Introduction

My research I have undergone incorporates what the public is watching on television, and whether or not there is a relationship between their TV preferences and their opinions on the U.S prison system. Ultimately, this research is to better understand whether or not the media has an effect on the public’s opinions on U.S incarceration. I asked questions involving education, voting rights, and solitary confinement, to name a few. However, this is preliminary research, this is merely the beginning to what I wish to continue in the future. There are plenty of unanswered questions at the moment, however with what I have done so far, I am excited to further what I have found.

Methodology

I conducted a survey using Google Forms, and composed a series of thirteen questions. Some of these questions being demographics, most others being in regards to U.S incarceration. I focused on questions regarding issues I have seen depicted in TV shows, as well as questions that are either commonly talked about, or are simply what I am interested in. I posted my survey to various social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter. I did not have a specific demographic in mind to target, so what came from my social media posts was unintentional, yet sufficient. My mentor shared it as well. After 7 days of the survey being posted, I closed it and analyzed the data.

Aims/Research Question

My ultimate priority in conducting this research was to identify any sort of relationship between opinions on the prison system and the type of show the majority of respondents are watching. My research question I ended up sticking with was “What prison related TV shows is the public watching, and do these shows shape their opinion on the current U.S prison system?” After viewing the results, my aims in terms of future research have changed slightly, and my potential upcoming research pertaining to this may differ in later surveys.

Results

TV Shows

Prisoners should have access to GED classes while incarcerated

A convicted felon should lose their right to vote

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Conclusions

After reviewing the data, I have found that the majority of those who responded were between the ages of 18-30. Perhaps the respondents answered a bit more liberally given their age. This is something that I would definitely change in any future research I pursue. In terms of TV shows, Orange is the New Black seemed to be the most popular amongst the other 8 answer choices. This wasn’t too much of a shock, although I am pleased that at least one person who took the survey has watched at least one show from the options I presented. As the graphs show, the majority of respondents are in favor of mental health and education facilities, however aspects such as suffrage and solitary confinement were a bit more dispersed all over the board. This may lead to the idea that modern television is not depicting every issue with the prison system that there is or speculated to be—or perhaps the media is catering to the ages the majority of my respondents were, knowing that these are the issues they are already concerned with.

Aims for future research

After conducting this research, I found that there may be a relationship between what TV shows are exemplifying, and the opinion that viewers may have on the prison system. It is interesting to note the variations in responses I received depending on the question. Perhaps in the future, this research could be furthered to better understand the impact TV has on the public opinion, as well as it has on how our nation runs its systems. I would like to dive deeper into understanding what issues modern television are showing to their audiences, and how this influences the general public’s attitudes towards the modern U.S prison system. Perhaps with changes in media depictions, we can work to fix some of the issues that I presented to respondents in my survey.

Acknowledgements

This research was influenced by my mentor, Stephanie Brown, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Illinois.

Citations