The consumption of foreign Netflix originals by American audiences

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Abstract

The increasing dominance and popularity of streaming video-on-demand platforms, most notably Netflix, has transformed the television and film industry – from disrupting established business models, to affecting the process of production, as well as audience's attitudes and viewing behaviors (Pardo, 2013). One of these recent developments that remains largely unmapped in academic literature is the unprecedented success of non-English Netflix originals on the American market. Shows such as the German *Dark* or Spanish *Elite* are breaking the traditional notion of a one-way flow between the continents and gaining avid viewers among the mainstream US audience, which has historically been thought of as rather resistant to international television imports (Hazelton, 2018; McDonald, 2009; Saleem, 2018).

Hence, the present thesis explored this emerging phenomenon by investigating why do American viewers watch foreign Netflix originals and how does cultural proximity and individuals' cultural capital relate to the consumption of foreign Netflix originals by American audiences. Additionally, the study also investigated the ways in which American viewers perceive the quality of foreign Netflix original and how these perceptions of quality contribute to the shows' appeal.

The exploration was guided by theories related to the transnational appeal of high-end television, the contemporary conceptualizations of quality TV and the theories surrounding the roles of cultural proximity and cultural capital in informing and motivating television viewership (Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018; La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

The study focuses on five popular foreign, non-English Netflix originals produced in four different countries – *Dark* (Germany), *3%* (Brazil), *Elite* (Spain), *Cable Girls* (Spain) and *The Rain* (Denmark). The data was collected by means of semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews and was analyzed using the method of thematic analysis. The sample of interviewees consisted of American viewers of the selected foreign Netflix originals. Participants were students or recent graduates aged 18-29, recruited from 12 different US universities.

The findings of this study were organized around two central thematic sections – motivations related to the narrative, including plot and character-related factors, and motivations related to the viewers and their distinct needs, experiences and viewing positions.

The analysis identified that the American viewers were motivated to watch foreign Netflix originals because of a) characteristics related to the plot, b) characteristics related to the

character development and c) as a means of escapism. Furthermore, the findings revealed that both cultural proximity, cultural capital and the characteristics attributed by interviewees to quality television, contributed to informing and directing the viewers' motivation to watch foreign Netflix originals.

Finally, the study resulted in new theoretical contributions by attempting to unify the existing theories related to transnational appeal of foreign television and applying them to the context of foreign Netflix originals and their consumption by US viewers. As a result, the study provided new valuable insights by shifting the perspective from creating strategies of transnational appeal to investigating how these are received by audiences, and by focusing on the American viewers which have been largely understudied within this context.

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1 Introduction

The increasing dominance and popularity of streaming video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms has transformed the television and film industry – from disrupting established business models, to affecting the process of production, as well as audience's attitudes and viewing behaviors (Burroughs, 2018; Pardo, 2013). Netflix, the American streaming service and, more recently, a production company, is prominently cited as one of the most notable actors in leading and accelerating these transformations across the globe (Jenner, 2018). Re-inventing the understanding of today's television by both viewers and industry professionals, Netflix is a major driving force behind many of the emergent industry logics – changing how viewers' make decisions about the content they want to watch through a heavy utilizations of meticulously-crafted algorithms, or promoting new modes of viewership, like binge-watching (Burroughs, 2018; Jenner, 2018). Moreover, with its strong push towards international expansion, which has now led to Netflix being present in over 190 countries, serving over 151 million subscribers (Netflix, 2019), the company also plays a significant role in shifting the established logics of the international distribution and reception of film and television content.

One of the notable developments, which constitutes the central focus of the present research, is the unprecedented increase in local original programming produced by Netflix in its international markets, outside of the United States (Spangler, 2018). Some of this increase might attributed to the company's larger strategic shift towards original programming, as it prepares itself for a future where major studios and TV networks increasingly focus on keeping their most valuable content to themselves, in order to enter the streaming market as competitors. As a result, opportunities to license quality content that could drive Netflix's subscriptions are minimized (Rodriguez, 2018). However, there are other convincing explanations directly related to the company's global expansion. First, in attempt to serve its diverse international base of subscribers, implementing original content tailor to local tastes of audiences in various national markets is an important strategy of localization (Lobato, 2019). Second, European governments are putting increasing pressure on Netflix and other streaming services by implementing quotas for the minimum amount of local content, as well as directions on how prominently local content needs to be advertised to local viewers by algorithms (Lobato, 2019). In 2018, the European Parliament has approved a new regulation that will require at least 30 % of the content available in the local SVOD catalogs of each member country to have a European Union origin. Member nations have until September 2020 to fully implement the quota, but they can enforce it sooner if they wish (Clarke, 2018). This puts Netflix in a position where producing high quality local original productions might be necessary for its continuous

success on the EU market in the not so distant future. Furthermore, it might constitute one of the driving forces behind Netflix's proclaimed strategy of creating local content with a global appeal, since creating local European content which at the same time has a potential to succeed in other non-European markets, allows the company to repurpose the financial investments that will go into these local productions many times, in many markets.

To demonstrante the increasing shift towards original programming, in 2018 Netflix spent over 12 billion US dollars on content, marking a 35 % increase from the year before, with 85 % of this budget being allocated to original series and movies. The company has also launched more than 30 international original series in countries that include France, Poland, India, South Korea and Japan (Spangler, 2019). In 2019, Netflix's first European production center was opened in Madrid, Spain, which aims to employ up to 20 thousand people (Cabeza, 2019). At the time of opening, Netflix's CEO Reed Hastings announced that 24 global originals were currently being in the phase of production or development in Spain (Hopewell, 2019). Furthermore, a research conducted by Ampere Analysis shows that around 52 % of Netflix original series are now produced outside of the U.S., meaning the majority is made internationally (Roxborough, 2019). These figures show that Netflix is increasingly venturing into foreign markets and partnering with local producers to tell local stories with global appeal, instead of just relying on licensed content coming mostly from the United States (Spangler, 2018).

The German series *Dark* is one of the first and most prominent examples of this upcoming trend. The series became one of the most watched non-English shows on the platform, with 90 % of its viewing coming from outside of Germany (Roettgers, 2018). It claimed success in countries such as the United States, where it scored in the top 10 original Netflix series in terms of audience demand following its release in December 2017 (Parrot Analytics, 2018a). Similarly, the Spanish-language original *Money Heist* has been met with very high demand on the US market, ranking in the top 10 in the second quarter of 2018 (Parrot Analytics, 2018b). In 2018, the company also tapped into the potential of Nordic drama, with the Danish production *The Rain* becoming a global hit (Roxborough, 2019).

This tendency seems to contradict both the established industry wisdom and scholastic findings that claim that locally produced drama, especially from smaller markets, such as Germany, does not generally travel well internationally and is often turned down by major broadcasters on the US market (Kumb, Kunz, & Siegert, 2017). Similarly, it challenges the traditional notion that audiences tend to prefer locally produced programming to foreign imports,

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due to the sense of cultural proximity it can create on both the national and cultural-linguistic level (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

Over the past decades, the flow of American products to international markets around the world – be it Europe, Latin America or Asia – has been thoroughly debated and researched within the academic circles. The phenomenon has mostly been theorized through the lens of the cultural imperialism debate, which suggested the existence of a one-way flow from the West to the rest. Within this discourse, the "West" was mostly synonymous with the United States, or to a lesser extent the UK and parts of Western Europe, while "the rest" represented national markets around the world (Lobato, 2019). The one-way flow theory implies that the United States motion-picture and TV industries largely dominate the global trade through massive exports of content to foreign markets, where it serves as a relatively cheap way for national broadcasters to fill their schedules. This led scholars and practitioners argue, the United States exert asymmetrical influence on these markets, creating cultural and economic dependence (Lobato, 2019).

The willingness of international audiences to consume television content produced in the United States is then often explained using the dynamics described above. That is, since viewers are being constantly exposed to entertainment content coming from the United States, this exposure can over time lead them to become accustomed to American content due to its omnipresence, and even create a sense of familiarity and proximity (Beck, 2002; La Pastina, & Straubhaar, 2005). Moreover, the demand for American film and television is often high within viewers in small national markets, as local producers do not have the financial means to reach standards of quality established by the US industry (La Pastina, & Straubhaar, 2005). Consequently, the traditionally assumed role of nationality in the reception of foreign media content is diminished. The end result is that American blockbuster movies such as *The Lord of the Rings* are gaining success worldwide and as Lobato (2019, p. 76) puts it, "CSI and Grey's Anatomy can be seen almost anywhere, while flagship productions from the rest of the world travel less frequently beyond their national borders".

However, the flow of televisions products has recently undergone changes which made it possible for content from diverse national markets to spread internationally, and succeed in historically import-resistant markets, such as the United States (Buonanno, 2018). And as presented at the beginning of this chapter, some of Netflix's foreign original productions were able to achieve just that, prompting industry practitioners to argue United States might be becoming and increasingly important market for foreign-produced, non-English shows (Hazelton, 2018). However, as these developments are very recent, little is known about the

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forces and logics that guide the transnational reception of television content (or film) in the opposite direction to the historically assumed one-way flow – that is how, why and under which conditions viewers in the United States consume foreign content imported from local, international markets.

Similarly, there is a lack of academic research into the factors that contribute to the global success of Netflix's original programming, especially the ability of locally produced non-English originals to cross national, cultural and linguistic borders. And even though the company claims to have an unprecedented amount of data on their users' behavior that goes far beyond the traditional divisions along demographic categories, and which Netflix uses to drive everything from production, through creating personalized viewing recommendations for its subscribers, the company never releases its data in full. Consequently, this lack of transparency leaves scholars with little information to answer long running questions about transnational audiences' tastes and viewership (Gray, 2017).

Research questions

As a result, some critical cultural scholars in the field of television research had called for a revival of audience studies, focused on uncovering and critically assessing insights about contemporary audiences, without having to rely on speculations or uncomplete data released by private companies (Gray, 2017).

Consequently, the present research aims to answer the following **research question** (RQ) and **sub-research questions** (Sub-RQ):

RQ: Why do American audiences consume non-English, foreign[1] Netflix originals?[2]

Sub-RQ1: How do American audiences perceive the quality of non-English, foreign Netflix originals? And how do their perceptions of quality contribute to the appeal of Netflix originals?

Sub-RQ2: How does cultural proximity and individuals' cultural capital relate to the consumption of non-English, foreign Netflix originals by American audiences?

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[1] Within the context of this research, *foreign* refers to being produced outside of the United States.
[2] This question pertains to both making the **choice to view a Netflix original** and the **appeal of a Netflix original**, i.e. the level of enjoyment and positive rating by the viewer.

Hence, the theoretical problem this thesis aims to explore can be divided into three parts. First, it will attempt to uncover the motivations of American viewers for watching foreign Netflix originals, and identify the factors that can both increase or decrease their appeal to those viewers and entice or prohibit enjoyment of the series. This part of the research will be guided by existing literature identifying strategies of creating television programming with transnational appeal (Jenner, 2018; Dunleavy, 2014), as well as findings related to factors influencing viewers' attitudes to televised fiction series (Diego & Etayo, 2012) .

Second, taking into consideration the repeatedly theorized link between 'quality TV' and transnational success of contemporary television drama (Diego & Etayo, 2012; Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018), and the long term strategy of Netflix to brands itself, and especially its original programming within the paradigm of quality TV (Jenner, 2018), the present thesis will aim to explore these links in more detail. Specifically, it will explore how American viewers perceive foreign Netflix originals in terms of quality, which characteristics they assign to the concept of 'quality TV' and which aspects of quality are most important to them when it comes to televised fiction.

Finally, it will attempt to identify the contributions of cultural proximity in motivating viewership of foreign Netflix original series by considering various avenues through which the foreign series might create a sense of familiarity or foreignness within the American viewers. Furthermore, the concept of proximity is heavily depended on the layers of identity available to viewers, i.e. what is perceived as proximate or distant and foreign, depends on each person's cultural and ethnic backgrounds, language abilities and other aspects (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005). As a result, contributions of cultural capital will also be considered.

In order to answer the research questions proposed by this thesis, a qualitative research approach was implemented. Specifically, a series of 13 semi-structured in-depth interviews was conducted with American viewers of the following five selected foreign Netflix originals – *Dark* (Germany), *Elite* (Spain), *3%* (Brazil), *Cable Girls* (Spain) and *The Rain* (Denmark). The sample of participants comprised of United States nationals, who are students or recent graduates of a college or university in the US, under the age of 30 and have seen at least one season of at least one of the Netflix series listed above.

Scientific and social relevance

As proposed above, the *scientific relevance* of the present research lies in its potential to fill in the existing gap in academic knowledge concerning transnational audiences, and success factors related to transnational programming. This is especially relevant considering that to this day, success factors have mainly been studied in relation to theatrical release and focused on

the US, English-language productions (Kumb, Kunz, & Siegert, 2017). Similarly, in line with the traditional one-way flow paradigm, scholastic investigations into transnational viewership of foreign film and television have mostly focused on local audiences from European, Asian and Latin American markets and their consumption of American (or other anglophone) products. Hence, the outcomes of this study can provide a valuable shift in perspective and aid in assessing how the logics of transnational appeal apply to American audiences.

Furthermore, the current study aims to expand the understandings of how transnational appeal of television content is achieved by exploring existing theories within the more specific context of the reception of foreign Netflix originals by American viewers. As a result, it further complements previous research investigating the strategies producers of high-end television drama implement in order to create a global-local appeal by providing valuable insights into how these strategies are received by viewers. Finally, the exploration of these areas can also help scholars to gain a better understanding of the specific nature of SVOD audiences' behaviors, values and preference, especially in relation to overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers.

The project also carries a *social relevance*, since it can uncover new frames for discussion about diversity in television and the multidirectionality of cultural flows in today's globalized and digitalized world. This will be beneficial for both industry professionals as well as policymakers in making better informed decisions related to production and distribution of film and television programming.

Thesis outline

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows:

First the *Theoretical chapter* provides a literature review discussing the main theories and previous research findings related to transnational appeal of television content, as well as more general insights into factors influencing attitudes towards televised fiction series. It highlights the relations between certain aspects of the quality TV paradigm and the potential of television content to travel and succeed internationally. This chapter also discusses previous studies related to transnational viewership of foreign film and television by viewers from countries including Spain, Croatia or New Zealand, and considers how these insights could be applied to guide the exploration of viewership by audiences in the United States. Finally, it considers the current American viewing context and, in the light of the theories of cultural proximity and capital, discusses the potential barriers that could prevent American viewers from seeking out and enjoying foreign content, as well as factors that could contribute to their appeal.

Second, the *Method chapter* discusses the choice of a qualitative approach to conduct this investigation. It provides an insight into the process, and reasoning behind the sampling of

the five selected foreign Netflix originals, as well as the participants that were interviewed. Finally, the process of data collection, operationalization and data analysis is described transparently and in detail, including the topic list used to guide the interviews.

The fourth chapter introduces the *results* (themes) that emerged through the means of analyzing the interviews. In this chapter, two major thematic sections are identified. First, motivations related to the narrative, including factors related to the plots and characters, as well as considering the contributions of cultural proximity and interviewees' perceptions of quality. In the second part, motivations related to the viewers and their distinct needs, experiences and viewing positions were identified, while considering the contributions of cultural capital. The findings are discussed in relation to previous academic studies and the literature review presented in chapter 2.

Finally, based on the findings, the *Conclusion chapter* provides clear answers to the research question and sub-research questions outlined in the introduction. Furthermore, it critically discusses these findings and their theoretical implications. Finally, this chapters addresses the limitations of the present study and provides suggestions for future research.

2 Theoretical chapter

As detailed in the introduction chapter above, the theoretical framework describing the construction of global-local appeal within Netflix's original productions proposed by Jenner (2018), along with insights into the factors that influence attitudes towards televised fiction series (Dunleavy, 2014), as well as previous research on cultural proximity and cultural capital (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005) will guide the present study. The following chapter will introduce and discuss these theoretical concepts in more depth and explore how they can be applied to the current research.

2. 1 Netflix as a transnational broadcaster

The current understandings of transnational audiences are highly fragmented, lack a common conceptual framework and are based on findings developed at times when digital, intercultural communication did not play a role nearly as central, as it does today (Athique, 2014). Therefore, these understandings are starting to lose their relevance as media consumption and distribution gain an increasingly transnational character, by taking place and connecting people across national boundaries (Jenner, 2018).

Netflix's international expansion into 190 countries, accumulating over 151 million subscribers worldwide, can serve as one of the most prominent examples of this phenomenon of increasing transnationality in the current media environment (Feldman, 2018; Netflix, 2019). The beginning of Netflix's internationalization dates back to 2010, when it started offering its services in Canada for the first time. Soon after, other territories followed and by 2015, the company was present in Latin America, parts of Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan (Lobato, 2019). As Netflix expanded outside of the US borders and into the new territories, the position, as well as its audiences' expectations have substantially shifted. Viewers across the globe got accustomed to new modes of viewing, more specifically binge-watching, which is promoted by the very structure of Netflix's scheduling model that releases entire seasons at once and at the same time for all its national markets (Jenner, 2018). International audiences also became familiar with and accustomed to Netflix's original programming meeting the characteristics of the quality TV paradigm, which tries to position itself in contrast to (national) cable-TV broadcasting and other television forms 'of the past' (Burroughs, 2018; Jenner, 2018)

Furthermore, Netflix's audience is highly fragmented, with groups of viewers accumulating around specific texts across borders, rather than within one national context, as used to be the case in the broadcast television era (Jenner, 2018). This explains how series such as *Stranger Things* or *Narcos* are managing to gain cult following in countries across the

globe (Lobato, 2019). As a result of this fragmentation, national identity is no longer always the dominant axis when it comes to the choice and reception of television and film programming, but instead, audiences can take on various viewing positions, drawing upon both their national and transnational identities (Jenner, 2018).

The viewing positions audiences can choose to take are therefore heavily dependent on the availability of different identities, which as Straubhaar (2007) argues, continue to layer up as people migrate, travel, live abroad, learn new languages and gain access to new media. According to Jenner (2018), the command of a foreign language and the familiarity with different cultures are the two most important aspects of transcultural viewing experiences, ones that can allow them to think and function across cultural domains. However, this does not prevent content produced outside of the viewers' nation to be perceived as foreign, to the extent that it can portray situations or settings that might seem culturally distant to the viewers, and hard to relate to (Jenner, 2018). Therefore, in the case of Netflix, the strategy of creating a global-local appeal across national borders relies on identifying commonalities other than nationality that can bind viewers together and be universally understandable.

2. 2 Grammar of transnationalism

In order to speak to both local/national and global audiences, Netflix aims to implement a *grammar of transnationalism* in the production process of all its original programming (Jenner, 2018). The concept refers to a set of textual features that have the capability to shift the viewers' focus towards perceived commonalities rather than differences. In the context of the present, the grammar of transnationalism framework can therefore provide a useful guide for trying to identify the aspects that could either minimize or compensate for the cultural distance between the country of origin of the selected foreign Netflix originals and the American viewers. Specifically, Jenner (2018) identifies the following five text features that together comprise Netflix's global-local strategy:

1) Employing genres associated with quality or serious subject matters. Instead of relying on the lowest-common denominator programming, the company tries to brand its production within the paradigm of 'quality TV', in accordance with the standards previously set by HBO. These include complex, edgy narratives and aesthetics, pushing artistic boundaries and utilizing the genre of serialized dramas (Burroughs, 2018; Jenner, 2018). In order to claim this position, Netflix often employs serious genres associated with quality, such as political thrillers (e.g. *House of Cards*), or historical dramas (*The Crown*).

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2) Disrupting the idea of history as 'ours'. Achieved by putting emphasis on the visual elements, such as elaborate sets and costumes, postmodernist hyperreality, as well as fantastical and horror elements, rather than the national and political aspects. This strategy can be exemplified using the American hit series *Stranger Things* which became highly popular around the world. The series portrays a very specific period in American history, i.e. the 1980's, however the fantasy and horror elements utilized within the show highlight its hyperreality. This allows the show to shift the focus away from the local political and societal debates related to this time period, which might be foreign and distant to international viewers who are not familiar with the history of the United States and the country's cultural developments.

3) Aesthetics. Specifically, experiential, originality-focused cinematic aesthetics, within the paradigm of 'quality TV' are some of the major strategies utilized to create transnational appeal. This notion is supported by other authors as well, who notice that Netflix relies on high production values and cinematography and is freer to push artistic boundaries and produce more edgy, complex content, since it is not subject to the whims and desires of advertisers, unlike traditional broadcast TV (Burroughs, 2018).

4) Appeal to a transnational value system. Even though Netflix's in-house dramas often focus on locally specific issues, they simultaneously manage to keep a transnational appeal by emphasizing a more global system of liberal values, recognizable by audiences everywhere. For example, one of Netflix's earliest originals, Orange is the New Black, deals with issues that seem highly local, such as the American prison and penal systems, or the Black Lives Matters protest. However, while exploring these topics the show simultaneously refers to broader liberal values such as anti-sexism, anti-racism, or anti-homophobia that can resonate with viewers' not familiar with the US context.

5) Multilingualism. Finally, implementing multiple different languages into its original productions can serve to address and appeal to a number of non-English or bilingual audiences. Some recent examples can include the American-Colombian series *Narcos*, which has dialogues in both Spanish and English, or the American drama *13 Reasons Why*, that introduced segments of Spanish dialogue in its third season, in a move that could possibly increase the perceived authenticity of its Latina characters, and appeal to Spanish-speaking viewers.

Since language can hinder the effects of other strategies of transnationalism, Netflix further implements strategies of domestication, to prevent any disruptions. This mainly entails translation, specifically the use of either subtitles or dubbing, based on the customs of the given market (Jenner, 2018). The importance of localization (or domestication, in Jenner's terms) for

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Netflix's international strategy is similarly cited by Lobato (2019), who points out the streaming service attempts to make its content accessible to global viewers by translating millions of hours of content each year, making it the most multilingual television service that has ever existed.

2. 3 High-end television drama and transnational appeal

Even though Netflix has recently gained a flagship position in the production and distribution of transnational high-end programming, we can find examples of these strategies of global-local appeal, as described by Jenner (2018), being increasingly implemented by smaller producers and broadcast television channels as well. This can be attributed to the intense competition between broadcast channels and streaming services (with their increasing production of high-quality original content), which makes high-end original drama a necessary asset for attracting viewers (Dunleavy, 2014).

Using the case study of a Danish crime series *Forbrydelsen*, a high-end drama created for a local public broadcast channel, that has been subsequently exported to 120 countries and gained a large transnational success, Dunleavy (2014) identifies five key characteristics of contemporary high production value TV drama, as well as the role of narrative transparency in its transnational distribution.

1) A must-see allure. According to Dunleavy (2014) post-network era high-end drama aims to attract addictive, rather than appointment viewing. This is often achieved by implementing a complex, serial narrative. This partially overlaps with Jenner's (2018) strategy of implementing quality genres and can be further supported by the findings of Steiner and Xu (2018) which revealed that hour-long serial dramas were related to a high-attentive binge-watching, as the complex plot, dialogue and characters required a more careful viewing and analysis. Combining this with cliff-hangers that typically appear at the end of each episode then enticed viewers to continue watching.

2) Higher profile for authorship. The second factor refers to a shift towards establishing a single writer-producer, who is given an increased creative autonomy spanning from creating the vision to its realization. Consequently, this type of organization allows for more complex and innovative narratives.

3) Generic mixing in concept design. The third characteristic of a high-end drama stands for achieving conceptual innovation through blending the tropes and aesthetics of various genres (e.g. melodrama and crime investigation). Interestingly, comparing this to the strategies of transnational appeal attributed to Netflix productions, Jenner (2018, p. 227) proposes that "quality TV often re-invents or eschews genre, Netflix' reliance on algorithms of

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genre […] means that this often does not apply to Netflix. Instead, it often employs genres associated with 'quality' or serious subject matter."

4) Narrative complexity. A characteristic that refers to serialized storytelling and dense layering of interweaving storylines and is once again closely related to the concept of quality genres and television as pioneered by HBO. This complex structure also allows for the interrogation of morally ambiguous lead characters, creating distinctive mythologies, the use of non-linear storytelling and the juxtaposition of conflicting perspectives.

5) Enhanced visual quality. The fifth characteristic is that current high-end TV drama is getting much closer to the visual qualities of cinema. This is especially due to the extended after-life for high-end drama, and the utilization of innovative digital video formats. To further the links to previous theories, the concept of enhanced visual quality also very closely resembles the strategy defined as "aesthetics" by Jenner (2018).

Dunleavy (2014) concludes that even though *Forbrydelsen* was devised for the Danish audience, fulfilling the five above-mentioned characteristics of contemporary high-end drama has positioned it to successfully compete in foreign markets with American and other drama products, creating a world-class production that managed to overcome the traditional resistance of English-speaking television networks, as well as audiences, to foreign subtitled imports. In this sense, the above described characteristics of high-quality television drama can be simultaneously understood as strategies that have the potential to create global-local appeal and ensure transnational success. Hence, despite the study focusing on content produced by a traditional broadcaster, the identified factors can provide a highly useful guideline in the context of the present study, as they theorize additional avenues through which cultural distance between the American audiences and foreign Netflix originals could be overcome, and through which these productions could appeal to the American viewers.

2. 4 Narrative transparency and cultural proximity

Besides the five characteristics of high-end drama contributing to transnational success, Dunleavy (2014) also emphasizes the international potentials of *narrative transparency*. This concept often used to explain the international appeal of American films and television programs, but applicable to the context of distribution flows in various other directions (e.g. from Europe to the United States). In this context, narrative transparency can be defined as "any textual apparatus that allows audiences to project indigenous values, beliefs, rites, and rituals into imported media" (p. 8), that is tropes, values, and myths with the potential to resonate universally. It is therefore very closely related to and encompasses various elements of the

strategies of transnational appeal previously defined by Jenner (2018) as *disrupting the idea of history as 'ours'*, *appeal to a transnational value system* and, to a certain extent, *multilingualism*.

The concept of narrative transparency can be also linked to La Pastina and Straubhaar's (2005) **theory of cultural proximity**, which the authors claim can be used to explain viewers' choices of television programming. According to the theory, audiences tend to choose television programs that are closest and most relevant to them in cultural and linguistic terms, meaning their first preference is often for shows produced in their local or native language and national culture. The second preference would then be for programs produced within cultures that are similar, be it through historical, linguistic, religious or other ties.

However, according to La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005), viewers' preferences can also go to programs which deal with broad universal themes that have the capability to resonate globally. This is a concept, that was later identified by Straubhaar (2007) as thematic proximity and is very similar to how Dunleavy (2014) defines the mechanisms of narrative transparency. Specifically, some of the commonly cited universal themes or archetypes according to the authors, are: self-determination, endurance and strength, a main 'disobedient female' character who defies social oppression, an archetype of a heroic struggle and resistance again enemies, poverty and misfortune, and finally a mobility of an individual or family from poverty to material success (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

Additionally, genre and value proximities were also developed in later Straubhaar's (2007) work, to complement those of purely linguistic and cultural bonds. Here, genre proximity refers to a familiarity with certain genre and the narrative structures and tropes that they use regardless of country of origin. Value proximity then refers to share values, similar to the strategy described earlier in this chapter in relation to Netflix's strategy of portraying transnational liberal values that can resonate with people around the world.

To summarize, it is apparent from the theories and models detailed in this chapter so far, that there are multiple emerging overlaps between the factors and strategies that both Jenner (2018) and Dunleavy (2014) attribute to the creation of transnational appeal. At the same time, while some of these factors and strategies seem to be informed by the concept of quality, other seem to rely on the more traditional concept of creating proximity. More specifically, factors such as innovative aesthetics, or complex edgy narratives, seem to promote appeal within transnational viewers by making them appreciate the technical, conceptual, narrative or artistic excellence and craftsmanship of the foreign television product – therefore it could be seen as a strategy of *compensating for the cultural distance*, rather than erasing it. On the contrary, there are strategies such as the implementation of narrative transparency (Dunleavy, 2014) or

promoting transnational values (Jenner, 2018), that seem to rely on creating cultural proximity in the traditional sense as outlined above with the theory of La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005). These strategies could therefore be seen aiming to *erase or minimize the cultural distance* and appeal to viewers by allowing them to personally, linguistically and culturally relate to the situations, characters and values portrayed in the foreign series. The following table created by merging the overlapping concepts from Jenner's (2018) and Dunleavy's (2014) models demonstrates the proposition outlined above:

Strategies for transnational appeal of high-end drama	
Quality as compensation for cultural distance	**Proximity** to minimize cultural distance
Complex narratives	Narrative transparency
Quality, serious genres	Transnational values
High profile for authorship	Multilingualism
Innovative, cinematic aesthetics	
Must-see allure	

Figure 1 Unified model of the strategies for transnational appeal of high-end drama

Finally, when considering the contributions of proximity to transnational appeal of foreign television, a recent study conducted by Jensen (2018) can provide valuable insights. The above-mentioned models presented by Dunleavy (2014) and Jenner (2018) consider proximity at the level of production and development, that is as a strategy that producers use to create a potential for transnational appeal before the series even reaches the viewers. On the other hand, Jensen (2018), provides an additional unique perspective by conducting research into the audience reception of high-end Danish television drama by Australian viewers. Focusing on the shows *Forbrydelsen*, *Borgen* and *Bron/Broen*, Jensen challenges the traditional notion that cultural distance (reflected in the settings, institutions, values or daily life portrayed in the shows) must necessary cause viewers to identify with the foreign show less, and consequently be less motivated to watch it over a local production.

On the contrary, through analyzing the interviews with Australian viewers, the author identifies two major sources of appeal that work regardless – or even because of – the cultural distance experienced. First, when watching the Danish series, Australian viewers experienced a

sense of *emotional proximity*, in the sense that situations and characters portrayed in the show not only stroke an emotional chord and seemed similar and relatable to the life of the viewers, but many viewers reported the Danish characters actually seemed more multi-faceted and authentic then those in Australian or American series. Second, Jensen (2018) identified that the *perceived "otherness"* of the show acted as a source of appeal for viewers, rather than discouragement. Respondents enjoyed the edginess of the series, the different aesthetics and even the societal otherness, perceiving Danish society as more advanced, progressive and as treating minorities better compared to what they are witnessing in Australia. Jensen (2018) concludes that audiences constantly move along a global/local and familiar/strange continuum and are able to effortlessly zoom in and out. Consequently, some of them "actually prefer non-local content because it is felt to be emotionally proximate, more authentic, different, aspirational and even exotic" (p. 14).

A similar argument is proposed by Straubhaar et al. (2015), who identify *cosmopolitanism* as a useful perspective for examining viewers' choices of television programming. Specifically, cosmopolitan viewers exhibit an orientation and openness towards global culture, meaning they are interested in exploring different national cultures and open to consuming foreign content, at times even choosing content that reflects the cultural "other" over domestic production. As seen from both Jensen's (2018) and Straubhaar et al. (2015) insights, it is therefore apparent that there is another emerging avenue for transnational success of foreign television shows. One that in contrast to the models presented by Jenner (2018) and Dunleavy (2014) does not rely on neither creating proximity or compensating for proximity through the means of the quality paradigm, but in which "otherness" and cultural distance is understood by viewers as an asset and a source of appeal on its own.

2. 5 Defining quality television

As proposed in the summary above, both the framework of 'grammar of transnationalism' proposed by Jenner (2018), as well as the characteristics of contemporary high-end television drama defined by Dunleavy (2014) rely heavily on various aspects of 'quality tv' and the role of this concept in creating a global appeal for audiences across borders. However, the concept of quality television does not have a clear, widely accepted definition and can be studied from several angles (Bayo-Moriones, Etayo, & Sánchez-Tabernero, 2018).

In a study focused on revisiting quality television from the perspective of audiences, specifically focusing on viewers of Spanish television channels, Bayo-Moriones et al. (2018), propose the following ten potential dimensions of quality in relation to television content:

information, entertainment, education, promotion of desirable values, content variety, commitment to society, originality, technical quality, protection of local culture, and *adjustment to one's own preferences and opinions*.

The authors argue that conceptualizing quality television in terms of originality and innovation or technical excellence associated to taste and aesthetics, is characteristic predominantly within the circles of professionals and practitioners, such as television critics, producers and buyers. While, based on their exploration, the researchers conclude that viewers themselves most often associated *entertainment* with the concept of quality television when assessing the content of the Spanish broadcast channel Antena 3.

These findings, however, differ from the model presented by Jenner (2018) which suggests that the way television content produced by Netflix appeals to audiences is more heavily dependent on attributes such as aesthetics, values and genre.

In relation to the research questions presented in the beginning of this study, it is therefore important to explore which (if any) of the above are the dimensions of quality television that Netflix subscribers attribute to, and use to evaluate Netflix's original programming, taking into consideration the different target audiences (and their expectations) of traditional television channels, as opposed to a transnational, SVOD broadcaster.

2. 6 Factors influencing attitudes to fiction series

A further insightful contribution into this discussion is provided by Diego and Etayo (2012) who give an overview of explanatory factors of preferences for television fiction series and explore the role of demographic factors in creating preference for either domestically produced or American-made fiction within Spanish audiences.

The authors identify various factors that have been previously found to influence audiences' attitudes to fiction series.

1) ***Enjoyment.*** Previous studies have suggested enjoyment, related to hedonic motives, such as fun and amusement, to be the most important motive driving the consumption of entertainment products.

2) ***Appreciation and meaningfulness.*** However, recent scholastic work has identified other sources of gratification not related to pleasure, such as appreciation or meaningfulness, as significant motives for exposure to entertainment.

3) ***Identification with main characters*** has also been found to be positively related to enjoyment of television series.

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4) ***Affective disposition*** and ***parasocial interaction*** mechanisms. Where affective disposition is defined as the viewers making moral judgments about characters which in turn increases their enjoyment of the entertainment product (Zillmann & Cantor, 1977 in Diego & Etayo, 2012), while parasocial interaction stands for a one-sided emotional relationship that audience members can experience in their encounters with a media performer, particularly in the context of television (Rubin & Perse, 1987 in Diego & Etayo, 2012).

5) ***Personal resonance.*** Previous findings have revealed that when memories from the viewer's own life are prompted by watching a television program, a more refined reception of the fiction program may take place as a result.

6) ***Cognitive elaboration.*** Related to the previous point, the level of reflection prompted by watching a fiction program can influence the viewer's attitudes and enjoyment.

7) ***Cultural proximity.*** A level of familiarity that allows viewers to culturally identify with situations, events and characters portrayed in the program.

8) ***Preexisting familiarity with actors***, as well as attitudes towards the actors involved in a television product, can similarly influence the level of audience enjoyment.

9) ***Perceived realism.*** The fictional world altering or breaking the rules of the real reference world can be perceived negatively by the audiences.

10) ***Perceived quality.*** Quality in terms of production values, acting standards and editing has also been shown to play a role in creating a sense of connectedness.

Relating this overview to the notions of Jenner (2018) and Bayo-Moriones et al. (2018) on quality television and the perception of quality by audiences, the vast number of above-mentioned factors seem to show the dimension of *enjoyment or entertainment* could be just one aspect or avenue of audience reception of television series, and can coexist and complement the understanding of quality defined by Jenner (2018) which puts more emphasis on factors such as aesthetics and production values (here defined as *'perceived quality'*), *cognitive elaboration* prompted by complex and innovative narrative styles, or *appreciation.*

Furthermore, the strategies of transnational, global-local appeal previously described by Jenner (2018) as a *transnational value system* or *disrupting the idea of history as ours,* seem to overlap with the concepts Diego and Etayo (2012) go on to define as *personal resonance*, *cultural proximity* or *identification with main characters*, and simultaneously ties into the concept of *narrative transparency* proposed by Dunleavy (2014), further strengthening the link between television's transnational appeal and audience's perceptions of its quality.

Another aim of the present research will therefore lie in uncovering which of these (as well as other) factors influence the attitudes of American viewers towards foreign Netflix originals, how they connect to the perceptions of quality, and finally how they can act together to motivate viewership.

2. 7 Cultural capital and programming choice

The rise of multichannel broadcasting and later, the emergence of streaming on-demand platforms, created a cultural divide between the old way of broadcasting to mass, diverse audiences and the new trend of narrowcasting to educated and affluent niche audiences (Buonanno, 2018). However, Straubhaar (2007) argues that, even though the emergence of new media channels might lead people to believe that the identities of large numbers of viewers are deeply globalized, their proportion is in fact quite small. Consequently, the traditional levels of identity (i.e. local, regional, national) remain to be the strongest for many people.

According to La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005), this divide can be crucial in informing and predicting viewers' choice of television programming, since it shapes the levels of identity available to them. Class, ethnicity or even geographical placement within the country can have a significant impact on what is relevant to the viewers.

Therefore, when assessing the choices made by viewers confronted with an influx of both nationally produced content and foreign imports, a tension remains between the historically assumed preference for local programming that is closest and most relevant to them in terms of culture and language, as opposed to choosing an internationally produced content (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005). As the authors propose, increased exposure to content and information flowing in from different corners of the globalized world, can overtime lead to the content creating a sense of familiarity and proximity, due to its omnipresence, as is the case with products from the US being avidly consumed by audiences across the world.

This trend can be further exemplified with the empirical findings of Pjesivac and Imre (2016) who indicate that cultural capital acquired through the knowledge of English language, US lifestyle, and the exposure to American movies and press, all served as strong predictors for consumption of American television (sitcoms and dramas) by young Croatian audiences.

Similar research has been conducted by Diego and Etayo (2012) who explored explanatory factors related to Spanish viewers' preferences for domestically produced versus foreign-made television fiction, specifically focusing on studying the role of demographic characteristics. The study builds upon previous findings that showed sex, age, education, nationality and taste all have the potential to shape preferences for entertainment content. Most

relevant to the context of the present study, the authors cite results showing that better educated people are often more demanding in terms of the quality of the fiction series they watch, and they might also be more likely to follow and understand complex narratives and plots typical for high-quality American production. Furthermore, more educated (non-American) viewers should have a higher level of cultural proximity towards American series, since they are more likely to have travelled to the United States and therefore would be more knowledgeable about the place at which the series are set, as well as more likely to have some proficiency in the English language.

In terms of nationality, Diego and Etayo (2012) point out the impact of immigration on the Spanish television fiction and argue that the often negative and stereotypical portrayal of immigrants in domestic production could result in viewers with an immigrant background (as opposed to Spanish-born viewers) to be less inclined to prefer domestically-produced programs.

Finally, relating to the earlier discussion of connections between quality and programming choice, the authors suggest viewers whose favorite type of television content is fiction programs can be expected to prefer content with higher production values, which means they might incline to prefer American-made series, whose production budget is much higher.

The findings of the study have supported some of these notions. They revealed male viewers preferred American series, while female viewers showed preference for domestically produced ones. In terms of age, American series were more appealing to younger viewers, which the authors hypothesize could be due to young people expecting higher production standards and more creative storylines. According to expectations, higher educational level was positively related to a preference for US-made television series, and viewers who reported preferring fiction content tended to also prefer American series over Spanish-made ones. Finally, the perceived quality of fiction series (either Spanish or American) was significantly related to viewers' preferences for one or the other. However, other variables remained significant even when the perception of quality was controlled for, suggesting it is not the only factor viewers considered.

Another study exploring the relationships between demographic factors and the consumption of foreign film online was conducted by Huffer (2017). The reasoning behind focusing on online consumption specifically is because, as the author argues, the recent emergence of SVOD platforms and increased circulation of film online has brought along the idea that these new avenues of access will contribute to a process of democratization which will encourage a more globally-diverse viewing culture, due to the breadth and variety of international film now available online, as well as how easy it can be for viewers across nations

to access it. Furthermore, scholars argue that this could bring more opportunities for filmmakers from previously marginalized markets, that used to be disadvantaged by the old distribution patterns, such as the one-way flow from the United States to the world (Iordanova, 2012 in Huffer, 2017).

However, Huffer (2017) argues that viewers' engagement with international film can be limited by various constraints related to the structure and access to online platforms, as well as cultural competencies. Focusing on the latter, certain socio-demographic variables can alienate viewers from particular cultural spaces and content.

In an exploration of the methods used to access and types of films watched by New Zealand audiences, Huffer (2017) found that the engagement with foreign films was positively related with an increase in age an income. However older people with higher income were also less likely to access film through online distribution platforms. The author hypothesizes the link between age and consumption could be due to younger audiences having less interest in socio-culture hierarchies of the past, when it was common for middle class to distinguish themselves through the consumption of more exclusive, higher forms of culture. Overall, the study revealed that engagement with foreign films is higher in offline spaces, such as through theatrical exhibition and film societies.

2. 8 American viewing context

The flow of cultural products from the United States to local markets (such as European countries) has historically been strongly one-dimensional (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005). And even though, as Buonanno (2018) points out, this flow has recently undergone changes which made it possible for films and television series originated in a wide range of places to spread internationally, production from the United States still claims the largest share of global circulation. As Steemers (2004) proposes, this is partially because the United States profit from a commercial system that promotes mass-appeal fiction programming, which has the potential to appeal just as much to international audiences as it does to the multiculturally diverse US market, while the exports of non-US programs to the country can be quite problematic since they often lack a cross-cultural appeal that could capture the interest of American viewers.

This is especially visible in the US cinema industry where, as McDonald (2009) argues, foreign-language films have always comprised only a small share of the box office, where as of the early 2000's the top ten foreign films released in the US only reached 10% of the box office revenues generated by the top ten domestic films, and foreign language products accounted for mere 2 to 5 % of films released in the United States (Tu, 2009).

Furthermore, in the United States foreign films were historically mainly consumed as a symbol of high culture, by young audiences from universities and cosmopolitan cities (McDonald, 2009). However, some industry observers argue this logic has been revolutionized by the SVOD platforms, and specifically Netflix. They claim that while foreign-language products might be struggling to make profit in US cinemas, they are gaining unprecedented success on US television platforms (Hazelton, 2018; Saleem, 2018). Furthermore, as the States are becoming an increasingly important market for non-English, subtitled shows, industry practitioners predict these will become more mainstream, and therefore American audiences more accustomed (Hazelton, 2018).

When it comes to the barriers American viewers experience in relation to the consumption and enjoyment of foreign film or television, one of the most often cited issues is subtitling.

There is an established notion in the industry that viewers from the United States tend to be resistant towards subtitled imports and prefer dubbing, even if they might themselves report differently (Roettgers, 2018). Furthermore, this trend seems to be persistent for American Netflix audiences as well, despite the push from the company towards creating a high-quality content with an international appeal, or as Netflix's Chief Product Officer Greg Peters has put it "It doesn't matter where you live or what languages you speak, this is about great storytelling" (Collins, 2018). However, United States seem to be one market in particular, where the company struggles to turn this idea into practice. A survey conducted by Netflix has shown that a high percentage of American viewers does not want to watch content in other languages than English. By conducting experiments, the company did find that if the quality of the foreign-language content was high, audiences were happy to watch it (Collins, 2018).

However, they also found viewers were much more likely to finish the series if they were shown a dubbed version, rather than a subtitled one. This is in line with the company's data on some of their most popular foreign originals, such as the German show *Dark* and Brazilian *3%*, both of which the majority of American viewers watch with dubbed audio (Nguyen, 2018; Roettgers, 2018). As a result, for the American market, dubbing is now set as a default when watching a foreign production on Netflix, with subtitles offered as an option. Furthermore, Netflix routinely provides dubbing in 10 languages, up to as many as 26 in case of children productions, while continuously experimenting with the form. For example, Netflix had the German cast members of *Dark* dub the show in English, in order to increase authenticity (Collins, 2018).

2. 9 Linguistic barriers and subtitles

Despite the ongoing discussion surrounding subtitles and viewers' resistance to reading them, large-scale research into audience attitudes and the effectiveness of subtitles across various markets is still largely missing. A first cross-national study exploring the reception and effectiveness of subtitling as an audio-visual translation method was conducted by Perego et al. (2016). Focusing on four European countries with different audio-visual translation traditions – Italy, Spain, Poland and Belgium – the authors aimed to explore the links between familiarity and effectiveness, as well as appreciation of subtitled film.

First, the findings suggest that viewers in traditionally dubbing countries (Italy and Spain) are increasingly becoming more open to subtitling as an AVT method. The study also revealed that existing familiarity with subtitles did not seem to influence the cognitive performance of viewers, i.e. the subtitles effectiveness, when watching a moderately complex film. This was exemplified by the fact participants were able to understand the film's content and dialogues and performed well on a face-name association test, regardless of their previous familiarity and experience with consumption of subtitled content. However, the sample of the study has comprised mainly of undergraduate and postgraduate students of translation, interpreting, applied linguistics and psychology which could have skewed the results due to a certain level natural or acquired linguistic skills that is to be expected within this population.

Contrary to previous findings, Perego et al. (2016) also found that for some viewers a lack of familiarity has interfered with their ability to fully process the visual track of the movie. As the authors hypothesize, this could be due to the cognitive burden of performing a non-routine activity. Linking this to the findings of Dunleavy (2014) and Jenner (2018), who propose contemporary high-end television fiction can be characterized by its complex narratives, interweaving plots and innovative aesthetics and visuals, reaching a cinema-like quality, it is possible that this issue may be even more strongly pronounced for viewers of subtitled foreign Netflix originals, due to their higher complexity potentially increasing the cognitive burden even further.

The results of Perego et al. (2016) also showed that a lack of familiarity had a negative effect on the perception and appreciation of the subtitled film by viewers. Specifically, audience members who reported lower familiarity enjoyed the film experience, dialogues and original voices of actors less, while also judging their ability to remember the content, dialogues and images of the film as poorer than average, therefore underestimating their actual performance. Reflecting on the results, Perego et al. (2016) conclude that as the usage of subtitles becomes more common (increasing viewers familiarity in a given region), the ability to perceive subtitled

films and non-intrusive, exploit their benefits and fully appreciate the experience should grow as well. The authors are therefore proposing a very similar argument to the one made by some industry practitioners who, as previously mentioned, believe that thanks to services such as Netflix, foreign audio-visual products will eventually become more mainstream and audiences will get accustomed to their consumption (Hazelton, 2018).This proposition can also be supported by previous finding which show that the traditional division between dubbing and subtitling countries is becoming less distinct, as in the era of internet streaming, SVOD platforms and fansubbing, subtitling is becoming more accepted across nations, especially with younger audiences (Perego et al., 2016).

Additional findings can be drawn from the case study conducted by Cha (2006), who explored the impressions of the Korean film *OldBoy* held by American viewers, as well as the sources of its transnational appeal, while also focusing on the barriers and concerns that US audiences face when watching foreign movies. Cha (2006) proposes two main barriers – linguistic and cultural. In exploration of the linguistic barriers viewers might face when interacting with foreign films, Cha (2006) distinguishes between subtitling and dubbing as the primary means of translation and suggests that the means of translation that prevails in a certain country can be a strong indicator of the country's attitudes towards foreign films and culture. While source-oriented (or foreignizing) methods, such as subtitles, emphasize and preserve the original form of the cultural product as much as possible, target-oriented (or domesticizing) translations aim to make it easier for the audience to follow and understand the story by sacrificing parts of the original production.

However, both methods carry their own advantages and disadvantages for the viewers. Concerning subtitles, one of the main struggles is the split of attention that audiences experience when they need to focus on both the subtitles and visual track of the film, possibly making it difficult to fully follow the narrative, and argument which can be further supported by recent findings of Perego et al. (2016) previously mentioned in this chapter. Secondly, subtitling often reduces the original dialogue to as much as one third of the original, which can result in loss or shift of meanings.

When it comes to dubbing, the main issue lies in the loss of the original soundtrack – including actors voices. According to Cha (2006) this can eventually result in the carefully produced balance and feel of the film being changed and not corresponding with the original intention.
Furthermore, dubbing is considered to be an attempt to hide the foreign nature of a film. Hence, some authors argue that subtitles which ensure a continues exposure to the original soundtrack

and therefore constantly remind audiences of the foreign origin of the film, have greater ability to promote viewers' interest in foreign cultures (Cha, 2006).

According to classification proposed by Szarkowska (2005), major English-speaking countries, such as the United States can be categorized as so-called source-language countries. These refer to markets that are strong film exporters, hardly import foreign films and if they do, foreign films tend to be subtitled rather than dubbed. They are considered as a minority product on the market and labelled mostly as independent.

Cha's (2006) study, which consisted of a content analysis of discussion posts IMDb, as well as interviews, have revealed multiple findings. As for the linguistic barriers that viewers faced while watching the Korean film OldBoy, Cha (2006) found that viewers did not experience difficulties when watching the film with subtitles, which they attributed to having a regular exposure to foreign films. Furthermore, they expressed it is important to have an open-minded attitude towards possible culture and linguistic barriers as serious film goers. Finally, they also admitted there is a certain level of prestige to watching films with subtitles, since the mainstream American audience often has difficulties with them.

2. 10 Motivations for watching foreign film

As for the viewers' motivations and attitudes, Cha (2006) finds that foreign movies often act as prestige agents for American audiences. This means some viewers are motivated to watch foreign films because it helps them gain prestige as either/both *film connoisseurs* and *trend leaders*. Both of these groups share a disappointment with Hollywood production and like to consider themselves different from the mainstream US film audience.

1) **Film connoisseurs**. A group of viewers that found Asian films attractive due to the fact they were different and more difficult than typical Hollywood films, forcing them to think harder and consequently gain a feeling of prestige for doing so.
2) **Trend leaders**. For these viewers watching foreign films was a matter of pride, which they achieved through distancing themselves from the mainstream American audience. Specifically, they enjoyed the feeling of becoming new trend leaders and early adaptors who watch uncommon Asian films, that the most of the American public haven't had the chance to experience yet.

Cultural barriers

Concerning the issue of cultural barriers, Cha (2006) suggests that preexisting impressions and stereotypes related to foreign cultures may restrict viewers from seeking and enjoying the experience of watching a foreign film. On one level, familiarity can exert an

important influence. The author illustrates this issue within the context of Asian films and culture by pointing to the reluctance of American audiences towards Asian heroes, since they are mostly accustomed to seeing European or African-American actors on screen. Furthermore, Hollywood often opts to remake rather than release original Asian films.

Furthermore, as Cha (2006) argues, American viewers might be more prone to feel a certain superiority about their culture and film production due to the dominant position of the United States, as well as the English language, in the world and the long-lasting one-way flow of cultural products. The author identifies this as a sign of ethnocentrism and proceeds to emphasize its importance not only on the level of foreign film consumption, but also marketing.

Specifically, when film producers from non-western countries try to enter a western market, they tend to hide the film's country of origin and attempt to appear as domestic suppliers. On the contrary, producers and companies from advanced, western companies try to advertise and emphasize the fact as much as possible.

Even though focused on the (western) British market, Steemers (2004) proposes a very similar argument. After the United States, Britain is often cited as the world's second largest exporter of television programming. However, according to Steemers (2004), various genres can differ quite significantly in their potential for international export. As the author proposes, the sales of British drama outside of a few anglophile markets such as the Netherlands or Sweden are limited because the drama's distinctive 'Britishness' is hard to disguise. The author suggests that similarly to America, the key to success of British production seems to lie in suppressing the look and feel of programming that expresses national origins. The author supports her point with examples of a number of successful entertainment formats, factual events, event drama and animation, that are not recognized as British by audiences and can be further adapted by dubbing to hide any further remains of otherness.

This is partially reflected in the results of Cha's (2006) study, in which respondents not only viewed the mainstream US viewers as ethnocentric and having negative attitudes towards foreign cultures, but also believed the American market environment was the main cause. Specifically, they shared the idea that the elimination of foreign film from the US market (possibly accompanied with the erasure of any traces of foreign content's origin, as proposed by Steemers (2004)) has made the American viewers ethnocentric and narrow-minded.

Finally, while some respondents believed that knowing very little about the film's country of origin history can prevent viewers from enjoying the experience and understanding the narrative, other respondents claimed that it is still possible to enjoy a foreign film without having an extensive knowledge of the culture, since there are other aspects to it, such as the

aesthetics, the entertainment value, the cinematography or the plot – an argument which is very much in line with the theoretical findings of Diego and Etayo (2012) which identified cultural proximity as one of many, but not necessarily the primary factor that can shape viewers' attitudes towards fictional quality, with factors like enjoyment, perceived quality of meaningfulness possibly playing a more important role for certain viewers.

2. 11 Conclusion

Based on the findings presented in this chapter, we can argue that American audiences might have historically lacked a similar level of familiarity, exposure and cultural capital related to foreign imports, as opposed to audiences in smaller international markets, however this logic seems to be changing rapidly and it therefore remains to be explored, what kinds of cultural capital and what sources of proximity today's American audiences rely on in terms of the choice and reception of non-English Netflix originals.

Finally, the present research will aim to consider that availability of a certain type of content does not automatically translate into viewers' interest, choice and engagement (Buonanno, 2018). Especially, within the context of Netflix, which claims that its algorithms and recommendations drive up to 75 % of viewing choice and are designed in a way that encourages users to confirm consistent patterns of choice (Buonanno, 2018).

3 Method

The following chapter provides a detailed and comprehensive description of the research method and design used to answer the proposed research questions. This includes reporting and discussing the methodological choices that have been made in relation to sampling, operationalization, data collection and data analysis, as well as considering any ethical concerns. The aim of making these decisions explicit is to ensure a level of transparency and systematicity that will increase the rigor and validity of the qualitative research (Meyrick, 2006; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

3.1 Research design

The purpose of this study is to explore the motivations of American viewers for watching foreign Netflix originals and investigate in which ways these motivations relate to the concepts of cultural proximity, cultural capital and viewers' perceptions of quality. In order to answer the research questions proposed by this thesis, a qualitative research approach was implemented. The aim of qualitative research is to "examine and interpret observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns" (Babbie, 2016, p. 382). This makes the utilization of qualitative methods a suitable approach for answering the questions proposed by the present research, as it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences, and meanings that Netflix viewers assign to their consumption of foreign Netflix originals.

In order to provide a systematic guidance for this exploration, the research design of this study was informed by the theoretical findings presented in the previous chapter, as well as sensitizing concepts derived from these findings. However, the goal of the present study does not lie in empirically testing what is already know, but rather building upon and expanding the existing theoretical knowledge on transnational consumption of media products, within new contexts that have not been previously investigated, i.e. the interplay of the foreign imports market in the United States and the Netflix originals production. This further exemplifies the need for a qualitative investigation approach, which can serve as a tool for uncovering new insights, meanings and contexts (Flick, 2009).

For the purpose of conducting the qualitative exploration and collecting data, a series of 13 semi-structured in-depth interviews was conducted. This type of interviews was selected as the most suitable for the present research, since it is oriented towards learning and generating new meanings from the respondents, as opposed to testing preexisting assumptions (Wengraf, 2011). A necessary amount of standardization is achieved through a set of pre-prepared

interview questions (or topics) and probes. This ensures that the interview is focused on the relevant topics and provides avenues for answering the research questions. However, this structure remains flexible and therefore allows the researcher to remain open to new paths of exploration that might emerge during the interviews (Wengraf, 2011). As a result, semi-structured interviews prove valuable in providing a flexible approach that allows for generation of new meanings (Hermanowicz, 2002).

In the context of the present thesis, the method of semi-structured in-depth interviews was applied in two steps. First, the main theoretical concepts relating to the research question, that is factors assumed to motivate viewership of foreign Netflix originals, were operationalized in order to ensure transparency and systematicity. Second, the operationalizations of main theoretical concepts were used as a basis for creating a comprehensive topic list with questions and probes that would guide the interviews, while ensuring enough flexibility to accommodate for new emerging concepts.

3.1.1 Sampling of Netflix original series

As previously outlined in the introduction, the present research will explore transnational viewership within the context of the United States market and its Netflix subscribers. The choice to focus specifically on American viewers and their reception of foreign-produced, non-English television content was informed by academic findings, as well as recent debates within the industry that suggest that the United States, as a country that has once been very resistant towards foreign film and television imports, is now becoming an increasingly important market for imported non-English shows, with foreign television series gaining unprecedented success with American viewers on platforms such as Netflix (Hazelton, 2018; Saleem, 2018). Additionally, in the past success factors have mainly been studied in relation to theatrical release and focused on American, English-language production (Kumb, Kunz, & Siegert, 2017). Choosing to examine the processes related to the choice and reception of foreign, non-English Netflix originals by viewers in the United States can therefore bring valuable and relevant insights that could potentially bring some light into the current developments.

For the purpose of conducting the interviews, a list of five selected non-English Netflix originals available for viewing in the United States was created. As for the ambiguity related to the multiple definitions of Netflix originals, this study will operationalize a Netflix original series, as any show that was commissioned and produced by Netflix (Robinson, 2018). Therefore, shows that Netflix has co-produced or were produced by another network (with Netflix having exclusive streaming rights) will not be included. In terms of foreign production, some of the most

prominent examples of this category are the Spanish series *Money Heist*[3] or UK's *Black Mirror*. The former show's first two seasons were originally produced for and aired on the Spanish television network Antena 3, before Netflix acquired the streaming rights for these seasons in 2017 and took over the production of season three. *Black Mirror* premiered on Channel 4 in the UK and was later purchased by Netflix, who took over the productions of seasons three and four. Reducing and specifying the definition of Netflix originals ensured that the present research is clearly oriented and provides the opportunity to explore its findings in the light of Netflix's transnational content production and distribution strategy.

As for selecting the sample of multiple Netflix original shows, this approach was mostly informed by two considerations. First, it is based on the evidence suggesting that audiences of Netflix originals, and especially of non-English Netflix originals, are very fragmented and that the awareness of each one specific series among US viewers can be quite low (Strott, 2015). Secondly, being able to explore meanings that viewers attribute to a range of different television series, representing different topics, genres, languages and places of origin, can provide the opportunity to gain a more complex picture of the consumption context. For example, by allowing the researcher to explore how characteristics that viewers attribute to quality television might differ across genres or comparing the degree and type of cultural differences perceived by viewers who watched Latin American, as opposed to European shows. Consequently, it also provides a better environment for studying the relations to cultural capital since it allows for these links to be explored across countries of (production) origin that have different amounts of geographical and cultural distance to the United States, and across languages that may be more or less familiar to American viewers.

In order to gain the most relevant and valuable insights, the most suitable approach to creating the sample of Netflix original series to be examined during the interviews would be selecting the foreign Netflix shows that are most popular among viewers in the United States. However, implementing this approach was not possible due to the following constraints. First, Netflix is known for publishing its viewership data very rarely, only for selected shows and internationally, instead of dividing viewership by country (Kafka, 2019). Secondly, industry tools, such as Parrot Analytics, provide some very valuable and comprehensive insights, however the reports generally feature the TOP 20 in-demand shows in a given market for the given year or quarter. Since the majority of foreign television imports on the US market cannot compete with

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[3] The first two seasons of the crime drama series were produced by Spanish companies Vancouver Media and Atresmedia.

more popular, mainstream US hits, these reports exclude majority of the foreign-produced, non-English content and therefore have a limited use for the purpose of the present research.

Consequently, to overcome the lack of transparency when it comes to Netflix viewership data, the five shows used for the purpose of this research were sampled based on their international popularity rankings and available viewership statistics, which served as indirect, but extensive evidence to support the assumption of their popularity in the United States. Using these insights, the following five Netflix original series produced in 4 different markets and languages were selected[4]: *Dark* (Germany), *Elite* (Spain), *3%* (Brazil), *Cable Girls* (Spain), *The Rain* (Denmark).
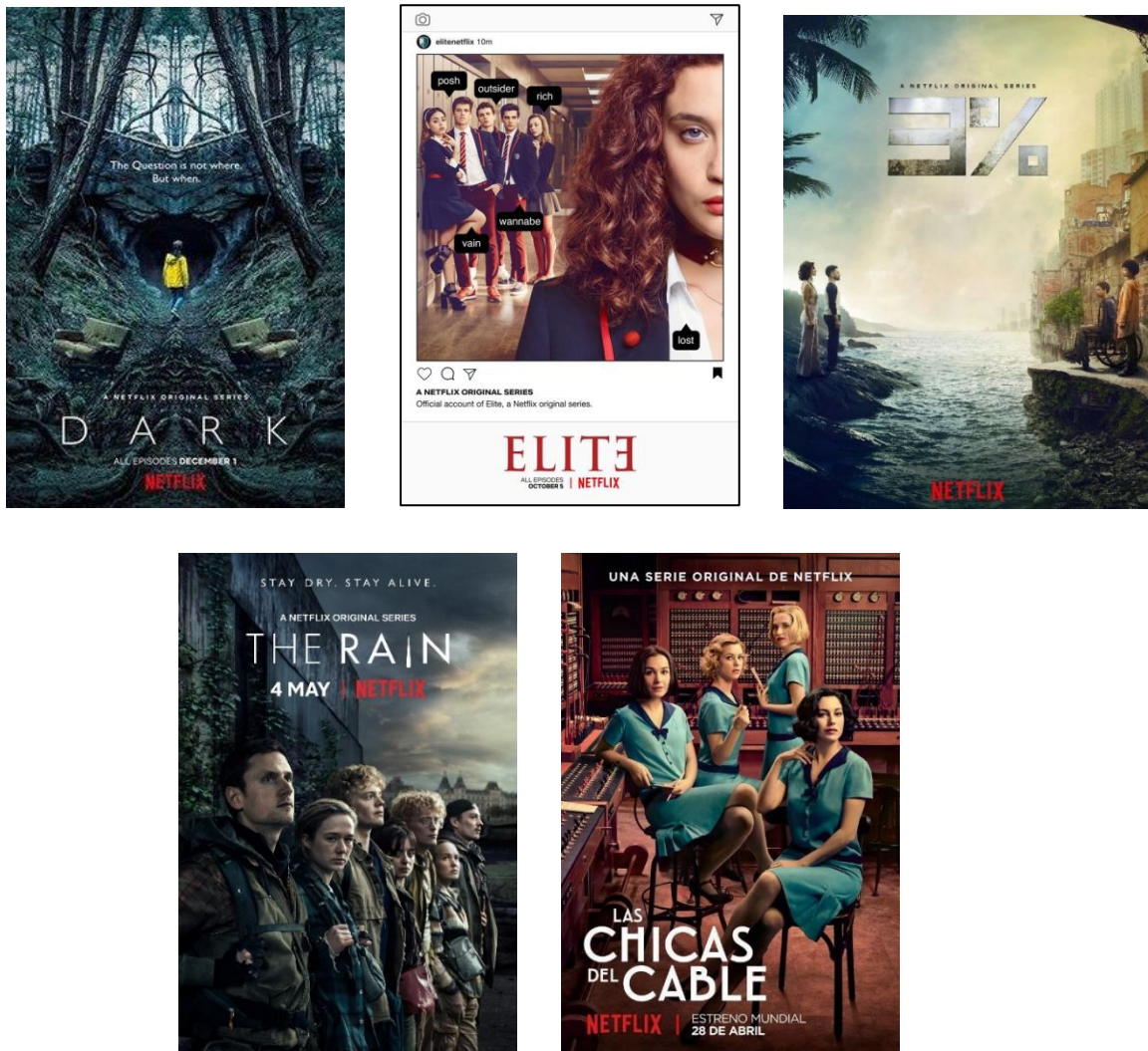

Figure 2 *Posters for the Netflix original series* Dark, Elite, 3%, The Rain *and* Cable Girls*. Artwork by Netflix.*

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[4] Ordered by popularity (from highest to lowest) based on the overview of 20 most popular Netflix original TV shows from outside of the US, issued by the Business Insider on Feb 28th 2019.

To provide some examples of this evidential support, the selected series were recently featured in Business Insider's overview of TOP 20 most popular Netflix original TV shows from outside of the US, placing from the 3rd to the 7th highest spot, preceded only by two other Netflix shows *Narcos* (Colombia)[5] and *Money Heist* (Spain), which were however excluded from the present research. This decision was made since *Money Heist* was not produced by Netflix and therefore not fulfilling the definition of Netflix originals used within the context of this thesis (Clark, 2019). As for *Narcos*, the series is not entirely produced outside of the United States, but rather a joint production between United States and Colombia. And even though a greater portion of the dialogue is in Spanish, the show has been previously criticized for starring American actors who only speak Spanish with accents perceived by critics as unauthentic (Brodzinsky, 2015). As a result, *Narcos* has been excluded from the present research on the basis of both not being a purely foreign production (produced entirely out of the United States) and only vaguely fulfilling the criteria of being a non-English production.

Three of the selected shows – *Elite*, *Dark* and *Cable Girls* – have also previously been featured on the TV Time's list of TOP 20 most viewed Netflix shows of 2018 (Thomson, 2018). Furthermore, all five of the selected series have been renewed for another season(s), which can be considered an evidence of their success, most likely including success within the United States as the country continues to be Netflix's most important market.

This point can be further supported by the fact that in the press release announcing the second season of the Danish show *The Rain,* Netflix commented it resonated with audiences globally, including the United States, and proved that the series touches on universal themes anyone can identify with (Netflix, 2018). In 2017, the Brazilian *3%* have been ranked by Netflix as the 2nd globally most devoured (i.e. watched more than two hours per day) show of the year, beating established US hits, such as *13 Reasons Why* or *Riverdale* (Netflix, 2017). Finally, as for the most popular shows within the United States, *Dark* has been featured by Parrot Analytics as the TOP 9th most demanded Netflix series in the United States in 2017 (Parrot Analytics, 2018a). While other sources citing the show's transnational success pointed to the fact that over 90 percent of its viewing came from outside of Germany. According to Netflix officials, it had also become one of the most-watched non-English shows on the platform (Roettgers, 2018).

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[5] American-Colombian crime drama series produced as a partnership between Gaumont International Television and Netflix. The first out of four seasons originally aired on Netflix in 2015.

3. 1. 2 Sampling of respondents

The sample of respondents was recruited from the population of Netflix subscribers who are nationals of the United States and have finished watching at least one whole season of at least one of the selected foreign original series listed above. Furthermore, a decision was made to narrow the sample of respondents to people currently enrolled at university and recent graduates under the age of 30. This population was not only most accessible, but given the relatively small scope of the interviews conducted within the context of a master thesis (where the standard is 10-15 respondents), narrowing the sample down to a more focused and specified group created a potential for exploring more nuanced differences in the reception of and attitudes towards foreign content that could otherwise be overshadowed by major generational gaps or great differences in educational backgrounds. Similarly, it allowed for discussing the findings of the present research in a clearer and more focused context, while taking into consideration some specific characteristics of this specific population. To provide a clear overview, respondents were welcomed to participate in the research if they fulfilled the following requirements:

1) They are currently enrolled at college/university in the United States OR have recently graduated from one.

2) They are under the age of 30.[6]

3) They have seen at least one season of any of the Netflix shows listed above.

4) They are a United States of America national[7].

As for the requirement defining the minimum of episodes a respondent had previously watched (i.e. one entire season), this ensured the respondents would be able to discuss their viewing experiences and reception of the text in depth and allow for discussions of the broader context of the show. However, some attention was also given to series the respondents started watching and did not finish, or felt strongly about not wanting to watch, and the related reasoning and motivations, since this can provide us with important information regarding the factors that might restrict or prevent a global appeal and transnational accessibility of Netflix's originals.
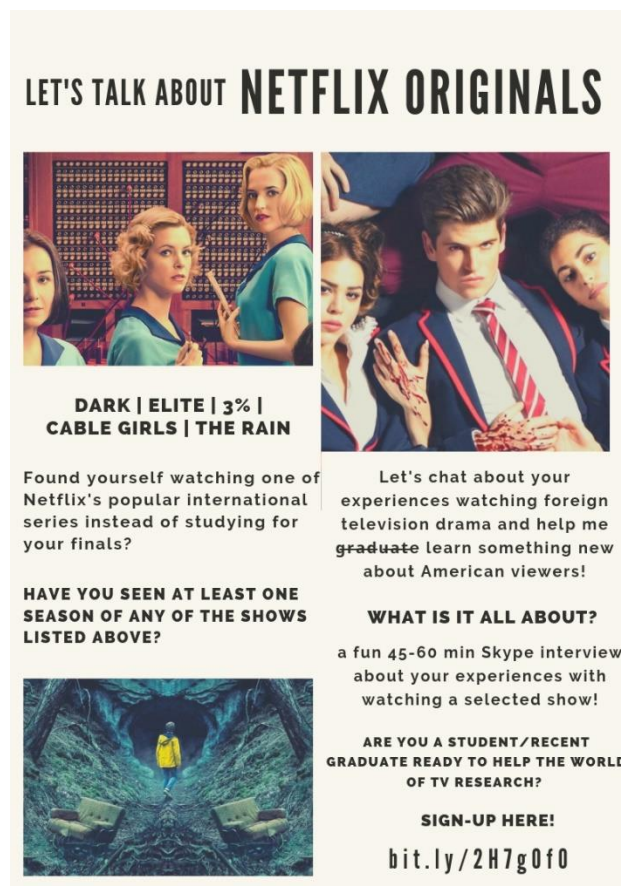
The selected sample of respondents was non-random and purposive, which is justified by the qualitative and explorative nature of the present research. However, great attention was

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[6] The minimum age has not been formally established, however most students in the United States are at least 17 years old at the time they enter university.

[7] This definition includes DACA recipients and childhood immigrants but excludes international students, non-immigrant visa holders and immigrants who relocated to the USA in adulthood.

given to ensuring respondents represent various ethnic, demographic and educational backgrounds, as well as various geographic locations, in order to gain sufficient diversity of views, attitudes, and experiences. This concern was especially relevant given the fact this research operates with the concept of cultural capital, which is affected by all of the factors mentioned above.

The recruitment process took place continuously during the months of May and June 2018. Respondents were recruited online through publishing recruitment posters in various university and student groups on Facebook. Each poster included an overview of the research and participation criteria, as well as link to a Google survey form that potential respondents would fill in to express their interest. Along with their contact information, this form also served to collect some basic information about the person's age, educational background and the Netflix series they have watched, which allowed for creating personalized informational emails for each respondent. These were then utilized as one of the main tools to build a quality rapport in the initial stage of contact.

Figure 3 Informational poster used to recruit interviewees. Poster designed by the author. Artwork by Netflix.

To ensure sufficient diversity, especially given the immense differences in cultural and demographic make-up across the various regions of the United States, a special attention was given to recruiting respondents from different parts of the country. The resulting sample of 13 respondents (12 females and one male) ranged in age between 18 and 29 years old (with an average age of 22.1 years) and was recruited from 12 different universities[8], located in 8 states and effectively covering the Northwestern, Western, Southwestern, Southern, Southeastern and Northeastern regions of the United States. The complete overview of respondents and their demographics is included in Appendix A.

3. 2 Data collection

A total of 13 semi-structured in-depth interviews was conducted between May 14th and and June 16th. At the end of the data collection phase, a total of 11.7 hours of interviews have been recorded, resulting in an average duration of 54 minutes per interview. All 13 interviewees have been conducted through a video-call, with 10 conducted through Skype and 3 through Facebook video call. This choice has been made because of the international nature of the present research, where the potential respondents were located in the United States, while the researcher was based the Netherlands. Since the significant distance ruled out face-to-face contact with interviewees which is often recommended as the best approach to qualitative interviewing, video-call interviews were selected as the closest accessible alternative (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003).

However, special attention was given to creating a strong rapport with the interviewees, both prior and during the interviews, in order to stimulate the sense of connection and immediacy that would be experienced in a face-to-face setting. The strategies used to create report included establishing contact with respondents prior to the interviewees. During this early phase of contact the researcher aimed to create a positive and relaxed atmosphere and communicate with the interviewees in a way that was professional and would promote trust in the legitimacy of the research. But at the same time aimed to communicate in a manner that was friendly and casual enough to make the interviewees feel at ease and break down some of the barriers caused by the physical distance, as well as apprehensiveness that some people might feel due to the impersonal nature of online communication (Legard, Keegan, & Ward,

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[8] University of Washington, University of Montana, University of California - Irvine, University of California - San Diego, University of California – Los Angeles, University of California – Santa Barbara, California State University Long Beach, Northern Arizona University, Texas A&M University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, College of Charleston, New York University.

2003). This phase of contact was generally conducted either through email, WhatsApp or Facebook chat, based on the preferences that each interviewee expressed in the initial survey, therefore providing them with a platform that they would feel the most comfortable with. Beside establishing initial rapport, this phase of contact also served to answer any questions related to the research and the interviewing process, scheduling a date and time for the interview, and sending the consent form to the interviewee for review.

The second phase of contact started with the beginning of the scheduled interview. After ensuring a quiet, well-lit environment and checking software and recording equipment as to prevent technical difficulties, the researcher connected with the interviewee through a video-call. After exchanging greetings and making sure the interviewee was ready to start the interview, the consent form was discussed with the interviewee, answering any concerns or questions. At this point, the interviewees were asked whether they give the researcher a permission to start the recording. After the recording has begun, the interviewee was first read a short summary of the research and its purpose, before moving onto a series of introductory questions related to the participants' demographic information, such as preferred name, age or educational background. These questions served to not only ease the participants into the interview by giving them a topic that is familiar and easy to talk about, but also aimed to collect contextual information that could be beneficial in guiding and formulating questions later on in the interview process, e.g. in relation to cultural capital (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003).

As the interview continued, pre-prepared list of questions and topics was used to guide the interview, progressing from more general, contextual questions, to questions directly exploring the experiences with specific foreign Netflix originals in more depth. Although, the topic list was used as a guide, it remained open to new emerging concepts and meanings introduced by the interviewees (Wengraf, 2011). In order to encourage interviewees to discuss their thoughts and experiences in depth, probing was consistently utilized throughout the interviews (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003).

The final phase of the interview was signaled by introducing the final topic, which encouraged the interviewees to reflect on the general theme of the research, as well as discuss any topics or questions that they felt were of importance and wanted to share, in order to help them adjust to wrapping up the interview. Finally, interviewees were thanked for their contributions and encouraged to contact the researcher should they have any questions and additional concerns they would like to share.

3. 3 Key concepts and operationalizations

The selection and operationalization of key concepts that informed the topic list was guided by existing theoretical findings introduced in the previous chapters, which identified both factors that have the potential to influence viewers' attitudes towards televised fiction, as well as factors more specifically contributing to the transnational travelability of cultural products and the creation of global-local appeal. These concepts were deemed to have high relevance for the exploration of aspects that could contribute to motivating the transnational viewership of foreign Netflix originals by subscribers in the United States, and were operationalized in the following way:

Motivation

Motivation was selected as the central concept to be utilized in order to answer the main research question presented by this thesis, that is why do American viewers consume non-English Netflix originals. Drawing on the literature presented in the theoretical chapter, the concept of motivation was operationalized as a set of factors that have the potential to act as a source of appeal and consequently entice viewership of (foreign) content. The sources of this appeal can take various forms such as promoting positive attitudes and emotions (e.g. enjoyment or fulfillment from watching a foreign show), achieving goals (gaining a sense of prestige, using foreign content to learn a language, staying in touch with cultural heritage) and others (Cha, 2006; Diego & Etayo, 2012). Furthermore, based on the existing findings pertaining to factors that can influence viewers' attitudes and choice of television programming, three main potential facets of factors informing the motivation of Netflix viewers for watching foreign originals were defined – cultural capital, cultural proximity, and perceptions of quality (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005, Diego & Etayo, 2012; Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018).

Cultural proximity

The first facet of factors with the potential to motivate (or discourage) viewership of foreign content is cultural proximity. The implementation of this concept into the research design is based on the findings that propose viewers tend to prefer watching television programs that are a) closest and most relevant in terms of culture and language (most often represented by national programming), b) produced within cultures that are similar to that of the viewer or c) have universal themes, transnational values or a level of narrative transparency that allows viewers to resonate with the content regardless of their culture of origin (Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018; La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005). Consequently, for the purpose of this research, cultural proximity was operationalized as a set of factors that promote (or impede) a sense of

familiarity and allow viewers to culturally or personally identify with situations, events and characters portrayed in the program (Diego & Etayo, 2012).

Cultural capital

Cultural capital, defined as the "possession of cultural competencies and cultural knowledge that is unevenly distributed in society and provides for distinguished modes of cultural consumption" (Bourdieu, 1984 in Rojas et al., 2004, p. 4-5), is proposed as another potential facet for motivating or discouraging the viewership of content produced outside of the cultural and linguistic zone of its viewers. As outlined in the theoretical chapter, previous findings exploring links between cultural capital and audience behavior propose the types and extent of cultural capital available to different viewers can be crucial in informing their choice of television programming and affect which content is close and relevant to them in terms of culture and language (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

Hence, in the context of this thesis, cultural capital was operationalized as a set of demographic factors and life experiences that have the potential to influence the cultural competencies and knowledge which are available to the viewer and relevant for the consumption of foreign television content. This can include factors such as ethnicity or immigration background, knowledge of foreign languages and cultures, familiarity with specific translation methods (e.g. subtitles and dubbing), exposure to foreign media, international travel, encounters with cultural diversity and others.

Perception of quality

As for the third and last facet of motivation, perceived quality is continuously cited in literature (see Diego and Etayo, 2012 or Dunleavy, 2014) as a factor that has the potential to influence attitudes towards televised fiction series. Furthermore, fulfilling characteristics of the 'quality TV paradigm' is proposed as a means to create programming with a global-local appeal, ensuring transnational success and overcoming resistance to foreign imports from both broadcasters and audiences (Diego & Etayo, 2012; Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018). However, as argued in the theoretical section, characteristics assigned to high and low quality television can differ greatly across genres and groups of viewers, therefore one of the goals set by this research is to identify the specific dimensions of quality that American viewers use to evaluate Netflix's original programming. Therefore, perception of quality was operationalized as a set of factors, aspects or characteristics that viewers attribute to and use to evaluate the quality of Netflix content. Informed by the previous research, these could include (but are not limited to) aspects such as entertainment, production values, acting standards, visual and aesthetic

quality, portrayed themes and values, originality, informational value or content variety (Bayo-Moriones et al., 2018; Diego & Etayo, 2012; Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018)

3. 3. 1 Topic list and sample questions

Informed by the operationalizations of key theoretical concepts as discussed above, a comprehensive topic list was subsequently constructed to guide the semi-structured interviews and aid in collecting relevant data. The topic list included a brief standardized introduction that covered the purpose of the research, specified how the collected data is going to be handled and stored, addressed concerns related to protection of privacy and encouraged respondents to ask any questions they may have before beginning the interview. After the introduction, basic information about each respondent was collected (such as name, gender, age, nationality or educational level), followed by a total of 46 questions divided into 10 topical sections. The following section provides an overview of these topics, as well as their short definitions and sample question. For the full list of questions, see Appendix B.

1. *General use of Netflix*

The first section briefly explores the context of the respondents' use of Netflix, including the duration of their subscription to the service and frequency of use.

Sample questions: Could you tell me since when do you have a Netflix subscription? What motivated you to get it?

2. *Content choice and preferences*

The second section explores the programming choices and preferences of respondents informed, among others, by empirical findings pertaining to the role of algorithms and recommendations in influencing viewing choices (Buonanno, 2018; Burroughs, 2018).

Sample questions: How do you learn about new Netflix shows that you might be interested in watching? What specific factors do you consider when making the decision to watch a Netflix show?

3. *Consumption of foreign content*

The next section narrows the focus towards the respondents' consumption of foreign Netflix content, exploring areas such as the frequency of foreign content consumption, the motivations for its consumption, use of alternative platforms to consume foreign content, when and how do respondents identify that Netflix content has a foreign origin, or if and how has subscribing to Netflix changed the amount of foreign content respondents consume.

Sample questions: How often do you currently watch Netflix series and films produced outside of the United States? What are your motivations for watching foreign Netflix series? How would you compare the amount of foreign content you watch now, compared to the time before you had Netflix?

4. *Translation preferences*

Relating to the theoretical findings on linguistic barriers and the effect of familiarity with different translation methods on the enjoyment and attitudes towards foreign audio-visual content, this section explores respondents' preferences for subtitles or dubbing across different types of content, genres and viewing contexts.

Sample questions: Why do you prefer subtitles over dubbing / dubbing over subtitles? Do you usually multitask while watching Netflix non-English shows? Does this affect your preference for subtitles / dubbing?

5. *Experiences with watching selected foreign show*

The following section provides an in-depth exploration of respondent's experiences and motivations for watching selected foreign Netflix original show(s), including how they first learned about the series, what enticed them to watch first episode, what made them want to continue watching the show, which aspect appeal to them and which did not, or what translation method they used and how it affected their experience.

Sample questions: Can you describe how you first learned about the series X? What specifically motivated you to watch the first episode?

6. *Cultural capital*

The sixth section aims to explore the types of cultural capital available to respondents, both in terms of familiarity and encounters with foreign cultures and languages in general, as well as more specifically exploring the familiarity with the culture of origin of the Netflix series each respondent has watched.

Sample questions: Can you describe any specific life experiences that you think have an influence on the series you choose to watch? For example, family upbringing, command of foreign language, education, travel, immigrant background… Were you familiar with X culture before you watched show X? In what forms have you encountered it before?

7. *Cultural proximity*

Closely relating to the previous topic, this section uncovers respondents' perceptions of cultural differences between their own culture and the culture of origin of the Netflix series they have watched, explores aspects of selected shows that created a sense of familiarity or

foreignness within respondents and addresses the importance assigned to cultural familiarity in order to enjoy consumption of foreign content as expressed by respondents.

Sample questions: When watching show X, what aspects (such as situations, events and characters) did you find easy to personally relate to? When watching the show, what made you realize/identify it was not an American production?

8. Additional barriers and appeal factors

The following section briefly examines some additional barriers, as well as sources of appeal that go beyond the concepts of cultural proximity and capital. Furthermore, it explores respondents' perceived appeal of selected shows to mainstream audience, which provides a valuable opportunity to explore whether or not do respondents consider themselves to be members of the mainstream audience, and to potentially uncover additional barriers or sources of appeal that respondents do not directly experience themselves, but believe to be experienced by other viewers in the United States.

Sample questions: Do you think that show X would be difficult to enjoy for the mainstream American audience? Why or why not? Do you personally feel that watching foreign Netflix shows carries a sense of prestige or high culture?

9. Perceptions of quality

The ninth section seeks to explore the respondents' understanding of quality in relation to television programing, and more specifically foreign Netflix original series. It identifies the characteristics viewers attribute to high quality television, examines which aspects of quality are most important to them, how their role differ across genres, and draws comparisons between the perceived quality of American and foreign Netflix content.

Sample questions: What characteristics would a TV show need to have for you to think it is a high-quality show? How would you assess series X specifically in terms of quality?

10. Final thoughts on the transnational appeal of foreign originals

Finally, the last section provides respondents with the opportunity to share their own thoughts related to the wider phenomenon that is being examined by the present thesis research, that is reflect on whether or not do they believe foreign Netflix originals are becoming more mainstream within the United States, how they perceive the attitudes of American viewers towards foreign content in general, and what are the main barriers as well as appeal factors that could either motivate viewership of foreign Netflix originals, or prevent audience members from accessing and enjoying them.

Sample questions: Do you personally think that foreign Netflix originals are becoming more mainstream in the United States? Why or why not? Do you believe foreign Netflix originals have (or do not have) an appeal for American viewers? Why or why not?

To conclude, this chapter operationalized the core concepts utilized by the present research, that is motivation, cultural proximity, cultural capital and perceptions of quality. Additionally, the structure of the topic list used to guide the interviews was provided and illustrated with sample questions. The following chapter will provide an account of the data analysis, including specific steps taken and the analytical approaches that informed them.

3. 4 Data analysis

The collected data was transcribed verbatim and analyzed through conducting a thematic analysis, since this method has the potential to identify and develop new concepts without the analysis being overly restricted by existing theory (Boeije, 2010). The entire analysis was conducted utilizing Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. The approach to the analysis was a combination of deductive and inductive processes.

The data were first coded line-by-line, providing a rich and unrestricted account of the meanings contained within. Subsequently, the themes were developed based on the patterns emerging from the codes. Following a more inductive approach, the aim of this part of the analysis was not to fit the data into a preexisting coding frame that was previously created based on a specific theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Instead, the aim was to create themes that would reflect the data collected during the interviews, and therefore represent even the experiences and meanings reported by interviewees that might not have been present in previous literature.

However, as Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 84) emphasize, "data are not coded in epistemological (or theoretical) vacuum" and researchers cannot completely dissociate themselves from their theoretical knowledge. Furthermore, the construction of the topic list that was used to guide the interviews was informed by existing theoretical concepts and findings related to the transnational viewership of television content. It is therefore necessary to point out that the preexisting ideas of certain avenues of explorations (e.g. related to previous findings about cultural proximity or viewers' motivations) had a contributing effect on the analysis and the results. For example, some areas of exploration were given more space and attention given their prominent position on the topic list, and similarly, some themes could have appeared more salient to the researcher during the coding process and therefore inform the findings in a more deductive way.

The actual process of coding involved three subsequent phases, informed by grounded theory, an inductive method that aims to develop theories through observation and pattern discovery (Babbie, 2016). The three phases are open, axial and selective coding. During the open coding phase, the collected data (i.e. interview transcripts) was carefully read and divided into fragments. These fragments were compared, grouped into categories that address the same theme and assigned appropriate codes that express their meanings. The result of this phase of coding was list of all relevant codes, so-called coding scheme (Boeije, 2010). In the axial coding stage, the codes were reassembled in order to uncover relationships between salient categories and subcategories. This involved examining which elements appeared to be dominant and which are the less important ones. During this phase, the definitions and indicators of each category became clear (Boeije, 2010). Finally, with selective coding, the connections between the identified categories were explored, with a focus on identifying a core category and systematically relating it to other categories. This stage also aimed at answering questions, such as what are the main messages communicated, or which themes had emerged repeatedly in observations (Boeije, 2010).

3. 5 Ethics

In order to fulfill the ethical standards for conducting qualitative interviews, all participants were asked to read the informed consent form where the purpose of the research was explained as well as the procedure of the interview, their right to cease the participation in the research at any time without any repercussions and information about how the data collected during the interviews was going to be handled and stored (Flick, 2011).

A standardized consent form (see Appendix C) was used that has been previously approved by the ethics committee of the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication. The collected data was treated with confidentiality and no information that could directly lead to identification of the respondents was published. This was ensured by anonymizing the data throughout the study and in the appendix, that is only including respondents' first or preferred name and basic demographic information such as age or the university the person attended. Other identifying information, such as full names or contact information was stored separately from the transcripts and secured with passport protection. Only the researcher and the supervisor of the Master thesis had access to the videos from the Skype interviews.

4 Results

As previously mentioned, the present study aims to explore the motivations of American viewers for watching foreign Netflix originals. In doing so, it utilizes the method of thematic analysis and explores not only the explicit sources of appeal and motivation identified by the interviewees, but also aim to explore how cultural proximity, cultural capital and perceptions of quality interact and contribute to motivating the viewership of foreign Netflix originals. Guided by the themes that emerged from the analysis, the following chapter will explore these issues in two steps. First, motivations related to the narrative are identified, including factors related to the plots and characters, as well as considering the contributions of cultural proximity and interviewees' perceptions of quality. In the second part, motivations related to the viewers and their distinct needs, experiences and viewing positions will be identified, while considering the contributions of cultural capital.

4.1 Motivations related to the narrative

The first section of the results chapter will aim to introduce and explore themes related to the appeal factors and motivations associated with the narrative of foreign Netflix original shows, such as motivations related to the plot and characters. Subsequently, this chapter will also explore how a sense of cultural proximity is experienced by viewers while watching the show. Both cultural proximity and the viewers' perceptions of quality television will then be explored in terms of how they can contribute to motivate viewership of the foreign Netflix original content.

4. 1. 1 Plot and theme related motivations

While exploring the factors that entice and motivate participants' viewership of foreign Netflix originals, a strong, recurring theme has emerged, suggesting the plot or storyline of a given show is a significant factor in creating a source of appeal for interviewees, both at the initial discovery stage (i.e. when making the decision to watch the first episode), as well as during the subsequent stages (i.e. when making and reevaluating the decision to continue watching). Qualities and characteristics related to the plot and storyline have also been the ones most frequently used by interviewees when asked to share their perceptions and evaluation of the specific shows, suggesting their central role in both the *choice* and *reception* of foreign Netflix originals. During the interviews, three plot-related characteristics in particular have been repeatedly identified by interviewees as the main enticements for choosing, continuing to watch and enjoying a foreign Netflix original show.

First, interviewees perceived the plots of foreign Netflix originals to be complex and captivating, which in turn enticed them to continue watching the shows. Secondly, interviewees were motivated to watch foreign Netflix originals due to the perception that they provided them with different and more diverse perspectives compared to American television products. Specifically, interviewees considered the plots of foreign Netflix originals to be original, diverse and represent topics that might be considered taboo or marginal in mainstream American production. Finally, some interviewees observed that they enjoyed watching foreign Netflix originals as a means of escapism, since the different perspectives that these show offered allowed them to escape the reality and perspectives that they encountered in the American media and their day to day lives in the United States. The following section provides an in-depth exploration of each of these plot-related motives and further demonstrates how they impact interviewees' experiences related to the consumption of foreign Netflix originals.

Complex, captivating plots

One of the plot qualities that interviewees reported when asked to explain the factors that enticed them to watch foreign original content on Netflix, is the plots' ability to captivate the viewers' interest by leaving them with questions that they will want to know the answers to. While some interviewees used the term 'captivating' to describe this type of plot, others also conceptualized it in terms of utilizing cliffhangers or having an unpredictable ending. Consequently, multiple participants expressed that even if they did not enjoy other aspects of the show, they would still feel compelled or even pressured to continue watching, in order to get the answers and gain a sense of closure. Or as Abbey explains in relation to seeing the first episode of *Elite*:

> I was like, oh, what happened? [...] I liked the mystery aspect of it. [...] Because the whole first episode, the way it's set up right there, it leaves you with so many questions. And I was like, even if I didn't like the show - I really enjoyed it from the first episode - but even if I didn't, I would have to finish it because I want to know the answer. (Abbey)

This quality described by interviewees as 'captivation' or 'cliffhanging' can be linked to what Dunleavy (2014) calls a 'must-see allure', a concept that the author considers to be one of the key characteristics of contemporary high-end TV drama. Dunleavy (2014, p.4) defines this concept as "an ability, increasingly augmented by the use of serial narrative, to engender

'addictive' rather than merely 'appointment' viewing". Additionally, must-see allure, and the consequent addictive viewing also bear similarities to the increasingly prevalent concept of binge-watching. Since most foreign originals follow the pattern of an hour-long serial dramas, the findings of Steiner and Xu (2018) presented in the previous chapter suggested this type of content is not only related to a high-attentive binge-watching, but in combination with cliffhangers typically appearing at the end of each episode, also motivates continued viewership.

This theory seems to find support in the present research with interviewees describing the plots of foreign Netflix originals as 'easy to binge-watch' or even 'made to be binge-watched', creating a link between the cliff-hanging, captivating nature of the shows' plots and the consequent urge to watch multiple episodes at once (or in a short amount of time) experienced by viewers looking for answers and closure. In the present research, four interviewees specifically expressed that they binge-watched the selected foreign series (i.e. consumed multiple episodes at a time). One of these interviewees consumed the first season of the given show within a day and four other respondents said they finished the entire season in three days or less. Finally, another three interviewees reported finishing in less than a week. This means that while the last group did not specifically describe (i.e. self-identify) their viewing of the series as binge-watching, it can be assumed that at least a portion of their viewing experience would fit the definition. This is because since each of the examined series has a total of eight episodes (with the exception of *Dark* which has a total of ten), watching multiple episodes at a time would most likely be necessary to finish the series in just a couple of days/in under a week.

These findings also suggest that altogether more than half of the interviewees (8) finished the series faster than is the average time that Netflix reports it takes its viewers to finish the first season of a serialized show, which according to a 2016 study conducted by the company, is one full week (Koblin, 2016). More specifically, at least five interviewees would fit into a category identified by the above-mentioned study as the "very fast bingers", who take on average four days to finish the first season of a series. According to Netflix, this type of fast binging is most strongly associated with genres, such as horror, thrillers or sci-fi (Koblin, 2016). This is partially reflected in the present study, where interviewees who finished the season in under four days were mostly watching the shows *3%, Dark* and *The Rain*, which all fit the genre definition of sci-fi and carry some thriller elements.

This interplay between the must-see allure, cliff-hanging and binge-watching can be exemplified with the following quote from Beth, describing her motivations to continue watching the Spanish show *Cable Girls*:

I don't think that *Cable Girls* is a great piece of cinematic work, but it's one of those things that like, because it's so soap opera-y, I can't put it down. [...] it's catchy and it's one of those shows that I think it's really easy, that if it is like a Saturday night and you don't have anything else going on, it's one of those shows that is incredibly easy to binge watch. (Beth)

Besides the plots' captivating qualities, another major source of enjoyment and motivation for (continued) viewing of foreign Netflix originals that emerged from the interviews, was the plots' complexity. Interviewees felt like there was an added value stemming from being forced to engage with the content in more depth and enjoyed taking on a more active role while looking for answers and hidden details or meanings. This theme was especially prevalent amongst viewers who watched series that could be sorted under the sci-fi genre, such as *Dark* and *3%*. As Pamela explains when talking about the Brazilian *3%*:

It was pretty much a mental competition of showing who is intelligent, who is smart enough to go there. [...] it was a brain game and I love that. [...] It makes you think. And at the same time, it makes people wonder like how do they think of this? [...] It's like you're also playing to win. So that's also interesting having that concept in the show that you're also trying to figure out ways around. (Pamela)

The sentiments shared by these interviewees are well-reflected in previous theoretical findings. Related to the transnational appeal of high-end television, Dunleavy (2014) introduces a very similar concept, called 'narrative complexity', which refers to a serialized storytelling with dense layers of interweaving storylines and is considered by the author to be a marker of contemporary quality television genres and one of the factors crucial for positioning foreign TV imports to successfully compete in foreign markets with American products. The idea of complexity could be also compared to the concept of 'cognitive elaboration' introduced by Diego and Etayo (2012) as one of many factors influencing viewers' attitudes to TV fiction series. According to the authors, attitudes and enjoyment can be influenced by the level of reflection prompted by watching the fiction program, which is in line with the experiences of Pamela, who

likened the show *3%* to a brain game that prompts her to think about the answers. It can also be further supported with Elica's statement, in which she describes the German original *Dark* as a mind puzzle that reveals new angles with repeated viewing:

> Dark in theory is kind of simple, but all the stuff that they're trying to do is pretty complex, like with the time. [...] Time travel in general is so complicated. It's kind of like a mind puzzle. [...]I feel like it just kind of sucks you in from the beginning. And you just want to keep watching it because you know like, there's so many intricacies in that story. I watched it twice and I feel like it's one of those stories where you notice something new every time you watch it. (Elica)

Originality and diversity

Another strong theme related to motivating initial as well as continued viewership[9] revolves around the idea of foreign Netflix originals fulfilling respondents' desire to be exposed to different perspectives, other than those provided by the American television content available to them. Specifically, the interviewees reported the plots and themes of foreign originals as offering more diversity, originality and representation than American shows.

Concerning originality, interviewees have repeatedly expressed the belief that foreign television content, including foreign Netflix originals, tends to provide viewers with more original and less predictable plotlines, which consequently motivates viewership and increases enjoyment as it keep interviewees on edge and does not make them feel like they are watching content they have already seen many times before, only in different forms. For example, Cassidy describes this as follows:

> [...] foreign TV shows seem to have a better plot line than most American shows because most American shows, it's really predictable and Spanish TV shows, it's just kind of like, well, Spanish or other foreign TV shows, it's just less predictable and you actually get surprised at what's going on, especially if you're fully focusing in on what's happening. (Cassidy)

Furthermore, as another interviewee argues, the sense of originality can also stem from not following American archetypes and established rules related to specific genres. This could

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[9] i.e. making the decision to first start, and then also continue watching the show

be seen as a reflection of some previous theoretical insights, which have linked originality and innovation, generic mixing (i.e. blending the tropes of various genres) and pushing artistic boundaries, to contemporary high-end television, and considered them a sign of quality, that can be interpreted positively by both viewers and professionals alike (Bayo-Moriones et al., 2018, Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018). Beth expresses her opinions on breaking the genre rules in foreign television in the following quote:

> What I like about foreign television shows is that it gives you like a really different perspective on the world. And I think that a lot of American material, for example The Office [...] you know how the plotline is going to work. Versus like if you watch something from a different country then you don't necessarily know. I think that a lot of American television series are pretty much like this is what happens and if this is a drama then this is how it has to escalate, while foreign films are not playing by those rules. And I think that's really cool. (Beth)

Along with originality, another quality that respondents felt is largely missing from many American television products, is diversity and proper representation of both people and current issues. Many interviewees expressed they feel like foreign shows are more open to deal with and portray topics or themes that would be deemed too risky and controversial to appear on screens in the United States, with one interviewee even describing the situation on the American TV market as a form of censorship:

> They [foreign series] are usually a little more sadistic. There's a lot of censorship in America and so a lot of times it's like there's a fear of using certain topics. And I also noticed that foreign shows tend to have a lot more diversity even if it's more of their nationality, like Dark, I really enjoyed that. I didn't even know that they had a deaf character, but they were signing through it, I was like, oh that's nice because that's not something you'd see in America. It's kind of just more of very stereotypical white, even though we're very mixed as a culture here. (Michelle)

As suggested above, as well as throughout other interviews, representation of diversity, in terms of nationality, race, sexual orientation or even disabilities constitutes another important facet of this theme. Multiple interviewees expressed this factor not only increased their enjoyment of the show, but sometimes even acted as the sole motivator for choosing to watch

the first episode, for example when learning that a show respondent would not otherwise be interested in, had a good representation of LGBTQ characters. The interviewees observations that foreign Netflix originals implement a great amount of diversity and representation within their storylines and character arcs also find support in theoretical literature. In an in-depth exploration of the various ways in which Netflix has reinvented the concept of television and positioned itself as a transnational broadcaster, Jenner (2018, p.173) suggests that a focus on diversity is an integral part of Netflix's "long-term strategy in developing a specific brand of quality" and "is an essential part of how Netflix can position itself against established media conglomerates" (p. 174). As a result, and informed by the features of HBO-style quality TV of the 1990's and early 2000's, Netflix original productions aim to provide increased representation through dealing with topics such as identity politics, sexuality, questioning heteronormativity and acceptance of identities that do not fit the prominent white, straight, cis, middle-class male stereotype (Jenner, 2018).

While some respondents appreciated the social impact this type of representation can have and considered the approach of foreign TV to issues such as open expression of sexuality to be pioneering, for other respondents, representation also held a personal importance. An example was provided by Cassidy, who expressed open discussion of certain topics and representation of strong female characters provided a sort of escape from how she personally experienced these topics being handled while growing up in the United States.

> I noticed there was a lot more strength within the female characters then in most shows. And I really love that so very much because there's not a lot of a strong female presence in what I've had growing up, besides like Disney princesses. And everyone was open to talk about sexuality and open to talk about sex and what you're attracted to, which is not something as common lately. Because everyone just assumes at this point. And so having that open discussion of STDs [sexually transmitted diseases] and sexual orientation, or how often someone has sex was definitely an important part of the show. With Americans, we have a very, very strict sex thing, where it's very difficult because there's a lot of discrimination not only amongst anyone that isn't straight, but anyone that is female. So seeing a lot less of that in the show made it a lot easier to watch because it just kind of ease off from everything that I've gone through. (Cassidy)

Relating to the experiences expressed by Cassidy, the feelings of escapism have proven to be frequent enough among respondents to constitute a stand-alone theme. For these interviewees, seeking a different perspective was related to perceiving the socio-political situation in the United States as adverse and/or not reflecting own values. Consequently, this group of respondents reported seeking out and enjoying foreign shows because they allowed them to escape the situation and experience feelings of hope by seeing how things work elsewhere in the world, in cultures whose situation they evaluated more positively, as Beth suggests:

In the US, [...] we're all over the front news right now for really depressing reasons. And so I think that like people want hope and people want to know that this borderline authoritarian regime is not in every cranny of the world. And that like people can be artistic, people can be creative. Like right now, our government is trying to crackdown on journalists. They're saying that like journalism is bad [...] and so we want to know that there is a whole different world out there and that it is accessible. [...] It's giving people images and ideas that are not American and I think that's really important. (Beth)

Interestingly, very similar sentiments have been recently discussed in an opinion piece published in the New York Times, in which Manjoo (2019) describes how Netflix's attempt to sell international ideas to a global audience has provided the author with an unforeseen means of intellectual and social escape after the victory of Donald Trump Jr. in the 2016 presidential elections. Similar to the experiences expressed by interviewees in the present research, Manjoo (2019) describes the need to find a sanctuary in *"places where the American president-elect and his American opponents and their American controversies simply did not exist"*. Ultimately, the author recalls finding this sanctuary on Netflix, indulging in the British reality series *The Great British Bake Off*, which as he says, provided him with utopian images of a polite baking competition, set in a multicultural land with enough state-provided welfare and free time to gain an expertise in sweets-making.

4. 1. 2 Characters related motivations

The third and final emerging theme directly related to the role of plot in motivating viewership is the character development. Specifically, interviewees reported feeling motivated to continue watching a selected show, because they have developed an emotional connection to

one or more of the characters and wanted to see how their individual stories are going to develop over time, as Elica explains:

> I feel like after a couple of episodes, I think specifically for *Dark* and *3%*, but also for all of them in general, you kind of get attached to the characters. So like all of them do a really good job of giving each one some kind of backstory or giving the characters a lot of depth. So you care about the characters and want to know what happened. (Elica)

On the other hand, *poor* character development, which some interviewees described as characters not being dense enough, not feeling complete or making unrealistic and illogical decisions, was the leading reason for not wanting to continue watching a show or not finishing it, further pointing to its central role in (de)motivating viewership. Additionally, contrary to the findings of Diego and Etayo (2012), who argued identification with main characters is related to positively influencing enjoyment of TV fiction series, the experiences of some interviewees suggest characters do not need to be personally relatable, for them to enjoy seeing their respective storylines unfold. Instead, interviewees considered how well-thought out and interesting were the individual characters' story lines. As Abbey describes:

> I couldn't particularly relate to any of them, but I really wanted to know [...] the Muslim girl, I really wanted to know like, what was gonna happen with her because, you know, her and the guy, the bad guy, I was like, whoa, that can't happen. And I also [...] was just interested in the way that the characters were working, not because they were relatable, but just because their stories, their individual stories I thought were interesting. Like who they were as people. (Abbey)

4. 1. 3 Contributions of cultural proximity

While the previous two themes explored some of the most prominent sources of appeal and enjoyment explicitly identified by the interviewees, the following section demonstrates the potential contributions of cultural proximity in enticing or hindering the viewership of foreign Netflix originals. Specifically, expanding on the understanding of cultural proximity proposed by La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005), this section of the results describes to what extent interviewees feel that foreign Netflix originals contain aspects which either promote or impede a sense of familiarity and how this allows or prohibits interviewees to culturally or personally

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identify with situations, events and characters portrayed in the programs. An analysis of the interviews revealed that both culturally foreign and familiar aspects are experienced by the American viewers while watching foreign Netflix original series and can be generally observed across multiple levels, including content, visuals and language.

4. 1. 3. 1 Creating a sense of familiarity

The first theme that emerged from the interviews shows that interviewees experience a sense of familiarity in various forms and across various levels while watching the foreign Netflix originals examined in this study. Furthermore, the interviewees' experiences largely reflect the essence of concepts introduced both within the theory of cultural proximity (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005) and the grammar of transnationalism framework (Jenner, 2018), such as utilization of universal themes and archetypes, or appeals to a transnational value system.

On a content level, respondents reported experiencing familiarity through the situations, themes and characters portrayed by the selected shows, which according to their evaluation felt relatable and like something they could personally identify with or encounter in their own life. The respondents' viewing experiences therefore suggest that the selected foreign Netflix originals discussed in the context of this research most likely exhibit some characteristics of what Dunleavy (2014) refers to as "narrative transparency", which allows for the projection of viewers' own values, beliefs, rituals and myths into imported media, and therefore allows this type of foreign content to resonate universally. In the following excerpt, Isa explains the ways in which various characters from the show *Elite* and the situations they found themselves in, related to her own life experiences:

> I think all of us have had a mean girl type figure growing up. So there's always that mean girl somewhere and I think that's pretty relatable. There's always that guy that like has a shady business but you're not really sure, but you don't want to ask. [...] And then there's like Ander, which is the person that's involved in this secret relationship, which when you're from the South I think that a lot of people grew up in sort of like repressive cultures. And you know, I did, I related to that sense of like conservative repression of, you know, being who you are and stuff like that. Or like coming out as being gay or whatever. That was what I related to. Like I said, I like *Elite* for its representation. (Isa)

This idea of using universal themes, or "narrative transparency" as a tool to transcendent borders and effectively engage global audiences with the story and its characters does not only appear in theoretical literature but is often brought up by the producers of foreign shows as well. It is apparent that with the increasing importance that local, especially European, markets have for the production and distribution of original Netflix content (Lobato, 2019), both the company and the creators of various international shows are focusing on creating shows that can succeed across different national market (Jenner, 2018). This suggests the signs of narrative transparency identified by viewers are not accidental, but rather a part of a deliberate strategy that starts at the early stages of production. For example, Jantje Friese, the co-creator of the German series *Dark* admitted in an interview with IndieWire that even during the development process, they never thought of *Dark* as just a German show, but rather approached it as a global show that should have the potential to reach a global audience (Nguyen, 2019). To achieve this goal, the creators seem to rely on both implementing themes that can resonate universally and allowing for a narrative transparency. As Friese states in the interview, "*even though the culture is different all around the world, there are certain things that are everywhere. The same people laugh, cry, they get born, they die – just fundamental human stuff*" (Nguyen, 2019). Similarly, Darío Madrona, an executive producer of *Elite* states that while they do not write the show thinking about being international, they do try to write about universal topics and issues that Madrona believes anyone in any part of the world can identify with (personal communication with Castro, Feb. 6, 2019).

This sentiment appears to be shared by some viewers as well. As one of the American interviewees describes, the everyday experiences and struggles portrayed in *Dark* were not only perceived by her as relatable and similar to the realities of her own life in the United States, but also prompted her to reflect on the universality of people's experiences across the world.

> I felt like the younger children definitely had a more tumultuous family life, which personally to me is relatable. It was kind of intriguing and assuring that like, you know, people from other cultures and countries still have very similar experiences to me and people in America. And I'd say just because in both shows they [the characters] were all very young, they were kind of dealing with the same emotions that I would right now. (Mia)

According to *Dark*'s co-creator Friese, making sure that the overall narrative works for everyone was of great importance for Netflix. And while the company was open to including certain references that would be only familiar to German viewers (e.g. a traditional chocolate bar that is rebranded in each of the show's time zones), Netflix also made sure to eliminate aspects that they believed global audience would not get, such as lines that relied on a culturally specific form of sarcasm (Gill, 2017).

Shifting away from the strategies of universal themes and narrative transparency, another facet through which interviewees of the present study experienced a sense of familiarity while watching the foreign Netflix originals, relates to the perception of similarities between the foreign products and US-produced films and television. Interviewees expressed that the selected foreign Netflix originals carried many similarities to American shows in terms of plot and theme, especially by relying heavily on drama, or more specifically high school drama, as well as certain universal tropes and topics (e.g. travelling across time and dimensions) exploited by American and foreign Netflix shows alike. This prompted interviewees to, for example, compare *Elite* to *Gossip Girl* and *Pretty Little Liars*, or liken *Dark* to *Stranger Things*. Other interviewee drew comparisons between the Brazilian *3%* and major US film productions such as *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent*. The link between well-known American films and series that respondents have previously watched or encountered and the foreign originals, has therefore provided an additional layer of proximity and familiarity. For example, when asked about how easy or difficult does she think the show *Elite* would be to enjoy for a mainstream American audience, Carlota reflects on the similarities to a popular US produced show in the following way:

> I don't think it should be very difficult, I felt like it's very similar to other American teen dramas, like attending school, being wealthy. For example, there's a show called *Gossip Girl* and that's like, I feel like that's kind of representative of this show, just set in different countries. Although I do feel that this show has a lot more deeper content in terms of culture, and actual social identities, whereas *Gossip Girl* is really just drama. (Carlota)

However, the perception of these similarities is not reduced to the participants of the present study. The prominence of these apparent links can be demonstrated with the fact that many television critics have previously came to very similar conclusions, comparing the foreign originals to the American hits mentioned above, as well as other prominent series. For example,

Elite gets compared to shows such as *The OC* or *Riverdale*, while *Dark* was declared by some as a mix between the mystery drama *The OA* and *Stranger Things* which introduce a similar mix of time-travelling, sci-fi and horror elements (Onieva, 2018; Rogers, 2017).

The assumption that these perceived similarities can have an important role in motivating viewership, stems not only from the theory of cultural proximity, but is also supported by the testimonies of foreign Netflix originals producers, who believe that being able to compare their product to shows global viewers are already familiar with, can help them reach a greater audience and entice people to watch it. As Darío Madrona, an executive producer of *Elite* explains in a recent interview, if a series reminds the viewers of something they have already seen, it can let them know what to expect and help them gain a better understanding of what the series is about, which can consequently lead to reaching a bigger audience (personal communication with Castro, Feb. 6, 2019). Similarly, the creators of *Dark* have previously admitted that while they want people to acknowledge the show is not just a German take on the American *Stranger Things*, the constant comparison to the US hit provides them with an exciting opportunity. Specifically, the creators believe it has a potential to gain more viewers, as fans of *Stranger Things* will now most likely at least think about watching the German mystery drama (Grobar, 2017).

Expanding beyond universal themes and similarities to specific American content, four interviewees expressed that the selected foreign originals did not reflect the culture of origin much, or even at all. These respondents shared the opinion that the show could easily be an American production, had it not been produced in foreign language, which consequently provided a sense of familiarity. As Carlota points out when talking about *Elite*:

> I don't feel like the show itself captivated a lot about Spanish culture because it was centered around like the students and their lives as students and their own personal lives and didn't really reflect much of Spanish culture. I felt that if anything, it could just be a regular American show, but it's just in a different language. (Carlota)

Other respondents specifically emphasized that foreign Netflix originals seem to utilize and depend on American archetypes, that at times actually contradict the archetypes, culture and production traditions of the culture of origin. A valuable perspective was shared by Isa, who grew up and graduated from university in the United States, but has also spent multiple years living in Madrid, which has put her in a unique position allowing her to compare the Spanish

Netflix original *Elite* with television content created by established Spanish producers (such as the national TV broadcasters). Reflecting on this comparison, Isa believes *Elite* utilizes themes, archetypes and acting styles that are very similar to traditional American productions, and not remotely Spanish:

> I think the show is really American in the sense that they put a lot of individual emphasis on each character, [...] there's a very strong emphasis on like the character dynamics between the children themselves, there's no one that does it better than America. Like High School Musical and the Breakfast Club, [...] 90210. These kinds of examples of the very stereotypical like, oh we are going to high school together and we're all in these dramatic situations. Very American. That's not remotely Spanish. The acting was really American and it feels almost unnatural to hear people speaking Spanish and saying those things because like, yes, they're speaking Spanish, but the things that they do, they don't follow character archetypes from Spanish TV. If you compare it to a typical Spanish television show, it's not very normal. And then the acting is very like larger than life and so are the actors. The actors, they only appear Spanish, their faces are Spanish, but they don't really act Spanish. (Isa)

4. 1. 3. 2 Creating a sense of foreignness

After exploring the factors that aided in creating a sense of familiarity for interviewees watching the selected foreign originals, two main facets were identified – that is the utilization of universal and relatable themes, and the perception of similarities between the selected foreign shows and American film and television products.

However, the interviewees have also identified several facets through which the foreign origin of the examined shows became salient, and which therefore contributed to creating a sense of foreignness. Linking back to the theories introduced in the beginning of this study, the following facets can be valuable for understanding how a sense of foreignness (or otherness/cultural distance) can contribute to either promoting or discouraging viewership of foreign Netflix originals. More specifically, it can help identify whether a sense of foreignness is perceived by viewers in line with the more traditional theory of cultural proximity which assumes that viewers tend to give preference to television products that are most culturally, geographically, or linguistically proximate and familiar, and a sense of otherness or foreigners should therefore impede their motivation to watch the given product (La Pastina & Straubhaar,

2005). Or whether it more closely resembles the later theories proposed by Jensen (2018) and Straubhaar et al. (2015) who propose some viewers perceive otherness as a source of appeal and intentionally seek out foreign content as a result.

Beginning at the linguistic level, the original language of the content, as well as translation method used for its viewing were the two most prominent factors that prompted interviewees to identify the examined Netflix show had a foreign origin. Interviewees suggested that they mostly realized the given series was not an American production either upon starting to watch the show and hearing a foreign language, or when they realized the series was dubbed. This realization was most often prompted by the perception that the voices do not match the mouth movements of the actors. Furthermore, automatic dubbing was reported as a strongly disruptive factor that caused the interviewees discomfort, as it did not sound right and forced them to manually switch to subtitles after they have started watching.

> I think there's been one or two instances where I like an advertisement and via the advertisement, I had no idea what country it's from and then I'll be watching it and it will be usually, you know, because I'm in the US it will be dubbed, so it will be English dubbed and then like three sentences in I'm like this is weird and then I'll realize that oh, this is in Turkish, or this is in German or this is in whatever. And then because it just throws me off, I'll switch it to the original language. (Adil)

This apparent aversion towards dubbing can provide an interesting insight into how the group of viewers interviewed in this study compares to the larger American audience, and to what extent they fit the image Netflix has of its US-based subscribers. Specifically, there is an established belief expressed by both industry professionals and viewers that the American audience is historically rather resistant to subtitling as a translation method (Farr, 2011; Kaufman, 2014; MacDougall, 1998). In the present study, interviewees also expressed this belief, with seven interviewees perceiving the languages barrier as the main factor preventing mainstream American viewers from seeking out and enjoying foreign Netflix originals. Furthemore, the notion that American viewers are "lazy" and seeking easy to consume content was expressed in seven interviews, and five interviewees suggested that mainstream American viewers do not want to read subtitles. In the following segment, Pamela expresses this belief when reflecting on whether or not can the show *3%* be easily enjoyed by the mainstream American audience:

Definitely people would not want to see it if it was not dubbed. People don't like to read. So the dubbing was great and I've seen that a lot of TV shows, they now do the dubbing. So that people can see the show. This was especially happening for the House of Paper, *La Casa de Papel*, it was a good show, but it wasn't getting as much attention as it was supposed to be getting here in the US. And I was actually reading an article where it said that Netflix had to change the profile picture that was on our Netflix content page to translate it to English. Because it was showing in Spanish and they changed it […] because people will see something and they will be like, okay, that's in Spanish, that's another language. I'm not going to see it. […] I will not click on it because I don't know if there's subtitles, I'm too lazy to even look at the subtitles, I'm not going to read the subtitles - that kind of thing. (Pamela)

Additionally, a survey conducted by Parrots Analytics shows that in 2018, only 17 % of Americans said that they watched a foreign-language TV series with subtitles. While this rather low percentage could be partially influenced by the overall low viewership of foreign content in general (dubbed and subtitled), the authors of the survey suggest subtitled content is not the type of localization viewers on the American market expect and that dubbing appears to be a better choice (Kay, 2018; Parrot Analytics, 2018c). This notion could be further supported by an experiment conducted by Netflix, which revealed viewers were more likely to finish watching the French show *Marseille*, if it was streamed with dubbing. This happened despite the fact that majority of the viewers expressed that they prefer to watch foreign Netflix originals with English subtitles. Finally, both the German *Dark* and Brazilian *3%* were watched by majority of the American viewers with dubbed audio (Nguyen, 2018; Roettgers, 2018). As for *Dark*, the number of viewers in English-speaking countries that watched the show dubbed reached the heights of 81 % (Gill, 2018). These insights consequently prompted Netflix to set dubbing as a default translation for viewers steaming foreign shows within the United States.

The contrast between these findings and the aversion to dubbing expressed by interviewees, and striking preference to watch foreign Netflix originals with subtitles (expressed by eleven interviewees), could serve as an evidence that the sample of viewers interviewed in this study might to an extent differ from the mainstream American audience in both their attitudes and behaviors. The nature and causes of those differences could lie in a variety of different factors, some of which are discussed in the section of this study dedicated to the contributions of cultural capital in motivating viewership (see chapter 4.2.1). However, it is worth

mentioning that the same Parrot Analytics study from 2018 that identified only 17 % of Americans have watched a foreign subtitled show in the past month, has also revealed that the number increased by 12 % compared to the market average for the group of US viewers aged 18-24. Additionally, American women were 7 % more likely than men to watch a subtitled show (Kay, 2018; Parrot Analytics, 2018). Consequently, since the present study worked with a sample of almost exclusively women aged 18-29, age and gender both appear to be factors that could help explaining the different preferences of the present sample compared to the mainstream American audience.

Furthermore, the interviewees' preference for subtitles can also be considered in the light of the highly complex narrative, typical for Netflix original shows, as well as other high-end dramas within the paradigm of quality TV. Eight interviewees reported that they do not multitask while watching foreign Netflix originals, as it would make it too hard for them to focus. This can mean that a need for dubbing was not deemed necessary, as the viewers stayed in front of the screen, dedicating it their full attention and therefore being able to read the subtitles and not miss any part of the rather complex plots. However, contrary to the theoretical proposals presented within the theoretical section, as well as the findings of Perego et al. (2016) that suggest subtitling might make paying attention to a highly complex narrative difficult for the viewers as it requires them to split attention between reading and following the visual track, interviewees in the present research actually seem to use subtitles as an aid, explaining their preference for subtitle use by saying that they want to be able to read along, sometimes in order to catch everything being said – as reported by four interviewees. While other four interviewees reported that they perceive subtitles to be more accurate. The latter insight is in line with the findings of Cha (2006) who points out that while subtitles preserve the original form, dubbing can change the feel and original intention of a film.

Following the linguistic level, another facet through which interviewees identified the foreign origin of the examined shows is related to the visual content. The settings of the series appeared to constitute the main giveaway factor, when it came to identifying the show was not produced in the United States. Altogether, nine interviewees shared that the visual portrayal of the locations where the stories were set, such as the homes, schools, or even the shots of the landscapes and streets of entire cities, looked very much foreign and not like they could possibly originate in the United States. Using an example of the Spanish show *Elite*, Carlota explains the contrasts she noticed between how certain locations were portrayed in the series and how she would expect them to look in an American production:

Honestly, I felt like the locations, especially the school doesn't look like a normal school in America, because it just looks a lot more nicer. And yeah, I've certainly never seen a school like that here. And then I don't know, sometimes when they had shots, like within the streets, the streets definitely looked different than normal streets you'd see in America, so I guess that's also another hint that it's not set [in the United States]. (Carlota)

Additionally, interviewees also experienced a sense of foreignness or unfamiliarity as a result of certain cinematographic and aesthetic choices made by the producers of the selected shows. These included factors such as color schemes, lighting, or filming angles and editing style. For example, Elica recalls perceiving the contrast in the color palette and mood/aesthetics portrayed in *The Rain*, *Dark* and *3%*, compared to those utilized by American TV shows:

The way that they're shot […] the color undertone and like the color palette of Brazilian shows in general, I feel like it's very different from American TV shows or just from the ones that I watch. Anyways, a lot of the [American] ones that I end up watching are just very like bright in colors and very happy. […] But definitely, especially with like *Dark*, *3%* and *The Rain*, I feel like all of them have a very dark color palette. Or a little bit more depressing, whereas all of the American that I watch are more like happy and sunny. (Elica)

A similar insight is shared by Mia, who believes the German *Dark* and Scandinavian *The Rain,* both utilize a color palette that is different from the one used in American shows and includes a lot of blue, hence darker tones. However, the interviewee also brings up the valid observation that these rather darker undertones could be partially the consequence of the themes of the specific shows, which are both also quite dark, dystopian and mysterious. As for the filming angles and editing style, Michelle notices the difference in filming style utilized in *Dark*, which in her opinion contrasted American productions in the way "they angled things" and by having a lot more natural flow of the camera. Similarly, Beth describes the differences in filming angles utilized in the show *Elite* followingly:

It's the lighting and the way that they focused on characters, with having the camera like pretty darn far away from the characters a lot. And like in the US I've

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just observed, like in American films, that when a character's having a solo moment, then they're more apt to like to zoom in on them. (Beth)

Bordering the visual and content level, another notable identifier that helped the American viewers identify given show was not produced within the local market, were the actors. More specifically, interviewees pointed out that the actors hired to play parts in the foreign Netflix originals were much more diverse, especially in terms of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. One of the interviewees, Pamela, specifically noted that in the Brazilian *3%* "there was not a lot of white people" and that the show included actors of lot of different skin colors, which made her immediately identify the show was "definitely not American". Similar observation about the portrayals in *3%* was made by Elica, who also suggested this lack of representation in American series might be an issue of somewhat inaccurate representation that the industry is slowly trying to correct, rather than a result of the United States not being at all racially and ethnically diverse.

They have the black actor, multiple black actors and people can kind of see the different ethnicities. And I feel like they are representative of the population, because they have so many ethnicities [in Brazil] as well. Apparently, I know there's not, or at least I don't think there's as much of that going on. So I feel like it's just interesting to see that. I think America started thinking a little bit better about it, but before, I feel like they would not really have as much representation. But it's starting to get a little bit better. (Elica)

Finally, on a content level, identifying foreign origin was frequently prompted by some of the situations portrayed in the shows being perceived as unrelatable, or unrealistic. Specifically, the interviews revealed that cultural differences between the United States and the countries of production origin in areas such as education, law enforcement, family relationships or the general functioning of society sometimes stood in a way of promoting a sense of proximity and familiarity. As Cassidy said in relation to the Spanish show *Elite*:

I've never heard of someone having sex that often in a public school building, or even in a private school building, cause there's a lot of teachers and students around. And I saw some unrealistic-ness with not allowing religious symbols because I know that if that happened in America there would be quite a few

lawsuits, and so it seemed a little bit unrealistic. But I don't know how things fully
are in Spain. So I don't know if it's the same way. (Cassidy)

The experience of Cassidy showcases an example of a cultural difference that could be
arguably perceived as negative by many viewers, that is the observation that the scope of
religious freedoms as portrayed by *Elite* seems limited, compared to what the viewers are used
to in the United States. Linking this back to the theory of cultural proximity, as well as the
findings on factors affecting attitudes to television fiction, this inability to culturally identify with
some of the situations portrayed in the selected foreign Netflix originals, could hinder the
enjoyment and motivations for watching the shows (Diego & Etayo, 2012; La Pastina &
Straubhaar, 2007).

However, in many cases, the fact that these situations would unfold differently outside of
the United States (i.e. in the show's country of origin) is evaluated positively For example, when
talking about *The Rain*, Mia pointed out that not only did the Danish school "look much different
and much nicer than many schools in America", but she also perceived the types of academics
or curriculums student engage with to be "much more actually productive and beneficial for the
students". Another compelling example was provided by Cassidy, who notices that the way
society deals with law enforcement and former convicts, seemed more community based:

[…] the community sense behind it and how everything was dealt with. Because I
remember one of the characters got released recently out of prison and usually,
they would have him under house arrest or in a halfway house. They wouldn't have
him right out of prison. Just being out in the open, having a job. And so that's where
I kind of picked up also where it's like this is not fully how we do things. The system.
(Cassidy)

Given the increasing criticism of the high incarceration rates in the United States and the
country's criminal justice system (which is often accused of being corrupt and inhumane), the
portrayal described by Cassidy above, while foreign and unfamiliar, could actually have the
potential to promote positive attitudes towards the series and its content, rather than hinder the
viewing experience as the theory of cultural proximity might suggest. In fact, Jenner (2018)
explains how the critique of the US penal system by another wildly popular Netflix original,
Orange is the New Black, managed to successfully appeal to both local, as well as global
audiences. The author suggests this is due to a strategy of creating a global-local appeal that

she refers to as "appealing to a transnational value system". The core of this strategy lies in portraying and promoting a range of liberal values that can resonate across cultures. According to Jenner (2018), those values mainly refer to democracy, human rights, anti-sexism, anti-racism, and anti-homophobia. Furthemore, in the context of the present research, it is easy to see how these values (and their portrayal within the examined shows) could be received by interviewees rather positively and possibly aid in motivating viewership, as young Americans tend to lean politically left, that is more liberal and democratic (Byler, 2019; LeTourneau, 2019).

4. 1. 4 Contributions of quality perceptions

As proposed earlier, theoretical findings related to the conceptualization of quality television, the exact characteristics that define it and the importance and consequences these factors have in shaping the opinions and actions of both viewers and producers are quite varied and continue to be a source of academic debates and new developments (Bayo-Moriones et al., 2018; Jenner, 2018; Krauß, 2018; Nelson; 2007). Therefore, in order to explore which dimensions of quality Netflix subscribers attribute to, and use to evaluate (foreign) Netflix original programming, interviewees in the present study were asked to reflect on their own perceptions and understandings of quality television, as well as the aspects of quality that are most important to them. The findings gained as a result of this exploration can then provide an additional context for understanding how the interviewees' perceptions of quality connect to the various themes identified in the previous section, and how they can interact together to motivate viewership of foreign Netflix originals.

Firstly, reflecting Netflix's long-term strategy that aims to brand its original programming as "quality TV" (Jenner, 2018), the analysis revealed that striking majority of interviewees (10) indeed describes Netflix originals (both foreign and American) as high quality productions. Furthermore, nearly half of the interviewees (6) expressed that they believe Netflix originals exhibit higher level of quality than shows available on American cable television, and therefore prefer to watch Netflix over cable.

Concerning foreign Netflix originals specifically, four interviewees shared that they believe foreign originals are significantly higher quality than American. This belief was supported by various sentiments. For example, the interviewees expressed that foreign Netflix originals are less cheesy, more original and artistic, have better-thought out plots and deal with deeper and more serious topics. Additionally, one interviewee reflects on one the potential underlying causes of these differences by suggesting that foreign producers are finding themselves in an advantageous position, that allows them to learn from the example set by (not only) American

shows, and build upon them to create ones that are different, more original and therefore perceived as higher quality by some.

> Foreign TV shows, I noticed, have definitely had a higher quality because they see what America's doing, they see what all the other countries are doing, and they try to make it a little bit different. (Cassidy)

As outlined in the introduction of this section, in order to create a link between the dimensions of quality that interviewees use to evaluate television series and their motivations to watch foreign Netflix originals, interviewees were asked to describe their personal understandings of "quality TV". By analyzing these insights, it became apparent that the characteristics attributed by interviewees to "high quality TV" largely overlapped with the narrative-related characteristics/factors that motivated viewers to watch selected foreign Netflix originals (as discussed in chapter 4.1). This overlap therefore provides and indirect, but convincing evidence that perceptions of quality did indeed inform interviewees motivations for watching the shows.

Similarly to the pattern that emerged when exploring the narrative-related motivations for viewership of foreign Netflix originals, plot and plot-related factors were also reported by majority of interviewees (11) as the most important characteristics of quality television. Interviewees repeatedly expressed that perceived quality of the plot plays a central role in their assessment of the quality of a given television series as a whole. And while some interviewees expressed, they prefer television shows that can deliver the "entire package", scoring high across many dimensions of quality at once (e.g. narrative, visuals, acting, budget), they also believe a high quality plot has such a central importance that it can easily compensate for deficiencies in other areas, such as cinematography or costuming. As Michelle points out:

> If I'm looking for quality TV, I'm looking for TV that has a good story plot to it, rather than the production. Like my favorite show is Wynonna Earp and there's a bunch of demons and the way they do some of the demons is just really bad […] but the story is still great, and the acting is still great. […] Like I would much rather watch theater with people in general clothing be able to act out the storyline then have really good quality costumes. (Michelle)

Additionally, when it comes to the interviewees' opinions of what exactly constitutes or characterizes a high-quality plot, the viewers refer to aspects that once again largely overlap with the ones discussed in relation to plot-related motivations in chapter 4.1. Specifically, they believe high-quality plots need to be well-thought out and consistent (i.e. avoiding plot holes) and interweaving multiple storylines (see "complexity", ch. 4.1.1), unique and unpredictable (see "originality", ch. 4.1.1), and portray well-rounded, relatable characters, to which the interviewee can develop an emotional connection (see "character-related motivations, ch. 4.1.2.). For example, when explaining the qualities Pamela looks for in a plot, she refers to the the concept of originality, which she defines in terms of novelty, unpredictability and not being repetitive.

> Bad quality television would be just the same overall story. Like the same story over again or they made a remake of a story that I already know and it's kind of like, okay that makes it bad. While high quality would be something that you haven't seen, something new, a new story, a new concept. (Pamela)

Alongside the complex and original plots, other major characteristics attributed to quality television by the interviewees were visuals and cinematography, with six interviewees emphasizing their significance, as well as the quality of acting, which was mentioned in five interviews.

Linking to existing scholastic debates surrounding the conceptualization of quality television, the main characteristics that interviewees attribute to high quality TV are very similar to those discussed by various contemporary academics and industry professionals. This provides an interesting insight, given that the only recent study which attempted to revisit quality television from the perspective of audiences, concluded that while professionals and practitioners tend to conceptualize quality in terms of dimensions such as originality, innovation or aesthetics, viewers themselves most often associate entertainment with the concept of high quality TV (Bayo-Moriones et al., 2018). However, as the above-outlined findings show, interviewees in the present study exhibited a complete opposite of the pattern described by Bayo-Moriones et al. (2018). Instead, their understanding of quality more closely resembled the more refined and critical approach that is observed (and expected) within the circles of industry professionals and scholars, rather than laymen viewers.

For example, the reliance on complex narratives, deep exploration of characters' psyche or the employment of edgy, controversial themes, as well high-end

cinematography that resembles theatrical releases in both quality and production budgets, have all been emphasized as central defining aspects of contemporary high-end, quality TV by various scholars over the last decade (Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018; Nelson, 2007) while also being fully reflected in the accounts provided by interviewees in this research. Furthermore, during the interviews it became apparent many interviewees were able to conduct critical and complex reflections, showing an understanding of the inner workings of the television and streaming industries, even though neither of the interviewees has an educational or professional background in these disciplines, nor related ones.

To provide an example, interviewees independently (i.e. without a prompt from the researcher) acknowledged how the switch to world-wide digital distribution created increased access to foreign television programming, reflected on the role of algorithms in guiding viewers' decisions and even acknowledged the different constraints and opportunities experienced by cable, as opposed to SVOD producers and their implications for the final products. Related to the last point, Michelle reflects upon these differences in the following way:

> […] Having the ability to do Netflix originals means that they can target more specific audiences instead of just worrying about ratings. Where cable TV is like to stay on air and to continue having a show, we need to make sure everyone's watching so we have to appeal to everyone. […] Whereas Netflix can make sure that they're enjoying the content and I think it's a little bit more enjoyable for the person who's trying to watch that specific type of show. (Michelle)

Michelle then continues to reflect on the different time constraints as well:

> I think since cable TV has the deadlines where they're still filming while releasing. So sometimes things seem maybe a little bit rushed where Netflix originals like they can really say whatever they want. They can have their entire story in front of them watching the entire story unfold and change whatever they want before they give us the final product. So I think Netflix originals take more time to make sure it is exactly how they wanted, where cable TV makes it so like we have continuous content. (Michelle)

To conclude, the understanding of quality TV expressed by the interviewees in the present study seems to closely resemble the conclusions made by scholars and industry professionals, therefore suggesting viewers have a more refined and critical approach then authors such as Bayo-Moriones et al. (2018) attribute them, and which goes far beyond understanding quality in relation to the product's entertainment value. However, it is important to acknowledge various questions remain unanswered regarding the cause of this more refined understanding. Therefore, a further exploration might be beneficial to determine, whether this phenomenon is merely a consequence of the interviewees' higher level of education, or whether it could be attributed to some broader potential causes, such as the advancement and expansion of Netflix originals possibly changing and refining the way in which viewers evaluate serialized television.

4. 2 Motivation related to the viewers

The first results section of this study introduced and explored themes related to the appeal factors and motivations associated with the narrative of foreign Netflix original shows, such as plot and character-related motivations. Furthermore, the latter parts of the previous chapter have explored how a sense of cultural proximity is experienced by viewers while watching the show. Both cultural proximity and the viewers' perceptions of quality television were then explored in terms of how they can contribute to motivating viewership of the foreign Netflix original content. On the other hand, the following chapter shifts the focus from the narrative (i.e. characteristics related to the product) to exploring motivations that are informed by the distinct characteristics, life experiences and diverse viewing positions of the interviewees themselves.

4. 2. 1 Contributions of cultural capital

For the purpose of the present study, cultural capital was operationalized as a set of demographic factors and life experiences that have the potential to influence the cultural competencies and knowledge which are available to the viewer and relevant for the consumption of foreign television content. This definition was informed by the theoretical findings that suggest television viewers are equipped with various layers of identities, related to factors such as class, ethnicity, geographical placement, or even the knowledge of foreign languages and exposure to foreign cultures. These factors are then believed to influence the viewers' choice of television programming, as they determine which content is the most relevant to them, especially in terms of language and culture (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005;

Straubhaar et al., 2015). For example, a first-generation Mexican viewer living in the United States with limited knowledge of the local culture and language, but strong ties to their country of origin, might be more prone to prefer Mexican television over the US production, since the former has greater relevance in terms of their identity and is also more easily accessible and understandable given the types of cultural capital available to the viewer.

Hence, in the context of this thesis, the various layers of identity and the types of cultural capital available to the interviewees were examined, in order to explore how they could contribute to the choice and motivations to watch the specific foreign Netflix originals. After analyzing the interviews, five prominent types of cultural capital have emerged – immigration background, international friends and family, living in a multicultural environment, travelling abroad and knowledge of foreign languages.

4. 2. 1. 1 Immigration background

Altogether, ten out of thirteen interviewees reported having an immigration background, which in all cases stemmed from being second generation immigrants, the children of parents born outside of the United States, in countries including Mexico, Japan, China and the UK. Additionally, the interviewees believed their immigration background is one of the factors that contribute to their choice of foreign programming. They mainly attribute this to the fact that they have always been exposed to different culture(s) and language(s) by their family and relatives, as well as more specifically exposed to foreign television programs coming from those cultures, especially during their childhood when they lacked the ability to choose their own TV programs. Some interviewees therefore suggest this experience has made it easier for them to consume foreign content (even from cultures different then their immigration background), since they are used to watching programs that deal with concepts, values or languages they do not fully comprehend or are not accustomed to. As Isa explains:

> I am Chinese so I'm used to watching shows that I don't necessarily understand. Because my parents speak two languages, so there are films that are made in Hong Kong and they're in Cantonese, which I don't speak and but my parents speak it, and then there's films that are made in Mandarin, which I do speak, but not extremely well. So I'm used to watching foreign content since I was young, just because of my parents, even content I didn't understand. So I'm not like a regular person in the sense that like I don't have any problem watching something that I don't understand. Obviously like no listening problem, which is to say I could hear

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a totally different language and as long as I've watched the subtitles, that's enough for me. I know that people get annoyed by subtitles. (Isa)

The experiences of parental influence in early childhood and adolescence, during which interviewees were exposed to their heritage culture through viewing television programming that their parents have chosen to watch, reflect a phenomenon previously described by academics as remote enculturation. Remote enculturation is then defined by the authors as "learning aspects of one's heritage culture via indirect or intermittent exposure" (Ferguson et al., 2016, p. 166). The learning process can be both self-initiated or initiated by various outside sources, most often parents and relatives, who act as enculturating agents for their young children. Additionally, watching television programming (especially genres such as soap operas, or telenovelas) from the country of heritage together with their children, is a popular form of remote enculturation implemented by first-generation immigrant parents, since it allows them to both fulfill their personal goals to remain connected with their culture, and at the same time pass the heritage onto their children (Ferguson et al., 2016; Lee, 2004).

Staying in touch with own cultural background

As previously mentioned, majority of the interviewees that participated in this research found themselves at the position of second-generation immigrants who were born and raised in the United States, often using English as their first and/or primary language, while their parents were born in other parts of the world and immigrated to the country later in life. This seems to leave some interviewees in a situation where they feel somewhat detached from their culture of origin and as a result seek out opportunities to stay in touch with given culture through consuming foreign media, and more specifically foreign Netflix originals. Additionally, consuming content related to one's own cultural background seems to give the respondents a more "at home feeling", while also feeling like the content is in certain ways more relevant, relatable and representative of their identity. This sentiment is shared by Carlota, who explains:

> [...] I think being in a family with immigrants, you're still exposed to your culture that you come from and like while I'm not Spanish, seeing people speaking Spanish and all that, it just gives me that more at home feeling. And also because I attend university where it's predominantly white and Asian-identifying individuals, you don't really see that many people that look like

myself or identify with cultures like myself, so I think the content that I choose is sometimes a reflection of that I want to see more people like me or that identify within the same culture as myself and are speaking foreign languages that I still understand. (Carlota)

Linking back to the study conducted by Ferguson et al. (2016), the interviewees' experience of using foreign Netflix content as a way to stay in touch with one's own culture and gain a sense of relevance and relatability can be considered an example of self-initiated remote enculturation. In fact, the experiences described by the interviewees are very much in line with the example cited by Ferguson et al. (2016, p.169) which describes how "Mexican American adolescent girls watch telenovelas as a way to travel to Mexico without leaving home".

Similarly, the benefits cited by Carlota and other participants were also previously pointed out by studies focusing on the viewing habits of immigrants, which showed that viewership of television content from one's country of heritage can help people connect with their culture and reinforce their ethnic or cultural identity (Lee et al., 2004; Georgiou, 2012) Furthermore, they seem to support some of the notions made by theory of cultural proximity introduced at the beginning of this research, as they follow the general pattern described by La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) who propose audiences tend to choose (or give priority) to television programming that is closest and most relevant to them in cultural and linguistic terms.

4. 2. 1. 2 Multicultural environments and daily encounters

Another common theme that respondents reported, were their frequent encounters with foreign cultures in day-to-day life due to the multicultural environments they live in (described by eight interviewees) and the diverse people they are surrounded with, outside of the circle of their closest family members. Geographical location within the United States and attending university were some of the most prominent factors that seemed to contribute to the high levels of multicultural encounters experienced by interviewees. As Mia explains:

I'd say [I encounter foreign cultures] daily because we have Mexican students, we have people who are exchange students from China, and other parts of Asia, and then we have a few people from like Poland too. I met a new friend like a few months ago, she was born in Afghanistan. So I can start learning more about Middle Eastern culture I guess, but through her. Um, so I'd say definitely daily, because in southern California too, there's really any culture. (Mia)

Additionally, eleven interviewees reported having friends or relatives with different cultural backgrounds, which often served as a source of inspiration for them to watch content produced within that specific culture, or directly affected their exposure and familiarity with foreign programming by being in frequent contact with said friends and relatives. During the interviews, Mia provided the following two examples demonstrating this process:

> We have a few family friends living in Germany. And they had actually come to visit a couple years ago before I'd watched the show [Dark] and they were, speaking German while they were here. And I think I just was really interested in that, because I wasn't as exposed to Germany and German culture before. So that was really motivating. (Mia)

> I have a few different Mexican friends who really want me to start watching Spanish shows, which I really should start doing. Um, so I think it's definitely an outside influence in terms of like relationships and people that I know that will get me more interested in learning about a culture. (Mia)

4. 2. 1. 3 Travelling abroad

Another major source of encounters with foreign cultures was international travel. Seven interviewees reported travelling abroad and consequently opening up more to foreign cultures and feeling more motivated to watch foreign content. This phenomenon also finds support in previous theories and empirical findings. For example, Straubhaar (2007) points out that as people live abroad or travel to foreign countries, new layers of identity and cultural capital become available to the viewers, which can in turn make new types of content more relevant and therefore desirable.

Similarly, Diego and Etayo (2012) argue that more educated European viewers should have a higher level of cultural proximity towards American series, since they are more likely to be able to travel to the United States. Although the direction of the flow (American series to Europe) is opposite of the one examined in the present research, the logic of the argument seems to work just as appropriately in this scenario. That is, not only do indeed the young, educated interviewees exhibit high levels of international travel, but travelling also seems to increase their interested in television content produced in countries or regions they have travelled to, as those places become more proximate and relevant due to this experience.

Travelling was also mentioned as a factor that has the potential to counter the limitations related to encountering foreign cultures while growing up and living in a less diverse environment. As Cassidy demonstrates:

Growing up in Montana you don't really get much diversity. Cause it's Montana, literally the small percentage of like any other culture that isn't white, is foreign exchange students. So I honestly didn't have that much of a change growing up until I reached college, because it was just like a lot of white people and like maybe a couple African American people, a couple of foreign exchange students. And so definitely becoming an adult helped that a lot cause I got to travel a little bit more, I got to experience different people and different cultures and it just felt like sort of a release because I've been really wanting that. (Cassidy)

4. 2. 1. 4 Knowledge of foreign languages

Another factor frequently cited by scholars as playing a significant role in developing a sense of cultural proximity and motivating viewership of foreign content is language. Jenner (2018) proposes that command of a foreign language, along with the familiarity with different cultures constitute the two most important aspects of transcultural viewing experience. This notion is further supported by the findings of Pjesivac and Imre (2016) which revealed that knowledge of English language (along with exposure to US lifestyle and media) served as a strong predictor for consumption of American television by young Croatian viewers. The knowledge of foreign language can therefore possibly act to both make certain types of foreign content more culturally and linguistically proximate (e.g. Spanish shows for Spanish speakers) and therefore contribute to motivating viewership. Or, as previously expressed by an interviewee in relation to the role of immigrant heritage, knowledge or exposure to foreign languages seems to also aid in getting accustomed to watching subtitled content in a language the viewer does not necessarily understand.

In the present research, the knowledge of foreign languages emerged as a strong theme within the exploration of interviewees' cultural capital. Altogether, ten interviewees reported having at least some knowledge of a foreign language (i.e. other than English). However, only five of these interviewees had high or fluent proficiency in the original language of the foreign Netflix show they have watched, while others had either low knowledge or none at all. Similarly, despite the fact that majority of interviewees has an immigrant background, only four people were at least moderately familiar with the culture of origin of the foreign Netflix original they have

watched (e.g. German culture for *Dark*, Brazilian culture for *3%* etc.). This is an important insight since while respondents clearly exhibit very high levels of general cultural capital (i.e. they travel abroad, speak foreign languages, encounter foreign cultures in their everyday lives), very few were actually familiar with the specific culture or language of the specific foreign Netflix originals they have watched. Furthermore, when questioned, majority of them (ten interviewees) did not believe previous familiarity with the culture of origin of a show is necessary for enjoying the show. They explained this position by arguing the selected foreign Netflix originals weren't "about culture" and that their strong, enjoyable plots were universally understandable. As expressed by Mia, some interviewees even believed watching the show first might be a good introduction into the culture:

> Um, no, I don't think you need to know everything about the culture. I feel like watching the show [Dark] first would actually be a good like introduction into learning about the culture or might like prompt you to learn more? I mean it could like help you appreciate smaller aspects of the, of the show, but I don't think it's important for going in. (Mia)

Another interviewee, Michelle, then refers to the perceived universality of the show's plot:

> I'm not familiar with German culture and I really enjoyed it. I think it might help. But I also think that had a lot to do with that the show, it didn't seem like it was trying to make any commentary on German culture. I did notice it had a lot to do with like the Chernobyl thing, which like I knew a little bit about at least. Um, so it might make a little bit more of a difference to have that at least history background, but I don't know if there would necessarily need to be anything cultural wise for at least that show.

It is worth mentioning that the theme of foreign Netflix originals being universally understandable, utilizing tropes and archetypes similar to American shows and not carrying many strong traces of the local culture has also emerged quite prominently when identifying the motivations for viewership related to the narrative of the shows. Therefore, the questions that remained to be answered is what does this mean for the theory of cultural proximity as proposed by La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005)? And could this be a support for Jenner's (2018)

framework of grammar of transnationalism and suggest that Netflix is indeed succeeding in hiding the foreign origin of its non-English originals by shifting focus towards commonalities, rather than differences, as the author suggests? From the analysis and the very specific sample of interviewees, it is possible to observe that for the group of viewers the two forces seem to act simultaneously. Demonstrating that a sense of cultural proximity seems to be created for the interviewees through the combination of the various layers of cultural capital available to them, as well as the perception of universality and narrative transparency of the shows themselves.

4. 2. 2 Language practice

Finally, moving onto the final theme that emerged within the motivations related to viewers, and their distinct needs and experiences, a major source of enticement for watching foreign Netflix originals, especially in the initial stages of starting to discover and consume foreign content, was the goal to practice a foreign language. While this theme is not sorted under the contributions of cultural capital, and rather constitutes its own category, it is worth mentioning that there is a degree of overlap present, to the extent that while for some of the interviewees language practice was a stand-alone motivation for viewership of foreign original content, for others it was partially informed by their immigrant/cultural background, as they were trying to improve in the language of their own heritage. Altogether, five interviewees expressed that they were motivated to watch foreign Netflix originals, because they were seeking to learn or practice a foreign language. As apparent from literature, language practice as motive for indulging in foreign-language films and television is becoming increasingly common, as many students believe that watching subtitled series and movies can help them improve their skills in the target language (Birulés-Muntané & Soto-Faraco, 2016). This phenomenon can be exemplified with a quote from Cassidy, describing some of her motivations for consuming Spanish shows on Netflix:

> With Spanish TV shows, there's this study where it's like if you listen to the language while reading it, you adapt a lot more and since I'm trying to learn Spanish, that helps definitely factor in. But in all honesty, they just have better plot lines. (Cassidy)

However, as many of these interviewees report, once they started watching foreign content and have gotten more familiar with it or improved their language skills, their motivations

have shifted, and they found other sources of appeal that kept them searching for more foreign shows:

> When I first started looking, it was definitely to help me learn languages because I really wanted to learn different languages. So obviously that's there. It helps to hear it a lot, to learn a language. [...] I don't have any motivation to learn German right now, but I still really enjoy just watching Dark as a show. (Mia)

Consequently, it becomes apparent that while the goal of language practice can serve as an initial motivator for viewership of foreign Netflix originals, it does not seem to exist in a vacuum, and interviewees in the present research are finding other strong sources of appeal, as discussed in the previous chapters, that entice them to continue seeking out and watching foreign Netflix original content.

5 Conclusion

The global expansion of Netflix into over 190 countries, paired with its increasing focus on producing original programming with a global-local appeal, has attracted the attention of both academics and industry observers. Scholars have begun exploring the strategies that the company utilizes in order to create content that can travel well across cultural and national boarders (Jenner, 2018), and some speculate that Netflix's approach is starting to change established industry and market logics by increasing and democratizing access to film and television content from diverse corners of the world (Buonanno, 2018; Huffer, 2017). Netflix's local original content produced in territories such as Europe or Latin America are gaining unprecedented success with audiences around the world, including the Unites States market, which has historically been deemed rather resistant towards foreign film and television imports (McDonald, 2009; Saleem, 2018).

As a result, both industry observers and academics are starting to suggest that Netflix is defying the traditionally assumed logics of a one-way flow from the West to "the rest" (Lobato, 2019) and the assumed preference of audiences for content that is most culturally proximity (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005) and is instead increasingly appealing to American viewers with its foreign original content, making its consumption become more mainstream than ever before (Hazelton, 2018, Saleem, 2018). However, academic research exploring these recent developments and assumptions and identifying the logics behind the apparent appeal of foreign Netflix originals is missing. As a result, the present study explored why do American audiences consume foreign Netflix originals, and what are the various facets through which their appeal is created.

The exploration was guided by the following (sub-)research questions:

RQ: Why do American audiences consume non-English, foreign Netflix originals?

Sub-RQ1: How do American audiences perceive the quality of non-English, foreign Netflix originals? And how do their perceptions of quality contribute to the appeal of Netflix originals?

Sub-RQ2: How does cultural proximity and individuals' cultural capital relate to the consumption of non-English, foreign Netflix originals by American audiences?

In order to answer the research questions proposed by this thesis, a qualitative research approach was implemented. A series of 13 semi-structured in-depth interviews was conducted

with American viewers of the following five selected foreign Netflix originals – *Dark* (Germany), *Elite* (Spain), *3%* (Brazil), *Cable Girls* (Spain) and *The Rain* (Denmark). Data collected was analyzed by means of a thematic analysis. The analysis revealed two overarching thematic sections – motivations related to the narrative and motivations related to the viewers. The two themes (and their respective sub-themes) demonstrate why American viewers choose to watch foreign Netflix original series and illuminate how cultural proximity, cultural capital and the interviewees perceptions of quality contribute to motivating this viewership.

5.1 Answers to the research questions

RQ: Why do American audiences consume non-English, foreign Netflix originals?

As previously stated, the phenomenon of American viewers increasingly consuming non-English foreign content, more specifically foreign Netflix originals, and contributing to the productions transnational success has gained the attention of industry observers. However, the reasons why viewers in the United States choose to consume foreign content despite many traditional industry logics suggesting they should not (e.g. theory of cultural proximity, the one-way flow), remained unexplored.

In answering this question, the present study identified two facets of motivations that entice American viewers to consume foreign Netflix originals – motivations related to the narrative and motivations related to the viewers and their unique viewing position (RQ). As for motivations related to the narrative, the emerging themes demonstrate plot-related and character-related motivations had a central role. Specifically, *complex, captivating plots* that utilized forms of narrative complexity in combination with cliffhangers, provided major enticement for continued viewership of foreign Netflix originals (RQ). The complexity paired with cliffhanging simultaneously acted to promote binge-watching, which proved to be a prominent mode of viewership of foreign Netflix originals among the viewers. As a result, this finding supports some of the previously established theories suggesting that a) complex narratives typical for high-end television drama promote a sense of must-see allure, and consequently binge-watching or "addictive viewing" (Dunleavy, 2014) and b) that Netflix aims to promote and support this mode of viewing (Jenner, 2018).

Second, the American viewers reported *original and diverse plots* motivated them to watch the specific foreign originals, as they appreciated the lack of predictable tropes and clichés that they attribute to some American content. Furthermore, foreign Netflix originals were perceived as providing a greater representation in terms of gender, race or sex and sexual

orientation, and being more open to dealing with sensitive or edgy and "taboo" topics, which might support previous theories proposing that Netflix relies on promoting a system of liberal transnational values within its original productions, in order to appeal to audiences worldwide.Finally, *good character development* motivated the viewership of foreign Netflix originals, as the complexity of characters and the opportunity for establishing emotional connections with them, was another major source of appeal that motivated interviewees to keep watching.

Additionally, all three above-mentioned findings not only reflect some of the strategies of transnational appeal established in previous literature but also further the link between transnational appeal and Netflix's strategy to position its productions within the paradigm of "quality TV". This is due to the apparent overlap between the characteristics attributed to quality TV by both scholars (Burroughs, 2018; Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018) and the present interviewees, and the motivations for viewing foreign Netflix originals. The theoretical implications section will address this notion in more detail.

Sub-RQ1: How do American audiences perceive the quality of non-English, foreign Netflix originals? And how do their perceptions of quality contribute to the appeal of Netflix originals?

First, in accordance, with the various proposal that Netflix aims to brand its content within the paradigm of quality TV (Burroughs, 2018; Jenner, 2018), the analysis revealed that the quality of both foreign and American Netflix originals is perceived as high by the interviewed American viewers, with some interviewees perceiving the quality of foreign Netflix originals to be even higher than American, due to these productions being perceived as less cheesy, more original and artistic, with better thought out plots and dealing with deeper and more serious topics.

The most important characteristic of quality television reported by American viewers was the plot or narrative. According to the interviewees, the main characteristics of a high-quality plot are well-thought out, consistent, unique and unpredictable. The second emergent theme identified characters as the second most prominent aspect contributing to the distinction of quality television. Specifically, well-rounded, relatable characters were considered to be a sign of a high-quality television. As previously noted, these characteristics of quality largely overlap with the factors that interviewees reported as a source of motivation for viewing foreign Netflix originals, providing an indirect support for the notion that perceptions of quality did indeed

inform viewers motivations and the shows' transnational appeal (Jenner, 2018; Dunleavy, 2014).

Sub-RQ2: How does cultural proximity and individuals' cultural capital relate to the consumption of non-English, foreign Netflix originals by American audiences?

The analysis revealed that both cultural proximity and cultural capital informed and directed the motivations of American viewers for watching foreign Netflix originals (Sub-RQ2).

As for *cultural proximity*, when watching foreign Netflix originals, the interviewees experienced both a sense of familiarity/proximity and foreignness at various levels (e.g. content, visual, linguistic) and through various avenues. On a content level, universal themes (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005) and narrative transparency (Dunleavy, 2014) allowed interviewees to recognize, relate to and personally resonate with the situations and characters portrayed. Another avenue through which proximity was experienced is through the perceived similarities to American films and television.

Similarly, a sense of foreignness or otherness was experienced by viewers on linguistic, visual and content level – through the language in which the shows were streamed, the settings and through various situations portrayed in the shows. What makes these findings interesting to the existing scholastic debates is that other than the backlash towards automatic dubbing, which was perceived as disruptive, other traces of foreignness identified by viewers were never explicitly perceived as negative. In fact, in case of foreignness created on the content level, there were cases where it was perceived as positive, since the interviewees believed that while certain situations were very different from their lived experiences in the United States, they actually preferred the way they were portrayed in the foreign shows. This challenges the traditional understanding of cultural proximity as necessary means to promote viewing and cultural distance as necessary inhibiting it (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005). Instead, it more closely resembles the preliminary findings of Jensen (2018) that show "otherness" or foreignness can sometime act as a source of appeal and motivate transnational viewership.

As for *cultural capital*, the analysis identified that multiple types of cultural capital informed the motivations of American viewers for watching foreign Netflix originals. The most prominent themed that emerged, was related to the viewers' immigration background. As second-generation immigrants, processes of remote enculturation (Ferguson, et al., 2016) both self-initiated and initiated by parents or other family members motivated the viewership of foreign Netflix originals. In other words, watching the selected show helped the American

viewers connect with their heritage culture and reinforce their ethnic or cultural identity (Lee et al., 2004; Georgiou, 2012) furthermore, living in multicultural environment and being surrounded by people with diverse cultural backgrounds, travelling abroad and knowledge of foreign languages or the goal to learn a foreign language all contributed to motivating the choices of foreign television programming.

5.2 Theoretical implications

The present findings provide a valuable addition to the existing literature, in the sense that they expand the understandings of how transnational appeal is achieved by applying them to the more specific context of the reception of foreign Netflix originals by American viewers. As of now, the existing academic literature discussed in the theoretical chapter that explores the transnational appeal of foreign television is somewhat fragmented (Jenner, 2018; Diego & Etayo, 2012; Dunleavy, 2014). Relevant concepts are referred to using language that is not unified and factors contributing to transnational appeal are being explored individually and informed by various theories (once reliant on the paradigm of quality, other time on the notion of cultural proximity), instead of providing a systematic categorization that could guide a more complex and nuanced exploration.

As a result, the present study attempted to organize the previous findings, theories and strategies and identify few distinct avenues through which transnational appeal could be created, and viewers' motivations to watch foreign content affected. Through this process, a more unified model was created, which aimed to explore transnational appeal by considering the contributions of factors/motives informed by a) perceptions of quality, b) cultural proximity and c) cultural capital. Furthermore, unlike previous studies and theories related to the transnational travel and success of television products (Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018; La Pastina and Straubhaar, 2005), the present research attempted to explore all these facets of motivation simultaneously, hence providing a more complex picture of how they can relate to, complement and interact with each other, across various levels of the viewing process.

The unified model, demonstrating the results of the present study and how the three distinct facets of appeal – quality, cultural proximity and cultural capital – inform viewers' motivations to watch foreign Netflix originals, is presented below.
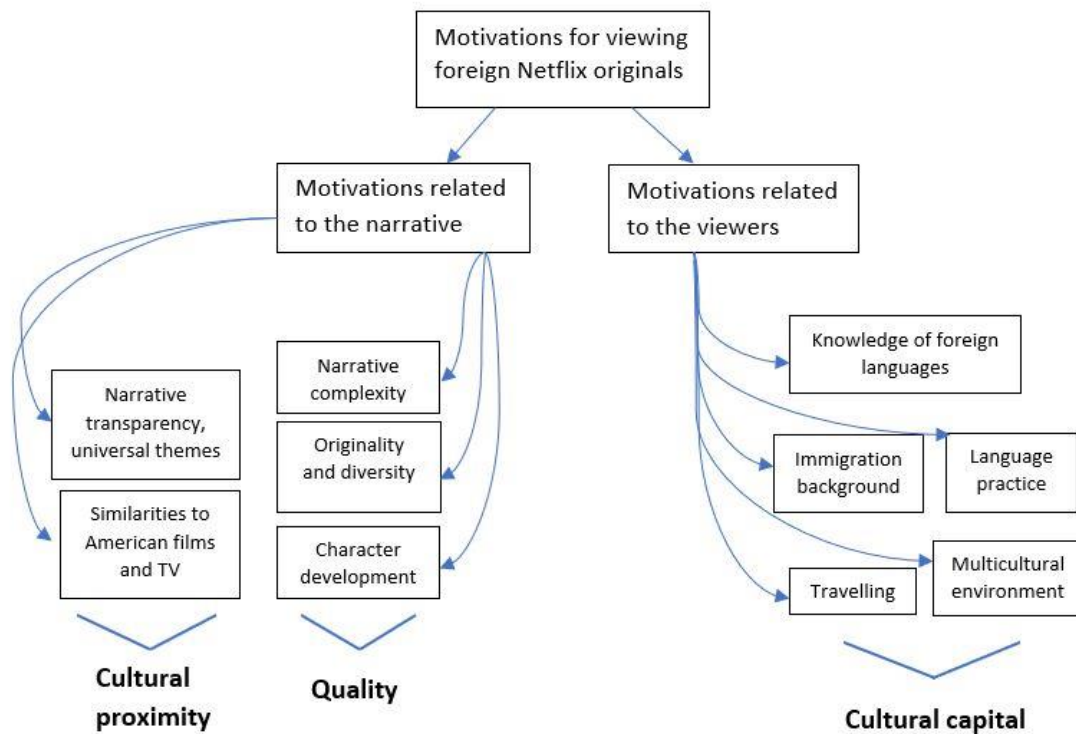
Figure 4 Motivations for viewing foreign Netflix originals – model

Another theoretical contribution made by the present study was achieved by exploring transnational success from the perspective of an audience. Since previous authors (Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018) already established theories on how producers of high-end drama implement certain strategies and content characteristics in order to make the shows easily accessible and enjoyable for audiences around the world, the current study showcases how these strategies are received by viewers. Consequently, the analysis was able to bring evidence that some of the strategies of transnational appeal allegedly utilized by Netflix and other producers of high-end drama (Dunleavy, 2014; Jenner, 2018), such as narrative transparency, complexity or innovative, original and edgy themes and aesthetics, were indeed not only noticed, but appreciated by the viewers.

Finally, the study has proposed a shift of perspective in understanding the ways in which viewers evaluate the quality of television programming, and the aspects of quality they consider most important. Specifically, the understandings and reflections of the American interviewees related to television quality were much more refined, critical and complex than could be

expected based on previous academic findings, which mainly attributed the more refined conceptualizations of quality (i.e. in terms of innovation and aesthetics) to industry professionals and scholars, while mainstream viewers were believed to conceptualize quality in terms of the amount of entertainment the television content provides, hence on a more surface, utilitarian level (Bayo-Moriones et al., 2018).

5.3 Social implications

To briefly reflect on the social implications of the current study, the findings can provide helpful insights for industry practitioners and academic in multiple ways. First, the results can contribute to the debate on cultural protectionism in the era of streaming video on-demand, and the implementation of local content quotas, that is currently unfolding across European television markets (Lobato, 2019). First, it provides some valuable insights into how is local (European) content received by viewers in other parts of the world, which could inform the economical viability of local quotas in a long-term perspective, as producing high-quality, high-budget content that will not do well outside of the given local market can be a great financial burden. Additionally, it also opens up an interesting discussion regarding to what extent does local content produced by Netflix actually carry traces of the culture of origin, especially given the reports of many interviewees that the examined foreign Netflix shows were mostly universal, and "not about culture". If that was the case, it would surely mean great economic potential for Netflix, which could easily fulfill local quotas in European markets with easy to export hit series that would drive the platform's subscriptions and viewership across the globe. However, it probably would not fulfill the implied wishes of local governments, who seem to implement these quotas as a means to promote the country's cultural heritage.

Secondly, as mentioned in the section above, the present study expands and challenges previous theories related to the ways in which audiences evaluate the quality of television content. This could prompt further academic exploration that would try to gain a more nuanced understanding of the causes behind these inconsistencies. For example, by exploring whether Netflix's programming strategy within the paradigm of quality TV promotes a different, more critical and reflective reception of their (foreign) original series, or whether perceptions of quality could maybe differ for various groups of viewers based on their tastes and demographic factors. Consequently, these explorations (beginning with the one presented in this study) can help producers of contemporary television content better understand how to create series that will be positively accepted by viewers, and that have the potential to transcendent national borders.

5.4 Limitations and further research

After presenting the various contributions of the current study, it is equally important to point out and illuminate some of its limitations, and discuss how they could guide further research. First, while the present study was prompted – among others – by the recent suggestions of industry observers that Netflix's international business model and focus on local original programming might be turning otherwise import-resistant Americans into avid fans of foreign Netflix productions, and making watching foreign TV increasingly mainstream in the United States (Hazelton, 2018, Saleem, 2018), this notion cannot be supported or denied with the present research. That is because, while the results clearly demonstrate there is a group of American viewers who enjoys watching foreign Netflix originals, the qualitative nature of this research and the sampling method makes it impossible to identify to what extent does this group of viewers represent the "mainstream" American audience and to what extent it might represent a very small exception, a "specialized" audience with higher-than-average levels of cultural openness that might have always existed but did not enjoy the attention of scholars or media. This is especially relevant given that the present sample was narrow and specific – comprising of young, highly educated adults, almost exclusively female.

Linking this to the existing theoretical findings that show lower age, higher education and identifying as a female are related to increased consumption of foreign content, increased cultural openness (Straubhaar et al., 2015) and increased willingness to read subtitles (Parrot Analytics, 2018c), it would be beneficial for further research to complement the present findings with a quantitative study that would examine the relationships between American viewers' demographic factors and the consumption of foreign (Netflix original) shows.

Additionally, while the present study provides an in-depth exploration of the various motivations that contribute to the viewership of foreign Netflix originals by American viewers, it cannot be determined what is the weight of the individual motivations in informing the viewers' decision to watch a show. As demonstrated in the results, multiple motivations and appeal factors are reported by each interviewee, working simultaneously, and at times even working against each other – for example when a sense of foreignness is negatively experienced by the viewer on the linguistic level but at the same time feelings of proximity are positively experienced on the content level, with the show portraying familiar and relatable characters or situations. As a result, quantitative exploration into the different interrelations and the importance that viewers assign to potential motivating factors, would also be valuable. Expanding on the topic of proximity, implementing the method of focus groups to explore some of the findings outlined by the present study would be desirable, as interviewees sometimes

struggled to remember the details of a given series, which means the recollection of the specific aspects that created a sense of proximity or foreignness might not have been complete or fully accurate, and the emotional reaction that was prompted through the presence or lack of proximity might be equally difficult to fully recollect. Having the participants react to screenings of foreign Netflix originals in real time, or right after exposure, might therefore bring more nuanced and in-depth insights into the role of proximity in enticing or prohibiting viewership.

Finally, textual analysis could be implemented in future research, in order to provide more context to some of the findings presented in this study, such as the interviewees' perceptions that the foreign Netflix originals rely heavily on universal themes and do not carry strong traces of the local culture, in fact, having a closer resemblance to popular American films and television shows. A comparative analysis of television content produced by local broadcasters compared to local Netflix productions, or comparison between American and foreign Netflix original shows could therefore bring additional valuable insights.

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Appendix A: Description of sample

Name of the interviewee [10]	Age	University	Netflix originals watched	Date of the interview
Adil	29	University of Washington	Dark	14. 5.
Carlota	19	University of California San Diego	Elite	16. 5.
Beth	25	Northern Arizona University	Cable Girls	16. 5.
Alejandra	21	Texas A&M University	Cable Girls, The Rain, 3%	17. 5.
Cassidy	19	University of Montana	Elite	17. 5.
Abbey	20	Texas A&M University	Elite	22. 5.
Elica	25	California State University Long Beach	Dark, The Rain, 3%	24. 5.
Isa	24	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Elite	25. 5.
Pamela	24	University of California Irvine	3%	29. 5.
Mia	18	New York University	Dark, The Rain	30. 5.
Michelle	22	University of California Los Angeles	Dark	8. 6.
Savina	19	University of California Santa Barbara	Elite	13. 6.
Rebecca	22	College of Charleston	3%	16. 6.

[10] Real or preferred name/pseudonym

Appendix B: Topic list

In the beginning I would like to shortly summarize the purpose of this interview and answer any additional questions you might have. As I already mentioned, this interview will focus on the motivations of young American viewers for watching foreign Netflix originals and their experiences. The outcome will be used as part of a master thesis research that I am conducting as a Media and Creative Industries student at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. The interview will be recorded, however the recording will be anonymized, safely stored and eventually deleted, ensuring your confidentiality.

Can you confirm that you have read the informed consent form and agree to participate in this research?

Is there anything you would like to ask before we start?

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE

- Real name:
- Nickname (if requested):
- Date of the interview:
- Nationality:
- University:
- State:
- Languages:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Educational level (highest level):
- Student/Graduate:
- Current professional activity: none, full time job, part time job, sector/activity
- Netflix series:

At first I would like to ask you a few questions about how you use Netflix and the type of content you watch.

GENERAL USE OF NETFLIX

1. Could you tell me since when do you have a Netflix subscription?
    - What motivated you to get it?
2. How often do you use Netflix per week?
    - *How many hours a day?*

VIEWING PREFERENCES

3. What types of content do you most often watch on Netflix?
    - *E.g. movies, documentaries, serialized TV fiction, reality TV…*
4. Concerning TV fiction, what are your favorite genres?
    - *E.g. fantasy, drama, comedy, sci-fi…*
5. How do you learn about new Netflix shows that you might be interested in watching?
    - *E.g. recommendations from friends, read an online review, saw a trailer on FB, recommended by Netflix algorithm…*
6. What specific factors do you consider when making the decision to watch a Netflix show?
    - *E.g. other people's opinions, the actors, the theme of the show…*

CONSUMPTION OF FOREIGN CONTENT

7. Would you say you are aware of the country of origin of the Netflix content you watch?
8. What usually makes you realize that a certain Netflix show or film has a foreign (i.e. non-American) origin?
    - *E.g. the Netflix information box, the dubbing/subtitles, the setting, the actors…*
9. How often do you currently watch Netflix series and films produced outside of the United States?
10. What are your motivations for watching foreign Netflix series?
    - *E.g. learning a foreign language, learning about other cultures…*
11. Do you usually watch foreign content on Netflix alone or together with someone else?
    - *E.g. a friend, family, partner…*
12. What other media platforms do you use to watch foreign content?
    - *E.g. cinema, cable television, online platforms…*
13. How would you compare the amount of foreign content you watch now, compared to the time before you had Netflix?
    - *If you watched foreign content before you had Netflix, through which media did you access it? E.g. cinema, cable television, online…*

SUBTITLES VERSUS DUBBING

Usually when you watch foreign content it comes with either dubbing or subtitles, so I would like to ask you a few questions related to your personal preferences between those two.

14. Do you usually watch movies and television with dubbing or subtitles?
15. Does your preference differ based on the type of platform or content? How?
    o *E.g. prefers dubbing for movies in cinemas, subtitles for Netflix shows, or dubbing for animation, subtitles for live action…*
16. Why do you prefer subtitles over dubbing / dubbing over subtitles?
    o *E.g. habit, easier to focus, offered as default setting…*
17. Do you usually use headphones or earphones when watching Netflix?
    o *Does this affect your preference for dubbing/subtitles?*
18. Do you usually multitask while watching Netflix non-English shows?
    o *E. g. do you use your phone, surf the internet, cook, clean…*

EXPERIENCES WITH WATCHING A SPECIFIC SHOW

(DARK, ELITE, 3%, CABLE GIRLS OR THE RAIN)

Now that we talked a bit about foreign content in general, I would like you to think about the specific Netflix series you watched.

19. Can you describe how you first learned about the series X?
    o *E.g. recommendations from friends, read an online review, saw a trailer, recommended by Netflix algorithm…*
20. What specifically motivated you to watch the first episode?
    o *E.g. liked the trailer, liked the actor, good reviews…*
21. What were your thoughts about the show after watching the first episode?
22. What made you want to continue watching?
    o *What did you find attractive? E.g. captivating story, nice visuals, relatable characters and themes, familiar actors, high perceived quality…*
23. Was there something that made you not want to continue watching the show?
    o *Did you experience any difficulties watching the show? E.g. did not like the dubbing, unrelatable characters…*
24. Did you watch the show with dubbing or subtitles?
    o *Why?*

25. How long did it take you to finish the show?
    - *Did you watch multiple episodes at a time? One episode at a time with breaks in between?*
26. After watching the show, what do you think about it?
    - *What did you (not) like about it?*

CULTURAL PROXIMITY AND CAPITAL

As you might already know, X is a show produced in Germany/Spain/Brazil/Denmark and therefore can be considered a foreign cultural product. That's why in this next section, I would like you to reflect a little bit on your own encounters with foreign cultures and languages.

27. Can you describe any specific life experiences that you think have an influence on the series you choose to watch?
    - *E.g. family upbringing, command of foreign language, education, travel, immigrant background…*
28. How often do you encounter foreign cultures?
    - *In what forms? E.g. in the press, international friends, traveling…*
29. Were you familiar with X culture before you watched show X?
    - *In what forms have you encountered it before? E.g. in the press, television…*
30. What knowledge do you have of language X?
31. How much different do you consider culture X to be from the American culture?
    - *E.g. in terms of values, aesthetics, way of life, societal issues…*
32. When watching show X, what aspects (such as situations, events and characters) did you find easy to personally relate to (if any)?
    - *E. g. situations that you know from your own life, similar problems, similar settings…*
33. When watching show X, which of its aspects seemed foreign or hard to relate to (if any)?
    - *E.g. did the setting seem realistic, was there a different family structure compared to what you are familiar with, different themes and problems the protagonist dealt with…*
34. When watching the show, what made you realize/identify it was not an American production?
    - *Alternatively: What made you think it was an American production?*
35. How important do you think it is for viewers to be familiar with the culture of a show in order to be able to enjoy it?

- - *E. g. knowing a lot about Germany in order to enjoy the show Dark…*
36. Do you think that show X would be difficult to enjoy for the mainstream American audience?
    - *Why or why not?*
37. Do you personally feel that watching foreign Netflix shows carries a sense of prestige or high-culture?
    - *In what sense? Why or why not?*

PERCEPTION OF QUALITY

Relating to the previous question, there is currently an ongoing discussion whether or not can Netflix originals be considered a quality TV and what does that mean to different people. That's why I would like to ask you a few questions about your own ideas.

38. Have you ever heard about the concept of quality TV?
39. What is your understanding of quality TV?
    - *What characteristics would a TV show need to have for you to think it is a high-quality show?*
40. Do you think these characteristics of quality differ based on genre?
    - *E.g. reality TV is high quality when it is entertaining, while a historical drama is high quality when it is accurate, realistic and visually striking?*
41. For you personally, what is the most important aspect of quality when watching a show?
    - *E.g. the aesthetics, plot quality, acting…*
42. Are you familiar with the concept of Netflix originals? How do you understand it?
43. How would you assess Netflix original series in terms of quality?
44. How would you assess series X specifically in terms of quality?
    - *E.g. in terms of technical quality, aesthetics, entertainment value, plot quality, acting…*

FINAL THOUGHTS

Finally, since this study focuses on exploring the appeal of foreign Netflix originals to American viewers, I would like to ask you a few final questions about your thoughts on this phenomenon.

45. Do you personally think that foreign Netflix originals are becoming more mainstream in the United States?
    - *Why or why not?*

46. Do you believe foreign Netflix originals have (or do not have) an appeal for American viewers?
    - *Why or why not?*

Appendix C: Consent form

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Zuzana Pekarkova, z.pekarkova@gmail.com, +420 720 580 688

Willem Ruyslaan 225, Rotterdam, 3063 ER, the Netherlands

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a research about foreign Netflix originals and their consumption by American viewers. The purpose of the study is to understand what motivates viewers in the United States to watch foreign Netflix original series, how do the viewers' personal experiences and backgrounds (such as previous encounters with foreign cultures and languages) inform this consumption and finally, how do they perceive and assess the quality of foreign Netflix original series.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to your general use of Netflix and content preferences, your experiences with watching a selected Netflix original series (*Dark, Elite, 3%, Cable Girls* or *The Rain*), previous encounters with foreign content, cultures and languages and your perception of quality related to foreign Netflix originals.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape or video recorder for the interview. This recording will be used solely for the purpose of transcribing the interview and will not be published or made accessible to anyone but the researcher.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information, such as date of birth, in the

study or not. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using a pseudonym or initial instead of your real name.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take approximately 45 – 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact the supervisor of this thesis research – anonymously, if you wish— Deborah Castro Marino at the following email address: castromarino@eshcc.eur.nl.

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

 Name   Signature   Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

 Name   Signature   Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.