An analysis of the role of reality television in the representation of immigrants on TLC's show, 90 day fiancé.

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF REALITY TELEVISION IN THE REPRESENTATION OF IMMIGRANTS ON TLC’S SHOW, 90 DAY FIANCÉ

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A Thesis
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REPRESENTATION OF IMMIGRANTS ON TLC’S SHOW, 90 DAY FIANCÉ

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This thesis is dedicated to the precious memory of my loving mother, Medeyonmi Omolara Seton, and my darling father, Gbolade Olaseni Seton

who have made unquantifiable sacrifices to give me invaluable opportunities.
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I would first like to acknowledge the One who knew me before I was ever formed, my Father and friend, God Almighty. You definitely have a plan for my life. Thank you for surrounding me with your love and encouraging me every step of the way. I would also like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Siobhan Smith-Jones, committee co-chair, Dr. Lindsay Della, and committee member, Dr. Manuel Medina, for your reassuring words and assistance during this project. Thank you for giving me the courage to pursue my passion and allowing me to blossom while doing so. To my siblings, Ekundayo, Oluseye, Olurotimi, Oluwafunmito, Temitope and Olatundun, thank you propelling me in the times I doubted myself. To all my friends, thank you for your constant kind words, occasional rebuke and firm support. To all the brilliant professors and staff at the Department of Communication, University of Louisville, I could not have asked for a better support system. Thank you.
ABSTRACT

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF REALITY TELEVISION IN THE REPRESENTATION OF IMMIGRANTS ON TLC’S SHOW, 90 DAY FIANCÉ

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April 14, 2020

A larger number of people reside outside their country of birth today than in any other time in history, and these levels are expected to continue to rise in the future (International Organization for Migration, 2011). The United States is currently the most popular immigrant destination in the world, with more immigrants than any other country. Immigrants statistics indicate that the immigrant population in the United States reached a record of 44.4 million in 2017 (Pew Research Centre, 2019). Correspondingly, the percentage of immigrants who were admitted into the U.S. as spouses of citizens has increased over of the last of the era, from around 10% in the late 1960s, 15% in the 1970s, 22% in the mid-1980s and in the late 1990s, and a further rise around start of the 21st century (Stevens, Ishizawa & Escandell, 2012).

Growing concerns regarding immigration have accompanied the rising immigrant population in the United States. However, in order to understand these growing concerns, the role of the media must be carefully examined because audio-visual representations of immigrants in mainstream media, film, and television may account, to some degree, for these concerns. Consequently, understanding media’s representation of immigrants is vital to understanding how dominant immigrant stereotypes come to be in larger society and accordingly, attitudes towards immigrants and immigration.

Keywords: stereotypes, immigrants, reality television, media effects.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A nation of immigrants, the United States has struggled to conquer the fascination and fear with which it approaches immigration. Both legal and illegal immigration have been a concern to the government and the public alike since the birth of the nation. Irrespective of this fascination or fear, the number of people migrating to the United States continues to rise steadily. However, it is imperative to investigate the contribution of the media to this debate, more specifically, it is crucial to examine the contribution of television’s representation of immigrants to this discourse. Cisneros (2008) argues that visual images construct metaphoric representations of immigrants, and Barker (1999) analogously upholds this argument, noting that the representation of race and ethnicity, which global television circulates, cannot be isolated from wider cultural stereotypes. This study seeks to understand the role of reality television in suggesting new ideologies or stereotypes, or reinforcing existing immigrant stereotypes.

Consequently, through an inductive-deductive analysis, this study will analyse randomly selected episodes of 90 Day Fiancé, using the theoretical framework of second-level agenda setting and reinforcement theory. This project seeks to examine the role of American reality television in the portrayal of immigrants, which may or may not be in line with prevalent social ideologies or stereotypes of immigrants. Does an analysis of stereotypes on 90 Day Fiancé reveal a reinforcement of prevalent immigrant stereotypes, or does the show attempt to suggest new stereotypes or ideologies? The study further considers the question of whether American television attempts to present or reinforces
dominant positive and negative immigrant stereotypes in the show *90 Day Fiancé*. Using second-level agenda setting, this study seeks out patterns and themes related to salient attributes from the show to inductively analyse prevalent stereotypes or ideologies on the show, and then turn to a deductive approach using the reinforcement theory to analyse the reinforcement or lack of reinforcement of positive and negative immigrant stereotypes noted in published academic literature and recent prominent stereotypes upheld by President Donald Trump on the show.

**Significance of the Topic**

With the prevalence of immigration discussions and debates, immigrants have been perceived through various positive and negative stereotypes, often propagated through their representations in media. The media play an important role in mental representations as they form the principal source of knowledge about numerous issues. This knowledge contributes to how the audience comes to understand and interpret the world (Mistiaen, 2019). Immigration to the United States, for the purpose of marriage, often leaves the immigrant spouse at the receiving end of preconceived stereotypes held by American families and friends. Hence, the immigrant spouse is usually viewed through the lens of these stereotypes and is subconsciously placed in the ‘other’ category, indicating a separation between Americans and immigrants. Although this separation is not entirely negative, at other times, it is indeed negative as the immigrant is not viewed as an individual first, but viewed under the collective umbrella of immigrants to whom certain stereotypes have been attributed (Watson & Hill, 2003).

By examining predominant immigrant stereotypes in academic literature, this study seeks to understand the role of American reality television in attempting to present
or reinforce immigrant stereotypes on the show, *90 Day Fiancé*. The study seeks to understand whether reality television makes use of the theory of second-level agenda setting to prioritize certain representations that fuel stereotypes of immigrants, or whether media simply reinforce existing immigrant ideas identified in academic literature and those publicly upheld by President Trump. Similar to the "shape-versus-mirror debate" in advertising, which considers whether advertising mirrors social values or shapes them (Lantos, 1987), this study seeks to use these aforementioned theories to unearth and understand the role of *90 Day Fiancé* in either shaping dominant immigrant stereotypes or mirroring already existing immigrant stereotypes. Although the study could produce results displaying an interplay of both theories in stereotype creation and reinforcement, this study is nonetheless vital at such a time as this when debates surrounding immigration and immigrants are becoming more intense in the midst of rising immigration numbers. Furthermore, *90 Day Fiancé* is a reality show that many audience members believe to be unscripted, real-life events offering viewers a window into the lives of the couples. Consequently, representations of immigrants on the show are likely to be perceived as more believable and reliable when forming opinions or confirming pre-existing perceptions about immigrants. This enhanced believability is particularly concerning because reality television is really not representative of reality.

**Brief Overview of *90 Day Fiancé***

*90 Day Fiancé*, which captivated a myriad of viewers when it first aired in January 2014, is an American documentary/reality television showing on The Learning Channel (TLC). According to TLC.com (n.d.), *90 Day Fiancé* follows the stories of Americans who bring their immigrant partners to the United States on the fiancé(e) (K-1)
visa. Based on the stipulations of the K-1 visa, the couples must legalise their unions before the visa expires in 90 days, thus the title of the show. If the marriage is not legalised by end of the 90-day window, immigrants must return to their home countries. The success of this show has resulted in six spin-offs, and a seventh in the making. Scholars like McCombs (2018) have argued that media content is vital to the formation of public opinion. Scholars in an opposing school of thought have argued that media have very limited capability to effect change or form public opinion. Therefore, this study will analyse the role of 90 Day Fiancé using two opposing theories to interrogate the impact of immigrant representations on the show as either attempting to suggest immigrant stereotypes, or simply reinforcing existing ones, or both.

**Theoretical Framework**

The study uses agenda setting, specifically second-level agenda setting, and reinforcement theory to guide its analysis of 90 Day Fiancé. These two theories are at opposing ends of the media effects spectrum. The study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media affect audience members; however, there is little agreement on the nature and extent of these assumed effects (McQuail, 2010).

On one end of the media effects spectrum, reinforcement theory argues that media have little effect on their audiences, instead people’s predispositions and existing beliefs have more power over their decision making than the media do (Klapper, 1957). In this situation media are hypothesized to reflect, confirm and reinforce existing beliefs. On the other end of the spectrum, second-level agenda setting theory argues differently, positing that media have substantial effects on their audiences, particularly by emphasizing or focusing on some issues or matters over others. Second-level agenda setting theory
examines the influence of the attribute of salience, or properties, qualities, and characteristics that describe objects or people in the news, as well as the tone of those attributes (Wu & Coleman, 2009). It is yet to be affirmed, however, which of these schools of thought is more accurate in reality television. Do media propagate stereotypes or are stereotypes shown in reality television only a reflection of the stereotypes that exist in society? This study will examine prevalent stereotypes from the lenses of these two theories in order to determine which theory is more applicable to reality television, or if both appear to have substantial relevancy.

**Second-level Agenda Setting**

McQuail (2010) defines agenda setting in media as the process by which the relative attention given to items or issues in news coverage influences the rank order of public awareness of issues and acknowledgment of importance. Trenaman and McQuail (1961, p.178) argue that, “the evidence strongly suggests that people think about what they are told but at no level do they think what they are told.” Similarly, Wu and Coleman (2009) define agenda setting as the phenomenon of the mass media selecting specific issues and portraying them frequently and prominently. This careful selection of issues leads audience members to place more emphasis on such issues and identify them as more important than others. Similarly, media may disaffirm some stereotypes by paying no attention to them, or giving them very little priority.

In 1922, Walter Lippmann wrote about second-level agenda setting in his book, *Public Opinion*. Although Lippman never used the term ‘second-level agenda setting’, he established the principal connection between world events and the images in the public mind (Freeland, 2012). McCombs and Shaw (1972) formalized the theory after exploring
the issue of media influence in the 1968 Presidential election. In their “Chapel Hill Study,” 100 residents of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, were surveyed on what local residents considered to be most important issues of the election between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon. McCombs and Shaw compared those issues to issues of that ranked high nationally. Freeland (2012) explains that the results showed a high relationship between the issues of undecided voters and the issues presented in the media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This finding establishes a substantial relationship between media reports and audience’s prioritization of public issues (Baran & Davis, 2011).

McCombs (2003) accordingly argues that at the second level of agenda-setting, the salience of issues is interlaced with audience’s cognitive images, thus representing the merging of attribute agenda-setting and the formation and change of opinions. Furthermore, the images of reality the media create have implications for personal behaviours (McCombs, 2003). Consequently, the second-level agenda setting theory suggests that media not only influence the topic or issues their audiences give priority to, but media also influence their audiences’ understanding and perspectives on the topics in the news. While the first level agenda setting centres on the perceived importance, or salience, of matters or subjects (Wu & Coleman, 2009, p.776), Coleman and Banning (2006) suggest that the second level second-level agenda setting further focuses on the tone and the perception of an issue or subject in addition to the amount of coverage it receives. Freeland (2012) explains that agenda-setting and second-level agenda setting play a strong role in politics and policymaking, and are most evident in political campaign advertisements. In relation to this study, the tone and perception surrounding immigrants matter in the ideologies that are associated with immigrants.
Although second-level agenda setting has been applied to news coverage, this study seeks to examine whether second-level agenda setting is also relevant and applicable in studying the media effects in reality television show, *90 Day Fiancé*. Critics of agenda setting theory describe it as inapplicable in the modern day because the way people receive media is changing. Traditionally, studies of the agenda-setting power of the media focused on political campaigns and network news programming (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Today’s audiences lean more towards media like the internet to get information. Critics argue that this change in the media landscape affects the mainstream media’s ability to set agendas. Nevertheless, studies show that the agenda setting power of the media is applicable outside the traditional definition as media themselves evolves. Feezell (2018) examined agenda setting on social media through the two-step flow of communication. He argued that social media can serve an agenda-setting function by providing users with incidental political information as sieved through the process of two-step communication flow within users’ respective networks. Feezell (2018)’s study concluded that agenda setting can occur on social media platforms through incidental exposure to political information, leaving the strongest effect among the least politically interested.

From studies such as Feezell (2018), it is clear that agenda-setting theory is evolving, and the media still possess the capacity to set agendas, only in less conspicuous ways. Accordingly, it is important to examine what role media play in the ongoing debate about immigration in the United States. As a result, this study will examine whether media place emphasis on certain portrayals of immigrants which in turn attempt to shape
public perception of immigrants, as posited by second-level agenda setting theory. One such new context of exploration in media is reality television.

**Reinforcement Theory**

Reinforcement theory is a limited media effects theory that is applicable to communication. In 1960, Klapper published *The Effects of Mass Communication*, in which he proposed the central tenets of reinforcement theory to challenge the dominant media effects theories that had become popular during the middle decades of the 20th century. Reinforcement theory generally states that people seek out and remember information that provides cognitive support for their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. The main assumption that guides this theory is that people do not like to be wrong and often feel uncomfortable when their beliefs are challenged. Audiences are active and exist in a society where they are influenced by important social institutions.

Klapper (1957) proposed that the media do not wreak direct effects on their audiences, rather they function among and through other factors and forces. These forces or factors are the very intervening variables that tend to make mass communication a contributing agent of reinforcement rather than change. These variables include audience predispositions (and their offspring: selective exposure, selective retention and selective perception), group memberships (manifested through intra-group interactions), and opinion leadership (two-step flow of communication).

Klapper (1960) argued that the mass media do not have the ability to influence audiences. He posited that regardless of the nature of effect, whether social or individual, media are only more likely reinforce than cause a change. Klapper (1960) argued that people’s attitudes, beliefs and behaviour were more likely to be influenced by their
family, schools, communities and religious institutions. Klapper (1960) also pointed out that certain attitudes and beliefs that audience members possess, such as racial and religious tolerance, are unlikely to be changed by the media because attitudes on racial and religious tolerance are essential to the self-images of audience members and pivotal to the formation of clusters within the society. These attitudes have been occasionally termed “ego-involved,” attitudes because they are particularly resistant to change by media or any other agency.

Reinforcement of ideologies and stereotypes in television

In keeping with reinforcement theory, research has found that stereotypes can be bolstered through the media, particularly on television where they are used to gain new viewers whose ideals align with what was being presented in the programming (Essays UK, 2018). Television also uses stereotypes to keep viewers, as these individuals may have tuned onto the show because the stereotypes shown fit their perceptions of other races, cultures and ethnicities (Essays UK, 2018). Wilson, Guetiérrez, and Chao (2013) give a history of the use of mass entertainment to reinforce the values of the masses or the audience. In the 19th century, when the major medium of mass entertainment was the stage, the populist audience began to demand that people of color be included in theatrical performances. This demand not only led to an inclusion of people of color in theatrical performances, but also the accommodation of the prejudices and values of the masses. Consequently, to please the audience, media accommodated their prejudices, because the audience sought for their prejudices and values to be shown and reinforced in media. Wilson et. al (2013, p. 65) explain that stereotypes are “shortcuts to character development and are a crucial element of mass entertainment and literary fare”. In other
words, stereotypes are conveniently used in television to develop characters using a one-size-fits-all approach, rather than investing time in the actual development of characters. Ferguson (2008) argues that the media tend to depict groups of people using images that are generally similar with the larger society’s perception of those groups. By the same token, the media may symbolize a broadcast face to the biases, concerns, and worries of the group from which it receives its funding. Through themes, the media may thus project and reflect the concerns of a particular group of people.

**Reinforcement of ideologies and stereotypes in advertising**

Reinforcement theory has also been used to examine advertising campaigns. While examining television’s impact on behaviour in anti-smoking commercials, O’Keefe (1971) posits that the most universally recognized effect of mass communications on behaviour is the reinforcement, or strengthening of biases or predispositions. Campaigns in particular have been most influential when the attitude encouraged is consistent with the desires of the population. Klapper (1960) further argues that mass communication functions within and through a string of mediating factors and influences, and therefore does not function as a sufficient source of audience effects. These mediating factors include selective exposure and selective retention. The media only change opinions if the audience are inclined to change. For example, the media are unable to change political and religious beliefs but their influence on fashion and popular music is considerable (McQuail, 1983).

In looking at *90 Day Fiancé* from the perspective of reinforcement theory, the fact many of the show’s cast members are immigrants might serve to reinforcing racial stereotypes preconceived by audience members. This act of reinforcement may function
to justify audience perception of immigrants, thus making it more difficult to embrace a
different opinion of immigrants and subsequently, of immigration.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

By analysing emerging immigrant stereotype themes that appear on 90 Day Fiancé, and stereotypes upheld in academic literature and by President Trump, this study will interrogate the representation of immigrants in reality television from two opposing sides of the media effect argument. One side of the argument maintains that the media only reinforce pre-existing beliefs and ideologies, while the opposing school of thought purports that media powerfully affect public perception and opinion by assigning more weight on certain matters, hence placing them at the top of the public’s agenda. This study, therefore, examines which media effects argument is more dominant in 90 Day Fiancé, while acknowledging that an interplay of both arguments may also be uncovered. The representation of immigrants in 90 Day Fiancé may consequently be discovered as an attempt at shaping new immigrant stereotypes, an attempt at reinforcing existing immigrant stereotypes, or both. This section will begin by examining the history of immigration and cross-national marriages in the United States. It then examines the stereotypes and ideologies of immigrants espoused by President Trump and those identified in academic literature. Finally, this section examines the representation of immigrants in American television and the authenticity of reality television.

Immigration in the United States

The United States has recorded a momentous increase in its immigrant population over the last few decades. Immigrants are people who has been granted legal permanent residence by their host countries (Kamya, 1995). For this study, the term ‘immigrant’ is
used in place of ‘foreigner’ because the immigrant cast members from *90 Day Fiancé* come to the United States with the intention of legalising the union with their American partners and living permanently in the country. Accordingly, the intention to immigrate makes the term ‘immigrant’ more fitting in this study. Garand, Xu and Davis (2017) explain that from 1970 to 2007, the foreign-born population of the United States almost tripled, surpassing one-fifth of the total population in many states. The immigrant population percentage from 1996 to 2008 reveals a substantial growth of immigrant populations in states like Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, where the foreign-born population more than tripled. Garand, Xu and Davis (2017) further report that in 2008, the immigrant population exceeded one-fifth of the population in California (33.5%), New Jersey (25.9%), New York (25.4%), Florida (22.7%), Nevada (21.63%), and Hawaii (20.7%). As a result of this dramatic increase, immigration has become a significant issue for the American public leading to concerns about immigrants and immigration in across the country, and in American politics (Garand, Xu & Davis, 2017).

According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), around 90% of fiancé visas were approved in 2016. However, in 2017, the numbers took a plunge when President Trump took office, dropping to around 66%. This study examines the negative immigrant stereotypes publicly championed by President Trump and broadcast in across the media. Although yet to be proven, it may be assumed that the negative perception of immigrants held by the current president may directly or indirectly influence lower visa approval rates. However, prior to examining these immigrant stereotypes, this study will examine the history of cross-national marriages in the United States.
Cross-national Marriages

Cottrell (1990) explains that cross-national marriage is a relatively modern phenomenon, reflecting a dramatic increase in cross-national relationships since the middle of the 20th century. Cross-national marriage was not a topic generating social attention in the United States until the second world war. After the war, interest in war bride marriages continued to dominate research on cross-national marriage through the 1970s. Ever since, cross-national marriages have been on a rise. According to the U.S Department of State (2018), over 500,000 immigrant visas were issued to spouses of U.S citizens between 2014 and 2018 at foreign service posts. Among young Americans, who are mostly the ones choosing partners, the acceptance of cross-national marriages lies between 75% to 90% (Wang, 2012). Today, roughly one in six U.S. marriages involves an immigrant and a large share of these are marriages with native-born citizens. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the United States will become a majority-minority society by 2043, with immigrants in minority group (Lichter, Qian & Tumin, 2015).

Levchenko and Solheim (2013) clarify that the prevalence of cross-national marriages in the United States has been a steady increase since the passage of 1965 immigration legislation that allowed for family reunification, where citizens of the United States and permanent residents could sponsor relatives to migrate to the United States. Levchenko and Solheim (2013) further explain that the end of the 20th century saw an increase in travel for tourism, business, and study, as well as the development of communication technologies that supported in-person and technology-mediated international contact and communication. The result of this free flow of communication and travel is an exponential increase in the number of non-immigrant visas issued.
annually to spouses of United States citizens who were born in countries outside the United States over the last two decades (Levchenko & Solheim, 2013).

The Skepticism Surrounding Immigration for Marriage

Cross-national marriages have consistently faced scepticism proceeding from concerns of marriage fraud. According to Elson (1997, p. 370), special privileges that the law gives for the existence and preservation of close family relationships have been abused by many people who feign legitimate relationships in order to bypass the law. According to a former Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), these marriage scams occur when an immigrant persuades an American that the marriage is real. Upon the acquisition of the immigration benefit, such as a green card, the immigrant abandons the petitioner. Following concerns regarding the increase of marriage scams, in 1985, Congress proposed a revision in the statutory meaning of ‘fiancé’ to include requirements such as “previous meetings, common language, and/or a firm intent to marry” (Elson, 1997, p. 370). This history led to the skepticism cross national marriages face today in United States.

Representation and Stereotyping of Immigrants

A stereotype refers to an over-generalized representation of characteristics of certain groups. Stereotypes are ubiquitous and often cover racial groups (Bordalo, Coffman, Gennaioli & Shleifer, 2016). Fujioka (1999) specifically defines stereotypes as “cognitive structures that contain the perceiver’s knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about some human group” (p. 53).

A person categorised as a member of a certain group is therefore expected to possess the same attributes or stereotypes of the larger group, and is assessed on the basis
of the stereotypes or group attributes (Fujioka, 1999). Although stereotypes allow for easier and efficient processing of information, they may birth biased judgment or even discrimination against particular groups (Alesina, Carlana, La Ferrara & Pinotti, 2018). Mastro (2009) posits that stereotypic media content can influence visible expressions or evaluations toward social groups, and may result in discrimination against such groups. The media therefore play a significant role in framing public opinion and discourse about immigrants (Esses, Medianu & Lawson, 2013). Consequently, negative stereotypic images assigned to immigrants in media may partly account for volatile attitudes towards immigrant groups.

Esses, Medianu and Lawson (2013) question whether negative ideologies of immigrants and refugees such as being volatile, or easily susceptible to perceived threat, may result in the dehumanization of these groups. This dehumanization refers to the denial of their full humanness, a perception of immigrants or refugees as being sub-human. An example of such dehumanization is the term ‘alien’ used to describe immigrants. According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), title 8, chapter 12 and subchapter 1 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) defines an alien as “any person not a citizen or national of the United States”. Although it has been proposed that negative media portrayals of immigrants and refugees are likely to lead to dehumanization of immigrant and refugee groups, Esses, Medianu and Lawson (2013) argue that there has been little direct evidence for this assertion. Nevertheless, the media play a crucial role in shaping or framing public opinion and discourse about immigrants and refugees. Over the course of the past two decades, representations of immigrants and refugees in many Western media content have become
increasingly negative, with the media focusing on the threats that immigrants and refugees pose to members of host societies. This narrative further breeds negativity and distrust in immigrants from members of host countries. For example, Chavez (2001) analysed magazine covers from major American publications between 1965 and 1999, and found that a sense of threat and alarm about the perceived negative impact of immigration on the country has risen significantly, with a particular focus on immigrants as invaders. Similarly, Cisneros’ (2008) analysis of American television news for four months in 2005 indicated that immigrants are represented visually and metaphorically as dangerous and destructive pollutants that must be controlled in order to prevent contamination.

Along the same lines, Ferguson (2008) argues that immigration to the United States continues to remain at the top of the public interest agenda. Legislation has also focused on concerns surrounding the treatment of immigrants in mass media, such as the specific targeting of immigrants for fair or unfair stereotyping in the media. Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Ferguson (2008) explains that public agenda polls on attitudes toward immigration demonstrate a hardening of American attitudes toward immigration. In addition, these negative portrayals may also decrease immigrants’ self-ideologies and self-esteem (Ferguson, 2008).

In a study published by Latino Decisions (2012), it was reported that news and entertainment media have hugely impacted non-Latino perceptions about Latinos and immigrants. Stereotypes people believe to be true are informed by the images, characters, and stories they commonly encounter in news, television, film, and radio programming about immigrants and Latinos. Expectedly, people exposed to positive news or
entertainment stories about Latinos and/or immigrants hold the most favourable opinions about both groups. This study furthermore reinforces evidence regarding the influence of media representations.

Essentially, studies have shown that the stereotypic images of immigrants that media disseminate significantly influence public opinion and discourse about immigrants and immigration (Esses, Medianu & Lawson, 2013). This influence from media content is even more important to interrogate when the stereotypic content is negative. Although media have often used stereotypic images, their usage should be highly discouraged even when they appear positive because stereotypes often result in overgeneralizations. More important to consider, however, is when the stereotypic images are negative.

**Existing Immigrant Stereotypes**

**Immigrant Stereotypes in Academic Literature.** Menjívar (2016) suggests that negative media portrayals of immigrants produce an environment in which the public is stimulated to see the problems immigrants allegedly cause. The opposite takes place when audience members encounter positive media portrayals of immigrants. A further concern with negative stereotyping of immigrants in media is that it may promote prejudice against immigrants. Or, equally bothersome, immigrant stereotyping in media may simply fail to challenge exiting prejudices in larger society, hence reinforcing them. Consequently, an increase in positive representation of immigrants in the media may result in building awareness and concern regarding the issues that immigrants face in the United States, leading to a more open American society that encourages the integration of immigrant populations into the American culture (Ferguson, 2008). Therefore, positive
media representations may result in more positive attitudes towards immigrants that supports immigrant assimilation.

The perception of Americans towards immigrants and immigration at large is not entirely negative. Mutz (2018) reported that Americans view immigrants more positively today than 20 years ago. Research on attitudes toward immigrants generally focuses on anti-immigrant sentiment. Yet, the 1996 General Social Survey indicates that half the population believes that immigrants favourably impact the U.S. economy and culture (Haubert & Fussell, 2006). Haubert and Fussell (2006) reveal that cosmopolitans (i.e., persons who are highly educated, those in white-collar occupations, those who have lived abroad, and those who reject ethnocentrism) are significantly more likely to believe that immigrants make a favourable contribution to the United States.

A growing positive ideology of immigrants is one of shared social identity. Parks-Yancy, Shih, DiTomaso and Post (2009) found a deep ascription among white Americans to the idea that the United States is a country of immigrants whose strength lies in a humanitarian, open door policy. This view of history interprets everyone as immigrants, the only difference being the time or generation of entry.

Secondly, immigrants are increasingly being perceived as good for the country. Between 1993 and 2001, agreement grew about the positive impact of immigration in the United States grew from 29% to a peak of 66%. Although once controversial, more Americans now share the view that immigration and immigrants are good for the country (Fussell, 2014). Furthermore, Mutz (2018) reports that the percentage of Americans who say that immigrants strengthen the country has increased from 31% in 1994 to 63% in 2016. In the same way, the percentage of Americans who view immigrants as a burden
has decreased from 63% to 27% (Mutz, 2018). Immigrants are also viewed as capable of making the United States more innovative and of increasing the efficiency and prosperity of the American economy because of the competitiveness they bring to the country. Immigration is said to directly affect the population and labour force of the United States, which directly increases the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011).

Thirdly, immigrants are seen as creatively enriching American culture. Hirschman (2013) explains that the mixed cultures immigrants possess often give them a unique position that tends to offer more possibilities for innovation. Contemporary American cuisine, which combines traditions from almost every country in the world, is a clear example of the impact of immigrants on American culture. For instance, immigrants from China have brought Chinese noodles, which have become a staple among Americans. Mexican immigrants brought tacos, which have pervaded U.S. households and eateries with the gastronomical concept of Taco Tuesdays. Sushi, which originated from Japan, has become a consistent genre of consumption in which Americans indulge. The creativity immigrants bring to the United States has left its imprint on American music, theatre, dance, film, and many other realms of artistic endeavour. Immigrants have broadened the cultural outlook of the United States and have occasionally even defined American culture through literature, music, and art.

Lastly, immigrants are perceived as being determined and persistent. Immigrant families appear to be more successful than others in raising highly motivated children. This high level of motivation is a result of the expectation of most immigrants who anticipate that the economic, social, and psychological costs of leaving their home
country behind will be compensated by a better future for them and their children. This motivation often drives immigrant parents to persistently ensure their children excel. Excellence by first and second generation immigrants has been noted in areas such as math, science, engineering, technology, sports, spelling bees and so on (Hirschman, 2013).

Although scholars have highlighted some positive immigrant ideologies, the prevalence of negative immigrant stereotypes cannot be overlooked. These negative stereotypes are often associated with immigrant groups that are still considered as outgroups. Ruiz (2012) posits that although many immigrants think that their representation in television implies that they have become part of the American culture, film and television portrayals however imply that immigrants can are still outsiders. Essentially, immigrants are still perceived, and portrayed in media, as outsiders in some capacity. Nevertheless, scholars suggest that not all immigrant groups experience resistance from natives or the continuous feeling of being outgroups. Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) explain that in a variant of hypotheses emphasizing prejudice, immigration-related attitudes are straightforward extensions of racial attitudes. Thus, native-born white Americans are likely to be more supportive of immigrants from Europe. Hence, bases of intergroup difference that are common to racial attribution such as skin tone, are likely to shape attitudes on immigration. Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) further explain that several immigrant attributes might also contribute to ideologies of social and cultural distance, such as difficulty with English and differing religious or cultural practices. These differences could provide an explanation for why immigrants who do not speak English or those from outside Europe are viewed more
negatively than those who are fluent in English or share common cultural or religious practices.

A prevalent negative stereotype is that immigrants are a potential threat to the general economy. A majority of Americans believe that immigrants use more social services than native born Americans. However, Tsai and Gu (2019) report that foreign-born adults in the United States were less likely to receive welfare than native-born American adults. This belief leads many Americans to perceive immigrants as a burden and threat to the American economy (Parks-Yancy et al., 2009). Secondly, immigrants are viewed as a threat to American unity and culture. Researchers have argued that symbolic cultural, ethnic or linguistic anxieties have contributed to anti-immigrant sentiments historically and in recent times. The sentiment is shaped by anxieties over the changing makeup of the United States and the perception of threat to the American culture. Furthermore, fears about the inability of immigrants to integrate and their perceived desire to maintain their own languages, is a constant source of anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States (Parks-Yancy, et al., 2009).

Thirdly, immigrants are often perceived as criminals and dishonest. According to Green (2016), although many scholars have argued that immigrants at worst show no greater inclination toward crime than native populations, popular belief often tags immigrant groups as criminal threats that society needs to protect itself from. The false connection between immigration and crime has been a habitual premise in American popular culture and media for much of the country’s history (Green, 2016). This sentiment has also resulted in the belief that immigrants who migrate to the United States on K-1 visas have the wrong intentions, and are simply marrying Americans in order to
get a green card. Lastly, immigrants are thought to be incompetent and undependable.

Stereotype research depicts the generic immigrant as incompetent and untrustworthy (Lee and Fiske, 2006).

**Trump’s Negative Immigrant Stereotypes.** During his presidential election campaign, the then Republican candidate, Donald Trump made immigration the core of his campaign, canvassing for a more detailed policy agenda, on immigration than on any other matter (Pierce & Selee, 2017). In a 2015 *The Guardian* report, Trump said that Mexico sent its “worst elements,” including rapists, drug-runners, and criminals to the United States and that “tremendous infectious disease” poured across the U.S.-Mexico border (Neate & Tuckman, 2015). The report also stated that a “beautiful” wall that would be built between Mexico and the U.S., and that said wall would be paid for by Mexico. This wall was a necessary solution to the issue of immigration (Campbell, 2015).

After his election in 2016, a *Business Insider* report in 2018 (p.1) reported a discussion with lawmakers at the White House regarding immigrants which led to President Trump’s exhibiting frustration over the subject of protecting immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador, and African countries, and allegedly referring to them as “shithole countries”. When powerful political figures make such statements through the media, their impact on public perception is far reaching, directly or indirectly shaping attitudes. Winders (2016) also highlights a shift in language, describing immigrants as ‘illegal aliens’ and ‘criminals’ by Trump. With stereotypes such as these regarding immigrants, it is crucial to examine whether the ideals being propagated by Trump regarding immigrants are reflected in reality television show, *90 Day Fiancé*. 
In addition to his anti-Mexican rhetoric (Green, 2016; Young, 2017), Trump also constantly linked immigration to terrorism, regularly promoting Islamophobia and advocating for a total ban of Muslims from entering into the United States. He furthermore signed an executive order after his inauguration promising to give immigration preference to Christian refugees who were fleeing religious persecution (Young, 2017). In another example, a *USA Today* analysis of the 64 rallies Trump held between 2017 and 2019 reported that when discussing immigration, the president used the word “invasion” at least 19 times, the word “animal” 34 times, and the word “killer” nearly three dozen times (Fritze, 2019). Furthermore, while campaigning, Trump also said that immigrants “compete directly against vulnerable American workers.” (Preston, 2016, p.1). In other words, according to President Trump, immigrants were unduly taking advantage of vulnerable American workers, and unfairly taking their jobs.

Although President Trump evidently holds and publicizes negative immigrant stereotypes, academic scholars have equally published research about the positive impact of immigration and positive ideologies of immigrants. Given the two opposing theories which will be used in this study to interrogate the role of reality television in the representation of immigrants on *90 Day Fiancé*, it is imperative to understand that both theories have been carefully selected for this study because they offer a unique path to unravelling immigrant perceptions present in reality television and an explanation for their presence on the show. Reinforcement theory can help identify pre-existing stereotypes that emerge in the *90 Day Fiancé* narrative, demonstrating whether academic and/or popular notions about immigrants are reflected in the show’s edited story lines.
Creating Immigrant Stereotypes

The Significant Role of Television in the Representation of Immigrants. An opposite school of thought argues the importance of television as a visual form of media in shaping what people believe. Representation in television and film refers to codes and a range of audio-visual systems that have the capacity to construct meaning (O’Donnell, 2013). In television, representation of people and events is encoded by using elements such as camera angles, lighting, sound, music and editing in order to convey the desired narrative, conflict, character action, dialogue, setting, casting, and so on. Because it is impossible to show everything on television, image selection is necessary. This selection results in some form of representation. Consequently, representation codes work together to encode a preferred meaning, while making an effort to present the impression of naturalness, and in the case of reality television, the illusion of reality. In essence, representation is a combination of many elements in order to generate and portrayed the preferred narrative (O’Donnell, 2013).

Fujioka (1999) notes that television, which has been considered a prominent source of information, continuously plays a role in constructing viewers’ social reality. Because television conveys replications of familiar everyday settings, and because it shares similar characteristics of real life events such as sound and sight, content consumed via television may become part of our social construction and experience; thus, serving as a basis for social judgements such as racial attitudes and ethnic stereotypes. Mistiaen (2019) similarly argues that media play an important role in mental representations as they serve as the foremost source of knowledge about many issues, contributing to how people understand the world.
According to Mastro (2009), academic research into television fiction and the portrayals of ethnic minorities and immigrants has also revealed viewing effects on social attitudes and beliefs regarding minorities. In this context, it is assumed that the image of ethnic minorities and immigrants in television fiction contributes to the upholding of stereotypes and prejudice. On the other hand, it has also been reported that viewing television series that present a positive image of minorities and identification with minority characters is associated with more positive attitudes towards them. According to Ortiz and Harwood (2007), this constitutes empirical proof that the greater mediated contact with members of an out-group in a favourable context, the greater the knowledge of the out-group and feelings of trust and respect, and the less prejudice and the ideology of threat. Barker (1999) adds that the representation of race and ethnicity that global television disseminates cannot be detached from wider cultural stereotypes.

In a study released in 2018 by non-profit media organization, Define American, in conjunction with the Norman Lear Centre of the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, 143 episodes from 47 television shows that aired between 2017 and 2018 were analysed. Results showed that immigrants on television are overrepresented as criminals. The study also found that immigrant characters are less educated on television than in reality. The significance of this finding is that television viewers may derive meaning from representation, and because reality has manifold meanings to people, representations also constitute multiple meanings. Hence, representation does not usually result in one meaning, however, it results in some meaning (O’Donnell, 2013). The construction of some meaning, particularly through representation of immigrants in television, may contribute to the establishment of a
separation between immigrants and natives, consequently resulting in a ‘we’ ‘them’ dialectic.

**Television’s propagation of the concept of the ‘other’**. Watson and Hill (2003) explain that the concept of the “other” stems from George Herbert Mead’s (1934) social psychology and symbolic interaction frameworks. Cultural, queer, and feminist studies have appropriated the concept of the ‘other’ to mean a person, persons, group, social class, community, race or nation who are not ‘us’ and who are defined by their difference from us; yet who by that difference contribute to our concept of self, as individuals, members of groups, etc. (p. 209).

In television studies, the ‘other’ represents a group of people that another group of people fear, dislike, or feel superior to, resulting in a ‘them and us’ attitude. Dominant groups who have the power over representation in television may bestow less dominant groups with certain characteristics and habits, turning them into the ‘other’. When a group is the ‘other’ individual differences tend to be lost because members become bunched together into a combined ‘them’ category. This category results in stereotypes that do not take individual personalities into account, which is why it is extremely crucial to understand the role of television in representation and stereotype creation, reinforcement or other times, repudiation (O’Donnell, 2013).

The philosophy of one’s own group and other groups is also based on the ideology of representation in the mass media. This ‘us’ versus ‘other’ philosophy often emanates from representations in media that causes groups to attach certain attributes to the general population of another group (Friedland & McLeod, 1999). Trebbe and Schoenhagen, (2011) thus argue that representation in the media is vitally important for
the social integration of ethnic minorities. The ‘us’ versus ‘other’ rhetoric often results in disintegration and separation, particularly for minorities such as immigrants. Therefore, representation in media often contributes to social integration or disintegration in immigration contexts.

Having established the contribution of television to the propagation of the ‘other’ dialectic, which demonstrates that media can develop and generate its own stereotypes, it is imperative to closely examine the role reality television in representations; particularly because reality television is often portrayed and believed by audiences to be reality (Tyree, 2011). Hence, the representations in reality television may be perceived as more actual than representations in other mainstream media, thereby more overtly contributing to the advancement of new stereotypes among viewers. However, an understanding of reality television reveals that the images disseminated are often far from reality.

**An Overview of Reality Television**

From Allen Funt’s *Candid Camera* in the 1950s, reality television has its roots in documentary film, which was originally used for education or persuasion, and television news and human interest stories. Reality television continues to grow in popularity as television programming that offers ‘real’, albeit edited and scripted experiences to its audience. As early as the 1950s, when *Candid Camera* aired, there was a certain pleasure that audiences gained from peeking into real lives of others (Allison, 2016). Because it is often considered to be real life, the narratives in reality television can evoke sympathy or empathy from audience members who often find the stories relatable or astonishing (Carmichael, 2010).
Although critics may write off reality television as insubstantial, social and cultural trends inevitably shape the productions and audience reactions (Taddeo & Dvorak, 2010). With successful shows such as *Big Brother, The Biggest Loser, Survivor, Keeping Up with the Kardashians, Wives and Girlfriends of Sports Stars (WAGS), I am Jazz, Unexpected* and more recently, *90 Day Fiancé*, reality television is a booming industry that continues to generate scholarly analysis.

The notion of television depicting the real lives of real people is not new. Reality television is purported as unscripted real-life situations. But according to Friedman (2002), producers of reality programs create drama through the editing process, particularly in cases when there is a ‘winner’. Dates (2004) agrees but adds that casting plays a significant role in reality television manipulation. She asserts that producers exploit the vulnerability of cast members on reality programs and they create distorted images of participants. Dates (2004) further contends that when cast members do not conform to the roles producers desire, they are either not selected at all or they are eventually cut off from the program.

Although networks regularly entertain viewers by exploiting negative portrayals of marginalised groups, the goal of cast members is often to achieve fame and build brands themselves (Orbe, 2018). Rather than allowing a space for reality television cast members to construct their own identities, reality television genre actually suggests some stereotypes are ‘more real’ than others (Jones, Jones & Smith, 2010). Media analyst, K. Sue Jewell (1993), argued that the way media perpetuate stereotypes is a reflection of the larger mindset of society and media must change these stereotypes in order for society to begin to change theirs. Therefore, the onus is on media to be the agent of change. This
argument falls in line with reinforcement theory, which forms a partial framework of the current study.

The question of the authenticity of narratives and actions in reality television is important in understanding reality television. According to Tyree (2011), storylines and actions in reality television are not entirely real. Egwu (2016) contends that many reality television shows contain scripting and staging and consequently are re-imagined as situation-comedies or dramas. Darling (2004) further posits that in this repositioning, reality-based programming must have conflict and resolution as well as villains and heroes. Following this conventional narrative structure with easily recognisable characters helps to move the story along from episode to episode. These recognisable characters often have stereotypical behaviours, which according to Wilson and Gutierrez (1995) serve as a substitute for character development. In addition, as Wells (2018) explains, no program has the ability to completely mimic reality, not even reality television. Consequently, the representation of immigrants in the show, 90 Day Fiancé, although largely scripted and possibly far from reality, may be accepted as truth by audiences who believe that reality television is indeed reality.

Overview of The Learning Channel (TLC). In 1972, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare together with NASA founded an informative and instructional network which was to be broadcast for free through a NASA satellite. The network then became privately acquired by the Appalachian Community Service Network in 1980 and was renamed ‘The Learning Channel’. The network broadcast adult education shows, documentaries on nature and history, and science. Discovery Communications acquired The
Learning Channel in 1991. This acquisition resulted in the addition of more documentary-type television shows on the channel (Acuna, 2012).

However, in the mid-90s, the network started branching out its content to target a more mainstream audience by including reality shows such as Medical Detectives and Trauma: Life in the ER. The network also included construction-based do-it-yourself shows like Hometime and Home Savvy. The channel rebranded itself as TLC in 1998. After its rebranding, many of the older shows such as Paleoworld, Trauma: Life in the ER, and Medical Detectives were moved to be broadcast on Discovery Channel. Subsequently, the older shows were replaced by shows such as Wedding Story and Baby Story, which targeted stay-at-home mothers. The network began to broadcast other content such as renovation series, like Trading Spaces, fashion shows, such as What Not to Wear, and now reality shows such as 90 Day Fiancé. Around this time, the network's tagline became Life Unscripted (Acuna, 2012). According to Discovery (2018b, p. 6). alone “reached approximately 86 million subscribers in the U.S.” in 2018 another 6 million in Canada and approximately 417 million subscribers globally as of December 2018. The target audience are adults, particularly women within the ages of 25 to 54. The network began airing 90 Day Fiancé in 2014.

**An Overview of 90 Day Fiancé.** The show 90 Day Fiancé captivated a myriad of viewers when it first hit television screens in January 2014. According to TLC.com (n.d.), 90 Day Fiancé gives its audience a unique look into the world of cross-national dating and marriage. Using the K-1 visa, the immigrants travel to the United States to marry their American partner and live in the country. The show follows the couples on their journeys towards overcoming language barriers, cultural changes and skeptical friends
and family. In addition, the couples must then legalise their union before the expiration of the K-1 visa, which is valid for 90 days. If the marriage is not legalised before the end of the 90-day period, the immigrant must return home. The short period within which couples are expected to legalise their unions often leaves the families of the American partners in doubt about the authenticity of the relationship.

The series currently has five spin-offs, with a sixth brewing. The sixth, *90 Day Fiancé: Happily Ever After*, documents the ups and downs of past *90 Day Fiancé* couples after their marriage, *90 Day Fiancé: Before the 90 Days*, which follows couples who have begun a relationship but are yet to begin the K-1 visa process, *90 Day Fiancé: What Now?*, which gives updates on couples from past *90 Day Fiancé* seasons, *90 Day Fiancé: The Other Way*, which follows relationships where the American partner permanently moves to his or her partner's home country, *90 Day Fiancé: Pillow Talk*, a reaction show featuring a number of previous cast members that take part in reacting to a new episode of *90 Day Fiancé: Happily Ever After*, and *The Family Chantel*, which focuses on the relationship of *90 Day Fiancé* season four cast members' Pedro and Chantel, and their immediate families. The sixth spin-off, *90 Day Fiancé: College Edition* is reportedly in the pipelines. According to Jensen (2019) in a *USA Today* report, *90 Day Fiancé* is TLC's biggest franchise with an average of 3.4 million viewers.

As a result of *90 Day Fiancé* garnering such a large following, this study is most concerned with the representation of the immigrant spouses on the show. Many audience members may not have a close relationship or acquaintance with immigrants, and certain stereotypes or ideologies might already exist about these immigrants, which frequently leads the families and friends of the American partners, and even the viewers, to perceive
the immigrants in a certain way. Shapiro and McDonald (1992) for example, have stated that mediated information is more likely to exert influence on those people who have had little or no direct contact with people from other countries or cultures because they are lacking in a sufficient method of evaluating information. Armstrong, Neuendorf, and Brentar (1992) also noted that media exposure affected white college students’ racial attitudes, particularly for those who had little direct interracial contact. Consequently, the perception of reality television as real-life might make the impact of stereotypic representation of immigrants on the show stronger than expected. Because reality television is often thought to portray unscripted real-life events, the messages being communicated are likely to have more impact on the audience than mainstream media.

**Implication of the Study**

If the media prioritise, reinforce or negate particular certain immigrant stereotypes, as Barker (1999) posits, these stereotypes cannot be detached from wider cultural stereotypes. Therefore, through this study, the theory of second-level agenda setting might be applicable to *90 Day Fiancé* to prioritise certain stereotypes in the minds of its audiences. Furthermore, given the political debate regarding immigration in the country, if certain immigrant stereotypes propagated by the present administration are found to be prevalent on the show, it gives this study basis to report that the producers of the show are able to reinforce certain stereotypes through their audio-visual representations of immigrants. If none of these prevalent stereotypes are found on the show, we can conclude that the show does not uphold documented immigrant stereotypes.
This study is of strong import because further division and distrust towards immigrants in the United States may broaden if 90 Day Fiancé prioritizes or reinforces certain negative immigrant stereotypes. As Ferguson (2008) explains, even if the media are not necessarily responsible for the development of prejudice in American culture, it can be argued that the media could be used as a force for positive change. At the very least, by presenting immigrant populations as well-rounded cultural groups and avoiding unfair prejudicial depictions, the media may be capable of providing positive grounds for diversity, cultural exchange and immigrant integration.

**Research Questions**

As evidenced by the literature, this study aims to answer the following research questions;

1. How are immigrants on the show 90 Day Fiancé portrayed? What, if any, stereotypes of immigrants are dominant in the show?

2. What effect, if any, does the 2016 election have on dominant immigrant stereotypes on the show?

3. Which theory, reinforcement theory or second-level agenda-setting theory, appears more dominant on the show? Does reality television attempt to shape new stereotypes or reinforce existing stereotypes through its portrayal of immigrants?
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Using the theory of second-level agenda setting and reinforcement theory, this study considered the question of whether American reality television attempts to shape new immigrant stereotypes or reinforce existing ones. Consequently, this study took an interpretive approach to communication research, using a macro-interpretive theoretical frame (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) in the methodology. Applying a mixed methodology, this study analysed the data inductively for patterns of immigrant presentation emerging across episodes of 90 Day Fiancé, and assessed these patterns vis-à-vis second-level agenda setting theory to identify themes related to salient attributes and presentational tone. Following this inductive perspective, the analytical frame for this study was adjusted to deductively reflect the core tenets of reinforcement theory. Both positive and negative stereotypes displayed in current mediated depictions of immigrants in the show were identified and coded deductively.

Sampling

To arrive at the specific episodes that were analysed in the study, the researcher made use of two phases of sampling. The first phase was a stratified random sampling method, that categorised the population into two timeline groups: pre-election and post-election. The second phase used random assignment to further divide the two strata of episodes into two subgroups, one that would be inductively analysed and one that would be deductively analysed. At the time of data collection, which was January 2020, seven seasons and 80 episodes had been aired since 90 Day Fiancé’s inception in February
2014. The study only focused on episodes from the seven seasons of *90 Day Fiancé*, and not on the spin offs. The entire population of 80 episodes was considered in the random sample in order to ensure that the sample was representative of the entire show at the time of data collection.

In order to ensure that sampling was truly randomized, after stratification, each of the names of each of the 80 episodes were written on pieces of paper, folded, and placed into the two separate boxes labelled ‘pre-election’ (n=38, 47.5%) and ‘post-election’ (n=42, 52.5%). Season 4 was broken up by the election. Afterwards, a total of twelve episodes were randomly selected from each box by an independent person: Six episodes were chosen from the ‘pre-election’ box and six episodes were chosen from the ‘post-election’ box. Because the study employed an inductive-deductive analytical approach, random assignment to analytical method was accomplished by employing the same independent person to blindly select three episodes from the pre- and post-election samples to be inductively analysed. The three remaining episodes from each group were used for the deductive analysis. All episodes included in the sample were sourced from *YouTube, Amazon Prime* and *Daily Motion*. The twelve randomly selected episodes, divided into two strata with their respective random assignments to analytical method are given in tables 1.1 and 1.2 below.

Of interest to note, is that as the seasons progressed, the length of the show increased. According to TLC’s website, longer airtime was allocated to episodes from Season 5 episode 5 onward. Subsequent episodes were aired for an average of 86 minutes, as opposed to the initial average of 42 minutes in earlier seasons. In this study, all episodes examined under for the post-election analyses Season 5 were aired after the
2016 presidential election. The reason for this lengthier screen time was not given. To adjust for the difference in show length, the deductive analysis objectively uses proportional time allotted to make code-based comparisons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inductive Episodes</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Season 2 Episode 2</td>
<td>42 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 3 Episode 4</td>
<td>41 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 3 Episode 8</td>
<td>41 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deductive Episodes</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>42 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 2 episode 7</td>
<td>43 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 4 Episode 4</td>
<td>42 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.1 Data analysis: random assignment of pre-election episodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inductive Episodes</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Season 4 Episode 12</td>
<td>43 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 5 Episode 12</td>
<td>49 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 7 Episode 10</td>
<td>86 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deductive Episodes</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Season 5 Episode 7</td>
<td>86 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 6 Episode 11</td>
<td>86 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 7 Episode 3</td>
<td>minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2 Data analysis: random assignment of post-election episodes

**Inductive Data Analysis**

To begin analysis, the inductive approach was first employed with the six episodes assigned to the inductive method. Thomas (2006) explains that inductive analysis suggests approaches that principally use detailed readings of raw data to develop concepts, themes, patterns, or a model through interpretations by the researcher. Descriptions of these themes are given in table 2.1 below.
Identifying emergent inductive themes. For each episode, the content was coded and instances depicting positive ideologies or negative stereotypes of immigrants were recorded. The specific content coded included the scenes, behaviours, comments and reactions to comments. These instances were identified using the framework of the second-level agenda setting theory. Therefore, instances where certain attitudes or stereotypes are given priority through techniques such as repetition, context, and presentational tone were noted.

Saturation. The episodes were watched a minimum of three times until the researcher reached a point of theoretical saturation. In the inductive approach, the researcher watched the episodes over and over again to note and record emerging themes or stereotypes associated with immigrants. The researcher sought both positive and negative stereotypes being portrayed by immigrants and watched each episode a minimum of three times to ensure that the same themes were emerging, or if any new ones were emerging.

For the inductive analysis, the researcher observed and the coded emerging positive and negative themes regarding immigrants’ representations. Afterwards, the researcher placed themes that were similar into broader categories. The themes were then analysed again to determine if categories could be collapsed and/or expanded.

Deductive Data Analysis

Following the inductive analysis of data, a deductive approach was then employed to investigate if positive and negative stereotypes identified in literature and held by President Trump were present and being reinforced on the show. Here, the researcher sought for the presence or absence of previously discussed stereotypes on the show using
the theoretical framework of the reinforcement theory. Thomas (2006) explains that
deductive analysis denotes data analyses aimed at testing whether data are consonant with
prior assumptions, theories identified, or theoretical explanations constructed by the
researcher. Therefore, a deductive analysis was conducted using pre-identified themes
and patterns to determine if there were any consistencies between the manner in which
immigrants are portrayed on the show and existing positive and/or negative stereotypes
that have been identified in the academic literature or espoused by President Trump.

**Stereotypes coded.** Using the negative immigrant themes identified as being
upheld by President Trump and the positive and negative immigrant themes identified in
academic literature, the researcher sought to code the themes identified below. These
themes were categorized as President Trump’s immigrant rhetoric, negative themes about
immigrant from the academic literature and positive themes from the academic literature.
Descriptions of these themes are given in table 2.2 under the appendix.

President Trump’s immigrant themes include:

1. Immigrants are alien
2. Immigrants are animals
3. Immigrants are criminals - drug runners, rapists, killers
4. Immigrants are infectious disease carriers
5. Immigrants are competition for vulnerable American jobs

Negative immigrant themes in academic literature include:

1. Some immigrants are culturally distant because of the colour of their skin and/or
language skills
2. Immigrants are a threat to the economy
3. Immigrants are a threat to national unity and culture
4. Immigrants are criminals
5. Immigrants are dishonest
6. Immigrants are incompetent and undependable

Positive immigrant themes in academic literature include;
1. Immigrants have a shared social identity
2. Immigrants are good for the country
3. Immigrants creatively enrich the American culture
4. Immigrants are determined and persistent

**Deductive Coding Method.** The researcher identified these themes using a time code. The time code was tracked for each theme noted across the episodes. Then the amount of time spent on each theme was divided by the total number of minutes available for analysis in each stratum. In this way, a portion of time allocated to the theme across episodes was calculated and compared across strata. When a longer portion of time was given to a particular theme, the researcher interpreted it as the show’s attempt at reinforcing a stereotype. Although some themes received proportionally more time than others, the presence of the themes were, nonetheless, recorded as the show’s attempt to reinforce such themes. Given the fact that the episodes on the show became lengthier in Season 5 (86 minutes), a time code was applied in order to fairly analyse the time allocated to themes across the shorter and longer episodes. The researcher however notes that although the episodes became lengthier in Season 5, after the 2016 presidential election, one of the episodes analysed inductively, Season 5 Episode 12, was a shorter episode (49 minutes). This episode was aired before the season’s *Tell All*, and the desire
of the producers to reserve the sensational details of the couples’ stories for the finale, probably accounts for its shorter length.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Inductive Analysis

Given the inductive-deductive approach used in this study, an inductive analysis was first conducted to identify emerging immigrant themes from randomly selected episodes on *90 Day Fiancé*. Emerging themes that were observed, which attempt to suggest new stereotypes of immigrant spouses, are discussed. The themes are discussed in their order of prevalence.

Emerging inductive themes

The following themes emerged from the pre-election inductive analysis:

1. Immigrants are family-oriented
2. Immigrants are dishonest
3. Immigrants are domineering
4. Immigrants are a potential threat to the economy
5. Immigrants are adaptable and are risk takers

The following themes emerged from the post-election inductive analysis:

1. Immigrants are dishonest
2. Immigrants are irrational
3. Immigrants are a threat to national unity and culture
4. Immigrants are a potential threat to the economy
5. Immigrants are family-oriented

First, the emerging pre-election themes are examined.
1. **Immigrants are family-oriented**

Evelin, Justin’s Columbian fiancée, is portrayed as family oriented. She is close to her family and desires to tighten the bond between her fiancé, Justin, and his estranged family. She attempts to form a relationship with Justin’s mother and makes plans to invite her mother-in-law to go wedding dress shopping with her. Another example of this theme is Jonathan’s Mexican fiancée, Fernanda. Fernanda encourages her fiancé to rebuild his relationship with his estranged mother even though she discourages the couple from getting married. She also encourages Jonathan to invite his mother to their wedding.

Nicole’s Moroccan fiancé, Azan, is shown to live in a collectivist culture with his parents, siblings, aunts and uncle all living in the same house. Azan also expresses a desire for his family to like and accept his American fiancé, Nicole. A final instance noted is Kyle’s Thai fiancée, Noon, who encourages him to reconnect with his mother who became estranged because of an alcohol addiction issue that damaged their relationship.

2. **Immigrants are dishonest**

The second emerging inductive theme is that immigrants are dishonest and cannot be trusted. An instance of this theme was noted in the relationship between David and his Thai fiancée, Annie. David faces opposition from his daughter who believes Annie is a gold digger, although David is not financially buoyant. On the other hand, Annie’s family expresses their trust in David to take care of their daughter in America, and gives him a gift before he and Annie move to the United States.

Likewise, Danny’s South African fiancée, Amy faces some skepticism from Danny’s father, Charles, who welcomes Amy hesitantly because does not agree with their
interracial marriage due to perceptions of dishonesty and distrust for Amy. Danny later reveals that his father always questioned Amy’s intentions because he thinks Amy is only getting married to Danny for the green card. Finally, Danielle’s family is skeptical of her relationship with her Tunisian fiancé, Mohammed. Danielle’s son, Corey expresses his skepticism towards Mohammed’s intentions and thinks Mohammed is scamming Danielle in order to get a green card. Overall, the families of the immigrants appear to trust the American partners, however, the American families hardly trust immigrant partners.

3. Immigrants are domineering

A final inductive theme that observed from the pre-election analysis is that male immigrants are domineering. For example, Loren’s Israeli fiancé, Alexei, who is from Israel, is portrayed as controlling. He opposes the idea of having strippers at Loren’s bachelorette. Alexei constantly calls Loren while she is at her bachelorette party and finds out if she had strippers at the party. Although this is an American tradition, Alexei is portrayed as an alpha male who attempts to control the happenings in Loren’s bachelorette event without being present at the party. Another instance of this theme was identified in Elizabeth and her Moldovan fiancé’s scene, Andrei. Andrei similarly opposes Elizabeth’s bachelorette party that her sisters have planned to hold in Las Vegas. He says that Elizabeth should not go to a club for her bachelorette party, he adds “…you’re a woman, you have pride”. He believes that the club is an indecent place to be, especially when one is getting married. Lastly, Chantel’s Dominican fiancé, Pedro, is portrayed as attempting to control Chantel’s alcohol intake at lunch after she gets drunk while partying the previous day. He says Chantel has no control.
4. **Immigrants are a potential threat to the economy**

The third theme that emerged is that immigrants are a financial threat. Immigrants are portrayed as materialistic, and who want to milk their American spouses financially. For instance, Brett’s Filipino fiancée Daya is portrayed as materialistic. She asks if the engagement ring Brett gave her is an original diamond ring and repeatedly asks that Brett verify that it is an authentic diamond ring. This portrayal leaves the impression that Daya is more concerned about the authenticity of her ring than the authenticity of her relationship.

In the case of Melanie’s Jamaican fiancé, Devar, he is portrayed a financial threat to Melanie because he expresses his desire to send money back home to Jamaica to help his sisters pay their mortgage. As a prelude to the next week’s episode, Melanie’s sister asks Devar if he plans to send money to his sisters in Jamaica to help them pay their mortgage, he says ‘Oh yes absolutely’. Melanie then remarks that she needs to reconsider signing a prenuptial agreement. This scene portrays Devar as someone on a quest to leverage on his relationship with Melanie to get a green card in order work and to enrich his sisters.

5. **Immigrants are adaptable and are risk takers**

The fourth emergent theme observed is that immigrants are risk takers and are adaptable. All the immigrants on *90 Day Fiancé* leave their jobs, friends, and family behind in their home country and take the risk of moving to the United States to be with their American partners. For many of them, it is their first time in the United States, and regardless of their true intentions for moving, they adapt to the culture, food, environment, families and lifestyle in order to survive. The immigrant spouses often
express their homesickness, however, as they strive to adapt to their new home. For example, Josh’s Russian fiancée, Aleksandra, embraces Mormonism, a religion she converted to after she began a relationship with Josh. She changes her lifestyle, gives up alcohol, partying, and immodest clothing to adapt to her new religion. Aleksandra also attempts to cover up her tattoo in order to be modest on her wedding day. In another instance, Chelsea’s Nicaraguan fiancé, Yamir, leaves a successful musical career and band in Nicaragua to start a new life in the United States with Chelsea, and start his music career afresh. Although his manager, Gabriel vehemently opposes this decision because Yamir does not speak any English, he nevertheless takes a risk and moves to the United States.

Continuing with the inductive exploration, emerging themes from the three post-election episodes were also identified and analysed. The emerging themes from this time period, presented in order of prevalence, will also be analysed.

1. Immigrants are dishonest

The first theme that emerged from the post-election episodes that were analysed inductively is that immigrants are dishonest. Immigrants are portrayed as manipulative and as gold diggers. For instance, Narkyia’s Nigerian fiancé, Lowo is portrayed as dishonest. Narkyia mentions that Lowo deceived her at the beginning of their relationship using a profile that did not belong to him. She was also skeptical of his Nigerian prince story, which is a typical narrative used by Nigerian scammers. Lowo’s dishonesty was further portrayed when Narkyia finds out that Lowo hid his attempt to reconnect with the mother of his child while speaking with Narkyia. Likewise, Chantel’s family expresses a deep distrust for her Dominican fiancé, Pedro. Her parents request that the couple get a
prenuptial agreement before getting married in order to protect Chantel in the event of a divorce. Although her family’s skepticism can be excused because Chantel lied to them about the type of visa Pedro was on, and only revealed Pedro’s actual visa status two days before the wedding. Chantel told the lie, and not Pedro. Pedro’s family on the other hand was aware that he was moving to the United States to marry Chantel. Pedro is also portrayed as a potential gold digger. Chantel’s parents ask her to get a pre-nuptial agreement before their wedding because they are cynical of Pedro’s intentions for marrying Chantel. Similarly, Molly’s fiancé, Luis, who is also Dominican, is portrayed as dishonest. Molly’s father believes that Luis used Molly as a ‘ticket’ to the United States, and does not actually love her. Furthermore, David’s family perceives his Thai fiancé, Annie, who is 25 years younger than he is, as a gold digger. David’s daughter notes that Annie is a younger woman who her father wants to marry to take care of him, and have sex with for free. She further expresses skepticism that Annie has the right intentions for marrying David.

In the same vein, Nicole’s mother is worried that Nicole’s Moroccan fiancé, Azan, is only using her to get to the United States. Azan is also portrayed as a gold digger. Nicole tells Azan that she does not have enough money to file for his K-1 visa and she says she hopes their love is strong enough to last. Azan replies “I don’t know”. This portrayal implies that Azan is only with Nicole for her money and her ability to bring him to the United States. Similarly, Blake’s Finnish fiancée, Jasmin is portrayed as dishonest. Blake’s friends suggest that Jasmin is only using Blake to get to the United States to be with her sister, who previously won the visa lottery. Jasmin and her sister had applied for the visa lottery some years ago, however, only her sister won the lottery.
Blake’s friends therefore believe Jasmin is only using Blake to get to the United States. Lastly, Jorge’s Russian fiancée, Anfisa is also portrayed as a gold digger who is only interested in Jorge’s money. Anfisa is shown as being upset when Jorge does not buy her the things he promised her. She jokingly says “money is the most important thing in marriage”.

2. Immigrants are irrational

The second theme that emerged is that immigrants are irrational and thrive on conflict. An instance here is the portrayal of Jorge’s Russian fiancé, Anfisa. Anfisa is portrayed as irrational and hot tempered. She keyed ‘idiot’ on Jorge’s car when Jorge refuses to spend time with her and buy her the things he promised her for. Anfisa is often shown screaming at Jorge and quarrelling with him. Jorge, however, promised Anfisa many material things before bringing her to the United States, which could have been done in a bid to keep her in the relationship. Likewise, Blake’s Finnish fiancée, Jasmin is portrayed as an unsupportive and irrational partner. She refuses to attend Blake’s close friend’s birthday party because she is uncomfortable in their social setting. Jasmin neither enjoys drinking alcohol nor listening to rap music. However, her fiancée and his friends own a record label which produces rap music, and they often consume alcohol. This explains her discomfort around Blake’s friends.

Similarly, Mike’s Ukrainian fiancé, Natalie is equally portrayed as irrational. She squabbles with Mike for not believing in God and refusing to practise her faith. She throws her engagement ring back at him. She also says she does not love Mike yet but has strong feelings that can grow into love. However, in the “Tell All” episode, where
couples are interviewed and open up about their stories, Natalie reveals that Mike cheated on her, causing her to reconsider her love for him.

3. **Immigrants are a threat to national unity and culture**

   The third emerging theme is that immigrants are a threat to the unity of American families. Immigrants are portrayed as strangers who come into the families of their American partners and bring about disunity within the families. The reason for this rift differs from family to family; however, most American families believe that the immigrant’s mission is to take their family members away from them. For instance, Luis is portrayed as bringing about friction between Molly and her older daughter, Olivia. Olivia eventually moves out of the house when she discovers that her mother and Luis got married in the Dominican Republic without telling anybody. Olivia believes that Luis was going to take her mother away from her. She says “…somebody from another country gets to come in and take my mum away, I don’t like it”. Molly also reveals that her father has also not spoken to her in two months because he is opposed to her relationship with Luis. Similarly, David’s marriage to his Thai fiancé, Annie, causes a further rift between David and his children. His daughter believes that Annie is taking him away from them. Given the 25-year age gap between David and Annie, his children think their father, who leaves them in the United States for four years to pursue a life in Thailand and then returns with a girl half his age, has misplaced priorities. His daughter, Ashley, who is closer to Annie in age, expresses her skepticism about Annie’s intentions. This expression causes a further strain in her relationship with her father. Finally, Nicole also plans to move to Morocco, away from her family with her young daughter, May,
against her family’s wishes, if Azan’s visa is not approved. These examples imply that immigrants bring disunity into the American families to which they come.

4. Immigrants are a threat to the economy

The fourth theme that emerged is that immigrants are lazy. For instance, Tania’s South African fiancé, Syngin is portrayed as lazy and lacking ambition. Tania complains that Syngin did not learn wood working while she was away on a work trip in Costa Rica and he has refused to make efforts pursue a career path. Tania comments that Syngin has quit jobs in the past with no follow through and without plans. However, at the Tell All, Syngin notes that he worked in the mines in South Africa and it was a terrible experience because he lost friends while working in the mines. Syngin revealed that he has trauma from the experience, which accounts for his fear to get just any job he does not like. Also, Nicole’s mother is worried that her daughter’s Moroccan fiancé, Azan is only using Nicole for the visa while milking her for her money. Azan says “if I didn’t meet Nicole, I would still have a job”. This implies that he quit his job after meeting Nicole and became finally dependent on her.

Similarly, Blake’s Finnish fiancé, Jasmin, is portrayed as lazy because she is unwilling to work even though they need the additional income. Jasmin says she “just wants to focus on her inner peace and have a good mind”. She says she is not work-oriented and she is comfortable with Blake being the breadwinner. However, Blake’s mother expresses the financial burden Blake would have to bear in a one income household in Los Angeles. Blake also notes that it is hard for him to be the sole provider.

5. Immigrants are family-oriented
The final theme that emerged from this post-election inductive analysis is that immigrants are family centred. This theme covers family approval both from the families of the immigrants and the American families of which they are becoming a part of. In one instance, Anna’s Turkish fiancé, Mursel is unable to stand up to his family when they oppose his relationship with Anna because she has children from a previous marriage. Although his family asks him to return to Turkey and he makes the painful decision to obey their order to return to Turkey before the end of the 90 days, his actions show how important his family’s approval is to him. He says “I don’t want to get on the plane today, I mean, I am going to Turkey unwillingly, I have to go for my family, for my mother”.

Michael’s Brazilian fiancée, Juliana, also seeks the approval of Michael’s ex-wife, Sarah. Juliana makes efforts to become close friends with Sarah by inviting her to see her wedding dress and becoming instantly close to her fiancé’s children. Speaking about Michael’s ex-wife, Juliana says “I think Sarah likes me, I hope…I wanna be [her] friend, her best friend”. Juliana also breaks down in tears when none of her family members text her on her wedding day to show their support. Nevertheless, she continues to fund her family’s life in Brazil, even though they do not speak with her. Lastly, Narkyia also finds out that her Nigerian fiancé, Lowo, attempted to reconnect with the mother of his son, at the beginning of their relationship. He did this because his family expected him to get married to the mother of his child, thus he made the attempt in order to please his family.

**Deductive Analysis**

Using a deductive approach, the researcher identified deductive themes from academic literature, and those upheld by President Trump. From the identified deductive
themes, the study found the following themes to be reinforced in the pre-election deductive analysis (in order of the greatest proportion of time to the smallest proportion of time allotted to the theme across coded episodes in the show):

1. Immigrants are dishonest (11.1% of analysed minutes were dedicated to this idea)
2. Immigrants are determined and persistent (9.1%)
3. Immigrants are culturally distant because of their skin color (5.4%)
4. Immigrants are a potential threat to the American economy (1.3%)
5. Immigrants are a threat to national unity and culture (1.1%)

The following themes were found to be reinforced in episodes of 90 Day Fiancé aired after the 2016 presidential election:

1. Immigrants are dishonest (11.6%)
2. Immigrants are a potential threat to the American economy (7.3%)
3. Immigrants are a threat to national unity and culture (6.5%)
4. Immigrants are culturally distant because of their language skills (1.7%)
5. Immigrants are incompetent and undependable (1.7%)
6. Immigrants are criminals (1.5%)

Instances of the deductive themes were identified and coded using time stamps. In other words, the length of time allocated to these themes on the show was indicative of the producers’ attempt to highlight these themes and reinforce them. First, the themes which were found to be reinforced in 90 Day Fiancé before the 2016 presidential election will be discussed.

1. Immigrants are dishonest
A total of 14 minutes and 4 seconds (11.1%) were dedicated to this theme in the three episodes deductively analysed before the election. One instance of this theme was observed in the relationship between Mike’s and his Russian fiancé, Aziza. Mike’s family believes that Aziza only wants to marry Mike for a green card. Mike’s mother explicitly said to Aziza, “I figured out the plan…I’m gonna go to America, marry the guy, and after the wedding, I’m gonna feed them all rat poison. No? That’s not the plan?” Mike’s mother also asks her why she did not meet a man in Russia. Also, Kelli, Mike’s friend thinks his Russian fiancé Aziza has ulterior motives. She says Aziza wanted to come to the United States on the work visa and got denied and then suddenly she chose to come on the K-1 visa, thus implying that Aziza used Mike to get to the United States in order to work.

Similarly, Brett’s friend, Sue is also skeptical of his Filipino fiancé, Daya’s intentions. She notes that many Asian women marry American men, come to America, and then divorce the men afterwards. Likewise, Jorge’s sister, Loudres, tells Anfisa, Jorge’s Russian fiancée that “…as a family, we talk and we’re like, is she using my brother?” Loudres believes that Anfisa is only marrying Jorge for his money. She perceives her to be a mail order bride. In a similar way, Danielle’s son Corey believes that his mother’s relationship with her Tunisian fiancé, Mohammed, will not last because Mohammed is scamming his mother. Likewise, Danny’s father, Charles, questions his South African fiancée’s intentions, he asks if she want a green card. Finally, Matt’s Ukranian fiancé, Alla, is also perceived as having ulterior motives for moving to the United States. Matt’s best friend, Patrick, also believes that Alla is using Matt to stay in
the country and Matt’s family also asks her if being married to an American is something she has been thinking about for some time.

2. **Immigrants are determined and persistent**

The second theme that was reinforced on the show is that immigrants are determined and persistent. A total of 11 minutes and 34 seconds (9.1%) was dedicated to this theme. This positive theme portrays immigrants as persistent, determined, and hardworking. For instance, Alan’s Brazilian fiancée, Kirylam is portrayed in this manner. She follows through with a referral and works hard as an amateur model in a photoshoot. Kirylam explores an unanticipated modelling opportunity without any prior experience and is excited about the possibility of modelling career and determined to follow through with it notwithstanding her Mormon faith and her fiancé’s skepticism. Similarly, Brett’s Filipino fiancée, Daya, is portrayed as determined to foster a good relationship with her fiancé’s daughter, Cassidy. She becomes an instant mother to Cassidy when Cassidy comes visiting for the summer, and although Cassidy does not easily warm up to her, Daya persistently makes efforts to build a relationship with her step-daughter to-be.

In a similar manner, Russ’ Columbian fiancée, Paola’s also portrayed as determined and adaptive. She is determined to learn about Russ’ favourite sports and quickly learns how to play the games. On subsequent episodes, Paola also works hard to break into the modelling industry in Miami. Finally, Danielle’s Tunisian fiancé, Mohammed, is portrayed as determined to adapt to Danielle’s financial situation by cutting down on the wedding expenses. He is initially portrayed as supportive of Danielle and determined to work through their financial difficulties. Immigrants express their
desire to work and earn money immediately once they receive their green cards in order to be less financially dependent on their American partners.

3. **Immigrants are culturally distant because of the color of their skin or language skills**

   This theme refers to instances where immigrants are portrayed as culturally distant to Americans because of the color of their skin or their language skills. A total of 6 minutes and 53 seconds (5.4%) was dedicated to this theme. In this instance, Amy is portrayed as culturally distant because of the color of her skin. Amy, a South African with a multicultural background, faces her sceptic Caucasian father-in-law to-be, when she meets him two days before her wedding to fiancé, Danny. Danny’s father, Charles, does not hesitate to register his displeasure with his son’s choice to marry his mixed race South African fiancée, Amy. Charles believes that his son’s interracial marriage will present some challenges for the couple and their children. He asks, “are you two prepared for an interracial marriage in our country where it’s not accepted?” Interestingly, this episode was aired in 2014, a time when interracial marriages were already widely accepted and fairly common in the United States. When Amy asks if he knows anything about South Africa, he says it is one place he and his wife have decided never to go. Amy goes ahead to talk about frequent questions she gets from people asking if Africans live in huts.

4. **Immigrants are a potential threat to the American economy**

   Under this theme, immigrants were portrayed as dependent on their American partners, this a potential threat to the economy. A total of 1 minute and 35 seconds (1.3%) was dedicated to this theme. For instance, Jorge’s Russian fiancée, Anfisa, is
portrayed as a materialistic gold digger who is only marrying Jorge for his money. Anfisa constantly complains that Jorge promised to buy her many things but he has not fulfilled his promise to her. In a similar fashion, Danielle’s Tunisian fiancé, Mohammed is portrayed as unsupportive when Danielle eventually loses her job. Mohammed says he cannot live in the situation because he expected life to be better in the United States and not worse. Mohammed’s statement suggests that he is Danielle’s financial responsibility, and if Danielle is unable to take care of him financially, he may become dependent on the government for financial maintenance.

5. **Immigrants are a threat to national unity and culture**

   This theme recorded one instance where an immigrant was portrayed as a threat to American culture for 1 minute and 25 seconds (1.1% of the pre-election episodes). In the show, immigrants have been portrayed as being opposed to the American culture of bachelor and bachelorette parties. Their opposition is portrayed as an attempt to control their American partners, or an outright attempt to dismantle a long standing American culture. For instance, Jason’s Brazilian fiancée, Cassia, vehemently opposes the idea of Jason’s bachelor party because she expresses her distrust for Jason’s friends whom she believes will bring prostitutes to his room during the party. When Jason mentions that it is tradition, she firmly states “I don’t care about the tradition. I’m not from here, I don’t like this idea”.

   Lastly, the themes which reinforce the identified positive and negative stereotypes of immigrants in post-election episodes that were deductively analysed are discussed below. Some identified themes were found to reinforce both positive and negative stereotypes
associated with immigrants both in academic literature and those upheld by President Trump after the 2016 presidential election.

1. **Immigrants are dishonest**

   This recurring theme was also reinforced in *90 Day Fiancé* after the 2016 presidential election, garnering a total of 29 minutes and 48 seconds (11.6%) of airtime. Although this theme received a considerably lengthier airtime on the show, according to TLC’s website, longer airtime was allocated to the episodes from Season 5 episode 5. Subsequent episodes were aired for an average of 86 minutes, as opposed to the initial average of 42 minutes in earlier seasons. All episodes examined under for the post-election analyses Season 5 was however aired after the 2016 presidential election. The reason for this lengthier screen time was however not given.

   In one instance of the theme, Ashley’s Jamaican fiancé Jay, is portrayed as dishonest and unfaithful. Jay is caught on a dating app talking to an 18-year-old lady two weeks after his wedding to Ashley. He is, however, 20 years old while Ashley is 31 years old. Likewise, Kalani’s Samoan fiancé, Asuelu is perceived as dishonest by her family, particularly by Kalani’s sister and father. Kalani’s sister, Kolini believes that Asuelu got Kalani pregnant the second time so he could stay in the United States. Similarly, Eric’s Indonesian fiancé, Leida, is portrayed as having ulterior motives for being in the United States. Leida says she always dreamed of living and pursuing her medical career in the United States. This gives the perception that she only used Eric to fulfil that dream.

   Also, Mursel, Anna’s Turkish fiancé, is portrayed as dishonest when he tells her that he plans to hide the existence of her three children from his family for possibly ten years. When he eventually tells his family about Anna’s children, he is asked to break off
the relationship and return to Turkey immediately. Also, Robert’s friend tells him that Dominican girls “… can play the game, once they get that green card, it’s a done deal”. He says all Dominican girls think about is dollars and dollar signs. This generalizing statement is indicative of a stereotype associated with female Dominican immigrants. Accordingly, Michael’s Brazilian fiancé Juliana is portrayed as a gold digger who wants to marry Michael for his money. At her interview, she is asked if she has ever worked as a prostitute in the last ten years. Although this is a standard procedure question, the producers of 90 Day Fiancé highlighted this question over all of the other questions she was asked during her interview. When Michael discusses his concern with his lawyer regarding Juliana’s interview question, the lawyer replies, “…there is a big trigger for the question, South American countries, big age gap…”. Juliana is portrayed as likely using Michael as a ticket out of poverty because of the eighteen-year age gap and economic gap between them.

2. Immigrants are a potential threat to the American economy

The second theme reinforced after in post-election episodes is that immigrants are a threat to the American economy because they are a financial burden on Americans. A total of 18 minutes and 48 (7.3%) seconds was dedicated to this theme. For instance, Elizabeth’s father, Chuck, believes that her Moldovan fiancé, Andrei is going to be a financial burden on him. He believes that Andrei just wants to be in the United States and he will end up supporting Andrei and Elizabeth’s family financially. Likewise, David’s Thai fiancée, Annie is portrayed as financially dependent on David when she expresses her concern about David’s lack of money. Similarly, Josh’s Filipino fiancé, Aika is portrayed as a financial burden because she demands that Josh buy her a new expensive
engagement ring that he cannot afford because she does not want to wear the one he gave
his ex-wife. Josh comments that “when you constantly talk about money and rings that
just makes me feel like I’m being used or like kind of bad”. Similarly, Eric’s Indonesian
fiancée, Leida, is portrayed as a financial burden when she says that “…we only have
Eric to take care of me and my son”. Also, Robert’s Dominican fiancé, Anny, is
portrayed as financially dependent on Robert’s tight income when she requests that
Robert buy her clothes and a new iPhone which he promised her. Anny also asks for a
wedding on Miami Beach. When Robert takes her to a thrift store to buy clothes, Anny
becomes upset that Robert brought her to shop for used clothes. She tells him she
expected him to take her to buy nice clothes and not used clothes which she does not
wear even in her country.

3. Immigrants are a threat to national unity and culture

Under this theme, two sub-themes were identified. The first is that immigrants
cause divisions within American families. The second is that because immigrants are
unable to assimilate, they pose a threat to the American unity because they will bring
divisions in the American culture. A total of 16 minutes and 52 seconds (6.5%) was
dedicated to this theme. One instance of the first sub-theme is when Eric’s Indonesian
fiancé, Leida, is portrayed as the cause of the division between Eric and his daughters,
particularly his first daughter, Natasha. Leida’s arrival with her son, Allesandro, brought
about some friction between Eric and Leida and Eric’s daughter (who lives with Eric and
jointly pays the rent for the apartment with her father). The constant friction led to Eric
deciding to kick his daughter out of the house and choosing to prioritize his fiancé and
her son over his daughter.
In a similar manner, Larissa, Colt’s Columbian fiancé, is portrayed as quarrelsome and bringing about disunity within Colt’s family. Larissa arrives in the house Colt shared with his mother. Colt and his mother also share a car and a joint bank account. This peculiar relationship between Colt and his mother frustrated Larissa who always ends up in one disagreement or another with Colt’s mother. Similarly, Larissa has a fall out with Colt’s cousin, John and uninvites him to her wedding. John, is Colt’s only cousin in Las Vegas who is expected at their wedding.

Also, David, Evelin’s Spanish fiancé is portrayed as attempting to take Evelin away from Claremont, New Hampshire, where her music career exists and where her family resides. Although Evelin feels comfortable in Claremont near her music and family, David wishes to explore the country more and believes that Evelin’s music is keeping her in Claremont. Evelin’s producer and family are, however, not pleased about David’s plan to take her away from Claremont. David’s attempt at convincing Evelin to leave Claremont is portrayed as an attempt to take her away from her family and divide them.

In the second sub-theme, immigrants are also portrayed as unable to assimilate to the American culture. For instance, Nicole’s Moroccan fiancé, Azan is portrayed as someone who will struggle to assimilate in the American culture. He fears that he will not find his Moroccan culture in the United States and that people will disrespect his culture. Nicole and Azan’s relationship face cultural clashes when Nicole wants to publicly display her affection for Azan but Azan constantly pushes back stating that his culture and religion do not support such public display and Nicole should respect his culture. In another instance, when Elizabeth’s Moldovan fiancé, Andrei, meets with her sisters, he
strongly kicks against Elizabeth’s plan to attend a bachelorette party her sisters are organizing for her in Las Vegas. He does not agree with the American tradition of bachelor’s and bachelorette parties and had a hard time embracing it.

4. **Immigrants are culturally distant because of their language skills**

   A total of 4 minutes and 30 seconds (1.7%) was dedicated to this theme. Anna’s Turkish fiancé, Mursel, is portrayed as culturally distant because he has challenges communicating in English with Anna and her family. Mursel relies on a translation application to translate his Turkish to English for Anna and to translate Anna’s English to Turkish for him. For example, when Anna and Mursel tell Anna’s children that Mursel’s family does not know about them, the entire conversation with the help of the translation application. Anna’s children have a hard time communicating with Mursel. This language barrier also contributes to Anna’s first son’s hesitation to accept Mursel as a part of the family.

5. **Immigrants are undependable**

   The fifth theme being reinforced on *90 Day Fiancé* is that immigrants are undependable. A total of 4 minutes and 22 seconds (1.7%) was dedicated to this theme. For example, Molly’s Dominican fiancé, Luis is portrayed as an undependable step-father to her two daughters. Luis, 26, is portrayed as saying inappropriate things to Molly’s teenage daughter, Olivia. He asks Olivia if she wants to get married to her boyfriend or if she is just with him for sex. Furthermore, Luis is portrayed as incapable of taking care of Molly’s younger daughter Kensley at the playground. When Luis attempts to push Kensley on the swing by standing in front of her, she asks him to go behind her to push her. Luis, however, continues to tell her that “it’s okay”, until Kensley tells him that he
does not know how to swing her because he is not from her country. Molly goes ahead to have a conversation with him asking him to step up to his responsibilities as a step-father. Luis remarks that he feels like a child living in Molly’s house and everything is happening all too fast.

In a similar manner, Elizabeth’s Moldovan fiancé, Andrei is also portrayed as undependable and incapable of taking care of Elizabeth after getting married. Elizabeth’s father, Chuck, comments that Andrei and Elizabeth would become financially dependent on him if they get married. This comment implies that Andrei cannot be depended upon to care for his family. Also, Emily’s Russian fiancé, Sasha, is portrayed as undependable. Sasha had been in two previous marriages before meeting Emily. When Emily, who is nine months pregnant, meets with Sasha’s ex-wife, she expresses concern that Sasha would leave Emily the same way he left her. Lastly, Tania’s South African fiancé, Syngin, is portrayed as undependable as he is unable to make a choice and a concrete plan towards pursuing a career path. He considers being a bartender, then a fireman, an actor in Hollywood, and a singer in the opera. Because he is portrayed as indecisive, he cannot be depended upon because Tania mentions that he has quit jobs in the past without following through.

6. Immigrants are criminals

Lastly, a theme that was reinforced in 90 Day Fiancé is that immigrants are criminals. A total of 4 minutes (1.5%) was dedicated to the only instance of this theme on 90 Day Fiancé. Colt’s Brazilian fiancé, Larissa is portrayed as a criminal. She is charged with domestic battery after an argument with Colt gets heated shortly before their wedding. Colt calls the police. Although Colt then asks the police not to come anymore,
they still show up nonetheless. Although Colt does not press charges, the state of Nevada presses charges of domestic battery against Larissa. Larissa is consequently portrayed as a violent criminal.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

In this study, the depictions of immigrants on TLC’s hit show, 90 Day Fiancé, were analysed using the following research questions:

1. How are immigrants on the show 90 Day Fiancé portrayed? What, if any, stereotypes of immigrants are dominant in the show?
2. What effect, if any, does the 2016 election have on dominant immigrant stereotypes on the show?
3. Which theory, reinforcement theory or second-level agenda-setting theory, appears more dominant on the show? Does reality television attempt to shape new stereotypes or reinforce existing stereotypes through its portrayal of immigrants?

The results will be discussed from the deductive and inductive analyses conducted, and with reference to the two time periods (pre-election and post-election) in which the episodes of the show were examined. Consequently, this analysis will attempt to sufficiently answer all three research questions posed earlier.

Research Question 1

The first research question inquires about how immigrants on the show are portrayed and what stereotypes of immigrants are dominant on the show. From the inductive analysis, which identified emerging themes, and the deductive analysis, which identified reinforced themes, it can be concluded that immigrants were portrayed both positively and negatively on 90 Day Fiancé. From the inductive and deductive analyses, the majority of stereotypes associated with immigrants before the 2016 presidential
election were negative. From a total of ten stereotypic themes associated with immigrants on *90 Day Fiancé* before the 2016 election, only three of those themes were positive. The positive themes that emerged from the pre-election inductive analysis were: immigrants are family-oriented, and immigrants are risk takers and are adaptable. Because immigrants often feel alone, attacked, untrusted, and unaccepted when they move to the United States, particularly on a K-1 visa, they constantly seek approval from their partners’ families and friends. The only positive theme that was reinforced on the show from the pre-election deductive analysis is that immigrants are determined and persistent. All immigrants on *90 Day Fiancé* are depicted as risk takers who leave the comfort and familiar culture and lifestyle in their home country to start and build up a life together with their American partner. Although immigrants such as Michael’s Brazilian fiancée, Juliana, seemed to just hope that the relationship would turn out positively, her decision to leave her modeling career and move across the world to be with Michael is a risk that can only be taken by someone who is determined and adventuresome. It is, however, important to note that more negative stereotypic themes emerged and were reinforced about immigrants on the show than positive ones.

Table 1.3 outlines which stereotypes emerged from the inductive analysis and which ones were reinforced by the deductive analysis. The superscripts used in table 1.3 below show trends in the themes. Descriptions of the trends according to the superscripts numbers are given in the table 1.4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes- Inductive Analysis</th>
<th>Reinforced Themes- Deductive Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-election</strong></td>
<td><strong>Post-election</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive immigrant ideologies</strong></td>
<td>Immigrants are family-oriented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

65
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative immigrant stereotypes</th>
<th>Created or Reinforced</th>
<th>Description of trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are adaptable and</td>
<td>Created</td>
<td>This theme was only identified in the inductive analysis. It may be indicative of the show’s attempt at trying to develop this description of immigrants more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are risk takers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are dishonest</td>
<td>Reinforced</td>
<td>This theme occurs both before and after the election and in the inductive and deductive analyses, so this stereotype is one that is being reinforced. However, after the election it may be being more strongly reinforced (according to the deductive analysis).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are dishonest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are irrational</td>
<td>Reinforced</td>
<td>This theme indicates a stereotype that is being reinforced by the show and that gains much more traction after the election in 2016. It was barely noted before the election and didn’t even emerge as a theme in the inductive analysis prior to the election, but post-election it is one of the stronger stereotypes reflected by the show.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are irrational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are a potential threat to the economy</td>
<td>Reinforced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are culturally distant because of their skin color</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are a potential threat to the economy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are culturally distant because of their skin color</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are a potential threat to the economy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are an irrational threat to national unity and culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are a threat to national unity and culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are a potential threat to the economy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are a threat to national unity and culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are a potential threat to the economy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are culturally distant because of their language skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are culturally distant because of their language skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are culturally distant because of their language skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are culturally distant because of their language skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are incompetent and undependable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are criminals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.3 Summary of emergent themes and reinforced themes
Reinforced

This theme indicates a stereotype that the show consistently reinforces and attempts to present both before and after the 2016 election. The trend from the deductive analysis however shows that the time spent reinforcing the theme increased by 6% after the 2016 election.

Reinforced

These themes indicate that the idea that immigrants are culturally distant is being reinforced by the show, although the rationale for the distance seems to change over time from an emphasis based on skin color to one based on language proficiency.

Reinforced

This theme shows a positive stereotype that was being reinforced before the election in a fairly strong capacity, but it then it is missing from post-election analyses (both inductive and deductive).

Created

These themes were observed to be new themes presented on the show before and after the 2016 election.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reinforced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reinforced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reinforced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Created</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.4 Observed trend from emergent and reinforced themes from the show

The most dominant immigrant stereotypes observed were all negative. Prior to the 2016 presidential election, it was observed that the show attempted to present three negative stereotypes of immigrants, the most dominant of which was that immigrants are dishonest. The other two were: immigrants are a potential threat to the economy, and immigrants are domineering. The show also reinforced the dominant stereotype that immigrants are dishonest. For instance, when Michael’s young Brazilian fiancée, Juliana, goes for her K-1 visa interview, she is asked if she has ever worked as a prostitute in the last ten years. Juliana admits that she felt insulted by the question and Michael remarks that he is not a pimp. Although this is a standard procedure question in U.S. visa applications, the producers of 90 Day Fiancé highlighted this question as though she was not asked any other questions during the interview. When Michael discusses his concern with his lawyer regarding Juliana’s interview question, the lawyer explains the circumstances that likely led to the question being asked (country of origin, age
difference). Nevertheless, this production decision has the effect of portraying Juliana as someone with dishonest intentions who is likely using Michael as a ticket out of poverty.

In addition, the show reinforced the stereotypes that immigrants are a potential threat to the American economy because they are financial burdens on their American petitioners. Finally, the show reinforced the stereotypic theme that immigrants are a threat to national unity and culture, and immigrants are culturally distant because of their skin color. Danny’s South African fiancé, Amy, who is from a multicultural background faces a challenge from Danny’s father, Charles who is skeptical of their interracial marriage. It is interesting that although the particular episode with this instance was aired in 2014, when interracial marriages were already fairly common in the United States, Amy still faces a racist father-in-law who is concerned about the color of her skin.

After the 2016 presidential election, the show still attempted to present the dominant and reoccurring immigrant stereotype that immigrants are dishonest. Along with that, the show attempted to present new negative stereotypic themes such as: immigrants are irrational, immigrants threaten national unity and culture, and immigrants are a potential threat to the economy. However, when the show attempts to portray immigrants as lazy and as financial threats or burdens to their American spouses, the show fails to explain that the immigrants are not legally permitted to work using their K-1 non-immigrant visas until they apply for, and receive work authorization. According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) (n.d.), an immigrant may apply immediately for work authorization, along with their marriage-based green card application. The average processing time, however, for an application for employment authorization is four and a half months as of September 30, 2019 (USCIS,
n.d). Given the possibility of an existing backlog of applications, processing may take a longer time. Within that time, applicants are not legally permitted to be in paid employment. Consequently, immigrants do not have the option to work for pay, and therefore are financially dependent on their American partners or petitioners. As a matter of fact, many immigrants on the show express their desire to get jobs after receiving their authorization. The failure of the producers to educate audience about the peculiarities of the K-1 visa often result in an inaccurate portrayal and perception of immigrants.

In addition, the producers of 90 Day Fiancé also reinforced the dominant stereotype that immigrants are dishonest. The show also reinforced other negative stereotypes such as immigrants are a potential threat to the American economy, immigrants are undependable, immigrants are a threat to the unity within American families, and immigrants are culturally distant because of language skills. Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) explain that several immigrant attributes might contribute to ideologies of social and cultural distance, such as difficulty with English and differing religious or cultural practices. These differences could provide an explanation for why immigrants, such as Anna’s Turkish fiancé, Mursel, who do not speak English, or those from outside Europe are viewed more negatively than those who are fluent in English or share common cultural or religious practices. Likewise, the literal transcription of the grammar of the immigrants while speaking may contribute to a distancing of immigrants. Although 90 Day Fiancé is an American show, the use of a literal transcription for the words uttered by the immigrants, and not those spoken by the Americans suggests that the show, which is watched by viewers around the world, is only primarily for Americans. With a global audience, it is expected that if the producers of 90 Day Fiancé
provided literal subtitles for the words of the immigrant cast members, the same should be done for the words spoken by the American cast members. Furthermore, the literal subtitles used in the show highlight the grammatical errors immigrants make while speaking English. It is unclear if the literal subtitling is an intentional effort at highlighting the immigrants’ inadequate command of the English language, or if the subtitles simply replicate the grammar of the original speaker. If the latter is the case, it is expected that the words of all cast members, both immigrants and Americans alike, should be similarly subtitled.

In the instances where immigrants are depicted as undependable, the researcher observes a major factor that may contribute to the portrayal. For instance, Molly’s Dominican fiancé, Luis, is 26 years old, while Molly is a 41-year-old with two daughters. Luis is expected to instantly step into the shoes of a step-father, and when he is unable to sufficiently fulfil his role as a step-father, he is perceived as undependable and incapable. For instance, Luis is portrayed as incapable of properly helping Kensley on the swing at the playground. However, Luis’ limited understanding of the English language may account for his inability to understand Kensley’s request.

Overall, the show seems to reinforce existing stereotypes. Which ones it is reinforcing, however, change over time. Prior to the 2016 election, the show seemed to do better at attempting to present and reinforcing positive themes of immigrants as compared with the 2016 election. Following the 2016 presidential election, the show was observed to be reinforcing negative stereotypes of immigrants. Only one stereotype seemed to be a new representation of immigrants developed through show content and storyline; that of immigrants as family oriented. This attempt to develop a positive
perspective on immigrants through second-level agenda setting scenario seems to persist over time, but its prevalence may be lessening as new episodes of the show are developed. These observations lead to the discussion of this study’s second research question.

*Research Question 2*

The second research question inquires if the 2016 presidential election had any effect on the dominant immigrant stereotypes on the show. The researcher observed that the 2016 Presidential election appears to be a critical factor in the portrayal of immigrants on the show. From the analysis of the themes on the show, it is clear that more negative themes were associated with immigrants after the 2016 presidential election than before the 2016 presidential election. Using both the deductive and inductive approaches, the researcher recorded more negative stereotypes after the election than before the election. Before the election, three positive stereotypes of immigrants were recorded, while seven negative stereotypes of immigrants were recorded in total. In terms of the reinforcement of the deductive themes, the researcher observed that all negative stereotypes, aside from immigrants being culturally distant because of the color of their skin, received more time allocation after the election than before the election. Although the differences were not enormous in other themes, the stereotypes that immigrants are an economic threat and a threat to the American unity, was noted in the inductive analysis where the theme was not prevalent pre-election but was often displayed post-election.

After the election, one positive stereotype of immigrants was recorded, while ten negative stereotypes of immigrants were recorded. Given President Trump’s largely negative characterization of immigrants, these findings indicate that the 2016 presidential
election may be a factor accounting for the increased negative portrayal of immigrants on the show after the election. Of the three negative immigrant stereotypes upheld by President Trump, one of those stereotypes was reinforced on the show, which is ‘immigrants are criminals’. Colt’s Brazilian fiancé, Larissa was arrested and charged for domestic battery by the state of Nevada. Although the episode analysed only touched on this theme briefly, subsequent episodes dedicated a lot of time to Larissa’s arrest and court hearing. As discussed in the results, Larissa and Colt’s living situation with Colt’s mother aggravated Larissa and often caused disagreements between the pair. Larissa constantly felt attacked and alone because she felt that Colt and his mother had formed an alliance against her.

*Research Question 3*

Finally, the third research question inquires about which theory of the two theories within the study’s theoretical framework, appears to be more dominant on the show. Furthermore, this study attempts to answer the question of the overall role of reality television in either attempting to shape new stereotypes in agreement with the second level agenda setting theory or reinforcing existing stereotypes, in agreement with reinforcement theory, through its depiction of immigrants on *90 Day Fiancé*.

The researcher observed that the show predominantly reinforces existing stereotypes. In some instances, the show seemed to be attempting to shape new stereotypes (pre-election we see the emphasis on immigrants being family oriented, but post-election the new stereotype seems to be that immigrants are irrational). Using the theoretical frameworks of this study, which are the second level agenda setting theory and the reinforcement theory, the study’s results reveal that the show does reinforce more
stereotypes of immigrants than it attempts to newly shape or create. Although a total of ten themes emerged from the pre-election and post-election inductive analysis, only four themes were not found in published academic literature or popular public rhetoric. The themes that the show attempts to develop include: immigrants are family-oriented, immigrants are adaptable and risk-takers, immigrants are domineering, and immigrants are irrational. In the deductive analysis, however, a total of eleven themes were found to be reinforced on 90 Day Fiancé. It should be noted, however, that four of those eleven identified deductive themes were commonly observed in both the pre-election and post-election analyses. Consequently, the more dominant theory on the show is the reinforcement theory. This result however does not nullify the attempt of the producers of 90 Day Fiancé to shape new stereotypes, however, more stereotypes were reinforced than were newly introduced.

Based on the results of this study, it can be deduced that the overall dominant role of 90 Day Fiancé is to mirror society by reinforcing existing both positive, but largely negative immigrant stereotypes. Given the scripted nature of reality television shows as earlier discussed, it is apparent that reality television largely treads in the inaccurate, incomplete, and unfair stereotyping of immigrants.

**Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Studies**

The researcher recognises some limitations which may have impacted the outcome of this study. The first is the qualitative nature of the study. Given that the researcher was the primary research instrument for this study, subjectivity could not be completely eliminated. The researcher is an African immigrant in the United States who is interested in investigating the representation of immigrants in American entertainment
media. However, the researcher ensured subjectivity was reduced to the barest minimum with the triangulation of two different methodological approaches. Secondly, the sample size may not have been truly representative of the population. Only twelve episodes were analysed out of 80 episodes. Although all seasons of 90 Day Fiancé were represented within the sample, a larger sample size may have produced an alternative set of results. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalised to the entire series, but are only suitable to be applied to the episodes analysed in this study.

For future studies, the researcher suggests that the sample size be expanded to accommodate more episodes of 90 Day Fiancé and its spin off shows. Additionally, the researcher suggests that a comparative analysis be conducted to compare the stories of 90 Day Fiancé cast members with couples outside of the show who have gone through the K-1 visa process in order to examine the validity of the show’s depictions. Lastly, the researcher suggests that a comparative analysis be conducted to compare the portrayal of immigrant cast members before the 90 days, during the 90 days, and after the 90 days using the show’s many spin-offs.

**Conclusion**

This present study was conducted to investigate the representation of immigrants in American reality television. The study consequently focused on the original 90 Day Fiancé seasons that are popular among audiences in the United States and across the world. The researcher sought to address three main matters: what dominant stereotypes associated with immigrants are portrayed on 90 Day Fiancé, what side of the media effects argument does the show appear to support through its representation of
immigrants, and lastly, what effect did the 2016 presidential election have on the representation of immigrants in the show.

Weighing in on the media effects debate, the study went a step further to specifically examine whether reality television attempts to shape new stereotypes of immigrants or simply reinforce existing ones. Using the second level agenda setting theory, which argues that the media offers audience what to think about by reason of the salience attributed to some issues over others, the study sought to understand if *90 Day Fiancé* attempts to shape new stereotypes. Similarly, the study used reinforcement theory, which argues that media has limited power and can only reinforce existing beliefs or preconceived notions of audience members, to understand if *90 Day Fiancé* simply mirrors prevalent immigrant stereotypes in the society. This two-sided exploration informed the use of a deductive-inductive approach to analyse randomly selected episodes of the show. Finally, the popularly-reported stereotypes upheld by the current president of the United States, President Trump informed the researcher’s effort to examine whether the President’s election into office in 2016 impacted the representation of immigrants on *90 Day Fiancé*.

Irrespective of the positive or negative stereotypic themes attributed to immigrants on *90 Day Fiancé*, stereotypes are characteristically harmful. Although the study identified some positive representations of immigrants on the show, positive representation is not sufficient to mitigate the anti-immigrant themes the show reinforces. As Alsultany (2012) argues regarding racial stereotyping of Muslims and Arabs in media representations, a similar argument can also be made here, that a diversity of representations, even an abundance of positive depictions of immigrants, does not in
itself solve the problem of immigrant stereotyping. Consequently, a plethora of negative immigrant representations is a recipe for continued immigrant stereotyping. Through this study’s analysis, *90 Day Fiancé* has proven to be a fertile ground for the harvesting and reinforcement of anti-immigrant stereotyping. The fact that only one positive theme was attributed to immigrants after the 2016 presidential election, in comparison to three positive themes before the 2016 presidential election, may be an indication of the show’s attempt to bolster negative immigrant stereotypes upheld by President Trump. This result is indicative of the fact that political eras may have an effect on immigrant representations in media per time.

The relationship between political eras and the representation of immigrants in the United States dates as far back as the early 1900s. As Wilson, Gutiérrez and Chao (2013) explain that the Japanese, who migrated to the United States and settled in California, after the Japanese government passed laws enabling its citizens to migrate, became scapegoats during San Francisco Mayor, Eugene Schmitz’s corrupt administration. Schmitz’s administration claimed that Japanese worked for lower wages and were taking jobs away from Whites. This assertion is similar to President Trump’s claim that immigrants are in competition for jobs with vulnerable Americans (Preston, 2016). Subsequently, the “Yellow Peril” was launched against Japanese restricting Japanese immigrants’ rights in America. In the same vein, popular literature warned of the dangers of intermarriage with Asians and claimed that Asian men intentionally sought white women. These attitudes towards Japanese immigrants were replicated in entertainment media (Wilson et. al, 2013). The results of the current study may be indicative of a trend towards a repetition of the fate that befell Japanese immigrants in the early 1900s, should
the administration of President Trump continue to uphold and propagate negative immigrant stereotypes. Furthermore, Wilson et. al (2013) notes the role of audience members in the kind of content aired in media. When audience members demand a certain type of content, media producers often give them what they seek, which may be a possible explanation for the reinforcement of anti-immigrant stereotypes on 90 Day Fiancé.

In conclusion, an analysis of the portrayal of immigrants on 90 Day Fiancé shows that anti-immigrant themes still prevail in media, and particularly in reality television. Although the show was found to primarily reinforce existing stereotypes from the academic literature, it was also found to reinforce an anti-immigrant stereotype propagated by President Trump: that immigrants are criminals. Consequently, in order to mitigate against anti-immigrant stereotypes in society, reality television ought to desist from reinforcing such inaccurate and negative immigrant stereotypes which confirm people’s prejudice towards immigrants and fuel anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States.
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U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (n.d.). Historical national average processing time (in months) for all USCIS offices for select forms by fiscal year. Retrieved from https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/historic-pt


## Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging theme/ stereotype</th>
<th>Definition/ Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Immigrants are family oriented | - Immigrant appears to prefer collectivist settings  
- Immigrant spouse expressed a desire to be close to their family  
- Immigrant spouse expressed a desire to be close to their partner’s family  
- Family approval is important to immigrants |
| Immigrants are dishonest | - Immigrants is using American partner to get a green card  
- American family does not trust immigrant spouse’s intention  
- Immigrant spouse leaves American after coming to the United States |
| Immigrants are adaptable, are risk takers | - Immigrant spouse leaves their home countries to move to the United States  
- Immigrant spouse adapts to the American culture and lifestyle. |
| Male migrants domineering | - Male immigrant attempts to control American’s lifestyle—eating, drinking, partying, exercising |
| Immigrants are irrational | - Immigrant spouse makes decisions considered as irrational and quarrels with American/American’s family |
| Immigrants threaten national unity and culture | - Immigrant’s arrival brings about a rift in the family.  
- American family feels immigrant wants to take their mother/father/daughter/son/friend way from them |
| Immigrants are a potential threat to the economy | - Immigrant does not want to work in the United States  
- Immigrant cannot make up their mind on which career path to pursue  
- Immigrants are materialistic  
- Immigrants are gold diggers  
- Immigrant demands expensive material possession |

*Table 2.1- Emerging themes from inductive analysis*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inductive themes</th>
<th>Definition/ Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are dishonest</td>
<td>- Immigrant has ulterior motives for marrying American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Immigrant only wants a green card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Immigrant is scamming American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Immigrant is unfaithful in the relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are determined and persistent</td>
<td>- Immigrant is determined to explore an unfamiliar territory- career path, religion, lifestyle, foster relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are a potential threat to the American economy</td>
<td>- Immigrant is a financial burden on American partner because he or she is financially dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Immigrant demands expensive possession that puts a strain on American’s finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are the threat to national unity and culture</td>
<td>- Immigrant expresses disinterest assimilating into the American culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Immigrant hinders American from participating in American cultural traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are undependable</td>
<td>- Immigrant is incapable of taking on a role- step-father, provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are criminals</td>
<td>- Immigrant is arrested for a criminal offence or convicted for a criminal offence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are culturally distant because of their skin color or language skills.</td>
<td>- Immigrant is unaccepted or find it difficult to fit in because of the color of their skin or their limited command of the English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2.2- Codebook for reinforced deductive themes*
CURRICULUM VITAE
Morohunfolu J. Seton
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https://www.linkedin.com/in/foluseton/

EDUCATION
MA University of Louisville (2020)
Department of Communication
Master of Arts in Communication
Thesis: An Analysis of the Role of Reality Television in the Representation of Immigrants on TLC’s Show, 90 Day Fiancé

B.Sc. Covenant University, Nigeria (2011)
Major: Mass Communication

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS
Spring 2020 Graduate Teaching Assistant
Introduction to Public Speaking
Department of Communication, University of Louisville

Spring 2019- present Graduate Research Assistant
Department of Communication, University of Louisville

PUBLICATIONS

• The role of American Television in the Portrayal of Immigrants on TLC’s 90 Day Fiancé (Spring 2020)

POSTER PRESENTATION

AWARDS
• Multicultural Association of Graduate Students (MAGS) Research Award (2020)
• Dean’s Citation Award (Department of Communication) May 2020 commencement
RESEARCH INTERESTS
Africans in American film and television, Immigration, Identity and Representation of immigrants and immigration in film and television, Media effects, Culture and language, Television and Film history, Religion and film, Intercultural communication.

SKILLS
Organization and management of press events and media initiatives, Editorial authorship, Social media management, Speech writing, Press releases, Qualitative and Quantitative Research, and Public Relations

WORK EXPERIENCE
October 2018- present
University of Louisville- Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Communication
• Assisting professors with assigned tasks such as: grading and proctoring exams- Dr. Siobhan Smith-Jones, Dr. Lindsay Della, Dr. Scott Sanders, Dr. Remington Smith and Dr. Steve Sohn.
• Graduate research assistant
• Graduate teaching assistant
• Social media management for Film Minor program, University of Louisville
• Public Speaking instructor

March 2018 – August 2018
Temple Management Company- Public Relations Executive
• Writing and distribution of press releases for celebrity clients
• Overseeing media interviews of top management and celebrity clients
• Team member- pitch to the former Senate President of Nigeria on the digitalization of public records
• Team member- pitch to Coca-Cola Nigeria on expansion of Nigerian market reach
• Public Relations business development and support for Small and Medium scale enterprises
• Editorial publication- Reinforcing fair play in international sporting bodies'
• Tracking and reporting publication of disseminated press releases

October 2017 – April 2018
HYBR Group- Communications Manager
• Management of internal and external communication materials
• Social media management- Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.
• Tracking and reporting publication of disseminated press releases
September 2013- May 2016

**Samsung Electronics West Africa- Public Relations Executive**

- Research and pitching of marketing ideas to top management
- Management of PR initiatives for Consumer Electronics and Service departments
- Anchoring and planning press events for product launches, and in-state and out-of-state CSR projects
- Annual conference logistics planning and implementation for 80+ partners
- Grew social media following by over 1000% with a limited marketing budget under 2 years.
- Management of relationship with public relations agency
- Management of relationship with local Nigerian media
- Media monitoring and reporting of competition’s activities
- Tracking and reporting publication of disseminated press releases
- Training in media relations and media interviews (South Africa, 2015)
- Samsung Global media reporter - published articles on Samsung’s Global internal reporting platform

January 2013- September 2014

**Terragon Group Limited- Account Executive**

- Co-management of creative team to develop online character and game for GlaxoSmithKline Nigeria
- Management of social media communication for the launch of GlaxoSmithKline Nigeria’s Purple Party
- Creation and implementation of social media calendars for clients
- Maximization of clients’ digital advertising spend to achieve campaign goals with Google Adwords

December 2011- October 2012

**Adaba 88.9 FM, Ondo, Nigeria**

- Sourcing and casting of news bulletins and news segments
- Anchoring weekly global news program; ‘*Around the Globe*’
- Interim announcer
- Professional news casting trainings

**VOLUNTEERING**

Cast member and social media management for “*In Transit*”- Local Radio Drama series: A Behaviour Modification Media (BHM) Production.