Women's representation in media is a fundamental indicator of how society values women's voices, stories, and autonomy. Yet how do we measure something as complex as gender bias in popular culture? The Bechdel Test offers one simple but revealing metric: Does the show have two female characters who talk to each other about something other than a man? It's a deceptively simple question—yet the majority of films and television shows fail it. This assignment asks you to apply standardized measurement tools to examine gender representation on screen and to think critically about both what these tests reveal and what they might miss.

This exercise develops three essential sociological skills:

1. Applying systematic measurement methods to analyze culture
2. Examining how gender inequality appears in media representation
3. Thinking critically about the limitations of measurement tools and the complexity of social phenomena

Assignment Overview

In this research application, you will watch and analyze television episodes using the Bechdel Test and at least one additional gender-focused measurement tool. You'll examine how women are represented on screen, which characters have agency and voice, and what patterns emerge across episodes and genres. By using standardized tests, you'll learn how sociologists operationalize abstract concepts like "gender bias" and "representation." You'll also develop your own test (if pursuing Advanced level) to measure dimensions the Bechdel Test misses.

The specific requirements for what you need to do vary depending on what grade you would like to earn: Basic (75), Proficient (87), or Advanced (100). Students who come close but do not satisfactorily complete the requirements for a level will be allowed to revise and resubmit their application.

Before you begin: - Watch [Anita Sarkeesian discuss the Bechdel Test - Read Walt Hickey, Ella Koeze, Rachael Dottle, and Gus Wezerek's [The next Bechdel Test - Before watching, predict whether each episode will pass the Bechdel test and your (or another) test - While watching, take detailed notes on anything meaningful you observe related to gender representation

Report Structure

Use the standard [research report template]. Below are the specific requirements for each section:

In your submission, clearly state which level you are attempting: "Basic," "Proficient," or "Advanced." You must complete all components of that level to earn the grade.

Rubric: Assignment Components by Level

Introduction: Project Overview

All levels should: - Explain what the Bechdel Test measures and why it matters sociologically - Describe which test(s) you will use (Bechdel and one other for Basic/Proficient; Bechdel and your custom test for Advanced) - Note your predictions: Before watching, which episodes do you expect to pass? Why? - Explain your research question (e.g., "Which genres pass the Bechdel Test more often?" or "Do shows with women directors have different gender representation?")

Methods: Analytical Roadmap

All levels should: - Name the television shows and specific episodes you analyzed (include air dates) - Explain the Bechdel Test criteria clearly - Describe the second test you used: - **Basic/Proficient:** Identify which test from [The next Bechdel Test you chose and explain its criteria - **Advanced:** Clearly explain your custom-designed test, including: the criteria, the outcome scale (pass/fail, letter grades, numeric 0-100), and what each outcome value represents - Describe your note-taking approach: What observations did you record while watching?

All levels should include: - Screenshots from episodes you analyzed (showing female characters, interactions, etc.) to support your findings - Your detailed screening notes for all episodes (can be in appendix)

Findings: Trends and Significance

All levels must include: - A data table showing: Episode | Show | Passes Bechdel? | Passes [Your Test]? | Notes - For each episode analyzed, include a screenshot with a caption explaining what it shows about gender representation

Basic (250 words minimum): - Summarize results: How many episodes passed/failed each test? - Note at least one pattern (e.g., "Comedies passed more often than dramas") - Analyze what surprised you or was unexpected

Proficient (500 words minimum): - Create a detailed results table for 4+ episodes - Compare results across episodes: What patterns emerge? Do certain genres pass more often? - Analyze whether your initial predictions were accurate - Explain what these patterns reveal about gender representation in television - Connect findings to more than one course concept (bold them, e.g., **gender roles**, **stereotypes**, **representation**)

Advanced (750 words minimum): - State your hypothesis clearly at the beginning of the findings section - Create a comprehensive results table for 4+ episodes showing both Bechdel and your custom test scores - Analyze whether the data supports or refutes your hypothesis - Discuss patterns and exceptions: Which episodes or genres performed unexpectedly? - Examine how the two tests reveal different or similar insights about gender representation - Include detailed

analysis of how your test captures dimensions the Bechdel Test misses - Connect findings to two or more course concepts (bold them, e.g., **intersectionality**, **gender stratification**, **media representation**, **stereotyping**)

Conclusion: Sociological Synthesis

All levels should: - Reflect on what your analysis reveals about gender in media - Discuss limitations: What do these tests measure well? What do they miss? Could intersectionality (race, class, sexuality, disability) affect how we interpret results? - Consider: How might audience interpretation of gender representations vary based on viewers' own social positions? - Connect back to broader sociological questions about how media shapes or reflects gender inequality

Advanced should add: - Discuss your custom test: Does it better capture gender bias than the Bechdel Test? Why or why not? - Consider methodological questions: Are these reductive measures? What complexity do they lose?

Appendix: Supplementary Information

All levels should include: - Your detailed screening notes for all episodes analyzed - Screenshots from each episode with captions - Your results table(s)

Advanced should add: - Your custom test criteria documentation (clearly written definitions) - Any additional analysis or comparison tables