death by disrespecting burial traditions and the departed, especially since Joffrey was the King. The television show additionally exaggerates the taboos by framing Joffrey's body prominently into 1/3 of the shot during the scene. Alongside the sociocultural taboos, HBO has additionally adapted this scene into rape. In the source novel, Cersei originally resists Jaime's advances due to the listed taboos and fear of being discovered, pounding ‘on his chest with feeble fists, murmuring about the risk, the danger, about their father, about the septons, about the wrath of gods' (Martin, 2000: 278). Despite these taboos, Cersei consents to Jaime. In contrast, Cersei does not consent to Jaime in the television program. In the scene, Cersei is stood over Joffrey's body and crying. She briefly turns to Jaime for comfort, before shifting to face the body. Calling Cersei a ‘hateful woman', Jaime forcibly grabs and turns her around, holding her by the neck and forcing her to look at him. He then forces himself on her, ripping her clothing and ignoring Cersei's repeated pleas for him to stop while crying, and tells her that he does not care. The adaptation transforms

[16] The Great Sept of Baelor is a cathedral-like holy building in the Capital Kings Landing. It is the centre of religious worship for the religion Faith of the Seven, which has similar ties to Christianity/Catholicism.

the consensual sex scene into rape, furthering the inclusion of taboo and content risk within the show.

The portrayal of Jaime raping Cersei in *Game of Thrones* caused outrage among some critics and viewers, reinforcing the critique of excessive negative risk. For example, Christopher Orr writes:

> Benioff and Weiss seem to have decided to make the scene 20 percent more awful, with Cersei resisting more aggressively and never giving any meaningful form of consent. But that 20 percent changed everything: Suddenly, Jaime—by that point one of the most sympathetic characters on the show—was a rapist (Orr, 2015).

Orr's comments reinforce the excessive negative risk and suggest that the scene had also harmed the audience's perception of Jaime. Although creators David Benioff and Dan Weiss declined to comment, HBO Original Programming chief Michael Lombardo gave his support of Benioff, Weiss and the creative teams behind the scene (Littleton, 2015a). However, interviews with members of the production team have indicated that the portrayal of rape was not intentional. The episode director Alex Graves states that it ‘becomes consensual by the end' (quoted in Orr, 2014), later explaining that the consensual part was through Cersei wrapping her legs around him (Ibid. 2014). Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, who plays Jaime, also gave an ambiguous statement, stating that ‘there are moments where [Cersei] gives in [to Jaime], and moments where she pushes him away' (Ibid. 2014). These statements reflect a poor management of risk and a lack of knowledge about the subject. Instead of subduing the excessive negative risk caused by the scene or explaining why it was included or adapted in this way, the statements reproduce common myths of rape culture in which the implication that a woman will eventually consent to or enjoy sexual advances despite saying otherwise defends rape. The answers also suggest that Jaime's rape of Cersei was not an intentional choice by the show's creators but more of an accidental occurrence. The accident could result from indulging in a ‘longstanding penchant for ramping up the sex and violence of [the] source material, and this time [Creators David Benioff and Dan Weiss] did it so carelessly that even they didn't recognize where it had taken them' (Orr, 2014). Therefore, HBO increased the content risk to the point that it caused an accidental occurrence of excessive negative risk.

It is hard to determine if Jaime's rape of Cersei in *Game of Thrones* was an accidental or intentional instance of excessive negative risk. Viewing the scene alongside similar cases in the show, it suggests that HBO is intentionally pushing the limits of content risk within its content. One such instance is the rape of Sansa Stark (Sophie Turner) by her newlywed husband and sadist Ramsey Bolton (Iwan Rheon, 5.06). With this episode, critics stated that for a show that pushes 'taste boundaries when it comes to nudity, violence and gore' (Vincent and Hawkes, 2015), it 'crossed the line' (Seemayer, 2015) and is an excessive negative risk in this episode. Although it some of the outcries can result from the scenes deviation from the source novels (where Sansa is not raped), some critics imply that portraying the act of rape itself is what caused the perception of risk to become an excessive negative risk. Most of the outcry came from fan sites, such as the feminist site *The Mary Sue*[17] which stated they would stop reporting on *Game of Thrones* because of Sansa's rape (Pantozzi, 2015). *The Mary Sue* article states that Sansa's rape was unnecessary, as it did not add to the show's narrative or character development, as the show has already established Ramsey as a villain and Sansa has 'already overcome abusive violence at the hands of men' (Panzotti, 2015). In addition, Jill Panzotti states that rape, in general, 'is not a necessary plot device' (2015). Using *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) as an example, Panzotti explains that rape can be discussed or overcome within a narrative without the showing the act itself to the viewer. The nudity, violence and profanity section outlined that as HBO has fewer content restrictions from the FCC than broadcast channels do, it can and does include otherwise prohibited content to distinguish the channel. Therefore, by showing Sansa's rape, HBO is presumptuously intentionally using content risks to maintain the channel's distinction and reputation of taking risks.

Outcries of excessive negative risk in *Game of Thrones* is not just limited to scenes of sexual violence, but also violence against children. An example of this outcry is Shireen Baratheon's (Kerry Ingram) death. Named as 'one of the most disturbing scenes in "Thrones" history' (Henry, 2015), Shireen's parents burn her alive as a sacrifice to their gods (5.09). Spencer Kornhaber suggests that this scene crosses the limit of acceptable content risk a point beyond redemption, asking if there is 'any redeeming a show that snuffs out a little girl, whom the audience has come to know over the years, in one of the most painful fashions imaginable?' (2014). In the following season, another and younger incident of child death also caused

[17] It is worth noting that as a feminist site, *The Mary Sue* would have taken a strong response to the representation of and sexual violence towards women in *Game of Thrones.*

criticism, where Ramsey Bolton makes his dogs kill his mother in law and newborn brother (6.02). To Rebecca Hawkes, this scene is on par with Shireen's death as ‘one of the show's most unsettling scenes yet' concerning sheer emotional horror (2016). For Adam Epstein, the infant's death not only crosses the limit of transgressing taboos but also breaks ‘one of the unwritten cardinal rules of television is that infants don't die' (2016). Megan Garber echoes statements that *Game of Thrones* went too far with the child death scene, but also writes that:

> It was the most horrifying *Game of Thrones* moment since, well, the show’s previous depiction of a child’s violent murder. But it was not at all unusual: The Bolton infant joins the increasingly populous parade of children who have met their deaths in the series’s eponymous game. Lommy. Joffrey. Zalla. Mycah. Shireen. Etc. Kid-killing, indeed, is so common on *Game of Thrones* that *Vulture* recently took it upon itself to rank the child deaths the show has thus far portrayed, according to their respective sadness (Megan Garber, 2016).

Garber’s statement and the repeated incidents excessive negative risks suggest that HBO is intentionally increasing the levels of content risk within the *Game of Thrones.*

With the growth of excessive negative risks in *Game of Thrones*, critics have stated that the show ‘has decided to be shocking for its own sake, rather than to propel the story' (Kain, 2016). This statement also implies that content risks are more accepted or excused if they serve the narrative of the show. Erik Kain also states that HBO is in danger of trying to increase the content risk higher and higher to shock the audience rather than build a coherent story. Although written in response to HBO's comedy series, Variety highlights how HBO is increasing the content risk of its shows for shock value, stating that ‘somewhere along the way in its effort to stand apart from the rest of the TV universe, HBO fell over the edge in search of edgy' (Wallenstein, 2011). Kain additionally suggests that this type of shock decreases the value of the show by asking:

> Is it better to be unpredictable at the cost of a coherent story? Should we value Game of Thrones based merely on its ability to throw us off, or should we value and judge it based on the many other facets that contribute to its quality? (Kain, 2016)

Kain's suggestion summaries how increasing content risk for shock value is not an element of quality television. Therefore, by consistently increasing the amount of content risk in *Game of Thrones*, HBO could be replacing quality with risk. This concept alludes to a contrasting element of the complex relationship between the two terms. In this relationship, successful risks are viewed as positive and become integrated into the formula for quality television. However, unsuccessful risks or excessive negative risks can act as a turning point in the balance between the two terms. At the turning point, risk is a negative element that can lose the status of quality within the show. Therefore, only a certain amount of risk can be associated with quality television before the show loses its status as quality.

Conclusion

Over HBO's history, the channel has built an association with quality television and risk, particularly within the late 1990s. Within its programming, content risk includes inclusions of nudity, violence and profanity that FCC restrictions would prohibit on commercial television or transgressions of sociocultural taboos. Due to the multiple ways that risk can be classified, the chapter has further indicated the changeable and complex nature of the term. As certain elements of content risk have spread across broadcast television, such as profanity, this chapter has shown that risk can be viewed positively under the implication that they are a part of the quality formula. However, without the quality framing, the risks are instead seen as negative. Therefore, the relationship between risk and quality influences how risk is accepted and perceived. In addition, this chapter has also discussed the concept of excessive negative risks, where the amount of risk goes beyond an implied level of acceptable risk. Excessive negative risk further indicates a complex and fluid relationship between quality and risk. In this relationship, acceptable levels of risk become integrated into the quality formula. With the quality framing, the risks are perceived in a largely positive way. However, increasing amounts of risk can cause the show to lose its status of quality, and the risks will become negative. Overall, quality television can only contain a certain quantity of risk. If the levels of risk extend beyond an implied acceptable level, the programme loses its status as quality television.

Chapter Three:

Netflix and Cinematch*:* Managing Risk in Quality Television

Further exploring the relationship between risk and quality television, this chapter examines how industry and critical discourse use the terms outside of a cable company by focusing on the video-on-demand (VOD) service provider Netflix. Using the case study of *House of Cards* (2013-)*,* the chapter focuses on commissioning and distribution risks due to the show's two-season commission and all-at-once distribution methods. Secondly, it discusses how risk was attached to Netflix through critics and trade press and the negative connotations associated with the term. In addition, this chapter looks at how risk is managed by Netflix through its user data and Cinematch algorithm, creating a perception of managed risk. Finally, it explores Netflix's effect on the television industry, its potential threat to cable television and how the company uses notions of quality and risk in an alternative way to HBO, arguing that the company does not promote its association with risk but instead uses its data to transform negative risk into positive managed risk.

Similar to HBO, Netflix has not always had an association with quality television. The company was launched in 1997 and began as a publically traded DVD rentals and sales company. In 1999, Netflix adopted a subscription-based business model and became the only national video rental service in America that could promise its customers no late return fees (McDonald and Smith-Rowsey, 2016: 1). The beginning of the company's association with quality television was through the start of its on-demand streaming service in 2007[18], which gave its subscribers instant access to films and television programmes online. With most customers using the streaming service, the company sought to split the streaming and DVD rental sides of their business in September 2011 into two separate companies, Netflix and Qwikster. Because Netflix and Qwikster required separate accounts and subscription charges, the split caused a mass of complaints and a loss of 800,000 subscribers (Wingfield and Stelter, 2011). The spilt also caused a 'dizzying plunge in the company's stock price' of approximately 82%, falling from $299 in 2011 to $53 in 2012 (Steward, 2013). Following the reactions to Qwikster, Netflix dropped the company in October 2011, quietly rebranding and moving its DVD shipping service to DVD.com. The quiet split allowed the Netflix brand to focus its

[18] As outlined in the Introduction, the 2007 launch of Netflix's on-demand streaming service is used as the start of the TVIV era in this dissertation.

services on streaming content and build its association with quality television through original programming. Before the announcement of the spin-off Qwikster, Netflix had begun to further this association by acquiring the rights to its first original programme, *House of Cards.* In this context, original means a programme that Netflix exclusively produces, co-produces or distributes, rather than aggregated content or an original story, as *House of Cards* is an adaptation of the BBC mini-series of the same name (1990) and based on the novel by Michael Dobbs (1989).

Before the release of *House of Cards,* Netflix had over 30 million subscribers (Kafka, 2017). However, 'Analysts and investors [were] concerned with how Netflix plans to increase its subscriber base' (K. Smith, 2013) with its business model based on current content. By solely relying on and offering curated content, Netflix could lose its subscribers as 'aggregation in and of itself is not enough to retain customers' (Ulin, 2014: 370). Jeffery C. Ulin's statement provides a sense that if a company just provides aggregated content, its subscribers would be able to access the same content from other providers and thus have no reason to remain loyal to the company and continue their subscriptions. Therefore, to increase and retain subscribers, a company must offer its customers something unique that they cannot find elsewhere. Similar to HBO, Netflix began to create original content as a unique selling point for the business. For Netflix, producing original and quality programmes also helped the company recover the losses caused by Qwikster in addition to providing a unique selling point. By 2014, over a half of U.S. homes with a broadband internet connection were Netflix subscribers (Strangelove, 2015: 145) and in the first quarter of 2017, the company had over 95 million global subscribers (Kafka, 2017).

Case Study: *House of Cards.*

Announced in 2011, *House of Cards* is Netflix's first television programme. Set in Washington, DC, the show follows politician Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey) as he plans to achieve more political power. Although critics like Yoni Heisler classify *House of Cards* as a quality programme (2016), it is worth noting that not every original production by Netflix shares the same status. Alongside its quality television programmes, Netflix has additionally expanded its original content into genres not usually associated with quality such as its upcoming unscripted reality television shows (Ingram, 2017). As Netflix's first original production, critics

labelled *House of Cards* as brave and risky, with a ‘strong likelihood of a disastrous end' (Rosenbaum, 2013). In addition to being the first US VOD television programme, the show was predominantly labelled by television critics and trade press as a risk for two main reasons. These reasons are its commissioning and its 'revolutionary' distribution method, which ‘broke all conventions of traditional serial distribution by making available the entire first season […] at once' (Klarer, 2014: 205). Based on these two reasons, commissioning and distribution risks are the focus of discussion for the case study.

***Commissioning risk in* House of Cards.**

Typically, US television programmes will go through many stages and changes, such as producing a pilot script and episode, before being commissioned by networks. Usually, only one season of a television programme gets commissioned at a time, with its renewal based on the show's ratings and performance, as low rated and performing shows create less revenue and are unlikely to be renewed. With *House of Cards*, Netflix commissioned the show for two seasons (or 26 episodes) for approximately $100 million (Ulin, 2010: 371), all without seeing a single scene (Baldwin, 2012). Although labelled as commissioning risk because of its location in the commissioning stage of production, the risk also involves two other subcategories of risk. The first subcategory is probability risk of the show's success or failure and whether the show would be able to generate an audience. In addition, as Netflix's first original programme, the company could not guarantee that moving into original content would be successful, increasing the probability risk. Secondly, commissioning risk holds a level of economic risk, as the company could lose $100 million if *House of Cards* was unsuccessful. In some regards, as the programme is an adaption of a previous series and novel, it had a pre-existing audience, thus lessening the commissioning risk. Nonetheless, Netflix is a publicly traded company and does not belong to a larger parent company and therefore had no financial aid or security like HBO or The CW if the $100 million investment did not work, highlighting the extent of the commissioning risk.

By using the data collected from its Cinematch system, Netflix alleged to manage the manage the commissioning risks involved in *House of Cards*. Cinematch is Netflix's data collecting algorithm and is designed to recommend content to users based on their likes and viewing history. It uses a combination of three different methods. The first is the user's profile, which involves aspects such as their scrolling and viewing history, streaming habits and past ratings.

The second method is ‘collaborative filtering via "Customer Clusters"' (N. Alexander, 2016: 90), in which users are grouped to other users with similar tastes and thus recommended the same content that the other users have watched and enjoyed. Lastly, Cinematch uses ‘a tagging system meant to group closely related or "neighbouring films"' (Ibid. 2016), built from an extensive number of tags and suggests similar content based on what a user has just watched. In addition to the three methods, Cinematch also priorities Netflix's original content, showing users advertisements for this content and automatically including promotions for them in the autoplay feature when a user has finished watching a television series (Ibid. 2016: 91). Cinematch is an integral part of Netflix's business model, and it is consistently seeking out ways to improve its accuracy. In 2006, the company ran a competition called ‘The Netflix Prize' which would give the winning team $1 million if they could increase the accuracy of Cinematch by 10% (Hallinan and Striphas, 2006: 188). With more than 40,000 teams from 186 countries taking part (Keating, 2013: 184), the competition closed in 2009 and encouraged teams of scientists and professionals to rewrite improved algorithms for the company. Since the contest, Cinematch continues to be changed and updated. For example, in 2017 Netflix replaced the rating system with a thumbs-up or thumbs-down rating and a match score which predicts a personalised percentage of how much users might like a programme or film, based entirely on users' viewing habits instead of overall popularity among Netflix users (Sprangler, 2017). Overall, Cinematch gathers a vast amount of information about how subscribers use Netflix and viewer likes and viewing habits. This information has become an integral part of how the company commission its original content.

Netflix used the data collected by Cinematch to guide its movement into and migrate risks associated with its original content. Firstly, the data showed that its users watched television programmes more than films (N. Alexander, 2016: 91). Because of this, Netflix chose a television programme as its first original content and have focused on producing television shows rather than films. Not only did Cinematch influence the focus on television, but it also informed the type of content to create based on users existing and overlapping interests. For example, Chief Content Creator Ted Sarandos explains that:

> With *House of Cards*, it was identifying not just somebody who saw *The Social Network* [2010] or liked David Fincher but trying to figure out what everybody who liked [*The Curious Case of*] *Benjamin Button* [2008]*, Seven* [1995]*, Fight Club* [1999] and *Social Network* have in common. It’s that they love David Fincher’s style of

> storytelling… You look at Kevin Spacey fans, and then you say, "How about people who love political thrillers?" We went back and pulled all the political thrillers people have watched and rated highly. So you've got all these populations, and right where they overlap in the middle is the low-hanging fruit. If we can get the show in front of these people, they will watch it and love it (quoted in Hallinan and Striphas, 2016)

Situated in the middle of the overlapping interests of David Fincher films, Kevin Spacey and political thrillers, Netflix presumed that *House of Cards* would attract attention by appealing to many different audiences. Basing its strategy on this presumption, Netflix not only predicted that the show would be a success but also generated another unique selling point for the company by taking an alternative approach to commissioning. In addition to using the data to select the shows, Netflix also used Cinematch to advertise the show in different ways to these audiences. For example, Kevin Spacey fans saw trailers predominantly featuring the actor, while users that watched women-centred films like *Thelma and Louise* (1991) saw trailers that featured the show's female characters (Carr, 2013). Therefore, Netflix used Cinematch to identify audiences that would be interested in *House of Cards*, while also promoting the specific parts of the programme that appeals to those viewers, limiting the amount of commissioning risk for the show.

In addition to how Cinematch is used to manage risk by finding and advertising to users' interests, this data creates an alternative definition and view of quality television. The suggestion that the programmes are generated by and uniquely selected for a user's interests implies this alternative perspective of quality. For example, some users may feel like because Netflix knows they enjoy Kevin Spacey films, the company have specially commissioned *House of Cards* for them and people like them to watch and enjoy. This audience response has been assumed based on the company's commissioning methods as there is no evidence if, and how many, subscribers have this reaction. The concept that shows are generated by and uniquely selected by a person's interests is similar to the idea of exclusiveness, as Netflix's programmes and suggestions are uniquely exclusive to each user. As noted in Chapter Two, exclusivity can be linked to higher art as it is less accessible to the masses and can thus be a part of the high-brow television category of quality. Therefore, Netflix uses Cinematch to calculate levels of commissioning risk but also as a way of generating and framing its programmes as personalised choices, reinforcing the company's association with quality.

***Distribution risk in* House of Cards.**

When Netflix released the first season of *House of Cards*, it distributed all 13 episodes at the same time across its global platforms. This all-at-once method of distribution was chosen to reflect changes in viewing behaviour, such as watching episodes at more convenient times with DVR (digital video recorder) devices and to giving its subscribers the ability to binge-watch[19] the entire season. The distribution method was labelled as a risk by critics for losing the benefits and publicity of the traditional distribution method of weekly broadcasting. For example, Steven Rosenbaum states that Netflix would lose the weekly broadcasting benefits of social media engagement, press coverage and audience anticipation for the next episode, as:

> A series that releases episodes weekly creates a social media engagement as fans comment on episodes, make guesses about character's next moves, and share social media links and buzz with each other via Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and more.
> A weekly release schedule gives media critics and bloggers a series of editorial pegs to write about the series.
> A weekly release schedule builds anticipation — encourages multiple check-in's and an arc. (Rosenbaum, 2013)

In addition, the all at once distribution of *House of Cards* is identified as a risk by critics as it 'completely remove[s] [the audience] feedback loop, both from [studio] executives and the audience' (Pepitone, 2013). The removal of the feedback loop thereby prevents Netflix from making changes or altering storylines for episodes based on audience reception. Critics identified the biggest distribution risk for Netflix as the danger of people signing up to watch *House of Cards* and immediately cancelling their subscription once they have finished, so 'instead of getting a new subscriber, [Netflix is] going to get eight bucks' (Pachter, quoted in Pepitone, 2013).

Overall, critics outlined how Netflix's distribution model would result in *House of Cards'* short, unprofitable and unsustainable impact for the company. However, in a letter to its investors, CEO Reed Hastings wrote that:

[19] Binge-watching is the process watching multiple episodes of a television programme in rapid succession.

> Linear channels must aggregate a large audience at a given time of day and hope the show programmed will actually attract enough viewers despite this constraint. With Netflix, members can enjoy a show anytime, and over time, we can effectively put the right show in front of members based on their viewing habits … For linear TV, the fixed number of prime-time slots mean that only shows that hit it big and fast survive ... In contrast, Internet TV is an environment where smaller or quirkier shows can prosper because they can find a big enough audience over time. In baseball terms, linear TV only scores with home runs. We score with home runs, too, but also with singles, doubles, and triples. (quoted in Rosenbaum, 2013)

The letter shows how Netflix denies the associations of distribution risk, believing that flexible viewing habits can ensure greater success over longer periods of time. Therefore, in this context, Netflix does not want to be associated with risk due to the negative connotation of the term.

Cinematch also reveals data on how Netflix subscribers watch content. In 2016, the company published some of this data, showing that its users not only binge-watched content but also how long it took them to binge-watch different types of shows (Koblin, 2016). Knowing about the binge-watching viewing practice of its subscribers, Netflix encouraged the behaviour in *House of Cards* through its all at once distribution, which 'invites, even challenges, its viewers to fully immerse themselves in the narrative world and allow the storytelling momentum to take hold' (McCormick, 2016: 101). In addition, Netflix also uses binge-watching as part of its promotional strategy and in some cases, control the critical discourse around the term. For example, in a paid sponsored article for *Wired,* Netflix has written on how binge-watching viewing practices have caused television to get better, as binge-watching viewers are consuming television programmes in smarter, more active ways (McCracken, 2014). This article demonstrates how Netflix is not only promoting the change in viewing behaviour but also how the discourse is used to further Netflix's association with quality under the suggestion that binge-watching is making television better.

Netflix also encouraged binge-watching though elements of *House of Cards'* content, such as the absence of flashbacks or recaps and quickly resuming action, as the viewers will have just watched the previous episode (Stelter, 2013). Sarandos summarises this by stating that the

show ‘assumes [that audiences] know what's happening all the time, whereas television has to assume that a big chunk of the audience is always just tuning in' (quoted in Stelter, 2013). Binge-watching is also encouraged through the design of the website and its features such as autoplay, which automatically queues and loads the next episode for audiences to watch. Adam Chitwood writes that binge-watching a television show devalues individual episodes and makes it difficult to differentiate one episode from the rest (2016). Therefore, Netflix's binge-releasing model can potentially lower the overall quality of the program by producing individual episodes that the viewer might not classify as quality. Stating that it is almost impossible to pinpoint ‘a fulfilling, contained episode of a Netflix series that was just as satisfying for viewers to rally around' (Ibid. 2016) as broadcast television shows, Chitwood's article thus suggests that binge-watching can mask poor storytelling by disguising weaker moments in an episode's content. Therefore, Netflix's distribution and encouragement of binge-watching can reduce the risk of viewers not returning to watch the next episode in the following week, as audiences are more likely to forget or move past a duller or less entertaining episode if the next one is immediately available to watch. By encouraging viewers to go past weak episodes, the all at once distribution method can mask the weaker points of a show, giving an overall impression of a higher quality than in a weekly broadcast schedule. Overall, this shows how managing risk can alter a show's status of quality and can further the argument that quality and risk must exist in a certain tension for a programme to be classified as quality television.

To Mario Klarer, Netflix's distribution of *House of Cards* ‘not only bowed to these new viewing habits of their customers, but also acknowledged, which seems even more important, that the series format has completely emancipated itself from its roots in television with its piecemeal release pattern' (Klarer, 2014: 205). Klarer's statement shows that Netflix's programming as something other to television, which fits into the high-brow television definition of quality. The high-brow television definition defines quality programmes that distance themselves from the lowbrow television medium and evoke aspects of higher art forms of the sociocultural hierarchy. In addition to its distance from television through its distribution method and release on a VOD platform, *House of Cards* also evokes comparisons to higher forms of art. For example, the show evokes an association ‘with the prestige of literature instead of TV' (McCormick, 2016: 105) by naming its episodes as chapters and through its repeated use of Shakespearean asides (Klarer, 2014). Netflix's television programmes thus evoke higher art forms, in this case, serial fiction and Elizabethan drama, which influence its status as quality.

Because Netflix does not publish viewing figures and data for its content, there is no record of exactly how many people watched *House of Cards*. However, Netflix reported that the show was the most streamed piece of content in over 40 countries (Carr, 2013). Critics have also estimated the show's impact, stating that ‘huge percentages of Netflix subscribers watched back-to-back episodes, devouring a season of content in just days' (Matrix, 2014: 199), particularly in the 18-34 demographic. In addition to a large percentage of subscribers binge-watching the show, Netflix also reported that fewer than 8,000 people signed up for a subscription and cancelled after finishing House of Cards. (Rosenbaum, 2013), demonstrating that the distribution risk has a limited effect on the company. Using Netflix's quarterly subscription number rates, Rosenbaum estimated that based on the increase in subscribers, the company had regained its $100 million cost for two seasons of *House of Cards* within the first three months of its first season's release (Ibid. 2013). In the VOD context, the commissioning and distribution risk holds negative connotations and is applied to Netflix by critics, rather than originating from the company itself. This relationship contrasts with HBO's use of risk, which HBO self-apply to the channel via the content risk in its programming. In addition to changing definitions and implications of risk, the term therefore also has different connotations based on who is applying the term and what purpose its use is expected to achieve. As Netflix's first original programme, *House of Cards* represented the company's entry into the television market as content providers, thus becoming a new competitor for networks and cable channels. In addition, as a VOD service, the company also represented new technology entering the television industry and through its commissioning and distribution methods, a change to established television norms. Therefore, the negative label of risk attached to Netflix can be a response to the changes and new technology that the company was bringing to the television industry. The following section explores Netflix's influence on the television industry in more detail.

Post *House of Cards:* Netflix’s Relationship to the Television Industry

Following the launch of *House of Cards*, Netflix became the first VOD company to win a Primetime Emmy award, indicating a rising level of industry recognition for the business. The industrial notice is also shown by the business's 91 Emmy award nominations in 2017 for its original programmes, ‘second only to the premium cable service HBO' (Ng, 2017). After *House of Cards*' success, critics also began describing the company as symbolising ‘a change within

the digital television landscape' (Jenner, 2014: 2). Other critics have stated that the corporation has blurred the lines of what television is (Ulin, 2014: 369) and has 'revolutionized the US television industry several times over' (Dupont, 2014). These critics indicate a change in how Netflix's programming and distribution methods are referred to, replacing the negatively charged word risk and instead implying positive risk, showing that it is possible to alter perceptions of risk over time. Using the positive risk label, Netflix began to build a reputation as innovators in the industry. CEO Hastings' statement that Netflix had reinvented television 'by giving viewers the freedom to watch what they wanted, when they wanted it, and by allowing content producers to reach a global audience more easily than in the past' (Ingram, 2017) demonstrates this sense of innovation for the company. Following the changed perception from negative to positive risk, broadcast networks and cable channels began to integrate Netflix's binge-watching friendly television formats. For example, the network Fox situated a viewer straight into the action in *The Walking Dead* (2010-) rather than recapping the audience's knowledge of the show (Stelter, 2013). In addition, *Beyond* (2017-) used all at once online distribution alongside a weekly broadcast schedule, while the entire third season of *12 Monkeys* (2015-) aired in a single weekend. Therefore, Netflix's success not only altered perceptions of its distribution and binge-watching models but also influenced an adoption of these methods within the television industry and changed the ways audiences can watch and access quality television[20].

Coining the term 'Peak TV', FX Networks CEO John Landgraf has described how the TVIV era is witnessing a new golden age of television due to the increased amount of content available. The increase in content is chiefly attributed to Netflix (Theilman, 2010), as the company is rapidly increasing its amount of original content[21]. In 2014, the company had a $3 billion budget for content (Steele, 2014). In 2017, this budget has increased to $6 billion (Ingram, 2017), with the goal of doubling its original content and achieving 50% original content on the website (J. Alexander, 2016). To Landgraf, the increased amount of content poses a threat to the television industry, giving the industry 'no choice but come up with new business models to address the erosion in the traditional advertising market and the disruption

[20] It is worth noting that although most networks and cable channels follow a weekly broadcast schedule, distribution strategies have not always been stable as networks have previously experimented with alternative distribution methods prior to Netflix' influence.

[21] Netflix is also attributed to cause its competitive VOD providers such as Amazon Video and Hulu to also increase its original content.

in the way viewers are watching television' (Landgraf, quoted in Littleton, 2015b). The increase in production will also cause television programmes to be ‘briefer, lower-budget and filled with the kind of product-placement ads that audiences hate and advertisers pay for' (Thielman, 2016). Although elements such as duration and budget are not an exclusive indicator of quality, critics are reporting that Peak TV will end in a ‘less luxurious future' and decrease in quality programmes (Ibid. 2016), thus implying that U.S. quality television is in a state of crisis. Therefore, Netflix is also associated with danger risk, as the company's increase in content poses a threat to the television industry and quality television.

Netflix's perceived threat to cable television is another danger risk for the business. Using the metaphor that ‘Netflix is a train that can't be stopped, and it's starting to flatten cable', Alexis Kleinman states that Netflix poses a threat to cable television through the phenomenon of cord cutting (2015). Cord cutting is the process of audiences discontinuing their television subscriptions and instead relying on VOD services (Doyle, 2013: 69). There are also two other categories of cord cutting, ‘cord shaving' and ‘cord nevers'. Cord shaving involves audiences moving to ‘lower-cost pay TV packages which they supplement with' VOD services (Strangelove, 2015: 95), while cord nevers are predominantly young people who have never taken out a pay television subscription but will sign up for VOD subscriptions (Ibid. 2015: 104). Some market analysts have dismissed the idea of cord cutting as overblown (Ibid. 2015: 96) or believe that VOD will never be a full replacement for pay television services (Crawford, 2013: 175). However, data shows that over 1.55 million U.S. households cut the cord in 2011 alone, and the growth of pay television subscriptions has slowed (Strangelove, 2015: 96), implying that cord cutting holds a threat to cable television. Yet, there is no evidence that Netflix encourages the cord cutting phenomenon. Until its 2010 bankruptcy, Blockbuster was Netflix's biggest competitor in the DVD rental industry. As Netflix has moved into VOD and original content, it now competes with other VOD providers such as Amazon Prime. Netflix’s danger risk is also identified by its challenge to pay television on all three fronts of ‘original content, aggregated content and competition for subscribers' (Ulin, 2014: 334). Statements that Netflix's goal is to become the 'first real network of the internet' (Baldwin, 2012) shows the company's challenge to pay television as a competitor. In addition, the company's intention to 'pursue top-tier award nominations, overtake the conversation in the TV press, and hire some of the best talent around […] to dominate the television landscape' (J. Alexander, 2016) also shows Netflix's status as a competitor. This context also suggests that risk associated with quality television not only applies to the channel or company created the programme but also

to its competitors or the rest of the television industry. In particular, Netflix is reported to challenge HBO through Sarandos's statement that the company's goal 'is to become HBO faster than HBO can become [Netflix]' (quoted in Bishop, 2013). As outlined in Chapter Two, HBO is the leader in quality television. As Netflix's statements challenge HBO, they suggest that Netflix plan to replace HBO as leaders in quality television. The danger risk is also used to further Netflix's association with quality programming by generating a perception that the company can threaten and is thus on a similar level of quality to HBO.

In addition to original content, Netflix's association with quality and risk is also influenced by its content acquisitions. An example of this is the purchase of *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013). During the first season of the show's run on the basic cable channel AMC, it attracted an average of fewer than one million viewers, which could have resulted in the show's cancellation (Pomerantz, 2013), potentially before the show could generate enough viewership or discourse to obtain its status of quality. When Netflix acquired *Breaking Bad*, the show gained an additional platform to attract new audiences. Attracting more viewers turned the show into a success for AMC, with the final episode reaching over 10 million viewers and its adverts selling for an estimated $250,000 per 30 seconds (Ibid. 2013). Netflix's acquisitions, therefore, provide a platform in which shows are given a second chance to perform and gain viewership (Ulin, 2014: 371), decreasing the probability risk attached to the show's success or failure. The acquisitions also give the perception that Netflix's platform can turn low-rated or struggling shows into profitable quality programmes, increasing the association of quality with Netflix. The success of *Breaking Bad* not only created a mutually beneficial relationship between Netflix and AMC but also 'permanently changed the way studios evaluate television shows', creating an environment where struggling shows are given a second chance at success (Ibid. 2014). As well as acquiring content, Netflix has also negotiated beneficial deals with networks such as The CW. As Chapter Four outlines, the relationship gives Netflix exclusive rights to stream full seasons of its scripted content eight days after the finale airs on The CW. In addition to acquiring content, Julia Alexander also states that Netflix can commission programmes that networks cannot:

> Moonves also said Netflix can take on projects that other networks might be interested in, but can't afford to bet on, or don't have room in their broadcasting schedules. *Stranger Things* [2016-], for example, is one of Netflix's most popular shows, according to chief content officer Ted Sarandos, but the streaming service was one of

> the last destinations where creators Matt and Russ Duffer shopped the series. In fact, the brothers were rejected 19 times before coming to Netflix, at which point Sarandos and his team immediately jumped on board. (J. Alexander, 2016)

This quote implies Netflix's platform can take risks that U.S. networks cannot, further reinforcing the association of managed risk with the company. The association of managed risk contrasts against the content risks and excessive negative risks associated with HBO, showing that quality and risk have a different relationship depending on the context and company. In addition, the managed risk also reinforces the possibility of altering perceptions and subcategories of risk by transforming the negative commissioning and distribution risks into positive managed risk. Lastly, the managed risk suggests that although risk can be modified, it cannot be removed, further strengthening the argument that risk is a fundamental aspect of quality television.

Conclusion

Critics predominantly applied risk in the VOD context to Netflix's commissioning and distribution methods. For *House of Cards*, the commissioning and distribution risks were used and perceived negatively. Netflix also has an association of negative danger risk due to its potential challenge to television via an increase in production in the Peak TV era, the phenomenon of cord cutting and the challenge to cable companies, showing how risk is not just limited to the television show or its producing company. The connotations of risk depend on why the term is used, such as the negative way that risk was applied to Netflix to counter the threat of new and alternative competitors in the television and quality television industry. Using its Cinematch data to calculate and control the risk associated with the show, Netflix changed its commissioning and distribution risk into an association of managed risk. With the *House of Card*'s success, critics changed the way they wrote about Netflix's commissioning and distribution methods, transforming negative risk into positive risk. Under Netflix's association with positive risk, broadcast television replicated and integrated Netflix's distribution methods. Overall, risk can be modified but not removed from a show.

Netflix also uses its data to manage risk and create programmes that that U.S. networks cannot. However, the case of *The Get Down* shows how the company is unable to manage high levels

of economic risk. During the show's production, *The Get Down* went over its $7.5 million per episode budget and cost over $120 million overall, making the series one of the most expensive in history (Littleton, 2016a). Labelled as an economic and production risk due to its high costs and production difficulties which stopped and started the show ‘so many times that some writers on the series began to jokingly call it "The Shut Down"' (Holloway, 2017). The difficulties included production delays, which caused Netflix to release the show in two parts, breaking its all at once distribution method. Despite Netflix's statements that the company is allowing showrunner Baz Luhrmann to have creative control and freedom on the show (Littleton, 2016a), *The Get Down* was ultimately cancelled after its first season, indicating that the company's association with managed risk has a limit. As Chapter Two discussed, HBO's association with risk was through its content risks and was actively promoted by the channel even if the associations were negative, such as its excessive negative risks in *Game of Thrones*. In contrast, Netflix's associations with risk are through its commissioning and distributing risk, which was negatively applied by critics. Instead of promoting risk, Netflix used its Cinematch data to build a perception of positive and managed risk, not only to create a unique selling point for the company but also further imply a complicated relationship between risk and quality television programmes.

Chapter Four:
The CW, Representational Risk and Changing Quality Demographics.

The previous chapter established how risk could be used and applied and suggested that the negative commissioning and distribution risks applied to Netflix by critics can counter the potential threat of the VOD provider to the television industry. From this, this chapter looks at the context of broadcast television after Netflix's impact, studying what this reveals about the relationship between quality and quality television particularly in relation to target demographics. It uses The CW as a basis for this study, as the broadcast network has changed its target demographic in the TVIV era from 12-34-year-old females to the quality demographic. The chapter also details the typical relationship between broadcast networks and advertisers, outlining how networks tailor their shows to appeal to advertiser's preferences. Using *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* as a case study, this chapter outlines the content risks that The CW takes within its programming. Specifically, it explores the representational risk in *Crazy Ex Girlfriend,* including its positive representations of females, bisexuality and Filipinos, all of which contrast with the predominantly white, male characters in quality television. Finally, it argues how the representational risk is used to appeal to alternative parts of the quality demographic, namely female, non-white and LGBT audiences and suggests that these audiences are becoming a more prominent part of the quality demographic.

Broadcast Advertising and The CW's Target Demographics

Before understanding the CW's relationship to the quality demographic and the potential risks involved in targeting this audience, it is important to outline the typical relationship between broadcast networks and advertisers. All commercial networks, including The CW, derive their 'revenues solely from selling commercial time to advertisers' (Zhou, 2004: 319). Advertising is purchased in two main ways, through the upfront and scatter markets. The upfront market is ordinarily a two-week period in May, where advertisers buy slots and arrange contracts for the upcoming season in the following September. Throughout the rest of the year, advertisers purchase the remaining slots as part of the scatter markets. Each year, advertisers buy approximately 70-80% of advertising slots during the upfront markets (Phillips and Young, 2012: 181). Advertisers prefer to buy during the upfront market as the rates in the scatter market 'are unknown and could be increased greatly if the show succeeds' (Goldman, quoted in Fahey,

1991: 690). The advertising prices for television shows are calculated based on the predicted number of viewers and demographic of the audience. Television programmes that have previously aired are easier for networks to price as they can use its previous ratings and demographic information as an estimate for the next season. If the programme does not deliver the predicted ratings or demographic, then the network has to ‘re-negotiate the agreement or provide additional commercial spots until the agreed on audience is delivered' (Phillips and Young, 2012: 185-6), causing a loss of revenue for the network. Advertisers will pay more money for higher numbers of viewers and certain demographics that are more likely to be interested in and buy from the company, such as the quality demographic. As outlined in Chapter One, the quality demographic is wealthy, well-educated, 18-49-year-olds living in urban areas. This demographic is valuable for advertisers by being early adopters of new technology, buying more products than the average viewer (Bottomley, 2015: 485) and being willing to spend money on premium products (Logan, 2016: 148). Shows with higher ratings and desirable demographics are more valuable to advertisers, allowing networks charge higher rates for the advertising slots on such programmes. Therefore, networks commission and air programmes that meet the requirements for demographics and ratings, prioritising advertiser needs in programming decisions (Lotz, 2007: 89). The programmes that deliver high ratings and the quality demographic are successful shows for networks as they thus produce more advertising revenue.

Advertisers will also pay more for advertising spaces in certain genres, such as sitcoms, and pay discounted prices for programmes such as news programming and police dramas (Brown and Cavazos, 2005: 18). To Brown and Cavazos, generic preference from advertisers is due to the assumed content in the shows, as advertisers will ‘prefer programs that have "light" content to programs with heavier or more difficult content' (Ibid. 2005: 30). These programmes are preferred because they ‘put viewers in a receptive mood' (Sunstein, quoted in Brown and Cavazos, 2005: 18) to receive the commercials, thus framing the advertiser's products in a better way. In addition, the content of the programme should not show the advertiser's product in a negative light. For example, automobile or pharmaceutical companies would not want their adverts to air on a programme that features characters that die in a car crash or by a medical drug overdose. Programmes that feature elements of content risk, such as portraying social issues like abortion, have caused groups and individuals to boycott advertisers. These boycotts are in place until either advertisers withdraw their funding of the programme or the network remove the risky content from the show. For example, advertisers of the sitcom *Married…*

With Children (1987-1997) were threatened with a boycott over images in the series of promiscuity, homosexuality and 'anti-family' representations (Fahey, 1991: 663). The boycott caused advertisers to put pressure on the network, which responded by refusing to air one episode of the programme, 'toning down the show and moving it to a later time period' (Ibid. 1991: 664). In contemporary U.S. television, networks have 'internalised many of advertisers' perceived values' (Lotz, 2007: 90) and self-regulate their programmes to include fewer content risks to suit the advertiser's needs.

With a niche target demographic of 18-49-year-olds of all genders, The CW's current target audience resembles the quality demographic. As a 50% joint venture between CBS and Warner Brothers, The CW was initially created in 2006 to target females aged 12-34 and was dubbed the '*Gossip Girl*[22] network for bubble-gum shows that predominantly attracted teen girls' (Poggi, 2015). The initial target demographic came from the combined demographic of United Paramount Network (UPN) and The Warner Brothers Television Network (The WB), which primarily targeted audiences between the ages of 13 and 34, both of which were shut down from their respective parent companies to create The CW. Following Mark Pedowitz's presidency of The CW, its target demographics were changed to appeal to more advertisers and 'gain traction with clients and categories that wouldn't give us the time of day because we were too young and too female' (Tuck[23], quoted in Poggi, 2015). An example of these clients would be automobile companies, which make up the top advertising category in U.S. television (Curtin and Shattuc, 2009: 46). With the demographic change, advertisers from automobile companies would be more interested in The CW's shows as its audience will be at a legal age to drive and own cars. Jeanine Poggi states that The CW achieved the change in its target demographic through a 'slate more heavily skewed toward supernatural, sci-fi and superhero themes' (2015), naming the shows *Arrow* (2012-), *iZombie* (2015-) and *The Flash* (2014-) as examples. The latter of these examples also achieved the network's highest priced advertising of $70,687 per 30-second slot in 2015 (*Advertising Age*, 2015: 18), bringing the network extra revenue. The CW now attracts 18-49-year-olds and has a near even split of genders with a 54% female viewership, down from 66% the during the previous year (Poggi, 2015). The network has also increased its ratings, as the 2015 season achieved an 11% prime-time increase to 2.1 million viewers (Ibid. 2015). Although not a part of the superhero or fantasy genre, the case

[22] *Gossip Girl* is a teen drama series that ran on The CW from 2007-2012.
[23] Rob Tuck is the Executive VP of national sales in The CW.

study *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* explores how the CW take content risks to target the quality demographic. Receiving numerous praise that Kelsea Stahler labelled the show as a 'critical darling' (2017), the show was chosen because of its strong relationship to quality and risk and thus provides a more interesting discussion than using *Arrow* or *The Flash* as the case study.

Case Study: *Crazy Ex Girlfriend.*

Crazy Ex Girlfriend is acclaimed as a quality programme by critics and industry, winning two Emmy awards[24] and a Golden Globe in 2016 for Best Actress in Television Series Musical or Comedy for the show's lead and creator, Rachel Bloom. *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* was labelled a risk for The CW by critics such as Jason Lynch, who states that in 'a fall overrun with safe, on-brand shows, The CW is the only network going out on a limb with its new entry' (Lynch, 2015). There are three ways of classifying the risk associated with *Crazy Ex Girlfriend*. The first subcategory is commissioning risk. Although commissioning risk is applied to every new programme, the risk was highlighted by critics as the show was The CW's only new programme during the 2015 season (Ibid. 2015). If the show was unsuccessful, The CW had nothing new to offer its audience and lost a chance to attract new audiences to the network. Secondly, *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* is a generic risk, due to its status as a musical romantic comedy. Although the comedy aspect of the show fits into the advertiser preference for light-hearted content, Jane Borden describes the generic hybridity of musical and romance as a 'risky and unique choice for prime time' (2015). Additionally, the opening line in Stuart Heritage's article 'What is it? A musical romantic comedy. No, wait, come back. I promise it's good' (2016) implies a lowbrow perception of the genre, which could put some viewers off watching and damage the show's success.

The third category of risk associated with *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* is content risk. This risk includes elements such as addiction and 'when people become ready to acknowledge their dependencies' (Shoemaker, 2017) as well as 'unhappiness, dissatisfaction and mental illness' (Ryan, 2016). The content risk within *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* poses a danger that the show would not fit with the light-hearted and safe content preferred by advertisers, potentially decreasing the value in an advertising sense. However, critics praise the content risks for being included beneath the

[24] *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* won the Emmy awards of for Outstanding Choreography and Outstanding Single-Camera Picture Editing for A Comedy Series in 2016 and gained a further three nominations in 2016 and 2017.

surface and premise of the show within critical discourse. For example, Alison Shoemaker states that:

> In its stellar first season, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* performed many wonders, but none were greater than this: it played a long game, gradually revealing exactly how smart and self-aware it was, peeling back layer after layer of insanity until it became clear that the ostensible romantic comedy was something else entirely. Sure, there's a love triangle, but that's just the set-up. The real trick was how much was buried beneath the surface. (Shoemaker, 2017)

Shoemaker's statement implies that the content risk within the show is an important part of how the show generates its status as a quality programme. In addition, Shoemaker's statement also indicates that the content risk was not apparent in the start or premise of the show. The deeper content risk could also suggest an additional subcategory of hidden risk, in which shows could be cancelled or fail to pick up an audience as they are unaware of the hidden content. The content risk within *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* also originates through the show's initial pilot produced for the premium cable company Showtime as a 'raunchy', alternative comedy (Scherer, 2015) that could take advantage of cable's looser FCC regulations. Moving from cable to broadcast network, the 'creators had to tone down some of the more explicit content' (Ibid. 2015) and prevent the characters from cursing. Yet, The CW retained many of the content risks associated with the show, with creator Bloom stating that the network 'is down for what the show is, they're down for the darkness, they're down for the improvisation, they're down for the sketches' (quoted in Emani, 2015). Therefore, *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* uses a cable television level of content risk on a broadcast network, which emphasises the content risks in the show and increases the network's association with risk. As outlined in Chapter One, HBO's reputation with content risk is closely related to its programmes status of quality. Therefore, by linking *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* to content risk and cable television, the show's status as quality can also be reinforced.

Representational risk forms a significant part of the content risk in *Crazy Ex Girlfriend*. In HBO's programming content, Chapter Two identified representational risk in both diverse programming and negative representational images. For *Crazy Ex Girlfriend*, the show's diverse characters and narratives are the basis of The CW's representational risk. Regarding gender, critics such as Maureen Ryan also praise the show for its complex portrayals of women

and female relationships when other television programmes are ‘rarely deeply interested in depicting complicated friendships between women, especially if those friendships delve into strange and transgressive areas' (Ryan, 2016). Most critical discussions of the show centre around the use of the word crazy in the title, which is ‘perfect despite how regressive it might seem' (Allen, 2015). Samantha Allen describes the use of crazy as perfect due to the show's explorations and deconstructions of the word crazy, rather than promoting a regressive stereotype of a crazy ex-girlfriend or woman based on the word's historical use against women. The word crazy originated from the Ancient Greek word hysteria and was used to diagnose women with ‘wandering wombs' in the same vein that Western society diagnosed women with a disorder of hysteria (Mahdawi, 2016). In contemporary society, Harris O'Malley describes how the word crazy is used ‘to shame women into compliance' (2014) by telling women that their emotions are wrong and ‘they don't have the right to feel the way that they do' (O'Malley, 2014). By dismissing someone's emotions, the word crazy is used to control them, as ‘they no longer trust their own feelings and instincts, they [will] come to rely on someone else to tell them how they're supposed to feel' (Ibid. 2014). To Emma Gray, *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* reclaims crazy as ‘the female characters who control the "crazy" narrative – not the men who surround them' (Gray, 2015). Gray evidences this through the statement that:

> At no point during the pilot does anyone in Rebecca’s life call her crazy. In fact, the only time the label comes up is when she’s insisting that she’s not crazy, mostly to herself. When she finally breaks down about her real reasons for coming to West Covina when confronted by her new coworker Paula, it’s Rebecca who berates herself with the crazy trope: “Oh my god, I’m crazy,” she says in horror. “I’m crazy and I’m irrational and I’m everything my mother said.” (Gray, 2015).

Melissa Leon also states that craziness is explored and deconstructed in the show, creating an ‘empathetic portrait of a smart, accomplished woman prone to the same insecurities (and terrible life decisions) as the rest of us' (Leon, 2016). Shaunna Murphey additionally describes how the show centres on female perspective and relationship to the word crazy through the title lacking the possessive pronoun ‘my'. The lack of a possessive pronoun also demonstrates how the show is not ‘the story of Rebecca as the extension of someone else, that is, a man calling her crazy' (2015).

Concerning representational risk, critics also praise *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* for its representation of sexuality, particularly within the bisexual character Darryl Whitefeather (Pete Gardner). Bisexuality is a rare occurrence in U.S. television. For example, the 2015-2016 GLAAD[25] report finds that only two fictional bisexual male characters appeared on broadcast television in 2015 (GLAAD, 2015: 7). Bisexuals are often misidentified as either homosexual or heterosexual (Ochs, 1996: 217) and erased by the word bisexual not being spoken on screen (Bryant, 2005: 311-2). On-screen bisexual representation is generally associated with certain myths about the sexuality. For example, the most common bisexual myths that bisexuals are secretly either confused, experimenting or haven't 'finished coming out' (Udis-Kessler, 1996: 45), or are promiscuous and non-monogamous (Majorie Garber, 1995: 351). *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* not only uses the word bisexual but emphasises bisexual imagery through its use of the bisexual pride flag and Darryl's stylised imitation of bisexual icon Freddie Mercury in his coming out musical number, '*Getting Bi'* (1.14). The song is also used to dispel some common myths about bisexuality. For example, sexual promiscuity through the lyrics 'Being bi does not imply that you're a player or a slut', or instability through 'It's not a phase / I'm not confused / Not indecisive / I don't have the "gotta choose" blues' (Schlesinger, 2016). In addition to dispelling common myths about bisexuality, the critic Shirley Li praises Darryl's bisexual representation for not using his sexuality as a provocative power move or as 'a joke or a shock tactic' (Li, 2016). Li also praises the show for its the narrative pace and content of the discovery of his sexuality, becoming 'one of few male bisexual characters on TV who's given screen time to both explore his newfound understanding of his sexuality and to enter into a relationship with another character: White Josh.' (Ibid. 2016). Overall, Allen names Darryl's bisexuality as 'the single most authentic and positive portrayal of bisexuality ever seen on network television' (Allen, 2016). The representation risk in The CW addresses myths and previous negative representation through its diverse characters, and contributes to the show's framing as a quality text, suggesting that certain risks help generates a programme's classification as quality.

Crazy Ex Girlfriend also uses representational risk with its inclusion of a Filipino-American lead love interest Josh Chan (Vincent Rodriguez III) and his Filipino family during a Thanksgiving episode (1.06). The show's creators designed Josh's character as an 'Asian bro', an American term used to describe attractive young Asian men (Chavez, 2016). Josh's creation aims to reflect the large Asian population of Southern California, which is home to a quarter

[25] GLAAD is a LGBT ran non-governmental media monitoring organization.

of the U.S.'s Filipino-American population (Fernandez, 2015). Since Rodriguez's casting, the role was made into a Filipino-American character to reflect Rodriguez's ethnicity. Emil Guillermo praises Josh's character, stating that the love interest role 'has rarely been written for Asian-American males' (2016). The Thanksgiving episode also made *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* the 'first TV series to depict Filipino-American family life, with a large Filipino cast of actors, in a single episode' (Fernandez, 2015). The episode was praised not only for including a large cast of Filipino actors, but also for its accuracy. Examples of this accuracy are the episode's writer of Filipino-American Rene Gube[26] and how the 'show's team took great pains to make the Chans as accurate as possible to the way Filipinos are' (Estrella, 2016), including using traditional Filipino dishes such as *Dinuguan*[27] (blood pork stew). The show's attention to detail has also resulted in statements that 'U.S. audiences have likely never seen a Filipino household depicted so accurately on television' (Cheng, 2016). With positive representation, the show can also appeal to Filipino and non-white audiences. Like the representations of gender and sexuality within the programme, the representational risk deconstructs negative images and makes *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* the first broadcast television show that positively portrays a large Filipino cast in an episode. The critical praise of the programme for its representational risk highlights how the risk is a positive element that predominantly constructs the show's status as quality, reinforcing the argument that risk is a fundamental aspect of quality television.

With the emergence of quality programmes such as *Crazy Ex Girlfriend*, The CW is becoming a competitor in the quality television market. Yet, The CW earns less advertising revenue than other broadcast networks, generating an average of $35,120 per 30 second-commercial for its programmes during prime time based on estimates created by *Advertising Age* (2015: 18) for the 2015-6 season. With this average, The CW charged the lowest rate of the five networks of CBS, NBC, Fox and ABC, earning roughly $100,000 less per 30-second commercial[28]. The lower adverting cost can result from The CW's lower ratings, as the network had an average of 1.99 million viewers per show (Porter, 2016). This figure is relatively low when compared to the ratings for CBS with 10.91 million, NBC with 8.11 million, Fox with 6.78 million and ABC with 5.78 million viewers (Ibid. 2016). During *Crazy Ex Girlfriend*'s first season, the show

[26] Rene Gube also guest stars in the show as Father Brah.
[27] Although *Dinuguan* is not traditionally served on Thanksgiving, the dish was included in the show as it was made by Racheal to impress Josh's family.
[28] To the nearest whole number, the 30 second commercial prices are an average of 122,690 for ABC, 134,432 for CBS, 146,516 for Fox and 151,425 for NBC.

received an estimated $23,159 per 30-second commercial slot (*Advertising Age*, 2015: 18), around 34% lower than The CW's average price of $35,120 and received just over 1 million viewers (Moraes, 2016). Therefore, in the sense of being valuable to advertisers, *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* has a lower value than the rest of The CW's or other networks' programming. However, the network will also value the show based on its status as a quality programme, achieved predominantly through representational risk. The CW also uses representational risk in its other shows. For example, the acclaimed *Jane the Virgin* (2014-), which is 'the only show currently on network television with a predominantly Latino cast' (Martinez, 2015) or the upcoming release of *Black Lightning* (2018-), featuring a predominantly black lead cast. The network also promotes its representational risk, using *Jane the Virgin* star Gina Rodriguez to give a speech during the 2017 advertising upfronts to 'put its mission of diversity and inclusion in the spotlight' (Wagmeister, 2017). As contemporary quality television is overwhelmingly white (Albrecht, 2016: 105), one reason for the inclusion of representation risk could be to counter the white male bias in quality programming. The diverse programming also offers a unique selling point for The CW to differentiate itself from the other networks, especially since its parent company CBS faced criticism for a lack of diversity in its lead roles (Wagmeister, 2017).

In the U.S., white men are recorded to earn 31% more than black men (Redden and Kasperkevic, 2016) and 17% more than white women in 2015 (Brown and Patten, 2017). As the white male audience earns more money than other demographics, they generally have more spending power and value to advertisers. Therefore, the white male bias in quality programming can be a way to appeal to this part of the quality demographic. With The CW's representational risk in *Crazy Ex Girlfriend*, the programme appeals to other audiences, such as female, non-white and LGBT audiences who previously might not have had enough spending power to classify as wealthy and thus part of the quality demographic. Therefore, The CW targets its programming to a different type of quality audience than its competitors. Appealing to a different quality demographic can also reflect changes in America's demographics. The combined buying power of African-Americans, Asians, Native Americans and Latinos has grown over 200-300% from 1990 to 2007 (*The Associated Press*, 2009), implying that non-white groups will form more desirable demographics to advertisers over time. Overall, the shift in demographics symbolises a change in the quality demographic.

Despite its comparatively low ratings of one million viewers per show, *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* has been consistently renewed by The CW, revealing the subcategory of renewal risk. The renewal can be classified as a risk, as low ratings denote a small interest and advertiser appeal to the show and thus would generate less money. When asked why the network chose to renew this show, amongst other low-rated programmes, Pedowitz states that it was 'never about the numbers' (quoted in J. Alexander, 2017) because of the different ways that the audience can watch and access its shows. The CW has its own free, on-demand streaming website called The CW Seed, which streams in-series programmes on a rolling five-episode basis. The platform has increased the number of viewers watching the content more than 100% since 2016, with an additional 111% increase in hours of content viewed on the website (O'Connell, 2017). Funded by adverts, The CW seed creates additional revenue for the network. In addition, The CW has an exclusive deal with Netflix that gives the VOD company rights to carry new seasons of the network's shows six days after the season finale airs on The CW in America. The Netflix deal could provide the network with an additional $1 billion in revenue, depending on the volume and longevity of The CW's programmes, making it 'one of the richest TV output deals ever' (Littleton, 2016b). The Netflix deal both provides additional revenue for The CW and allows audiences to find or catch up on the programmes before the new season starts, giving its shows an additional chance to find a new audience. As the show is watched more through delayed or streamed viewing (Framke, 2017), the low ratings do not reflect the overall viewership of the programme. As Netflix does not release viewing figures for its programmes, it is challenging to access the total viewership of the programme. Therefore, renewal decisions do not rely on rating information but instead on how the show is perceived, including its status as quality television, and accessed across numerous platforms, changing the management of renewal risk for broadcast networks. By using alternative methods of accessing the content, The CW is also transforming the renewal risk into managed risk similar to how Netflix manage risk outlined in Chapter Three.

The different ways of viewing The CW's programmes imply that the value for its shows come from whether or not there is a demand for the content. Julia Alexander states that it is 'clear that there's a desire for CW content, just not on traditional television' (2017). Ryan also states that The CW produces programmes that are easily watched on streaming services, as 'very few networks marry episodic storytelling to the kind of long-term arcs that encourage binge viewing as well as the CW' (2016). The network's assertion that the ratings are not important to them draws similarities in its business model to Netflix and demonstrates how its

programmes appeal to streaming audiences more than traditional broadcasting. Due to The CW's large streaming audiences, the network gains funding from advertising revenue on its streaming platform and distribution deals with Netflix, rather than solely focusing on commercial broadcast advertising. With low ratings and other sources of income, the network can take more content based risks within the programming, risks that would traditionally contrast with advertiser preferences, such as the content risks of social issues or representational risk. This risk has not only caused its shows, particularly *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* and *Jane the Virgin* to be labelled as quality, but also caused many critics to label the network as a leader in quality television within broadcast television. For example, Todd VanDerWerf writes that 'The CW's shows reflect a fascination with using good storytelling and compelling and diverse characters' which have assembled 'a long list of shows that are worth watching' (VanDerWerff, 2016). While Matt Taylor describes The CW as the place where audiences can 'find the best original content', as it has 'recently transformed into a breeding ground for unique content that's seemingly happy to appeal to a niche audience… but should be recognized by the masses that celebrate HBO, Netflix and FX as the purveyors of quality television' (Taylor, 2017). Overall, The CW takes content risks to produce quality programmes that have an appeal beyond its traditional broadcast into streaming and on-demand audiences. With the different ways of accessing the programming content, the network has demonstrated an alternative way for broadcast networks to value quality programmes and the success of its shows beyond the value they can attract from commercial advertisers.

Conclusion

Established as a niche network for 12-34-year-old females, The CW has changed its demographics in the TVIV era to the 18-49-year-old, mixed gender, quality demographics. The network achieved this change in demographics through its programming, which included a move towards quality television with shows such as *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* and *Jane the Virgin. Crazy Ex Girlfriend* included content risk such as social issues that could contrast with advertiser preferences for light-hearted content. Unlike in HBO's content, the content risk in The CW's programmes predominantly consists of representational risk. The representational risk included diverse characters and narratives and deconstructed negative images and can be a way to counter the predominantly onscreen representation of white males in quality programming. The diverse programming provides the network with a unique selling point, but

can also target different audiences within the quality demographic. For example, the representation can attract female, non-white or LGBT audiences. As the spending power of non-white audiences is increasing in the U.S., these audiences are becoming more prominent and valuable members of the quality demographic. Overall, this chapter has indicated a change in quality television to include representational risk to better attract a changing quality audience.

Conclusion

This dissertation examined three different contexts of U.S television in the TVIV era, namely the premium cable company HBO, VOD service Netflix and broadcast network The CW. These discussions outlined and discussed the relationship between quality and risk and how television discourse and industry use the terms. Firstly, the literature review in Chapter One explored existing literature on quality and risk to create definitions for the following chapters. There are two key definitions of risk: a probability risk or danger risk. Probability risk is the is odds of something being a success or failure. Danger risk is the same as probability risk, only the risk is something that is dangerous, hazardous or potentially harmful. In addition, this chapter outlined the subcategories of risk used in the dissertation based on their location within a programme, such as commissioning risk, content risk and distribution risk. The literature review also divided quality into three categories: as an aesthetic, as an industrial practice and as high-brow television. These explorations lead to two primary definitions of quality. The first definition, high-brow television, identified quality programmes as something other to television, which evokes elements of other media to elevate its status on the socio-cultural hierarchies of art forms. The second definition outlined quality television based on the quality demographic that it attracted, namely wealthy, well-educated, liberal 18-49-year-olds living in urban areas. Chapter One also began to describe the relationship between quality and risk, stating that quality is fundamentally associated with risk as quality programmes need to take risks to be successful amongst the competition, differentiate themselves from LOP programming and generate a classification as quality.

In the second chapter, the *Game of Thrones* case study discussed how the premium cable company HBO built an association of quality television and risk, particularly content risks such as nudity, violence and profanity that is not regulated by the FCC. Identifying different elements of content risk within *Game of Thrones*, this chapter also highlighted the changeable and complex nature of risk. For example, risks within some contexts are viewed with positive connotations and perceived as being a part of the quality formula, while in a different context, such as nudity on broadcast television, the content risk is seen through a negative connotation and not a part of quality. By discussing elements of excessive negative risk such as the Cersei or Sansa's rape scenes, the chapter also outlined how if the levels of risk within a quality show exceed an implied acceptable level, the programme loses its status as quality television.

Chapter Three focused on commissioning and distribution risk associated with *House of Cards* within the context of the VOD company Netflix. It explored how risk is applied the business by critics under a negative bias. This negative bias in risk is used to serve the purpose of lessening the potential challenge or danger that Netflix poses to quality television via an increase in production in the Peak TV era and the phenomenon of cord cutting. Using its user data and Cinematch algorithm, Netflix transformed these negative connotations of risk into a positive type of managed risk. Through this discussion, this chapter further illustrated the complicated relationship between quality and risk, showing how the connotations of risk are dependent on who is applying the term and for what purpose as risk is used as a positive attraction in one context and as a potentially damaging for the company and quality televisions in another. It also illustrated how aspects of risk could be used as a positive attraction, selling point and identification of quality within one context while potentially damaging term in another. In the final chapter, this dissertation discussed the broadcast network The CW and how broadcast networks avoid taking content risks to increase a programme's appeal to advertisers. Using *Crazy Ex Girlfriend*, the case study explored the content risks such as representational risk and how this was used to target a different audience within the quality demographic, namely female, non-white or LGBT people, which may become more prominent members of the quality demographic. As the content risks within the show are responsible for the programme's classification as quality, this chapter also reinforced how risk is a fundamental aspect of quality television.

These chapters also highlighted a how quality television is changing in the TVIV era, demonstrated through the discussions of Peak TV. As discussed in Chapter Three, Peak TV details how the increase in content creation is causing quality television to enter a state of crisis. The different ways that audiences can access quality television also indicate a change in the way audiences watch quality television, especially since the broadcast network The CW has become a multi-platform network, offering both broadcast and on-demand ways to access its content. In addition, The CW's targeting of an alternative audience of the quality demographic also symbolises how this section of the audience is also increasing their spending power in America and will become a more prominent part of the quality demographic. With a change in demographics, quality programmes could no longer have a white male bias and instead include representational risk through diverse characters and narratives as shown in *Crazy Ex Girlfriend*. By not exploring the changes to quality television in more detail, this is a limitation of the

dissertation and in future research, can be examined through the analysis of more case studies, such as Amazon Prime Video. Like Netflix, Amazon is a VOD service that entered the quality television market in the TVIV era. However, Amazon differentiates itself from other providers by incorporating its video services as part of the websites multi-function function, offering free shipping on its products with a selection of books and music in the Prime subscription. In addition, the website also merges its free prime videos with titles that aren't included in the subscription, to upsell its viewers more video titles. The platform also integrates its ownership of IMBD into an 'X-ray' function that reveals information about the actors, filmmakers, music, and assorted trivia in each scene as the viewer watches a programme. The exploration of changes in quality television would provide further context into the complex and fluid relationship between quality and risk and what the influence the change in quality television will have on this relationship.

Overall, this dissertation has outlined how the core value of quality television is its inclusion of risks. In relation to quality, risk cannot be exclusively defined, but manifest in many ways, such as through the content, commissioning, and distribution of a programme and can originate from different sources, such as critics or through the programmes' creators. Risk can also have positive or negative connotations and be used to serve a specific purpose depending on where the label comes from, such lessening potential danger or challenge of a programme or company, as evidenced in chapter two. Not only is risk a part of quality television, but is also framed by the classifications of quality. With a quality status, the risks inside a programme are predominantly perceived as successful and used within positive contexts. Without the quality status, the risks are instead viewed as negative. However, this framing only works to a certain extent and holds an implied level of acceptable risk. As evidenced in chapter two, if a quality programme goes beyond the accepted level of risk, then the show can lose its status of quality and instead hold a negative association of risk. Therefore, quality and risk must exist in tension for a show to be perceived as quality.

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Beyond. Freeform. 2017-.

Black Lightning. The CW. 2018-.

Breaking Bad. AMC. 2008-2013.

Castlevania. Netflix. 2017-.

Crazy Ex Girlfriend. The CW. 2015-.

Dallas. CBS. 1978-1991.

Deadwood. HBO. 2004-2006.

Down the Shore. FOX. 1992-1993.

Dream On. HBO. 1990-1996.

Everybody Loves Raymond. CBS. 1996-2005.

Fight Club. Directed by David Fincher. 20th Century Fox. 1999.

Game of Thrones. HBO. 2011-.

Girls. HBO. 2012-.

Goliath. Amazon Video. 2016-.

Gossip Girl. The CW. 2007-2012.

Hill Street Blues. NBC. 1981-1987.

House of Cards. BBC. 1990.

House of Cards. Netflix. 2013-.

Insecure. HBO. 2016-.

iZombie. The CW. 2015-.

Jane the Virgin. The CW. 2014-.

*M*A*S*H.* CBS. 1972-1983.

Mad Max: Fury Road. Directed by George Miller. Warner Brothers. 2015.

Married… With Children. Fox. 1987-1997.

Mary Tyler Moore Show. CBS. 1970-1977.

Northern Exposure. CBS. 1990-1995.

Oz. HBO. 1997-2003.

Seven. Directed by David Fincher. New Line Cinema. 1995.

Sex and the City. HBO. 1998-2004.

Six Feet Under. HBO. 2001-2005.

Sometimes a Great Notion. Directed by Paul Newman. Universal Pictures. 1970.

Stranger Things. Netflix. 2016-.

The Corner. HBO. 2000.

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button. Directed by David Fincher. Paramount Pictures. 2008.

The Flash. The CW. 2014-.

The Get Down. Netflix. 2015-2017.

The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story. FX. 2016.

The Social Network. Directed by David Fincher. Columbia Pictures. 2010.

The Sopranos. HBO. 1999-2007.

The Walking Dead. AMC. 2010-.

The West Wing. NBC. 1999-2006.

The Young Pope. HBO. 2016-.

Thelma and Louise. Directed by Ridley Scott. MGM. 1991.

True Detective. HBO. 2014-2015.

Twin Peaks. ABC. 1990-1991.

Westworld. HBO. 2016-.