BLACK WOMEN AND *SCANDAL:*
REPRESENTATION AND RECOGNITION IN CROOKED SPACES

By

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ABSTRACT

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Discourses surrounding Black femininity and Black women's bodies often rely on racist and sexist narratives that define Black women as angry, emasculating, inhumanly strong jezebels. In 2012, a new series and possible disruption to the structure of structural and social exclusion in media emerged. *Scandal*, under the helm of Shonda Rhimes –head writer and executive producer of Grey's Anatomy and Private Practice starred Kerry Washington as Olivia Pope, a political relations crisis manager for the Washington, DC elite. Pope, based on public relations crisis manager Judy Smith (former press aide to President George H. W. Bush) "handles" situations with her "gladiators in suits." Conversations surrounding the prominence of *Scandal* pointed to Pope's commanding presence, her beauty, and the dramatic and well-written script. Some noted the show and Pope's representation as a high-powered Black woman –the first of her kind and the first Black female lead in 40 years– could change negative representations of Black women. Others argued her messy life and continued affair with the White Republican President constrained representations and positive recognition, and limited value associated with Black women.

Through a Black feminist lens influenced by institutional ethnography and social citizenship, this dissertation focuses on digitally mediated (Internet) conversations that (fail to) positively recognize the image of Olivia Pope and place them in conversation with Black women's narratives in order to understand the relationship between representation and positive value and recognition (social citizenship). Analysis of digitally mediated comments (N=1,426)

from twenty-one articles revealed individuals discussed Pope's body, representation(s) of Black femininities, and Black women generally through three themes: the (im)Materiality of Race, Media Misrepresentations, and Controlling Humanity. Findings from focus groups (N=15) and interviews (N=5) revealed participants actively disengaged from digitally mediated conversations to maintain sense of value and belonging. They argued that many conversations and narratives restricted recognition and value to Black women generally and Pope specifically, which created a sense of disease. From their narratives, two prevalent themes remained: Media Misrepresentations and Mediating Social Citizenship (access to positive recognition and value). Participants found Pope's character complex and multifaceted. They argued her 'messiness' demonstrated humanity previously bracketed from Black women, and her level of power and influence challenged notions of Black femininity. At the same time, participants found her image constraining, limited by respectability politics, and controlled by a larger discourse of 'readable' or 'legible' Blackness.

Despite the challenges participants found within Pope's characterization, many argued her image and character exists as a future text, or an image that presents a divergent construction of Black femininity. As such, her image provides a template for emerging characters and writers looking to challenge monolithic constructions of Black women's bodies and femininities. It is important to note that participants argued despite the possibility of Pope existing as a complete future text, her character falls short and remains constrained. Finally, participants found greater possibilities for divergent future text representations in new media series' (e.g. YouTube, Hulu, Netflix). They cautiously hoped for images that provided the possibility of increases in human representations that would provide greater access to positive value and recognition, in both media and society.

For my Grandmother, Second Mom, my Grandfather, and Godmother: Thank you for instilling a love for education, strength, passion, and a desire to be an agent of change.

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"'Thank you' is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. Thank you expresses
extreme gratitude, humility, understanding." ~Alice Walker

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation builds upon my thesis[1] that examined 'online' comments in response to CNN's series "Black in America." I found individuals, when discussing Black women's bodies, Black femininities, and Black culture used racist and sexist discourses and controlling images. These comments and conversations restricted positive recognition of Black women, thereby limiting access to social citizenship. As I continued my examination of conversations and comments on the Internet, a new series, *Scandal*, aired on the major broadcast channel ABC (ABC.com 2013; IMDB 2015). Under the helm of Shonda Rhimes –head writer and executive producer of Grey's Anatomy and Private Practice– *Scandal* starred Kerry Washington as Olivia Pope, a political relations crisis manager for the Washington, DC elite. Based on public relations crisis manager Judy Smith the former press aide to President George H. W. Bush, Olivia Pope through her firm Pope and Associates manages crises with exaggerated storylines. Pope "handles" situations with her "gladiators in suits" (ABC.com 2015b; Wikia 2015b). *Scandal* gained notoriety and became a must-see-show[2] due to the fast paced dialogue, memorable monologues, dramatic storylines, and high-end fashion.

Conversations surrounding the prominence of *Scandal* pointed to Pope's commanding presence, her beauty, and the dramatic and well-written script. Some noted the show and Pope's representation as a high-powered Black woman –the first of her kind and the first Black female lead in 40 years– could change negative representations of Black women (Cooper and Lindsey

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[1] My thesis is entitled: "Colorblind Ideology" and "Controlling Images": Representations of Racial and Gender Discourses in Online Comments.

[2] Live tweeting or commenting on social media occurs when individuals write comments about the show while it airs. In January 2013, *Scandal* received 2,200 twitter comments (tweets) per minute; the following month, it received an average 10,000 tweets a minute (http://goo.gl/ExsTl) that remained consistent throughout 2014.

2013; Liston 2013; McGinnis 2014; Wright 2014). Others argued her messy life, continued affair with the White Republican President constrained representations and positive recognition (Bowen 2013; Maxwell 2013).

In my examination of conversations and comments, it seemed individuals' narratives went beyond that general discussion of Pope's character and discussed non-mediated Black women's bodies and femininity in potentially constraining ways. I noticed that some Black women who challenged controlled discussions of Pope's representation argued that for an hour each week, sometimes more, they felt recognized and valued –that all eyes focused on a powerful, engaging and sensual Black woman. The debates surrounding Pope's representation, both affirming and challenging her representation, provided a unique opportunity to answer questions raised in my thesis. By focusing on Pope and *Scandal*, I had the opportunity to delineate the ways digitally mediated engagements constrain and/or enable social citizenship, or positive recognition and value of bodies and cultures.

Through this dissertation, I examine the ways comments in digitally mediated spaces discuss representations of Black women. I focus on conversations that (fail to) positively recognize the image of Olivia Pope from the ABC series, *Scandal* to understand the relationship between representation and positive value and recognition (social citizenship). I examine the influence these conversations have on Black women's experiences in digitally mediated spaces. Through focus groups and interviews, I outline the ways Black women understand, relate to and challenge Pope's presentation and her representation of Black femininity in media. I discuss the importance of positive recognition as a means to increase Black women's value and access to social inclusion within digitally and non-digitally mediated spaces.

The remainder of this chapter provides a brief discussion of the research problem, specifically surrounding controlled constructions of Black femininity, mediated representations, interactions on the Internet and potentially synergistic relationship(s) to social citizenship. I provide a narrative of research questions that guide both aspects of the data collection–digitally mediated comments and focus groups and interviews. I then outline the purpose and goal of the study and provide an overview of the chapters within the dissertation. Finally, to provide background on the show, I conclude the Introduction with 'Notes on *Scandal'* that gives readers an outline[3] of the main characters and Pope's intimate relationships.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

This dissertation has two sites of analysis: digitally mediated spaces and face-to-face conversations that operate outside the digital sphere. I label focus groups and interviews, non-digitally mediated as they encompass spaces where Black women engage with others in physical, proximal, and tangibly material spaces. Though many spaces operate as 'non-digital,' for the purpose of this dissertation, I employ the term for focus groups, interviews, and face-to-face interactions. In the first site, I examine comments made in digitally mediated spaces surrounding Pope's body, sexuality, and construction. The second site, in-person focus groups and interviews, provides a way to understand the potential effects of engagement in digitally mediated spaces, including the level of experience with veiled racist and sexist comments and narratives that deny positive recognition and value. It is important to note that I use the term digitally mediated spaces to ensure the reader does not see a false dichotomy between engagement in 'online' and 'offline' spaces. As Sassen (2002) argues, the Internet and associated engagements remain bound within social structures that mimic 'real life' experiences and recreate the social experience of

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[3] For more information about plot lines and character interactions, please see Appendix E.

oppression. With this understanding, I wanted to know if (and how) individuals used racist and sexist discourses to discuss Pope and in turn Black women. From this, I sought to understand if Black women, when interacting in digitally mediated spaces, experience social exclusion.

I begin this project from the premise that racist and sexist discourses influence how individuals understand, respond to, and discuss bodies when presented in media (Entman and Rojecki 2001; Entman 2007; Hall 2011). For Black women, racist and sexist discourses produce narratives that position their femininity in direct opposition to Whiteness, where dominant narratives place positive value on White femininity (innocent, demure, passive), while denigrating Black femininity (emasculating, violent, aggressive). Within media, these narratives operate as controlled images that present Black women as emasculating, inhumanly strong, welfare queens, and jezebels (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009; Collins 2000b, 2004; White 2001).

Contemporarily, scholarship explores representations and consumption of Black bodies in media (Hobson 2008; Joseph 2009; Thornton 2011), challenges to representational standards and controlled discourses (Ferguson 2004; Goldman 2014; Jackson 2014; Lee 2010) the ways individuals present themselves and interact in digitally mediated spaces (Brock 2012; Finin and Tseng 2007; Grasmuck, Martin, and Zhao 2009). Others focus on use and prevalence of racist and sexist language in digitally mediated spaces (Herring et al. 2002; Holland 2012; Hughey and Daniels 2013; Hughey 2012). Those examining the intersection of gender and race outline the effects of racism and sexism on perceptions of Black women. Their works examine the role of a hypercritical gaze on Black women's lives, and outline the potential social and personal effects of interactions (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009; Cooper 1995; Harris-Perry 2011; Harris 2009; Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003; V. Lee 2010; Rose 2003). The hypercritical gaze placed on Black women's bodies extends beyond discourses to include a "project of belonging" (Holland 2012).

This project incorporates a set of relations that includes a seemingly real or biological connection, and one that focuses on "the work of identifying with others, a belonging usually imposed by a community *or* by one's own choice" (Holland 2012:3–4 emphasis original). The work of identifying Black women through racist and sexist discourses, marking their bodies, and constraining their social positionality performs the work of belonging.

Narratives and discourses that rely on racist and sexist ideologies fail to recognize Black women as valued members. Although Black women have designated space within the project of belonging, it remains bound within and demarcated by inhuman strength (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009; Harris-Perry 2011). As Harris-Perry (2011) argues, Black women's strength is the necessary requirement for citizenship. This dissertation, influenced by her work examines representation and recognition to understand additional constraints on Black women's access to citizenship and belonging. Incorporated within this and other work that examines recognition and belonging is social citizenship, or the right to share in the social heritage and to "live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society" (Marshall 2009). Social citizenship extends beyond a reciprocal relationship between an individual and the state. According to Somers (2008), social citizenship involves "the right to have rights," or the right of positive social and moral recognition. It also means one has the right to exist outside binary oppositions, and through this has the same level of dignity and respect afforded to the dominant group (Somers 2008:5–6).

Current research on recognition and representation in media outlines racist and sexist ideologies and discourses, accounts for the structure and social experiences of racism and sexism, and delineates the erotic nature of racism (Fordham 1993; Holland 2012; St. Jean and Feagin 1998; McKittrick 2006; B. Smith 1983; Woodard and Mastin 2005). These works, at

times fictional, challenge social exclusion (Bell-Jordan 2008; Hunt 2005a; Ruby 1988; Torres 1998), and outline changes in Black women's presentation over the past century (Garcia 2012; Johnson 2012; Rose 2003; Williams 1995). For instance, Jackson (2014) in his examination of Black women's representation in Tyler Perry's *Temptation* argues Perry's films portray Black women as victims. He continues, "If the Black woman is not the victim of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse she is viewed as powerless in a patriarchal society" (2014:64). Squires (2008) and Goldman (2013) through examinations of reality television programs demonstrate that hypersexual and violent narratives representations constrain representations and perceptions of Black women's bodies. Through this and similar works, scholars demonstrate that racist and sexist discourses control representations, define bodies, and place Black women on the margins of acceptability.

The social experience of race and gender shapes how individuals act, interpret their surroundings (Hall 2011), and engage with others in digitally and non-digitally mediated spaces. Racist and sexist events often "reveal the larger forces of the centuries-old racial hierarchy of this society" (Picca and Feagin 2007:2). Much like non-digitally mediated spaces, digitally mediated interactions reinforce social and cultural capital and influence how individuals interact with others. Although early Internet scholars theorized it would provide a space free of racial classification, contemporary scholars argue the Internet and associated engagements mirror and recreate experiences of social exclusion defined through and by racism (Hughey 2012; Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman 2000; Nakamura 2002). These studies focus on: the parameters of interactions; examine group and individual identities and the presentation of self; and analyze the ways sanctions and norms exist digitally mediated spaces (Davis 2011; Fernback 2007; Gershon 2008; Herring et al. 2002; Kendall 1998; Peaslee 2009; Wise, Hamman, and Thorson 2006). The

findings reveal that racial events in digitally mediated spaces, like non-digitally mediated spaces, organize and influence social worlds.

The nebulous, multifaceted and multilayered interactions in digitally mediated spaces problematize the study of racist and sexist discourses and the social experience of exclusion. Though these interactions mirror face-to-face engagements, the rapid or hyper-speed rates of engagement with at times anonymous others, could increase the social experience of exclusion (Herring et al. 2002; Magnet 2007; Stokes 2007). Extending Picca and Feagin (2007) who applied Goffman's theory of the front and backstage to race relations found that White students, in backstage encounters engaged in conversations and jokes that normalized racist belief patterns, which increased cultural capital (Picca and Feagin 2007:16). With the advent of social media, many treat Facebook and Twitter like the backstage, posting comments and narratives that demonstrate their normalized racist beliefs. Digitally mediated comments, whether backstage or frontstage present Black bodies as deviant through subtly racist discourses, and receive active challenge and support from numerous others on 'the web' (Brock 2008).

With the advancement of the Internet and continued engagement with social media (e.g. chat rooms, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit), individuals use the Internet "to both form and reaffirm individual racial identity and seek out communities based on race and racial understandings of the world" (Daniels 2012:698). Through a rebranding of racial truths, post-racial and colorblind discourses in digitally mediated spaces call into question the veracity of racial truths and whose narratives constitute the truth of race and racism (Daniels 2009:19). Colorblind[4] and post-racial[5]

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[4] Individuals engaging colorblind narratives often argue they do not "see race," and that racism would cease to exist if people stopped talking about/acknowledging race and racism (Bonilla-Silva 2006).

discourses therefore complicate the analysis of racism on the Internet and associated social effects (Daniels 2009; Hughey and Daniels 2013; Nakamura 2002; Wise et al. 2006). Digitally mediated engagement through online conversations, though it offers citizens the "potential to set the agenda themselves" (Antony and Thomas 2010:1284), remains bound within racist and sexist structures that mirror non-digital engagement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the current moment, few studies examine the impacts of digitally mediated engagement for Black women. Within the impacts of digitally mediated engagements I include: assertions of Black women's social positionality, potential affects and effects from engagement, and the ability to access social citizenship. Smith (2003) argues, "while the ability to take an active role in the shaping of culture is enabled by new media, we must also focus on the constraining aspects of emerging technologies" (2003:6). By examining comments in digitally mediated platforms, I identify prevalent themes surrounding fictional characters, their associations with Black women's bodies and group representation. Including focus groups provides insight into the impacts digitally mediated engagements have on Black women's lives.

I have two sets of questions to examine how individuals discuss representations in digitally mediated comments, and outline the potential a/effects of representation and (positive and negative) recognition on Black women's lives. The first surrounds digitally mediated spaces, and the second engages Black women's narratives through focus groups and interviews. My research questions for digitally mediated spaces are: (1) How do digitally mediated comments discuss the representation of Black femininities, and (2) do narratives within comments

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[5] Individuals engaging post-racial narratives argue race as a structure no longer disproportionately impacts social groups in positive/negative ways (Cummings 2011; Wise 2010).

recognize value and positive traits of femininity? If there is active denial of positive recognition within comments, the final question is: (3) What are the potential discursive effects of the restriction of representation and recognition for future representations of Black women?

After conducting two focus groups and finding that participants intentionally avoided digital engagement with unknown and unsafe others, I reformatted questions to better address their narrative concerns. The general questions guiding focus groups and interviews are: (1) (based upon experiences in digitally mediated spaces) What are the main or most prevalent narratives of representation and recognition? From this, I focus on participant's personal experiences and perceptions of Pope's influence on society. The questions are: (2) Does Pope's representation of Black femininity provide positive recognition and value for Black women; and (3) What influence does Pope's representation of Black femininity have on Black women's ability to access positive value and recognition?

My choice to examine both the structure of comments in digitally mediated spaces and the a/effects Black women experience when interacting in digitally mediated spaces stems from personal experiences. My interest in experiences of exclusion began in my senior year of college where I took part in a comparative history study abroad in South Africa. The course examined structures of racial oppression between the United States' Jim Crow and South Africa's Apartheid, two programs meant to keep certain groups and individuals from participating fully in society. Seeing increased levels of homelessness and its disproportionate effect on women and children, I began to consider the ways belief systems created barriers to accessing care, to feeling safe and at home, and denied rights to certain bodies. Through conversations in South Africa and the remainder of my undergraduate career, I realized narratives excluded Black bodies from belonging through devaluation and disrespect, limiting their access to social citizenship.

Although I studied and understood poverty and inequalities, I had yet to consider the ways discourses and narratives –how we think about the world– justify social exclusion for certain groups. After my experience in South Africa and during my Master's in Communication, I focused on the representation of Black women's bodies and Black femininities in media and associated restrictions of belonging.

As I increased interactions in digitally mediated spaces, my experiences with constrained recognition and social exclusion also increased. Initially, I downplayed the significance to the vastness of the Internet, the immediacy of comments, and its never-ending cycle. This argument led to suppositions that I could simply turn the Internet off and the associated negative experiences would end. However, the Internet provides avenues of support; it connects me to friends and provided intimate ties not otherwise available. Although limiting digital engagement could diminish negative a/effects, it would also limit my connections in turn increasing isolation. To continue my engagement on the Internet and mitigate associated effects in my non/digital life, I sought out safe spaces. I realized, as I reached out to others about my experiences, they to experienced negative conversations and comments.

Conversations and comments surrounded fictional characters, popular artists or actress, and those in positions of power like Michelle Obama. For instance, when the movie "The Hunger Games" debuted and moviegoers realized Rue, portrayed by actress Amandla Stenberg, had true to the book brown skin, they used social media to express frustration, disgust, and anger. One comment in particular struck me, and increased my perception that Black women despite their representation and characterization remained constrained within a disproportionately negative material space: Aiana Paui tweeted "Awkward moment when Rue is some Black girl and not the little blonde innocent girl you picture" (Vidani 2012). Aiana Paui, while her race is

unknown had a White avatar and engaged clear racist narratives that exclude Black girls' and women's bodies from innocence, a highly desirable feminine trait. This seemingly benign, or post-racial comment actively restricted value and positive recognition from Black girls' and women's bodies. Comments similar to this harass Black women, creating hostile digital spaces.

Amanda Hess (2014), notes that women increasingly face harassment in digitally mediated spaces from potentially anonymous attackers. The spaces women experience social policing, attack, and exclusion are the very spaces where they "laugh, whine, schmooze, procrastinate and flirt." Further, the site of attack "sits in my back pocket wherever I go and lies next to me when I fall asleep. And since I first started writing in 2007, it's become just one of the many online spaces where men come to tell me to get out" (Hess 2014). Hess' experiences of social exclusion, as a White woman, largely surround gender and sexist assertions. I mention this not to devalue Hess' experiences. Instead, I mention it to demonstrate that highly publicized narratives surrounding social exclusion often focus on White women's experiences. These narratives and associated calls for action often fail to address the intersectional spaces Black women occupy.

PURPOSE AND GOAL OF THE STUDY

Through this dissertation, I examine the importance of representation and recognition in digitally mediated spaces. I delimit Black women's experiences in digitally mediated spaces and provide insight into their perception of the importance of representation and recognition in media, in digitally mediated spaces, and in society. Similar to the crooked room (Harris-Perry 2011) that results from consistent engagement with social exclusion and structures of oppression, I maintain that consistent engagement with digitally mediated spaces mirrors the effects in a diffuse and nebulous space, or crooked spaces. To achieve this, I place Black women's narratives

and experiences as central organizing principles for interrogating data. Lazar (2007:142) argues the aim of feminist critical discourse studies

> Is to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities.

My task, similar to Harris-Perry is to "explain how black women's citizenship is shaped by their attempts to navigate" spaces "made crooked by" negative representations, controlled images, and exclusionary practices. The effects or "psychic consequences" of engagement with crooked spaces creates imbalance and a sense of uneasiness. The psychic effects of interaction became clear within focus groups and interviews, where participants discussed their active avoidance of conversations to maintain a sense of balance, calm, and limit the physical sensations associated with stress. Because I have a somewhat limited understanding of the effects of the crooked room, the final goal of this dissertation, to outline ways Black women create safe engagements in digitally mediated spaces, became a future goal.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Following this chapter (Introduction), chapter 2, Theory and Literature Review, outlines relevant literature and theoretical frameworks that undergird this project. I focus on race, gender, intersectionality, media, and social citizenship. I outline my theoretical frame of crooked spaces, an expansion of Harris-Perry's (2011) "crooked room," to digitally mediated interactions and present theoretical framings for examining Black women's social experiences of exclusion through Black feminist theories, institutional ethnography, and social citizenship.

Chapter 3 outlines the rationale for qualitative methods. I delineate the influence of my Black feminist praxis in data collection and analysis and outline the parameters of Black feminist research and critical discourses analysis. I address the two major components of this research:

digitally mediated narrative analysis and in-person focus groups and interviews. The first of two empirical chapters, chapter four Media Misrepresentations: Debating Responsibility, Relatability and Representations in Media, presents significant findings from digitally mediated comments and focus groups. Because many participants intentionally avoided (potentially) negative conversations, this chapter focuses on Black women's perceptions of the ways the media mis-represent Black femininities. I address their perceptions of digitally and non-digital interactions to understand the ways bodies are in/accurately presented and outline the potential effects on perceptions of Black women in media and society.

In chapter five, Mediating Social Citizenship: Complex Representation, Future Texts and Recognition I discuss participant and digitally mediated narratives that argued for a futuristic and human reading of Pope's character and representation Through the narrative of future texts, I discuss challenges and adherence to respectability politics, racist and sexist discourses, and the requirement of complex and multifaceted characters. Taken together, chapters 4 and 5 address the ways commentary surrounding fictional characters influence perceptions of Black women – bodies, femininities, culture– and associated a/effects on Black women's lives. I address participants' choice to disengage from digitally spaces to establish a sense for safety and outline what this means for accessing social citizenship in the digital age. The final chapter, Summary and Conclusions synthesizes findings from digitally mediated spaces and focus groups and interviews. I address the ways conversations discuss representations of Black women in ways that challenge or maintain controlled discourses and attempts to provide or restrict recognition and value through (veiled) racist and sexist discourses and respectability politics. I also discuss the importance of carefully reading images that allows for messiness, humanity, and counternarratives.

Through a deconstruction of digitally mediated comments, and focus group and interview data this dissertation describes how *Scandal* and Olivia Pope provide active and meaningful challenges to bracketed femininities. I outline challenges pejorative constructions of Black femininities and delineates the a/effects digitally mediated engagements have on Black women's lives. Further, this dissertation adds to the paucity of scholarship on Black women's lived experiences. My dissertation will contribute to scholarship on Black women and femininities, Black feminisms and Black feminist theorizing, race and racial theory, media studies and social citizenship. Finally, this project's focus on social citizenship furthers the way scholars understand the project of, and politics of belonging. For Black women, social exclusion in digitally mediated spaces relies on symbolic violence that is an invisible and insidious mode of domination that acts upon women and goes unrecognized (Morgan and Bjorkert 2006:441). By theorizing the structure of racist and sexist interactions in digitally mediated spaces and their a/effects on Black women's digitally and non-digitally mediated lives this project begins to tie the role of symbolic violence in digitally mediated spaces with social citizenship literature.

NOTES ON *SCANDAL*

> Everyone has secrets and Olivia Pope (Kerry Washington) has dedicated her life to protecting and defending the public images of the elite by keeping those secrets under wraps. Pope and her team are at the top of their game when it comes to getting the job done for their clients, but it becomes apparent that these "gladiators in suits," who specialize in fixing the lives of other people, have trouble fixing those closest at hand – their own.[6]

Olivia Pope is a high profile fixer for the Washington, DC elite. A former lawyer with an Ivy League education, she specializes in managing crises and avoiding scandal and ruin for her clients. In the first episode, the audience meets Olivia Pope in a standoff with Russians in an abandoned warehouse making a deal worth 3 million dollars, while she makes small talk (did

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[6] ABC (2015) About *Scandal*. http://abc.go.com/shows/scandal

you propose to your girlfriend (yet) with the man next to her. Before meeting Olivia, the audience meets Harrison Wright, a gladiator in a suit. Harrison is on a blind date with Quinn Perkins, which is actually a job interview. He informs Quinn that the pay is not good, but the benefits –being "gladiators in suits" is worth it. Quinn accepts the position; Olivia navigates the standoff and secures her clients safety. The first moments of the show exemplify the fast paced nature of *Scandal* and the monologues laden with memorable quotes. Each episode provides a new scandal or crises for Pope's team to "handle." Through cases and flashbacks, the audience learns background stories for Pope, her associates, and her intimate relationships.

Significant Relationships

The most significant relationship in *Scandal* surrounds Republican President Fitzgerald "Fitz" Thomas Grant III and Olivia Pope. Grant is a Rhodes scholar with a PhD and JD from Yale and Harvard respectively. The son of a former Governor and State Senator for California, Grant had a difficult childhood –through subtle clues, we learn his father was abusive. Grant's political ambitions seem to come from his father and his wife; he would be happy living a simple life with the woman he loves, which is not his wife. Grant is in love with Olivia Pope whom he met during his bid for the Presidency when he was Governor of California. Grant, under the direction of his campaign manager hired Olivia as his public relations manager. Their attraction was instant. Although they attempt to remain neutral, they soon become intimately involved. After assuming the Presidency, Fitz appoints Pope the Director of Communications. However, as their relationship develops, Pope decided it best to end her tenure and open her firm, Pope & Associates. Pope continues her relationship with the President and attempts to maintain a veil of secrecy; however, their relationship is no secret (ABC.com 2015a; Wikia 2015b).

In subsequent seasons, the audience learns more about Pope's life including the death of her mother Maya Pope (Marie Wallace) a terrorist, her father Eli Pope (Rowan Pope) head of B613, a black-ops CIA sub-division, and her previous engagement to the Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate, Senator Edison Davis (D-FL). Pope, despite Edison's repeated attempts to marry her, declines. In a momentary break between Olivia and Fitz ("Olitz"), she begins a relationship with Jacob "Jake" Ballard ("Olake"). Jake Ballard, a former intelligence officer at the Pentagon and for the Joint Chief's of staff who later worked for B613. Ballard and Grant served together in the Navy, where the two became close friends (ABC.com 2015a; Wikia 2015b).

Main Characters

The first season introduces the main characters. These characters consist of Pope's associates, the President, his wife. The Chief of Staff for the White House, her father ("Command") head of B613, and Jake an operative of B613 and friend of the President. In the first season, we learn of Pope's connection to each character, including how her associates came to her employ. Abigail "Abby" Whelan, before working for Pope was a lawyer in an arranged political marriage to Charles Putney. Putney, in a drunken rage beat Abby severely leaving her with broken ribs and a broken jaw. Whelan reached out to Pope who fixed the situation: she found Abby an excellent divorce attorney, provided her employment as an investigator at her new firm, and broke Putney's knee with a tire iron. Diego "Huck" Muñoz, an ex-operative for B613 (Command), forced to live on the streets after his contract with the government ended, met Olivia on a subway platform. Touched by their interaction, Olivia helped Huck by providing employment on the Grant campaign and helping him find and establish a home (ABC.com 2015b; Wikia 2015b).

Harrison Wright, a luxury car salesman turned insider trader found himself on trial along with his boss, Adnan Salif. His attorney, Olivia Pope fixed the situation resulting in an eight-month probation sentence rather than years in jail. After this, Harrison started working for Pope as an associate. The final associate, Quinn Perkins (formerly Lindsay Dwyer), joins the firm in the first episode. Lindsay Dwyer is running from her past living under a new identity after waking up in Washington, DC with no memory of getting there. Framed for killing her boyfriend and six others after a bomb exploded at his workplace shortly after she threatened him, Lindsay's dream job is to work with Pope. Through flashbacks, the audience learns Pope called in a favor during Dwyer's trial, ending the seemingly closed case (ABC.com 2015b; Schmitz 2014; Wikia 2015b).

The audience meets two additional main characters in season one, Cyrus Beene and Melody "Mellie" Grant. Mellie, wife to President Grant, met Fitz through his father who arranged the political marriage. Although Fitz secured the Presidency, Mellie is the one with true political aspirations. Mellie, who later runs for political office, supports her husband and understands the larger picture of political success. This keen understanding undergirds her tacit acceptance of the affair between Olivia and Fitz: she wants power and access and knows he needs Olivia to maintain his position as President. Mellie and Fitz ("Melitz") have three children together: Fitzgerald "Jerry" Thomas Grant IV who is killed in season four, Karen Grant, and Theodore "Teddy" Grant, who is born in season three, the result of a political move after Fitz is caught cheating (ABC.com 2015a; Bricker 2014; Raftery 2014; Wikia 2015b). Although initially a recurring character, Mellie Grant's character propelled the show, moving her to a regular.

Cyrus Rutherford Beene, the White House Chief of Staff is a shrewd and ambitious man. Married to a woman for sixteen years to further his political career, he later openly admits he is

gay and marries James Novak. Cyrus knew the Grant family for many years. When asked to run Fitzgerald's campaign, he turned down an offer to run Harvard University, which resulted in his appointment to Chief of Staff for President Grant. Although his affair with James began on the campaign trail, Cyrus was not "out" in an effort to advance his political career. After Cyrus secured the coveted position and established his political career, he learned many knew his secret. Beene then married his partner James and the two eventually adopted a little girl. However, Cyrus did not want children; he agreed to the adoption to ensure his husband would stop looking into Defiance –the operation that landed Fitz the Presidency. A short time after this, a Command operative (Jake Ballard) killed his husband to cover up the Vice President's murder of her husband (ABC.com 2015a, 2015b; Wikia 2015a, 2015b). The final four (recurring) characters are: David Rosen, the Assistant U.S. Attorney (seasons 1-2) and later the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia; Stephen Finch, a litigator who previously worked with Olivia; Sally Langston, the (more conservative) Vice President; and Charlie, Huck's rival at B613 (Command). While Rosen becomes a recurring character, ultimately moving to a lead character, Finch, Langston, and Charlie Remain supporting characters.

CHAPTER TWO

RELEVANT LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The devaluation of Black women's bodies and femininities through comments in digitally mediated spaces influence Black women's lives. Through an examination of Black women's experiences in digitally mediated spaces surrounding *Scandal* and lead character Olivia Pope, I reveal the ways representations and conversations surrounding Black women's bodies and femininities constrain or enable access to social citizenship. To achieve this, I situate my work within relevant literature that outlines the ideological construction of race and gender, the social experience of racism and sexism, and describe the representation of Black bodies in media. I present three frameworks –Black feminisms, institutional ethnography, and social citizenship – that form my theoretical perspective. This chapter provides the foundation of this project, as a whole this project describes the interaction between representation, recognition, digitally mediated narratives, and Black women's experiences. Through this analysis, I outline how digitally and non-digitally mediated narratives influence Black women's ability to access positive recognition and value in their everyday lives.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Race, Racism and the Media

Race as a contemporary social structure, cemented through the enslavement of African peoples, created ideological constructions that created a hierarchical system that distributes and structures access to resources and social goods (Du Bois 2000; Carr 1997; Fredrickson 1981, 2000; Hall 1986, 1996; Mills 1997a; Taylor 2004; Winant 2001). The construction of race within the United States relies upon binary relationships forged through domination create and maintain social exclusion and oppression (Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi 2008; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Feagin

2010; Omi and Winant 1994, 2008; Winant 2000, 2001). There are two contradictory and dominant ways to understand race: that race is an illusion –it is purely ideological and therefore it is not permanent and can be removed or eliminated, or that race is fixed– it is a concrete, unmovable, and permanent structure (Omi and Winant 1994). Race, therefore is neither purely ideological, nor is it not a permanent and immovable structure (Omi and Winant 1994; Winant 2001). Although race is neither permanent nor purely ideological, the structure of race disproportionately influences social experiences (Bonilla-Silva 2004, 2012; Brodkin 1998; Feagin and Elias 2012; Lee and Bean 2007; Nakayama 1995; Taylor 2004). As Baudrillard (1983) and Alexander and Mohanty (2010) argue, racial ideologies create mapped constructions, or cartographies. These cartographies define and outline racialized bodies and social engagement. Additionally, they define the essential characteristics of racial groups that exist within structures of power. Everyday narratives, whether presented in person or through digitally spaces rely on racial cartographies and structure social experiences exclusion.

Hall (1996), Feagin (2010), and Ditomaso (2013) argue in the contemporary moment of increased colorblind and post-racial narratives negate race experiences and structural effects of racism. Scholars examining these discourses focus on patterned language, code words, and racial significations (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Mills 1997b; Monahan 2006; Myers 2001; O'Brien 2000; Teasley and Ikard 2010; Wise 2009, 2010). Racial significations or code words call upon heuristic understandings of race and use subtle and at times seemingly race neutral language. For instance, the term "thug" appears a generic moniker for one engaging in illegal criminal activities; however in the social imaginary, the term conjures up the image of an inherently violent Black man (Mills 1997b; Obama and Thornton 2010; Selmi 2011). Signified language,

emblematic of colorblind and post-racial narratives perform the work of racialized grammar that defines "how to speak properly" about groups (Bonilla-Silva 2006:54).

Masked racist structures create forms of discrimination like variation in criminal sentencing, differential police stops, and disparate administration of the death penalty (Brown et al. 2003; Selmi 2011; Ziegert and Hanges 2005). Scholars examining subtle racism in non-digital spaces (Rodriquez 2006; Williams and Land 2006) and digital spaces (Daniels 2009, 2012; Joseph 2009; Thornton 2011) argue narratives through the white racial frame rebrand racial truths that rely on inversions and reframe the effects of structural inequalities to the shoulders of the oppressed (Feagin 2010). As a whole, racist ideologies create seemingly real constructions or maps of bodies. In media, the "real is produced from miniaturised units, from matrices, memory banks and command models," which allow for the indefinite reproduction as "it no longer has to be rational since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance" (Baudrillard 1983:3).

Through media, commonsense narratives portray Black bodies as violent and angry; as comedians or buffoons; as hypersexual and immoral in a seemingly endless chain. Challenges to these presentations remain constrained through interconnected relationships of the media elite and the desire of state actors who seek to maintain power and privilege for the dominant group (Born 2000:421; Gray 2005:155; Hunt 2005b). Overt and subtle racist narratives presented daily influence perceptions of the other. However, these images do not fall on the receptive minds of a whole accepting, ingenious audience;" instead, they "interact with personal experience" (Entman and Rojecki 2001:7) Due to heightened levels of segregation and limited interaction between racial groups, contact is mainly impersonal and distant (Brooks and Hebert 2006; Entman and Rojecki 2001:7). For instance, as Innis and Feagin (1995), Havens (2000), and Thornton (2011)

demonstrate that Whites, when engaged with images of Blacks that present a similar culture or habitus to Whites (e.g. the Huxtables (*The Cosby Show*) and Gus (*Psych*)) use images as justifications for their negative perceptions of Blacks. Blacks who adhere to cultural Whiteness support the perception that Blacks 'fail to' adapt to the culture of Whiteness are at fault for racism and experiences of social exclusion. These conversations argue if Blacks operated similar to the Huxtables, they would not experience social exclusion and would have access to power, wealth, and prestige.

Individuals take on, integrate, and embody discourses presented in media that reify dominant discourses and resubstantiate social oppression and racist and sexist cartographies without direct engagement (Entman and Rojecki 2001; Entman 1994; Fredrickson 2000; Searle 1995). Individuals are thus more likely to rely on narratives presented in media. The images of Black Americans as lazy and socially problematic expand beyond localized or nationwide media –television shows and movies transmit controlled presentations around the world. Therefore, even when individuals have no experiences with groups they have specific patterned ways of understanding groups that delimits their engagement and perceptions without direct contact. For instance, Waters' (1994, 2001) work with immigrant populations demonstrates that their beliefs about Black Americans, irrespective of direct engagement align with the white racial frame. As such, narratives and beliefs surrounding Black Americans posit they lack a strong work ethic and discipline, and are lazy (Waters 1994:805).

Black Women, Racism, Sexism and the Media

Black women occupy places that create horrifying pain, generate unspeakable terrors that exploit their bodies and negatively structure their social experiences (Peterson 1995). Through the case of Moore versus Hugh Helicopter, Crenshaw (1989) demonstrates that juridical

exclusions position Black women outside the parameters of acceptability, that their femininity lacks the capacity to 'represent' all women. This supposition effectively negates Black women's value and reinforces social marginalization. Black women's bodies, defined as deviant provide fertile ground for the active denial of their humanity and uphold the project of belonging (Holland 2012). As such, marginalized bodies exist and provide "the breeding ground for various forms of racism" (Aziz 1992:291). Through the project of racism, the social experience and exclusion for Black women strips them of voice, negates their lived experiences, intentionally engages violent forms of silencing, and maintains invisibility (Ferguson 2004; hooks 1988; Lorde 2007). Silencing not only dispossess voice, as a component within a racist and sexist project, it attempts to make Black women and their pain invisible and unworthy of attention. The project of belonging, enacted through interpersonal and structural engagement actively silences Black women's voices and negates their value and respect (hooks 1988:8). Within academia, this annihilation occurs through the invalidation and misrepresentation of Black women's work and knowledge and positions it as invalid, not worthy of mention or direct quotation (Ahmed 2007; hooks 1990; Simmonds 1992; Yancy 1998). Black women's writing becomes valid only when rearticulated through male or White female voices or "white institutions of higher learning" (Rodriguez 2001:247). Through the negation of intellectual property, Black women remain invisible. Similar to the negation of Black women's voices in the academy, Black women experience silencing in digitally mediated spaces. It is important to note that while Black women experience continually silencing, they continually challenge negations and experiences of oppression by creating safe spaces in both non-digitally and digitally mediated spaces.

Thus, narratives surrounding Black women, their femininities and bodies, similarly defined through the white racial frame exist within a "mutually constituted systems of

relationships—including norms, symbols, and practices" organize "around perceived difference" (Nakano Glenn 1999:9). Black women encounter a distinctive set of social practices resultant from structures of power that create unique, yet shared experiences "grounded in interdependent concepts of binary thinking, oppositional difference, objectification, and social hierarchy" (Collins 2000b:71). Roberts (1997) demonstrates through an examination of social policies and procedures that Black women's bodies experience consistent control through coerced or unknown sterilization and disproportionate exposure to high-risk long-term birth control. Scholars and in particular Black women examining the effects of racist and sexist policies on Black women's bodies and lives acknowledge the tenuous position of Black women in society and as 'subjects' in scientific study (Collins 2000b, 2000c, 2004; Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Lee 2010; Roberts 1997). Their projects, like Roberts', engage experiential or embodied standpoints that hold "Black women's experiences of simultaneous and multiple oppressions as the epistemological and theoretical basis of a "pragmatic activism" (McClaurin 2001:63).

Within media, this oppositional difference presents itself through controlled images: the Matriarch (domineering, emasculating and angry), the Jezebel (hypersexual), the Mammy (asexual, jolly), and most recently the Welfare Queen (lazy, hypersexual, unsuitable mother) (Collins 2000a; Harris-Perry 2011; Harris 2009; Morgan 1999). The Mammie, an asexual being sacrifices her life to create happy homes for White children. In contrast to this, the matriarch is an overly aggressive and angry woman who lacks true femininity and control over her children. Where the matriarch exemplifies a pathological and emasculating femininity, the Jezebel presents a pathologically hypersexual and sexually aggressive woman. The image of the Jezebel in the media objectifies Black women, relegating them to sexual aggressors only interested in one-night stands and sexual pleasure. The welfare queen, the apparent combination of the

Jezebel and Matriarch, is a "highly materialistic, domineering, and manless" woman with multiple children (Collins 2000b:80). Finally, contemporary social and economic problems and the downfall of family values results from the problematic welfare queen, an amalgam of the matriarch and the angry Black woman. As hooks (1996) argues, Black bodies transformed through media lenses, move fictionalized representations to factual images. These images, defined through and by White supremacist ideologies affect conceptions of self and others, social interactions (Brown Givens and Monahan 2005; Entman 2007; Louw 2001).

Race(ism), Sex(ism) and the Internet

Digitally mediated spaces, like non-digitally mediated spaces rely on controlled discourses to restrict value and recognition to Black women's bodies and femininities. As Sassen (2002) argues,

> Much of what happens in electronic space is deeply inflected by the cultures, the material practices, the imaginaries, that take place outside electronic space. Much of what we think of when it comes to cyberspace would lack any meaning or referents if we were to exclude the world outside cyberspace.

Contrasting Sassen's assertion, some early works addressing race and the Internet argued it provided a space for racelessness and could operate as a space where the confines of negative structurations of race and gender ceased to exist (Kolko et al. 2000). Booth and Flanagan (2002), similar to Sassen argue that scholars who adhere to this belief fall into the 'mythology' of the Internet. They continue, "the two most powerful myths about the Internet are that, first it is an "identity-free" space…and, second, that because the Internet allows for "free" exchange of information, cyberspace is free also of class and cultural hierarchies" (Booth and Flanagan 2002:13).

As research on the Internet expanded, feminists in their examination of cyberculture called attention to the uneven effects of the Internet and cybertechnology in women's lives,

much like the uneven nature of access to technology in the 'everyday' world (Booth and

Flanagan 2002; Koivunen 2009; Lazar 2007; Levine 2009; Talbot 2007). Contemporary studies

focus on the disparate experiences of social exclusion, the use of racist and sexist narratives, the

impact of trolling on perceptions of belonging, and the structure of communicative interchanges.

For instance scholars examine the mechanisms behind Twitter usage and the impact of tweets

(Finin and Tseng 2007; Marwick and Boyd 2010; Zhao and Rosson 2009) and map the

geographical areas, or geo-tagged locations of tweets (Cheng, Caverlee, and Lee 2010; Graham,

Hale, and Gaffney 2013; Meyer et al. 2009; Sloan et al. 2013). Studies also examine

characteristics of twitter audiences (Bernstein et al. 2013; Marwick and Boyd 2010), and how

certain groups[7] use Twitter (Florini 2013; Liston 2013; Sharma 2013). Some examine the virality

of content, or the rapid rise and sharing of a particular image or comment. Berger and Milkman

(2012) found that while "positive content is more viral," virality "is driven by more than just

valence. Sadness, anger, and anxiety are all negative emotions, but while sadder content is less

viral, content that evokes more anxiety or anger is actually more viral" (Berger and Milkman

2012:199). Negative emotions and comments that engage negative narratives have a higher

likelihood of achieving virality. In turn, they have a greater chance of negatively influencing or

affecting minority populations. It is important to not only understand why or what makes content

viral; we must also ascertain the a/effects viral comments, or those that are increasingly negative

have on social experiences of exclusion.

The relationships between "cyberspace and individuals –whether as social, political, or

economic actors– are constituted in terms of mediating cultures; it is not simply a question of

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[7] The focus on how Blacks use Twitter stems from their increased engagement: Blacks, who
account for approximately 13% of the American population, account for 26% of Twitter users
(Pew 2013).

access and understanding how to use the hardware…" (Sassen 2002:370). Scholars must also interrogate how the Internet and engagement constitutes relations of power. Thus, by reframing the lens through which we analyze content, the Internet becomes a site or space of cultural engagement that provides: the possibility for understanding cultural changes and conditions; the material a/effects of a non-material space; and allows for the interrogation of the ways non-digitally mediated life creates digitally mediated 'life.'

Brock (2012) argues some Internet research, specifically those that examine social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) through an instrumental approach fail to understand tacit connections between culture and engagement. Brock's work, similar to Davis (2011) and van Dijk (2013) demonstrate the importance of examining the impacts and structure of communication and culture in digitally mediated spaces. Despite the levels of research on race, racial representation, and its transition to the Internet, few works focus on Black women's social experiences in media and digitally mediated spaces. The lack of attention paid to Black women's experiences reifies their "transitional and unsettled" position within America ([1892] Cooper 1998:112–113). In the following section, I outline relevant literature as it relates to the presentation of Black women's bodies in media and their experiences in the digital world.

The repetition of racist and sexist images in media desensitizes viewers from the pain and suffering of Black women. Beginning in the seventeenth century, advertisements portrayed Black women as objects, "products and commodities to be bought, raffled, and sold" (Jenkins 2014:207). As slavery ended, Black women in advertising and media transitioned from products and objects for purchase to pathological beings requiring control. The effects of the "frequent and repetitive nature of advertising and commercial messaging intensified feelings of Black inferiority and subordinate cultural positioning" (2014:211). Black women's pathological and

subordinate cultural positioning created a particular discursive space that is invisible, misrecognized, and devalued (Collins 2004; Harris-Perry 2011; Jenkins 2014; Poran 2006; Puff 2014). Through socialization, individuals learn to engage with Black women and respond to their representations and social experiences of exclusion by disavowing their experiences, negating the validity of their experiences and anger, and disavowing sympathy for their situation. Contemporarily, this results in rigid classifiers and narratives that deny Black women value and recognition, even when they clearly experience social exclusion and victimization.

For instance, Fiske (2005), in his examination of the frames in media surrounding Anita Hill,[8] found the negative construction of Black femininities as hypersexual, angry and adverse mitigated the veracity of Ms. Hill's claim. The hyperreality of hypersexual Black femininity reframed her testimony and allowed the popular press, and media to malign her character. Fiske continues, Black women whether in situations similar to Ms. Hill, or simply represented in media exist through a specific gaze and strategy that links their behaviors to "morality rather than to economic and social policy" (Fiske 2005:117). Further evidence of narratives exists in an interview between Michelle Obama and Larry King. In the 2008 interview, King attempted to cast Michelle as angry calling upon quotes from Sarah Palin that noted her husband "palled around with terrorists" (Johnson 2012:5–6). Rather than engaging the rhetoric in this instance and others, the First Lady resists and subverts by actively defining herself as patriotic, who like others is filled with "righteous anger about the existence of inequality and injustice" (Johnson

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[8] Anita Hill, an aid for the Clarence Thomas while at the US Department of Education, in a private FBI report indicated Thomas sexually harassed her. After the tapes leaked, Clarence Thomas, the conservative nominee for US Supreme Court, denied the allegation. The confirmation hearings reopened to address these claims. During the proceedings, Ms. Hill's accounts and persona came under fire; her character maligned, her respectability called into question. The findings dismissed her allegation. Although the ordeal ended with Thomas' confirmation, individuals and media reporters and pundits continued to challenge Ms. Hill's character, with what some term character assassination.

2012:7). Mrs. Obama's active challenge to King's discursive control demonstrates the influence of the White racial frame, and the male gaze. Goldman's (2014) analysis of Black women in reality television and Jackson's (2014) examination of Tyler Perry's presentation of Black women characters expand the conversation on the influence of racist and sexist constructions of Black characters. Through their work, focused on reality television stars and the fictional characters in Tyler Perry's movies, they reveal character construction through writing and editing relies on a controlled male gaze.

Though responses to Mikki Kendall, posting as @karnythia on Twitter, did not overtly draw upon one controlled image, responses to her hashtag #solidarityisforwhitewomen dismissed her claims and positioned Kendall as an overly angry Black woman. Kendall created the hashtag in response to continual negations and silencing on the intersectional experiences of racism and sexism in Black women's lives. Kendall, voicing similar concerns to other Black feminists[9] in social media argued the solidarity of the feminist movement largely surrounded issues facing White hetero-sexual women, and through the narrative that their issues are the same issues Black women face. For instance, Hugo Schwyzer who consistently mistreated Black women and women of color on Twitter and through his blog said, "This whole #solidarityisforwhitewomen thing is an abusive cudgel to be used against a lot of people who are really working at inclusivity" (Schwyzer 2013; Trudy 2013). Despite Schwyzer's repeated attacks and attempts to silence Black women, he garnered support from some White feminists. Schwyzer, like others who challenged Kendall's hashtag ignored their racial privilege and resubstantiated the silencing of Black women's voices by positing that Black women are the problem and limit inclusivity. The power behind Schwyzer's response and associated support denote a pattern of abuse Black

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[9] Please note I mean Black women who are feminists and Black feminists.

women experience when interacting in digitally mediated spaces: their voices and discussion of the experiences of exclusion remain silenced.

The experiences of Mikki Kendall, like that of Michelle Obama in her interview with Larry King, demonstrate the continued effects of controlled discourses on representation and recognition. Despite continued attempts to control Black women's bodies through racist and sexist discourses and a heteronormative White male gaze, writers and producers actively challenge and disrupt these constraints. For instance, Lee's (2010) examination of popular culture and contemporary popular Black women challenges the controlled gaze associated with Black women's bodies. Her work reframes narratives of sexuality that "looks to women in popular culture as purveyors of subversive sexual scripts that undermine traditional scripts that delimit female sexual agency and empowerment" (Lee 2010:8). By rereading representations, by placing Black women as purveyors and subjects that control their sexuality, and defining them as "revolutionaries who define traditional prescriptions for female prudence, and inaugurate sexual scripts that carve new spaces for eroticism and sexual freedom," (2010:128) Lee creates new spaces of recognition and value for Black women. These narratives reshape Black women's representations and challenge the invisibility inscribed within their social location. Although challenges create the potential for increased diverse representations, for "…more positive images of Black women, as well as other underrepresented groups, need to appear in non-celebrity reality television programming…" (Goldman 2014:49).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Black feminist scholars focus on the structures of power, discourses that exclude Black women's bodies recognition and belonging. Their works acknowledge that Black women exist within a particular material and discursive space, and that Black women and their experiences

are unique. To address both the sparse and negative representations of Black women in media and society, Black feminist works place Black women as subjects and engage their voices as the lens through which they analyze and interrogate the social world. As a Black feminist, I position participant narratives as central to interrogating the effects of digitally mediated engagement. Their narratives surrounding representation and recognition remain central in my analysis of *Scandal* and Pope's influence on representations of Black women.

Within my research it was clear that participants' wanted to minimize their discussions of digitally mediated engagement, and increase their discussion of Pope as a representation of Black femininity and what a/effects this had on their lives and perceptions of Black women in society. The choice to begin from the experiences of participants gains support through an institutional ethnographic lens, as this 'way of doing sociology,' centers social analysis on the wants, needs, and perceived problems from members of an institution. The final framework engaged in this project is social citizenship, or the right to positive value and recognition within a society.

By incorporating Black feminisms, institutional ethnography and social citizenship, I examine the social experience of exclusion in digitally mediated spaces, I describe Black women's thoughts on representation and recognition associated with *Scandal* and Olivia Pope, and outline how these two interact to enhance or restrict access to positive recognition and value in digitally and non-digitally mediated spaces. In the following pages, I present an overview of Black feminists works and discussions of the impacts of racism and sexism on Black women's lives. I outline how the practice of institutional ethnography aids this work and helps reconceptualize social media engagement. I conclude by outlining the social citizenship with focus on the role of recognition and its influence on perceptions of value and belonging.

Black Feminisms and Black Feminist Praxis

> Repeated patriarchal defilement and violences against black women's bodies/minds
> have summoned black feminists, authors, academics and poets to comment on and
> redraw the place of femininity, black womanhood, race and nation(s), in modernity.
>
> McKittrick 2000: 223-224

This dissertation uses a Black feminist theoretical construction to understand Black women's experiences. I engage the voices of Black women theorizing Black women's experiences of oppression, their exclusion from politics of belonging, and restriction of value and positive recognition to understand Black women's experiences in digitally mediated spaces and associated a/effects from engagement. Following James (1999), Lorde (2007), Rodriquez (2001), and Smith (1989), who call for Black feminist theorizing that challenges the ontological construction of Black femininity to create authoritative discourses and place black women at the center of analysis, I place my participant's narratives as central guiding features in analysis.

Because Black women within American society are positioned outside the acceptability of womanhood, they are forged "in the crucibles of difference" (Lorde 2007:112). The ontological experience of oppression invalidates Black women's knowledge and positions their expertise as non-authoritarian and lacking power (Collins 2000b; Mulinari and Sandell 1999; Simmonds 1992; Yancy 1998). For instance, Harding (1992), Yuval-Davis (2006a) and Zivi (2006) argue the effects of forced 'objectivity' in academia, including the forced denial and abstract removal of personal experiences, places certain forms of knowledge above others. This creates unequal knowledge structures that privilege White androcentric forms of knowing (Ahmed 2007; Butler 2006; Mulinari and Sandell 1999; Yuval-Davis 2006a, 2006b).

Objective, positivist and androcentric (male centered) science elides the effects of structures of oppression, posits experiential knowledge is biased and as such is not valid, and maintains the forced invisibility of Black women's voices and writings (Chay 1993; McKittrick

2000, 2012; Scott 1991; Smith 1998; Yancy 1998). duCille (1994) argues the final paradox for

Black women is the juxtaposition of legibility and subjectivity. For scholars and academicians to

consider Black women and their experiences valid, they "must be legible as white or male."

Further, Black women and texts surrounding Black women must be as readable as maps that

operate as "indexes to someone else's experience, subject to a seemingly endless process of

translation and transference" (duCille 1994:623). Thus, the cartography of Black femininity

remains constrained within scientific thought as it the experiences of oppression remain

intentionally illegible to those in academia and by extension, agenda setters and the lay public.

My dissertation attempts to redress the elision of Black women's experiences by privileging my

participant's knowledge and experiences and placing their narratives in conversation with Black

women's theorizing and writings on Black women.

  For over a century, Black women's scholarship focused on similar themes. For instance,

Cooper (1892), Harris (2009), and Nash (2011) address the question of the social experience of

exclusion for Black women –where do Black women fit, how does race account for its

intersection with gender; how do Black women experience race differently than Black men.

Black women writing on the experience of race and gender, spread across time and discipline,

demonstrate that the experience of oppression and social exclusion remains consistent for Black

women. Those adhering to a Black feminist frame or praxis examine the multiple oppressions

Black women experience through an intersectional rather than additive frame. Their work,

although intentionally neither canonical nor organized in waves is separable into three distinct

orientations: liberal, radical, and revolutionary (James 1999; King 1988). Liberal Black feminists

argue for humanistic reform of the juridical system while accepting their legitimacy. Radical

Black feminists reject the legitimacy of the juridical system and fault neocolonialism, the

corporate state, and capitalism for the oppression of Black women. For King (1988) a radical

Black feminist must discuss and declare the visibility of Black women while acknowledging two

innate and inerasable traits: that Black women have a special status in America *and* they have an

imperative right to self determination (King 1988:72). In contrast, revolutionary Black feminists

attempt to abolish corporate-state dominance by connecting political theory with radical

transformation (James 1999:79).

I situate my dissertation as a combination of the three, where I see the need for a

humanist reform of the juridical system but do not tacitly accept the legitimacy of the state in

light of consistent attacks on Black bodies. Although I acknowledge that neocolonial frames and

policies maintain the oppression of Black women's bodies and access to goods and resources, I

see spaces or avenues where capitalism can facilitate Black women's liberatory aims. Like King,

I believe Black women occupy a distinct space within the United States, and to challenge

oppression must define themselves for themselves. Finally, by placing Black women's voices as

the guiding feature for understanding the a/effects of engagement in digitally mediated spaces

and the limits of mediated representations on positive recognition and value, I outline the

possibility for increases in access to social citizenship for Black women through complex

representations.

Institutional Ethnography

In order to challenge the active denial of Black women's voices in digitally mediated

spaces, we must place Black women's narratives at the center of our analysis. However, this is

not enough to actively deconstruct and delimit the effects of engagement and interaction. To

understand the experiences of exclusion within digitally mediated spaces, I engage the

framework of institutional ethnography. Although some scholars (Coffey, Holbrook, and

Atkinson 2014) place institutional ethnography as a method or tool for examination, Smith (2005) argues institutional ethnography is a type of sociology. As such, its aim "is to *reorganize the social relations of knowledge of the social* so that people can take that knowledge up as an extension of our ordinary knowledge of the local actualities of our lives" (2005:29 emphasis original).

Institutional ethnography describes and outlines relationships between groups and institutions, often focusing on institutional practices or the effects of engagements. This approach begins with and orients its questions through the lens of those involved, or the stakeholders. I argue, although Black women (and others who engage in the following process) are not traditionally defined as stakeholders, through live tweeting media makers (e.g. Rhimes) engage with audiences, which creates the perception of influence and a stake in the production of the show (Weinstein 2014). This process and consistent engagement creates new avenues for advertising and product development (Smith 2015; Weinstein 2014), and reframes how we conceptualize 'stakeholders.'

As Jenkins' analysis of the changing dynamics of advertising notes, Black women as a target audience are highly influential, have tremendous spending power, and their "standards of normalcy have led to shifts in beauty, fashion, entrepreneurism, and business" (2014:216). Because of their influence, Jenkins contends that advertisers "must be respectful and respond to shifts and avoid stereotyping" (2014:216). Similarly, Midha (2014) discussing the results of the 2014 study, *Discovering the Value of Earned Audiences - How Twitter Expressions Activate Consumers*, in partnership with FOX, Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) and db5 found, individuals

> After seeing TV-related Tweets, 90% of respondents took subsequent action such as
> watching a show they've never watched before, resuming watching a show that they'd

previously stopped watching, and/or searching for more information about the show online.

The conclusion from their examination of 12,000 Twitter user's interactions reveals that media makers and advertisers should "program Twitter like you program your network. Develop a Twitter strategy that treats Tweets as an extension of both your content and promotional efforts" (Midha 2014). Rhimes seems to follow this advice. Her continuous engagement with her audience through live tweeting creates a connection between the audience and the show, drives investment, and creates the perception that viewers have direct communication and influence on the show and its characters. Though my dissertation does not focus on Twitter commentary, I argue these findings extend to conversations outside Twitter as Rhimes interacts with her followers in nearly identical ways through social media sites like Facebook and ABC.com. Black women's influence and their understanding of this influence creates similar characteristics to stakeholders within institutional ethnographies. Because an aim of this dissertation is to understand how representations and associated conversations influence the ability to achieve positive recognition, I discuss the intricate connections and influences of mediated conversations and perceptions of value. This conversation provides relevant information for media makers on the impacts character representations have on society, and on challenging or reifying controlled images of femininity.

An institutional ethnographic framework also ensures my work remains "in the world of the everyday experience and knowledge," is relevant to participant experiences, and "appears in how people talk of what is going on in their lives" (Smith 2005:40–41). Within focus groups, participants indicated they intentionally ignored racist and sexist comments in digitally mediated spaces to maintain some semblance of balance, even if temporary. An institutional ethnography takes standpoint as a methodological device where knowledge begins "in the actualities of

people's lives," that translates their experience and knowledge into the problematic, or orientation for a study (Smith 2005:207). Therefore, consistent reframings of conversation by participants operate as a guiding force and orientation to this study. Further, participant comments indicate a larger pattern where consistent interactions with crooked spaces produce consistent disease and imbalance. They also point to the importance of contemporary images of Black women in media. Pope's representation, despite potential problematics provides (momentarily) the semblance of belonging, of value, and of desire. Deconstructing interactions in digitally mediated spaces provides ample data to examine the restriction of, attempts to access, and negotiations of social citizenship.

Social Citizenship

Sarvasy (1997), Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman (2005), Somers (2008) examine social citizenship, the project and politics of belonging, and outline the parameters of acceptability. Scholars examining access to social citizenship in the current moment extend T.H. Marshall's articulation of social citizenship, or "the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society" ([1950] 2009:149). The main component, belonging, is a dynamic process that encompasses social locations and positionalities stratified and arranged based upon dominant ideologies and power arrangements. Further, the ability to belong relies on biased historical memories or stories that define or exclude certain groups as members of a community (Said 2001; Yuval-Davis 2006a:199–202).

I argue the discursive work of exclusion produces stress, and restricts access to social citizenship. The formation of belonging and citizenship within the United States, formed over centuries of conflict and subjugation, includes several factors. The three oft studied, and

37

arguably, biggest predictors of access to citizenship –political, economic, and social– are race, class, and gender (Nakano Glenn 1999, 2002, 2011). Within the context of the United States, parameters of belonging –defined through an idealized White male citizen– created an ideal type that forms boundaries or borders of acceptability which all members of a community are measured against. My discussion of an 'ideal type(s)' of citizen stems in part from Weber's concept of an ideal type used as a 'one-sided measuring stick' (Gerth, Mills, and Turner 1991) augmented by the social construction of race and gender through the lens of citizenship.

In the contemporary moment, the ideal citizen constructed from historically racist and sexist ideologies that proscribed desired characteristics for individuals in society is White (Harris-Perry 2011). The defining characteristic for membership, including ability to approximate or adhere to white norms and values, provides or restricts access to goods, services, and positive recognition (Hall 1996; King 1988; Myers 2001; Sarvasy 1997). Somers (2008) extends social citizenship to include "the right to have rights" (Somers 2008:5), which includes the right of recognition. The right to recognition provides the space to define oneself outside the framework of oppression or through the gaze of the dominant group. It also includes the right to "the same level of respect and dignity" afforded to other (valued and ideal) members of society (Somers 2008:6). Black women are not afforded that respect and recognition in the dominant culture, with racist and sexist ideologies policing the boundaries of acceptability (Christensen and Siim 2010; Foote 2004; Harris-Perry 2011; Orloff 1993).

The boundaries and borders erected to control access to resources, goods, and respect denies Black women access to full social citizenship. Rhetorical strategies of exclusion demonstrate the ways dominant understandings of gender performance and desirability stigmatize non-idealized bodies, producing the social experience of unbelonging (Christensen

38

and Siim 2010:14). Within the macro-level, the politics of belonging refer to dominant "political discourses and arguments about citizenship, welfare, gender equality, national identities, and democracy" (Christensen and Siim 2010). This level creates, constructs, and reifies crooked spaces through engagement and interactions with the State, the economy, and structures of oppression. The interpersonal aspects of social citizenship defined through "underlying notions and social practices" delineate and "confirm existing prejudices" (Christensen and Siim 2010:11).

Discourses surrounding the politics of belonging and social citizenship control those who define the categories and those defined by categories of exclusion. These controls mandate that individuals and groups defined as belonging, or those who wish to belong, remind those outside the parameters of acceptability of their problematic nature. Harris-Perry (2011), examining the effects of structures of oppression on Black women' lives, or the dis-ease experienced from interactions, argues Black women experience sensations similar to existing in a crooked room. The crooked room describes the effects of the social experience of oppression and exclusion, or white supremacy, microaggressive interactions (2011:129). The processes that create the crooked room produce a continued state of imbalance, which leads to discomfort. Citing psychological research, Harris-Perry argues while all individuals attempt to find balance, some are unable to find it leaving them in a consistent state or feeling of imbalance. The crooked room, theoretically bound within tangible or material conditions, does not fully encompass or explain racist and sexist acts in online spaces. Increases in new media (social media) usage create diffuse and multifaceted social experiences of expression that when combined with racist and sexist narratives mirror experiences of the crooked room. I expand Harris-Perry's term to crooked

spaces to account for the fluid and nebulous structure of the Internet and associated interactions in digitally mediated spaces.

SUMMARY

This project, through Black women's narratives of their experiences in digitally mediated spaces, theorizes the ways narratives constrain or enable access to social citizenship, or the right to belong, to be valued and receive positive recognition. Taking account of Black women's narratives and employing their voices as the lens through which I understand Pope's importance and impact on representations of Black women, I expand the discussion of the influence of media on perceptions of self and value in society. Discourses surrounding Black women, within the current historical moment of assumed post-racialism, limits the ability to illuminate the effects of, and challenge the reification of unbelonging. Through free-access sites, individuals can engage in racist and sexist discourses and attack Black women with little recourse (Hess 2014).

McKittrick in her discussion of geographic cartography as a site of struggle acknowledges that one must see and understand the memories of exclusion to remember and discuss experiences of exclusion. Racist and sexist cartographies thrive "on forgetting and displacing blackness" (McKittrick 2006:33). As such, active "sighting" is required to understand the ways conversations in digitally mediated spaces discuss representations of Black bodies and femininities including potential restrictions to social citizenship. Further, if research fails to attend to these experiences and sites of struggles, the experiences of Black women remain misremembered and erased from conversation. My use of a Black feminist institutional ethnographic praxis that takes account of social citizenship attends to cartographies of power, knowledge, and struggle through the Black women's narratives.

This dissertation, as an exploratory project builds knowledge surrounding digitally mediated spaces as an emerging media institution that provides the space for the continuation of ruling relations (racist and sexism) of bodies in contemporary Western societies (Smith 2005:205–207). This provides active sighting and limits the possibility of misremembering Black women's experiences and thoughts on the a/effects of digitally mediated engagement. As a whole, this project furthers the field of intersectionality, race and racism studies, analysis of digitally mediated spaces, and expands the conversation surrounding social citizenship. Through my examination of the intersectional positionality of Black femininity, the use of and challenge to racist and sexist discourses in digitally mediates spaces, I document ways discourses restrict the valuing of Black women as full citizens in U.S. society, and the ways Black women attempt to mitigate these effects of exclusionary discourses. Finally, through my integrative framework, I reveal the ways Black women engage with and interpret narratives in digitally mediated spaces and demonstrate the importance of understanding the interrelationship between social citizenship and digitally mediated spaces.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This chapter presents the qualitative methods used to examine and analyze digitally

mediated[10] comments, Black women's experiences in digitally mediated spaces, and associated

perceptions of thematic findings from digitally mediated comment analysis. My methods are

informed by a Black feminist theoretical framework, and draw from the works of Beauboeuf-

Lafontant (2009), Harris-Perry (2011), Yuval-Davis (2006a), and Christensen and Siim

(Christensen and Siim 2010). Studies that examine digitally mediated comments using

quantitative methods tend to focus on linguistic structure, impact factors, and the structure or

requirements for virality.[11] For instance, Jansen et al. (2009) use algorithms to define and

describe linguistic patterns of digitally mediated comments, while Bernstein et al. (2013) use

survey data to examine audience range and associated impact factors. Others using survey data

and statistical analysis of comments (number, amount of 'likes') examine the parameters of

interactions, characteristics associated with the presentation of self, and theorize emerging trends

based upon viral analysis (Davis 2011; Fernback 2007; Gershon 2008; Herring et al. 2002;

Kendall 1998; Peaslee 2009; Wise et al. 2006).

Although quantitative analysis of digitally mediated spaces provide insight into the

structure of digitally mediated comments, they often focus on defining rather than describing,

and adhere to a positivist stance that fails to provide rich descriptions of experiences (Coffey,

Holbrook, and Atkinson 1996; Dicicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006; Morawski 1997). Further,

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[10] As discussed in chapter two, digitally mediated describes the Internet, social media sites, and
other platforms of engagement 'online.' Digitally mediated comments are comments made in
digitally mediated spaces (across differing platforms).
[11] Virality relates to the rapid circulation of a comment, video, meme on the Internet between
users across or within a specific platform.

they do not examine experiences of social exclusion, and do not account for embodied

knowledge or researcher influences on data collection and analysis.

In contrast, qualitative methods bring personal narratives to the forefront of analysis, and

"back into an arena where abstractions, numbers, statistics, and canonical theories and methods

can predominate" (Herrmann 2012:136). This project rejects positivism, engages a Black

feminist lens and attempts to describe and explore both the structure of comments in digitally

mediated spaces and ascertain Black women's experiences. As England (1994) argues,

> "Part of the feminist project has been to dismantle the smokescreen surrounding the canons of neopositivist research – impartiality and objectivist neutrality – which supposedly prevent the researcher from contaminating the data (and, presumably, vice versa). As well as being our object of inquiry, the world is an intersubjective creation and, as such, we cannot put our commonsense knowledge of social structures to one side"

As such, this project acknowledges bias, the intersubjective construction of knowledge and

privileges experiential and situated knowledges. This provides richer understandings of Black

women's experiences with structures of oppression and social exclusion (Beauboeuf-Lafontant

2009; Grant and Simmons 2008; Haraway 1988; McClaurin 2001; Mulinari and Sandell 1999;

Scott 1991; Smith 1982, 1998; Stone-Mediatore 1998).

My Black feminist praxis challenges the notion that research is bias or value free, and

sees truth as partial, subjective and intrinsically tied to power relations. I attempt to redress the

notion of a dominant form of 'truth' surrounding experience that denies bias and values certain

(White/male) ways of knowing (Carter 2011; Lorde 2007; O'Shaughnessy and Krogman 2012;

Simmonds 1992; A. Smith 1983). My experiences and knowledge as a Black woman and Black

feminist influences the methods I choose, the questions I ask, and how I interpret data.

Reflexivity through critical reflection provides a more accurate analysis of comments and

presentation of narratives, which enhances rather than invalidating data (Boylorn 2008; Harding 1992; Krueger and Casey 2009; McClaurin 2001).

SITUATING MYSELF

As discussed in chapter two, Black women in the United States experience a keen sense of exclusion. I experienced the most intension forms of exclusion throughout my undergraduate and graduate careers in classrooms and in personal conversations. As my presence in digitally mediated spaces grew through interactions on social media websites and in comments sections of articles and blogs, my experiences of social exclusion increased. In these spaces, I found consistent and unremitting messages that defined my body as undesirable and my femininity as problematic. At times, I felt a compulsion to challenge racist and sexist assertions or to provide counter narratives. These attempts at conversation left me frustrated and at times stressed or hurt. Unlike non-digitally mediated spaces, the social exclusion I experienced occurred at hyper-speed, and at times without my intentional engagement.[12] As I developed this project, I wanted to understand the structure of comments in digitally mediated spaces, how narratives used discourses to assert controlled lenses and restrict value and recognition. More than that, I wanted to understand Black women's experiences in digitally mediated spaces and their perceptions of comments and relative a/effects on their lives. Because my project rejects a bias free framework, it is imperative that I consistently reflect on my experiences in relation to both the construction and analysis of this project. This requires a reflexive stance, which I discus in the following sections.

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[12] When one logs onto a social media website they are not in control of the information presented. While someone may log on merely to check messages, or leave a message for a friend they find various types of information –shared stories, retweets, shared status messages, etc.– in their feed. These messages can present information that triggers frustration, anxiety, or stress irrespective of the person's intentional engagement with the larger conversation.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity aids data collection and analysis as it "induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions" (England 1994:244). In feminist research, or any research that has social justice aims, it is crucial to engage the "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (1994:244). A reflexive approach provides the possibility for openness to active challenge, and including participant perspectives in focus groups and interviews (Flowerdew 1999; O'Shaughnessy and Krogman 2012). The process of continually reflecting provides spaces for participant's voices in analysis, continually refines uses of literature and theory, and creates critically and potentially liberatory research. To create a reflexive and critical project with social justice aims,[13] I interrogate and explore tensions within feminisms, Black feminisms, Black culture, and Black women's social positionality. I acknowledge these tensions and effects of racism, sexism, classism and heteronormativity on Black women's experiences when conducting research. I place Black women's narratives and experiences as central organizing principles for interrogating data.

As I organized questions for focus groups and interviews, I considered debates in digitally mediated spaces about Black women and feminism, including their potential for inclusion in conversation during focus groups. Although I do not examine feminisms specifically in focus groups, it is possible that participants will consider or discuss contemporary debates. Because Black women have a unique history with feminisms, and contemporary conversations

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[13] As discussed in chapter two, the goals of this dissertation include: providing tools for Black women to create safe digitally mediated spaces, creating a website that presents research findings and provides avenues for conversation in safe formats (moderating all comments). A final goal is to theorize the impacts digitally mediated comments to further research on unbelonging in non/digitally mediated spaces.

debate varying types of 'Black' feminisms, I sought out and familiarized myself with contemporary and colloquially relevant conversations surrounding Black women and feminisms. This ensured I could to participate in conversations if asked questions during groups. Additionally, through a reflexive stance, I am able analytically to separate personal beliefs, contemporary debates, and participants' perspectives. In addition to potential (polarizing) conversations on feminisms, I considered the presentation of my non-digital body in focus. This surrounded the potential for hair politics to influence participant engagement and perceptions of my goals or me as I wear my hair 'naturally.'

Digitally mediated black feminist debates

As discussed in chapter two, tensions within Black feminisms in digitally mediated spaces often discuss who 'controls' or represents the voices of a multifaceted movement. For instance, current debates surround Beyoncé's representation of feminism and articulations of hoodfeminism. In 2013, Beyoncé released the song "Bow Down," which featured a masculine tone and timbre and consistent guttural growls. The lyrics told women in the game that question her dominance, her position, ability to generate money, and stature as the 'queen' to bow down. On the same album, the song "Drunk in Love" featuring Jay Z engages misogynistic language. Jay Z says, "Catch a charge I might, beat the box up like Mike. In '97 I bite, I'm Ike, Turner, turn up. Baby no I don't play, now eat the cake, [14] Anna Mae. Said, "Eat the cake, Anna Mae!"

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[14] "Eat the cake! Anna Mae" references the movie about Ike and Tina Turner's abusive relationship, *What's Love Got to Do with It*. In the scene where Ike tells Tina, "Eat the Cake Anna Mae," he shoves cake in Tina's face after she politely refuses to eat it. After she attempts to leave the table and her friend attempts to stop Ike from hitting Tina, he violently slaps the friend.

Beyoncé recently claimed feminism,[15] which challenges counter assertions, and potentially problematizes claims of embodied masculinity and promotion of misogyny. Specifically, Christa Bell and Mako Fitts Ward (2013) critique of Beyoncé's brand of feminism, bottom bitch feminism, which gains its name from Pimp Theory. In Pimp Theory the woman who rides the hardest for her 'man' and keeps his other whores (or hoes) in line, is the 'bottom bitch.' Bell and Fitts Ward (2013) continue the bottom bitch,

> Isn't trying to elevate the status of her sister ho's. She isn't looking to transform pimp culture. The bottom bitch is a token who is allowed symbolic power, which she uses to discipline, advocate for, represent and advance the domain of the stable. In pop culture, she represents the trope of the chosen black female, loyal to her man and complicit in her own commodification.

Through Bell and Fitts Ward argument, Beyoncé is complicit in the advancement of misogyny. Although one could argue Beyoncé is not responsible for Jay Z's (her husband) lyrics or presentation of misogyny, she has some control over the features on her songs and is a powerful woman. Conversations in digitally mediated spaces debate Bell and Fitts Wards' assertions. For instance, Kendall (Kendall 2013a), who advances hoodfeminism, sees Beyoncé's uses of masculinity and her brand of feminism and potentially empowering.

Mikki Kendall and Jamie Nesbitt Golden advance their own brand of feminism for Black women, hoodfeminism through the website hoodfeminism: life at the intersection. On their site, they attempt to provide a space and voice for those who experience marginalization, negative sanctions for their 'loudness' or 'ratchetness,' and for those policed by respectability politics (Nesbitt Golden 2013). Additionally, the site and the articulation of a new type of feminisms for "the other hood chicks, for the ones living in the inner city and navigating poverty, as well as the ones in the country making a dollar stretch" is safe from those who attempt to silence ratchet or

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[15] http://www.cnn.com/2014/12/12/showbiz/music/beyonce-feminism-yours-and-mine-video/

hood women, which includes Black women and women of color. Further, the site provides a space where Black women remain "experts on our own experiences" (Kendall 2013b). Although debates and colloquial conversations surrounding hoodfeminism or Beyoncé's brand of feminism may seem inconsequential to this project, they are prominent on news feeds, stories and links are shared widely, and remain prominent conversations on blogs dedicated to issues and news important to Black women. Additionally, some conversations overlap with sites of analysis and could influence focus group interactions.

Through a reflexive stance, I am careful when commenting on adherence to varying types of feminisms. While I argue certain types of feminism provide the allusion of power and access, only to resubstantiate patriarchal and heteronormative structures of power, I do not share these beliefs within focus groups. Within focus groups, if a participant advances a differing feminist perspective, challenges the need for feminism or debates the validity of feminisms, I rely on critical distance to moderate the conversation. I also defer to participants for answers to questions that place value judgments on feminisms, or challenge adherence to a particular perspective. While I may attempt to aid the conversation by providing additional information, I couch it within a larger conversation or direct quote from a scholar, which removes personal ties and limits response bias. In data analysis, I place my perspective within brackets, seek out additional sources to provide insight into comments, and discuss the importance of diverse and multifaceted forms of Black feminisms.

Negotiating the non-digitally mediated body

My reflexive engagement also means I am cognizant of my body and my positionality as a middle class, natural-haired woman with what some term a 'White voice.' My natural hair could be the least impactful portion of my construction; however, within the Black community,

and in particular with Black women, hair politics (whether you use 'creamy crack'[16] or opt out) can define your space and how others interact with you. My hair is rather voluminous and has a looser curl pattern, which leads some to argue I have "good hair." The idea of good hair, a remnant of slavery remains a common narrative within the Black community. The creation of a niche market for Black hair care furthers divisions between 'natural' and 'non-natural' women. In some natural circles, there is an overwhelming narrative that use of relaxers points to a desire to be White, or adhere to White norms.

Nakeya Brown's art installations, a yet untitled project and "The Refutation of Good Hair" (TROGH), resulted from her daughter's experiences with comments and conversations about her daughter's hairs' ability to approximate "good hair." Brown's work on TROGH examined rejection and acceptance, placed on a continuum through still life portrayals. The still life pictures presented Black women's gaze on themselves and their hair. Brown, through her work attempted to refocus the narrative of good hair. She argues, "it was time to begin exploring black female identity in an unconventional way" (Brown 2014). My reflexive stance means I must remain cognizant of hair politics, and the presentation of self in focus groups. To ensure participants do not ascribe a particular belief system to my body based upon perceptions of my natural, or "good hair," I wear my hair in a bun. Like Brown, I refocus the narrative of good hair to examine its underlying structures of racism, oppression, and exclusion

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[16] Chris Rock, in his 2009 documentary film Good Hair, examined the Black hair industry to understand why African American women place "so much emphasis on their hair" http://www.oprah.com/entertainment/Chris-Rocks-Good-Hair-Documentary. Within the documentary, Rock labels relaxers "creamy crack," which has taken off and is used regularly to describe one's dedication to using relaxers: it is an addictive substance that many believe they "need" to have.

ENTERING THE (DIGITALLY MEDIATED) FIELD

Hughey and Daniels' (2013) work on racist comments on online news sites provided a template or guideline for examining posts, but did not provide insight into the rate or effects of (un)intentionally negative comments, or trolling. Trolling occurs when individuals post comments with the intention of disrupting the conversation. This occurs through blatantly racist and sexist language, or comments that present counter or inflammatory narratives (Binns 2011; Buckels, Trapnell, and Paulhus 2014; Herring et al. 2002; Turner 2010). Trolling, however, does not account for all negative experiences, especially those occurring within social media interactions. Within this section, I examine narrative experiences of digitally mediated and symbolic violence[17] in women's lives. A careful examination of these spaces, focusing on Black women's experiences provides a foundation for focus groups; it also provides a better understanding of participant experiences.

Online engagement often portends an intimate feel; however, the essential characteristics of the Internet and digitally mediated spaces are freely accessible and open to the public. For instance, Gross and Acquisti (2005) found 61% of selected Facebook profiles used identifiable images (face and location) and shared personal data (political views, sexuality, and telephone numbers). This level of sharing may seem insignificant to individuals; however, when taking into account the possibility for stalking and negative online engagement, the effects of shared personal information compound. One's non-digitally mediated social networks provide smaller numbers of intimate or significant ties with fewer than 2000 acquaintances or interactions.

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[17] As discussed in chapter two, symbolic violence is a non-physical, invisible, and insidious "mode of domination which acts upon the women but which goes unrecognized" (Morgan and Bjorkert 2006:441). This occurs through narratives that restrict positive recognition, define bodies as deviant, and assert control over narratives interactions. While women and men may be complicit in its use, they often fail to recognize its occurrence (Bourdieu 1989, 1991).

However, when using social networks in online spaces, one can have "hundreds of thousands of additional friends within just three degrees of separation from a subject" (Gross and Acquisti 2005:3) with unlimited access to personal information –including whereabouts and life events. With the advancement of social media sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) privacy is constrained by whom you share with, and whom *they* share information with, which means nothing shared remains private. The lack of privacy, potential for non-intimate others to gain access to your life can lead to violence and stalking in digitally mediated spaces.

In preparation for fieldwork in digitally mediated spaces, I spoke with colleagues levels of sharing, perceptions of privacy and reflected on personal experiences of social exclusion. I outlined my belief that violence towards women exists in digitally mediated spaces like non-digital spaces,[18] but through symbolic gestures and threats. In one conversation, a colleague shared a story of a Black woman harassed online after posting a comment that challenged patriarchy and Black misogyny. After reading the comment and taking offense, a Black man using sexist language caused the unnamed woman to leave the site, and seek refuge in a space dedicated to Black women. The man, expressing his sexist rage, tracked her through cyberspace. He somehow found her and promptly continued to violate her safety and the new space.

Amanda Hess (2014) describes her experiences with digitally mediated harassment in the article "Why Women aren't Welcome on the Internet." Hess experienced tweeted threats of rape and murder. Her unknown tormenters followed her online activity and demonstrated intent to harm challenging her online safety. Hess concludes, after seeking help from the police that it is

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[18] While out for a night of fun with her boyfriend and friends in Detroit, MI, a man murdered Mary Spears for rejecting his continued and unwanted advances. Her boyfriend attempted to interject after several attempts between the two, which resulted in a fight. During the fight, the man pulled a gun, shot her for rejecting him, and shot others for attempting to stop him from speaking to (harassing) her. http://madamenoire.com/476135/man-kills-detroit-mother-of-three-after-she-rejected-his-advances/

not possible to stop "someone without a body and potentially no identifying characteristics from harassing you when the laws regarding harassment and violence against women" are lax (Hess 2014). Starr (2014) complicates the narrative of digitally mediated harassment through an intersectional lens. Through interviews featured in the article, "The Unbelievable Harassment Black Women Face on Twitter," she addresses the unique challenges Black women face in digitally mediated spaces. For instance, Pia Glenn discussing her experiences on Twitter said,

> It takes fewer back-and-forth vollies to get to 'nigger bitch,' 'nigger cunt…I've had lynching threats. People send me terrible historical pictures of our ancestors being lynched. So proportionately speaking, if you're not a person of color, you will not get that…When a white woman gets terrible harassment about being raped, attacked or killed, that's very serious as well. But there's no way she can get the lynching threats with historical pictures of black people.

The vollies Glenn refers to are tweets between individuals surrounding a particular topic, and when she asserts a contradictory narrative to the structure of racism, she receives racist threats.

Yaba Blay discusses tensions and apprehension of 'vollies' in relation to interacting with other women of color, particularly Black women. After live watching[19] *Dark Girls*[20] and commenting on her personal experiences with colorism, Blay experienced insults and refusals to acknowledge her experiences with socially oppressive narratives and behaviors. The continual denial of her experiences is part of the larger structure of racism and sexism with in the United States. For Blay, the continual silencing of Black women and specifically dark girls creates a type of training similar to war. Black women, as Blay argues wear armor and wage battle, at times this occurs with other Black women (Blay 2013).

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[19] Live watching refers to watching a program while interacting on Twitter or another social media platform.
[20] Dark Girls, a documentary film by Channsin Berry and Bill Duke, both men, explored "the deep-seated biases and attitudes about skin color particularly dark skinned women, outside of and within the Black American culture." The film focused on Black women's experiences, with emphases placed on those trying to 'make it' or those struggling to achieve upward mobility.

The effects of engagement and conversations in digitally mediated spaces (e.g. Kendall, the unnamed woman, Glenn, and Blay) create distinct experiences that mimic battles and require protective armor. As I entered the digitally mediated field, I decided to collect comments and not engage in conversations to avoid the need for armor, and to create distance between myself and comment analysis. I also considered the effects discussing potentially similar experiences could have on participants. In a later section, I discuss the direct consequence of armor or protection from digitally mediated conversations on focus group engagement.

DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT

Digitally Mediated Comments

As I began collecting data on conversations surrounding Pope and articulations of her femininity and race, I realized the vast and nebulous structure of digitally mediated comments could create an overwhelming number of sites of analysis. To narrow the field, I created parameters for inclusion where stories had to include at least one of the following topics: Black women and race, Black women and sexism, race and gender/racism and sexism, Olivia Pope and race. My interest in understanding constraints surrounding access to social citizenship in digitally mediated platforms specific to Black women led me to look for sites with targeted audiences and those with higher rates of Black readership. To find sites that discussed the aforementioned topics and had greater levels of Black participation, I performed a continual refinement of Google searches using the phrases: Olivia Pope and race, Black women and *Scandal*, race and *Scandal*, Black women and Olivia Pope, which resulted in over twenty pages on Google, and nearly five hundred 'articles.' I refined the list, and chose popular sites, those that receive heavy traffic (listed on the website pages), or had a large amount of weekly comments across stories. This process generated 21 articles and 1,426 comments.

Focus Groups and Interviews

The second and non-digitally mediated site, focus groups and interviews uses thematic findings from digitally mediated comments to examine if Black women interact with similar narratives, and what their experiences in digitally mediated spaces are in relation to *Scandal* and Olivia Pope. Focus groups and interviews provide the best method to illuminate the experiences of Black women that would otherwise be missed (Krueger and Casey 2009; Morgan 1997; Munday 2014; Peaslee 2009). They also provide for a multifaceted examination of digitally mediated spaces to understand the potential a/effects of these interactions, including increased stress and dis-ease on Black women's lives (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009; Rose 2003).

Although focus groups and interviews provide detailed and rich information, if one is not careful, they can universalize and fetishize the experiences of Black women (Peterson 1995). To avoid this, I use a highly collaborative and exploratory structure in focus groups, and critical reflexivity in analysis. I see focus groups as spaces that provide an educational and political experience for myself and my participants (Poran 2006:741). This orientation, or research praxis, acknowledges the importance of engaging participant insights in groups and analysis. Additionally, it provides the spaces for participants to guide conversations and control their narratives (Hesse-Biber 2014; Lather 1986; Munday 2014; Oakley 1970; Poran 2006). This can create a safe space for participants to discuss potentially stressful situations and experiences.

Similar to Rose (2003), Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009), and Kynard (Kynard 2010), I privilege participants' narratives and allow their voices to guide or influence data analysis. Because I ask participants to discuss the ways language in digitally mediated spaces influence their perceptions of (re)presentations of Black women and perceptions of self, I am vigilant in

respecting their voices by providing autonomy (defining themselves for themselves) in analysis (Collins 1990, 1998).

As Baxter (2003), Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009), and Poran (2006) suggest, I create a collaborative space for examining digitally mediated spaces and discussing the a/effects digitally mediated comments have on understandings of Black femininities and Black women's bodies. Finally, under the advice of two mentors, Dr. Tamara Beauboeuf and Dr. DeBrenna Agbényiga, I positioned myself as a 'learner' within focus groups. Within groups, I communicated gratitude for their engagement, and choice to share experiences in digitally mediated platforms. As I entered the field, I approached Black women I knew colloquially to collect data. After several rounds of calls with few respondents, I added my picture to the bottom of the call for participants. This demonstrated I was a Black woman, which in tandem with the use of extended friendship and acquaintance networks increased responses.

Sample characteristics

My target population encompassed women who self identified as Black, which includes the possibilities for those who are foreign or U.S. born, who consider themselves African American, or a larger more diasporic identity of Black. For inclusion in my work, women had to be between 19 and 44 years. I was intentional in my age choices. I chose the starting age of 19 as it increased the likelihood that participants would live on their own, have a full time job, or be enrolled in some type of advanced education (e.g. 2 or 4-year college, trade school). Although the women at the younger end of the spectrum may not see parallels between their current lives and Olivia Pope, they may find her positionality aspirational. Along the same lines, I end the range at 44 as women in their early 40s are likely hitting their stride in their career, or are beginning a second career and could relate to Pope's positionality.

Before focus groups began, I asked participants to provide some insight into their background, including class and neighborhood demographics. I explained that this information would help me better form focus groups and would provide insight into their perspectives on *Scandal*. Most participants gave this information via email before their focus group. A majority of my participants came from lower to low-middle class backgrounds, where they (or their families) live in predominately homogenous Black neighborhoods. Each participant, through some type of advanced education, was in the process of creating a better life for themselves or their children.

The final component for inclusions required active participation in digitally mediated platforms. Although participants could vary in their usage (e.g. heavy to light use of Twitter, blogs, Instagram, or Facebook), they had to access digitally mediated spaces at least twice a day, spending at least 15 minutes each time. This was a self-report feature, so I had no way to ensure the accuracy of reports. However, as media scholars demonstrate the Internet is a daily part of our lives, where individuals spend hours daily (Gruhl et al. 2005; Manago, Taylor, and Greenfield 2012; Sloan et al. 2013; Wise et al. 2006) Thus, I believe my participant's discussion of their time in digitally mediated spaces.

Focus group organization

I started focus groups in the spring of 2014 and conducted four focus groups (N=15) and five interviews (N=5) with Black women in a medium sized mid-western area. Focus groups began with light appetizers and provided a space for the women to introduce themselves and generate familiarity with each other. It also allowed for women who were late to arrive to not feel they caused disruptions. After light appetizers, we discussed the consent form and I provided women the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym. I then opened the conversation with a

general discussion of *Scandal*, Olivia Pope, and supporting characters, which lasted for approximately 10 minutes. With the conversation flowing and participants actively sharing their perceptions of the show, I turned the conversation to digitally mediated spaces. In each group, I discussed digitally mediated thematic findings and asked the women to decide where they wanted to start. Although this could cause conflict, most women wanted to start by discussing Olivia Pope's humanity or the ways the media portrays Black women. My encouragement of slight ownership within group and the ability to 'steer' the conversation provided a blending of friendship with friendliness, without creating a false sense of power balance or true friendship (Kirsch 2005).

Although the first two focus groups had few participants, they provided an overabundance of data as they lasted approximately two hours. I found that participants had a great deal to say about Olivia Pope and conversations surrounding Black women's bodies and femininities. Throughout the first two groups, it became clear that participants did not want to speak about their experiences in digitally mediated spaces. Instead, they wanted to focus on Poe's characters and associated influences on (re)presentations of Black women in media including the need for 'messy' portrayals. While participant's acknowledged the problematics of racism and sexism in digitally mediated spaces, including some attempted challenges, they overwhelmingly avoided these conversations in digitally mediated spaces and in focus groups.

As I continued to try to link racist and sexist discourses in comments with their experiences, my participants steered the conversation to other points, at times ignoring the narrative I pointed to or stating they saw it in online spaces, but what *they* wanted to discuss surrounded something else entirely. After concluding the first two groups, it was clear that although my participants experienced racist and sexist discourses, veiled and overt, in digitally

mediated spaces, they intentionally avoided their discussion. My Black feminist and reflexive praxis pushed me to take some time off from conducting focus groups to understand my participant's voices and ensure I did not silence them by pushing my own interests or agenda.

Initially I viewed the choice to disengage as the start of a new project; one that divested from engagement in digitally mediated spaces. I then realized what my participants alluded to was quintessentially the same: I was merely looking at it the final product. By removing themselves from digitally mediated conversations surrounding Olivia Pope, my participants ensured they maintain aspects of their social citizenship, mostly associated with positive recognition. Through careful reflection and additional conversation with participants, I concluded that their choice to ignore comments and avoid conversations in digitally mediated spaces was the result of experiences of attack, symbolic violence, or other negative/unpleasant experiences.

To avoid battle, or having to wear armor, participants made active decisions to limit their engagement in digitally mediated conversations surrounding Pope and *Scandal*. They chose to engage with others deemed 'worthy,' while ignoring others in an attempt to protect their sanity and mediated health. Their choices lessened the requirement to prepare for battle and limited experiences like Hess and Glenn. This also allowed participants to achieve some level of pleasure from the show, including the fact that millions of people are 'hooked' on a sexy Black woman with money, access, and power. Finally, their choice ensured they could watch and enjoy Olivia Pope without consistent conversations that pointed out flaws, engaging respectability politics, or outlining potential problematics with the show.

With this understanding, I was careful when discussing experiences in digitally mediated platforms with subsequent focus groups. I gave space for participants to discuss their

experiences, make the choice to avoid the conversation or refocus it on something less obtrusive.

I did ask participants, if they were comfortable to discuss their choices to dis/engage in digitally

mediated spaces. I found that when they posted to social media sites the text was nondescript; for

example, "No! What?!?!?!" "How could she do that?!" "Mellie is coming for…" or "Look at that

bad outfit!!" Without context and with no real commentary on the show or interactions

participants removed the possibility for negative feedback. When participants chose selective

others for conversation, they often waited for the next day when conversations about *Scandal*

died down, and only engaged with known others who would not create dis-ease or tension.

Interview organization

I conducted additional interviews with participants who provided significant

contributions to the group through challenging others, presenting different lenses for interpreting

digitally mediated interactions and those whose narratives illuminated focus group themes. For

convenience, I used digitally mediated spaces to conduct interviews (e.g. Skype, Google

Hangouts). I sent the consent form digitally, which we reviewed before beginning the

conversation. Each interview began with a discussion of the main themes from focus groups,

then transitioned to questions based upon their narratives. Before we began the conversation, I

outlined my rationale for asking for a follow up interview, and provided the questions I wanted

to ask. Throughout the interview, I asked the participant to choose the theme or questions they

were most interested in discussing. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, while two

lasted 90 minutes.

FRAMES AND ANALYSIS

I draw from Foucault (1982), Said (2000, 2001), Smith (2005), and Smith (2003) to

understand power, subjectivity and its relation to Black women in digitally and non-digitally

mediated spaces. Although constrained through racist and sexist structures, Black women have access to power and are able to produce and use power. This power produces counter narratives, and challenges taken for granted racist and sexist discourses surrounding Black femininities. "While the ability to take an active role in the shaping of culture is enabled by new media, we must also focus on the constraining aspects of emerging technologies" (Smith 2003:6). My examination of Black women's experiences in digitally mediated platforms attempts to understand the ways Black women create and shape culture, while interrogating the constraining aspects of digitally mediated spaces on positive recognition and value.

I see 'data' as "the outcome of the researcher's active relationship with the research context, including the other social actors and their respective accounts" (Bryant and Charmaz 2011:21). Through a reflexive praxis that acknowledges biases and positionality, I attend to potential conflicts in belief systems (e.g. adherence to feminist principles, belief in the endangered Black man). Further, I allow my participant's voices to guide my understandings of their perceptions of digitally mediated comment findings, and their perceptions of and experiences in digitally mediated spaces.

My use of grounded theory most closely aligns with the Constructivist Grounded Theory Method (GTM) as it "recognizes and retains the strengths of the method itself…offers clear guidelines for examining how situations and people construct the studied phenomenon," while moving "the method further in to the interpretive tradition" (Bryant and Charmaz 2011:21). GTM attends to historical connections of racist and sexist ideologies and the a/effects discursive oppression has on Black women's bodies. Because the constructivist model of grounded theory takes account of positionality, experiential knowledge, and theoretical orientations, it creates a connection between data and the way I read and interpret data (Charmaz 2007, 2008).

The combination of GTM with critical discourse analysis and a Black feminist praxis provides the tools to understand the implications of my positionality on my reading and analysis of comments and engagement with participants (Watson et al. 2012). This also aids my reflexive process "because grounded theory is an emergent method that develops as the research process unfolds" (Bryant and Charmaz 2011:27). The manner in which I code, interpret, and analyze data is an ongoing process. Although it has a finished product, throughout the process I continually reflect on my positionality, the voices of my participants, racist and sexist language and associated challenges or counter-narratives. The continual feedback loop allows for participant's voices to shape and influence data analysis, while adding depth and nuance.

Digitally Mediated Comments

Despite arguments that digitally mediated spaces are potentially distinct, no real distinctions exist between language and discourse in non-digitally and digitally mediated spaces (Daniels 2012; Downing 1988; Johnstone 2007; Kolko et al. 2000; Rourke and Kanuka 2007; Warschauer 2000). Therefore, while text may appear different, or engage slightly different wording or tone, the underlying structure constructs and places bodies in opposition and provides the possibility to create or constrain identities. As a Black feminist engaging an institutional ethnographic framework, I pay careful attention to the social construction of bodies and language. I see digitally mediated spaces as mirrored sites of oppression. They are not separate or distinct spaces; instead, digitally mediated spaces represent racist and sexist discourses, albeit in new or different ways. Thus, 'online' and 'offline' lives have an inextricable connection that requires research to examine the nuanced differences in digital interactions and the fluidity of a/effects on lives.

Through an analysis of language similar to Warschauer (2000), I interrogate the ways narratives in digitally mediated communication create links between identity, value, and Black women's bodies and femininities. Through digitally mediated comments individuals question, discuss, challenge, and potentially redraw the borders of acceptable femininities. These conversations influence the identity construction of the commenter and the one under discussion. Aided by the belief that certain bodies 'belong,' commenters use racism and sexism to demarcate the boundaries of exclusion and maintain privilege.

I focus on the use, maintenance, and work of the white racial frame and veiled racism to understand its impacts on Black women's lives. I draw from the works of Warschauer (2000), Kolko and Nakamura (2000), Peaslee (2009) Davis (2011), and Hughey and Daniels (2013) to deconstruct specific or patterned language and communication. Similar to Hughey's (2012) examination of birther[21] comments surrounding President Obama, I see "racialized comments as crucial mechanisms in the (re) production of" (168) identities that, as Hobson argues perpetuate old ideologies (2008:112). The intrinsic connection between non/digitally mediated platforms requires specific methodological approaches to analysis that take account of the historical structure of racism and sexism, the erotic nature of racism, and account for mechanisms that control access to citizenship (van Dijck 2013; van Dijk 1993; Holland 2012; Thornton 2011).

My goal, like Smith (2005), Hobson (20008), and Hughey (2012), in examining digitally mediated comments is to identify patterned narratives and discuss the implications and potential negative social and personal e/affects. Within my analysis, I follow the suggestions of Hughey and Daniels (2013), and consider the context of the story presented, including dominant political climates. When coding, I considered the tone or tenor of conversations, and specific interactions

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[21] Birthers are individuals who challenge President Obama's citizenship. They assert he was born outside the United States, and his Hawaii birth certificate is a falsified document.

between commenters and analyzed discourses in comments "in relation to the overall racial climate of the era…and the story's particular context" (Hughey and Daniels 2013:338). While maintaining context, I examine comments line by line to identify and explain patterned discourses that focus on the 'whats' and 'hows' of social exclusion, and create a "contextually scenic and contextually constitutive picture of everyday language-in-use" (Holstein and Gubrium 2011:347).

I began the process by separating articles by content leaving three camps: archetypal characters, Black women and *Scandal*, and race and *Scandal*. After initial separation of the articles, I examined comments for adherence to racist and sexist language, the structure of narratives surrounding Black femininities and Black women's bodies, and the articulation of Black women's roles or responsibilities. I also looked for spaces of challenge to dominant or pejorative language. When conversations occurred, I read the original comment and replies to understand nuances. Finally, I read comments for sarcasm or other potentially misleading statements/sentiments. This process revealed three overarching themes: the (im)materiality of race, media (mis)representations, and controlling humanity. With findings from digitally mediated comments, I began focus groups to understand Black women's experiences in digitally mediated spaces, their experiences with similar articles or conversations, and to ascertain if thematic findings are consistent with their experiences in digitally mediated spaces.

Focus Groups

The analysis of participants' narratives in focus groups and interviews similar to Watson et al. (2012) uses a theoretical lens influenced by critical discourses analysis and Black feminisms. I engaged a "constant comparative method…to continually examine emergent data, comparing it with existing data in order to fully develop a theory grounded in participants'"

(Watson et al. 2012:461) narratives. Following Lazar (2007), my aim is to show "the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced…negotiated, and challenged" (142) by participants in digitally mediated spaces.

Through a consistent reflexive process and a grounded approach to analyze data after each focus group, I added and reshaped questions to incorporate emerging data (Charmaz 2007; Watson et al. 2012). In each group, I presented findings from digitally mediated comments asking participants to select the theme they were most interested in discussing. Each focus group focused conversation on two themes. The first, (re)presentations of Black women in society included the role of the media in presenting accurate or non-controlled images and debates surrounding "responsible" images. The second, controlled humanity included discussions of the need for complex and messy characters, and challenges to respectability politics. The focus on these two themes influenced questions asked in later groups and informed interview questions.

The analysis of focus groups and interviews occurred in four steps. First, I reviewed transcripts alongside audio recording to ensure an accurate presentation of participant's voices. I then coded each focus group separately for manifest and latent themes. This resulted in five codes: (im)materiality of race, media (mis)representations, mediating responsibility, mediated readability, and controlling humanity. I then combined narratives from each focus group by theme and reanalyzed the comments. Similar to my analysis of digitally mediated comments, I read responses in tandem with the overall conversation. Following a grounded theory method informed by critical discourse analysis and Black feminisms, I kept conversations in tact to ensure the meanings of narratives remained true to the participant's voice and the tenor of the

group (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009; Bryant and Charmaz 2011; Charmaz 2008; van Dijk 1993; James 1999; Lazar 2007; McClaurin 2001).

After completing separate focus group and interview analysis, I combine theme specific narratives, refining the code list through axial coding, which as Creswell (2013) argues allows for the analysis of theme specific narratives and conversations through a continual refinement and incorporation of themes. Within this process, I attended to structures of power and access that influenced my participant's understandings of society, interactions, and the self (Creswell 2013; Creswell et al. 2007; Flowerdew 1999; Hesse-Biber 2014). For your convenience, after this chapter I include Table 1 that lists participant and digitally mediated commenter names.

Through coding, I found overlapping narratives with similar underlying rationales. Deconstruction of the comments reveals that mediating responsibility and mediated relatability are sub-themes of media (mis)representations. I further refined themes by deconstructing narratives surrounding the (im)materiality of race within focus group conversations. This revealed that conversations directly correlated with the (mis)representation of race. I therefore subsumed the (im)materiality of race within media (mis)representations. With the combination of themes and sub-themes, I reframed media (mis)representations to *media (mis)representations and relatability*. This theme now presents an examination of participant's perceptions of (1) the ways the media accurately or mis(re)presents Black femininities; (2) the debates surrounding the need for respectable characters, and who bears responsibility for creating or reading them; and (3) the relatability of (re)presentations of Black femininities and Black women's bodies.

The second theme emergent from narrative analysis, *controlling humanity*, surrounded participant's arguments for (1) the need for diverse and multifaceted (re)presentations of Black femininities and Black women's bodies, (2) the importance of non-controlled representations and

challenging controlled images; and (3) the importance of creating characters that operate outside the parameters of respectability politics. Narratives within this theme argue for an increase in the ability to portray a wide range of human behaviors. The final step in this process was in-vivo coding of focus groups and interviews "to ensure that concepts stay as close as possible to research participants' own words or use their own terms" as they best capture "a key element of what is being described" (King 2008:473). I present the findings from digitally mediated spaces in conversation with focus group findings in chapters four and five.

LIMITATIONS

Because this research is small numerically, it is not generalizable. While that is not the aim of this project, it is a limitation. Most focus groups participants had some level of higher education, with several in advanced degree granting programs. This could influence the manner in which they interpreted *Scandal,* the level of investment in the show, its lead character, and likelihood to relate to Olivia Pope. In the future, I will expand my data set and attempt to target Black women with more diverse current socio-economic and educational positionalities to ascertain what impacts class and education have on engagement in digitally mediated spaces and perceptions of *Scandal* and Olivia Pope. Finally, a potential limitation surrounds the incorporation of participants whom I am familiar with, or know through network ties. The potential implications of my relationships, most unknown, with some general acquaintances and a couple 'friends' could blur the lines between friendship and friendliness in interviews and influence their reactions to questions. I acknowledge that this is a potential limitation. However, I believe the participants I was familiar with understand the importance of data collection, as they are academics and scholars. Because of this, they answered honestly, at times challenged questions, and provided commentary that reflected their voice.

TABLE 1: Participant Names and Digitally Mediated Designations

Participant Pseudonym	Digital Commenter Chp. 4	Digital Commenter Chp. 5
Vanessa	Kim	Asha
Renee	Diva B	Briauna
Imani	OldPopeyeSalt	Ms_Twisted_N_Turned
Eliza	Aishah Shahidah	Ann
Cecilia	Rebecca	Terri
Sarafina	Tarani Joy	Tarani Joy
Jazzy	walterrhett	Crystal
Spartan	Guest360	
Traci	Gfusion	
Starbucks Cup		
Blue		
Samantha		
Marie Wallace		
Alicia		
Whitley		

CHAPTER FOUR

MEDIA MISREPRESENTATIONS:

DEBATING INTENT, RELATABILITY AND REPRESENTATIONS IN MEDIA

Scholars studying dominant racial undertones in media and controlled images of Black femininity argue the characterization of Blacks slants toward ridiculous, non-redeeming, and at times contradictory images. Images of asexual, hypersexual, and emasculating Black women dominate airways and television screens (Collins 2000a; Hunt 2005a, 2005b; Louw 2001; Torres 1998). Although Black women's images and representations changed over time, the prevalence of racism and sexism on character construction and representation remains prominent (Downing 1988; Jhally and Lewis 1992; Lee 2010; Woodard and Mastin 2005).

This chapter addresses participants' and individuals in digitally mediated spaces perceptions of potential shifts in representation, the relatability of representations, and debates over the responsibility of characters to challenge controlled images. I focus on narratives that debate the importance of relatability and recognition of representations, present debates on the importance of reading race (challenging post-racial fantasies) in *Scandal,* and address debates surrounding the conflation between reality television characters and fictional characters. Within this chapter I begin a larger conversation on the role of representation in accessing recognition, and the limits of contemporary representation on accessing multifaceted and human characters.

DEBATING REPRESENTATIONS: CULTURE, POLITICS, AND RELATABILITY

The Changing Face of Representation

Focus group conversations diverged from digitally mediated spaces in their discussion over the change in representations of Black women in media. While digitally mediated comments placed Pope's representation in comparison to historical images, participants

discussed representations as a continuum, some seeing a pendulum, while others found distinct

changes that "move beyond" stereotypes. Overall, participants and those in digitally mediated

spaces agreed that contemporary representations exist with greater diversity and increase access

to positive recognition. For Eliza, the image that presented the greatest challenge to controlling

images and created "positive" representations was Claire Huxtable from *The Cosby Show*. She

continued,

> We sort of went up… I don't know how to say this, but when we had Claire Huxtable we had… a lawyer, she's a mom, she's a wife. So the fact that she's a professional. I think that's the biggest thing that a lot of us who were growing up at that time. We saw someone who looked like us who was a professional. She wasn't a maid. She wasn't struggling.

Claire Huxtable, a lawyer, an upper-middle class Black woman married to a successful Black

man challenged images of hypersexual, lower-class, and uneducated Black women. *The Cosby*

Show and Claire Huxtable in particular acted as a role model for participants like Eliza and

Cecelia. Cecelia, considering the importance of complex and non-controlled images, continued,

> Yea, I think historically or just in general, Black women are portrayed as the "mom figure" or Big Momma, or she's the bitch, or... she's sort of standing in the background. There's some TV shows where she's just there. She doesn't represent anything, she's just there. There's a bunch of White men, there's more White men...and she could be professional or not: she's a token…she's just there. Sometimes the friend. Sometimes, you know she's the police offer that you refer to sometimes. I think too, she's being exploited...seeing people twerk. That whole generation of 'the most,' like she's over, I can't think of the word, but she's over sexified [sic] if you will.

> And then every once in a while you'll see these flashes of professional, like Claire Huxtable. You know Olivia Pope, sort of. There's some other television shows, I don't watch a lot of TV, but the one I watched one time, *Being Mary Jane*, so Mary Jane, but she's very complex, she has a lot going on, but still she's a professional.

> So, I think you see it a little bit more now. There's sort of an age where they push for the professional, sort of more positive. I think not even early 2000s... Now they're trying to come back and make it more realistic. Like Mary Jane. But, you still have this man in the middle or on the side.

So, it's, you know, it's still if you have a Black woman she needs to be categorized as something. She doesn't just 'exist,' There's not a lot where you can trade her out for an Asian or a White actress. It's still a little tokenism.

In the nineties, I thought about Queen Latifah show, Living Single and Maxine[22]… I just, it's kind of weird how the media portrays us. And it is trying to go like a little more realistic and away from stereotypes. But I think that it's been real hard throughout history to get away from the stereotypes. You either have the mammy or you have the overly, sexy, or ghetto, or they just kind of 'there'. We're portrayed as… I think they think it's real, but it's real "extra." It's either we're the overly sexual or we're asexual.

For Cecilia and Imani, representations of Black women exist through controlled lenses, that only in the later twentieth century experienced disruption. However, they note these moments and potential fissures are fleeting; in the contemporary moment, Black women exist through the controlled trope of the Jezebel or side piece, which relegates their femininity, respect, and power to an inconsequential aspect of their character. For Imani and Cecilia, the consistent portrayal of Black women through a specific discursive lens influences Black women's perception of self. As Cecilia contends, young Black girls and adolescents who see images of Black women in media begin to do "the most" in order to gain recognition and respect. These behaviors include twerking, being overly sexual, and in some instances degrading themselves. For these participants, though Pope provides a potential challenge to the 'ratchet side piece,' she remains a muted piece of the conversation.

The maintenance of controlled images in the contemporary reality obsessed moment, constrains Black women's abilities to define their images, bodies and representations for themselves. Cecilia and Imani see representations like Claire Huxtable as moments that provided Black women to redefine themselves and exist outside the paradigm of 'life imitating art.' In contrasting Pope's character to previous positive representations, they maintain that although

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[22] Maxine 'Max' Shaw played by Erika Alexander, a character on the Fox's *Living Single* was lawyer and the 'level headed' mainstream professional of the group.

Pope's characters slightly disrupts the status quo, her continued affair and savior complex

maintain controlled images and discourses. Jazzy, considering the conundrum of art imitating

life, or life imitating art noted that representations and character constructions remain within a

both/and realm where the white racial frame, and racist and sexist discourses continue to control

representations that restrict autonomy and subjectivity (Collins 1990). She continued,

> … I was scrolling through some pictures I had. We had gone to the Hollywood Walk of Fame where they have the stars on the ground and one of the stars that we saw next to Michael Jackson and was Hattie McDaniel.

> So I was thinking that Hattie McDaniel in Gone with the Wind and the type of role that she played and the type of role that women played during that time was very narrow, very subservient. Kind of like background you know.

> And I feel like what I'm starting to get now through Shonda Rhimes' characters is this more complex woman who, in some ways, is more of a leader in aspects of her life. Calling the shots, but then sometimes getting caught up in the life of a woman. I think of the lover, the romance, making the mistakes and at the same time you're being this leader. So I think we've come a long way in that sense. …We still have kind of like the B.A.P.S kind of role. Maybe.

While Jazzy acknowledged the change in representation, Jazzy notes the continuation of Halle

Berry's character, Nisi in B.A.P.S (Black American Princesses), or the 'ratchet,' lower class,

ghetto, loud, and boisterous Black woman. Despite the (potentially limited) continuation of

controlled images, Jazzy like Sarafina and Whitley argued Rhimes characters push boundaries

and increase non-controlled representations of Black women.

Renee, like Jazzy saw increased complexity in representations while noting the

maintenance of controlled images. Renee's narrative, similar to Eliza began with childhood

images and continued to the present day. She continued,

> Well, we weren't represented on –I'm old school so you know my age– *Dynasty, Dallas, Falcon Crest, Knot's Landing,* we weren't present. I mean growing up as a child and not seeing that. The closest thing I had to a woman of color was Nell Carter and she was typified in that role of caretaker: She was a babysitter. *Gimme a Break* for me as a young

girl that's what it was and then *The Cosby Show, 227*, things like that. So I see the progress.

I see (progress) from being the good friend, to having more agency, to be like for instance even Stacy Dash and all of her craziness… but be the valley girl, be the best friend. The best friend, but still have as much kind of clout. I kind of felt like she was still given a voice, so she made this impact on pop culture.

I'm seeing the growth even if, in some ways, we feel like right now the range has been limited. It's been a huge leap from what I saw growing up.

The leaps Renee points to challenge controlled representations; they also challenged participants and created some debate over their continued influence. For instance, Sarafina and Blue debated the importance of challenges to representations and the presentation of complex images. While Sarafina maintained that changes in representations existed, she argued stereotypes and controlled images remained highly prevalent. Blue in contrast argued that while stereotypes persist, their presentation and narrative changed. She continued,

I actually don't think it's the same –I'm gonna [sic] play a bit of devil's advocate– I actually do think the stereotypes…I think we go beyond the stereotypes because I don't know how not to. I don't know media in the way in which it's crafted, can actually go beyond stereotypes for any group.

In that case, when we look at Black women in the ways in which there's been some evolution of their – of the prototype, I don't think it's in the same model necessarily of – you know… the controlled images. I think it's actually gone beyond that a little bit. I think that we might be a little bit limited sometimes when we see the same stereotypes, because the stereotypes evolve. Even if it's in a stereotype, I don't know that we get away from that anyway.

There's never gonna [sic] be sort of a representation of all the complexities. From my perspective, I think there's been an illusion –of course, it's not all good. But I do think that we see differences.

To illuminate the discrepancy between Blue and Sarafina's perspectives, I asked Sarafina to expand upon her perception of contemporary representations, the role of stereotypes, and the ability to 'move beyond.' She continued,

I feel positively in some ways about them [representations of Black women]. I feel positively because people like Shonda Rhimes are getting contracts with ABC [and the like]. And so, they are pushing it along little by little. They are pushing and creating more space for more Black women, and to present more images. It's happening. But it's not happening fast enough. And it's not happening enough. So I don't feel optimism.

I'm cautiously realistic. I'm not a pessimist. I'm realistic… representations of Blackness have always been problematic, and they will always be because they were not intended to be realistic.

If you think about how Black folks entered entertainment in the first place, it wasn't meant to be a realistic representation of *us*. It was never meant to represent us as an audience. I still think there are more images, they look a little different. So as a consequence, looking back across one hundred years and seeing change, but *not much* it just has a different weave. Seeing that, it's like how am I supposed to be optimistic?! How am I supposed to feel good?

We have to create spaces for ourselves. But I don't know. I don't know. And I'm sad because I don't know. I'm sad because I don't have positive things to say. Every time I want to be positive, every time it's convincing myself of bullshit. Every time I try and look at TV, and I'm like 'oh yay!' I get optimistic and I get excited. Three seconds later, it's gone. Because there's something else that I can't…something else that hits me. Like I have trouble enjoying anything else. It's like, *'yea that shit right there…'*

And sometimes I have to, to enjoy, I have to turn my mind off just a little bit. And warranted TV is supposed to be an escape, but at the same time I have three seconds of enjoyment and then some kind of problematic something. And it will be subtle. It will be the most subtle things, like they way they juxtapose characters. But I'll catch it. And in some ways this is media reflecting back a fucked up society. In some ways. And that's what I mean when I say it has a different face [weave].

For most participants like Sarafina, the stereotypical images of Black women in media remain typified and enmeshed in controlled images, despite the possibility of challenge. Sarafina expands the frustration others mentioned, where Pope while she clearly begins to disrupt the control over Black women's representations and exists outside the full control of racist and sexist narratives, remains enmeshed within structural constraints. Pope, a fixer by nature also saves her employees and maintains asexual relationships. She also maintains an affair with a married man, and has two other men obsessed with her, her sexuality and body seemingly controlling their interactions. She is both a Mammy and a Jezebel, which for some demonstrates the both/and

nature of changes in representations. Along the same lines, but distinct, Jazzy notes that Olivia

Pope demonstrates clear differences in representations of Black women, especially in

comparison to Nisi, a ratchet, ghetto, loud, and obnoxious Black woman with decreased levels of

power and prestige.

Both narratives complicate how we understand representations and potential influences

on recognition and value. One posits that both images remain in tandem with each other, with the

subtle thematic narrative that representations *have* changed. While the second argument sees

Pope's representation as a both/and: a continuing amalgamation of challenges and reifications.

For instance, although Sarafina believed representations changed over the previous century, she

contends that conversations and representations of Black femininities remain constrained. Rather

than clearly or overt racist and sexist images, she finds subtle or veiled narratives that limit her

enjoyment. Similar experiences and levels of frustration led some, like Renee, Imani and Jazzy

to seek out alternate forms of media (e.g. YouTube, Hulu, Netflix). They argue new media, not

constrained by similar network or power structures provide spaces for complex portrayals.

Within these conversations, participants debated the role of responsibility in creating non-

controlled and complex representations. In the next section, I examine the debate surrounding the

role of responsibility in creating, presenting, and challenging racist and sexist characters.

Intentionality, Representation, and Recognition: Politics and (Post) Race

In each focus group participants argued Black women's political affiliations often

remained personal, with active participation in parties and movements that challenged structures

of oppression (Christensen and Siim 2010; Crenshaw 1991; Zivi 2006). As participants drew

parallels between their experiences as Black women of voting age, and in thinking about the

representation of Black femininity in media, some found Pope's lack of clear commitment and

engagement with a Republican man obfuscating, confusing, interesting, and problematic. Within conversations that debated Pope's upbringing –her private and presumably Ivy League education, her social class– and its relation to her decision to work for a Republican candidate, Marie Wallace and Whitley pointed Fitz' clear social liberalism[23] as evidence of her commitment to social issues and challenging structures of oppression. Others argued her relationship with Fitz existed before she knew his thoughts on race and attempts to create an equal wage bill.

Throughout focus groups, it became clear that participants questioned Rhimes' intention in creating a character with potential intentional subterfuge. Despite potentially frustrating debates within digitally mediated spaces and interpersonal conversations, participants maintained Rhimes' intention in creating Pope's complex political affiliations and the debates surrounding their importance maintained interest. Starbucks Cup and Jazzy saw the vague construction as a means to increase viewership. Others like Sarafina and Vanessa found Rhimes' vagueness problematic as it provided the space for Black women to ignore social justice issues and to adhere to conservative principles. Their arguments point to the importance of thinking about images outside the parameters of a fictional world, outside of the television screen. Because individuals view fictional characters as 'real' and ascribe their tendencies and beliefs onto non-fiction and non-digitally mediated bodies, debates surrounding Rhimes' intent gain importance.

Starbucks Cup, while debating Rhimes' intention in constructing Pope as a vague, potentially conservative, or independent Black woman enjoyed

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[23] The audience becomes privy to her perceptions on race after Mellie tells the country about Fitz's affairs and Cyrus has a heart attack. At the hospital, Mellie runs into Fitz who is visiting Cyrus. Fitz, who no longer cares what society thinks of his affair, tells Mellie he will leave her for Olivia. He then says, "…my relationship with Olivia is going to spark a *real* dialogue of race in this country and it is going to blow the Republican party wide open and let some light and air into places that haven't seen change in far too long. So the party will love her." Although Fitz says this while Olivia is elsewhere, it is clear through the narrative that Olivia and Fitz discussed their options and the role of race in their relationship.

That she's a Republican. I'm personally not Republican but for the show's purposes I really enjoyed that. I think it's just funny. So I was like yes. No, in real life but yes, for the show.

Pope's conservative leanings, for Starbucks Cup are acceptable and interesting as long as they remain confined in a fictitious world. Outside of that, the implications for Black women's lives and relational qualities end. These sentiments mirror those of Aishah Shahidah who argued Pope's political leanings were deceptive and problematic. Pope's politics, her ongoing affair with the Republican President, and lack of realistic political ramifications obscures the consequences conservative politics have on Black women's bodies and lives. For Aishah, the show imbued Pope with liberalism, effectively masking clear conservatism. As Renee and Eliza argue, Pope, the fictitious representation of Judy Smith who is a co-executive producer on *Scandal,* is a public relations consultant with conservative leanings. For Aishah, Smith's history and persona are "*very* problematic." Not only did Smith readily work for multiple conservatives and conservative groups, "Bush I, Clarence Thomas, Contras, BP Oil Spill, on and on and on," she also "was/is not on the (radical) Left side of justice but the (rabid, my words) Right (wing) side of (IN)justice." Because Pope's character and potential cases draw from Smith, Aishah concludes neither Smith nor "Pope represent the progress that I believe so many people literally fought and died for." Both Aishah and Starbucks Cup saw a problematic construction and misrepresentation of Black women's positionalities and overarching experiences.

The vast majority of media attention and national conversations surrounding Blacks in politics focus on the Democratic Party and liberal standpoints. As more Black Republicans gain positions in politics and advance perspectives on conservative networks, like Fox News, they tend to be men. Audiences thus, according to Starbucks Cup and Aishah have a greater likelihood to read liberalism onto the bodies of fictional characters when clear political

76

alignment fails. However, participants read Rhimes' intention in creating Pope as a way to create

a character that is powerful, commanding and politically ambiguous. Her characterization allows

for a new and divergent way of seeing and reading Black women in media. Although we cannot

know Rhimes' intention in creating characters without a clear political alignment, the

conversations her decisions generate provide the possibility to move the conversation about

Black women's representations forward. For instance, as Spartan contends, Rhimes' character

muddies the water of political representation and perception of Black women's allegiances,

while it also challenges how we read and understand racial representation in media. Blue,

responding to Spartan's concern continued,

> What I appreciate... And I think this sort of like –some of the critique is coming from
> expectations and what we have in terms of expectations of women– Black women, White
> women, but definitely Black women.
>
> Black women in Black communities are supposed to be a pillar. They're supposed to be
> overly moral. We're supposed to be the moral compass of the community, right. So for
> this Black woman to be a politician, similar to the way in which the Black community
> historically has critiqued Condoleezza Rice.
>
> And that's a whole other thing, right. As much as I have problems with her political space
> or her political views and sort of the power that she had and the way in which she
> exercised it, I can't get away from the fact that this was a powerful Black woman. And
> she worked in a system.
>
> What I appreciate about Shonda Rhimes is that she shows that this system is corrupt.
> There's nothing Olivia Pope can actually do that would be –even when she tries to do
> good– there's always corruption there because the political system is corrupt.

For Blue, like Marie Wallace, Rhimes' character construction demonstrates clear intention:

through popular characters, individuals must navigate and discuss the influence of race, politics

and gender in contemporary society. These conversations, made possible through her obscure

characters provide space to confront undergirding beliefs about Black women's positionalities,

devaluing, and social experiences of oppression.

As conversations within focus groups shifted in their negotiation of Rhimes' intentions in creating a frustratingly complex character, Jazzy and Sarafina made connections between Pope's supposed liberal leanings and digitally mediated debates about the importance of presenting Blackness, and what that should/could look like. These narratives included the push for a monolithic Blackness. Blue found debates that presupposed Pope's liberalism and lack of 'Blackness' resultant from her ambiguous affiliations as analogous to narratives surrounding Condoleezza Rice. Rebecca argued that despite problems with *Scandal*, Pope's representation of Blackness including her political affiliations presented something "truly different." She continued that while she supported "reading black representations historically," she believed that meant "that all of us, and not just characters on TV, need to constantly craft identities where we are reacting to the possibility that we will be read that way. And maybe we do. But part of the fantasy of Scandal [sic] for me is that she doesn't."

Pope, although she is a Black woman who in theory shares in the social experience of exclusion and oppression, does not live within a world punctuated by race. Instead, for Rebecca and Blue, Rhimes intentionally created a character that challenged the mapped construction of Black femininity where race and gender punctuate and permeates their everyday lives. Rebecca sees Pope as a woman lacks structural constraints, similar to her White counterparts in television shows like *Revenge*, *Sex and the City*, and *Nashville*. These conversations provided additional debates surrounding Rhimes' intention and the role of racial representation in media.

For Blue, Spartan, Renee, and Alicia shows with White female leads, unlike shows operate outside controlled expectations of 'culture' or social experiences of exclusion and oppression. Further, expectations for shows and character construction exist outside the expectant certainty that an image would accurately portray White culture. Within conversations

78

that examined Rhimes' intention in removing the prospect of Black culture within the show, participants debated contemporary challenges that *Scandal* exists within a post-racial fantasy. Some argued that the fantasy of post-racialism existed outside the contemporary parameters and meant something different to Black women.

Diva B. linked claims of post-racialism and controlled character construction arguing, Pope is not a "representation of all Blackness, and she most certainly isn't a symbol of and -racial anything." Because, "if one simply searched the Scandal hashtag on Twitter every Thursday night" they would "find the thousands of tweets basically calling Olivia a "nigger" whore for having sex with a [fictional] White man." Diva B noted that while Twitter and other digitally mediated spaces debate Pope's interactions, motivations, and sexual relationships, "No one is talking about how White Carrie Bradshaw is when she's writing sex columns and chopping down a man named Mister Big." Similarly, Tarani Joy saw Olivia Pope's construction as controlled by assertions of 'relatable' and readable Blackness that restrict actresses, representations and create one-dimensional characters.

> …We have to be careful that we're not holding up Scandal or its characters and their characterizations up to some higher standard of entertainment just because it stars a Black woman, who I think is the rightful protagonist [sic]. There are plenty of things wrong with the show, as riveting as it is, and it's unfair to shine a light on how the Black characters are mischaracterized without also recognizing other obvious flubs…[24]

For Tarani Joy and Diva B., Pope's character presents a space for careful critique that acknowledges the problematics while addressing the ways it diverges from stereotypical constructions. Their narratives point to the problematics with representations of Black women on screen, specifically the desire of some in the Black community to control images and

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[24] Tarani Joy notes the supposed other children the President has, who had at this point, yet to appear on the show. The president's children did not appear until season 3 episode 15, March 27, 2014. This article and its comments appeared a year earlier, in February 2013.

representations while arguing for more diversity and simultaneously clinging to a potentially monolithic image. Similarly, Spartan noted a friend of hers, a Black man, recently stopped watching *Scandal* because he found Pope's behaviors problematic, namely that she continued her affair with the President. This friend, as Spartan argued, continued watching Revenge and other shows that presented White women in similar, if not worse, situations. For Spartan's friend, the difference between *Scandal* and *Revenge* is the expectation that Black women remain 'respectable' and confine themselves to demure and chaste interactions (Higginbotham 1992).

Whitley, Blue, and Alicia and Tarani Joy agreed with Diva B. that although Pope's character draws from Smith's experiences, she is not "a representation of all the hopes and dreams of a people. She's a character on a TV show we use for escape once a week. Nothing more." However, as Renee argued, the control over Black women's bodies both within Black culture and within the framework of racism and the white racial frame, means representations are never 'just' images and "nothing more." This frame, according to Berger (1997) relies upon the faulty assumption that duplicitous words and images exist outside race and racial representations. As such, images of Black women within this frame refutes the possibility of 'just being;' instead, Black women in media exist as symbolic representations that often stand as reality.

(un)Intentionally black

Several participants debated the importance of the (potentially) intentional construction of Pope as a Black woman who has the ability to 'just exists.' Ann Woods, in discussing Pope's demeanor, quirks, and her relationships found her presentation of Blackness, including her politics and relationships relatable. She continued,

> All "points" listed above perfectly describe the crazy, immoral acts that real human beings will do for lust, love and power. If you don't think that this kind of stuff doesn't go on in D.C. or any other urban center of the world, you are clearly living a small-town life of religious seclusion in a rural area where handing out moral judgements [sic] of other

people are an entertaining pastime. As for me, well, I'm probably a terrible, cynical person in my own right who enjoys watching the foibles of my fellow humans. I can certainly relate.

For Ann, the relatability of *Scandal* surrounds its cynical nature and presentation of politics. Pope's character construction and interpersonal interactions represented 'real' life, resonating in ways other shows could not. Despite the allure of the show, including the potential for relatable representation, participants found Pope's representation most often missed the mark. Vanessa, Blue and Marie Wallace contended that her class and her upbringing placed her outside the parameters of relatability. Pope grew up in upper echelon of socioeconomic status, attained an Ivy League education, and works for the DC elite. Whitley, providing further evidence quoted Rowan (Eli) Pope's saying, Pope went to school with kings.[25]

Marie Wallace, following her interview sent an email with some concluding thoughts on Pope's relatability to Blackness. After watching an episode of Issa Rae's *Ratchet Piece Theater*[26] where Rae deconstructed the theme of "started from the bottom, now I'm here" in rap music, she found parallels to the conversation of Pope's relatability. She continued, Rae's piece

> Got me thinking about our discussion about resiliency and Olivia's relatability. I also was listening to the Black National Anthem and I feel that it, particularly the version with all three stanzas, really emphasizes resiliency and triumphing against the odds, etc. I wonder if perhaps Olivia's reliability is impacted by her inability (I would argue) to triumph in the same way. She grew up privileged. While she may be a Black woman in an environment typically dominated by white men, she is exactly where her upbringing intended her to be.

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[25] "…I have worked for every single thing I have ever received. I have fought and scraped and bled for every inch of ground I walk on. I was the first in my family to go to college. My daughter went to boarding school with the children of kings! I made that happen" (IMDB 2012; Wikia 2015b).

[26] Issa Rae, the writer and producer of the web series turned book, *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* also hosts the series, *Ratchet Piece Theater*. A play on *Masterpiece Theater*, *Ratchet Piece* features Rae deconstructing lyrics to popular 'hood' or 'ratchet' music she or audience members suggest. For more information or to watch an episode, please see: http://www.issarae.com/services-view/ratchetpiece-theater/

Comparatively, although not much of his backstory is known, Papa Pope talks about working hard so Olivia could have everything. I think in terms of race, Papa Pope is more relatable as a Black character, despite his other attributes that diminish his relatability. As evil as he may be, his power is unparalleled and thus, he's an example of the "now we're here" part of the theme.

Like Marie Wallace, Vanessa and Cecilia saw Pope's father as a strong presentation of Blackness that created points of relation. Cecilia and Eliza noted that Black men face increasing discrimination within the United States, their bodies policed and violated for existing. Both Cecilia and Eliza have Black children, they see the parallels between Rowan's story and his struggle to achieve economic success as similar to their experiences and struggles they face. Imani and Sarafina, who both agreed that Black men face distinct experiences of racism, also noted that these narratives silence Black women's experiences and ignore violence done to their bodies.

Despite the seeming importance of the 'bottom to the top' narrative, it remains one-dimensional and controlling, as it does not account for *all* Black experiences. For Samantha and Vanessa, cultural Blackness and struggle, though part of a narrative they have experience with is not relevant to their current lives, or their recent family history. Though it is important for some to find readability in Pope's experiences, including the social experience of exclusion the direct correlation to lower class, or class aspirations remains a contested issue. For some, like Blue and Marie Wallace the necessity of the narrative demarcates a space of Blackness that removes relatability and the ability to 'just be' and exist within a space free of specified racial signifiers. As Eliza, Vanessa and Renee Rhimes' construction of a character that lacks girlfriends to gossip with, no Black friends, nor does she have (non-terrorist/command) family to call for support removes moments of relatability. When race fails to create moments of relatability for participants, they look for other spaces, most finding none.

The question I came to in each group surrounded participants' choice(s) to continue

watching despite the lack of relatability. I wondered, at times asking participants what kept them

invested. At times, these conversations occurred spontaneously, without the need for a prompt.

In either instance, participants' responses remained similar: they noted that Pope's wardrobe, her

confidence to 'handle' situations, and her charisma created moments of relatability irrespective

of Rhimes intent. As walterrhett noted while discussing the cinematographic quality of *Scandal*,

> Each episode has its own pace and visuals; other series repeat cliches [sic]. She (Rhimes)
> innovatively dresses Liv in great clothes; the show's site has message boards devoted to
> her choices and style. Fashion resonates with her audiences. She turns out weekly trunk
> shows.

The message boards walterrhett refers to remain consistent over *Scandal*'s four seasons. In

September 2014, through Rhimes' collaboration[27] with *The Limited*, viewers gained the

possibility to dress and embody Pope. Whitley, like walterrhett found Pope's wardrobe a

consistent point of conversations in digitally mediated spaces, and a narrative that created

relatability and commonalty between differing audiences. Whitley continued,

> Speaks to how well dressed she is that now there's a clothing line: The *Scandal* clothing
> line. When was the last time that happened on television that you have this *bad*- dressed
> black woman and now everybody wants to dress like her? Now it's going to cost you
> $200 to buy that shirt she had on, but at the same time...

Despite the expensive nature of the clothing line, it remains 'worth it' as it proffers the

possibility to embody Pope's charisma and power. For Blue, Marie Wallace, Imani and Whitley

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[27] The collaboration between Rhimes and the Limited provides fans the opportunity to 'dress'
like Washington. Some clothing featured on the show is available on the Limited website the day
after the episode airs. The Times article announces the line official hit stores with the apt subtitle
"You too can look like Olivia Pope" http://time.com/3421614/scandal-olivia-pope-clothing-line/.
The Cosmopolitan article "I Tried on the New "Scandal" Clothes in Hopes of Becoming a
Gladiator: Did it Work? Am I now Olivia Pope?" features the writer trying on clothes and
discussing how they made her 'feel.'
http://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/celebs/a31446/trying-on-the-scandal-clothes/. As
the winter season ended, The Limited remained true to promoting the link between fashion and
Pope through merchandising its sale: "Winter Fashion Finale: New Styles Return February."

Pope's wardrobe personifies the "je ne sais quoi" quality of an "it girl" that generates desire and

relatability. The popularity of the clothing line, based upon participant narratives extends beyond

the show and Pope's character. Rather than the desire to *embody* Pope, participants want to be

the 'it girl,' the girl whose race operates secondary to her life, and who has men orbit her as if

she were the sun. Part of this surrounds Kerry Washington's portrayal of Olivia Pope, which is

intentional. Rhimes selected Washington over Gabrielle Union for a reason –part of which

according to Marie Wallace and Renee stemmed from her ability to exist outside of Blackness

and her ability to feed into a post-racial fantasy.

Part of the draw is the alluring idea that one can *handle* their situations with the same

power and commanding presence. Blue, after her recent career change saw Pope's style as

inspirational and empowering. For Blue, Pope's wardrobe in tandem with her strut exudes

confidence. The change in careers led to apprehension, and the realization that she required a

different style of confidence in her new job. As she sought out models or potential inspiration for

her new surroundings, she centered on Pope. A large part of the allure of Pope's wardrobe

surrounds the fantasy her life provides. Her wardrobe is emblematic of the possibility to exist

outside the punctuated silence of race; to exist in a space not defined by racial (discussion/battle)

fatigue syndrome.[28]

Pope's wardrobe, despite Rhimes' intentionality sells the possibility of post-racialism. A

post-racialism that is distinct from the colloquial and academic arguments of clear racist and

sexist discourses masked within seemingly benign racial language. The fantasy Blue wants to

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[28] For a humorous take on this that centers on Black women, please see:
https://www.facebook.com/fusionmedianetwork/videos/1186695448023098/?pnref=story. For
scholarly works on racial battle fatigue that includes Black women's experiences, please see the
edited volume: Martin, Jennifer L., ed. 2015. Racial Battle Fatigue: Insights from the Front Lines
of Social Justice Advocacy. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

surrounds her career changes, it surrounds the flux her life exists within, and it surrounds the desire to find and embody strength, power, and success. In her previous job, Blue experienced narratives that reduced her to merely the "diversity" hire; that clearly demarcated her position and space as Black and as inferior. Pope, a strong, empowered, sexual, and enigmatic woman existed in a space outside of this, "she can just be." For Blue, while Pope is "always already" a Black woman, she exists in a space where her race is visibly invisible. Pope exists in a stratosphere where her race and its intersection with her gender remain intangible –she does not have girlfriends whom she discusses racism and sexism with; she does not have consistent moments where she is forced to contend with others' assertions and expectations of her body based upon her race.

The tension created within Blue's career –between how she saw herself as a scholar and a human being versus how others at work treated her– removed the possibility for Blue to "just be." Instead, through consistent engagement with others of varying racial, ethnic, and genders she could not 'just be' Blue, a great academician and colleague. As Blue, like Whitley and Renee and Jazzy watched *Scandal*, they found moments of relatability that allowed her to envision a world where she could just exist, just be a woman, without being a *Black* woman. In these moments, Blue found hope for a future where her racial fatigue syndrome could cease, where she could simply exist like her White counterparts. Blue actively acknowledges that the post-racial lens she finds appealing in *Scandal* is a fantasy, and one that is not easily obtainable. However, the specter of Pope, the creation of the *Scandal* clothing line at a major store, and the continual obsession surrounding Pope in non-digitally and digitally mediated spaces points to its possibility. That possibility and the hope for a moment where Blue can find value and recognition regularly in her life remains important and aspirational.

For others the *Scandal* line merely represented a 'bad' wardrobe and the possibility to engender power, prestige, and swagger. While participants debated the accessibility of the wardrobe, including cost and sizes, Jazzy argued Michelle Obama's style of dress and persona provided greater access and relatability. Mrs. Obama wears up and coming designers and some clothing that one could purchase it without a high paying job. Whitley, responding to Jazzy's continued,

> Michelle Obama buys clothes from Target so she's a lot more accessible than Kerry Washington but at the same time again, you created a Scandal line at pretty much a realistically accessible store. The price may not be accessible but the store is definitely accessible.

Although places Pope shops are not easily accessible, her wardrobe nonetheless lends itself to relatability. The creation of *The Limited's Scandal* line for Whitley and Starbucks Cup, although still slightly out of reach, presents a more attainable option. *The Limited's* prices do not approximate high-end stores; they do however require some disposable income: collarless capes $200-250; dresses $130-$200; sweaters $80-150; shirts $40-100 (Limited 2015). Despite the prices currently out of range for participants' budgets, Whitley, Starbucks Cup, Blue and others agreed they would purchase items. Most participants thought gift cards and presents would facilitate the purchase of clothing, with a few willing to use credit cards. Sarafina, who unlike other participants did not find her clothing and lifestyle relatable and had no real desire to purchase clothing from the line. She continued,

> I mean, you [mentioning other focus group members] shop at the Limited all the time? No. Exactly. No, you will not catch me doing that. …I pay you in cable money to watch the show, to tap into your show, to access your genius. I am not going to go to a store that I do not, well first of all that would run my check. That I don't go to at a regular basis.

> This is where you disconnect from me, Olivia Pope. This is where we are disconnected. This is where I do not see you as 'like me.' Period. Like I said, there's that issue there too…The women who are connecting to this show are not able to afford [the clothing]. *What?* No! Uh huh. I ain't buying that.

And it pisses me off that that's where the clothing line is. Like, if you're going to have one and you know who really supports your shit, you might need to have it where they can afford that and go purchase it. I wish I would, girl. Please. If you ever hear something like that from me, come get me.

Olivia Pope clothing line? Olivia Pope isn't even a real person! She is not a real person. When she takes the character off, she carries herself home as Kerry Washington. I am not spending $200, $100. That is a lot of dough; I am not spending... Nope. [Extended laughter.]

Sarafina's hesitation in purchasing clothing from The Scandal line, and more importantly because it is solely available at *The Limited*, stems from her perception of the show and Pope's character. The presentation of Pope, although it is interesting and provides a disruption from intentional silencing, remains unrealistic and constrained in some respects. Sarafina noted previously that,

There is a positive representation or a positive presentation of a Black femininity [in *Scandal*]. She's a powerful woman. She's doing things in ways that *she* does them…but where is the source of her power? It's the sexual relationship with this married man.

I mean, he's actually the president. He's actually empowered. The only reason you got some power is because of your coochie. So it's not that you are actually the shit. You're good at managing and dealing with shit. And what you do is lie to the public. Your white is so dirty! You always have on white, but it's so dirty.

But at the same time, to see a Black woman that is in a television show on a weekly basis who isn't powerless…who is actually getting shit done. Who at least in appearance is in some control over her life and who can dress fly [is important].

As we continued to discuss the clothing line and its relationship to the lead character and writer, Sarafina's joking tone changed. At first, she found the choice of *The Limited* problematic, but amusingly so. However, after I mentioned the social stream available on *The Limited*'s website featuring women wearing the clothing with hashtags like "#It'sHandled," "#GladiatorsInSuits," and "#OliviaPopeStyle," she questioned the show and in turn clothing line's relatability and accessibility to Black women. Sarafina considered the implications of accessing the potentially

empowering clothing line. She respected Rhimes and what she attempted to do for Black women in media and society. Sarafina continued,

> That [the partnership with The Limited] also speaks to Shonda Rhimes too and how she sees the audiences and who she wants to tap in to. Because that line should have been at JC Penny or some place that somebody could actually go.

> Granted the show is upper class. I didn't know the name of wine until I started working at Olive Garden. …Most of us are not living like that, having a '73 Chateau every night. Now I'm upset because, see, realism. It's being real.

> The reality is that I got excited about a character because I hadn't seen anything like this before. I hadn't seen a character that was a Black woman who had a team working under her. Right? That kind of thing. So I got excited. I also got excited because Shonda Rhimes is a Black woman and she's writing the show. I thought she had a deep understanding [of Black women's positionality and access]. But now I don't know.

Perceptions surrounding the relatability of *Scandal,* its lead character and head writer and co-executive producer remained varied across participants. Some saw the lack of race, or meaningful presentation of race that represent their experiences as constraining. Others found Pope's power and confidence enabled their ability to relate and in turn provided some positive recognition –there is a clothing line after all. Still others questioned how Pope attained her position and power, and in turn what the clothing line and the show celebrated and if that was something that Black women could afford to relate to or attempt to embody. Despite contention and debate surrounding Pope's relatability, participants and those in digitally mediated spaces found her image and the desire to relate meaningful and important.

Representing Fictional Realities

As participants discussed the control over relatable representations, conversations turned to comparisons between fictional characters and "reality" show characters. These conversations addressed the potential influences conversations had on perceptions of Black femininities. Participants noted Black women Mona Scott-Young (e.g. *Love and Hip Hop* franchise) and

Shaunie O'Neal (*Basketball Wives*) are the executive producers[29] for the most popular reality television shows featuring minority-led casts hosted on VH1. When discussing representation of Black femininities in *Love and Hip Hop*, *Chrissy and Mr. Jones*, *Basketball Wives* other reality TV shows with minority casts participants questioned the ways networks and producers edited shows to represent controlled and monolithic construction of Black femininities. In this section, I address the conflict between fictional characters on scripted series in comparison to controlled representations of "real" Black women on (semi-scripted) reality television shows.

Reality television, although promoted as 'real' is semi-scripted. The women on the shows present their versions of reality, some as extravagant vacationers (*Real Housewives* franchise), others as celebrity wives, girlfriends or music industry artists (*Basketball Wives* and the *Love and Hip Hop* franchise). According to Goldman (2013), televised reality soap operas, or soaps like the *Real Housewives* and *Basketball Wives* are simulated real life events and dramatized reconstructions that incorporate suitably edited material. The suitably edited images present controlled constructions of Black women's bodies through a fixed gaze. For Black women, these images are strong, loud, angry and hypersexual. The women on reality programs at times cry foul when presented on television, their images edited to fit the mold of a dominant gaze. Although *Scandal* is a fully scripted series based on the experiences and life of Judy Smith, its basis in 'reality' could present itself in a way that reads as 'real.' Further, individuals' ties with television characters humanize them, creating ties between the viewer and the character that mirror real connections or attachment, which include love, trust and believability (Gardner and Knowles 2008; Reeves and Nass 1996).

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[29] For more information on Shaunie O'Neal as an executive producer see http://www.vh1.com/shows/basketball_wives/season_4/cast_member.jhtml?personalityId=14818#moreinfo. For information on Mona Scott-Young, her production company and the shows she produces see http://monamient.com/shows/.

The similarities in construction between *Scandal* and *Love and Hip Hop* as nightly soap operas or telenovelas generate comparisons. As such, similar to Docusoaps, *Scandal* could have the "power to educate its audiences about various topics while also perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing dominant ideologies" (Goldman 2013:17). Eliza, Cecilia, Imani, and Sarafina agreed that new 'reality' stars influence the representation of Black women in media in negative ways. For Eliza, the lines between fiction and reality became "blurred. Like there are no boundaries." Although Eliza does not enjoy reality television, in a follow up interview she noted that she watched the shows "on purpose" to understand what Black women "look like on television." Imani described the presentation of Black femininities on television, specifically reality television saying,

> Yea, and some of them are groupies, side pieces and mistresses and the fact that that the way they're representing Black women seems to be more infantile. Like we we're 40-something–years-old and we're jumping on the table and stamping each other's eyes out, like really?

> You know in real life, when we can get arrested and have a record, but that doesn't get shown on television and that's why I say it's sub-fictional. Because technically when you're an adult you have consequences that go with it and they don't show you all the consequences. And it's for pure entertainment and let's touch on some of these.

> I have friends who actually sit and watch these women every week they come on. And I'll catch it, when I go back to New York I have access to everything, and by that I mean I have all the cable channels. When I get there, I'm like 'this is what we're doing?' this is disappointing. I go right back to the stuff that I like, and the stuff that I watch. I don't know.

> I think reality TV and the way it's set up has shown a very fictional representation of Black women and at this point it seems like it's just one pattern, it's not a range and that's just the genre.

Despite the large and diverse range of channels, Imani argued images across the spectrum continue to depict constrained presentations of Black women's femininities that align with

negative actions and tropes. These actions often highlighted on reality television shows impact perceptions of Black women.

Marie Wallace noted her frustration in digitally mediated conversations that drew comparisons between reality television and Scandal where narratives argued both presented and glamorized the 'side piece' and a the Jezebel. Although Marie Wallace sees Pope's character as fictional, placing her outside judgment parameters used for reality television stars, she acknowledged that with fewer (non-controlled) representations Pope's behaviors (affair/simultaneous relationships) influence perceptions of non-fictional Black women. Although she, like Alicia and Traci found clear distinctions between Pope's choice to continue an affair with Fitz and the "shenanigans" on reality television, she concluded that Pope's affair and inability to fix her life caused harm and complicated positive representation and recognition. Within debates participants like Marie Wallace experienced dissonance.

Marie Wallace like Samantha, Vanessa and Alicia took issue Pope's affair. For some, the problems stemmed from religious conflicts, the intentional breaking of vows, while others found her messiness annoying. Despite the rationale, the dissonance remained, caused participants to question their dedication to the show, and continued viewership. To avoid continued dissonance while maintaining viewership, participants actively avoided conversations that pointed to Pope's problematic behaviors. They also avoided internal dialogue about episode or character interactions that would lead to interrogations of problematic behaviors. It is important to note that while participants actively avoided spaces of discomfort to continue watching the show, they remained cognizant of their choice and at times questioned whether they would continue watching. At the close of data collection, one participant's dissonance remained ever-present, leading her to discontinue watching the show. Before she discontinued her viewership, she like

Marie Wallace, Starbucks, Traci and others gained a sense of value and recognition from Pope's

image, or more specifically from the heightened focus on a powerful, intelligent, and beautiful

woman. Vanessa explained her dissonance saying,

> …I don't like the fact that she's some guy's mistress and one of the newer representations of a Black woman leading the show, you have to see her. Oh, she's the other woman but I ignore some of those aspects of her personality and I don't get into discussion with people about that because I'm like A, it's fictional. So, as much as you can say oh my god, the black woman's the white guy's mistress, I try to remember that it's not a real person. It's a character and I just try to look at the positive side of it…

In comparing fictional representations to Docusoaps, Vanessa argues, Pope's interactions with

her love interests are problematic, much like relationships presented on reality television shows.

> We're never going to see I think –or we're probably getting to that place to see as we talked about black women characters. It's almost like being a black woman who's married, who's happy, who's in love with her husband, who has two to three kids, who even works, has a job, and takes care of themselves, in reality TV we know that's super boring.

> The basketball wives that don't get on there acting crazy and they're just like I got to go pick my kid up from school. You know what? They're not on the show anymore. They're just featured because they're actually a wife and they're just a regular person living but it's like you got to be hitting people upside the head with bottles and throwing stuff and doing something crazy to get attention.

Others questioned negative critiques about Pope's sexuality, and pointed to the perceived lack of

critique in digitally mediated spaces. They argued a clear difference exists in the influence

fictional characters have in comparison to representation of 'real' Black women. As Kim argued,

> Why people have a problem with a well-executed script, great direction, actors and story flow on a fictional show but no problem with black folk acting a fool on reality shows is what worries me. Why aren't we concerned with those shows? Those are supposed to be real and we have no issue with those?!?!

> Do they really show "us" in the best possible light? Do they really keep from stereotypical anything? NO! Until we have a serious look at "reality" television and why everybody wants to be on it and Lord knows just about anyone can get a TV show if they are crazy enough, then to pick apart a show like Scandal is really hilarious.

> Scandal is written to entertain, not to teach or make political commentary although it gets its digs in each week. It was designed because the real life Olivia Pope is a bad mama jama – note she is an executive producer and while I am sure the names have been changed to protect the innocent or guilty, I often wonder how many of her real-life cases make it into the storylines…

For Kim individuals in digitally mediated spaces remove the fictitious parameters of *Scandal*, and judge Pope as if she was a real Black woman. Like Marie Wallace, Kim refuses to engage in conversations with others who fail to see the differences between the two, or who belittle the achievements Shonda Rhimes made in creating the character Olivia Pope and the show *Scandal.*

GFusion, like Kim and Marie Wallace argued individuals should analyze Scandal with the same lens as other fictional shows and stop comparing Pope to reality television characters.

> What is odd to me is the almost cult-like following of Black people & Black women in particular who praise Olivia Pope as "Boss/Bawsr [sic] B" then turn around & call the same type of dysfunctional characters on reality shows ratchet. How do we preach that this is just a show & does not need the over-analysis of it, yet we rake Tyler Perry over the coals over-analyzing [sic] everything he does when in reality his shows/ films have given more jobs to Blacks & contributed more to Black people than this show or any of Shonda Rhimes' shows have or will probably ever do. We are a hypocritical bunch.

GFusion, like Kim, Marie Wallace, Renee and Whitley, notes that *Scandal*, despite comparisons to reality television shows operates outside controlled narratives associated with other fictional Black-lead centered shows. Although GFusion conflates and reduces complex problems their narrative points to discrepancies in media presentations and representations of Black culture and control over Black femininities and Black women's social behaviors. Perhaps because few shows present a Black female lead on mainstream and primetime television, individuals remain uncertain how to categorize the show, respond to its characters, and conflate fictional and reality comparisons. Despite the lack of clarity on how to respond to images and the differences between reality television programing and fictional programming, participants and those in

digitally mediated spaces remained consistent in their attempts to read Rhimes into the show and character development.

Reading Rhimes, Reading Intentionality

Within narratives in digitally mediated spaces and focus groups, debates surrounded responsibility in creating characters that expand definitions of Blackness. Individuals also questioned the control over fictional character's bodies, arguing they should exist as fiction and outside the confines of 'reality.' For instance, Diva B. argued that Olivia Pope's fictional representation must exist outside the parameters of 'responsibility;' that Pope should not exist as an idealized image bound within the parameters of respectability or monolithic Blackness. Writers and producers challenge the control of dominant constructions of Blackness and expand the representations of Black bodies. Within narratives, individuals posit that viewers are equally responsible for reading representations, expanding the parameters of Blackness, and challenging controlled representations. Along the same lines of reading characters and shows responsibly, Whitley, Blue, and Marie Wallace note when it comes to *Scandal* and Pope's representation of Blackness, they intentionally seek out articles on Rhimes' writing habits, her rationale for character construction, and follow her tweets. These behaviors provide context and influence their understanding of racial representations in *Scandal.*

Marie Wallace contends that Rhimes' shows (e.g. *Grey's Anatomy* and *Private Practice*) have cult-like following because they rely on open casting[30] and regularly challenge controlled constructions through interracial and gay relationships. Starbucks Cup and Whitley continued

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[30] Open casting occurs when writers create characters outside the parameters of race. Through open auditions, the writers and producers then select the actor that best portrays the character. Although this process does not negate the possibility of racial biases, it does limit the control over character development and presentation.

that Rhimes' long-running series'[31] exist because she takes the audience on a roller coaster ride

that flips the standard format of characters and reframes racial and gender relations. Despite

participants' understandings of race within *Scandal*, and their active interrogation of Pope's

Blackness, some in digitally mediated spaces like Guest360 believe Rhimes' representations that

operate outside controlled representations of Blackness are indicative of her desire to "create a

post-racial society." For Guest360 the limited representations of racial dynamics and experiences

of racism within *Scandal* is "how the world should be." Guest360, unlike focus group and

interview participants appreciates that "Shonda makes it a point of not including race in her

shows," which for them is "how the world should be." Guest360, like others in digitally

mediated spaces, reading race into the show through active engagement with Rhimes' writing

style and her thoughts on the intersectionality of race with power, gender, and class remains

limited.

In contrast to Guest360's assertion, participants saw intentionality in Rhimes' subterfuge

surrounding race, and the potential post-racial frame a product of structures, or the writer's room

(Henderson 2011). Although they lacked clear understanding of Rhimes' perceptions on race,

racism and its intersection with gender and sexism, they argued her experience as a Black

woman punctuated her writing and her character development. Some argued that while Rhimes'

actively wanted to create clear and potentially consistent conversations surrounding race, or

experiences of racism and sexism in Pope's life, doing so would limit the show's appeal and

ensure its cancellation. Though Blue and Renee, like Guest360 appreciated the limited

representation of 'Blackness' in *Scandal* they disagreed that media or life should exist within this

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[31] Greys Anatomy is in its eleventh season, Private Practice ran for 6 seasons, Scandal is in its fourth season, and How to Get Away With Murder is moving into season 2.

frame. Instead, their articulation of post-racialism surrounded the ability to experience value and recognition without the specter of race omnipresent in narratives.

Vanessa, Eliza, Renee and Traci argued narratives like Guest360's limited conversations on the social experience of race that challenged their understanding of the world while maintaining social inequality and the experience of social exclusion. Participants whether they articulated a Black woman centric post-racialism or challenged its entirety argued the lack of racial conversations demonstrated the structures of power within media. For instance, Alicia argued Rhimes' limited position as a writer and producer constrains her ability to represent race. She continued,

> So my lens or one of the reasons why I would really engage in watching the show and why I continue to watch the show –obviously, I like the show. But it also has a lot to do with the fact that the writer and producer of the show is Shonda Rhimes. She's a black woman. I feel like I wanna [sic] support her. I wanna know what she's talking about, what she's thinking about and how that's kinda [sic] being perpetuated in the media. So that's kinda like my way.

> But I also think that we have to remember that Shonda Rhimes is not just living on her own little planet. She actually writes for a corporation. She actually has to have her scripts approved. There's a system she's operating in. I will say she does try to sneak stuff in there. And I'm like yes!

> For example, I think it was last season when Olivia's father, Rowan –I think he was either talking to her, Olivia, or he was talking to the president. I actually think he had two separate conversations. One comment he definitely made to his daughter was I told you when I raised you that you're gonna [sic] have to work more hard.

> Basically, I set this up for you –because this is not even the real world. What your experience is, is not even what the average black person's experience is. So he told her that. I'm like yes! I'm so happy –like let's talk about this! And then when he was going off on the president –I think it was an exciting episode. I'm like Shonda was really upset. When he was talking to the president, he was like going off on him. He was saying something like you rich, spoiled, nepotism, blah, blah, blah.

> And I'm like yes; thank you. So now we have laid it out that this is not nonexistent –we are aware that this is going on. She might not thread it into every episode, but it's there. And now that she said it, I'm like okay, good; I'm happy.

For participants, reading Rhimes' narratives surrounding the role and importance of race and gender into the show transforms seemingly insignificant mentions of race (e.g. Pope mentioning Sally Hemings and Cyrus calling Pope "the help"). For those like Whitley and Starbucks Cup, the responsibility to read and understand the role of race within Pope's life and in *Scandal* generally remains within the viewers hands. They find intentionality and representation in Pope's image and within the show. Though they acknowledge the signifier present within their lives impact their ability to 'read' race, they maintain that viewers watching the show –like Guest360– must actively navigate their positionality and their understanding of race within the context of the United States while engaging with the show and its presentation of race and gender. As Alicia and Marie Wallace argue, Rhimes brings politics and "uncomfortable" conversations to the front stage that provides the space for active interrogation of positionality. Within these moments, participants like Alicia find monologues and interactions indicative of Rhimes' intent in bringing race to the forefront while simultaneously pushing audiences to sit with discomfort in a non-confrontational way.

For participants, the interplay between writers, producers, and production companies creates constraints in the presentation and representation of Blackness. This also limits the type of Blackness presented. For Alicia, Samantha, Vanessa and Renee, although Rhimes may create characters that challenge mythical standards and controlled representations, interactions in the writer's room leaves accurate representations of race on the cutting room floor (Henderson 2011). Because the writer's room is a place where racial and gender 'differences' cease to exist, when a writer attempts to bring in personal knowledge that operates outside the parameters of Whiteness, they experience silencing and othering. Henderson continues,

> When othering becomes a method of silencing points of view, the ideas of those who are othered effectively die on the vine. If the other wishes to survive, she or he quickly learns

to present ideas that are acceptable to the more powerful writers in the room. It is this process that leads to the homogenization of ideas.

Othering is a common process; it is pejorative and hegemonic (Henderson 2011:147). Although Henderson's work surrounds half-hour comedies, I argue the process of othering exists in hour-long dramas like *Scandal*. The process of othering mitigates the construction of non-controlled complex characters and maintains the representations of Black women as loud, hypersexual, angry, welfare queens. Thus, the presentation of race and associated intersections with gender remain enmeshed in power dynamics.

Blue argued representations, irrespective of the writer's room, need not present extensive conversations about race, or belabor the point that Olivia is a Black woman: Pope is "always already" a Black woman. Because Pope exists as a Black woman in every interaction, her race and gender remain present in the presentation of her body. Therefore, active and continued representations of the social experience of race are unnecessary. In response to Blue's assertion of an "always already" construction, Sarafina continued,

> It's visible that she's a black woman. And I think that one of the interesting things that Shonda Rhimes does sneak in race in, in very subtle ways –as sort of a smack in the face to those who are racist. In her latest episode, they were talking about her– talking about Olivia Pope as Helen of Troy and how beautiful and all of this stuff.

> And it's sort of this…awkwardly, overtly, and directly addressing the fact that we are reinforcing this Black woman's beauty in a country that they have constantly [diminished/denied it]…

> I'm [Rhimes] just going to subtly put it in your face. It's sneaky as hell. And because it looks on the surface that she's not addressing race at all, but she is subtly doing so. It's wonderful for those of us who are like "Uh-huh, I see it."

For Sarafina, the subtlety of the Helen of Troy narrative refutes the possibility of a post-racial show or fantasy. Black women, barred access to desirable femininity does not exist in media as characters that "men go to war for." Black women may be sexually desirable, but they do not

warrant grand gestures. For Sarafina, Alicia and Spartan race seems inconsequential because

Rhimes, the lead writer and producer of the series presents sparing, brief, and sporadic

monologues about race and the effects of racism. The lack of conversations and few instances

minimizes the reality of race within Black women's lives, which for some (like Guet360) leaves

the impression that race is immaterial to Black women's everyday experiences.

Despite the potential insignificance of race within limited conversations, Sarafina and

Marie Wallace found Rhimes' inclusion of Helen of Troy as an analogous situation

demonstrative of the ways she 'slips' race into the conversation. Marie Wallace continued,

> I like how Shonda Rhimes makes people uncomfortable and then dares them to say anything about it. I love it as far as the race factor goes. So this black, Republican, educated, probably Harvard woman is screwing this White man who happens to be the President of the United States. How many people does that piss off? Let's start with that.
>
> …She [Rhimes] has…had so many interracial couples between the three of her shows. I love it because it makes people uncomfortable and [being] uncomfortable makes you talk about things that you don't want to talk about…
>
> And even with her other shows, with homosexuality and what not… she said, "I don't have gay scenes. I have scenes with people in it and you either like or you don't. You don't have to watch my show."
>
> So I enjoy it –I don't think it's in a post racial fantasy. I mean hey, Abraham Lincoln was having sex with Black people and he had biracial babies. So it's not the first time a White president would have slept with a slave or has slept with a Black person and got some little mixed babies running around.
>
> So I just love the fact that she purposely put this in America's front window. I want to say because of the audience, and I say America because there are White people, and Asian people, Hispanic, and Black people who are consistently tuning in each week to see what Kerry Washington is going to do as Olivia Pope.

For Marie Wallace, Shonda Rhimes engages uncomfortable conversations through her characters

and their everyday interactions. The show represents race, gender, and sexuality in somewhat in

your face and divergent ways that "get people talking." The discomfort experienced when

watching the show provides the possibility for open dialogue, and for Marie Wallace, refutes the possibility that *Scandal* is post-racial.

To ascertain if the subtlety provided accurate presentations for those who operate outside the social experiences of Blackness, I asked participants to consider the role of their lived experience in perceptions and readings of *Scandal*. Most acknowledged that their insider status influenced their reading of *Scandal* and the possibility that accurate representations of Black women's lives. Their status, or "always already" knowledge as Blue termed it provided a lens that deconstructed the subtleties of statements, like "the help" and the "Sally Hemings moment." Spartan, Renee, and Alicia acknowledged their perspectives exited within a particular material space not afforded to those who lack the social experience of exclusion. They argued that experiences in digitally mediated spaces, reminiscent of Guest 360, missed the opportunity to understand the role of race and gender in Black women's lives.

Narratives that deny the reality or importance of racism and sexism on Black women's lives led to participants' continual avoidance of conversations in digitally mediated spaces. Blue and Starbucks Cup argued when individuals argue for the immateriality, or lack of importance of race, they misinterpret the narrative of "the help" and reduce the importance of these narratives to trivial moments that reflect a bygone era. Marie Wallace captured the sentiment of the group when she argued that when individuals "lack of tangible connections" that provide insight into race, they likely lack the ability to "read key moments" that define or exemplify the "culture of Blackness."

Diva B. questioned why people pretended "that we as Black women (and men, as men are fans of the show too) that we somehow equate a fictional character to being the beacon and bastion of which we all aspire???" Rather than attending to the fact that "It's a SHOW,"

individuals should instead "enjoy the [fictional] character." Noting the difference in conversations surrounding White female characters, she argued they exist as fictional entities, without the requirement of readability, as beacons that one aspires towards, or as monolithic constructions. However, when one exists within the confines of a racist and sexist structure that defines and maps bodies without their consent, fictitious presentations "symbolically stand for those who have no voice, on one hand, and to make clear the character of a group of people, on the other" (White 2001:51). The systematic silencing of Black women's voices and experiential knowledge across spaces –digitally and non-digitally mediated– further maps the construction and control of bodies.

Fictitious characters like Pope act as symbolic representations of the culture of Black womanhood. However, through Rhimes' writing and construction, Pope's character and stories are "about the politics of work, sex & power…with a little drama mixed in" (Rhimes 2015). Rhimes, in discussing her writing style and what her 'brain' produces removes race from the conversation. This may be an intentional omission to fit within a narrative of inclusion, one designed to increase her audience. However, the intentional omission surrounding her stories, what her brain writes about, and its importance –the ad is for alzheimer's association– lends some support to the argument that *Scandal* exists within a post-racial fantasy, and that Pope despite her body remains raceless. The danger of this structure, as some participants alluded to, is the maintenance of controlled discourses of Black women's bodies. If Pope's character presents a nuanced and varied construction that challenges controlled images, then the character could open the possibility for redefining Black 'womanhood.' These conversations largely surrounded the challenge to respectability politics that I address in the following chapter, and the presentation of politics, which I address in the following section.

SUMMARY

Discourses surrounding Black women and Black female bodies inscribe sexuality from birth, which places their bodies on the margins or outside the parameters of innocence. In response to this, and as an attempt to gain positive value and recognition, respectability politics push Black women to perform asexuality and manipulate demure actions as a means to gain positive recognition. The effects of respectability politics and the attempt to ensure Black girls' existence outside hyper-sexualization maintain control over Black girls' and women's bodies and perceptions of self and others. For some participants and those in digitally mediated spaces, Pope challenges assertions of monolithic Black culture. She also challenges respectability politics through her choice to engage in two intimate relationships, one with a married man. Though this chapter focuses less on the role of respectability politics, comparisons between Pope and reality television stars points to attempts to control her sexuality and behaviors irrespective of Rhimes' intent in creating the character.

Pope's commanding attention, desire across racial lines, and clear sexuality create a desirable, commanding, and empowering image allows for a momentary suspension of racial fatigue, a moment where one feels that they belong, that their image and their body is the most desired. Within these moments, participants buy into a specific form of post-racialism that alleviates racial fatigue and empowers their interpersonal and professional lives. As such, Pope's influence on Black women's representation and recognition remains important for participants. However, this interaction is not simple or easily accessed. Instead, participants must actively read Rhimes' race and gender into character construction, while imagining (or inventing) intentional moments of racial subterfuge. By reading Rhimes into the narrative, participants find value and recognition into their lived experiences. Their access to signifiers and the always

102

already structure of their lives as Black women generates a sense of pride. Furthered by Washington's "it factor" and media darling status creates a cult like following, which Black women can partake in weekly, finding respect and recognition associated with Black femininity. Women across racial lines attempt to embody a Black woman and "handle" their life through a clothing line. While this may demonstrate the continued obsession with Black culture as inherently 'cool' and fashion forward while denigrating Black women's bodies, for participants it nonetheless influences their perception of value and recognition. Pope's wardrobe, in spite of its inaccessibility in price and sizes remains a space of recognition.

For some, Pope's characterization of Black femininity demonstrates the pervasive nature of archetypal images, specifically the Mammy and Jezebel. Critics[32] of the show question her construction, Rhimes' intention, and the relative impact on perceptions of Black women. Despite disagreement surrounding Pope's representation of Black femininity, Black culture, and the potential for a new 'image,' participants and those in digitally mediated spaces believe Pope's character and Rhimes' writing and producing provide the possibility to change the discursive construction of Black femininity. This possibility could lead to increased access to positive value and recognition of Black women's bodies in media, and in turn influence Black women's experiences in digitally and non-digitally mediated spaces. Some intentionally forgo rationality in their perception of the ways media presents Black femininities, ignoring the lack of relatable characterizations. Others willfully disregard conversations that conflate Pope's character with reality television stars and maintain her fictitious construction places her outside structural and mediated constraints. Irrespective of the aspect they ignore, participants allow their fascination with Pope to overcome them: they live in a brief moment where it is possible to be Helen of

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[32] See Emily Nussbaum's article on "Primary Colors" in the New Yorker http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/05/21/primary-colors

Troy, where it is possible to have millions of women –many White– wanting their life; where they can for a brief moment exist outside the parameters of race.

Olivia Pope embodies the image of a powerful, dominant, beautiful, and sexual woman. Her relatability through wardrobe enhances relatability and provides a sense of self-confidence or air of sophistication that many women across racial lines[33] find appealing. Within these moments it seemed that some lived vicariously through Pope each week. In doing so, they get to have the beauty, the power, the sexiness, the desirability, and that je ne sais quoi that pulls two incredibly powerful men into her circle. The most interesting, and common denominator irrespective of position, is the possibility that Pope's character provides a new way of reading Black femininity on screen. That Pope's construction is in some way unlocks or removes the brackets surrounding acceptable femininity. As participants noted, one cannot underestimate the importance of this key: it provides access to a new writer's room where Black women exemplify full, complex, and multifaceted *human* characters. I address this potential key, or future text, in the following chapter.

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[33] With the advancement of the *Scandal* clothing line and the current trend to post details about one's life through social media, women across the United States post pictures of themselves wearing the clothing line. On the streets of New York, a White woman wears a Pope jacket. In DC, a Black woman wears a jacket and top as she 'handles' her business. Both women embody Pope in their demeanor and dress, handling situations and showing the world their support for Pope and their fashion sense. For images, see the Limited's Social Stream: http://www.thelimited.com/features/the-style-list/social-stream?navid=top

CHAPTER FIVE

MEDIATING SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP: COMPLEX REPRESENTATION, FUTURE TEXTS

AND RECOGNITION

Popular culture, often exported from Black culture, proffers international coolness.

Despite the relative influence of Black culture, including cultural appropriation and cooptation,

Black people continually experience social exclusion and denigration[34] (Cartier 2014; Holland

2012; Toure 2011). For Black women, narratives of exclusion in media gain support from racist

and sexist discourses (Christensen and Siim 2010; Christensen 2009; Holland 2012). As a whole,

through cartographies of knowledge and power, Black women exist in binary opposition to

White women. This opposition confines bodies, sexualities and limits positive recognition

(McKittrick 2006; White 2001). Within the Black community and in direct relation to racist and

sexist cartographies, Blacks of greater socioeconomic means constructed narratives and

behavioral guidelines with the hopes of 'uplifting' and saving lower class Black women from

devaluing. Although designed to limit sexual engagement and promote 'moral' behaviors, these

attempts performed the work of discursive control that maintained social exclusion.

Contemporary Black women entertainers "…embody multiple time-spaces and

problematize what it means to be black and female now" (Cartier 2014:52). Nelson (2002) sees

future texts as reading strategies that provide the tools to unpack ideological norms and struggles

surrounding Black women in media. Cartier applying this analytic strategy to contemporary

Black actresses and entertainers who seemingly expand and challenge the parameters of Black

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[34] For instance, the Kardashian-Jenner girls, Kendall and Kylie receive praise from magazines and popular culture websites for their "epic" cornrows while "waking up like disss," while Black women experience negative sanctions or experience intentional silencing from the same websites and magazines. Please see: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/02/marie-claire-kendall-jenner-cornrows-tweet_n_5078924.html and http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/amandla-stenberg-kylie-jenner_55a28697e4b0ecec71bc5141.

femininity in media, argues characters like Olivia Pope provide new ways to read and interpret the tropes of "black female subjectivity" (Cartier 2014:53). This occurs through writers' active and direct challenges to pathologized and controlled narratives that place Black women's bodies on the margins.

Future text readings directly challenge the structure of power and oppression laden within racialized and sexualized structures, and provide the most effective weapons Black women scholars wield against intersecting oppressions (Cartier 2014:51–53). In doing so, scholars engaging future texts as an analytic strategy redefine Black women's bodies and femininities. They provide new ways to read and recreate mediated constructions; they reframe definitions of acceptability through an autonomous lens that provides value, recognition and access for Black women. As such, future texts have the possibility to create new narratives for Black women. Within digitally mediated spaces and focus groups, self identified Black women present counter narratives that reframe readings and interpretations of mediated (re)presentations. As such, they provide a different lens and analytic space for understanding Pope's character and Rhimes' motivations. These narratives provide the possibility for a type of Black femininity that is multifaceted, messy, and human, or a future text.

My examination of digitally mediated spaces and focus group/interview conversations draws from Nelson's (2002) concept of 'future texts' and Cartier's (2014) expansion of the argument. I use the theme of future texts within this chapter to ascertain if Black women's reading of Pope is an attempt to "release black representations from rigid signifiers, thus allowing them to freely float" and if their interpretations both online and in focus groups and interviews "proffer new paradigms for black women." Finally, drawing from Nelson, I examine

if Rhimes' construction expands, or re-presents and creates "anew the "black" in popular culture" (Nelson 2002:151).

NEGOTIATING FUTURE TEXTS

Within conversations surrounding the potential mis-representation of Black femininity, individuals questioned and debated the need for a new reading of Pope, and for new images that explored the full range of humanity. Pope's race, class, level of power, and sexuality stood at the foreground of these narratives. Her tumultuous relationships, often garnered greater attention when discussing the presentation of humanity. To provide some context to these conversations and the presentation of race, gender, sexuality, and power within *Scandal* I provide an often-discussed scene. In the December 6, 2012 episode "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" Olivia, upset with her current entanglement with Fitz goes to the White House to meet Cyrus. Despite her attempts to avoid Fitz, he begins a conversation surrounding their relationship and her clear avoidance. Pope, clearly frustrated states she is unsure about their relationship and how they "got to this place." Additionally, she "has no words" for their situation, or how she became this (other) woman. Fitz, assured of their love and its correctness indicates all that matters is that they are together. For Olivia, that is not all that matters: he is married and she is in a tenuous position. Noting the power differences and racial dynamics of their relationship, she responds "Really?! Because I'm feeling a little –I don't know– Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson about all of this" (Holmes 2013; Wikia 2015b). This is the first clear mentioning of race and power within the show as it relates to their relationship. It stands as a stark contrast to most scenes that abstain from conversations about racism, sexism, power and patriarchy. With charged words and the

status of the affair unresolved, Pope leaves the interaction. Her weighted words receive

response[35] later that day, while she paces in the White Houses Rose Garden.

> Olivia: Did you need something, Mr. President?

> Fitz: You know you used to sound sexy when you call me Mr. President. Now it sounds like I'm just a gym teacher.

> Olivia: Did you need something, Mr. President?

> Fitz: *The Sally Hemings-Thomas Jefferson comment was below the belt*.

> Olivia: Because it's so untrue?

> Fitz: *You're playing the race card because I'm in love with you? Come on! Don't belittle us. It's insulting and beneath you and designs to drive me away*. I'm not going away.

> Olivia: I don't have to drive you away. You're married, you have children, you're the leader of the free world. You are away, by definition, you're away. You're unavailable.

> Fitz: So this is about Mellie?

> Olivia Pope: No, no.

> Fitz: This is [laughs]. I smile at her and I take off my clothes for you. *I wait for you. I watch for you. My whole life is you, I can't breathe because I'm waiting for you, you OWN me, you control me, I belong to you.*

The interaction between Olivia and Fitz within this episode, specifically Pope addressing her

concerns and Fitz minimizing them mirror and frame their perception; they note a frustration in

watching the scene, that Fitz trivializes Olivia's concerns and demonstrate a distinct power

dynamic in the relationship. Fitz' assertion of his unquenchable desire for Pope belies the subtext

of the Jezebel for others, some noting her skin tone better approximates the Sapphire (Goldman

2014; Harris and Goldman 2014). This scene and others where Pope's certainty fails when

confronted by her lover, for some points to the complexity of loving and intimate relationships

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[35] I use italics to reference the places participants emphasized or indicated had heightened importance.

and presents demonstrates that even strong women are fallible. Embedded within these narratives, irrespective of their discursive tone is an attempt, at times simultaneous to define representations, control recognition and/or facilitate value. This chapter examines the thematic content within narratives that examined Pope's representation, the type of recognition it garners, and its impact on perceptions of Black femininities.

Representing Future Texts or Resubstantiating Controlled Images

Crystal contends that *Scandal* is "Absolutely one of the best shows on tv [sic] right now…it takes a certain level of progress for us to have a Black Woman that powerful be an emotional mess on television". Although viewers may not agree with Pope's behaviors and interactions, Crystal loves "that we can show a gorgeous black woman with so many dimensions on prime time." Like Crystal, participants debated Pope's character and the presentation of Black femininity. Vanessa, Renee and Blue argued Rhimes creates complex and messy characters that require careful readings. Her characters, while they provide some glimpse into lives and interactions, remain bound within fantastical story telling. However, for Vanessa and Renee this provided an avenue to challenge how we think about Black femininity and social interactions. Renee continued,

> You don't know if you're the main chick or the side chick or chick number five when the proportions are so disproportionate, the ratio of men to women. I feel like I know far too many women who have been a relationship with married or separated men, unwittingly and then continue because they're hooked in it. So the thing about Olivia is she walked with eyes wide opening and interaction with the wife. This is real life ya'll. This is what's happening.

> …I think it [the influence of pop culture] does…People consider relationships that they wouldn't consider before because you see media seems to validate what's right. It's sets this barometer for what's cool… I mean pop culture undeniably has an impact. How do people want to model their lives after Olivia Pope now versus before? I think no one goes out thinking I want to be the side piece. I don't think Olivia wanted to be the side piece. Mary Jane [*Being Mary Jane*] definitely didn't want to be the side piece but you have

Mary Jane who has a friend who says "yeah, I've dated a married man; I don't want the drama. I don't need a man coming home to me. I just want the perks."

Like you (Vanessa) said, she wants the effects of it. She doesn't want to be troubled by having this relationship and you say well what does that mean? What's their intrinsic, core thing? …So for everyone who was troubled by the Mary Jane relationship, there's so much more playing out between someone who was on the rise having to take care of a fan, the sick mother, a drug addict brother, a niece who was pregnant and had multiple kids and then still being pulled on.

Olivia…it's fantasy, it's why she doesn't have any family. That's the only fantasy about it. Forget the post race. She ain't [sic] got family. She's not struggling with what is true. …Not having family? Having your mom abandon you because she's a spy (Maya Pope) and your dad (Eli Pope) abandoning you because he's troubled by the fact that his spy wife will never love him. He has to imprison her. I mean that's the fantasy aspect of it. This is an arena that none of us will –few of us will ever touch.

…So I think that the reality is how do people feel about the side chick. That's happening. It's always happened. It's going to keep happening. It's just that now we have the privilege of sitting around here and kinds of testing it, seeing how it feels with our kind of moral compass. What does it mean to be a side chick? I think that the question becomes bigger because she's a person of power and you think that a person has power and privilege that they're smart so they would not choose that.

But that just comes back down to your humanity, your love. You can't help who you love and that doesn't excuse. It doesn't –it's not a justification or condoning the actions but this just shows human nature and how messy it is. So I think these are all reflections. The fantasy is we talk more about it and start to juxtapose it to other shows, she don't have family. How would she be is she was a woman who was anchored by a cousin or a sister or a good friend? She might make different decisions. …Like I said, going back to Shonda Rhimes, she's all about having complicated relationship dynamic.

The fantasy of *Scandal* and Olivia Pope remains bound within the coolness of her persona, the magnetic draw between Olivia and Fitz, and challenges Rhimes provides to one's understanding of right and wrong. Renee does not justify Pope's behaviors; instead, she understands them and sees it as a direct correlation to Black women's off screen lives. She notes her sister currently working in corporate America has dealt with potentially adulterous relationships, unbeknownst to her. Her sister however does not live within a fantasyland: she does not have problematic family relationships like Pope, and has a family and girlfriends like Mary Jane to challenge her choices and provide council. Pope's fantasyland lends itself to the appeal of *Scandal*. It also

provides viewers the possibility to interact and debate the messy aspects of the human condition

–without the confines of controlled discourses or limited representation.

Asha, like Renee, Blue and Starbucks Cup found a multifaceted character in Pope, one

that challenged one-dimensional constructions. Asha continued,

> Too many people (Black people) are focused on Olivia Pope's "Blackness" when if you have a question, you need to address it Shonda Rhimes, the creator and head writer for her show. You know, the one that also wrote Grey's Anatomy (groundbreaking) and Private Practice (also groundbreaking) and now Scandal (groundbreaking and obviously making people feel some kind of way).
>
> The thing is, I remember people talking about Dr. Bailey too on Grey's Anatomy and how "she didn't fit into some type of Black woman box." And do you know the reason for that? It's because we don't belong in a box.
>
> There is no one box we fit into and we can do anything we want. We can be anything we want, and we don't want anyone telling us who we are and who we can be and what we can do, and who we can do it with.. [sic] It's just pathetic that I needed to say that even to members of the Black/African American community. But clearly I did need to say it…

In response to Briauna, Asha continued,

> Refreshing to see a black female written as a person,instead [sic] of the stereotypical caricature which is supposed to define all blackness. It's very clear that Olivia Pope is a black woman from the way she walks to how she interacts with other black characters to her actions (ie [sic] banging on the hood of the car)…it's saddening and disheartening to see that black people are unable to accept a successful, powerful, complex black female.

Asha and Briauna challenge the contrived presentation of Blackness in popular culture and

mediated representations. They see Pope's Blackness without direct monologues because she

carries herself in similar ways. Pope's class and behavior as a successful Black woman challenge

the limits of racial representation where "ratchetness" and Jezebel's reign. "For all her flaws and

complications," Asha concluded "Olivia Pope is a black woman who needs to be portrayed on

screen." Like Asha, Renee saw Pope's character as the representation of real life complexities

and humanity outside the confines of controlled representation. Renee continued,

So what I'm saying is it's happened over, and over, and over again and these are, again, aren't new stories. Bold and the Beautiful. General Hospital. These are not new stories but it's just that we are finally giving the space to freely take on these roles. We have scandals in our backyards all the time and yet when out dirty laundry is aired then we all get uptight but there's scandals happening all the time with us, people of color.

Real life shit that has real life implications and yet we're worried about whether Olivia Pope is a side piece when everyone who commented has either been the side piece, know the friend who's a side piece, or has a man who is cheating on them in some relation with the side piece. So that's humanity. That's men who aren't faithful. That's humankind. People struggle with monogamy. It's just life being played out but when it's brown folks it's problematic.

The struggle with monogamy, sexual relationships and vulnerability presents the reality of

human relationships. It also stands as a challenge to representations of "brown folks" who

experienced mediated exclusion and confined vulnerability. The underlying narratives that

confine Brown and Black vulnerability and non-representational defining adultery, for

Ms_Twisted_N_Turned surround respectability politics. Rather than an image that adheres to a

perfect construct or a controlled presentation of respectable sexuality, Ms_Twisted_N_Turned

wants to see a

Messy life that isn't wrapped up in a neat conventional bow at the end of the season. Show me the complexities of the human condition. Show me people who exist outside of the accepted norm, and how they handle living within a world that has set boundaries that are considered "acceptable."

Later for perfect people, I want to see more people who deeply and unapologetically flawed. People who live within the realm of extreme, where life and death are the decisions that you make.

I like it gritty and down-low. I love being able to root for the "bad-guy guy aka #Papapope.

Save the black-and-white clean endings for the fairy tales we read to children, but give me Scandal in all its gritty, dirty glory.

In conversation with Ms_Twisted_N_Turned, Pennylane22 continued,

> Hear Hear! I cosign completely! Powerful, Brilliant Women can have complex, messy personal lives. We are all human, none perfect and this is Shonda's message in all her shows.

> People are real. If you want perfection and unblemished lives in stories, those start with "Once upon a time.. and end with "happily ever after"... although even those heroines go through "some things" first before the end.

The presentation of messy, imperfect, and blemished characters presents a different image and reading of Black femininity. It sheds light on the actions and narratives that police the borders of social inclusion. Participants like individuals in digitally mediated spaces continually asserted the need for complex, flawed presentations that subtly and overtly challenge dominant gender and racial norms. Pope's character and relationships disallow "happily ever after" narratives. Her representation, similar to Lee's (2010) argument surrounding Janet Jackson, Jill Scott, and Beyoncé shifts the narrative of representation by presenting Black women as desirable fantasy-inducing heroines. This construction and intentional reading of Pope exemplifies messiness and operates as a future text.

Pope's messiness when read as a future text is more than a reformatted controlled image; instead, it is the foundation for human representation, which for Renee

> …is a signature of Shonda Rhimes. And I don't have a problem with seeing the flaws. I think this is dangerous. I think that that's what we see in a lot of characters. You see powerful women across the board in these shows and you start to see them crack because that's real life and I know people who go to the office, on point, and they still ain't [sic] paying rent right. You know what I'm saying? I know these people who are making good money and make jacked up choices. It's like, how? I always talk about them regularly. Like…how are you so smart and so stupid? …So I feel like her [Olivia] character is very spot on. I feel like…no one's perfect and I think to have these kind of complicated characters that gets us kind of off our seat –people feel the same about Gabriella Union's character [Mary Jane in *Being Mary Jane]*. Same thing. Got it going on with a married man.

> …It's either you're not in a relationship so we point to –and again, not a show I watch but *Person of Interest* with Taraji P. Henson… Her character got killed off, but you know. Not in a relationship because they're so focused on their job and they don't show personal life. Or you have the character in [Abby Mills] in *Sleepy Hollow*. Again, *Sleepy Hollow*

is super ultra focused on her personal life. She had a tragic kind of story, history so you don't yet see her. She's hard, protecting herself because she's had trauma.

And so Olivia, what Shonda's slowly doing by revealing who these characters are is peeling back the layers of a person. …You have a persona and then open the door. It's that saying: The Cobbler's son wears no shoes. You making shoes for everybody and yet your kids running around barefoot. Is that by choice? Or is that because you won't make them for him? It's the same thing. Like you're running around here and you can broker these things but because you're so invested in saving other people you have little time to save yourself. So I feel like that's authentic. I feel like that's accurate of a lot of people, how they live their lives.

Rhimes is a storyteller that peels back the layers of humanity; she presents characters that reach across borders and boundaries. Her characters also reveal the inner workings of relationships that within a post-racial fantasy create the illusion that Pope's experiences are common and normative for all women irrespective of race. Renee finds Pope's inability to see the problems in her life as analogous to the cobbler's son, who has no shoes despite his father's profession. Similar to Goldman (2013, 2014) and Jackson (2014) that demonstrate the pervasive and controlled presentation of Black femininity in reality television, argue Pope's inability to fix her life, choose a partner to love, and maintain close friendships reifies pathological narratives of Black femininity. The barriers to seeing Pope as a future text devoid of structural constraints surrounds the intersectional effects of race and gender that encompass racism and sexism, and the politics of respectability.

For Jazzy, the complex interplay of Fitz and Olivia's relationship, which includes racial, gender, and power dynamics remains bound within controlled narratives *and* presents a future text. Jazzy notes Pope's image, unlike Halle Berry in B.A.P.S. is new. However, her interactions with Fitz remain confined. For instance, Fitz uses his power and bodyguards to summon and bring Pope to his side. In doing this, Pope remains enmeshed within the structure of patriarchy power and privilege (Rousseau 2009). Sarafina and Jazzy found it important to name patriarchy

and examine its influence on their relationship. Jazzy concludes that Fitz' interactions and

attempt to control Olivia are aspects of a larger structure at play also evidenced in his

relationship with wife Mellie. She continues,

> He's also doing the same thing to [controlling] his wife. So I think this relates how white men treat white woman, black woman. White men just treat women bad and I think that's realistic. And it's so real.

> It's just if you look at video games or whatever. White men are always this sort of hero character, accompanied by or fighting for or trying to get to some over sexualized, usually white woman. So what's that about? Because they just treat everyone like shit.

Fitz, as a powerful White heterosexual man has access to certain levels of power that enable his

actions and assumption of access to bodies. Imani discussing the dynamics of power within

relationships continues,

> There is a power dynamic in there because he's dangling her. He's dangling himself in front of her. But like, you keep saying you want to divorce this woman…but you won't do it because…it's out there, but it's not out there. And for him to say the Sally Hemings comment wasn't fair, of course he's going to say that because he's not the one with… I don't think he believes he's the one with everything at stake. In the end the powerful men get away with everything. You know that has been consistent with history.

> Yea, there's a hint towards race because it's hinting towards that whole thing with Thomas Jefferson and his comments about race. It's really interesting what he's [Thomas Jefferson] saying versus what he's really doing behind closed doors.

> Yea he's [Fitz] going to say it's not fair. But what he needs to do instead of harping on what the comment is, is really think about what is really going on between you two. She's hurt because you're saying you love her. You know, to me, it looks more like lust than love. I don't know how much he really cares about Olivia anymore. You know?

> Even with that scene, I think he's confused about the difference between lust and love, right? At one point he did love Mellie but something happened with that and so he became more consumed with Olivia because she allowed herself to be consumed by him. And so, I think if Olivia had put up a barricade and said, 'no this cannot happen,' I don't think he would be pursuing her. I don't think this would happen. Just like she let Jake in. Now she's got two.

Like Ann who saw realistic desires in *Scandal*, Imani found Pope's portrayal of lust, desire and

sensuality relatable. In an interview, I asked Imani to expand on the seeming tension within her

115

narrative, or the lack of ease she has in discussing Pope's representation and its influence on

positive recognition for Black women. Fitz' passion borders on an uncontrollable desire that is

all consuming. Imani argues his obsessive behaviors and desire to consume all aspects of Olivia

mirrors her understanding of Saartje Baartman, the Hottentot Venus. She continued,

> She [Olivia] has a measure of power too. She got access to where most of us will never have access. And that's a turn on for a lot of guys. Like 'Ooo, she has her own thing goin' [sic] on.' She doesn't have to…she doesn't really need them in a material way. I'm not sure she needs them in an emotional way either. But physically that's a turn on to some folks.

> But the heart is treacherous. Then it becomes confusing because on the one hand you're like 'I'm desiring' and that's an emotion but at the same time…there's something wrong with this, that internal conflict.

> So I think in terms of Hottentot…see with her, yes it was sexual exploitation, because they were amazed with the big butt and the big, enlarged. I mean everything was big: the butt was big, the vaginal area was big, and then also her breasts. So that back then turned men on. But Olivia, she doesn't have big breasts, she don't got a big butt, she's got a little cute petite body and that seems to be the esthetic right now for some folks. I think right now it's about big butts because they're talking about it in the music, but…Olivia has the "it factor" where you're just drawn. It's in their personality…she has charisma, that thing that brings them in without the extra physical stuff. Physicality I should say.

> It's hard to articulate it because we're still trying to figure out what it is about this woman that makes these men crazy. We call it the "it factor" because it's that thing that you just can't describe, and 'I just want what you've got and it just turns me on.' It's that it factor. And that's what she has. And even when she walks away they get more crazy. Like she said 'no,' [intoning they respond] 'but I still want you.' That's a stalker. I don't know if you've ever…like no matter what you do… And I think Jake is more of a stalker than Fitz. Like no matter what you say, they are not taking no for an answer.

> That's why I say they [Fitz and Jake] are obsessed with her. It's an obsession. They cannot take 'no' for an answer. They want to possess her. They don't want anyone else to have her. They'll do anything in their power to make sure, and make sure it's hard for others to have her even if that means bumping them off. Who knows, the ending might be that they have a match [Jake and Fitz]. I mean, they did kind of already have one. It might happen again, but in closer vicinity. It wasn't like punch, punch, punch…it might culminate to that. They've been using their own resources to get at one another over her.

Although Pope's body is slight in comparison to Saartje's the desire to consume her essence and the perceived status gained from 'dating' her stand as adequate measures to compare the obsessive relations between bodies that mirrors a conquest.

> …On the one hand we're hated and on the other hand we hear that there's always that attraction, as my friend would call it, "the conquest." There's always that one particular black woman that's the conquest. And conquest is not really a compliment because you're not… When men say they want a conquest they say they want to conquer you. They want to prove to their friends, 'I got this one.' That don't mean that he's in love with her, or that he's going to give her the world. He's just gotta [sic] have her. I possessed her for maybe one night, a week, a couple of months, a year. I got her. To say…It's like a feather in his cap. I got her.
>
> And so, for a lot of Black women that has been the case. We always say the White woman is the trophy. But a lot of times she's not the conquest. That may appear for some Black men that the white woman is the conquest for other reasons, and that is racial. But for men in general to have a woman, a Black woman at that, it's a conquest. And I think that's problematic. Because that goes way back to how they situated women during slavery and antebellum where you had the African women and the mulatto women, the "tragic mulatto." She [the tragic mulatto] in a lot of ways is put up as a certain pedestal to aspire to in terms of looks and desirability. But at the same time she's tragic because she's often lonely you know… She's not always the one who gets married. She's not always the one who gets to have a family. She is a conquest.
>
> And that could be a problem even for Olivia. Because if she's going to be considered a conquest… I mean, you see that she hasn't gotten married. Remember she was supposed to get married to the senator and she was like "no." I said, wow! She could have been. And it's indicative of a lot of Black career women too. We're 'career, career, career.' And when the opportunity to get married comes up, we're often like…well let's weigh it out: I don't know, I want my career first. And then we miss out on the one. That could have been the one. And that's layered too.
>
> In a sense, in terms of single black women in their careers, they are featured as conquests. The ones who are often featured as conquests are often not the ones who are in what we call 'lower class.' They are usually middle-class upper-middle-class or even rich, in that economic bracket. You don't hear too often that someone wants the poor black woman. You know…you just don't hear it.

Imani points to the contradiction between a conquest and partner. For Black women to attain a partner, they "in some ways have to be seen as individuals," as people and not as conquests or a notch on a belt they require autonomy. This construction is emblematic of desire and lust, and

not love. Imani points to the constraints Black women have within their love lives, self and other

perceptions of value and worth. As Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009:28) argues,

> Black women as victimizers in their own right, imbued with the force of a natural
> sexuality that could overcome civilization and restraint duplicitously claimed by white
> men, the image of Jezebel excused the sexual violations of the slave system…references
> to Black women as categorically whorish by nature, then, provided white men with an
> innocence and unquestionable authority with regard to their power over and abuse of
> Black women.

 Dominant narratives rely upon a pejorative construction that controls the presentations of power,

sexuality and privilege (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009; Holland 2012; Jackson 2014). It repositions

the blame for infatuation and control onto Black women. Despite participant arguments that

Pope's character provides a new or different reading of sexuality, some like Renee, Alicia, and

Blue like Imani argue sexual scripts and frames control possibilities for new readings. Slatton's

(2013) work on sexual scripts and White men demonstrates the pervasive nature of Black

sexuality and Black women's bodies as conquests, not love interests or equals.

Samantha discussed the influence of sexual scripts on her perception of extra marital

affairs. She continued,

> I think for me and my family –like my immediate family is all girls (3), a lot of girl
> cousins– women dominate in numbers. I think going back to our grandparents and my
> great-uncle, there's a lot of adultery. But adultery is just like upfront. It's like you have
> deacon, deaconesses…my uncle just died like a month or so ago. And his son found a
> letter that his father wrote to some woman about a ring at the beginning of the year, and
> his father's in his 70s-80s…

> In a way, adultery's like the big thing, the hush-hush thing, you don't talk about it. One
> year…he brought one girlfriend and later on took her home and brought the other. It's
> just like in your face. So when it comes to adultery and that kinda [sic] thing, it's a nerve
> for me.

> But it's also this complicated thing because you think about during the times when people
> were married and what kind of relationships that they had… Uncle Spencer was a
> cheater… Yes, he is a cheater with a capital C… And it's never just okay, he's a cheater,
> someone's a dick or she's a whatever. It's all these *other* things, especially when you're
> talking about different generational things. There's a different kind of – not even emotion

but vulnerability and how they handled vulnerability or they just need to fuck a lot. Ya' know? They would have had to go to their partners. They would go out. And they would do it. There was never this conversation about what needs were or what some of their issues were 'cause they couldn't talk about it.

So whenever I see a show, especially like a black woman or someone cheating, it's just this little –I don't like it, obviously. But it's a complicated thing because at the same time, I'm like that is some shit! Like that should've been some conversations before you went… I also get it at the same time. I also get relationships and how things just go unsaid and conversations people don't have or not even aware that they're vulnerable or need in a certain way. And I'm a Christian… Like I'm a Sunday dress clothes-little hat-like Christian, right. But I'm also *human*. So it's like it's so complicated and complex and frustrating and an awesome show at the same time.

Part of the hesitation she experienced watching Pope expands beyond religion to include

the politics of interracial relationships. Samantha highlights the complexities of sexual politics

within Black relationships, and potentially all sexual relationships: how do you communicate

what you need physically in a repressed society? The inability to communicate needs and desires

within intimate relationships leads to affairs and unfulfilled desires. For Samantha, her faith and

position as a Christian woman challenges the supposition that the fulfillment of desires

outweighs the moral obligation of monogamy. As Billson (1995) and Espiritu (2001)

demonstrate through analysis social and cultural practices that women bear responsibility for

transmitting the virtue and transmission of culture. Virtue, policed through religious narratives

that encourage limited sexual engagements, women experience religious and cultural scripts

(respectability politics) that restrict their ability to satisfy sexual desires. Thus, the cultural

expectations and religious doctrine Samantha, Alicia, and others note controls their perception of

Pope, and other (re)presentations of Black women's bodies in media.

Samantha however challenges the requirement that women 'keep the culture' through her

keen understanding of human sexuality and belief that women, like men have the right to fulfill

their sexual desires and fantasies. The 'things left unsaid' are human and point to the

complicated structure of relationships and the politics of gender and sexual fulfillment. For participants like Starbucks Cup, Spartan and Jazzy, Pope as a Black woman challenges the assertion that women's desires and multiple intimate partners are taboo. Their arguments and active interrogation of dissonance, like Samantha's actively contests cultural and sexual 'responsibility.' Thus, Pope's affair, despite its potential to reaffirm pathologized narratives, creates space for overt and warranted sexual desires and experiences for women. Pope's character presents a powerful woman, who while vulnerable and on a quest for love, has agency and voice that she uses to satisfy her sexual desires. In this, she attempts to 'have it all,' to be a woman in love, with a healthy sex life, and a strong career. Participants and those in digitally mediated spaces debated Black women's ability to 'have it all.' Some argued Pope's character provides a new image or way to 'have it all.'

The Future Text of "Having it All"

Black women, similar to their White counterparts experience dissonance when considering their ability to advance their education, have a family, find love, and enjoy a successful career. They see limitations and find disparate access to narratives that demonstrate the achievement of 'having it all.' Unlike their White counterparts, participants noted the intersectional a/effects of the social experience of race that complicates their lives. As some arguments conclude, Black women cannot simply "lean in[36]" to achieve the dream. Instead, they find some things require active sacrifice to attain the semblance of leaning in or having it all.

Participants, in thinking about Black women's ability to 'have it all' and what these (re)presentations look like on mainstream TV argued Pope's image, despite challenge from her

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[36] Sheryl Sandberg's (2013) book *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* presents the framework to address and find balance between a successful and rewarding career, the will to lead a full life including family, and love.

ongoing affair, provides a counter-narrative that demonstrates Black women can "have it all;"

that unlike Imani's earlier assertion that Black women can have an education, a career, and love.

Blue continued,

> You know what else I noticed? I agree, like the comments recently have been like "Oh my God." There's sort of been an acceptance of what it is. But I also noticed that we actually get more –especially during the sex scenes. Like last week when it started out with her envisioning [sexual relationships with] Fitz and Jake and Fitz and Jake, and the contrast. You get more excited then.
>
> I do think we're also seeing –I don't think is necessarily race-specific or even gender. I think it has to do with…this goes back to humanness. This is why I love this show. It goes to sort of the thrill of … People are sexual beings. Most people.
>
> Then there's this violent aspect of it that we don't want to engage in, but we do because there's a thrill there when you know –"Oh my god. He just killed himself in front of her." As gruesome as it is, there's something that just draws us into that.
>
> Again, I think the appeal to the human complexity, even the messed up part of it. We're participating. So people will critique it, but we're all watching.

Blue, in her conclusion notes that in spite of regular critiques that point to Pope's lack of

'respectability,' her position as the 'side piece' and her inability to fix herself audiences

continually tune in. The continual engagement with a show despite its problematics surrounds

the mundane and communal aspects of humanity. *Scandal* presents the complexity of sexuality

and the messiness of love that challenges the parameters of respectability. Through Rhimes'

writing and charismatic acting, audiences find themselves transposed in a world that presents

Black women as autonomous beings (future texts) defining and accessing their sexuality, gender,

and race for themselves. These presentations extend beyond race, which unites audiences across

racial lines.

Tarani Joy found Pope's construction powerful: she is woman who presents sensuality,

has clear sexual desires and complex interpersonal relationships. She continued,

But I think the lack of development behind Washington's character is purposeful. I don't think Rhimes is trying NOT to portray the various classic tropes of black women representation on screen, and perhaps it's (sadly) inventive that one Black woman is allowed to portray them all (though, I'm not entirely convinced with the "political mammy"), but we also see Olivia as none of those, even the amalgam of the stereotype of the "Strong Black Woman," in that we see her as vulnerable, scared, broken, wrong, and tired: human. All things that Black women aren't given room to be on television or in real life, and that is refreshing.

For Tarani Joy, Pope's development presents the future text of complex representation where Black women 'are given room' for fully human presentations. Complex characters challenge controlled constructions and present the full range of humanity and possibility for love and career. While presentations should be readable and relatable as future texts, they should also challenge personal beliefs or mores about the world and intimacy.

The representation of Pope's character as flawed and messy provides a human portrayal that yields access to value and recognition. As Vanessa, Whitley, and Octavia noted a seeming negative correlation exists between Black women's ability to have it all: as Black women attain higher levels of education, gain careers, and increase their access to power their ability to attain long-term intimate and sexual relationships, their ability to act upon their sexuality diminishes. This debate reminded Samantha of conversations with her sister, where they questioned what 'having it all' meant. She continued,

> …Just talking about this thing of sleeping with someone else's husband, regardless of him being white –but that almost Velcro– like magnetic attraction, that intensity, that awesome with somebody else's dude. Even just thinking like a black woman – like morally about that connection or what is okay to do. You know? Or what is okay to experience or what is okay to show? What's important to have? My sister and I probably talked about the sacrifices that women make to be good and to have things in their lives. And they forsake lots of things in order to have that.
>
> So she has this connection. But at the same time she has this connection, she's not gonna [sic] probably have children –ya [sic] know– all these things that black women give up in lieu of other things. At least for us, my sister and I started a conversation about what you give up to attain– what we feel that we have access to. You have money; you have class. But when we talk about dating and that connection of relationships, there's some

limitations there. That's at least outside this kind of a conversation we have. You can't have that kind of dialogue on Facebook –but something along those lines.

As Samantha and her sister note, Black women often sacrifice something –love, career, and family– to achieve a full life. Spartan extended the intersectional conversation, pointing to the intricacies of being a black woman wanting success and love. She continued,

> I think it's interesting to kind of look at the intersectionality of this box and what is really perceived to be necessary for success for a black woman. I directly see this comparison of black women have to be a strong woman. You have to be really rigid and by the book, and you have to do all these really stern things. And sometimes lose some of your femininity in order to progress up the chain or in order to achieve success in certain areas.
>
> Certainly in the sciences I see this a lot, where some black women basically looked stripped of femininity, of family life, all of that because they thought or were told that they had to sacrifice all of that in order to get access to the success that they wanted. That's interesting to just look at comparison.
>
> But there are also so many other women out there who are able to navigate many different boxes, having a messy life, have a family, have travel – all those sort of things. And be really feminine, or own their femininity and still be really successful…
>
> I think some people actually go through life just like that [referencing the strong black woman]. They have to perform their whole life to be set a criterion, and then maybe later they realize "No, this isn't really fulfilling. Maybe I do need to get back to what I really should be and being that messy more developed person and still have success."

The narratives Spartan experienced throughout her career in the sciences actively restrict women's bodies and lives. She noted her mentor, a man, left the 'child rearing' to his wife, kept late hours at the lab, and focused on advancing his career. He was able to have a family, find love, advance his education and cement a successful career. The presumed gender norm associated with children that allowed her mentor to create a successful career leaves Spartan questioning if she too can have the best of both worlds. In these moments, she finds herself forced to choose between the narrative of the successful scientist or the successful mother (Johnston and Swanson 2003). *Scandal* challenges this forced and contrived binary. Although

Pope does not have children, her image provides a new narrative for women: they can have love, femininity, not sacrifice their beliefs and attain a powerful career.

The challenges presented by individuals in digitally mediated spaces to Pope's femininity or balance between strength and vulnerability is an unfolding and complex story. Pope's ability to have 'have it all' remains constrained as her lover is a married man. As Terri argues,

> We get caught up in their struggles though and share their vulnerability to things that are "bad." They almost always a decision that brings on more drama (a word that's become associated with unwanted expressions of emotion — but that's what keeps the story going and I appreciate Rhimes' willingness to go there and keep going beyond what TV characters usually do. And just like their caught by their emotions, we're caught by their emotions. I'm going to have to take pressure pills to get through the next season.

> When I've studied other big and troubled characters like Pope – your goddesses, your lost girls, your dangerous women and so forth, there was a greater sense of distance and maybe even a feeling of superiority since I had to go into a distant time period or another language or an obscure form like a poem or a novel or even a painting. But a television serial that unfolds at home creates a more immediate and intimate experience.

> Olivia is among us and in some ways about us. Shonda Rhimes is a terrific storyteller. Totally mesmerized. Being troubled by Olivia... all of our feelings and critiques are part of this unfolding story. Olivia Pope is indeed a superhero — a fixer in a fix. And she's isolated herself from everything personal and is in control but not at all in control. That makes her a character. And I'm not worried about the integrity of feminist critique. It's an unfolding conversation. And I wouldn't really judge people for anxieties or fantasies they have about how to fit into this society and have what they want. Scandal is a great challenge to what we learned in school. Maybe love is Olivia's Kryptonite and maybe Scandal is ours. Staying tuned!

Love is Pope's ultimate weakness and keeps audiences intrigued. The possibility that *Scandal* operates as the audience's weakness surrounds the preconceived notion of what love should be, and the structure romantic relationships should form. Because Pope is unable to decide whom she loves more, or whom she wants to maintain a relationship with, we see a protagonist in struggle: a cobbler's son with no shoes. We also see Pope as a fixer, but one who cannot fix her life. This enigmatic character and seemingly paradoxical relationship creates a weakness in the audience, and challenges them to overcome their perceptions of Pope and of love. This as Terri

argues is the main attraction for *Scandal* viewers, and as my participants' note, is why reading

Pope as a bracket-shattering image of Black femininity (future text) is imperative.

Future Texts: Representation and Social Citizenship

The paradox of solving others' problems while remaining unable to solve one's own is

not new. However, it is a new presentation of Black women's love lives and relationships when

considering Pope's power, her positionality, and her class. My participant's note that Black

women, unlike White women in media remain constrained and on the periphery of complex

constructions. Renee expanded upon this drawing comparisons to the FX Network show, *The

Americans*.[37] She wondered if our understanding of Black families and Black women in

particular could lend themselves to the fantastical –a Black American spy family– or if

imaginations remain inhibited. She continued,

> Is it a stretch then that we could possibly be involved in some counterintelligence
> movement? So I think that that's what I appreciate. Again, not just show us in our full
> humanity. Show the possibilities that okay, let's just not make our aspirations for the
> vision of black people on television to be the doctors and the lawyers but let us be the
> computer hackers.

> Let us be –and not just the I'm the low level drug dealer or even a high level drug but
> show us in all these ways that we're allowing white people to be seen. That was my kind
> of –not my desire but my biggest question. Why the hell can't we just have the full range
> of possibilities? We just get limited to this and it's not just the kind of negative.

> It's just yeah, okay. You're goal in life should just be become a doctor and be a race star.
> No, I mean my sister was talking the other day about she knows a Black guy who builds
> fish tanks. Can't I just build a fish tank? Can you just know that we have the possibility?

> So to see things like Scandal where you see opportunities to develop in different ways
> because it's a reflection of where our possibilities are in real life. So for that reason I
> appreciate it.

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[37] The Americans (2013-) set in the 1980s (during the Cold War) stars Keri Russell and Matthew
Rhys who trained in the Soviet Union as 'average Americans.' The two immigrated and took on
the false identities, running covert operations while maintaining the guise of a married American
coup. To blend in, the two eventually had two American children who at the start of the series
are unaware of their parents' allegiances.

"Can't I just build a fish tank?" The question, although seemingly benign, points to the malignant effects of border policing and the social experience of exclusion. Black bodies remain enmeshed within a dynamic that precludes their ability 'to just be' and to exist within a realm of fantasy and of the ordinary. White bodies, however have the ability 'to just be' and to build fish tanks without question. White bodies, for Renee, can portray a spy family sent from Russia; they can engage in negative constructions or behaviors without the direct connection to, or pathologization of White culture. The inherent negativity within representations of Black women's bodies finds express challenge in Pope's representation and reflects the complexity of Black women's lives. Complex representations, unlike controlling images, increase access to representation and positive recognition (Goldman 2014; Lee 2010; Nicholson 2014; Rousseau 2009).

Although some participants found Pope's characterization constraining as it challenged their religious convictions and adherence to respectability politics, most found Pope's character opened dialogues on the importance of 'just being' or building fish tanks. Within these conversations, participants' argued the continued challenge to mapped constructions that limited positive recognition and value did not occur on mainstream television. They argued the images that presented the most challenge, those that represented a more authentic picture of their lives as Black women remained on the periphery, in alternate or new media (e.g. Lena Waithe's *Hello Cupid*, Jahmela Briggs' *First*, Nicole Byer and Sasheer Zamata's *Pursuit of Sexiness*, and Issa Rae's *Awkward Black Girl*).[38]

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[38] For *Hello Cupid* see: https://www.youtube.com/channel/SWwFguzCphIrw/featured
For *First* see:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxX62WIX3SI&list=PLVo7nGot4fPjY4FdstC5d5DQ-4accPFIb

The characters and presentations of Black women's lives within shows like *First* and

Tales from Kraka Tower[39] challenge our understanding of racism, sexism, and the social

experience of intersectional oppression. Because these shows are independent, present episodes

on the Internet and use free streaming channels like YouTube, the structural influence of the

writer's room is limited. Similar to Imani's "upbringing in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn," continued

engagement with diversity forces audiences to see Black women outside monolithic

constructions. However, Imani notes her interactions with diverse types of Blackness remains

invisible in media, much like her experience in the Midwest. Her comparisons denote the

importance of seeking out Black directors and producers to increase access to multifaceted

representations and increase positive recognition and value. She continued,

> When I see people, I know they not giving me everything they are in that moment. So, I
> don't…I can see layers of, complexity. You take each person for how they live their
> lives.
>
> As far as being in contact with a lot of Black directors and writers, what they are trying to
> do versus what Hollywood wants them to do, they have their own conflicts. It's similar to
> what happens with a lot of really good lyricists, top lyricists. Where they have really
> great stuff that never gets put on an album or really released to the mainstream because
> this is what the gatekeepers want. Now that's a *problem.*

The images presented in media, controlled through the lens of gatekeepers, or Hollywood as

Imani terms it, influences how her students understand the world. Although some insist they

want different, complex, and non-controlled images, little change occurs. Imani continued,

> Because even though we say we want it, we say it…I think there's been a problem. Like
> "Beyond the Lights," the director and writer for that film it took him years to get that film

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For *Pursuit of Sexiness* see: http://pursuitofsexiness.com/tagged/episodes
For *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* see: http://awkwardblackgirl.com
For a list of additional shows featuring Black women, please see:
http://www.forharriet.com/2014/10/14-incredible-web-series-created-by-and.html#axzz3bpjFTEP5
[39] For *Tales From the Kraka Tower* see:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSFrYUQFZkvEFXB-KHWug2w

out. Its' a very good film. It's actually very good. The marketing is bad…and that sort of hindrance and these kinds of stories keep happening.

I hope one day, but I really think it takes us being more proactive and entrepreneurial in terms of our approach and getting these things made. You need to work with people who have creative vision, but at the same time they are not giving in to what Hollywood thinks we want to see.

Because bottom line, Hollywood thinks we want to see certain things. Like, 'No I don't want that. Why are you showing that? You keep showing the same things!' And that is the conflict. And they only let a few in. The few that are "safe" …initially. I really think that Shonda Rhimes was safe initially. And then she busted out. She's ready to bust out.

Likewise, Imani describes the struggles of Black actresses addressed in a recently watched documentary "Angels Can't Help But Laugh," that

They have to start their own production companies. And it costs a lot of money to start it up, but we have to create our own vehicles because the roles aren't there. If the roles aren't there for White actresses, I can only imagine it's really tiny for Black actresses. That's pretty sad.

The selection of diverse and complex roles Black women have remains small in comparison to their White counterparts. For Imani, like other participants the ability to have varied roles, to star in shows that present differential constructions of Black femininities remains tied to value and recognition where the fewer roles equates to less positive value and recognition. Participants contend that representations like Pope, despite the problematics remain necessary. Sarafina and Imani's discussion points to the importance of new mediated presentations. Their narratives in tandem with digitally mediated comments places Rhimes' work as opening the door for more production companies that could positively influence Black women's access and representation. However, they note that her production company and the 'off Broadway' new media shows are not enough to change how we read Black women.

Exemplifying the conundrum Black women face in acting and associated perceptions of their bodies and femininities is the web series, *Black Actresses*.[40] Under the helm of Issa Rae Production (IRP), the series focuses on several prominent Black actresses discussing different moments in their careers, struggles they faced, and the state of affairs many Black actresses face. One of the main characters of the series, Cori is in the midst of a dry spell. The sixth episode features Essence Atkins and the theme of a 'dry spell.' In the episode, Cori meets with her agent who provides casting director feedback: she is too short; they liked her voice not her face, her face not her voice, or her face not her body. Cori asks her agent to "start pitching me a little differently…maybe spice things up" noting she can read, ride a bike and even provide a French accent. The agent, replies skeptically at first, "You know I don't get a lot of calls for a literate Black French girl, that's not, you know people aren't casting for that so much, uh…" Then her tenor changes in thinking about where Cori would find acting opportunities, she says with enthusiasm while banging on the table "But, can you dance?! Can you dance?! We're getting another one of these casting calls for that hip hop stip stompy jumpy. Eh? They're casting for that really soon. Huh?!" (Rae 2014).

Cori's experience and options exemplify the narratives within "Angels Can't Help But Laugh" (Burns 2007). The opportunity to see a Black French girl who can read and ride bikes is anomalous, just like a high-profile politically ambiguous, rich, sexual, strong and vulnerable Black woman. The comedic and slightly sardonic nature of *Black Actresses* illuminates Black women's experiences. Through Cori's continual struggles and triumphs, the audience sees the continual restriction of recognition and positive value for Black women in ways that Pope's life and relationships fail.

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[40] The series, *Black Actresses* as a whole presents the challenges Black actresses face in 'Hollywood' through satire, a partially scripted series, and interviews with Black actresses.

Embodying social citizenship

Towards the end of focus groups and interviews, I asked participants to consider the overall conversation including: how (limited) digitally mediated interactions surrounding Pope influenced their experiences and perceptions of value, how personal perceptions of Pope influenced their perception of Black femininity, and if Pope's character provided positive recognition and value. Recognizing the discourses associated with (re)presentations means acknowledging that despite attempts to reframe and present Black women's bodies in new and diverse ways remains constrained within a particular discursive space that silences and is exclusionary (Ferguson 2004; Harris-Perry 2011; Johnson 2012; Lee 2010). Participants argued that in spite of this, Pope's characterization provides challenge to bracketed recognition. The rereading of Pope and future text potential led some to engage in cautious optimism.

Whitley noted that the restriction of value Black women experience is part of life, that their bodies and femininities remain controlled by larger discursive structures, and that despite the possibility for future texts she sees dominant discourses as controlling her actions and interactions. She continued,

> Really, it's unfortunate that as Black women who are in the position of Kerry Washington that she must carry the torch for all Black women who stand in your background. Paris Hilton when she –whatever she does is whatever Paris Hilton does and that's okay because she's Paris Hilton. And it's unfortunate.

> But I still feel like that the time we live in: that [the torch], unfortunately is still [controlling] the things we're doing. And I'll still be telling my daughter what Mellie was telling her daughter, 'You just can't open your legs, right?' It's unfortunate but I think I'll probably continue to carry myself [that way].

> Well, my personality, I'm just loud and rambunctious anywhere, but when I'm in a more professional space I try to be more alert of what I'm saying. Especially in class when someone says something off the wall racist and I snap back immediately and I don't even care what has come out of my mouth.

So those are the times where I think about what I' saying as a Black woman and what that means for other Black women. What my little sister sees when she sees me, what I want her to see versus that big booty ho that 2 Chainz[41] is talking about who is getting all this money thrown at her. So I still feel like I have to carry that torch for my little sister and for my daughters and for my cousins and for my sister and for the Black woman standing next to me, unfortunately. But that's something I think I'm just willing to deal with.

Whitley controls her behavior at work, like Starbucks Cup and Jazzy, to maintain control over the narrative of Black femininity. This perceived control adheres to respectability politics and forces Black women to contend with negative beliefs surrounding the presentation of overt sexuality, and listening to 'ratchet' music in 'respectable places.' Whitley is willing to control the presentation of her body in an attempt to secure positive recognition for her sister and future children. Spartan addressed the notion of controlling one's body to achieve success, saying

> I think it's interesting to kind of look at the intersectionality of this box and what is really perceived to be necessary for success for a Black woman. I directly see this comparison of Black women have to be a super woman. You have to be really rigid and by the book, and you have to do all these really stern things. And sometimes lose some of your femininity in order to progress up the chain or in order to achieve success in certain areas.

> Certainly in the sciences I see this a lot, where some Black women basically looked stripped of femininity, of family life, all of that because they thought or were told that they had to sacrifice all of that in order to get access to the success that they wanted. But there are also so many other women out there who are able to navigate many different boxes: having a messy life, have a family, have travel –all those sort of things- and be really feminine, own their femininity and still be really successful.

> …I think some people actually go through life just like that. They have to perform their whole life to be set a criterion, and then maybe later they realize "No, this isn't really fulfilling. Maybe I do need to get back to what I really should be, and being that messy more developed person and still have success."

The ability to have that complexity and messiness remains constrained within discursive maps and controlled discourses (Durham 2004; Lee 2010; Stokes 2007). These discourses posit Black

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[41] 2 Chainz (Tauheed Epps) is a rapper known for his "Birthday Song" that features scantily clad women while he raps about his birthday desires. As he says, "They ask me what I do and who I do it for. And how I come up with this shit up in the studio. All I want for my birthday is a big booty ho. All I want for my birthday is a big booty ho" (Chainz 2012).

women should adhere to 'appropriate' and desirable traits to achieve value and recognition. As Alicia and Blue noted, there is a choice associated with the being messy, or not adhering to the standardized behaviors ascribed to one's body. Blue saw this within the choice to curse, as this is something she negotiates. For Blue, language defines Black women and in some ways confines their presentation through the idea of respectability. She continued,

> If we get into the politics of respectability in Black women, depending on where we are, that's not acceptable. But there are times when all I can do it curse. That performance, I feel like the burden becomes on us in particular I think –us as Black women– to always have to think about it.

> Even when you [Alicia] said there's a level of offense that we accept. I don't know if that's true for everyone. I wonder if that's just true for us. I wonder how many White men assume that there's a level of offense that they accept. I just wonder about if that's true. I don't know… Because you're right: there's a certain level. I have a tolerance level. I have a threshold that I deal with every day.

> There are people that every now and again pass it, but I have my threshold, my daily threshold – like "Oh, I can't take it anymore." I know I'm going to encounter it [devalue, disrespect, racism]. I know I'm going to have to deal with it. I just wonder if others are having to even have that thought.

The ability to exist outside the parameters of controlled discourses denotes a level of privilege that participants ascribed to non-Black bodies. The threshold Blue describes defines acceptable, and at times polarizing, behaviors for Black women. Similarly, Jazzy discussed the threshold of sexuality and respectability saying,

> I have just a thought on that …Thinking about sort of the age-old respectability argument with racism: It's like well if we just elevate ourselves to a White standard of respectability then hey, then maybe our Blackness will be somewhat forgiven. It's like our 'original sin.' It's like 'what are we going to do but don the finest clothes and step into that sway and speak the most… So that strikes me.

> Last night I went to this Afro Futurist party/costume ball thing. It was amazing! I don't know if you're familiar with Afro Futurism, but it's kind of like Black sci-fi meets historical continuity of transatlantic memory. So it's like Afrika Bambaataa times 15,000. And so you have all these people in there in these amazing costumes, masks; men are in dresses; women are in some sort of fantasy of tribal [clothing] …People are playing drums and djembes; people are howling.

132

It was amazing! And I walked away from it and I said, 'you know what? This was cool because it was avant-garde, but also because it's that sort of like 'no, don't box in Blackness. Don't tell us how to be. Don't tell us what our femininities are. Don't tell us that we're too whatever' because that's kind of like the backlash to that and to find continuity with the African ancestry. So I feel like that's part of what *Scandal* responds to is kind of like all of these things are Black and also White and deal with it.

For Jazzy, the presentation of Afro-futurism provides challenges to controlled discourses that police the boundaries and provides the possibility for new normative definitions of Blackness. The new, potentially normalizing effect of future texts provides access for varying types of Blackness. However, when considering contemporary access to social citizenship, Marie Wallace finds clear distinctions in access that link to the obsession over Pope's body (portrayed by Washington) and sensuality.

I think it could be said that Olivia Pope has a social citizenship in ways that other Black women don't. And so it's kind of this question of, is that a success for a Black woman to have this type of social citizenship and this type of relatability to women more broadly, or is it problematic that that's not more of a conversation?

Is it problematic that –when you [referencing me] were talking about social citizenship and whether Black women have it– kind of like women of color generally and especially Black women that we get that value and that recognition or value from each other and sometimes because of these messages and competing messages that doesn't happen either.

I feel like whether it's from men of color or from White women, I feel like there's still this way that Black women and women of color aren't given full access to recognize who they are.

Yeah, so that's kind of what I was thinking about in terms of –yes, it's this great thing that we can have this with each other, but when Kerry has it more broadly, what does that mean? What does that mean for other women that don't and what is different about Kerry that gives her that access?

What does it mean that she is this Black woman that has this status but this is how she wears her hair, this is who she dates, this is who she whatever on the show and what does that mean for other Black women?

Marie Wallace begins to examine the discrepancy in access to value and recognition. Kerry Washington, as a Black woman has a different level of recognition. Her access could stem from her sexuality, from her bodily performance, or from her ability to present the veil of Whiteness. As an actress, Washington gains recognition as a media darling, as a slight bodied Black woman. There are Black women who mirror Washington's body outside of Hollywood; however, for Marie Wallace their ability to gain recognition similar to Washington remains questionable. Marie Wallace's questioning opened the door for participants to debate the ways bodily performance and presentation influence recognition. Within each focus group, even without Marie Wallace's narrative, I asked participants to consider how various types representations influenced of recognition. Within this, I asked them to consider if conversations associated with Pope's representation could influence the recognition of 'everyday' Black women.

In continuation of her larger narrative thread, Marie Wallace thought Pope's image could provide challenge to controlled images. As such, Pope is a new reading of Black femininity, a future text. However, in considering the relative 'trickle down' effect of value and recognition associated with Washington and imbued within Pope, Marie Wallace argued it ended with Pope's –acceptable– body. Starbucks Cup, responding to Marie Wallace and the possibility that something in particular surrounds Pope's access continues,

> I don't personally because they both are sleeping with other people's husbands and they know better and they start and stop and start and stop and have that same thing but I've had a conversation with people –and this isn't my personal opinion– where they're like, 'yeah, Gabrielle Union's character is worse because she's sleeping with another Black woman's husband. And Kerry Washington is not...' [Marie Wallace: Because she's "sticking it to the White man"].

> And that sort of brings in the idea of race into the conversation and prior to that conversation I was like I never really thought about like Kerry Washington is better because she's not just a mistress. She's a White man's mistress and she's flaunting it in

front of his wife and his White wife can't do anything about it and this White man is going crazy over her and he's calling her and whatever, whatever, whatever.

But Mary Jane is –she's pulling out on the Black woman. And how could she treat another Black woman like that? How could she take another Black woman's husband? And I personally don't see it different but I can sort of...see that perspective. I don't think that that should make a difference but I can see how it does to some people.

Washington's ability to garner recognition via Pope exists because she disrupts a White union, unlike Gabrielle Union's Mary Jane. Because the structure of Whiteness and racism restrict Blacks bodies and their ability to access wealth, power and prestige, fewer mores according to Starbucks Cup surround the dissolution of White relationships. Thus, the restriction of social citizenship from certain Black bodies within the confines of Black conversations remains bound within respectability politics and the protection of 'Black love.' This however does not fully explain how Washington garners value and recognition that remains bound with her body and character portrayal. Pope's body remains the central feature of value and recognition, the same body Imani argued White men had an unnatural fascination with, paralleling the Hottentot.

Some argued Washington's features –a slight frame, petite facial features, straight or ringlet curly hair, and a lighter complexion– mirror White standards of beauty that garner access. Starbucks Cup argued Washington is not responsible for her body, or the ways individuals relate to her. She, like Marie Wallace thought Washington's lighter skin and smaller body had "the aspects of…more White like – I don't like that word but– "features," that lends "to sort her relatability with wider audiences." Marie Wallace argued that some of her appearance seems intentional. She continued "Some of that I think is surgery. Like Chenille [from the 2001 movie, *Save the Last Dance*] looks a little bit different [gesturing her nose] than Olivia."

The lack of recognition Black women experience surrounds their bodies, their facial features, hair texture, and skin tones. It is possible that Washington gains recognition through

bodily purchase. This purchase does not require active or tacit acknowledgement as those in dominant groups and those in positions of power grant access. Pope, a lighter skinned Black woman with slight and somewhat Eurocentric features 'better' approximates Whiteness. This garners her access into a system that provides or constrains recognition and creates emotional pain. As the material effect of a hierarchical racial system, "which favors light-skinned African Americans" Pope's space and access is noticeably different (Puff 2014:228).

To continue conversations on the possibility of embodied citizenship and restriction, I asked participants to consider what effect (if any) a different actress portraying Pope would have on popularity, reception and recognition. Although some argued "we can't know," Alicia, Eliza, Blue and others argued Pope's bodily performance and assumed proximity to peripheral Whiteness granted access, that when embodied by another –and darker skinned– actress would cease. As Spartan and Imani argued, although Viola Davis (Annalise Keating in *How To Get Away With Murder*) is powerhouse and her show is highly popular, her body places her outside standards of beauty and limits her access to recognition. Blue and Whitley argued that while the recognition Taraji P. Henson receives through her portrayal of Cookie Lyon in *Empire* is similar to Washington and Pope, Cookie's recognition remains bound within a prevailing stereotype of 'ratchet' Black femininity. Conversations they experienced or read 'online' often praised, recognized, and cheered Cookie's behaviors when she adhered to their perception of Black women as loud, violent, and stylish. Cookie's recognition remains bound within a controlled discourse that reifies pop-culture consumption of sassy, loud, fashionable and methodically vicious Black women.

Despite the potential for further control, it is important to note that even if Cookie Lyon is the personification of a controlled image, her character represents the reality of some Black

women's lives, and as such provides recognition. These arguments challenge the totalizing

control racist and sexist discourses have on Black women's bodies and femininities. They argue

that simply because one's behaviors may mirror a stereotype does not necessitate they reify

pathological constructions. They also challenge the supposition that adhering to Whiteness and

White culture and norms is desirable and aspirational.

Most participants argued one scene in *How to Get Away with Murder* challenged the

normalcy of White bodies. Annalise Keating, after a long day at work removed her makeup.

However, Viola Davis in this moment decided to go beyond the script and removed her wig to

reveal a tightly coiled Afro. This choice, for Renee, Jazzy, and Blue provided a cultural moment

where Black women's natural hair took center stage. It also removed any potential veil that

Annalise Keating was not Black; unlike Pope's perfect ringlets and loose waves that approximate

Whiteness remain bound within a "discourse of comparison" (Slatton 2013:39). Viola Davis'

intentional[42] decision to take off her wig destroyed the fantasy of the perfected (White) body. As

Alicia said,

> When I watched that scene, my thought was –and I can't speak for all Black women. I
> don't think I'm a representation of what all Black women do. What I liked about it was it
> seemed so real. It was authentic.
>
> So women in general, when they go to bed at night, wash their faces. Black women,
> specifically in my experience, actually do something with their hair before they go –she
> didn't sleep in her wig because that's not a common practice, as far as I know.
>
> Since that episode, when she goes to bed at night, she takes off her wig. We see her hair.
> We see her. And I just feel that is very real. You can watch past shows like –I don't
> wanna [sic] just make up stuff –let me try to be specific. We'll use *Scandal* for example.
> Olivia goes to bed. And she wakes up looking absolutely flawless. And that might have
> to do more with her characterization. But that's just not reality in regards to that.

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[42] Davis noted she pushed for the scene saying, "she's not going to bed with her wig on." Her
choice presented authenticity in Davis' portrayal and presented a "powerful and liberating"
moment. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/10/29/viola-davis-how-to-get-away-with-
murder_n_6068486.html?ncid=fcbklnkushpmg00000047&ir=Black+Voices

> If you watch just sitcoms like *The Game*, for example…But even in those TV shows, the Black women may be represented as floozies or whores or groupies. But it's the same thing. They go to bed with their little wigs and their makeup. No, we don't wake up like that. I like that. It's (Annalise's bedtime routine) authentic.

The authenticity of Black women's lives, their 'non-classical' beauty and body brackets their bodies from desirable femininity. Black women at times mask their deviant bodies through clothing, makeup, and wigs. The process Davis presented, of taking off false eyelashes, of removing her makeup, then removing the straight Euro-centric wig to reveal a textured short Afro changed the perception of her body. Her actions, unlike Pope's provide a clear narrative of racialization. Because Pope's hair remains straightened with very few scenes with "perfect (natural) ringlets," she remains within the confines of desirable femininity. Her ability to escape the Black body provides positive value and recognition. As Sarafina argued, it provides the possibility for analogous moments of desirability (e.g. Helen of Troy) from White men.

Though participants agreed that Pope's recognition and the popularity of the show may differ if played by a different actress, they maintained that multiple representations of different bodies and femininities are imperative to increase representation and recognition. Blue, discussing the differences in representation and the challenge to finding safe spaces to discuss empowerment gained through representation, continued

> But I think there's a level of –let me just say we know Kerry Washington has skin privilege. It's not just about her being a Black woman...There's all the other things that come along with that. I'm sure if this was a conversation about *How to Get Away with Murder* it would be different. That acknowledged. I'm also acknowledging my positionality as being what some people call lighter skinned or brown skinned, but having some skin privilege depending on where I am. I'm also aware of that.

> When I look at Olivia Pope, I might see a bit more of myself in her than another Black woman. That's just real. Then me as a single woman –me as a career woman, yeah. I think I might have a little bit more, and I think I get some affirmation from that. I'm like –if we want to go old-school, if I use the bitch word, that's a *bad bitch*. I'm saying that endearingly because I'm feeling it… There's this moment…some affirmations I get in

terms of what it means to be an empowered woman, empowered –problematically. But also still empowered. I'm okay with those contradictions…

So I do think that, there are definitely…I get that affirmation. Not necessarily in online spaces. I only get it –I keep my online conversations around those things with people I know, and that's because of some of things we talked about before and not wanting to engage in all the other crap. It's too much emotional energy. I know there's critique. I know there's that. I know that exists. But I disengage in that because I don't want to have to prove to anyone else why I feel empowered by this. There are other Black women that can go back and forth with it [the critiques], but I'm not interested in having those conversations too much with non-Black women actually.

The problematized empowerment Blue receives remains important. Blue, a woman with advanced degrees articulates her skin privilege and the ways her body mirrors Pope's. These similarities create moments for Blue where she can see a future for herself, a future where she has access to power, economic privileges, and social desirability. This affirmation comes with a level of critique that, similar to Marie Wallace and Starbuck Cup notes the effects of color privilege and bodily performance within the white racial frame. Though participants agreed on the importance of examining the role of privilege in representation and recognition, they maintained that these conversations exist 'offline.' By discussing representation and recognition through face-to-face engagement, participants believed they could control the level of stress and harm to their daily lives and maintain the limited space of empowerment Pope's image creates.

SUMMARY

For participants and those in digitally mediated spaces, Pope's representation provides a sense of empowerment and a complex representation of Black femininity that actively challenges exclusionary narratives and the boundaries of acceptable femininity. Although this representation presents the possibility for positive recognition, continual reliance on controlled images, respectability politics, and veiled racist and sexist narratives maintain the restriction of value, which increases stress and harm. Thus, recognition of Black women as complex, messy and

human remains bound within a discursive narrative of control (Brown Givens and Monahan 2005; Holland 2012; Johnson 2012; Lee 2010). Through intentional engagement with narratives that pathologize Black bodies and those that attempt to create recognition by demonizing sexual behaviors and desires (respectability politics), positive recognition remains constrained. Thus, despite attempts to read Pope as a future text, dominant narratives within the Black community and from the larger 'American' community Black women remain enmeshed in identity politics that limit her portrayal to a temptress with unquenchable desires.

Pope, as a Black woman with clear sexuality provides liberatory aspects, while she remains enmeshed within identity politics. For Pope's character, though it provides new readings and possibilities for future texts, her sexuality remains in an objective relationship to her lovers – she is not the sexual subject. At times, her seeming decision to take a passive role in her sexual relationships appears liberatory. Some may argue through this, she challenges and actively rejects the mantle of 'strength' surrounding Black womanhood. However, her decision is not a subjective one that demonstrates clear thought, action, and agency. Instead, she exists as an object, one that bends to the whims of her lovers. As such, she lacks agency and remains bound within sexualized scripts and roles ascribed by her White lovers.

Pope, is therefore both a liberatory image in that she presents a new type of Black femininity, one that is sexual while vulnerable, one that is strong and 'handles' situations, while having a love life with multiple men who at times set their lives to her moods. However, the persistent nature of racialized structures and the need to find a "legible" Blackness in Pope confines her image. This occurs on multiple levels: within the Black community through respectability politics and those who require a legible "bottom to the top" narrative to read "Blackness." It occurs from the larger post-racial American community who cling to the hope

that her lack of 'race' and fleetingly momentary racial entanglements demonstrate the immateriality of race, while maintaining the sexualized trope of the Jezebel or Hottentot –the conquest.

Because conversations surrounding Pope's body, femininity, and sexuality in digitally mediated spaces exist in a both/and relationship –liberating and constraining– they maintain social exclusion and restrict access to positive recognition. For Black women, those in digitally mediated spaces and my participants, this interaction limits their ability to access and achieve full social citizenship. Though Pope is a fictional character and as such does not stand as a representation of all Black women, she is a signified image that operates as a touchstone for understanding, interpreting, and engaging with Black women. Thus, the prevalent narratives that constrain and enable recognition in digitally mediated spaces directly influence Black women's ability to garner, achieve, and maintain positive recognition.

The a/effects of the always already structure of Black femininity, despite possibilities for future text readings, confines Black women's abilities to exist completely outside the structure of racism and sexism. Black women, face continued control through intra and inter-racial community policing. The effects of policing continue the restriction of access to humanity, to full positive and valued recognition. In moments of direct challenge and attempts to find liberatory aspects, participants deploy a cautiously optimistic stance. Finding solace in the possibility of change through acknowledgment that representation over the past century changed, they see possibilities for futuristic recognition and value. The spaces of recognition and value, though possible, remain outside popular and major broadcast networks.

By reading Pope as a future text and through the lens of Lee's (2010) erotic revolutionaries, her character provides the possibility for new and liberatory spaces of sexual

subjectivity, the control of the writer's room and other forces constrains possibilities. The empowerment participants' gain through Pope's image challenges the parameters of recognition and humanity, and provides the possibility for messy, complex, and human portrayals. This however is a first step, in a long and potentially protracted battle for recognition. As participants' argued, scholars must look to new media (YouTube, Hulu, Netflix) to find the continued fight for recognition and value. These avenues provide more nuanced and (potentially) realized future texts, which allow for vulnerability, sexual subjectivity, and power. These spaces reimagine representation, see bodies and femininities as futuristic, and provide empowered recognition.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The positionality of Black women, from girlhood, adolescence and into adulthood is inscribed with pejorative narratives of non-idealized femininities, which deny the opportunity for Black women to be seen as 'moral equals' worthy of equitable "social and political recognition" (Somers 2008:6). Transitioned to media, the discursive representations of pathological femininities present negative, confined, and controlled images of Black women by misconstruing images, bodies, clothing, mannerisms, language, and femininity (Albiston and Nielsen 1995; Brown Givens and Monahan 2005; Collins 2000). The restriction of complex and multifaceted Black female characters –through eroticized racism, bracketed femininity, and respectability politics– limit the possibility for recognition. The overlapping construction of culture, power, ideology, and technology creates a hybrid structure that mimics 'real life,' and recreates the social experience of exclusion for Black women. Embedded within digitally mediated comments, racist and sexist discourses deny positive recognition and value at continuous hyper-speed rates.

This dissertation sought to understand how presentations of Black femininities in media and associated conversations in digitally mediated spaces constrained or enabled access to positive recognition and value for Black women. Through an analysis of digitally mediated comments and focus groups and interviews, I examined how individuals discussed Pope's body, her femininity, and her intimate and interpersonal relationships. This analysis revealed that individuals in digitally mediated spaces, like non-mediated spaces found Pope's presentation of Blackness relatable and transgressive to controlling discourses, while others found it unrealistic as it was a marginal improvement over previous characterizations of Black femininity. For some her image of Black femininity denoted an idealized post-racial lens that removed the influence of

143

race and racism on Black women's unique social positionality. Others saw the limited discussions of race as normative to white supremacy and viewed her Black femininity as always already a Black woman by the mere presence of her skin, sexed, and gendered body. Some argued her interpersonal and intimate relationships remained confined through and by controlled images, that Pope's character merely represented the Jezebel and Political Mammy, while others saw a Sapphire in her lighter skin and Eurocentric features. However, narratives that pushed for new and different readings of Pope's femininity proved just as prevalent. Interestingly, the consensus across polarized debates surrounded the importance of Pope's image: the debate provides a space to create and recreate potentially non-controlled images.

Within focus groups, it became clear that the impetus behind varying debates surrounded the importance of creating images that gave Black women access to humanity, to challenge the restriction of value and the name the work of discursive practices and narratives that police the boundaries of inclusion. In the following section, I outline the general findings from my research questions and then provide an overall synopsis, with a detailed discussion of significant findings. This conversation ties the two empirical chapters together to examine the influence of representation on recognition and value for Black women. I then outline potential limitations to this study and suggest future directions for research.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Findings from focus groups revealed that participant experiences in digitally mediated spaces, to maintain some semblance of recognition and value, was limited. Participants chose to disengage from conversations in digitally mediated spaces to maintain a sense of balance and recognition, to find pleasure in the fact that each week millions of people tune into a powerful, sexual, desirable and 'bad' Black woman. When they chose to engage in digitally mediated

144

spaces they found comments challenged Pope's femininity that constrained her ability to express

messiness, human traits, and sexual desires. Participants noted that within conversations they

found themselves defending Pope's body, her relationships, or her presentation of Blackness.

These interactions mimic the social experience of exclusion, causing psychic effects: stress,

imbalance, and dis-ease. Although they noted that not all conversations attempted to police

Pope's body or to engage respectability politics to create distinctions between 'good' Black

women and Pope, their interactions with negative narratives outweighed the positive comments.

Negative comments have greater influence on conversations and receive heightened

responses that can create stress (Herring et al. 2002; Milkman 2012). Some individuals posting

negative comments may do so to create harm and frustration (trolling); participants argued their

experiences stemmed from seemingly 'genuine' conversation or from those not intent on trolling.

Some argued that if the person seemed like a troll, their comment would not cause as much harm

–they could ignore it and diminish its influence. Because some conversations strained friendships

or acquaintanceships, participants chose to disengage. The choice to disengage and limit online

interaction demonstrates the influence of racist and sexist discourses, of veiled language, and

controlled discourses on Black women's lives.

Overall, findings from digitally mediated spaces and focus groups revealed that

individuals when discussing Pope specifically, and Black women's bodies and femininities

generally both engaged and challenged controlled, racist and sexist discourses. Within this, some

masked racist and sexist discourses within veiled language that relied on tropes of the Jezebel,

Sapphire, and the (Political) Mammy. Some who challenged controlled discourses engaged

respectability politics that presumed "they would then gain visibility and recognition from those

institutions that that define liberal culture" (Ferguson 2004:76). Others actively challenged the

requirement of respectability politics, noting it, like racist and sexist discourses, maintained social exclusion. Others argued Pope as a fictional character exists outside the parameters of control, and that her representation should not stand as a narrative of the 'culture' of Black femininity. Those who constrained recognition to Pope's body and presentation of race and femininity through respectability politics and veiled racist and sexist discourses maintained social exclusion.

Although Pope's presentation of Black femininity challenged controlled representations, for participants it remained bound within a racialized and gendered structure. As Imani, Renee and Whitley noted, Pope's body, and in particular her tone, influenced perceptions of her femininity and her ability to gain positive recognition. Rhimes' writing style and her intentional creation of complex, multifaceted, and messy characters generated a sense of desirability and empowerment. However, several participants argued Pope's value remained constrained within sexualized and racialized politics. This construction revealed problematic relationships between Black women's bodies, their sexuality, social desirability, and consumption.

Because the relationship is complex, participants had no clear answer as to whether Pope's image truly provided positive recognition and value. Despite Pope's access through Washington's portrayal, positive recognition remains constrained within her image, not easily transmutable to Black women's bodies or perceptions of their femininity. In debating the reasons for Pope's limited access to recognition, participants remained unsure if it resulted from the lack of racialized conversations, or if it resulted from the lack of clear representation of the social experience of racism and sexism on Black women's lives. For some, they wondered if her access somehow surrounded her love of expensive wine that many associated with upper class Whites, or if resulted from her "bad," desirable wardrobe presented on a petite body. Without a clear

answer, it seems the combination of the traits, her "it girl" status, provides access to recognition. No matter the reason, Pope's access to value and recognition provides a new reading of Black femininity. For participants, it calls for a renegotiation of the representation of Blackness and its intersection with gender, sexuality, and class.

Relatable Representations: Reading Race and the (Post) Racial Body

The intangible and fictitious bodies of Black women, specifically Kerry Washington portraying Olivia Pope, remain enmeshed in identity politics. Pope, a high-powered Black woman in love with two White men, presents narratives surrounding race, class, gender, sexuality, and power. In digitally mediated spaces, individuals simultaneously note Pope's positionality and actively ignore the intersectional experiences or influence of race on her everyday life. Although focus groups chose to limit their conversation on this topic to limit their stress and engagement with refused recognition, their arguments demonstrate that Black women see race as an important factor in their life, one that is material, but one that is always in conversation with their gender and sexuality. As such, for participants like Blue and Renee, their engagement with race and racialized conversations remain limited, with their gender often existing at the forefront, or as a master status, of their experience (Fenstermaker and West 2002; Waters 2001; West and Fenstermaker 1995). However, even within these moments, participants acknowledged that the intersection of race and gender/sexuality/class created a unique experience and demonstrated the continued effects of racialized structures and racism on their lives.

Despite assertions that *Scandal* and Pope are post-race, participants read race onto Pope's body; they saw her presentation as an "always already" Black woman who represented race, albeit subtly, in every scene. They perceived her body and presentation of Black femininity as

147

always already Black despite the post-racial fantasy. For participants this occurred because Black femininity exists within a discursively mapped space that delimits access to power, privilege, and recognition (Alexander and Mohanty 2010; McKittrick 2006; Roberts and Bell 2008). Pope's inherently raced body created visibility for Blackness that for participants, disallowed silencing and mandate recognition. Their discussions within focus groups and interviews argued the presentation of race within *Scandal* remained limited, but important. They read race into/onto Pope's body and understood her life through their lived experiences. However, their lived experiences remain bound within a racialized structure that not many fail to understand or experience. In these moments, participants acknowledged the importance of challenging the potentiality of *Scandal*'s post-racial fantasy. Thus, when race remains limited in presentation, in ways that extend beyond symbolism or cultural significations, critiques of 'racelessness' gain importance.

The discomfort within these conversations remained palpable across focus groups. Participants remained divided on the role of race within the show, the importance of presenting it, and the fatigue they experienced in *having* to discuss and address race consistently. Despite potential racial fatigue, the lack of experiential knowledge when watching Pope engage with the world provides the space for the immateriality of race. When Fitz summarily dismisses Pope's argument that their relationship parallels Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson, when her Senator client addresses Abby as Pope and her only response within the episode is extending her hand to assert that *she* is Pope, race remains a footnote. Something that requires little conversation, something easily silenced, ignored, and misrepresented. The moments that present racialized structures and present the subtlety of racism in the contemporary moment require active membership or critical reading to understand.

Although race as a construct of itself does not accurately describe Black women's experiences –it is after all inherently androcentric– it remains a necessary construct for understanding the intersectional positionalities of Black women. As Higginbotham (1992) argues, "We must expose the role of race as a Metalanguage by calling attention to its powerful, all-encompassing effect on the construction and representation of other social and power relations, namely gender, class, and sexuality." She continues, it is imperative to recognize that race provides "sites of dialogic exchange and contestation, since race has constituted a discursive tool for both oppression and liberation" (Higginbotham 1992:252).

Respectability Politics, Controlled Citizenship, and Future Texts

Olivia Pope as a future text, despite her status as "primetime television's first post-racial Black heroine" (Wright 2014:20), is a relatable character. For some, her existence as a complex and multifaceted woman whose portrayal extends beyond monolithic constructions is a fresh take on Blackness. Pope's privileged life, ivy-league education with 'sons of kings,' current political and social positionality, and complicated love life challenged participants and those in digitally mediated spaces to rethink the confines of representation and relatability. Though most remained unable to relate on a class or political level, many found her wardrobe and embodiment of femininity relatable, and as something that complimented Black women's history as taste-makers (Harris 2014; Lee 2010). Pope's presentation of the relatable body expanded beyond a wardrobe. Her wardrobe epitomized her sensuality, power, and subtle sexuality; it created moments of career inspiration and empowered participants.

Through Rhimes' efforts paired with The Limited, individuals can personify Pope and gain Washington's media darling and 'it girl' status. This, for Blue, Whitley and Marie Wallace demonstrated the influence Black women have on popular culture. The *Scandal* line provides

purchase into a Black woman-centric world, where all eyes focus on the ability to command a room and handle situations. Saraphina and Jazzy argued despite the lure of the line and Pope's clear style maven status, her wardrobe and the ability to gain access remains limited: the *Scandal* line is unaffordable. Thus, even when Black women gain access to recognition, to positive value and desire it remains bound within the limits of consumption and desire that requires (some) Black women to sacrifice economic well-being. Despite this, for others participants like Whitley and Blue, they are willing to give up fringe benefits and request item-specific presents to gain the recognition Pope's wardrobe promises.

Reading Pope as a future text allows for more nuanced representations of Black women's thoughts on race, gender, and intersectionality. Because it is not clear where the boundary or brackets should be within these conversations, further study and interaction with Black women is necessary. Reading narratives about Black women's ability to be accurate representations, authentic constructions, or messy humans as future texts reframes conversations about symbolic representations and interrogates the bracketing off of Black femininity from respectability and value within American society. Black women must have access to a multifaceted presentation of the human condition and active recognition that this contains 'messiness.' Through these acknowledgments, Black women gain access to the possibility of social citizenship. However, consistent challenges to the presentation of multifaceted and messy presentations –even when fictitious– remain prominent in digitally mediated spaces and within focus groups and interviews.

Pope's sexual relationships present the trope of the Jezebel while her interactions with her staff and as fixer portray her as a Political Mammy. Her image, for some vacillating between these two controlling discourses, places her outside the idealized conceptions of femininity.

Within the context of puritanical America, women as caretakers are the 'keepers of the culture.' As such, their behaviors remain confined within a particular and delimited list, their bodies and social actions under consistent surveillance (Bilson 1995; Durham 2004; Marshall 1996). Because "Black females were used within stereotypical binary portrayals to construct ideal conceptualizations of gender, race, domesticity and consumerism," their bodies exist in juxtaposition as inferior and uncivilized women (Jenkins 2014:208). Respectability politics, emphasized by middle and upper class Blacks, acted as direct challenge to the "contemporaneous representations of class positionality, civility, and commodification" (Jenkins 2014:208). Within this narrative, and to preserve the value of purity of Black culture, Black women to exist as respectable, virtuous women who lack sexuality and engage in active disavowal of sexual desires.

Although several participants and those digitally mediated spaces argued respectability politics remain an antiquated remnant, they acknowledged their continual control and use to confine Black women's bodies and recognition. Others argued greater engagement with respectability politics; including active policing of Black women's bodies would decrease the social experience of exclusion. Participants like Whitley intentionally avoided behaviors that could align with a controlled definition of Black femininity at work to ensure her body avoided policing. Her choice, designed to create safe spaces for Black women was as an attempt to challenge the "constantly recycled…limited portrayals and perpetuated stereotypes" of Black women in media (Marshall 1996; Nicholson 2014:275). Whitley's attempt to disprove controlled images, like Samantha and Vanessa demonstrates the pervasive nature of respectability politics. That Black women, even when they actively disavow the politics in some ways engage them in their daily lives to create spaces of active and positive recognition. Respectability politics remain

151

a significant force in Black women's lives. For some participants and those in digitally mediated spaces, they challenge invisibility and position Black women's bodies as valued members of society (Ferguson 2004; Goldman 2014; Harris-Perry 2011; Nicholson 2014).

Respectability politics, like racist and sexist discourses reposition the right of control over Black women's bodies and blame them for their victimization. Although the intentions behind the construction of the politics of respectability aimed provide Black women access to social citizenship, the tactics used and continual reliance on White norms as a baseline for acceptability femininities reifies exclusionary brackets. Narratives that engage respectability politics maintain social exclusion, failed recognition, and limit the possibility of reading Pope as a future text, or as a character that challenges the confined borders of exclusion. Participant and digitally mediated narratives actively challenged respectability politics that control Black women's bodies and deny their recognition. It seemed within focus groups and some digitally mediated spaces, that as White (2001) argues, counter narratives operated much like Newton's law: for every dominant discourse, a counter discourse exists. These counternarratives or future texts pushed for new and divergent readings of Black femininity, Black women's bodies, and Black culture. They argued that controlled images and respectability politics failed to address Black women's current social experiences of racism, sexism, and varied intersectional positionalities. As such, they misconstrued Pope's body and disallowed for challenging and empowering images of Black femininity. For them, Pope stood as an exemplary of a future text.

Future texts provide new readings and spaces of recognition. They challenge invisibility associated with Black women's bodies and positive recognition. On the surface, Pope as a Black woman of higher socio-economic status, a woman engaged in an affair with the married Republican President and continuing a relationship with Command Operative Ballard

exemplifies the Jezebel. As a public relations fixer who saved her employees, Pope typifies the political Mammy. However, as a future text Pope exists as a multifaceted and complex woman who fails to solve her own problems, while saving others. Presenting Pope as a future text provides the possibility for the full range of humanity without the requirement of objectification. Pope's interactions with Jake and Fitz challenge sexual scripts. When she envisions herself with both men, Pope acts as a sexual subject in full command of her sexuality similar to Lee's (2010:64) power chicks. As a future text, empowered through her subjective sexuality, Pope reframes the narrative of Black femininity to include a woman who "does not sit around waiting on male approval and refuses to conform to societal expectations" (Lee 2010:69). Rather, like Serena Williams and Beyoncé, Pope builds an empire through her firm Pope and Associates, while Washington furthers her empire through the *Scandal* clothing line.

Future texts, much like Lee's erotic revolutionaries "defile traditional prescriptions for female prudence, and inaugurate sexual scripts that carve new spaces for eroticism and sexual freedom" (Lee 2010:128). Pope as a future text does not fully rupture gender and racial regimes; however, for participants her representation provides inspiration and opportunity for change. Despite participants' challenge to Pope's characterization as a future text, it is important to recognize the discursive space her representation provides. It challenges controlling images, while providing new avenues to see and read Black women's bodies, their sexualities, and their interactions with systems of power. Each week Pope provides active ruptures from the continual news-stream of devaluation, murder, and brutality Black women face. This is not to say that participants dismissed these moments, or saw Pope's representation as a complete challenge. Instead, it provided a momentary pause to the onslaught of violence, both physical and symbolic. Narratives from participants like Marie Wallace, Renee, Blue, and Sarafina point to the

importance of holding both change and continuation simultaneously. For participants, Pope is not a solution not the problem of racism and sexism in media or society. She, like Obama cannot be the 'savior'[43] to Black women or to representations of Black femininity despite the spaces and maps she provides (partial) rupture.

Although Black women's ability to gain positive recognition and value from Pope's character and continued representation remained limited, participants drew optimism and empowerment from her influence on popular culture. They argued that knowing millions tune in every Thursday to watch, discuss, and attempt to embody a powerful, sexual, educated and complex Black woman provided recognition and value. As a researcher, while I acknowledge this potential it remains important to maintain that the recognition Pope gains, the visibility of her body, and the ways she disrupts racist and sexist structures remains mired within body politics, colorism, classism, and the white racial frame. Pope as a future text, as a potential erotic revolutionary on the battleground of popular culture where "sexual scripts are the weapons" deployed "in a discursive war against the residual effects of male domination," fails to fully disrupt the routines of sexual stratification (Cartier 2014; Lee 2010:128; Nelson 2002).

Although Pope's representation and Rhimes' writing provide counter-narratives to controlling discourses that present the possibility of future texts and changing the social experience of oppression, her lack of full agency, controlled sexuality, and outside structures constrain her access to power and change. To be clear, I acknowledge that Rhimes is only one woman and as such cannot change the systemic structure of racism and sexism. I, like the participants, want more of Rhimes in her representations of race. At times, these hopes

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[43] For op-ed pieces that present the Black savior/end of racism commentary please see: http://www.forbes.com/2008/12/30/end-of-racism-oped-cx_jm_1230mcwhorter.html and http://townhall.com/columnists/dineshdsouza/2008/09/01/obama_and_the_end_of_racism/page/full

overshadow the importance of Pope's character and representation of Black femininity. Rhimes' work is important and disrupts silencing while providing safe spaces for Black women to celebrate the value and recognition of a Black woman. Thus, while Black women remain constrained by post-racial fantasies, by respectability politics, and by racist and sexist discourses, Rhimes' work and Washington's portrayal of Pope remain important spaces of contestation.

Roberts demonstrates the impact racist and sexist narratives and policies have on policing and controlling Black women's abilities to reproduce, achieve positive value and recognition, and attain power over their own selves (1997). Similarly, Black women's ability to gain recognition within digitally mediated spaces and in their everyday non-digital lives lack autonomy and subjectivity. Conversations surrounding Pope in digitally mediated spaces restrict Black women's perceptions of value and belonging, they challenge their abilities to perform sexuality. Narratives challenge the intersectional social experience of oppression and social exclusion; they posit that by removing race, by choosing one (unmarried) man, and by saving herself, Pope can achieve their recognition and value. However, popular culture despite its fascination with Black bodies remains inhospitable. The choice to disengage from digitally mediated spaces gives space for Black women to imagine a location where they, if even only for a moment, have value. This choice actively challenges the particular discursive and material space that posits the impossibility of "a virtuous black woman" (Roberts 1997:11). Thus, the effects of racism and sexism, even with the possibility of future texts, the possibility for positive value and recognition or social citizenship in mainstream media and popular culture remains limited.

LIMITATIONS

This dissertation, as an exploratory project has a small sample size. The limited sample size provides no ability to generalize onto a larger population. As such, it is the main limitation of this project. As a project influenced by institutional ethnography and Black feminisms, the goal of the research is not to create a generalizable product, nor is it to produce 'truth.' The aim of this project was two-fold: first, to understand how Black women experienced digitally mediate spaces, if these narratives (in digitally mediated spaces) surrounding Black women's bodies constrained or enabled access to social citizenship, and second, to delimit the effects and affects of digital engagement on Black women's lives and access to social citizenship. Although smaller numbers within focus groups could create an under saturation of data, in the third focus group I achieved saturation. The narratives of participants remained consistent in the third and fourth focus groups, even with different questions. Exploratory projects that begin from the perspective of the group require focused attention on stakeholders to ensure their narratives remain central to analysis (Smith 2005). Thus, while the small sample size is a limitation, I argue it is the smallest limitation of this study.

The second and greater limitation of this project is the general education level of participants. Most participants had some form of advanced education: two-year, four-year or post-graduate degree. Within this, some participants knew each other from their time at a large Midwestern University. The ties within focus groups and friendship connections proved important when discussing topics that caused debate. Because participants had some experience with debates within the classroom, and in challenging others on their perspectives, interactions remained friendly. Participants seemed at ease in challenging others, and drawing upon their interpersonal connections understood that they could disagree and remain friends. Although

participants had heightened levels of formalized secondary education that increased their current or potential class standing, many saw themselves as working, lower, and lower-middle class. Their lives within an academic structure as Black women remained focused on their upbringing as a way to understand the world. Because of this, very little economic diversity existed within the focus group. The third limitation of the study challenged my ability to ascertain whether Black women of different class standings had varied understandings or experiences in digitally mediated spaces. Their class perspectives in tandem with heightened education levels constrained my ability to understand if Pope's positionality seemed attainable or normative. Participants' perceptions of relatability remained consistent as most saw themselves as advancing to a higher SES and having similar education and job prospects to Pope.

The final limitation within this study surrounds personal connections and extended network associations with some participants. When I started the call for participants, I posted flyers in coffee shops, at local gyms, and other establishments. I also sent the call out through University networks, and those focused on minority outreach. Because I was a member of some of these spaces, some women whom I knew responded. Although they had limited knowledge of my research, they did know of my scholarship in general and some of my perspectives on race and gender within the United States. These interconnections could influence their engagement with the study, and as some may argue, generate response bias. However, the women in the group who knew of my research are scientists themselves who understand the importance of research. I acknowledge that some of the information I gathered could have some bias within it stemming from personal connections or network ties. However, I argue this also provides the possibility for research that has greater depth. Due to personal connections and network affiliations, I had some purchase into the 'community' and as such garnered slight 'insider.' This

status allowed participants to have relaxed interactions, believing that I would not cause further harm to Black women.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

"Canonical representation, recognition, and visibility depend on conformities produced and informed by the racially motivated regulations of gender and sexuality" (Ferguson 2004:69). Because Black women exist within a canonical cartography that defines their bodies through exclusion, intentional misrecognition, and invisibility, their ability to attain positive recognition and representation remains constrained. Washington and Pope challenge intentional misrecognition and misrepresentation. Together, they (begin to) shatter the silence and forced invisibility of complex Black women in media: Washington is a media darling, Pope has an eponymous clothing line that draws in women across racial lines. Although neither is invisible and both gain positive recognition, their bodies remain intertwined with controlled images that silence and negate humanity, constrain and enable social citizenship.

This research revealed that representations of Black femininities and Black women's bodies in media remained constrained through controlled images, veiled racist and sexist narratives, and articulations of respectability politics. These narratives restrict access to positive recognition and value. Within digitally mediated spaces, they create psychic harm –stress, imbalance, and disease. Black women, experiencing constraining narratives intentionally avoid digitally mediated spaces to maintain a sense of balance. However, with Internet engagement rapidly increasing, it is impossible to fully limit one's interaction with crooked spaces. Thus, it is important for future research to continue examinations of the effects and affects of engagement on Black women's lives, their conceptions of self, and their health.

In addition to outlining the effects of controlled narratives on perceptions of recognition and value, this research demonstrated that Black women see the possibility for future texts. They argue that Black women must have access to the full range of representation, and unlike Cori, should not face constraining roles. We should not underestimate the importance of future texts as real possibilities for social citizenship. If active visibility with positive recognition is required for value and respect, then research must examine how future texts provide the possibility for voicing Black women's multifaceted selves.

Future texts provide a space to reframe mapped constructions and renegotiate recognition. They also provide safe spaces for Black women. As participants and those in digitally mediated spaces note, *Scandal* and shows like *How to Get Away with Murder* offer momentary escapes. Although lasting only an hour (or less), they create a bubble where Black women feel valued and recognized; where their unknowability becomes knowable. Despite the potentially fleeting and momentary knowability, some Black women find value, and experience recognition that remains imperative to their everyday lives and to challenging unbelonging. As research on future texts and representations of Black women continue, it is important to examine how future texts create safe spaces, what spaces are best for safety and value, and what steps are required to further disrupt and possibly rupture exclusionary, racist and sexist structures. If it is the case, as participants argue that non-controlled images find open and safe spaces in digitally mediated platforms, we must understand how these spaces influence interaction and how we can increase audience participation. Increasing audience participation provides the possibility to create new norms of positive recognition and value for Black women's bodies.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Call for Participants

Focus Group on *Scandal*, Representations of Black Women & Social Media

MSU Sociology Doctoral Candidate seeks participants for focus group. Participants should self identify as a Black woman between the ages of 22 and 45, watch the series *Scandal*, and regularly use social media (Facebook, Twitter, vines, etc.).

Focus groups will discuss the character Olivia Pope and her representation of Black femininity. Guided conversations will surround how people discuss the show and the character in social media and potential affects on Black women's conception of self.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Focus groups will last approximately 90 minutes. All participants will receive small compensation ($20 cash). Focus groups will be recorded using video and audio devices. Your privacy will be protected to the fullest extent possible (your name and image will not be used without consent, all findings will use pseudonyms). Focus groups will be held in the Lansing area; however, if you live out of town and you have Google Hangout, you can participate!

Can you participate? Answer **yes** to the following:
✔ I am a Black woman
✔ I am aged 22-45
✔ I watch *Scandal*(!)
✔ I use social media regularly (at least once a day)
✔ I'm in the Lansing area or have Google Hangout

If you would like to participate, or know of interested parties, **please contact Leigh-Anne Goins**: goinslei@msu.edu
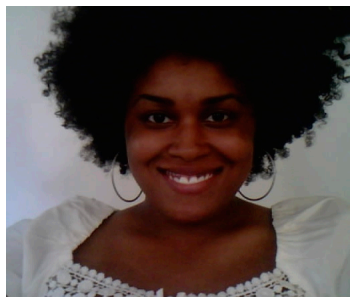

FIGURE 1: Picture of Researcher on Call for Participants

APPENDIX B:

Consent Forms

Focus Group Consent Form
(Re)Creating Unbelonging Through Online Comments

We are conducting research on the ways in which race is portrayed in the media, and how people view those portrayals for their own race, as well as the race of others in online spaces. We seek to gauge public opinion on these topics, and would very much like to see your opinions on this.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. It is expected that this focus group will take about two hours to complete, and during this time a short clip of *Scandal* will be shown. We do not believe that this study carries any risk to the participants. Findings from this study are expected to inform future thoughts on race, the media, and public opinion.

Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. No comments will be attributed to you in any reports of this study: instead of your name, a pseudonym will be used. To ensure confidentiality we ask that participants do not share the identities of others in the focus group. All data collected from focus groups will be kept in a password-protected computer in a locked office.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without consequence (e.g. will not affect you). You will receive small compensation for your time in the form of a $20 cash. If you choose to withdraw from the focus group after it has started you will still receive compensation.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Stephanie Nawyn, Department of Sociology, 316 Berkey Hall, MI 48824, 517-355-6640, nawyn@msu.edu, or Leigh-Anne Goins, 316 Berkey Hall, MI 48824, 517-355-6640, goinslei@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Thank you.

_____

Signature

Interview Consent Form
(Re)Creating Unbelonging Through Online Comments

We are conducting research on the ways in which race is portrayed in the media, and how people view those portrayals for their own race, as well as the race of others in online spaces. We seek to gauge public opinion on these topics, and would very much like to see your opinions on this.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. It is expected that this interview will take about one hour to complete. We do not believe that this study carries any risk to the participants. Findings from this study are expected to inform future thoughts on race, the media, and public opinion.

Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. No comments will be attributed to you in any reports of this study: instead of your name, a pseudonym will be used. All data collected from interviews will be kept in a password-protected computer in a locked office.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without consequence (e.g. will not affect you). You will receive small compensation for your time in the form of a $20 cash. If you choose to withdraw from the focus group after it has started you will still receive compensation.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Stephanie Nawyn, Department of Sociology, 316 Berkey Hall, MI 48824, 517-355-6640, nawyn@msu.edu, or Leigh-Anne Goins, 316 Berkey Hall, MI 48824, 517-355-6640, goinslei@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Thank you.

_____

Signature

APPENDIX C:

Focus Group Guide

Focus Group Opening:

Thank you very much for your participation in my focus group! My name is Leigh-Anne Goins. I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at Michigan State University. Currently, I am conducting research for my dissertation. I am interested in representations of Black women and Black femininities in media, and how various representations can create a sense of belonging, or a feeling of positive social recognition for Black women. I would like to understand the ways individuals discuss Black women, specifically in online spaces (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.) and how these narratives can enhance or detract from a sense of belonging. Through this focus group, I hope to understand how Black women view and think about Scandal, including its portrayal of race and gender, and the ways Black women (like you) use online spaces to discuss the show and Black femininity. Within this conversation, I would like to discuss postracialism in media, or the erasure or minimization of race as a salient or meaningful piece in conversations or representations of Black femininity. Today, the bulk of our conversation will surround one particular (and fictitious) woman, Olivia Pope, from the television series *Scandal*. We will address how representations of Black femininities have changed over time, what the character of Olivia Pope represents, her relatability, and the possibility for positive social recognition and value through her image and online conversations.

Throughout the rest of our time, I will ask you questions. Feel free to answer all of them, or select the ones that you feel most comfortable answering. There are no right or wrong answers. I don't have any expectations for answers. I really want to know what you're thinking and what you experience in online spaces. At any point during our discussion, please feel free to use personal examples, share stories, challenge a question or comment, and make connections to other things/places. If something does not make sense, or you need a question rephrased (additional explanation), do not hesitate to ask.

This focus group will take approximately two hours to complete. If we run over time, and you have to leave, please do not feel obligated to stay. I will stay as long as you would like to talk, so if we run over time that is okay. Please get comfortable, and if you need another drink or to refresh your appetizers, feel free to get up. Thank you very much for your participation! Let's begin.

Discussion Questions:

Opening Questions: (15 minutes)

1. How are Black women represented in media?
   a. This could be historically and/or contemporarily.
2. Are these representations positive?
3. What do you think about representations of Black women in media?
4. How is the intersection of race and gender, or Black femininity, currently represented on mainstream (i.e. standard cable) television?
5. Are there different types of Black women presented?
   a. If so, what types or forms of femininity have you seen?

Scandal Questions: (30 minutes)

1. What are your general thoughts about the television show, *Scandal*?
2. How often do you watch *Scandal*?
3. What drew you to the show?
4. Can you tell me a little about the lead character, Olivia Pope?
5. Do you see similarities between Olivia Pope, as a Black woman, entrepreneur, etc. and yourself?
6. Would you say Olivia Pope is an accurate representation of a some forms of Black femininity?
   a. What about a specific type of Black woman or femininity?
7. How is race represented in the show?
   a. Do you think this is an accurate representation of how race is experienced in everyday life?
8. How is gender represented in the show?
   a. Do you think this is an accurate representation of how gender is experienced in everyday life?
9. How is Black femininity represented in the show?
   a. Do you think this is an accurate representation of how the intersection of race and gender are experienced in everyday life?

Online Responses to Scandal (10-15 minutes)

1. When you engage in online spaces (twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc.), how do individuals discuss Olivia Pope and *Scandal*?
2. Do you see differences in the types of conversations?
3. Are there gendered (different comments from women vs. men) or other divisions you notice?

Postracialism and Representations of Black femininity in Online Spaces (30-45 minutes)

1. Some online articles and blogs argue Scandal operates in a postracial fantasy. Would you agree with this statement?
    a. If it were postracial, what would that mean to you?
2. Whether or not you consider the show postracial, do you think Black women consider the lead character, Olivia Pope, to be a postracial Black Woman?
    b. What does being postracial mean to you?
4. Does race have to be present to address Black women's issues?
5. Does race affect Black women (and their bodies) differently than men's?
    a. Is this represented in media?
    b. What does this look like within the show, *Scandal*?
6. How might engaging in a show that does not explicitly deal with race, or where gender is more salient (post-racial[44]) affect how we think about Black femininity and Black women?
7. Would these shows help to erase race from a national conversation?
    a. Does this matter to you?

Social Citizenship (Positive Recognition) (20-30 minutes)

1. When you think about the various representations of Black femininity and Black womanhood in media, do the images make you feel included in society?
2. Do you think others who see these representations, and who may not be Black women, believe or think positive, negative, mixed (etc.) things about Black women?
    b. When these individuals discuss Black women in online spaces, what might that look like?
    c. Would these narratives (tweets, Facebook comments, blogs, etc.) increase or decrease Black women's ability to belong (to feel valued, to have positive social recognition)?
3. What things are necessary to have a sense of belonging, to feel like people who look like you are respected and valued, that they are desired and valued citizens or members of a community?
4. Do you think the character Olivia Pope, and her representations of Black femininity, provide an image that could (or does) affect positive social recognition and value for Black women?
5. Do you think Black women seek out others in online spaces to create safe spaces and provide (faux, temporary, what) inclusion, positive recognition, and belonging?
    a. How does Olivia Pope relate to this interaction, seeking out, engaging with others in online spaces?
6. Do the women in online spaces, including you, discuss feeling as if you don't belong, or are not valued members of society?
    a. If you do, what things bring about these conversations?
    b. If they occur, what would be required to end these conversations?

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[44] If participants are not familiar with this term, I will include a verbal explanation of post racial that will surround the elision of race, or the intersection of race and gender, and the engagement of subtly racist and sexist, or overtly sexist and subtly racist narratives.

APPENDIX D:

Interview Guides

Marie Wallace

Opening:
Thank you so much for allowing me to interview you. I really appreciated all of your contributions during your focus group. In some of your responses to my questions and group conversation, you helped contextualize *Scandal,* representation, and recognition. Our interview will last approximately one hour. If we get to the end of time and you have more to share, we can stay longer. However, do not feel obligated to do so.

I would like to begin our conversation by discussing your general thoughts on the focus group. After this, I will remind you of some comments you made during the group and ask you to expand on them.

Questions:
1. In your focus group, you said growing up you watched Girlfriends, but that this show you could not watch –as easily- around your White friends. Could you elaborate on why this occurred?
    a. Why do you think Scandal is easier to watch and/or discuss Scandal with White people?
2. You mentioned that Olivia (and Shonda's other characters) are 'culturally Black.' Could you expand on what this means to you?
    a. Can you expand on how (or the ways you see) Olivia's 'Blackness' within the show –specifically things you relate to?
3. You mentioned Olivia's character is often 'policed' by Black people. That there are certain expectations of her because she is a Black female lead and there hasn't been one in a while.
    a. What do you think these expectations do to fictional characters, or actresses attempting to portray them?
    b. Do you think the expectations are justified?
    c. Do you think expectations hinder character development? Or the ability for Black women to be 'fully human' on screen?
4. During our focus group you said, "I love it because it makes people uncomfortable and discomfort makes you talk about things that you don't want to talk about as you having privilege." Could you expand on what this discomfort is?
    a. Could you discuss how privilege may stop someone from having this conversation, or create a level of discomfort?
    b. Why do you think Scandal (and ShondaLand shows) are able to make people uncomfortable, yet people continue to watch?
5. When our conversation turned to social citizenship, you pointed to the ways Black women are often not recognized or given value and respect by Black men and White women. I would like to spend a little time unpacking this, discussing what social citizenship means to you, and the ways characters on screen can or cannot affect Black women's abilities to access social citizenship in their everyday lives.
    a. Can you begin by discussing what social citizenship means to you?
    b. Why do you think Black women are denied access to full social citizenship?

  c. You mentioned that Olivia has more than others. Do you think this is because she's fictional, so she's granted more access, does it have something to do with her class/upbringing, or is it something else entirely?

6. Do you think Kerry Washington the actress, her body, speech patterns, and persona affect how we think about Olivia Pope?
  a. If she were played by a different woman, do you think the show would receive the same fanfare?
  b. If her body or her voice were different (pick an actress you'd like), would you be able to watch and discuss the show with your White counterparts like you do now?

7. Do you think more 'human' portrayals of Black women (flawed and complex characters) can change perceptions of Black women in our everyday lives?

8. What does watching Scandal do for you?
  a. Do you receive any benefits from watching the show?

9. Do you find yourself embodying Olivia in your daily life?
  a. If so, how/what does this look like?

Sarafina:

Opening:
Thank you so much for allowing me to interview you. I really appreciated all of your contributions during your focus group. In some of your responses to my questions and group conversation, you helped contextualize *Scandal,* representation, and recognition. Our interview will last approximately one hour. If we get to the end of time and you have more to share, we can stay longer. However, do not feel obligated to do so.

I would like to begin our conversation by discussing your general thoughts on the focus group. After this, I will remind you of some comments you made during the group and ask you to expand on them.

Questions:
1. In your comments you discussed the Rhimes' shows and the seeming post-racial lens they have. Do you think Scandal operates along the same lines as Greys and Private Practice –it's an interracial show, where there's not a strong representation of "Black culture."
    a. Do you think this helps with the overall appeal or draw?
    b. Does this make the characters more 'relatable' across the board?
    c. What would 'Black culture' look like on screen?
2. Considering her readability and representation of Blackness, do you think Olivia Pope is 'culturally Black?'
    a. Can you expand on how (or the ways you see) Olivia's 'Blackness' within the show –specifically things you relate to?
3. You mentioned the complexities of controlled images in media as existing and changing. Can you expand on this?
    a. You mentioned the show, Mike and Molly. Would you mind discussing the character and the ways you see his behavior aligning with stereotypical tropes?
4. During our focus group we discussed the want or need for some online commenters to regulate or express expectations for Olivia's character.
    a. What do these expectations do to fictional characters, or actresses attempting to portray them?
    b. Do you think the expectations are justified?
    c. Do you think expectations hinder character development? Or the ability for Black women to be 'fully human' on screen?
5. When our conversation turned to positive value and recognition in society and media, you pointed to the ways Black women are often not recognized or given value and respect by Black men and White women.
    a. Can you begin by discussing why Black women lack value and positive recognition in society?
    b. Do you think the same lack of value and positive recognition applies to Olivia Pope's character?
        i. If so, why? If not, why?

     c. Do you think Pope is granted more leeway or greater value respect because she's fictional? Does it have something to do with her class/upbringing, or is it something else entirely?

6. Do you think Kerry Washington the actress, her body, speech patterns, and persona affect how we think about Olivia Pope?
     a. If she were played by a different woman, do you think the show would receive the same fanfare?
     b. If her body or her voice were different (pick an actress you'd like), would you be able to watch and discuss the show with your White counterparts like you do now?

7. Do you think more 'human' portrayals of Black women (flawed and complex characters) can change perceptions of Black women in our everyday lives?

8. What does watching Scandal do for you?
     a. Do you receive any benefits from watching the show?

9. Do you find yourself embodying Olivia in your daily life?
     a. If so, how/what does this look like?

Imani

Opening:
Thank you so much for allowing me to interview you. I really appreciated all of your contributions during your focus group. In some of your responses to my questions and group conversation, you helped contextualize *Scandal,* representation, and recognition. Our interview will last approximately one hour. If we get to the end of time and you have more to share, we can stay longer. However, do not feel obligated to do so.

I would like to begin our conversation by discussing your general thoughts on the focus group. After this, I will remind you of some comments you made during the group and ask you to expand on them.

Questions:
1. You view Scandal along the same lines as Greys and Private Practice –it's an interracial show, where there's not a strong representation of "Black culture."
   a. Do you think this helps with the overall appeal or draw?
   b. Does this make the characters more 'relatable' across the board?
   c. What would 'Black culture' look like on screen?
2. From this, do you think Olivia Pope is 'culturally Black?'
   a. Can you expand on how (or the ways you see) Olivia's 'Blackness' within the show –specifically things you relate to?
3. During our focus group we discussed the want or need for some online commenters to regulate or express expectations for Olivia's character.
   a. What do these expectations do to fictional characters, or actresses attempting to portray them?
   b. Do you think the expectations are justified?
   c. Do you think expectations hinder character development? Or the ability for Black women to be 'fully human' on screen?
4. When our conversation turned to positive value and recognition in society and media, you pointed to the ways Black women are often not recognized or given value and respect by Black men and White women.
   a. Can you begin by discussing why Black women lack value and positive recognition in society?
   b. Do you think the same lack of value and positive recognition applies to Olivia Pope's character?
      i. If so, why? If not, why?
   c. Do you think Pope is granted more leeway or greater value respect because she's fictional? Does it have something to do with her class/upbringing, or is it something else entirely?
5. Do you think Kerry Washington the actress, her body, speech patterns, and persona affect how we think about Olivia Pope?
   a. If she were played by a different woman, do you think the show would receive the same fanfare?

b. If her body or her voice were different (pick an actress you'd like), would you be able to watch and discuss the show with your White counterparts like you do now?

6. Do you think more 'human' portrayals of Black women (flawed and complex characters) can change perceptions of Black women in our everyday lives?

7. What does watching Scandal do for you?
   a. Do you receive any benefits from watching the show?

8. Do you find yourself embodying Olivia in your daily life?
   a. If so, how/what does this look like?

Blue
Opening:
Thank you so much for allowing me to interview you. I really appreciated all of your contributions during your focus group. In some of your responses to my questions and group conversation, you helped contextualize *Scandal,* representation, and recognition. Our interview will last approximately one hour. If we get to the end of time and you have more to share, we can stay longer. However, do not feel obligated to do so.

I would like to begin our conversation by discussing your general thoughts on the focus group. After this, I will remind you of some comments you made during the group and ask you to expand on them.

Questions:
1. There were a few instances within your comments where you discussed the seeming post-racial lens within *Scandal*. In these moments, you debated the need for a "clearly" Black woman –instead arguing Pope is "always already" a Black woman. Could you expand on this?
   a. Do you think this helps with the overall appeal or draw?
   b. Does this make the characters more 'relatable' across the board?
   c. What would 'Black culture' look like on screen?
2. Considering her readability as always already Black, what are your thoughts on Pope's representation of cultural Blackness?
   a. Can you expand on how (or the ways you see) Olivia's 'Blackness' within the show –specifically things you relate to?
3. You argued that we, as a society, have moved beyond simple stereotypes and controlling images. Can you expand on this?
   a. If additional prompting is necessary –You said, you didn't know how we wouldn't or couldn't move beyond the same stereotypes (mammy, jezebel, etc.). What do you mean by that?
4. During our focus group we discussed the want or need for some 'online' commenters to regulate or express expectations for Olivia's character.
   a. What do these expectations do to fictional characters, or actresses attempting to portray them?
   b. Do you think the expectations are justified?
   c. Do you think expectations hinder character development? Or the ability for Black women to be 'fully human' on screen?
5. When our conversation turned to positive value and recognition in society and media, you pointed to the ways Black women are often not recognized or given value and respect across the board –including by other Black women.
   a. Can you begin by discussing why Black women lack value and positive recognition in society?
   b. Do you think the same lack of value and positive recognition applies to Olivia Pope's character?
      i. If so, why? If not, why?

      c.   Do you think Pope is granted more leeway or greater value respect because she's fictional? Does it have something to do with her class/upbringing, or is it something else entirely?

6. Do you think Kerry Washington the actress, her body, speech patterns, and persona affect how we think about Olivia Pope?
      a.   If she were played by a different woman, do you think the show would receive the same fanfare?
      b.   If her body or her voice were different (pick an actress you'd like), would you be able to watch and discuss the show with your White counterparts like you do now?

7. Do you think more 'human' portrayals of Black women (flawed and complex characters) can change perceptions of Black women in our everyday lives?

8. What does watching Scandal do for you?
      a.   Do you receive any benefits from watching the show?

9. Do you find yourself embodying Olivia in your daily life?
      a.   If so, how/what does this look like?

Renee

Opening:
Thank you so much for allowing me to interview you. I really appreciated all of your contributions during your focus group. In some of your responses to my questions and group conversation, you helped contextualize *Scandal,* representation, and recognition. Our interview will last approximately one hour. If we get to the end of time and you have more to share, we can stay longer. However, do not feel obligated to do so.

I would like to begin our conversation by discussing your general thoughts on the focus group. After this, I will remind you of some comments you made during the group and ask you to expand on them.

Questions:
1. During the focus group you mentioned that White characters have license to be spies and to "just be." Could you expand on what this means?
    a. Why do you think Black people and Black culture exists outside the parameters of spy craft (outside of country of origin debate)?
    b. What do you think is necessary to change this within media?
2. You noted that *Scandal* is an interracial show, where Pope's Blackness though legible, does not clearly present a specific type of "Black culture." Could you expand upon what the different types of Black culture are?
    a. Do you think the lack of representation helps with the overall appeal or draw?
    b. Does this make the characters more 'relatable' across the board?
3. Despite the lack of relatability to Pope's character, Do you think Olivia Pope's Blackness is 'culturally Black' enough?
    a. Why are there limits on the types of forms of Blackness in media?
    b. Who –if anyone– should decide on the types of Blackness presented in media?
4. During our focus group, we discussed the want or need for some 'online' commenters to regulate or express expectations for Olivia's character.
    a. What do these expectations do to fictional characters, or actresses attempting to portray them?
    b. Do you think the expectations are justified?
    c. Do you think expectations hinder character development? Or the ability for Black women to be 'fully human' on screen?
5. Within our group, you noted that the show and Pope are not post-racial; instead they are 'uniquely human.' Could you expand upon this?
    a. What does 'humanity' look like on television?
6. Although we did not discuss this in detail during your focus group, I would like your thoughts on positive value and recognition in society and media.
    a. Do you think Black women receive recognition, value and respect as characters and actresses in media?
    b. What groups are most likely to respect and recognize Black women?
7. If you can, please discuss why and how Black women lack value and positive recognition in society.

       a. Do you think the same lack of value and positive recognition applies to Olivia Pope's character?
          i. If so, why? If not, why?
       b. Do you think Pope is granted more leeway or greater value respect because she's fictional? Does it have something to do with her class/upbringing, or is it something else entirely?

8. Do you think Kerry Washington the actress, her body, speech patterns, and persona affect how we think about Olivia Pope?
       a. If she were played by a different woman, do you think the show would receive the same fanfare?
       b. If her body or her voice were different (pick an actress you'd like), would you be able to watch and discuss the show with your White counterparts like you do now?

9. Do you think more 'human' portrayals of Black women (flawed and complex characters) can change perceptions of Black women in our everyday lives?

10. What does watching Scandal do for you?
       a. Do you receive any benefits from watching the show?

11. Do you find yourself embodying Olivia in your daily life?
       a. If so, how/what does this look like?

APPENDIX E:

Extended Notes on *Scandal*

Season One

The overarching theme of season one is a scandal at the White House involving President Fitzgerald Grant sleeping with a young aid, Amanda Tanner, whom claims she is pregnant. As the season develops and Pope realizes Fitz did sleep with his aid, Olivia must confront her feelings for Fitz and the violation of their 'relationship.' Simultaneously, she navigates her tenuous relationship with the First Lady, Mellie, whom we learn is aware of the affair and has known of its existence from the start. The season closes with shocking revelations: Billy Chambers had an affair with Amanda Tanner and is the father of her unborn baby and he has a tape that proves the President had an affair with an unnamed woman –possibly Pope.

Quinn finds the body of Gideon Wallace a reporter for D.C Sun investigating the Amanda Tanner case/disappearance discovered someone planted Amanda with the goal of sleeping with the President. Pope, realizing the importance of Wallace's find and that Quinn's life could be in danger –her identity now at risk if her prints are found at a murder scene– scrambles her team to "scrub" the scene. As the season concludes, Pope embarks on a mission to find who planted Amanda, begins working for the President to protect him from the leaked tape, and works to protect Quinn's identity. The final revelation in season one that shocks audiences and reveals Beene's character comes when Charlie, Huck's rival at B613 (command) walks into the elevator with Billy Chambers and confesses that Beene hired him to kill Amanda (ABC.com 2015b; Abrams 2013; Mitovich and Ausiello 2015; Wikia 2015b).

Season Two

Season two surrounds the attempted assignation of President Grant, an investigation into the role of Defiance, OH in the previous Presidential election, and a national conversation surrounding the President's affair. James Novak, Cyrus Beene's husband begins an investigation

into the Defiance, OH, a place where all votes irrespective of their intent go to the Grant/Langston ticket. Revealed through flashbacks, the audience learns that Olivia, Mellie (First Lady), Verna Thornton (Associate Justice of the Supreme Court) and Hollis Doyle (CEO of Doyle Industries an oil company) rigged the ballot boxes in Defiance to ensure Grant's win. Grant learns of this later in the season, which strains his relationship with Olivia.

The season introduces Pope's father, Eli "Papa; Rowan" Pope, head of B613 (Command) an underground arm of the government, which although not exactly tied to the government runs intelligence and counter-intelligence missions to secure the country. Pope's father, who is decidedly not the nicest man, controls his operatives and maintains an offsite cell where those who misbehave live in 'holes.' Huck, a former operative is left broken after his engagement with B613. Through flashbacks, we learn the Pope asked her father to help her help homeless man she met on a subway platform. With her father's help, Huck receives the care he needs to begin his transition back to life. However, he is not quite the same as he enjoyed the work he did and likes killing. Season 2 also introduces Jake Ballard, a B613 operative, tasked by Rowan to watch Olivia Pope. Ballard, whom intrigues Olivia, is also friends with the President and the only person he trusts implicitly. As such, President Grant asks Jake to watch over Olivia, the two later begin a relationship (ABC.com 2015b; Abrams 2013; Mitovich and Ausiello 2015; Wikia 2015b).

Part way through the season, on his way to his 50th Birthday celebration, the President is shot. Olivia rushes to his side, and as he comes out of a coma and heals professes his love for Olivia and desire to leave his wife, Mellie. Mellie, who is now pregnant –partly as an effort to stem the conversation surrounding problems in their marriage– moves her due date up to keep Fitz at her side. Fitz meanwhile is determined to leave Mellie and begin his life with Olivia in a

cabin in Vermont, where the two will have children and grow old together. In a declaration of his

love, Fitz tells Cyrus about his plans and that the country will come to love a Black first lady and

for the first time have a "real" conversation about race. Fitz's declaration is not the first

seemingly progressive[45] moment of his presidency, or demonstration of his personal stances. At

the end of season two, James lies on the stand to protect Cyrus and those who conspired to elect

the President, Fitzgerald comes through albeit disturbed to earn he did not earn his election due

to Defiance. Olivia, after a mystery person leaks that Pope is the President's mistress finds

herself needing Pope & Associates for damage control (ABC.com 2015b; Abrams 2013;

Mitovich and Ausiello 2015; Wikia 2015b).

Season Three

In season three, the audience is left reeling from the closing scene where they learn

Rowan is Pope's father after she gets into a car attempting to find a safe space after being named

Fitz's mistress. This is not the only revelation about Pope's family: Pope's mother, previously

assumed dead in a plane crash is actually alive. Maya Lewis (Mama Pope) is not merely Pope's

mom who was in hiding; she is the terrorist, Marie Wallace. Although Pope thought her mom,

Maya was on the plane crashed by her now love interest, Fitz when, as a military officer was

commissioned for "Operation Remington," that shot down a 300 person passenger plane carrying

a suspected terrorist. Pope's mom, however did not board the plane resulting in the deaths of

innocent victims. Pope's firm finds this out after Maya escapes, her name leaked in the press.

Marie Wallace, after receiving momentary reprieve from Rowan's prison cell and seeing her

daughter as an adult, escapes custody and begins making contact with her previous terrorists

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[45] Fitzgerald Grant, a Moderate Conservative Republican President has a married and gay Chief of Staff, supports the United States having an 'open' dialogue on race –even if it seems the idea is Olivia's, he supports it– and in season three he advances an equal pay bill (ABC.com 2015b; Wikia 2015b).

connections. Her escape sets in motion Harrison's eventual demise in the third season. Harrison, after reconnecting with his previous boss, Adnan, results in his entanglement with Marie Wallace by way of Adnan (ABC.com 2015b; Mitovich and Ausiello 2015; Wikia 2015b).

The main story lines within this season focus on Grant's reelection campaign and the investigation into B613, now that Olivia understands the depths of her father's power and prowess in the nation's Capital. The President, after one term not seeing eye to eye with his conservative Vice President Sally Langston, embarks on his reelection campaign only to learn Sally is running for President as an Independent. Pope's team takes on his election campaign. Fitz, believing his reelection campaign is not successful begins to fantasize about a life with Olivia outside the White House. Fitz's new VP pick, Governor Andrew Nichols (R-CA), previously had an affair with Mellie. Mellie, who we learn this seasons was raped by Fitzgerald's father and believes her son, Jerry is Fitz's fathers, renews her relationship with Andrew, the only man in the last 15 years who comforted and cared for her. From Mellie's perspective, she could not sleep with Fitz after the rape as he reminded her of the event. Andrew saw a hurt woman, where Fitz only saw a cold-hearted 'bitch.' Throughout the remainder of the season, the dynamics of the rape play out with Olivia learning the truth and confessing it to Fitz in an attempt to garner sympathy for Mellie's situation. In the moment Olivia learns of the rape and potential paternity, she softens towards Mellie, who has always understood that Fitz *needs* Olivia and has always supported him, even when it meant her guaranteed discontent.

Adnan, working with Maya planted a bomb at Senator Hightower's funeral where the President is set to give the eulogy. The audience learns Maya killed Hightower to set her plan in motion. The President and current Vice President survive the bombing attempt, which gives Sally a boost in the polls. Harrison, now entangled in Adnan's plans with Maya and the bomb

plot finds himself on the losing side with B613, where he and Adnan die. Maya then attempts to

kill Rowan, leaving him in Pope's office where she finds him and rushes him to the hospital.

Before Maya attacked Rowan, he gave one final order that unbeknownst to him secured the

presidency for Fitz. The culmination of the cat and mouse game between Rowan –where Fitz

informed Rowan on his daughter's sexual preferences– ends in the death of the President's son,

Jerry Grant IV. Rowan believes Fitz took Olivia away from him, and to repay the favor, he

murders Jerry. Rowan does not dirty his hands killing Teddy; instead, he commissions a sleeper

B613 agent and the President's Secret Service Agent Tom Larson, to kill Jerry Grant by pricking

his hand with a super strain of bacterial meningitis. With all the turmoil of the past few weeks

Rowan suggests Olivia leave with Jake on a plane. In doing so, she ignores the President's call

when he needs her most. It seems in that moment she finally chose a man to love exclusively.

Season Four

Season four opens with Olivia on a beach, "in the sun," with Jake. She left Fitz, who

needed her –the audience learns later through hushed tones that Fitz attempted suicide. Olivia

returns with Jake to Washington to handle problems, her relationships damaged from her flight

with no goodbyes and no aid during Harrison's funeral. Their return opens their relationship to

problems, including Rowan framing Jake for Jerry's death. The President believing Jake killed is

son, beats him in an attempt to force a confession. Olivia convinces Fitz that Jake is not

responsible, and the three attempt to take down B613. Rowan, in response begins cleaning house

by killing B613 operatives. At the same time, Republican National Committee (RNC) chair

Elizabeth Noth and Vice President Andrew Nichols work together to start a war in Angola for

financial gain. Beene's husband James, who Jake Ballard operating as a B613 agent murdered

making it look like a car jacking, left a Beene alone with their adopted daughter (ABC.com

2015b; Wikia 2015a). In a vulnerable place, Beene begins an affair with an attractive man, who is actually a prostitute hired by Elizabeth and Andrew to gain blackmail and an advantage for pushing their war. When the plot is ruined, the two hire kidnappers believing the President will do anything to get Olivia back, including going to war.

After holding Olivia captive for several weeks, leading her to believe she is in another country, Olivia attempts escape. At this point, she realizes her captors have ulterior motives and begins to handle the situation. She discloses her importance and exploits her connection to the President suggesting a black-market auction rather than a direct sale. Although Pope believed the President would not negotiate on her behalf, he does, ultimately becoming irrational and placing many lives at risk. Olivia makes it back safely, only to realize Fitz went to war for her and attempted to negotiate with terrorists to secure her return, which disgusts her.

The second major arc in season four surrounds the takedown of B613. After receiving anonymous boxes surrounding operative Diego Muñoz's time at B613, his wife Kim Muñoz contacts David Rosen, the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia. Kim wants B613 taken down for its role in her husband's post-traumatic stress disorder and the disruption of their lives. Rosen, seeing a career making case and an organization he long wanted to disband, begins proceedings, which lead to the revelation that Diego Muñoz is Huck's real name. This starts a long running game of cat and mouse, where Rowan is always one step ahead of Pope's team. B613 escapes unscathed from the attempted take down, with "Rowan" killed off, leaving Eli Pope Rowan's real identity, able to assume a normal life.

Mellie, whose political ambitions remain consistent across seasons reveals she wants to run for a Senatorial seat in Virginia. Because there are no laws against it, thanks in part to a patriarchal structure that could not fathom its occurrence, she launches her campaign with Fitz in

the White House. However, her entanglements with Rowan, unbeknownst to her, sabotage her chances at running. Mellie provides the names of the Grand Jury members to Damascus Bainbridge (Rowan/Eli/Papa Pope), after he blackmails her with incriminating pictures and Fitz's Operation Remington file. Rowan, no longer under the guise of Damascus Bainbridge promptly has a (former) B613 member murder the jurors to ensure the case against him disappears. Although Olivia's team could not dismantle B613 and take Rowan down, thanks to advice from her Mother that no one knows who "Rowan" is– Pope's team pin an embezzlement charge on Eli Pope, removing his threatening presence from her life.

Huck, who Quinn realizes is the killer, does so to ensure he receives an immunity deal for his engagement with B613, while also protecting his family from certain death for his participation in the trial. Fitz learns of Mellie's betrayal of the jurors names and Cyrus' help in covering the truth. He orders Mellie out of the house and fires Cyrus. In this moment, viewers glimpse the possibility of a true 'Olitz' relationship. For the first time in four seasons, Olivia's life seems to find a balance. Jake, after nearly losing his life regains strength. Although he loves her, he cannot maintain a relationship as she is in love with someone else. Later that night, another person comes to her door. Fitz makes a grand gesture of his love, only to find his call unanswered. He returns to the White House dismayed only to find Pope on the balcony waiting for him. She made her decision, and is going after what she wants –Fitz. The final component in her disordered life no longer a concern, she embraces Fitz.

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[46] The articles included in this appendix include those that aided data collection and comment analysis. However, some articles (e.g. those with fewer than five comments) were not included in analysis.

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