

7-2020

Beauty is not Black and White: A Content Analysis of Black Women's Body Image in Television Media

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Beauty is not Black and White:
A Content Analysis of Black Women's Body Image in Television Media

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Communication

by

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Bachelor of Arts in Communication, 2014

July 2020
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Abstract

There are few bodies of literature that look at Black women's body image in television media. When Black women were studied most research (Falconer & Neville, 2000; Jhally & Kilbourne, 2010; Smith, 2014; Shearon-Richardson, 2011;) compared them to White ideals. However, this study did a content analysis of Black women in predominantly Black or ethnically diverse television shows using qualitative studies that suggest a Black ideal. The researcher examined lead character(s) body shapes, comments about their body, hair texture and comments about their hair. This research looked at protective factors (aspects Black life that allow for more body satisfaction) like Black men and peers influence and strength of ethnic identity through the lens of Social Comparison Theory. A population of eight television shows and 262 episodes were recorded using Snap Stream and a sample of 48 episodes were coded. The results indicated that there are Black ideals represented in television media that focus on curvier body shapes and hair textures. Furthermore, the study found that comments regarding a Black woman's body and hair may not be common in these television shows. This research is an introduction in content analysis of Black TV media and a focus on Black body ideals. As more Black writers and producers are able to share their stories and creativity, Black female leads need to be examined to make sure they align with a healthy cultural ideal.

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Acknowledgements

I am so grateful for my advisor and chairman of this thesis, Dr. Ron Warren. You have been an incredible advisor that was always happy to answer all of my repetitive questions. I could not have asked for a better person to help me through this process. Also, I would like to acknowledge my committee, Myria Allen and Matthew Spialek for being so patient and understanding during this long process.

I would also like to acknowledge the coders that worked tirelessly through the semester and completed this project on top of their other classes during a pandemic: Elyse Brown, Katie Coyle, Bri Hess, Deborah Koch, Deja Snyder, and Kelsey Wexler.

To my friends and family thank you for all your love and support. Thank you for your patience and endless support throughout my life!

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all the young Black girls that look for or want positive influences in their life. To my mother, who taught me there was no limit to my potential. I am grateful for all you have done and taught me. Without you I would not be the woman I am today. Lastly, this work is dedicated to God, he has blessed me repeatedly and I owe him all the glory and praise.

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Introduction

There are two schools of thought when it comes to Black women in media images. One perspective says, “considering the long absence of Black women on television, the simple presence of Black female characters may affirm the beauty of all Black women” (Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004, p. 44). The second perspective suggests that Black children are possibly more susceptible to media influence because their media consumption is higher (Gordon, 2008). Although previous authors looked at possible damaging effects within the Black women’s narrative (DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2010; Galloway, 2016; James, 2014; Smith, 2014; Shearon-Richardson, 2011), there are few content analyses of Black women’s body image in media.

The sizable literature regarding White women’s body image has been studied for decades. However, when Black women are referred to in the literature, the focus is often on White standards of beauty (Falconer & Neville, 2000; Jhally & Kilbourne, 2010; Smith, 2014; Shearon-Richardson, 2011). Most literature that looks at Black women compares similarities and differences of Black and White women’s body image and usually looks at this through the White ideal. Some researchers (Armer, 2017; Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Falconer & Neville, 2000; Shearon-Richardson, 2011; Wood, Nickel & Petrie, 2010) have looked solely at Black women ideals, but they focused on music videos instead of television programming (Dagbovie-Mullins, 2013; Emerson, 2002; Zhang, Dixon, & Conrad, 2009). Although the White ideal is often considered the standard of beauty, as times change and the trend of obtaining larger butts, thighs, hips, and lips become more popular, people have begun to study the ideals within different cultures (Bankhead & Johnson, 2014). The emergence of differing cultural ideals justifies a content analysis on Black women in television.

Because qualitative research (Breitkopf, Littleton, Berenson, 2007; Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Few, Stephens & Rouse-Arnett, 2003; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Mucherah & Frazier, 2013) has shown what is important to Black women to be considered beautiful, these qualities should to be applied to TV shows to find out if characters are true to the cultural ideal. If Black women characters emulate this ideal, it could feel like there is a space being made for them in the world where they can be seen and represented. The way to go about this is to be seen and represented in TV shows created about Black women, for Black women, and by Black women.

Recently there has been an influx of Black TV shows in the growing video streaming business. Streaming services are able to produce more content by new writers and creators without the content regulations and financial restrictions faced by broadcast and cable TV (Barnes, 2019). Black writers can cater to their target audience and have options on character portrayals that they feel represent their community. The list of Black shows on TV went from a handful of TV sitcoms in the 1990s (*Family Matters*, *The Jefferson's*, *The Cosby Show*, and *Fresh Prince*) to a long list of comedy, drama, thriller, crime, mystery, action and other genres. With so many new shows by up and coming Black producers, the need for a content analysis of Black women character portrayals has never been greater.

This study concentrates on body shapes, positive and negative comments, skin tone, and hair textures of Black women in television media. This content analysis will focus on media portrayals of beauty standards through visual body shapes and hair textures of Black women characters in the television shows, positive and negative dialogue between characters, and self-made comments by the Black female lead character. This study will help future researchers examine media images with Black beauty ideals and if portrayed stereotypes have changed. This content analysis is necessary to start the next wave of research on Black women and body image.

It begins by reviewing literature regarding body image and dissatisfaction, social comparison theory and racial and cultural differences in body image.

Literature Review

Body Image and Body Dissatisfaction

The term body image is frequently used in this literature, but its definition varies immensely. Parker et al.'s (1995) focus group study concentrated on physical appearance. They asked 250 adolescent girls (46 Black and 188 White) to describe what the "ideal girl" looks like. Participants said she is five feet seven inches tall, between 100 and 110 pounds, and has blonde hair that is flowy and long enough to throw over the shoulder. The woman has long legs and is naturally pretty "like a model face with high cheekbones" (p. 106). The girls also said the ideal girl could eat and not gain any weight, so thinness is a necessity. The authors described the ideal as the real-life embodiment of a Barbie doll and argued that this is the beauty standard causing so many girls' dissatisfaction with their body. This beauty standard aligns with the "thinness model," the most prominent model employed in research on body image and body dissatisfaction (Botta, 2000; DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2010; Shearon-Richardson, 2011; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). This model holds that "cultural, economic, and social forces require thinness as an essential defining element of female beauty" (Botta, 2000, p. 145).

The thinness model is not the only way to define body image or body dissatisfaction. Other definitions emphasize mental acceptance. Cash and Pruzinsky (1990) and Armer (2017), defined body image as a "multifaceted psychological experience of embodiment and not exclusively physical based" (p. 4). Values and attitudes about one's body image are shaped not just by the individual but also by groups (i.e., communities, friends, and families) and the surrounding society (Pai and Schryver, 2015). Thompson et al. (1999) acknowledge the challenges of defining body image because it includes many components like gender, ethnicity, sociocultural influences and more. For example, Bailey, Gammage, Van Ingen, and Ditor's

(2015) focus group found that people with spinal cord injuries still expressed positive body image (i.e., body acceptance, body appreciation and gratitude, social support etc.). Participants talked about body acceptance and defined it as coming to terms with their bodies, their disability, and accepting what could not be changed.

Sands and Wardle's (2003) definition of body image relates to internalized ideals observed in media content and a social environment. They argue that three reference points construct one's body image. First is the socially represented ideal portrayed in the media and promoted by significant others. It is the most commonly seen or talked about among people; it is what media outlets and loved ones convince people is the most beautiful and should be their goal. Socially represented ideals can be different depending on who is the majority or who is creating the media images. Second, the objective body is not based on an opinion or ideal, it is the physical body that is free from personal feelings and is centered solely on facts (e.g. weight or BMI). Finally, the internalized ideal is "the degree to which girls believe they must individually conform to the sociocultural pressures for beauty (thinness)" (Sands & Wardle, 2003, p. 202).

The internalized ideal is where body dissatisfaction starts to appear. "Body dissatisfaction" comes from discrepancies between someone's objective body and their internalized ideal body (Sands & Wardle, 2003; Tariq & Ijaz, 2015). A small gap can have minimal affects. However, a large gap can lead to negative interpersonal, psychological, biological and behavioral effects: interpersonal conflict, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, genetic components, anorexia, bulimia, and other eating disorders (Field et al., 2001; Kilbourne, 2000; Levine & Harrison, 2004; Nishna, Ammon, Bellmore, & Graham, 2006; Pai & Schryver, 2015; Paxton, Schutz, Wertheim, & Muir, 1999; Stice & Whitenton, 2002; Tariq & Ijaz, 2015;

Thompson, 2003). When girls do not reach a diet, weight, or appearance goal they set for themselves, they can experience body dissatisfaction, especially if they believe the goal is easily attainable.

Although body dissatisfaction has been shown to be prevalent for both men and women, females are statistically more likely to have body dissatisfaction than males (Kann et al., 2018). Fisher, Schneider, Pegler, and Napolitano (1991) reported that 80% of high-school girls felt they were above the weight that would make them happy, and 43% said they would like to weigh at least 10 pounds less. Storz and Greene (1983) similarly found that 83% of adolescent girls wanted to lose weight, although 62% were in the normal weight range for their height and gender. Sands and Wardle (2002) found 48% of 9-12-year-old girls said their ideal shape was thinner than their observed body image.

Girls' satisfaction with their bodies begins to decrease during adolescence (Calzo et al., 2012; Bearman, Martinez, & Stice, 2006); half of all normal-weight teenage girls consider themselves overweight and have tried to lose weight (Krowchuk, Kreiter, Woods, Sinal, & DuRant, 1998; Strauss, 1999). In 2007 the Center for Disease Control found that 15.8% of females were overweight, but 34.5% described themselves as overweight (Eaton et al., 2008). In 2017 the CDC (Kann et al., 2018) report stated that 17% of females were overweight, but 37.5% considered themselves overweight. Even more concerning, 60% of them were trying to lose weight at the time of the study (Kann et al., 2018).

If this gap persists, some girls will form eating disorders (bingeing, purging, anorexia, and bulimia) in college. Roughly five percent of the United States population (16 million people) are affected by binge eating disorder (Kann et al., 2018). Anorexia nervosa occurs in as many as one percent of middle-school females alone (Strasburger et al., 2006) and bulimia in as many as

five percent of young women (British Medical Association & Education, 2000). Edwards-Hewitt & Gray (1993) found 43.4% of woman had previously binged and 12.2% purged to control their weight. Edwards-Hewitt & Gray (1993) study of college-aged women found that 0.63% had behaviors and attitudes of anorexia, 14.15% had attitudes and behaviors of bulimia, and 58.8% reported binge-eating behavior. Body dissatisfaction is common with women. Some reasons are unknown but one that is common and has been heavily researched and known to play a role in body dissatisfaction is social comparison.

Social Comparison Theory

Although many theories can be applied to explain body dissatisfaction, numerous researchers focus on social comparison theory (SCT; Festinger, 1954), which posits that people compare themselves and others to images they believe can represent realistic, attainable goals (Botta, 1999). This can happen often in the groups in which people tend to seek membership. People seek membership in a group if they believe it can make a positive contribution or give them satisfaction (Turner, 1975). However, if a person does not identify with the group or feels like they are in the outgroup, a sense of insecurity can result from comparisons of oneself to those in the group (Turner, 1975). This cannot be prevented because social comparison occurs “spontaneously, effortlessly, and unintentionally” (Richins, 1991), and is likely to occur during periods of stress, novelty or change like joining a new group (Richins, 1991, p. 75).

Several researchers (Festinger, 1954; Patton, Beaujean, & Benedict, 2014; Stormer & Thompson, 1996; Te’eni-Harari & Eyal, 2015) note that the social comparison process can cause one to feel like they are failing or inadequate if they perceive they are comparing themselves to someone vastly different in either ability or opinion. According to Festinger (1954) ability is defined as a person who is unable to compete with someone else’s capabilities and therefore will

not try to compete. For example, a person who is just beginning to learn the game of chess does not compare themselves to a master of the game (Festinger, 1954). This also goes for opinions; if other's opinions differ too much from one's own, people will not accept them. For example, if a person does not fit a social group's definition of beauty and cannot achieve their version of "beauty", that person is likely to reject that idea of beauty entirely. Essentially, the differences of an individual and what they are comparing themselves to cannot be so large that the goal is unachievable. When it comes to body image, a beauty goal is not unachievable if girls see people that meet the perceived beauty standard. This is where media content comes into play. In a media-saturated environment, images can cause viewers to automatically and unconsciously compare themselves to the images (Frisby, 2004; Fry Brown, 2012).

Content analyses of mediated images show why these comparisons can be dangerous. Herbozo, Tantleff-Dunn, Gokee-Larose, and Thompson (2004) explain how videos, books, and shows give children an ideal to aspire to. Starting at a young age, unrealistic body ideals are set in front of children and they begin to feel pressure to make their bodies look like what they see. This logically leads us to ask about the kinds of bodies media content most frequently portrays to audiences. Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson and Kelly (1986) found 69% of female characters are overrepresented as skinny or below average in media (as cited by Fouts and Burggraf, 1999). Overweight women are underrepresented in media with only 5% considered heavy (Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson and Kelly, 1986, as cited by Fouts and Burggraf 1999). For the few overweight women that do exist in television media they are usually middle-class women. Armer's (2017) content analysis of advertisements discovered that White women who were considered obese were middle aged and were presented as working class. Black women who were obese were seen as consumers or spectators in work settings and had medium to dark brown skin tone. Herbozo et

al.'s (2004) content analysis found that 84% of movie characters and 10% of book characters with thin body figures had desirable traits: sociability, kindness, happiness and success. On the other hand, obese characters (64% in videos and 20% in books) were depicted as unattractive, unfriendly, cruel and were often seen thinking about food or placed in a setting related to food.

These messages potentially inform girls that beauty is associated with thinness and they should strive to look like this female cultural ideal. Internalizing the ideal will increase the desire to emulate the appearance. If an ideal is internalized it means a person strongly identifies with characters, they see on television that embodies it (Sands and Wardle, 2013). Te'eni-Harari and Eyal (2015) focus on social comparison of media personalities with whom people most identify. Similar to Herbozo and colleagues' (2004) study, media characters and body shape are associated with attractive personality traits. Children often identify with media characters because of attributes such as hair, weight, and personality. This identification can intensify because viewers might encounter the characters on other platforms (e.g., magazines, billboards, and social media). According to Te'eni-Harari and Eyal (2015), this reinforces the idea that a body ideal exists and can remind girls they have not reached it yet (Anschutz, Spruijt-Metz, Van Strien, & Engels, 2011; Benowitz-Fredericks, Garcia, Massey, Vasagar, & Borzekowski, 2012; Field et al., 2008; Hayes & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010; Hogan & Strasburger, 2008; Levine & Murnen, 2009). The more intensely girls identify with characters, the more likely they will have an eating disorder (Field, Camargo, Taylor, Berkey, & Colditz, 1999; Harrison, 2000a, 2000b; Levine, Smolak, & Hayden, 1994; Martin & Kennedy, 1994; Murray, Touyz, & Beumont, 1996; Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994). One study of 11,000 males and females between ages 9 and 14 (Field et al., 1999) found purging behaviors among teens were more likely if they subscribed to a media ideal of beauty, as much as doubling the risk of regular purging behaviors.

Media are an important source of social comparison (Gore, 1996; Patton et al., 2014), but another source is peers (Bailey et al., 2015). Peers can encourage unhealthy weight control behaviors or, quite the opposite, provide a place of comfort with acceptance and support (Mueller, Pearson, Muller, Frank & Turner, 2010). The problem is that friends are selected based on similar traits, so the possibility of perpetuating existing attitudes and behaviors, like unhealthy dieting and negative self-talk, is increased if you already engage in such behaviors (Mueller et al., 2010). Among peers, males' comments can be especially influential. Fouts and Burggraf (1999) found that male characters in television play a role in positive reinforcement. They found 51% of positive comments to female characters were from males regarding their weight, shape, and body which was more than they received from other female characters in sitcoms. This study found that the thinner a female character was, the more positively males commented on her body. Thus, female viewers might conclude that in order to be attractive to males, they need to be a certain body weight or shape.

Racial and Cultural Differences

The available literature on media and body image, while extensive, largely ignores cultural differences. Body ideals and the standards of beauty are different depending on cultural influences (Falconer & Neville, 2000; Gore, 1996; Shearon-Richardson, 2011). Kelch-Oliver and Ancis (2011) explain how the thinness model is defined through a White cultural ideal, whereas for Black cultures a different body ideal exists. Previous research has focused mainly on White women and White normative standards of beauty (Poran, 2002). Different ethnicities' body image will differ from White women and should be the focus of more studies of body image effects. After extensive research it was found that a Black centric content analyses that focus on Black women in media has not been done before. There is one content analysis focusing on

music and the sexualization and sexually promiscuous image of Black women in music videos (Emerson, 2002), but not Black women in television shows.

Although beauty standards might be different for Black women, that does not mean they do not face body dissatisfaction. According to Gordon's (2008) research Black children were more vulnerable to media's influence because of their higher rate of media consumption, which is an average of six hours of screen time a day. This would imply that Black girls are particularly more likely to internalize media message that emphasize beauty and the importance of women's appearance (Gordon, 2008; Schooler et al., 2004). Other studies found that Black children are also more susceptible to influences from media with characters that they identify closely with, meaning Black characters (Greenberg & Brand, 1994; King & Multon, 1996; Stroman, 1984). However, multiple studies (Botta, 2000; Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005) have found that even with a high chance of internalization many Black adolescents are satisfied with their bodies. According to Botta (2000) Black girls are more satisfied due to the fact their ideal size is larger than their counterparts' ideal images. So they decide to reject thin images in favor of themselves. In fact, there are significant racial and ethnic differences in prevalence of obesity in Black young girls (Bell, Rogers Dietz, Ogden, Schuler and Popovic, 2011; Neff, Sargent, McKeown, Jackson & Valois, 1997). At ages 2-5 they are 10% more likely to be obese, at ages 6-11, their likelihood increases to 20% and from age 12-19, it increases to 30% (Bell et al., 2011).

Black feminist theory (Bennett, 2016; Simms, 2001; Walker, 2014) provides insight on the cultural differences in beauty standards. The theory consists of knowledge based on the life experiences of Black women and documents their reality based on the intersectionality of sex, race, and class. Therefore, Black women have three aspects (i.e. sex, race, and class) they must change to live up to a White standard of beauty. This is why Black feminist theory looks at

whether there is a Black beauty ideal instead. One of the biggest differences between Black and White women is that Black women are aware of the White ideals that they cannot fit into. Neff et al. (1997), for example, asked Black girls to describe the ideal body type, the participants then asked researchers which ideals, Black or White? This showed researchers that many Black girls are aware of these differences. They describe their ideal girl as having very little to do with physical attributes and focused more on personality traits like smart, friendly, easy to talk to, and fun. Many said their ideal girl did not have to be pretty, just well-kept. When specifically asked about physical attributes of an ideal girl, participants said that regardless of their physical features, making what they had work for them was most important.

Black women's standards emphasize shape and curves versus White standards that focus on weight (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; DeLeel, Hughes, Miller, Hipwell, Theodore, 2009; Roberts, 1993;). Black women tend to have larger body sizes than White women due to the fact that cultural differences exist in attitudes toward physical appearance and weight gain (Schooler et al., 2004). Because previous studies continue to see this, this study will look at body shape, a combination of height, weight, and overall form (Blakemore & Jennett, 2001). Body shapes are physically observable: thin, athletic, heavy, obese, curvy, pear, apple etc. If there is a shape that stands out above the rest, then consumers of that content will assume that this is the way Black women should look. Hicks (2018) discusses how Black women do not feel being curvaceous is a problem and consider this body type as a positive attribute. Overstreet, Quinn, and Agocha (2010) found that Black women consider a larger butt and average weight to be ideal. The literature's previous findings of acceptance of different body shapes for Black women proposes a question that this study will answer:

RQ1: Are Black female lead characters portrayed with variations of body shapes?

Social comparison theory explains why Black adolescents are affected differently. For Black woman, a young, tall, White, blue-eyed, blonde hair woman on television is not an attainable goal to strive for. So instead of pushing themselves to look like this, they will accept what they have or look for images of women that more closely resemble themselves (i.e., Black women in media) (Armer, 2017; Evans & McConnell, 2003; Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Makkar & Strube, 1995). Capodilupo's (2015) study looks at Black women and the reasons for their body image problems. One of the models Capodilupo generates from their results contains a core category focused on body/self-image with four subcategories (hair, skin, attitude, and physique) that were important to Black women. They found that Black women had lower self-esteem and body image when the ideal image of Black women includes lighter skin and long, straight hair.

This is different from previous findings (Botta, 2000; Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005; Hunter, Kluck, Cobb-Sheehan, English, & Ray, 2017; Schooler et al., 2004) that state Black women's appearance satisfaction is protected from internalized ideals. The previous studies looked just at body shape instead of other factors such as skin tone and hair. As found by many researchers (Baugh, Mullis, Mullis, Hicks & Peterson, 2010; Parker et al., 1995; Poran, 2002) the White ideal is a petite white woman with straight hair. But is this ideal the same for Black women? Does television portray a different ideal for them?

RQ2: Are Black female lead characters presented with smaller (vs. larger) body shapes, lighter (vs darker) skin tone, and straightened hair (vs curly)?

There are multiple theories as to why the prevalence of dissatisfaction is not as high for Black women. Schooler et al. (2004) offer two of them: (a) that programs and messages about appearances in mainstream and Black-oriented television are different, or (b) the mechanisms by which White and Black women compare themselves to media images are different. Walker

(2014) and Hicks (2018) discuss how Black feminist consciousness (theory) predicted body satisfaction due to the fact there are possible protective factors: strength of ethnic identity, a mother's love, Black men's influence, and spirituality. The protective factors may have allowed Black women not to compare themselves to the thinness ideal and instead find satisfaction within their own identity. In this study there are two protective factors examined through female and male peers' comments: ethnic identity and Black men's influence.

Baugh, Mullis, Mullis, Hicks, and Peterson (2010) defined ethnic identity as "the level of identification with one's ethnic group that helps resolve issues and feelings both personally and within other ethnic groups" (p. 106). This means that a sense of cultural belonging allows for a positive attitude about body shape, their features, and themselves (Capodilupo, 2015). If they are connected to other people like themselves, they will pay less attention to what society tells them to look or be like. Wood, Nickel, and Petrie (2010) looked at influences of ethnic identity with 322 people and found that Black women paid less attention to societal ideals regarding attractiveness when they identified with their ethnic identity more. However, for people with lower protective factors or people not surrounded with similar people, it can affect them negatively (Hicks, 2018). It is crucial to see the emphasis on bonding with other Black women on TV so Black women know that they as a community stand together and can have a place to be themselves unapologetically.

It is also important to look at the relationship between Black women and Black men. Black men play a role in Black women's acceptance of a curvier body shape. Appearance-based comments from others are a key influence on Black women's body image (Fouts and Burggraf, 1999). Black women's comments are significant because Black culture places a higher value on a curvier body type and Black males prefer physically larger women (Kelch-Oliver & Ancis,

2011). This allows Black women to feel less pressure to be thin in order to be considered attractive (Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011) and feel more comfortable and accepting of full figures (Franko & Striegel-Moore, 2002). Even when considered overweight, Black women perceive themselves as attractive because there is a greater acceptance of diverse body types in Black culture (Davis, Clance & Gailis, 1999). This suggests that in addition to looking at the body shapes of Black women on TV, the appearance-based comments from other characters should also be considered. This will allow for a better understanding regarding how media images are reinforcing a positive or negative ideal on certain body shapes for Black women.

RQ3: Do central Black female lead characters receive more negative or positive comments about their body from other female and male characters?

According to Mucherah and Frazier (2013), skin color can play a role in Black women's body image. Skin color is part of a beauty standard that can be a disadvantage and emotional pain for women of darker skin. Colorism in the Black community has a history that traces back to the slave era. The lighter a Black woman was the greater possibility of being a house slave, which means favoritism from the master, access to education, better food and clothing, and higher chances of freedom (Hall, 1995; Hicks, 2018). Akintunde (1997) gives examples of popular TV shows that diminished dark-skinned Black women. *Comedy Jam*, for example, tells jokes regarding its Black audience members with comments like "you so Black you could leave a fingerprint in charcoal" (p. 164). From these shows and comments, which are watched and laughed at by Black people, Black women learn that nothing they do is right, even in a space that is supposed to be safe (the Black community). There have been conversations started by Black women on social media and television (Pinkett Smith, 2020; 2019, August 24) dedicated to speaking up against colorism and educate others on how this ideal has put them against each

other. Given all of this, it seems important to consider skin tone in the analysis of Black female characters:

RQ4: Does the amount of positive and negative comments differ depending on the female character's skin tone?

As Akintunde (1997) stated, hair is also a big target of ridicule regarding Black women. Hair has been evaluated as “good hair” or “nappy (bad) hair,” and what determines if you have one or the other is the texture of your hair (Hicks, 2018). The looser the curl and easier to brush the better, again the closest a Black person can get to White features. Wearing your natural hair is only acceptable if it is long. If not, people consider you “bald headed”. If it is not easy to comb through, it is called “nappy hair”. But a Black woman cannot wear weave, either. If weave is worn, they are considered artificial and bald headed. Thoughts about hair have been changing recently, though, as more women are wearing natural hair hairstyles (Hicks, 2018). A qualitative study (Hicks, 2018; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2013) of 17 Black undergraduate, graduate, and professional women talked about how they decided to resist conforming to White standards of beauty. Because of this they reclaimed their power, beauty and agency over a White environment (Hicks, 2018; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2013). Given this, we should consider if hair texture are reflective of a Black or White beauty ideal:

RQ5: Do central Black female lead characters receive more negative or positive comments about their hair from other female or male characters?

Black women's beauty is associated with curvier models, so this study will look at the relationship of body shape and positive and negative comments. Herbozo et al. (2004) found positive comments were associated with thinness and negative comments were attributed to ugliness and being fat. This association can lead to body dissatisfaction in girls. The threshold at

which Black girls manifest body dissatisfaction appears to be higher than it is for White girls (Van den Berg, 2012). A report from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC, Kann et al., 2018) found 21% of Black females were overweight but 36.8% of Black females consider themselves overweight and 55.3% of Black females were trying to lose weight. There is a good amount of body dissatisfaction when it comes to Black women, but an analysis of TV content might consider whether or not female television characters model these doubts about achieving a beauty standard. This study intends to test this variable to see if Black women in television shows are satisfied with their bodies or if they model the CDC's findings.

RQ6: Do central Black female lead characters make more negative and positive comments about their own physical appearance?

Methods

A quantitative content analysis was conducted to answer the research questions. The population of messages for this study was sampled from broadcast and cable television using the SNAP Stream software. Due to COVID-19 coders had to use Hulu and Netflix to watch the sample determined on SNAP stream. These circumstances also prevented skin tone from being coded reliably, so it was cut from the codebook and coding procedures. Shows that were examined revolved around Black women as lead characters and predominantly Black or ethnically diverse cast members (See Appendix A). The researcher pre-determined lead characters and important supporting characters to avoid confusion for coders. The shows were chosen when cast members had a Black woman in the principle main cast list and the woman was in over 75% of the currently available episodes. This sample encompasses shows with Black women leads (see Appendix C) and reviews the most watched shows on television. Black female leads that were analyzed for the character list and physical attributes were in 75% of the entire series, at some point portrayed a character as a teenager (13 and up) and considered a part of the principle main cast see Appendix C. Central Black female leads that were the focus of comments, in addition to the previous list, were in 99-100% of the episodes and are considered the main character(s) in the show see in Appendix C. There were five shows with only one central Black lead: *Black-ish*, *Empire*, *Grown-ish*, *How to Get Away with Murder*, and *Scandal*. While the other three shows contained multiple central Black female leads: *Greenleaf*, *Mixed-ish*, and *Queen Sugar*.

Coders determined body shape, hair texture, and verbal reinforcement about the characters in the show. Broadcast and cable stations were selected because 96.5% of American households still subscribe to them (Nielsen, 2017).

Sample

Previous studies mostly looked at broadcast and primetime television because they were, and continue to be, the top networks (Monk-Turner, Heiserman, Johnson, Cotton, & Jackson, 2010). In order to compile a sampling frame, the researcher conducted an online search for current, fictional Black TV shows and used ranker.com as a reference point. Ranker.com was used because it constantly updates highest ranked shows. The website is also user ranked, allowing the people to vote on the best TV shows. The website ranked 42 TV shows and the researcher pulled all the shows that were scripted from this list, not reality television shows or talk shows. The researcher also looked for shows on TV networks that target Black audiences (e.g. BET, OWN, VH1 etc.). If a show had a new season within the past five years it was kept on the list. A review of the cast members occurred using a combination of IMDb (an online database for film, TV, and streaming content) and the networks website.

Although this list does not include every predominately Black TV show with a Black female lead character, it does include many that are readily available to viewers. The titles of the series, their total number of episodes produced, and the number of episodes in this study's sample appear in Appendix A. From the identified series, episodes were chosen using random sampling. Because of time delays due to the Spring 2020 campus closure, the researcher had to cut the sample from 90 to 48 episodes. The researcher selected 48 episodes because any more than 4 episodes per week would infringe upon coders other classes. The episodes were selected from all possible airdates or available episodes of the 2019-2020 season, with no repeating episodes being used. To collect the sample above, access to the television shows on streaming networks was needed. An account on streaming services was created and made available to

coders to watch the final sample. Data input and analysis of coding required the use of Microsoft Excel.

Measures

Body shape. Body shape was coded using Overstreet, Quinn, and Agocha's (2010) body ideals beyond thinness scale, where they created images of the five most common body types. Body shape, in this study, is defined as apple, pear, hourglass, slim and overweight. Apple is defined as "full busts, waists and upper back and often width around the middle leading down to slim legs." Pear is defined as "slim torso, bust and waist with larger hips, thighs and bottom." Hourglass is defined as "wider bust and thighs paired with a thin waist." Slim as "straight and narrow with little bottom or bust." There was one additional category added by the researcher. Overweight, will be defined as "wide bust, waist, and hips that makes one appear round". Coders chose the figure that best represented the Black females that are named in the codebook. Coders were instructed to code cannot tell whenever characters on screens were not shown from the bottom of their knee to their head. This was due to the fact so much of the shape involves seeing how the legs connect to the hip and torso. This measure came from a qualitative study and did not provide an interobserver reliability.

Verbal Reinforcement. Verbal reinforcement was coded using Fouts and Burggraf's (1999) eight measurements of verbal reinforcement, only six of which were used for this study: (a) frequency of positive comments made by males about or to a female character regarding her weight or body (e.g., "You look great! Have you lost weight?"); (b) frequency of positive comments by other female characters regarding her weight or body; (c) frequency of negative comments made by males regarding her weight or body (e.g., "You are too fat Body to wear that dress in public!"); (d) frequency of negative comments by other female characters regarding her

weight or body; (e) positive self-comments made by the female character about her own weight or body (e.g., “I am a size four! I look great!”); and (f) negative comments (negative self-comments) made by the female character about her own weight or body (e.g., “My behind looks huge in this bathing suit!”) (Fouts & Burggraf, 1999). Negative verbal comments included humorous negative comments (i.e. backhanded compliments) and self-deprecation (e.g. “I look huge in these pants”, “I will never get a date looking like this”). This study determined positive and negative comments by the words used in the comments. If the words used were positive words (good, pretty, nice) then it was considered a positive comment, if negative terms were used (ugly, bad, horrible) then it was a negative comment. Similar to their study every time characters conversation revolved around body or weight coders looked for positive and negative comments. Coders looked at this through in-group, other Black characters, and out group, different race characters, for each one if these verbal reinforcements. Fouts and Burggraf had interobserver reliabilities ranging from moderate to high: positive comments by males (.72) , positive comments by females (.80), negative comment by males (.60), negative comments by females (.80), positive self-comments by female lead characters (.92), and negative self-comments by female lead characters (.76)

Skin tone. Skin tone was to be coded using a modified version of Gary’s (2011) skin color chart. Coders were to use the chart to determine the skin tones of the Black female lead characters. There were 18 color swatches, put into four categories. Rating skin tone of characters allowed for analysis comparing the amount of comments made towards people with lighter or darker skin tones. The skin tone chart goes from lightest (pale, White person) to darkest (dark skin Black person). Due to COVID not allowing on campus learning, coders could not code skin

tone reliably, so it was cut from the codebook and further coding procedures. This measure came from a qualitative study and did not provide an interobserver reliability.

Hair Textures. Throughout the literature the implications of hair being a large factor on body dissatisfaction for Black women is prominent. A narrative for Black women was success is only obtainable if you present yourself with straight hair (chemically processed, flat ironed, weave, wig etc.) but the idea has been challenged recently (Johnson & Bankhead, 2013). This study measured hair first by asking coders to identify the state of their characters hair regularly during the show (i.e. natural, chemically straightened, weave, wig etc.), this can be identified visually. Coders were instructed to code for straight/wavy and coily/kinky/curly hair textures. Any hair that was considered straight/wavy was either chemically straight, flat ironed, weave or wigs, or hair styles that were portrayed that way (e.g. long ponytails). Straight/wavy also included hair that is considered beach waves or loose curls. Hair texture coily/kinky/curly was hair that was more course textured, tighter curls, or natural hairstyle (e.g. puff, puff balls, braids, cornrows, dreads etc.). Although braids, cornrows, and dreads can be done on straight/wavy hair it was included in coily/kinky/curly because many Black women that wear their natural hair use these hair styles as a way to protect their hair from the elements and over manipulation of hair. This variable was created by the researcher specifically for this study.

Hair Comments. This also used Fouts and Burggraf's (1999) verbal reinforcement measurement but was adapted by the researcher to measure comments specifically for hair. This measurement gauges: a) frequency of positive comments made by males about or to a female lead character regarding her hair (e.g., "You look great! Did you do something different to your hair?"); b) frequency of negative comments made by males regarding her hair (e.g., "You know you cannot pull off that hair style"); c) frequency of positive comments about her hair by other

female characters (e.g. “you look amazing! Did you just dye your hair?”); d) frequency of negative comments by other female characters regarding her hair (“you should grow your hair back out. It looks much cuter when it is long.”); and e) positive comments by the female lead character regarding her hair (e.g., “Wow my hair turned out great today!”); and f) negative comments (negative self-comments) made by the female lead character about her regarding her hair (e.g., “I need to get my hair done, it is a hot mess”) (Fouts & Burggraf, 1999). Coders looked at this through in-group, other Black characters, and out group, different race characters, for each one of these verbal reinforcements.

Coders and Coder Training

Coders for this study were Black and White college undergraduate women and were enrolled in a communication course. Coders received credit hours for this project and six coders were used for this study. At the beginning of training coders and the researcher studied and discussed the coding protocols to become more acquainted with the variables and their definitions. The shows used for coder training were chosen by reviewing how many episodes per series were available and choosing those with excess episodes. The researcher made sure there were examples for every part of the code book although not every show was used for the examples. Discussions on the variables occurred for 12 weeks, meeting once a week for three hours. Conditions and explanations were added to the codebook during this time to increase reliability. The use of episodes that were taken from the population and given as examples for coding were not used in the final sample. Once coders were comfortable with the procedures and variables, an initial test was performed using two program episodes. Variables that did not meet standards for intercoder reliability were reviewed and retrained until reliability was established.

Intercoder reliability

This study achieved intercoder reliability by using Krippendorff's alpha. Krippendorff's alpha was used for this analysis because it satisfies the five criteria for a measure of reliability: assesses the agreement between two or more observers, grounded in the distribution of the categories or scale points used by the observers, constitute a numerical scale between at least two points, appropriate to the level of measurement of the data, and sampling behavior should be known or at least computable (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Krippendorff's alpha reliability scale begins at .75 (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) and was attainable for this study. Final intercoder reliability for variables are as follows: body shape ($\alpha=.73$), straight/wavy ($\alpha=.54$), coily/kinky/curly ($\alpha=.93$), comments ($\alpha=.99$). Body shape and straight/wavy were discussed and discrepancies straightened out before coders received the sample.

Data Analysis

To answer this study's research questions, a series of chi-square tests were conducted. Chi square is most appropriate because body shape and hair textures were nominal variables and comments were ratio level variables. For finding frequencies of body shape a one-way chi-square was used. To find the rest of the results a two-way chi square was used. The sample consisted of eight episodes of *Black-ish* (sitcom), four of *How to Get Away with Murder* (drama), eight of *Scandal* (drama), four of *Mixed-ish* (sitcom), two of *Queen Sugar* (drama), nine of *Empire* (musical), three of *Greenleaf* (drama), and ten of *Grown-ish* (sitcom). The reliability sample consisted of four *Black-ish*, one *How to Get Away with Murder*, and one *Scandal* episode. The sample episodes were randomly assigned to each coder.

Results

Research question one asked if Black female characters are portrayed with a variety of body shapes. A one-way chi-square test were conducted to assess body shapes in the television shows. The results of this test, as shown in Table 1, were significant: $\chi^2 (5, N=267) = 225.79, p < .001$. The total N in Table 1 includes all Black female leads across all the coded shows but only coded once per episode. There are 8 shows with 47 possible Black female leads. Table 1 shows that 2.2% of women were shown as overweight, 4.9% were shown as apple, 25% as pear, 2.6% as hourglass, 20.6% as slim and 44.57% were unidentifiable. This research question finds that the highest number of characters had pear-shaped bodies and the lowest number of characters were shown as having overweight bodies.

Table 1: *Black female leads distribution of body shape (n, percent)*

Body Shape	Frequency
Overweight	6 (2.2%)
Apple	13 (4.9%)
Pear	67 (25%)
Hourglass	7 (2.6%)
Slim	55 (20.6%)
Cannot tell	115 (44.57%)

$\chi^2 (5) = 225.79, p = .000$

The second research question asked how Black female characters are distributed across body shapes and straight/wavy hair, coily/kinky/curly hair, or both (i.e. in one episode were shown with straight and coily hair at some point). A two-way chi-square test was conducted to assess this question. The results of this test, as shown in Table 2, were significant: $\chi^2(10, N=$

267) = 30.77, $p < .001$. The total N in Table 2 includes all Black female leads across all the coded shows the amount of times they coded this depended on if hair texture changed during the episode. There are 8 shows with 47 possible Black female leads. The body shape of a Black female lead character does account for variability in what hair type is portrayed on that character. Cramer's phi was 0.24, thus 24% of variance can be explained by the type of hair on a character. With this said, 76% of the variances needs to be explained by other variables. Hence, the answer to the first research question is overweight characters are more likely to have coily/kinky/curly hair, apple is likely to have straight/wavy, pear is likely to have straight/wavy, hourglass is likely to have straight/wavy and slim is likely to have coily/kinky/curly. This means that the most frequently portrayed body shape, pear, is less likely to be seen with curly/kinky/coily and more likely to be seen with straight/wavy hair or both.

Table 2: *Distribution of body shape across hair type (n, percent)*

Body Shape	Hair Type		
	Straight/Wavy Hair	Coily/Kinky/Curly Hair	Both (Straight and Coily)
Overweight	2 (.75%)	4 (1.50%)	0 (0%)
Apple	8 (3.00%)	2 (.75%)	3 (1.12%)
Pear	29 (10.86%)	14 (5.24%)	24 (8.99%)
Hourglass	4 (1.50%)	3 (1.12%)	0 (0%)
Slim	10 (3.75%)	23 (8.61%)	22 (8.24%)
Cannot tell	60 (22.47%)	36 (13.48%)	23 (8.61%)

$\chi^2 (10) = 30.79, p = .001$

The third research question asked if central Black female lead characters receive more negative or positive comments about their body from male and female characters? A two-way

chi-square test was conducted to assess if Black female lead characters receive more negative or positive body comments from male or female characters. The results of this test, as shown in Table 3, were not significant: $\chi^2(1, N=27) = .3, p > .05$. The total N in Table 3 includes the amount of comments made toward the central Black female leads across all the coded shows made from the in group of males and females (i.e. Black males and females only). There are 8 shows with 14 central Black female leads that comments are aimed at or about. The test indicates that there was not a significant difference in other females positive and negative comments and males positive and negative comments. Hence, the answer to the third question is females and males are not more likely to make negative or positive comments about the Black female leads body.

Table 3: *Positive and negative comments about body/weight (in group) (n, percent)*

Comments	Sex	
	Males	Females
Positive	3 (11.11%)	8 (29.62%)
Negative	6 (22.22%)	10 (37.03%)

$\chi^2 (1) = 0.3, p > .05$

The revised fourth research question asked if the amount of positive or negative comments differ depending on the central female character's body shape. A two-way chi-square test was conducted to assess this research question. The results of this test, as shown in Table 4, were not significant: $\chi^2 (5, N=65) = 3.48, p > .05$. The total N in Table 4 includes the amount of comments made toward the central Black female leads across all the coded shows that focused on her body. The N comes from comments made by the in-group and out-group which allowed for more comments to be recorded. The test indicates there was not a significant difference in positive or negative comments depending on a character's body shape. So, the answer to the

fourth research question is that positive and negative comments are not likely to differ depending on a character's body shape.

Table 4: *Positive and negative comments based on body shape (n, percent)*

Comments	Body Shape					
	Overweight	Apple	Pear	Hourglass	Slim	Cannot tell
Positive	0 (0%)	7 (10.77%)	10 (15.38%)	0 (0%)	9 (13.84%)	7 (10.77%)
Negative	0 (0%)	2 (3.07%)	10 (15.38%)	0 (0%)	8 (12.31%)	12 (18.46%)

$\chi^2 (5) = 3.48, p > .05$

The fifth research question asked if Black female lead characters receive more negative or positive comments about their hair from male or other female characters. A two-way chi-square test was conducted to assess if central Black female lead characters receive more negative comments from male or female characters. The results of this test, as shown in Table 5, were not significant: $\chi^2 (1, N=10) = 1.68, p > .05$. The total N in Table 5 includes the amount of comments made toward the central Black female leads across all the coded shows. There are 8 shows with 14 central Black female leads that comments are aimed at or about. The test indicates that the volume of comments was not enough to get an accurate representation. Therefore, the answer to this research question is that females and males are not more likely to make negative or positive comments about the Black female lead's hair.

Table 5: *Positive and negative comments about hair (n, percent)*

Comments	Sex	
	Males	Females
Positive	4 (40%)	4 (40%)
Negative	0 (0%)	2 (20%)

$\chi^2 (1) = 1.68, p > .05$

The final research question asked if central Black female leads make more positive or negative comments about their own physical appearance. A two-way chi-square test was conducted to assess this research question. The results of this test, as shown in Table 6, were not significant: $\chi^2 (5, N=18) = .18, p > .05$. The total N in Table 6 includes the amount of comments made toward the central Black female leads across all the coded shows. There are 8 shows with 14 central Black female leads that comments are aimed at or about. An example of self-comments is Zoey, the main character in *Grown-ish*, giving herself compliments while also insulting a young lady that looks similar to her and is texting to her crush. She says “he’s going out with a girl that looks like you. Well you on a bad day. You with a ton of makeup on. Basically, you in special effects...hopefully he went home and is wishing for the company of an intelligent, beautiful young girl in a dope shirt [herself]” (Barris, Wilmore, Rothstein, and Kinney, 2018). The test indicates that there were not enough comments made by characters regarding their own bodies to be considered significant. Therefore, the answer to this question is that Black female leads are not more likely to make negative or positive comments about their own physical appearance.

Table 6: Positive and negative comments to self (n, percent)

Comments	Body Shape					
	Overweight	Apple	Pear	Hourglass	Slim	Cannot tell
Positive	0 (0%)	3 (16.6%)	3 (16.6%)	0 (0%)	3 (16.6%)	1 (5.55%)
Negative	0 (0%)	2 (11.11%)	2 (11.11%)	0 (0%)	3 (16.6%)	1 (5.55%)

$\chi^2 (5) = .18, p > .05$

Discussion

The aim of this study was to look at Black women's body image in television media. The overwhelming data on body image has looked into the White standards of beauty and what it means to be beautiful in a society where Whiteness is the key component of beauty. However, what is beauty when you are not White? Walker (2014) and Hicks (2018) talk about protective factors that allow for Black women's varying definition of beauty: ethnic identity, a mother's love, Black men's influence, and spirituality. These all allow Black women to view beauty differently than others. One of the factors, ethnic identity, allows for a positive attitude about body shape and features on one's self as long as they are connected to people that look like or associate with their ethnicity. With the influx of Black television shows on multiple platforms, the time to look at body image for Black women characters has never been better. This study found that television's portrayals of Black women do include some Black beauty standards, but still incorporate White standards as well. This study offers some insight on the cultural differences between Black and White standards of beauty, beauty standards for Black women in TV, and the nature of other characters' comments about those Black women.

Black vs White Standards of Beauty

Schooler et al. (2004) state that programs and messages about appearances in mainstream and Black-oriented television are different, and the mechanisms by which White and Black women compare themselves to media images are different. One difference is that Black women focus on curves when it comes to their bodies (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; DeLeel et al., 2009; Roberts, 1993). Black women do not compare their body by weight but rather the shape of it, unlike White women who do the opposite (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; DeLeel et al., 2009; Roberts, 1993). For Black women, hair is also a large portion of body image (Capodilupo, 2015).

The biggest struggle with hair is whether to wear their natural hair or to wear weaves, wigs, or extensions that usually make hair look straight or wavy or align with the White ideal. Akintunde (1997) says hair is a big target of ridicule regarding Black women because hair is evaluated as good hair or nappy hair. Good hair usually indicates a looser curl and a comb can easily be raked through it. This would be considered straight wavy. While nappy has tight curls and a comb cannot easily be raked through the hair. Since hair has many underlying meanings in different cultures, the way Black women choose to style and present their hair can affect others' assumptions about them.

This study shows some evidence of TV's culturally sensitive standards for Black women. Portrayals of diverse body types in Black television shows were reviewed and showed that 25% of the characters were pear shaped. This being the highest percentage, and slim next with 20%, could be an indication that there is more of an emphasis on curves for Black women. This could mean there are cultural standards shown in TV portrayals that fit Black beauty standards of larger hips and curvier bodies. This study concurs with previous studies (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; DeLeel et al., 2009; Roberts, 1993) that qualitatively state that Black women focus more on shapes and curves and see it as a positive. While Black women's television ideal is pear shape, right behind it is still the White ideal of slim. Meaning that there are cultural portrayals that match a Black ideal, but the White ideal is still prominent and portrayed within these TV shows.

This study also examined how Black female characters are distributed across body shapes and hair types. Overall, when hair was straight many of the Black female leads were pear shaped. If the hair was coily, the body shape was more often slim. When the character's hair was seen as coily and straight during one episode, the Black female leads were also more often to be pear

shape. These findings could be problematic because, in this sample, the majority of Black female leads with straight hair were pear shaped and those with coily hair were slim. Essentially, TV gives viewers ethnicity in small doses. It allows for pieces of a Black ideal. Black female leads can be pear shaped, but with straight hair, or they can be the White ideal shape (slim) and wear the “Black hair”. In short, the characters have to comply with the White ideal if they have any aspect of the Black ideal incorporated in their appearance.

The findings from this study have many possible implications for Black female TV viewers. One is that attractiveness involves a larger hip to bust ratio. Although this, in itself, is not damaging, if combined with accessibility to plastic surgery it could cause some young girls to strive for this shape (Goldman, 2012; Richins, 1991). Some may try to obtain the ratio through butt implants, liposuction, or waist trainers (Overstreet, Quinn, Agocha, 2010). The findings regarding hair texture suggest as long as you have a pear-shaped body you can be pretty with your natural hair – with the caveat that you have to wear it straight sometimes. It also has the potential to cause some women to believe that if they are not slim, then coily hair is not considered beautiful on them. Black women may still have lower self-esteem and body image because the ideal image of Black woman has lighter skin, long straight hair, and a curvy shape (Capodilupo, 2015).

Others’ Comments on Physical Appearance

The literature on this subject shows that other characters’ comments about women on TV can have an impact on viewers’ interpretation of the content. Fouts and Burggraf (1999) found that half of their 52 female characters in their study received any kind of comments. This study examined positive and negative comments made about a character’s physical appearance. First, it should be stated that comments in the shows were rare. There were very few appearance-based

comments made, which could mean appearance-based comments are disappearing from some TV shows. If a larger sample had been analyzed and there are still few comments, this could be a turning point in television. It might signal an elevated consciousness from writers that want to focus on other aspects of story lines and characters, not just appearance. It could also be that now the portrayed groups are actually writers for the shows that focus on them (i.e., Black writers for Black shows). Writers like Shonda Rhimes, Kenya Barris, and Issa Rae are finally given the chance to write content that they feel is important and accurately represents their community. Fewer comments could also be misleading, though. The comments that are stated may have such a large prominence or importance within the script that, although few in number, their impact is great. An example of this is *Mixed-ish*, particularly their hair episode (Gist & Saji, 2019). The star, Rainbow, a mixed-race child, is told by her White teacher to wear her hair neat for picture day. This is only one comment, but there are others in this one episode alone. Like when the youngest daughter asks her mom “So I’m not a good Black person if my hair is straight?” (Gist & Saji, 2019) The entire family then has a deep conversation about wearing your hair however you want the mother explains that she only pushed so hard for their natural hair because it took her so long to accept her hair (Gist & Saji, 2019). The rest of the show discusses the meaning of hair related content like whose hair is prettiest, what is “good hair”, and more. Even though comments may be few in a script, they can be hugely significant to the plot line of the show.

This study’s questions examined if positive or negative comments differ depending on a character's body shape. The most positive and negative comments were directed towards characters with pear body shapes. This may mean that pear shapes are portrayed as a positive body shape, as more attractive, and as a Black beauty ideal. However, since there were just as many negative comments, the pear body shape can also mean opening yourself up to criticism.

An example of a negative comment towards a character's body shape was during an episode of *Grown-ish*. A Black female lead told the central lead "how is getting fat helping her heal? If she's gonna be depressed she at least needs to lose weight, it's the only upside to being depressed" (Barris, Wilmore, Brown, Hall & Kinney, 2018). This was a comment about her eating habit post break-up which belittles not only her emotions but her body and the way she handles the breakup. Negative comments around pear shape can also be speculation that one's shape is not real (not obtained naturally), causing negative self-talk if comments are false and negative body image if they are true. In total, there were more negative comments than positive comments across all body shapes. This may be an indication that when discussing body shape, television producers are not ready to refrain from negative body shape comments on Black television shows.

Ethnic identity allows for a positive attitude about body shapes and features on one's self as long as they are connected to people that look like or associate with a viewer's ethnicity (Baugh, Mullis, Mullis, Hicks, & Peterson, 2010). Without a strong ethnic identity or lack of peers within ethnicity Black women may still pay attention to what society tells them to look like (i.e. White ideal) and compare themselves to this standard instead of making comparisons to those ethnically similar to them (Hicks, 2018).

Social comparison theory considers peers a source of comparison because of their influence on each other and ability to encourage unhealthy behavior and attitudes, like unhealthy dieting and negative self-talk (Mueller et al., 2010). Peers comments can impact Black women if those within their ethnicity do not give them positive feedback. This could cause a sense of insecurity to set in, causing low self-esteem and depression, which would only result in more social comparisons. If someone feels the group they are trying to fit in with (ethnicity) will not

accept them, they may feel isolated from all groups and accept vastly different appearance ideals. So Black males' and females' comments play a role in Black women feeling accepted in their ethnic group and could determine if Black women will compare themselves to Black or White ideals.

Peers' comments are important to look at because it was stated by Walker (2014) and Hicks (2018) that protective factors exist for Black women. Female comments are significant because according to SCT, ethnic identity is stronger when you are closer to your peers. This study did not show significant findings regarding other females' comments, but it did find that female characters make more negative than positive comments about female Black leads. This can indicate that there is positive reinforcement between peers to continue negative traits.

Black males were also looked at because they place a higher value on curvier body types and prefer physically larger women. Fouts and Burggraf (1999) determined that 51% of positive comments to female characters were from males regarding female characters weight or appearance. That study found that the thinner a female character was, the more positively males commented on her body. Though the present study did not yield statistically significant findings, there were more negative comments from males regarding appearance. This does not determine if males have an influence on Black women's body shape. However, the combined results of this study and Fouts and Burggraf's study begs the question of whether Black men's positive comments are aimed at curvier women. If so, it would affirm that this protective factor exists and is important in these TV shows.

Black women can be targets of ridicule even if something is positive. Some examples are wearing weave as a protective style or wearing their natural hair texture and hearing comments about their hair being nappy or needing to be brushed, or even being bald (Akintunde, 1997).

Another example is skin tone, where punchlines in some TV comedies (e.g. Comedy Jam) reference having dark skin like not being visible in the dark (Akintunde, 1997). Comments like these are real-life scenarios that may be shown on television. Even when a character has a beautiful body type, hair style, or gorgeous skin there will be something that is made fun of or talked about in a negative light.

This content found that both females and males made more positive than negative comments regarding the Black female leads' hair. Depending on the hair texture, this can be beneficial or harmful. How can it be both? Hicks (2018) and Simms (2001) both reference the cultural standards that Black women have heard regarding their hair since slavery: good vs. nappy (bad) hair. The implications of whether the positive comments are productive or damaging rely on the kind of comments made about hair texture. Individual hair texture comments were not coded so there can only be speculation of the constructive and destructive possibilities of these comments. If positive comments were directed at a character on screen that wore a natural hairstyle, or coily/kinky/curly, these can be seen as a positive reinforcement for Black woman's own hair and feelings about their hair. They can teach Black women that it is okay and even attractive to wear their hair in a style that accentuates its natural aspects. This comment pattern also can be interpreted as not feeling compelled to change one's hair to be considered beautiful. As amazing as this would be, positive comments can also have an adverse effect if the comments were focused on women with straight/wavy hair. It can tell Black women that, post-slavery and post-segregation, this is the only acceptable way to wear your hair and that the White ideal is still very much ingrained into Black culture and still considered most beautiful (Simms, 2001).

Internalized beauty ideals can originate in observed media content and one's social environment (i.e., portrayed on TV or promoted by significant others) (Sands and Wardle, 2003).

This study's look at comments that female Black leads made about themselves showed that those characters do not often talk about their own bodies in these television shows. Black feminist theory might help explain the lack of self-comments. Considering all that Black feminist theory encompasses, sex, race, and class, (Bennett, 2016; Simms, 2001; Walker, 2014) body shape could be deemed less important of an issue. Seeing someone you can relate to at the intersection of sex, race, and class might be more important for Black viewers than relating on just a physical level. Black oriented TV shows might reflect an intent to establish this deeper level of viewer identification with Black women characters. The interpretation of self-comments can have a positive impact on Black female viewers. If comments regarding the self are less potent, then it could mean there is not as much of an emphasis on body shape or size. This also applies to hair texture and skin tone. If there is more acceptance of shape, hair, and skin tone on television, Black girls might feel that their body image is not as important as other aspects of identity.

This study was unable to obtain the entire scope of comments but made way for possible indications of SCT at work in Black TV shows. Future analysis should examine whether Black female leads look to each other for feedback. If researchers find this to be true, it could mean that Black women watching Black female leads would be more likely to compare themselves because they can relate to the comments made from other females (e.g. mothers, grandmothers, friends, etc.) or males (father, brother, boyfriend etc.). If future research determines there are more positive comments towards Black female leads, it could lead to stronger ethnic identity. This could increase the argument of protective factors existing for Black women and have them focus more on what their cultural ideals say is beautiful.

Limitations

As with all studies, there are limitations that researchers should consider. One of these was the coder's ethnicity. The goal was to get Black college-aged women to participate, however finding participants that met these criteria and were willing to complete this project for a semester was difficult. Most of the coders were White college-aged women, which required simplifying some complex topics and visuals that many Black women know or experience on a regular basis (e.g. hair and comments) (Walker, 2014). As Black Feminist Theory suggests, topics like hair can be difficult for outsiders to understand. Saying "you have nappy hair" is not inherently negative to those who do not know the meaning. For example, in an episode of *Mixed-ish* that discusses hair the father, a white man, was talking about his wife's flat ironed hair in their wedding photos. He says "oh yeah I liked your hair there...unless you don't. But your hair looks beautiful always like a Black Farrah Fawcett. Oh no, you..Farrah is like a White you" (Gist & Saji, 2019). It would be easier for Black coders to spot these microaggression and allow for comments like these to be considered negative. Comments like these have sub textual meanings that for Black women are common knowledge.

A second limitation concerns the need to omit skin tone from this analysis. Capodilupo (2015) says skin tone impacts body image for Black women. Light skin Black women, that are usually racial ambiguous, with straight hair shows conformity to post slavery White ideals (Capodilupo, 2015). This ideal was the norm on TV and the closest Black women saw themselves for some time (Gary, 2011). Skin tone was not coded, but this is an important question to ask and apply to future analyses.

Another limitation was this study's sample size. The original sample would have consisted of 12 reliability episodes and 78 sample episodes total. The closure of the UA campus

in March cut off coders' access to the Center for Communication Research, which stored the original sample. This required trying to recreate the sample via streaming video services such as Netflix and Hulu, but those services only included a portion of the original shows. Although there can be implications made regarding the current sample, future researchers will want to keep in mind that implications could change with a larger sample size. It is also possible that there are more comments regarding body shapes within a wider variety of shows and this content analysis was just not large enough to capture this. Streaming services were not incorporated originally however they should be explored. Streaming services allow for more Black writers and creative content without the restrictions that come with broadcast and cable, including niche shows that cater to Black audiences (e.g., *Chewing Gum*, *She's Gotta Have It*, *Dear White People*, *Marlon*).

Another limitation is comments were coded by episode, not by character. An example of this would be in the show *Black-ish* when Ruby, the grandmother, makes an appearance-based comment to Rainbow, the lead character. Researchers could look at Ruby and Rainbow's body shape and say people with this shape made more negative comments towards a different shape. If coders recorded the data with the character as the unit of analysis, this could help detect more detailed patterns in characters' appearance-based comments.

Conclusion

This study looked at social comparison theory and how SCT applies to Black women watching Black television media. Black women, like their counterparts, will compare themselves to television media if the idea of beauty in front of them is attainable. Black women that have desirable body shapes and hair textures/styles can cause comparisons that could lead to striving to this ideal this could be beneficial or harmful similar to White women and their ideal. This study also looked at body shapes, examining which body shapes are prominent in Black television shows, how much variety is included in them, and if a Black beauty ideal was portrayed in shows starring Black women. Although there were small amounts of body variations within the shows, this study showed that pear-shaped bodies reflect Black beauty ideals in these shows, though the slim, White ideal is no less popular than other curvy body shapes.

This study also looked at body and hair comments to see the influence of protective factors that Black males and other females have on Black women. No significant findings were discovered, so that is something for future researchers to continue testing. Finally, this study asked if Black characters' body shapes were related to their hair style. It found that the combination of body shape and hair style was more often a blend of Black and White beauty ideals. The shapes that are curvier by nature (hourglass, pear, and apple) all were more likely to be seen with straightened hair. On the other hand, slim, the White ideal, and overweight were more likely to be seen with coily hair. This is something that researchers can look into and see why it is that these shapes were more likely to be seen with straight hair versus with curly hair, as well as what that could mean for viewers' self-perceptions of their appearance. All of these findings have many implications for young Black women watching television shows and future researchers should continue to examine these portrayals.

This study was needed because of the lack of research of Black women's body image. Research regularly explored the sexual images and sexualization of Black women in music videos but not body image in television. This study shows that examining body image can be beneficial. Findings showed there are aspects of Black ideals proving that current body trends, Black people in the media industry and a range of television shows have and will continue to have an impact on what is popular and presented in media. A range of shows and Black ideals will allow for a community in television for Black women that in the past did not exist. As stated by Marian Wright Edelman J.D. (as cited by *Homecoming*, 2019) "you can't be what you can't see."

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Appendices

Appendix A

Sampling frame

Shows	Available episodes	Sample
Black-ish	120	8
Empire*	9	4
Greenleaf*	12	8
Grown-ish	5	4
How to get away with Murder*	9	2
Mixed-ish*	10	9
Queen Sugar*	5	3
Scandal*	92	10
Total	262	48

*Black females are a part of the main writers of these shows

Appendix B

Content Analysis Protocol and Codebook Body Shape of Black Women in Television Series

Part 1: Introduction

This study aims to examine body image, verbal reinforcement, and hair of Black women in television shows that are likely to be viewed by Black females. This protocol will be used to analyze the content of television series which include broadcast and cable.

Major Concepts

Body Shape:

This study will look at the subsections of body image, that encompass body shapes. When looking at body shapes within the sample only the five most common body types and one additional type will be examined: apple, pear, hourglass, petite, slim, and overweight.

Lead Character/ principle characters

Only account for females and males that have significance to the story line and or have background stories that move the story forward. An extra walking in the background or in a crowd or listening to the main character talk does not need to be included in these numbers. Lead character is the person who is most often seen and named, majority of the events happen to them. Stand-alone character that has their own background, stories, and plots. Refer to character list if you need help identifying leads.

Verbal reinforcement

Verbal reinforcements are based off of how others look at the body shapes of Black women within the shows. This variable will give an insight into what others say about one character's body shape and if it is positive or negative towards them.

Part 2: Content Processing Procedures

It is essential that you follow the procedure carefully, so no coding sample or time is wasted.

The sample has been recorded and saved on the SnapStream (the website URL is 10.5.16.92) Each coder will have randomly selected samples to code and these sample will be sent out to coders once all initial reliability test have been completed and reliability has been met. Demonstrations on how to work the Snapstream will occur before coders are given the sample.

Coding should occur in Kimpel hall in room 405 (on laptops) or 405A on the middle three computers. If one computer does not work, then move to another computer. You should be able to use your own UARK login credentials on any of the computers. If that does not work on the laptops refer to the board for the password to get into the laptops. **Turn the laptops brightness all the way up. NOTE:** Room 405 is unavailable on Thursday nights.

Coding will occur via the online code book; and EXCEL file. There is a file folder on Sharepoint drive titled Body Image Research, open that and you will see docuements on the left. Click that and the excel codebook file titled "Body Image Codebook" will be there. Open this file and **IMMEDIATELY SAVE AS**, you will save it as "Lastname_ProgramTitle" (ex: Hubbard_BlackishJackofAllTrades). Upload it to **YOUR FOLDER** in sharepoint. Your folder has your name written on it. Each character should have its own row with everything filled out for that character. Each program should have its OWN SEPARATE EXCEL file, DO NOT have more than one episode for a single EXCEL file. Repeat this step every time you watch an episode of a show.

Make sure to circle which coder you are as well as the host show title, the episode name and time it aired. Choose an episode you are assigned to code and press play. Start coding when the episode starts. Do code the opening sequence that runs before the credits, but not episode recaps (for example "Last time on "). In that case, do NOT code the opening "Last time on ... ". Begin coding after the clip's shots have ended and the episode begins.

Start watching the episode looking for the main Black female lead and other Black females within the show. Code one body shape per line on the spreadsheet, identify the shape for each female character listed in the codebook. Only code for characters during the television shows, do not code advertisements or commercials regarding the show you are watching.

The character list at the end of the code book is for Black Leads, they tell you who you are coding physical attributes about.

When you get to comments ANYONE who comments about the people on that list should be marked on comments.

Make sure that while coding skin tone you turn off the lights to get a better visual of the colors on screen.

If you encounter a problem with the Snap Stream or streaming service, please alert the study director immediately so it can be rectified. **Make note of any coding questions you have, but only ask the study director, not other coders.**

Part 3: Coding variables and categories

Coder

Circle your name/number to indicate which coder you are.

1- Elyse

2- Katie

3- Bri

4- Deborah

5- Deja

6- Kelsey

Host Show Title

Circle the name of the show as it appears on screen.

Black-ish

David Makes Man

Empire

Greenleaf

Grown-ish

How to get away with Murder

Mixed-ish

Queen Sugar

Scandal

Tyler Perry's Sistas

Tyler Perry's The Oval

Episode name and time

Write the name of the episode title below. This is to make the show easier to find later for yourself and the researcher. Choose the start time of the show from the menu provided, if airtime is available.

Body Shape

Write the name of the character under the heading. Circle the figure number that best represent the woman for each of the following categories. Circle cannot tell or ‘6’ when you cannot see a character from their knees up. You are only coding what you can SEE not what you assume is there.

Black Female Lead	1	2	3	4	5	6
Female best friend/sidekick to lead	1	2	3	4	5	6
Other Female main character	1	2	3	4	5	6
Other Female main character	1	2	3	4	5	6

Body Type	Overweight	Apple	Pear	Hourglass	Slim
Description	“wide bust, waist, and hips that makes one appear round”	“full busts, waists and upper backs and often width around the middle leading to slim legs”	“slim torso, bust and waist with larger hips, thighs, and bottom”	“wider bust and thighs paired with a thin waist”	“straight and narrow with little bottom or bust”
Shape					
Figure #	1	2	3	4	5

6= cannot tell

*pear is hourglass but fuller hips; hourglass is more extreme pear shape with large busts



Skin tone: Circle **ONE** number that applies when looking at the category. Use the same leads you analyzed for body shape. If you see all the tones from one section that section is your best choice. Code zoomed in shots (**under boob to face and has most skin available**). Make sure that while coding skin tone you turn off the lights to get a better visual of the colors on screen. **Code the best time available and only that 1 shot do not code multiple times throughout the episode.**

Circle **ONE** number that applies, code skin tone using the laptops at highest brightness.

Black Female Lead	1	2	3	4
Female best friend/sidekick to lead	1	2	3	4
Other Female main character	1	2	3	4
Other Female main character	1	2	3	4

Hair Texture

Write the name of the central characters in the left boxes and circle yes if the character is shown with the corresponding hair texture at any point throughout the show. At the end of this episode if there are no instances of that hair texture for the character throughout the show circle no.

You will do this for any central female (as defined on your character list). Code hair texture any time you see it on screen (this includes flashbacks, or anytime you are clearly shown the character)

Evaluate hair styles from root to tip to identify the best category for each character (i.e. straight at the root with waves at the bottom would go under straight/wavy). “Natural hair styles” like braids, dreads, cornrows etc. would go under coily/kinky.

Characters	Hair texture			
	Straight/wavy		coily/kinky	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Yes	No	Yes	No

Verbal Reinforcement

Each time one of the following comments happens write a tally mark in the corresponding charts below. At the end of the episode write the number of tallies you have and circle it (ex: 8).

You will do this for the in-group (coming from Black characters) and out-group (coming from any other race characters (e.g., White, Asian, Hispanic, or any other)).

ANYONE who comments about the people on that list should be marked in their corresponding section of comments.

Code for narration if comment is still directed to character on screen (i.e. “She looked so great last night, she had on the best color for her!”). Code if a character recalls a comment statement to them (i.e. “Ms. Johnson said I needed to lose 3 pounds”).
qualifier

- 1) Males positive comments about/to central Black female character regarding **her weight or body** (e.g., “You look great! Have you lost weight?”)
- 2) Males negative comments to Black central female lead regarding **her weight or body** (e.g., “You’re too fat to wear that dress in public!”)
- 3) Other female characters positive comments about central Black female lead regarding **her weight or body** (e.g., “you look amazing! Have you been working out?”)
- 4) Other female characters negative comments about central Black female lead regarding **her weight or body** (“you should lay off the chips. Maybe come to the gym with me”)
- 5) Central Black female lead’s positive comments about other central Black leads regarding **their weight or body** (“wow that diets really working for you! Look at you go”)
- 6) Central Black female leads negative comments about other central black leads regarding **their weight or body** (e.g., “You’re too fat to wear that dress in public!”)
- 7) Central Black female character positive comments (positive self-comments) about her **OWN weight or body** (e.g., “I’m a size four! I look great!”)
- 8) Central female character negative comments (negative self-comments) about **her OWN weight or body** (e.g., “My behind looks huge in this bathing suit!”)

Person Speaking (in-group)	Target of comments		
	Positive and Negative	Central female Black lead (CBL)	To themselves
Black Males (BM)	+		
	-		
Other Black female leads (OBFL)	+		
	-		
Central Black female lead (CBL)	+		
	-		

Person Speaking (out-group) (e.g., White, Asian, Hispanic, or any other)	Target of comments	
	Positive and Negative	Central Black female lead (cbl)
Males (OUTMale)	+	
	-	
Other female characters (OUT OF)	+	
	-	
Cannot tell (when you cannot tell who the comment is coming from; this if for both IN and OUT group!)	+	
	-	

Hair Comments

Each time one of the following comments happens write a “+” for positive comments and “-” for negative comments in the corresponding charts below. At the end of the episode write the number of “+” and “-” you have separately.

Code for narration if comment is still directed to character on screen (i.e. “She looked so great last night, she had on the best color for her!”). Code if a character recalls a comment statement to them (i.e. “Ms. Johnson said I needed to lose 3 pounds”). **ANYONE who comments about the people on that list should be marked in their corresponding section of comments.**

- 1) Males positive comments about/to central female character regarding her hair (e.g., “You look great! Did you do something different to your hair?”)
- 2) Males negative comments to central female lead regarding her hair (e.g., “You know you can’t pull off that hair style”)
- 3) Other female characters positive comments about central female lead’s hair (e.g. “you look amazing! Did you just dye your hair?”)
- 4) Other female characters negative comments about central female lead’s hair (“you should grow your hair back out. It looks much cuter when it’s long.”)
- 5) Central female lead’s positive comments about other central Black leads hair (“wow I didn’t know your hair looked so cute when you get it done”)
- 6) Central female lead’s negative comments about other central Black leads hair (e.g., “Are you really going out in public with your hair like that?”)
- 7) Central female character positive comments (positive self-comments) about her own hair (e.g., “Wow my hair turned out great today!”)
- 8) Central female character negative comments (negative self-comments) about her own hair (e.g., “I need to get my hair done, it’s a hot mess”)

Person Speaking (in-group)	Target of comments		
	<i>Positive and Negative</i>	<i>Central female Black lead (CBL)</i>	<i>To themselves</i>
<i>Black Males (BM)</i>	+		
	-		
<i>Other Black female leads (OBFL)</i>	+		
	-		
<i>Central Black female lead (CBL)</i>	+		
	-		

Person Speaking (out-group) (e.g., White, Asian, Hispanic, or any other)	Target of comments	
	<i>Positive and Negative</i>	<i>Central Black female lead (cbl)</i>
<i>Males (OUTMale)</i>	+	
	-	
<i>Other female characters (OUT OF)</i>	+	
	-	
<i>Cannot tell</i> (when you cannot tell who the comment is coming from; this if for both IN and OUT group!)	+	
	-	

Appendix C

Black Lead Character List

Bold=central Black character

TV show title	Actress names	Character names
Black-ish	Tracee Ellis Ross Marsai Martin Yara Shaidi Jenifer Lewis Raven-Symoné Wanda Sykes Lorraine Toussaint	Rainbow Johnson Diane Johnson Zoey Johnson Ruby Rhonda Johnson Daphne Lido AV (Almaviligerais)
David Makes Man	Alana Arenas Phylicia Rashad Juanita Jennings Gillian Williams Lindsey Blackwell	Gloria Dr. Woods-Trap Mrs. Hertrude Jessica Kelly Marissa
Empire	Taraji P. Henson TaRhonda Jones Gabourey Sidibe Grace Byers Nicole Ari Serayah McNeill Kaitlin Doubleday Tasha Smith Claudette Burchett	Cookie Lyon Porsha Becky Anika Calhoun Giselle Tiana Brown Rhonda Lyon Carol Juanita
Greenleaf	Merle Dandridge Desiree Ross Lynn Whitfield Deborah Joy Winans Kim Hawthorne Lovie Simone Chevonne Highes	Grace Greenleaf Sophia Greenleaf Lady Mae Greenleaf Charity Greenleaf Kerissa Greenleaf Zora Greenleaf Karine
Grown-ish	Yara Shahidi Halle Bailey Chloe Bailey	Zoey Johnson Sky Forster Jazz Forster
How to get away with Murder	Viola Davis Aja Naomi King Amirah Vann Cicely Tyson	Annalise Keating Michaela Pratt Tegan Price Ophelia Harkness

Mixed-ish	Tika Sumpter Arica Himmel Christina Anthony Trinitee Stokes	Alicia Jackson Rainbow (Bow) Jackson Denise Tamika
Queen Sugar	Dawn-Lyen Gardner Rutina Wesley Tina Lifford Bianca Lawson Nikko Austen Smith Michael Michele Deja Dee Ninja Devoe Reagan Gomez-Preston	Charley Bordelon West Nova Bordelon Violet Bordelon Darla Asha Darlene Sierra Roberta Chantal Williams
Scandal	Kerry Washington Khandi Alexander Dinora Walcott Whitney Hice	Oilivia Pope Maya Lewis/Pope Reporter Carol Hannah
Tyler Perry's Sistas	KJ Smith Ebony Obsidian Mignon Novi Brown Crystal-Lee Naomi Keena Ferguson	Andrea 'Andi' Barnes Karen Mott Daniella 'Danni' King Sabrina Hollins Jasmine Borders Leslie Davenport
Tyler Perry's The Oval	Kron Moore Ptoshia Storey Ciera Payton Teesha Renee Taja Simpson Paige Hurd Melissa Williams Maurii Davenport	Victoria Franklin Nancy Hallsen Lilly Winthrop Sharon Welles Priscilla Owens Gayle Franklin Denise Truesdale Lindsay Yuma