SPOTLIGHTING DOMESTIC WORKERS REPRESENTATION IN FILM & TV





Media Impact Project



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INTRODUCTION

Domestic work is the work that makes all other work possible.

Within our homes, we care for loved ones, and receive care ourselves. We care for our belongings and create a space for respite.

There are more than 2 million domestic workers in the United States. These are the nannies that take care of our children, the housecleaners that bring order to our homes, and the care workers for seniors and individuals with disabilities, who ensure our loved ones can live with dignity. Despite doing the work that enables our society to function and our families to thrive, domestic workers are often the least valued. Their work is done behind closed doors, their contributions, humanity and struggles hidden from view.

Alfonso Cuarón during his Best Director Academy Award winning acceptance speech for Roma, a tremendous film about an indigenous domestic worker Cleo said: "As artists, our job is to look where others don't." Yet for far too long, the entertainment industry has either overlooked domestic workers or depicted them as one dimensional characters without agency, and frequently steeped in harmful stereotypes rooted in racism, sexism, and classism.

Telling authentic and complex stories of historically underrepresented communities has never been more important. Domestic workers are on the cutting edge of the most pressing social issues of our time – from immigration, to labor rights, to gender and racial justice. Our objective for commissioning and releasing this report is to establish a baseline for domestic workers on screen – where they are, where they aren't, their representation, and the substance of that representation. We hope this report will start conversations – on the history of domestic workers on screen, the real world impacts of that representation, and inspire new stories in film & TV that depict domestic workers as the heroines they are.

Rachel Birnam, *Cultural and Entertainment Partnerships Manager* & Kristina Mevs-Apgar, *Culture Change Director*

National Domestic Workers Alliance



EXECUTIVE SUMMRY

The National Domestic Workers Alliance partnered with the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project to commission a research report that establishes a baseline for representations of domestic work in scripted entertainment from 1910- 2020. This report includes two phases of research: a Frequency Analysis of domestic work keywords and a Content Analysis of 100 domestic worker characters.

KEY FINDINGS

FREQUENCY ANALYSIS KEY FINDINGS

- 47,000 mentions of domestic work keywords in film and TV scripts since 1916.
- Hollywood continues to use the term "maid" significantly more frequently than "housekeeper." The preferred term "housecleaner" is largely invisible in scripted film & TV.
- "Nanny" is the most frequently mentioned child care keyword.
- Keywords describing home care workers appear significantly less frequently than house cleaning and child care terms.
- Qualitatively, domestic work keywords typically appear in content about affluent people (e.g. Downton Abbey), content about domestic workers (e.g. The Nanny), and police procedurals (e.g. Law & Order: SVU).
- 1 in 3 domestic work keyword mentions were pejorative terms, the most commonly used being "servant."
- "Caregiver" has been rising in usage since the 1980s.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF 100 DOMESTIC WORKER CHARACTERS:

- The majority of domestic worker characters were white (69%) and female (94%). 25% were identified as immigrants in dialogue.
- 57% of domestic worker characters were house cleaners, 22% home care workers, and 21% child care workers.
- Child care workers and white domestic workers had the most dialogue.
- Domestic workers, and particularly non-white domestic workers, were portrayed as lower in competence than other characters (as indicated by language complexity).
- A qualitative analysis of dialogue spoken by domestic workers in small and medium roles found they discussed a variety of topics including romance with their employers and serious crimes.
- White domestic workers were overrepresented in our sample (69% overall, 60% U.S. titles), while non-white domestic workers were underrepresented (13% Latine, 12% Black, 4% API). However, in the U.S. today, 42% of domestic workers are white, 29% are Latine, 22% are Black, and 6.3% are API (Wolfe et al., 2020).
- White domestic worker characters had more dialogue than characters of color.

NDWA ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As you develop storylines, consider how race & ethnicity are impacting characterizations.

White domestic workers were not only overrepresented on screen (69% vs 49% in reality), they were given more dialogue than characters of color. They also won the most prominent spots on screen, holding 83% of large and 80% of extra large roles. When women of color did speak, they were portrayed as lower in competence than their white peers.

It's not quantity, it's quality of representation.

While visibility is important, if it lacks depth and substance, it further stereotypes domestic workers as silent figures on the periphery. Think twice before placing a domestic worker in the background of the frame, instead feature domestic workers in prominent and developed roles. When developing this domestic worker character, consider their full lives outside of the workplace. These women are more than the product of their labor, they are mothers, wives, sisters, girlfriends, grandmothers, heroines overcoming insurmountable challenges and young women coming of age.

Home care is the future of work.

Home care work is on track to be one of the fastest growing work sectors in the country.¹ And yet, home care is mentioned vastly less frequently on screen than child care and house cleaning. We need to see more stories about care – something we all give and/or receive at some point in our lives. When depicting home care workers, consider the real life demographics of this workforce: 61% of home care workers are people of color, 87% are female and 21% are immigrants.²

Reimagine the future by portraying a society where domestic work is respected.

One in three domestic worker mentions were pejorative terms, with "servant" being the most commonly used. Instead of telling domestic worker stories that spotlight injustice, trauma, and inherent disrespect, consider telling stories that illustrate the value domestic workers provide to our day to day lives, the skills they bring to their work, and portray these jobs with dignity and respect.

Consult with domestic workers when developing storylines and characters.

Given the nature of working within individual homes and the historical devaluing of this work, domestic workers have not had the opportunity to speak for themselves in terms of representation. In order to create an accurate and nauced depiction, it is important to speak directly with the community. The National Domestic Workers Alliance can provide expertise and access to authentic stories and factual information. Please reach out to us for assistance, insights and collaboration.

² https://www.domesticworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/WEAF_HCBSNational_v92.pdf



¹ https://www.domesticworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/WEAF_HCBSNational_v92.pdf

FREQUENCY ANALYSIS OF Domestic worker keywords

This presentation is based on research funded by the National Domestic Workers Alliance. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the National Domestic Workers Alliance.

OVERVIEW

Frequency Analysis of Domestic Worker Keywords examines the frequency of 27 keywords related to domestic work in scripted TV and film from 1910 - 2020 to set a baseline for domestic worker representation.

METHODOLOGY

DOMESTIC WORKER KEYWORDS

An initial list of 40 keywords was derived from recommendations by NDWA.

All keywords were tested in the Norman Lear Center Script Database, and the list was narrowed to 27 keywords that most accurately depicted domestic work content on scripted film and television.

Keywords were identified within three categories: child care, housecleaning, and home care work. Pejorative terms like "mammy" and "servant" were included, as well as the overall term "domestic worker."

DOMESTIC WORK KEYWORDS

CHILD CARE	HOUSECLEANING	HOME CARE
1. Au Pair 2. Babysitter 3. Male Nanny 4. Night Nurse 5. Sitter 6. Wet Nurse	 Cleaning Lady Domestic Servant Housecleaner Housekeeper Housemaid Laundress Maid 	 Caregiver Caretaker Care Worker Certified Nursing Assistant Home Aide Home Care Worker Home Health Aide Hospice Worker In Home Care Personal Attendant

The pejorative terms **"Mammy," "Servant,"** and **"The Help"** were also included, as well as the umbrella term **"Domestic Worker**"



ANALYSIS PROCESS

The source of data for this analysis was the Norman Lear Center Script Database, which includes transcripts for over 141,000 pieces of scripted content from television and films.

To identify the frequency of representations of domestic work over time, we searched the database for mentions of each keyword from 1910 - 2020.

Keywords were analyzed by frequency of mentions, number of pieces of content that included mentions, and the decades in which the mentions took place.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How many times was the keyword mentioned?
- How did the frequency of domestic work keywords change over time?
- What content contained the most keywords?
- What words were most frequently adjacent to the keywords?

KEY FINDINGS

We identified over 47,000 mentions of domestic work keywords in TV and film scripts since 1916.

Hollywood continues to use the term "maid" significantly more frequently than "housekeeper." The preferred term, "housecleaner" is largely invisible in scripted TV and film.

"Nanny" is the most frequently mentioned child care keyword.

Keywords describing home care workers appear significantly less frequently than housecleaning and child care terms.

Qualitatively, domestic work keywords typically appear in content about affluent people (e.g. Downton Abbey), content about domestic workers (e.g. The Nanny), and police procedurals (e.g. Law & Order: SVU).





TOTAL KEYWORD MENTIONS

We identified 47,378 mentions of 27 keywords related to domestic work in 141,050 TV and film scripts between 1916 and 2020.

For context, the word "Football" was mentioned 22,171 times in movie and television scripts between 1916 and 2020.

The following content contained the most keyword mentions:					
The Nanny	685				
Downton Abbey	494				
Devious Maids	392				
Doctor Who	332				
Law & Order: Special Victims Unit	309				
Law & Order	306				
Mrs. Brown's Boys	303				
Reign	244				
Agatha Christie's Poirot	226				
Jessie	214				
	The Nanny Downton Abbey Devious Maids Doctor Who Law & Order: Special Victims Unit Law & Order Mrs. Brown's Boys				

MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED

The pejorative term "servant" was the most frequently mentioned keyword, followed by "maid," "nanny," and "housekeeper."



KEYWORD MENTIONS BY CATEGORY

Nearly one in three domestic work keyword mentions were pejorative terms, largely due to the frequency of the keyword "servant."





► HOUSECLEANING

HOUSECLEANING IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

"Maid" was by far the most frequently mentioned housecleaning keyword, with 3.9 times as many mentions as "housekeeper."

"Housecleaner" is the preferred industry term in reality, but TV and film scripts almost never use the term; it only appeared 18 times in over 141,000 scripts.

HOUSECLEANING MENTIONS IN MOVIES & TV



HOUSECLEANING KEYWORDS OVER TIME

"Maid" is a problematic term in the housecleaning industry, but throughout the history of movies and television, it has been the most common descriptor used.

In early movies and television, depictions of maids were quite prevalent. "Maid" was mentioned in almost one-quarter (23.8%) of over 6,000 scripts from content that aired between 1916 and 1969.

In 78,124 scripts from the last decade, "maid" was still twice as likely to be mentioned (4% of all scripts) as "housekeeper" (2%).

PERCENTAGE OF SCRIPTS MENTIONING HOUSECLEANER KEYWORDS



Note: Percentages are out of all scripts analyzed in each decade - not just those with domestic keyword mentions. If the keyword was mentioned in a script, the script was included one time - no matter whether the keyword was mentioned in the script several times or just one time.



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"MAID" IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

The term "maid" was first mentioned on screen 10 times in the 1916 silent film Joan the Woman by Cecil B. DeMille.

"Maid" was most frequently mentioned in this content:

- 1. Devious Maids
- 2. Downton Abbey
- 3. Maid Sama!*
- 4. Kamen no Maid Guy*
- 5. Gilmore Girls
- 6. Upstairs, Downstairs
- 7. Will and Grace
- 8. Law & Order
- 9. Agatha Christie's Poirot
- 10. Law & Order: Special Victims Unit

* Maid Sama! and Kamen no Maid Guy are both Manga series that have streamed in the U.S.

The word cloud below shows the words that most frequently appeared adjacent (usually within 5 words) to "maid" in scripts.



Honor

(highest frequency first):

- Old
- Little
- Honor
- Service
- Room
- French
- School
- Marian
- Kitchen
- Hotel
- Scullery
- Devious
- Outfit
- Uniform
- Parlour
- Pretty
- Sexy
- Help

"HOUSEKEEPER" IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

"Housekeeper" was mentioned 3,306 times in 3,271 TV and film scripts.

The keyword was most frequently mentioned in these TV shows:

- 1. Who's the Boss?
- 2. Law & Order
- 3. Two and a Half Men
- 4. Law & Order: Special Victims Unit
- 5. Monarch Of The Glen
- 6. Midsomer Murders
- 7. Monk
- 8. The Doctor Blake Mysteries
- 9. Murder, She Wrote
- 10. Agatha Christie's Poirot

The word cloud below shows the words that most frequently appeared adjacent (usually within 5 words) to "housekeeper" in scripts.

A sampling of notable adjacent words includes (highest frequency first):

- Good
- Mrs.
- Know
- Yes
- Right
- Found
- Said
- Room
- Hello
- Cook
- Door
- Miss
- Sorry
- House
- Money
- Please
- Woman
- Called
- Callet
- Maid





CHILD CARE DOMESTIC WORK IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

"Nanny" has been mentioned in scripts almost 7,000 times, 2.2 times more than "babysitter" and 2.7 times more than the colloquial "sitter."

"Au pair" was mentioned very infrequently, only 371 times.



CHILD CARE KEY WORDS

CHILD CARE TERMS THROUGHOUT TIME

"Nanny" has always been mentioned more than other child care keywords, but it increased in popularity in the 1990s, during which it appeared in 2.6% of the 14,084 scripts analyzed. It remains more common than other child care keywords today.

PERCENTAGE OF SCRIPTS MENTIONING CHILD CARE KEYWORDS



Note: Percentages are out of all scripts analyzed in each decade - not just those with domestic keyword mentions. If the keyword was mentioned in a script, the script was included one time - no matter whether the keyword was mentioned in the script several times or just one time.

"NANNY" IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

The term "nanny" was mentioned 6,821 times in 3,400 scripts.

"Nanny" was most frequently mentioned in this content:

- 1. The Nanny
- 2. Jessie
- 3. Melissa & Joey
- 4. Berkeley Square
- 5. One Tree Hill
- 6. Law & Order: Special Victims Unit
- 7. Downton Abbey
- 8. Law & Order: Criminal Intent
- 9. The Good Wife
- 10. ER

"NANNY" IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

The word cloud below shows the words that most frequently appeared adjacent (usually within 5 words) to "nanny" in scripts.

A sampling of notable adjacent words includes (highest frequency first):

- Fine
- Good
- Fran
- Flushing
- Guessed
- Old
- Kids
- Thank
- Mean
- Please
- Miss
- Nanny-Cam
- Call
- Care
- Hot
- Baby
- Hire
- Called

MALE NANNIES IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

Male nannies have a history in Hollywood on shows like Charles in Charge, Friends, Modern Family, and Melissa & Joey. Colloquially, male nannies have been referred to on shows as a "manny."

Due to the popularity of the name "Manny," we were not able to reliably search for the term "manny," but "male nanny" was mentioned 20 times.



The Images used in this report are the sole property of the networks the series belong to. The still photos are used under educational fair use guidelines, for the explicit purpose of supporting this research report.



"BABYSITTER" & "SITTER" IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

"Babysitter" and "Sitter" are often misclassified as nannies, which can lead to workers being exploited. The keywords were most frequently mentioned on:

- 1. Law & Order: Special Victims Unit
- 2. The Simpsons
- 3. Bewitched
- 4. ER
- 5. Law & Order
- 6. Grey's Anatomy
- 7. Thirtysomething
- 8. Sam and Cat
- 9. Beverly Hills, 90210
- 10. Bob's Burgers

Babysitter" and "Sitter" are sometimes conflated with "Nanny," particularly in entertainment. This misclassification undercuts the duties, skill and training required to become a nanny and can lead to nannies being exploited by employers. Nannies are hired to care for children in the home on consistent schedules while babysitters are hired on an asneeded, short-term basis. In addition, nannies have responsibilities that go beyond child care, such as helping the kids learn.

The word cloud below shows the words that most frequently appeared adjacent (usually within 5 words) to "babysitter" or "sitter" in scripts.

A sampling of notable adjacent words includes (highest frequency first):

- Get
- Need
- Got
- Know
- Like
- Find
- Call
- Baby
- Right
- Good
- Home
- Tonight
- Kids
- Want
- House
- Old
- Last Night
- Canceled





HOME CARE

HOME CARE WORKERS IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

Home care worker keywords appeared much less frequently than those for the other domestic work sectors, but in reality, care workers are on track for being the fastest growing workforce in the country.¹

Many home care keywords appeared extremely infrequently, if at all. "Care worker" was mentioned 132 times and the following keywords combined were mentioned less than 100 times combined: "personal attendant," "hospice worker," "home care worker," certified nursing assistant," "home aide," and "personal care aide."



CARE WORKER MENTIONS

1 Home care workers, who ensure that seniors and people with disabilities can live with dignity and independence, are on track for being the fastest growing workforce in the country. From 2018 - 2028, the U.S. will need over 4.4 million home care job openings. Home care jobs are the future of work.

Source: https://phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/#tab=National+Data&natvar=Employment+Projections

HOME CARE TERMS THROUGHOUT TIME

No home care keyword was mentioned in more than 1.1% of scripts in any decade.

"Caregiver" has been rising in usage since the 1980s.

PERCENTAGE OF SCRIPTS MENTIONING HOME CARE KEYWORDS



Note: Percentages are out of all scripts analyzed in each decade - not just those with domestic keyword mentions. If the keyword was mentioned in a script, the script was included one time - no matter whether the keyword was mentioned in the script several times or just one time.



"CARETAKER" IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

"Caretaker" appeared much more frequently than other home care worker keywords, but still far less frequently than keywords in the other domestic work sectors; for example, "nanny" was mentioned 3.5 times more often and "maid" 6.6 times more often than caretaker.

"Caretaker" was also commonly used to describe characters who take care of buildings, homes, cemeteries, and animals. Thus, not all "caretaker" mentions were relevant. "Caretaker" was most frequently mentioned in these TV shows:

- 1. Doctor Who
- 2. Warehouse 13
- 3. Star Trek: Voyager
- 4. The Dead Files
- 5. Kommissar Rex (Inspector Rex)
- 6. Law & Order
- 7. Law and Order: UK
- 8. Greenleaf
- 9. Law & Order: Special Victims Unit
- 10. Criminal Minds

The word cloud below shows the words that most frequently appeared adjacent (usually within 5 words) to "caretaker" in scripts.

A sampling of notable adjacent words includes (highest frequency first):

- Like
- Old
- Yeah
- Know
- Said
- Good
- Take
- Called
- House
- Need
- Number
- Place
- School
- Mother
- Lives
- Care
- Father
- Primary





"CAREGIVER" IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

"Caregiver" was only mentioned 499 times in 409 TV and film scripts.

The term was most frequently mentioned in the following content. All of which are TV shows except for The Fundamentals of Caring:

- 1. Criminal Minds
- 2. ER
- 3. On the Basis of Sex
- 4. The Legendary Witch
- 5. Law & Order
- 6. Chicago Med
- 7. Law & Order: Special Victims Unit
- 8. Nurse Jackie
- 9. The Fundamentals of Caring
- 10. Chasing Life

The word cloud below shows the words that most frequently appeared adjacent (usually within 5 words) to "caregiver" in scripts.

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givers

A sampling of notable adjacent words includes (highest frequency first):

- Primary .
- Care
- Know
- Can
- Get
- Need
- Good
- Family
- Full-Time
- Giver .
- Father
- Home .
- Mother
- Doctors .
- Responsible
- Child
- Patient
- Suppor

PEJORATIVE TERMS

PEJORATIVE DOMESTIC WORKER TERMS IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

We analyzed mentions of three outdated and pejorative keywords for domestic workers.

"Servant" was the most frequently mentioned keyword among all tested terms, while "mammy" and "the help" were mentioned less frequently.



PEJORATIVE KEYWORDS

PEJORATIVE DOMESTIC WORKER TERMS IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

Similar to "maid," "servant" was very popular in early film and television, appearing in 14.3% of 6,377 scripts from before 1970.

While "servant" has been part of TV and films since the beginning, "mammy" was mentioned 51 times in 1939's Gone With The Wind and occasionally until the 2010s when it slightly increased.

While still extremely low, the relative frequency of the term "mammy" has sharply increased, from 1,472 scripts in the 2000s to 3,596 scripts in the 2010s.

PERCENTAGE OF SCRIPTS MENTIONING PEJORATIVE KEYWORDS



Note: Percentages are out of all scripts analyzed in each decade - not just those with domestic keyword mentions. If the keyword was mentioned in a script, the script was included one time - no matter whether the keyword was mentioned in the script several times or just one time.



"SERVANT" IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

"Servant" was most frequently mentioned in the following TV shows - many of which are period pieces:

- 1. Doctor Who
- 2. Reign
- 3. Downton Abbey
- 4. Merlin
- 5. Fate
- 6. Upstairs, Downstairs
- 7. Agatha Christie's Poirot
- 8. Another Period
- 9. Dynasty
- 10. The Tudors

The word cloud below shows the words that most frequently appeared adjacent (usually within 5 words) to "servant" in scripts.

A sampling of notable adjacent words includes (highest frequency first):

- Your
- My
- Civil
- This
- Public
- Humble
- Their
- Loyal
- House
- Faithful
- God
- Girl
- Good
- Lord
- Quarters
- Master
- Indentured
- Obedient



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"MAMMY" IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

"Mammy" was mentioned 888 times in 293 TV and film scripts. The term is also an Irish nickname for "mother."

The keyword was most frequently mentioned in the following:

- 1. Mrs. Brown's Boys
- 2. Gone With The Wind
- 3. Derry Girls
- 4. Kat and Alfie: Redwater
- 5. Stella
- 6. Father Figure
- 7. Burnistoun
- 8. Keeping Faith
- 9. London Irish
- 10. Roots

The word cloud below shows the words that most frequently appeared adjacent (usually within 5 words) to "mammy" in scripts.

A sampling of notable adjacent words includes (highest frequency first):

- Just
- Hello
- Well
- Little
- Daddy
- Thanks
- Hiya
- Love
- Son
- Baby
- Good
- Morning
- Short'nin
- Old
- Grandad





"THE HELP" IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

Every mention of "the help" was individually analyzed, and 439 relevant mentions were identified in TV and film scripts.

The term was most frequently mentioned in the following content:

- 1. Devious Maids
- 2. The Royals
- 3. The Nanny
- 4. Columbo
- 5. 2 Broke Girls
- 6. Dawson's Creek
- 7. Dynasty
- 8. Gossip Girl
- 9. Grey's Anatomy
- 10. Jessie

The word cloud below shows the words that most frequently appeared adjacent (usually within 5 words) to "the help" in scripts.

A sampling of notable adjacent words includes (highest frequency first):

- Can
- Need
- Please
- Thanks
- Family
- Friends
- Sorry
- Remember
- F***ing
- Talking
- Dating
- Screwing
- Fraternizing





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SEGMENTING: DOMESTIC WORK IN FILM

FILM MENTIONS

Due to the majority of domestic worker mentions appearing in television (69%), we've segmented the film data below to give the full picture of scripted entertainment representation.

Film represents 31% of the total domestic worker keywords. We identified 14,659 mentions of the 27 keywords related to domestic work in film scripts between 1916 and 2020.

The following films contained the most keyword mentions:

•	Gone With The Wind	51
•	Downton Abbey Movie	26
•	Hamlet	25
•	The Secret Garden	23
•	Gosford Park	20
•	Private Number	20
•	Ah-ga-ssi	19
•	A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum	18
•	The Bat	18
•	Four Sisters and a Wedding	17
•	Jassy	17
•	Table 19	17
•	The Handmaiden	17





FREQUENTLY MENTIONED FILM MENTIONS

The pejorative term "servant" was the most frequently mentioned keyword, followed by "maid," "nanny," and "housekeeper."

MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED KEYWORDS IN FILM



NOTABLE FILMS AFTER 2010

Some popular or notable films with domestic work mentions after 2010 include:

- Parasite (maid)
- Trolls Movie (scullery maid)
- Great Gatsby (servant)
- On the Basis of Sex (sitter)
- Nanny McPhee Returns (nanny)
- Mary Shelley (servant)
- Mary Poppins Returns (nanny)
- Incredibles 2 (nanny)
- Bridesmaids (maid)
- An Ordinary Man (maid)



CONTENT ANALYSIS OF 100 Domestic worker characters



This presentation is based on research funded by the National Domestic Workers Alliance. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the National Domestic Workers Alliance.



OVERVIEW

The Content Analysis of 100 Domestic Worker Characters utilized 5 domestic worker terms identified from the frequency analysis keyword list to produce a sample of 100 titles from 1944 to 2020 that both talk about and include domestic workers, to better understand demographic makeup and quality of representation.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE OF TITLES

We searched for the terms "cleaning lady," "nanny," "maid," "housekeeper," and "caregiver" in the Norman Lear Center Script Database.

For each of the 5 search terms, we identified the 20 titles that used the term most frequently in dialogue and had at least one Domestic worker in a speaking role (spoke at least 1 word).

This produced a sample of 100 titles that both talk about and include Domestic workers.

The 100 titles premiered between 1944 and 2020 and included 33 films and 67 TV episodes from 63 series (see Appendix A & B).

10 films and 2 TV series had domestic worker search terms in the title (e.g., The Nanny Diaries and The Nanny). Another 6 films and 2 TV series featured domestic work as part of its premise and/or a Domestic worker as a central character.

79% of titles took place in the U.S., 15% took place in the U.K.

The source of data for this analysis was the Norman Lear Center Script Database, which includes transcripts for over 141,000 pieces of scripted content from television and films. We excluded any titles that were non-scripted (i.e. documentary or reality shows), animated, and/or did not use English as the primary language. Each TV series was used no more than once per keyword.

SAMPLE OF DOMESTIC WORKER CHARACTERS

From each of 100 titles, we selected one domestic worker in a speaking role (total of 100 characters).

If a title had more than one domestic worker, one was randomly selected for analysis.

The 100 titles had a total of 2044 domestic worker and non-domestic worker characters in speaking roles, as identified by IMDB.

Because we were interested in "ordinary" as well as prominent examples of Domestic workers, the sample did not necessarily include certain well-known Domestic workers (like Alice from The Brady Bunch). Sampling Domestic worker characters by finding where they are talked about with Domestic worker terms- -rather than searching for prominent examples, who aren't necessarily referred to using these Domestic worker terms--suggests an opportunity to identify a contrast between how Domestic worker characters are represented by others vs. how they represent themselves. We included Domestic worker characters that were identified as such by dialogue (i.e. "Fran is our nanny"). Upon secondary analysis, we excluded workers who were hotel maids, or otherwise determined to not be domestic workers. Coders also identified the total number of characters in each title with a speaking role.

ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Eight coders were trained to identify the characteristics of the selected domestic workers (gender, race/ ethnicity, immigration status, occupation) by watching the selected title.

Using the NLC script database, coders separated the character's dialogue from the rest of the title's dialogue and determined the number of words spoken.

This dialogue was analyzed for language complexity using the Flesch Reading-Ease test and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test.*

Dialogue of domestic workers with small and medium roles (between 1 and 500 words) was then subjected to open-ended qualitative analysis to explore emergent themes.**

** Qualitative analysis of larger domestic worker roles is proposed as a potential avenue for further investigation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the characteristics (race/ethnicity, gender, immigration status, occupation) of domestic worker characters (domestic workers) in scripted TV and film?
- To what extent are domestic workers depicted as having agency and competence, as indicated by amount and complexity (respectively) of their language?
- When domestic workers are mentioned, do they also have a voice? (Do they represent themselves, or are they only represented?)
- When they do speak, what do domestic workers talk about?

KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of domestic workers were White (69%) and female (94%).
- 25% were identified as immigrants in dialogue.
- 57% of domestic workers were house cleaners, 22% home care workers, and 21% child care workers.
- Domestic workers had more dialogue, on average, than other characters.*
- Child care workers and white domestic workers had the most dialogue.
- Domestic workers, and particularly non-white domestic workers, were portrayed as lower in competence than other characters (as indicated by language complexity).
- A qualitative analysis of dialogue spoken by domestic workers in small and medium roles found they discussed a variety of topics including romance with their employers and serious crimes.

^{*} The Flesch Reading-Ease test and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test are used to assess the understandability of reading materials based on average syllables per word and average words per sentence. They are among the most popular readability formulas. See Ley, P., & Florio, T. (1996). The use of readability formulas in health care. Psychology, Health & Medicine, 1(1), 7-28.

^{*} While more dialogue indicates a high level of portrayed agency, this finding should be interpreted with caution, since the titles were sampled based on the frequency of Domestic worker character search terms. That is, Domestic worker characters spoke a relatively large amount, given that there was already a relatively high proportion of Domestic worker-related words mentioned in the dialogue. Thus, a selection of titles with Domestic worker characters that was not sampled based on Domestic worker-related keywords could plausibly show much less Domestic worker dialogue.



DOMESTIC WORKER CHARACTER DEMOGRAPHICS

In the U.S. today, 42% of domestic workers are white, 29% are Latine, 22% are Black, and 6.3% are API (Wolfe et al., 2020).

White domestic workers were overrepresented in our sample (69% overall, 60% U.S. titles), while nonwhite domestic workers were underrepresented (13% Latine, 12% Black, 4% API).

The majority of domestic workers (57%) were house cleaners, followed by 22% home care workers, and 21% child care workers. **68% of home care workers were professionals, 32% were family members.**

Child care workers were most likely to be white (81%), compared to 68% of house cleaners and 59% of home care workers.

89% of domestic workers spoke only in English (2% did not speak any English).

25% were explicitly identified as immigrants in the dialogue of the title.*

6% of titles addressed the domestic worker's immigration status in dialogue (green card, undocumented, etc.).

94% of domestic workers were women. Of the 6 men, 5 were home care workers and 1 was a housecleaner.

Wolfe J, Kandra J, Engdahl L, Shierholz H. (2020) Domestic Workers Chartbook: A Comprehensive Look at the Demographics, Wages, Benefits, and Poverty Rates of the Professionals Who Care for our Family Members and Clean our Homes. Economic Policy Institute.

https://www.epi.org/publication/domestic-workers-chartbook-a-comprehensive-look-at-the-demographics-wages-benefits-and-poverty-rates-ofthe-professionals-who-care-for-our-family-members-and-clean-our-homes/

Coders identified immigrants within the context of the isolated TV episode or film. Thus, it is possible that selected domestic worker TV characters are identified as immigrants in episodes that weren't included in the sample.

DOMESTIC WORKER CHARACTER DIALOGUE

Domestic workers had more dialogue, on average, than other characters.*

On average, domestic workers spoke 9.6% of the title's dialogue, while non-domestic workers spoke 5.4% of the title's dialogue. Domestic workers (n = 100) spoke 621 words on average, while all other characters (n = 1944) spoke 276 words on average.



* While more dialogue indicates a high level of portrayed agency, this finding should be interpreted with caution, since the titles were sampled based on the frequency of domestic worker character search terms. That is, domestic worker characters spoke a relatively large amount, given that there was already a relatively high proportion of domestic worker-related words mentioned in the dialogue. Thus, a selection of titles with domestic worker characters that was not sampled based on domestic worker-related keywords could plausibly show much less domestic worker dialogue.





DOMESTIC WORKER CHARACTER DIALOGUE

48% of domestic worker characters with small roles were white, 52% were POC.

74% of domestic worker characters with medium roles were white, 26% were POC.

83% of domestic worker characters with large roles were white, 17% were POC.

80% of domestic worker characters with extra-large roles were white, 20% were POC.

Home care workers (n = 22) spoke 7.3% of the title's dialogue on average.

Child care workers (n = 21) spoke 14.9% of the title's dialogue.



% of Dialogue




DOMESTIC WORKER CHARACTER DIALOGUE

White Domestic Workers (n = 69) spoke 10.8% of the title's dialogue on average.

Latine Domestic Workers (n = 13) spoke 4.6% of the title's dialogue.

Black Domestic Workers (n = 12) spoke 6.8% of the title's dialogue.

API Domestic Workers (n = 4) spoke 10.3% of the title's dialogue.*

Cleaners (n = 57) spoke 8.49% of the title's dialogue.



* The small sample of API Domestic Worker dialogue was skewed by the film Always Be My Maybe, in which an API Domestic Worker speaks 29% of the title's dialogue. Every other API Domestic worker character spoke 3.8% of the title's dialogue on average.



On average, domestic workers spoke at a lower reading level (6th grade) than non-domestic workers (7th grade).*

Domestic workers spoke fewer words per sentence (4.67) than non-domestic workers (6.14).***

White domestic worker characters spoke more words per sentence (4.83) than non-White domestic worker characters (4.26).*

These findings indicate domestic workers, and particularly domestic workers of color, are portrayed as less competent than non domestic worker characters.

Flesch-Kincaid Readability scores were compared using t-tests: * p < .05 (small effect size) *** p < .0001 (large effect size)



Words per sentence







EMERGING THEMES

SMALL ROLES

27 domestic workers spoke fewer than 100 words



American Housewife

The Mysteries of Laura



For the People

Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist

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11 characters engaged in "small" or professional talk:

"Oh, hello, David. So good seeing you. Meet my husband, Arthur." –Nothing in Common "Hola, I'm Christina. From Happy Housekeeper. My English not so good." –Desperate Housewives "Oh, Anna-Kat. I'm so glad you and Penny finally get to play ponies together. Come on, I'll show you to her room." –American Housewife

7 spoke in relation to murder:

"I already spoke to Detective Soto, and my employers would not like the police being in their home." –The Mysteries of Laura

"Sorry, it's hard to concentrate with all the dark energies in this house. Was someone murdered?" –Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist

"Who are you? What do you want? What do you want? (SCREAMING)" - MacGyver

5 discussed work-related challenges:

"When I work enough to repay what it cost to bring me, he will give me back my passport, and I can go home. He will. Soon." –For the People

"My manager doesn't allow us to check our messages while we're working. And I'm really sorry about that. I do my best to get him there, but the clinic's 40 miles from my house. I... I don't have a car, and I can't always get off of work." –Chicago Med

Even in small roles, there are opportunities for character development. On *Law & Order*, Rosetta is a domestic worker who discovers a murder:

ROSETTA: Third time I've asked you to fix it, Mr. Ramos. If I fall and break my hip, I swear I'll get my son after you. He knows people.

GEORGE: Oye, mami, you're late today.

ROSETTA: Your watch is always fast, George.

GEORGE: That's right. Like that, my days go quicker. Maybe when you're done cleaning, we could party.

ROSETTA: I don't party with married men.

GEORGE: Oh, didn't I tell you? My wife, pobrecita, she had a heart attack this weekend.

ROSETTA: Mr. Wells, it's me, Rosetta. Mr. Wells?

This dialogue was not relevant to the overall procedural narrative but generated character complexity.

MEDIUM ROLES

39 domestic workers spoke between 100 and 500 words



I Love Lucy

NYPD Blue



Will & Grace

Baywatch

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10 were questioned by the police in relation to a murder or kidnapping:*

"I already told you, detective, I didn't kill anyone." - The Glades

"I was her maid. I don't know who could've killed her." –NYPD Blue

"If you're trying to say that I had something to do with Mr. Hudson's death, you're wrong. I loved my boss." -CSI: New York

7 talked about functional, practical, or professional matters:

"I'm Irene Stuart, the new cook and housekeeper...Dinner will be at 8." - Monarch of the Glen

"Everything's ready, Mr. Sloan. If you come this way, I'll show you the kitchen, Mr. Basternook. I hope you like

it here, Felix. Oh, it's real cozy here, we have a horse and a cow." - Christmas in Connecticut

"I'm going to the store. Anything you'd like in particular? Okay, I'll check it out. See what they can do." –Elsa & Fred

* An additional 5 spoke in relation to murder, without being questioned by authorities.

6 discussed romance with their employer:

"I'll be right over to give the little guy a bath and get him in his jammies. Hey, I have an idea...How about when you get back from your meeting with the director, I give you a bath?" –9JKL

"It's hard for me to think of you as my employer. My stomach is always full of butterflies."—Baywatch

2 worked as domestic workers under false pretenses (not "really" a domestic worker, e.g., secret agent).

"I'm only here to take what's rightfully mine before you little mongrels get your grubby little paws on it." – Hunter Street

3 were assertive, played for laughs:

"I don't scrub no floors. You'll scrub the floors. That's a man's work. And I might as well tell ya' somethin'

else right now. I get Thursdays and Sundays off, see?" - The Honeymooners

"Now, I must have Wednesday afternoons off and every weekend. I can't possibly come before 9:00 in the morning, and I must leave before 7:00 at night. Of course, you have an automatic dishwasher?" –I Love Lucy

3 were very enthusiastic about their work:

"I just love being a full-time, live-in maid. I find it very rewarding." -Bewitched

"This is what I want to do now, you know, to live with an American family and care for them. Because it makes me happy." –Baywatch

"I just want to help Grace." -Will & Grace

1 spoke in depth about their personal relationships:

"Morty, she disappeared from my life when I was ten years old, Morty. Gone. This whole time I've thought she's dead. But she's not." –Hawaii Five-0

1 fought to improve legal circumstances for domestic workers:

"Between the dressing and the bathing and the toilet, it's not a task for one person, especially if you have

a day job...The judge said the tax code was clear. Caretaker's deduction was available to all women, but only to men who had wives who were incapacitated or dead - or were divorced." -On the Basis of Sex

1 gratuitously demonstrated knowledge about animals:

"Nice to meet you, Andrew. Did you know if flea were size of dog, it could jump over six-story building?" —Andy Richter Controls the Universe



LARGE ROLES

24 characters spoke between 501 and 1500 words



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13 were in films "about" domestic workers who were central characters.



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Evil Nanny villainizes a live-in nanny who uses the legal system to resist eviction

Likely inspired by the real-life story of a 64-year-old nanny who brought legal action against her landlord/employer

https://thecinemaholic.com/is-evil-nanny-a-true-story/

https://www.cnn.com/2014/06/27/us/nanny-squatter/



The Nanny and *Who's the Boss?* are two sitcoms that mine comedy from main characters who are "unconventional" domestic workers.

In an episode of *Family Ties*, a beautiful housekeeper finds work with the Keaton family, even though she lacks professional experience.

In an episode of *The Riches*, a formerly incarcerated woman pretends to be the maid for a family of con artists.

In an episode of *Black-ish*, an enthusiastic nanny assuages her employers' guilt around hiring a Black domestic worker:

"You don't have to feel guilty. I admire how hard you work. I hope to ball out and have what you do one day."

EXTRA-LARGE ROLES

10 characters spoke more than 1500 words



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SERIES TITLE	EPISODE TITLE	CHARACTER	S#	E#	YEAR
2 Broke Girls	And the Pastry Porn	Paulina	3	9	2013
9JKL	Lovers Getaway	Sara	1	9	2017
American Housewife	The Playdate	Roberta	1	10	2017
Andy Richter Controls	The Maid Man	Irina	2	8	2002
Avonlea	The Journey Begins	Nanny Louisa	1	1	1990
Baywatch	Island of Romance	Elke	3	13	1993
Berkeley Square	Gone a'Hunting	Nanny Collins	1	7	1998
Bewitched	Samantha's Super Maid	Amelia	5	14	1969
Black-ish	Black Nanny	Vivian	2	18	2016
Chasing Life	Unplanned Parenthood	Brian Conners	1	7	2014
Cheers	The Book of Samuel	Desiree	5	11	1986
Chicago Med	Best Laid Plans	Catherine	3	13	2018
Chicago Med	In the Name of Love	Ruth	5	18	2020
CSI: Miami	CSI: My Nanny	Mia	6	10	2007
CSI: NY	Trapped	Linda Cortez	2	11	2005
Curb Your Enthusiasm	The Nanny from Hell	Martine	3	4	2002
Curb Your Enthusiasm	The Christ Nail	Maria	5	3	2005

SERIES TITLE	EPISODE TITLE	CHARACTER	S#	E#	YEAR
Dads	Clean on Me	Edna	1	3	2013
Deadbeat	The Ex-orcism	Zoila	2	1	2015
Desperate Housewives	Careful the Things You Say	Christina	6	7	2009
Devious Maids	Once More Unto The Beach	Zoila	4	1	2016
ER	Brothers & Sisters	Jackie	8	9	2002
Family Ties	Help Wanted	Karen Nicholson	3	12	1984
Father Brown	The Star of Jacob	Nanny Langton	5	1	2016
Fingersmith	Episode 1	Susan	1	1	2005
For The People	Rahowa	Margo Elata	1	2	2018
Get Smart	The Laser Blazer	Ingrid	4	10	1968
Ghost Whisperer	Lethal Combination	Kelly Fergusen	5	19	2010
Grace and Frankie	The Aide	Toby	5	3	2019
Hawaii Five-O	Ohuna (The Secret)	Mary	3	7	2012
How I Met Your Mother	Nannies	Mrs. Buckminster	8	3	2012
How to Get Away with Murder	What Happened to You, Annalise?	Rose Edmund	2	10	2016
Hunter Street	The Key	Hedwig	1	6	2017
I Love Lucy	Lucy Hires a Maid	Mrs. Porter	2	23	1953

SERIES TITLE	EPISODE TITLE	CHARACTER	S#	E#	YEAR
Jessie	World Wide Web of Lies	Agatha	1	14	2012
King of Queens	Domestic Disturbance	Inez	7	10	2005
Last Man Standing	The Help	Blanca	2	10	2013
Law & Order	Deceit	Rosetta	6	17	1996
Law & Order	Evil Breeds	Pauline	14	18	2004
Law & Order SVU	Greed	Katarina	3	20	2002
Law & Order SVU	Shaken	Sarah	5	10	2003
Law & Order: UK	Shaken	Leyla Merton	4	3	2010
Lewis	Whom the Gods Would Destroy	Tina	1	2	2007
MacGyver	Twenty Questions	Maid	6	4	1990
Men At Work	Pilot	Alva	1	1	2012
Monarch Of The Glen	Episode 1	Irene Stuart	4	1	2002
NCIS: Los Angeles	Windfall	Bethany	5	20	2014
Nurse Jackie	Caregiver	Carolyn	2	5	2010
NYPD Blue	Caulksmanship	Mildred	4	9	1996
Odd Mom Out	Staffing Up	Rowena	1	8	2015
Rules of Engagement	A Big Bust	Ana	6	9	2012

SERIES TITLE	EPISODE TITLE	CHARACTER	S#	E#	YEAR
Seinfeld	The Maid	Cindy	9	19	1998
Sex And The City	Attack of the Five-Foot-Ten Woman	Magda	3	3	2000
So Random	The New Boyz	Oksana	1	24	2012
Spin City	The Gambler	Edith Connelly	5	13	2001
The Avengers	Something Nasty in the Nursery	Nanny Roberts	5	14	1967
The Dead Files	Return to Evil: Patricksburg, Indiana	Julie	6	9	2016
The Doctor Blake Mysteries	The Sky is Empty	Evelyn	2	9	2014
The Glades	Shot Girls	Ashley Collings	4	2	2013
The Honeymooners	A Woman's Work is Never Done	Thelma	4	4	1955
The Murdoch Mysteries	Downstairs, Upstairs	Nancy	4	4	2011
The Mysteries Of Laura	The Mystery of the Exsanguinated Ex	Olga	1	16	2015
The Nanny	The Nanny-In-Law	Fran	1	10	1994
The Riches	Cinderella	Chunky	1	9	2007
Who's the Boss	Pilot	Tony	1	1	1984
Will and Grace	My Fair Maid-y	April	1	12	1999
Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist	Zoey's Extraordinary Confession	Caregiver applicant	1	7	2020

APPENDIX B: LIST OF FILM CHARACTERS

FILM TITLE	CHARACTER Name	YEAR
A Nanny For Christmas	Ally	2010
Always Be My Maybe	Marcus	2019
An Ordinary Man	Tanja	2017
Benny & Joon	Mrs. Smail	1993
Christmas In Connecticut	Norah	1945
Cluny Brown	Cluny Brown	1946
Downton Abbey	Elsie Carlson	2019
Eloise at the Plaza	Nanny	2003
Elsa & Fred	Laverne	2014
Evil Nanny	Jen	2016
Friends With Money	Olivia	2006
Gosford Park	Mary MacEachran	2001
Hope Springs	Mandy	2003
Intensive Care	Alex	2018
MurderOrient Express	Hildegarde Schmidt	1974
Nanny McPhee	Nanny McPhee	2005

FILM TITLE	CHARACTER Name	YEAR
Nanny Mcphee Returns	Nanny McPhee	2010
Nothing in Common	Lucille	1986
October Kiss	Рорру	2015
On the Basis of Sex	Charles Moritz	2018
Private Lessons	Nicole Mallow	1981
Remains of the Day	Miss Kenton	1993
Stoker	Housekeeper 1	2013
The Cleaning Lady	Shelly	2018
The Fundamentals Of Caring	Ben	2016
The Help	Minerva	2011
The Long Walk Home	Odessa	1990
The Maid's Room	Drina	2013
The Nanny Diaries	Annie	2007
The Offerings	Alyssa	2009
The Scarlet Claw	Nora	1944
What Ever HappenedAunt Alice	Miss Tinsley	1969
Witness For The Prosecution	Janet McIntyre	1957







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