

Reframing Tropes: Black Women Professionals on Television

LaVette M. Burnette, Middle Georgia State University

Abstract: This research explores the complex character Annalise Keating on *How to Get Away with Murder* as a contemporary representation of the BWP. I offer an overview of the historical and reimagined tropes used to portray Black women on primetime television within an intersectional framework of race, gender, and class with insight from representational identity theory. I question if old and reimagined stereotypes still apply to contemporary depictions of Black women professionals on television. Previous research focused on representations of Black women in various genres but lacked a deconstruction of popular depiction of Black women professionals. The lack of substantive academic research on Black women representations serves as pretense for this research and contributes to the ongoing need to deconstruct fictional ideals of Black women. The findings indicate Black women professional continue to be depicted with old and reimagined stereotypes but offer more realistic portrayals of the lives of Black women professionals.

KEYWORDS: Black women professionals, representational identity theory, deconstruction, stereotypes, intersectionality.

The depictions of Black women professionals (BWP) on prime-time television historically were oversimplified and one-dimensional characters. A notable BWP was the *Cosby Show's* Claire Huxtable, an attorney married to a doctor. She was also a mother of five children. Mrs. Huxtable was shown primarily in the home with minimal references to her profession as a lawyer. Pixley (2015) notes Mrs. Huxtable represented an “unachievable” standard for Black women in her social class and elegance. More important, the character did not more fully encapsulate the possible struggle of the balance women working full-time with the responsibilities of a family experience. The absence of her professional life is an example of symbolic annihilation that Black women are only one-dimensional, even as professionals, and can only serve one purpose at a time (Kretsedemas 2010).

Historically, the stereotypes of the mammy, sapphire, and jezebel described how Black women were portrayed in the media. Black feminist scholars began to reconceptualize these traditional stereotypes to fully articulate the problems these representations had on Black women viewers. Pixely (2015) argued that the main character of the television show *Scandal*, Olivia Pope, reflected a mixture of all of the traditional stereotypes but can be seen as complex and multi-dimensional. Harris-Perry (2011) painstakingly unpacks the myths of representations about mammy, angry Black female, and the strong Black woman (SBW). The SBW trope, Harris-Perry warns, is detrimental because of her

systematic misrecognition and the creation of unattainable expectations for contemporary Black women (2011, 21).

The lack of visibility of fully embodied Black female characters with robust home and professional lives and the application of old and reimaged patterns of representations has been replaced by contemporary characters on primetime television like Olivia Pope on *Scandal*, Veronica Harrington on *Have and Have-Nots*, Miranda Bailey on *Grey's Anatomy*, and Annalise Keating on *How to Get Away with Murder*. Each character is complex and a fully realized representation of a BWP working as a government fixer, doctor, attorney, or professor.

This research will explore the complex character Annalise Keating on *How to Get Away with Murder* as a contemporary representation of the BWP. I first offer an overview of the historical and reimaged tropes used to portray Black women on primetime television within an intersectional framework of race, gender, and class with insight from representational identity theory. Representational identity theory is grounded in Black feminist thought and posits that Black women should be recognized not only as the intersection of being Black and a woman, but in all facets of her being (Brown 2014). Previous research failed to concentrate on BWP on television due to the lack of notable BWP characters. The lack of attention/research/analysis of BWP is a contemporary example of symbolic annihilation of Black women in media studies research.

By widening the lenses by which we view BWP, we uncover the dangers of media stereotypes embedded in these representations that can possibly stigmatize and shame Black women. The research evaluates whether the traditional or reimaged tropes are represented with the Keating character. The findings contribute to black feminist media criticism by asking the overarching question: are Black women professionals represented as fully realized people without the constraints of historical or contemporary tropes?

Literature Review

Black feminist thought (BFT) practitioners theorizes that Black women possess alternate views of society because of oppression rooted in the matrix of domination. Collins (2000) insists the matrix of domination is an interconnected web of sexism, racism, and separation based on class. Harris-

Lacewell (2004) purports the compound effect of matrix domination is a catalyst for black feminist thought to provide a space to negotiate the meanings of multiple oppressions in the work of social justice for Black women. Key themes applicable to carving these spaces is analyzing media representation of black women that can have multi-dimensional “readings” to redefine and justify the importance of Black women’s experiences. This reconceptualization creates a space for self-definition and offers an opportunity for self-valuation that are essential to cope with the matrix of oppression (Collins 1986).

The business of Black women carving spaces to encourage “heterogeneous dialogue so that, in the end, diversely rich understanding of Black womanhood can be heard” is the crux of BFT’s connection to media representation of BWP (Coleman 2013). Harris-Perry (2011) remarks that specific forms of media evoke the primary goal of BFT to give voice to Black women by acknowledging the challenges they face and seeking to understand the language, images, and experiences that resonate with Black women. The effects of representations of Black women in the media has real effects on how Black women sees themselves, pursue intimate relationships, and comport themselves at work (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003). In effort to fully articulate the magnitude and severity of the media’s effects of the multiple oppressions facing Black women, BFT scholars employ intersectionality of race and gender (Gines 2011).

Black feminist scholars and practitioners theorized the concept of intersectionality with many aspects of social location. Gines (2011) argued intersectionality is not a new term, but a framework built on pleas of inclusion from Black feminist pioneers like Maria Stewart, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barrett, Elise Johnson-McDougald, Frances Beale, bell hooks, André Lorde, Alice Walker, Deborah King, Angela Davis, and more. These women articulated the multi-dimensional struggle of Black women in different time periods and contexts, but the conjoining undercurrent that each is the same. Black women were placed in subjugated spaces due to the combination of racism, classism, and sexism. Connected to the mission of BFT, intersectionality as an ideological framework that offers scholars the fluidity and malleability to provide alternative perspectives at the individual level regarding self-identification and self-valuation.

A common mistake in research using intersectionality is crediting Crenshaw (1989) with the “coining” of the term. Collins and Bilge (2014) point out the “coining” was not the inception of

intersectionality as a theory but served the purpose of academic norms of ownership of cultural capital (2014, 81). Crenshaw (1989) used the term “intersectionality” as a theoretical advance from Black feminist thought to articulate Black women's unique perspective on race, gender, and class. She argued that Black women’s experiences cannot be contained as simply being a woman or Black, but the intersection of these two marginalized groups. The construction of the intersection is greater than the sum of racism and sexism. Cho, et al. (2013) suggested the future of intersectionality lies in the interdisciplinary works of scholars to challenge centrifugal tendencies to further understand our contemporary society.

The need for interdisciplinary efforts expands the scope of intersectionality as a model separate from racial and feminist observations because Black women, as Crenshaw (1989) mentions, are “burdened.” In a later discussion on intersectionality, Crenshaw (1991) refined her idea of “burden” by explaining that the intersection of race and gender create an urgent need to understand how the current social world is constructed. Brown (2014) pulls from black feminist theory and intersectionality to articulate a more complex view of how Black women legislators make decisions. Instead of focusing only on the intersection of race, gender, and class, Brown (2014) contends representational identity theory shows how Black women are connected, defined, and entwined in culture. More importantly, the theory takes into “account the collective nature of identity and emphasizes that Black women use their intersectional identities and individual experiences as Black women to influence behavior” (2014, 7).

Like Brown, I reject the idea that Black women’s experiences solely rest between the intersection of race and gender. Crenshaw (1991) and Collins (1986; 2000) both challenged idea that Black women are a monolithic group who possibly interpret the matrix of domination the same. Reducing Black women to this narrow space eradicates the individual value of experience, personal history, and individual preferences. I use representational identity theory to employ the theoretical and methodical advances of Black interdisciplinary scholars to create space for understanding how the representations of “real” Black women shape the representations of Black women on television.

Representations and Ramifications

Media scholars deem the depiction of Black women as negative (Krestesdemas 2010),

misrepresented (Nicholson 2013), and limited (Meyer 2015). Rather than try to rehash the negative implication of the media, I choose to emphasize how the mass media shaped the understanding of marginalized groups. Nicholson (2013) explains the media has the power to shape the understanding of marginalized groups because white audiences may have limited interaction that counters the media's narrative. If Black people are represented negatively or one-dimensional, the limited images may leave lasting (sometimes permanent) impressions for white audience members. The stereotypical views are problematic because by essentializing difference with individuals and groups, it reinforces imbalances of power and maintains hegemonic standards of behavior, appearance, and acceptability (Hall 1997, 258).

The imbalance from negative stereotypes of Black women are especially damaging because this particular marginalized group struggles for recognition. Pixley (2015) explains Black women are not simply invisible on television but showcased in appalling representations on television that do not fully embody the complete essence of black womanhood. By showing Black women as mammies, jezebels, or other continually negative images, Black women are conceived by casual white viewers only as one-dimensional bodies without understanding or considering the entire representation (Tyree 2010; Meyer 2015). The limited and negative representation of Black women on television has lasting effect on Black women and white viewers. Since BWP lack opportunities for accurate and affirming recognition, it is imperative to provide an overview of the historical and reimagined stereotypes of Black women in the media.

Historical Representations

The oldest and most prevalent stereotype used by the media to depict Black women is the mammy, a docile, maternal, overweight, dark-skinned, cantankerous servant who is devoted to the family she is employed by (Harris-Perry 2011; Tyree 2010; Meyer 2015; Meyers 2013; Nicholson 2013). On television, the mammy stayed in the home with the white family, devoted to the children while ignoring her own children and Black community. The stereotype stems from the relation of Black women slaves who cared for the white children and were seen by other slaves as abandoning other slaves. The mammy was depicted as happy, content, and trusted confidant to the white family and encouraged other slaves to accept their positions on the plantations. Arguably, the mammy can be considered the first depiction of a BWP, even though the one-dimensional characterization did not

include the struggles and disheartening conditions of slavery. Such depictions range from the classic mammy with a white handkerchief on her head as Mammy, played by Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind* to contemporary archetypes such as Aibileen Clark in *The Help* played by Viola Davis.

If BWP are not shown as mindless happy devotees to whiteness, she is shown as an over sexualized, attention seeker. The jezebel is characterized as young, exotic, and promiscuous. Depicted as selfish, ambitions, dangerous, and irresponsible with her children, the jezebel uses her body and sexuality to acquire material gains. Rarely shown caring for her children, the jezebel is not concerned with the wellbeing of the Black community. Nicholson (2013) contends the long-standing sexual stereotype was used to justify the dehumanization and objectification of slave women by the white men to manifest in the use of the jezebel in hip-hop music videos as over-sexualized video vixens.

In contemporary media, the BWP jezebel archetype is a career woman who places her career first, ignores family, uses sex or the male gaze for advancement. Instead of showing the jezebel in the home like the mammy, the jezebel is shown in the workplace or non-domestic roles like Regina Hunter played by Kim Fields in *Living Single*. The Hunter character was a secretary who was often called a “gold-digger sexpot” by other characters. She flaunted her sexual prowess over men to achieve her goals, portrayed as exotic through fashion and wigs, and used humor and quick wit with colleagues and friends.

The psychological state of Black women is shown as extremes of docile (mammy) to over-sexualized (jezebel). The most extreme is the sapphire character or Angry Black Woman. The angry black woman is “always angry about something” with outbursts of anger, looking for a reason to be angry, obsessed with status and aggressive toward black men (Kretsedemas 2010). The extreme characterization is a threat to whiteness, calls out oppression or maltreatment of blacks, but is seen as a non-ally to black men. The prevalence of the ABW as BWP is used with characters like Wilhelmina Slater played by Vanessa Williams on *Ugly Betty*. The role was of a black woman as a direct threat and often aggressive to white subordinates and counterparts. Slater often displayed flamboyant fits of anger without prompting. The angry black woman is particularly damaging because BWP must try to earn professional respect, while guarding against expectations they are irrationally angry or aggressive (Harris-Perry 2011). The ramification of the ABW stereotype on BWP sets the stage for others to not acknowledge emotional displays as legitimate or valuable.

Depending on the genre of study, historical stereotypes of the mammy, jezebel, and the ABW were combined and reconfigured to understand contemporary portrayal of Black women. Nicholson (2013) used hip-hop music videos to reclassify old archetypes to be used in current media critiques. The “baby mama” is a collection of all the classic archetypes of a homemaker, highly sexualized, with aggressive or protective nature to her children. She can be seen as an unintelligent single mother living on welfare or a working mother struggling to care for her children. The baby mama appears on television series as the comic relief or periphery character in need of help or counsel. In *Meet the Browns*, Brenda played by Angela Bassett is a stereotypical Black single mother who is caught in an endless cycle of poverty and struggle. She has three children from three different men. Throughout the film, Brenda self-deprecates her situation with humor and constantly seeks unreciprocated help from family members. The baby mama archetype offers a powerless, sexually irresponsible vision of black women that reinforces the idea that black women must be saved from themselves.

Contrary to the powerless baby mama, the reconceptualization of the angry black woman is the most applicable to BWP. Kretsedmas (2010) uses the “boss” stereotype as a manifestation of the angry black women to allow producers of television drama to include BWP in all white casts but keep the character on the periphery of social interactions. The position of the “boss” articulates a constant power struggle and aggressive outbursts, while downplaying her sexuality. A recent example of the “boss” stereotype is Miranda Bailey from *Grey’s Anatomy* played by Chandra Wilson. Bailey is a main character that is in a position of power, but not fully integrated in the social interactions of the main characters. Bailey is used in the storyline to fix problems and maintain order, shown mainly at the hospital suggesting she puts her career before family. The boss stereotype translates to a real-world classification used by Meyers (2013) of BWP as the powerful Black Bitch.

The powerful Black bitch (PBB) is a reimagined stereotype that draws on the classic angry black woman, the welfare queen, and the Bitch. The PBB uses her power to serve her own interests to control and affect the white counterparts. The ability to affect her white counterparts makes her “dangerous, evil, and in need of containment” (Meyers 2013, 68). Instead of using the PBB to analyze television media, Meyers used the PBB to analyze First Lady Michelle Obama’s media presence on Youtube and summarizes that PBB is becoming more prevalent within pop culture. Lewis (2015) notes Meyers’ discussion of the recurring representations of PBB offers a lens through which we

may begin to understand race gender stereotypes of Black women as unworthy of access to economic, political, and social power (p. 15). The reoccurring representations perpetuate the absence of Black women on television that can possibly have real-world consequences.

Methodology

This study will focus on how BWP are represented on prime-time television as illustrated by the Keating character. To answer the research question, I completed a textual analysis of season 2 of *How to Get Away with Murder*, a prime-time drama. Viola Davis portrays the main character Annalise Keating, a brilliant BWP criminal defense professor and attorney. She teaches a group of ambitious law students who become involved in multiple twisted murder plots. The show is a murder mystery that relies on complex power dynamics, flashbacks and time loops to intrigue the audience.

Created in 2014, HTGAWM has been nominated for 33 awards, winning ten awards ranging from best leader lady to best prime-time show on the Golden Globes, the Primetime Emmy Awards, the Screen Actor Guild Awards, the BET Awards, and others (IMDd.com 2020). The Keating character and show was successfully coupled with *Scandal's* Olivia Pope played by Kerry Washington. That show portrays a post-racial society with Black female leads. Brown (2016) claimed, “*Scandal* and *How to Get Away With Murder* are the most stressful, frustrating two-hour block of network television I’ve ever committed to watching.” The representation of a complex black female professor (Keating) and a profession political fixer (Pope) on mainstream television marks a gradual shift from oversimplified and one-dimensional characters to fully formed representations of BWP.

Textual analysis was developed for the study of mass-mediated and public messages and to search for meaning associated within these messages (Frey, Botan and Kreps 2000). The researcher can establish meaning by examining the producer, consumer, or the interpreter of the text (Tyree 2011). Communication scholars use textual analysis to study how messages within a text relate to other variables, isolate relationships between communication embedded in the text and various outcomes or go beyond description and interpretation to evaluate the text through specified frameworks (Frey, Botan and Kreps 2000). For this study, a textual analysis is used to explore how the representations of BWP connect to previous and newly identified images of Black women and to identify possible implications of these representations for the audience.

There are multiple approaches to textual analysis outlined by Frey, Botan and Kreps (2000): (1) rhetorical criticism, which is a systematic method of describing, analyzing, interpreting and evaluating the persuasive force of messages within a text; (2) context analysis, which identifies, enumerates, and analyses occurrences of specific messages and message characteristics embedded in the texts; (3) interaction analysis, also known as conversation analysis, that examines the messages exchanged during dyadic and group interaction to discover meaning within the text; (4) performance studies that combine previous approaches to interpreting text to recreate the meaning through performance.

This study employs rhetorical criticism, specifically feminist criticism, which analyzes how representations of gender are produced and maintained through mediated messages (Frey, Botan and Kreps 2000). Specifically, this work will focus on the empowering and damaging representations of BWP. Adapted from Meyers (2016), I used the grounded theory method with an intersectionality lens to isolate broad themes and patterns of reoccurring representations of Black women on television based on interaction of the Keating character and her colleagues and students. Grounded theory introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), allows the researcher's immersion into the data and the use of open coding to classify and deduct themes from the show (Lindolf and Taylor 2011, 241). I will then refine the thematic categories through the continuous comparison to other themes.

Analysis and Discussion

HTGAWM season two told a story of Keating trying to rebuild her relationships with her students, colleagues, family and lovers after a murder investigation and cover up. For the textual analysis, I watched the entire second season. In the initial viewing, the old and reimagined stereotypes were present. The first nine episodes of the season served as the foundation for the last 6 episodes that depicted Keating differently than previous episodes. I chose episodes 10 through 15 because Keating was confined to her home (also the location of her law practice) while recovering from a gunshot injury.

The midseason climax was Keating being shot by one of her students. Her recovery in the last six episodes was more informative on her mental wellbeing and emotionally charged compared to the

first part of the season. These episodes used present day scenes and flashbacks in Keating's life to explain how and why she was shot, her path to recovery, and the rebuilding of her relationships. I focused on scenes with Keating and her students, lovers, family, and colleagues because the stereotypical representations usually occurred during the interactions with other characters. The multiple settings of her home/office, courtroom, and Mother's house offer a multi-dimensional view of Keating's behavior.

Analyzing Keating's interactions with other characters in episodes 10–15 revealed her character is represented with old and reimagined archetypes. The angry Black woman and PBB appears as dominant representations while jezebel, mammy and baby mama appear as minor depictions. The angry Black woman archetype was represented in all six episodes, while PBB appeared in five out of six episodes with Keating's interactions with other characters. The jezebel, mammy, and baby mama were presented in at least three of the episodes but served as a recurring theme. The combination of each archetype introduced a more nuanced interpretation of Keating's motivation and behaviors. Keating's character cares deeply for those in her care (her students); however, her motivation and displays of care are latent with personal motivations. The narrative of mistrust by other characters and the deceptions by Keating shifts the interpretation of why Keating makes certain choices to what are the ramification of her choices and effects to other characters. The following analysis identifies the archetypes represented with examples from the episode.

Minor Themes: Jezebel and Mammy/Baby Mama

The jezebel archetype was observed in episode 13 *Something Bad Happened*. Keating's relationship with Nate, a police officer with whom she had an affair and complicated past, is showcased. The affair and sex with Nate serve as personal satisfaction and unknown motives on behalf of Keating. Nate appears genuine in his commitment for meaningful legitimate relationship compared to Keating insistence on casual sex. A night after sex, the next morning Nate is making breakfast and asks Keating "what are we really doing here?" As he hands her the breakfast, Keating takes the breakfast in a non-committal evasion of his feelings stating, "let's not complicate what we have." In the next scene, she throws away the breakfast without hesitation showing an unreciprocated level of care and commitment. Keating depiction as a jezebel is through her promiscuous sex with Nate and her use of her body to manipulate Nate to help her evade authorities in the murder investigation.

Keating's sexuality developed throughout season two storyline with the introduction of her college ex-girlfriend Eve. Like Nate, Eve is devoted to Keating with a slight difference. In the flashback scene on the same episode *Something Bad Happened*, the nature and depth of the relationships is revealed: Keating left Eve for her therapist and soon to be husband, Sam. In the scene, Keating is pregnant with Sam's child and Eve is surprised and disappointed. The scene shows how Keating once loved Eve but used Eve's love and devotion to take a case to benefit Keating's career. The question of Keating sexuality resurfaced in other episodes, but this pivotal scene shares how Keating uses those who love her for personal gain regardless of gender.

The storyline of caring for children was a minor theme that developed through three episodes but culminated in *There's My Baby*. Keating is portrayed as the mammy and baby mama of her colleagues and students in multiple scenes. In *She Hates Us*, Keating confronts Bonnie as she cries even though she was still healing from a gunshot wound. In *It's a Trap* she protects her student from murder charges with a plan to evade authorities. In the episode, while the students are panicking, Keating states, "let Mommy take care of it like always." As the episode continues, Keating wearily tells Bonnie that she never wanted children, but now she has the students and she must protect them at all costs. The baby mama archetype evolved from the mammy as Keating was shown being devoted to her "children," so much so that she neglects to protect her unborn child in *There's My Baby*. In this episode, Keating is pregnant, but puts herself in danger trying to protect another child at the expense of her unborn son. Due to her devotion to job, she is attacked by a client staged as a car wreck and loses her son. The depiction of the mammy with her students is a culmination effect of her baby mama depiction by which she fiercely protects those immediately in front of her (white family), while ignoring the pain and loss of her own son.

Major Themes: Angry Black Woman and PBB

In several exchanges with students, lovers, family or colleagues, Keating is shown to have unprovoked angry outbursts. In all six episodes, Keating is portrayed as "always angry about something," and appears to look for reasons to be angry. In each scene, Keating's level of anger was unequal to the opposing character. The outbursts were unprovoked or used to manipulate the direction of the situation. In the *She Hates Us* episode, Keating has several outbursts in court, first at

Bonnie because the students were present, and then when she yelled at the cross-examining attorney for manipulate court proceedings. In this particular courtroom scene, Keating's obsession with her status as an attorney is questioned and she responds with fierce contempt to the attorney and court. In *There's My Baby*, Keating storms into the common area of the office and yells at the students to leave as a carryover to a tantrum on Bonnie. In each scene, Keating uses anger to isolate herself from students and her colleagues.

Keating's anger festers through the season as she lashes out at Nate for asking questions on the direction of their relationship and finally showing anger at her father in *Anna Mae* for abandoning her mother during childhood that further deepened her connection to the angry black woman archetype as her aggression toward Black men. In *It's a Trap*, Keating used anger to avoid intimate questions from Nate. The display of angry indicated her emotional recklessness and manipulation over him. The kitchen scene discussed earlier shows a submissive Black man making breakfast for an angry, cold, and distant Black women. Her aggression toward Black men is revisited in the *Anna Mae* episode when she learns her elderly parents are reunited after years of separation. Keating's father left the family during her teen years, and she had not forgiven him for leaving the family. When the father asks for forgiveness for abandonment, Keating responds similarly as she did with Nate with unequal misdirected anger to avoid intimate situations. The angry Black woman archetype for the Keating character offers a more nuanced explanation of her outbursts but fails to show healthy ways to handle negative emotions.

The PBB depiction is evident is five of the six episodes. Keating's ability to manipulate key players to protect herself often pits those in authority to diminish her power. The PBB is shown as her control of her students and the storyline of "she must be stopped." In *She Hates Us*, Keating manipulates and lies to her students about details in the case to avoid being arrested. Her character is situated as her against the system, but she is controlling key players. In one scene, Keating is shown telling the students falsehoods, for illicit trust and to leave the scene of a crime, to later find out Keating had alternative motives. The PBB archetype is shown as dangerous and manipulative, so much so, Makayla, a Black female law student, calls Keating a "bitch" to her face.

The connection to the PBB archetype is more evident in the district attorney's office mission to "stop" Keating. Throughout the six episodes, the lead district attorney fails to catch or capture

Keating in any wrongdoing. She uses her intelligence and wit to outsmart the district attorney, starting in the *It's a Trap* episode when the law office is served a warrant to search the premise. Keating devises a plan to trick the police and DA to entering the house unlawfully rendering the search illegal. In the scene, the lead district attorney explains Keating must be brought to justice for her crimes, while Keating responds with “try me.”

The PBB indicates racial tension between the Black woman and whites. The post-racial society of HTGWM, rarely tackles or inserts race as a central theme. None of the episode has a white character mention and refer to any racial ques, but Keating is shown challenging racial issues in comments and interactions with subordinate white characters. The racialization comes from Keating, not the white characters. As a dark-skinned Black woman, Keating willfully challenges her white counterparts by bringing the “plight of a black child” into the discussion, calls into question racial motivations of judges, and even calls a white employee “white trash” in *There's My Baby* episode.

Conclusion

Through a textual analysis of the intersectional representation of the Keating character, old and reimagined stereotypes are used to depict contemporary BWP on prime-time television. Results support Pixley's findings of the Pope character on *Scandal* that Pope is not a monolith, but a “super trope” which includes “traces of simplifies stereotypes but whose complex humanity stretches beyond the lens that would attempt to limit them to one aspect of her character” (2015, 32). As I apply the “super trope” idea to the Keating character, she is more than a mammy, baby mama, jezebel, angry Black woman, or PBB. More importantly, Keating's choice and behaviors can be framed within the representational identity theory because no single or individual experience can define her or encapsulate the entirety of her character. The Keating character made choices based on the totality of who she was and made choices based on her own life and experiences, not the intersection of her race, gender, and class. Meyer (2015) adds that intersectional representation has a specific and purposeful ideological strategy of a television narrative to frame discussions of identity politics and differences. The televised identities of BWP continue to expand beyond the historical and reimagined representation to robust and full characters. The identity politics of BWP move from one-sided representation like Claire Huxtable to multi-dimensional characters like Keating.

Bobo (1995) reminds us fictionalized creations of Black women are not innocent because each stereotype is problematic by representing Black women as powerless or dangerous. Through the last six episode of season two, the Keating character was shown as dangerous, but intellectually powerful. The complexity of her character offers hope that Black women can be seen as more than sexual objects, devoted caregivers, or angry. The Keating character shows BWP are a culmination of life experiences that affect our mental health and life choices. For non-Black viewers, the Keating character illustrates a more realistic picture of Black women, along with possible scenarios BWP may face with regard to power struggles within a racist patriarchal society. No depiction or character is perfect, but the Keating character in her complexity and robust representation is a step toward more realistic visions of BWP.

The major limitation of this study was I only used six episodes from season two. To gain a fuller perspective of the Keating character, it would be helpful to survey the entire first three seasons to question the effect of the representations presented. Furthermore, it would be noteworthy to analyze the psychological representations of Black women with the Keating character. The ramifications of the loss of Keating's son and childhood trauma illustrate the theory of shame articulated by Harris-Perry (2011). The author claims Black women experience shame that has psychological ramifications in how she relates to others and conduct herself in the workplace. The Keating character exemplifies behaviors of shame that could offer ways to address mental health and healing in the Black community.

As Black feminist academics, we must listen to Bobo (1995) to move beyond only searching and analyzing negative depictions of Black women. By only concentrating on negative representations in the media, it can be self-defeating by diminishing any hope of recognition and seen as more than just part of our existence. It is imperative to Black women to rewrite and unpack the stories of Black women for other Black women. The future depictions of Black women like the Keating character move a televised world to be populated with complex and robust people that can influence how Black women see themselves and non-white relate to BWP in the real world. As long as Black women are presented as byproducts of only the intersection of race, gender, and class, we will continue to be misunderstood, misrepresented and discounted. Jefferies and Jefferies (2015) stresses the point that a pressing issue is the lack of Black women's voices and presence in both media production and scholarship about them. We as scholars must deconstruct negative images, then look for the good in

the media to construct representations of Black women to be recognized and accepted in the real world.

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