

Streaming with more diversity? Study compares representation of minorities in broadcasting vs. streaming services

July 23 2024



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The representation of women, ethnic minorities, seniors and sexual minorities on streaming services and mainstream broadcasters falls short.

This is shown in [research](#) conducted by communication scientist Serena Daalmans of Radboud University. "Progress is happening in too small steps," she says.

Every few years, Daalmans looks at how minority groups are represented on television. Up until now, there was no [comparative study](#) that included streaming channels. Daalmans says, "Most streaming services pay a lot of attention to diversity: people are hired to look into diversity specifically, for example. It could be expected that minorities should be well represented on streamers."

With colleagues Rhanna Haverkort and Mariska Kleemans, the communication scientist mapped what kind of people appeared in programs from the Top 10 recommended series (after creating a new account) at streaming services Netflix, Videoland, Prime and Disney. They did the same with a selection of programs aired on [prime time](#) on mainstream broadcasters such as NPO, RTL and SBS.

Daalmans explains, "We looked at how many people from underrepresented groups appeared in these programs and whether that corresponded to the percentage they represent in Dutch society. We also examined the quality of the representation. How stereotypical was it? For example, women are often only depicted with children, or as romantic partners. And storylines of older people are often about illness."

The main conclusion was that women are still getting a raw deal, both on streaming services and broadcasters.

"In the nearly 15 years I've been studying this, the representation of this group changes the least. One in three of the people we see on TV are women, while more than half of the population is made up of [women](#). In addition, they are often portrayed very stereotypically: for example,

sometimes we don't know whether they work, but we do know that they have a child or a relationship," says Daalmans.

Things were slightly different for ethnic and [sexual minorities](#): they did appear proportionally, but ethnic minorities were not stereotype-free. She adds, "We saw that ethnic minorities were more often associated with crime."

The representation of seniors left quite a bit to be desired: Only 5% of the people on TV were over 65, while that group makes up over 20% of Dutch society.

There was little difference in representation between [streaming services](#) and broadcasters. "Streamers mainly let people know that they want to represent fairly, but don't really live up to this. A lot is said about representation by both regular broadcasters and streamers needing to improve, but the data shows that progress is only made in very small steps," says Daalmans.

More information: Serena Daalmans et al, Streaming with more diversity? A comparison of the representation of minorities in broadcasting versus streaming television content, *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (2024). [DOI: 10.1057/s41599-024-03442-2](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03442-2)

Provided by Radboud University

Citation: Streaming with more diversity? Study compares representation of minorities in broadcasting vs. streaming services (2024, July 23) retrieved 23 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-07-streaming-diversity-representation-minorities.html>

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