

THESIS

WORKING ON MY HAIR: A VISUAL ANALYSIS OF NATURAL HAIR AND
BLACK WOMEN PROFESSIONALS IN POPULAR TELEVISION PROGRAMMING

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

WORKING ON MY HAIR: A VISUAL ANALYSIS OF NATURAL HAIR AND BLACK WOMEN PROFESSIONALS IN POPULAR TELEVISION PROGRAMMING

I examine the representations of Black women characters in professional settings on seven television drama texts. Black features are subjected to Eurocentering—the reduction of racial heritage markers to align with Eurocentric values—to protect hegemonic traditions under the guise of racial neoliberalism. This study focuses on hairstyles for Black women because hair functions as a racial signifier to the audience and is thus a key component of the visual rhetoric under observation. I answer the research question: how does the visibility and representation of natural hair invite the audience to discipline Blackness in professional spaces. The findings reflect that natural hair does lack visibility, with less than 25% of the sample representing significant moments for the main characters to interact with natural hair, and when visible the representation tends towards a disciplinary frame. Natural hair is a symbol of the Black savage framing that reinforces the superiority of Whiteness in the professional world. The Black woman with altered hair becomes a symbol for a civilized, thus successful, Black body able to participate in a professional society while natural hair remains the symbol for the opposite. Overall, audiences are invited to view natural hair in a very limited capacity for professional characters, and the framing reinforces negative perceptions of natural hair for Black women in a work-based Western society.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	II
LIST OF TABLES	IV
LIST OF FIGURES	V
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Overview and Rationales	2
1.2 Goal and Research Question	4
1.3 Organization of Thesis	5
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Racial Neoliberalism	7
2.2 Rhetoric of Containment	9
2.3 Eurocentrism	10
2.4 Creating Meaning from Visuals: Understanding the Power of Television	13
2.5 Hair in Symbolic Interaction	15
2.5.1 Black Hair	18
2.6 The Intersection Between Black Hair, Television, and Professionalism	22
2.7 Research Questions	23
CHAPTER 3. METHODS	24
3.1 Theoretical Framework of the Method	25
3.2 Sample	26
3.2.1 Summary of Programs	28
3.3 Analytical Procedure	33
3.3.1 Themes and Focus	34
3.3.2 Analysis Method	36
3.3.3 Analytical Method Limitations	38
3.4 Concluding Summary	39
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS	40
4.1 RQ1 and RQ2: Visibility and Context	43
4.2 RQ3: Frequency	78
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS	82
5.1 Other Considerations	85
5.2 Future Projects	86
REFERENCES	89
APPENDICES	95
6.1 Television Thematic Guide	95
6.2 Television Analysis Observation Sheet	98
6.3 Television Analysis Tracking Spreadsheet	112

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Program Demographics	79
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Google's Professional Hair	1
Figure 2 Michelle Obama's Look.....	9
Figure 3 Beyoncé Advertisement.....	12
Figure 4 Styles of Hair	34
Figure 5 Renee Atwood	47
Figure 6 Weave on Counter	50
Figure 7 Mary Jane	50
Figure 8 Annalise Keating	52
Figure 9 Cece	59
Figure 10 Tiana.....	60
Figure 11 Nessa.....	63
Figure 12 Annalise Crying.....	65
Figure 13 Abby Mills.....	69
Figure 14 Lisa Hudson.....	73

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

A tweet on April 5, 2016, shocked the Twittersphere and brought attention to the institutional disadvantaging of Black women in the workplace. @BonKamona screen grabbed and posted her results of a simple Google search: *unprofessional hairstyles for work*. The images returned were overwhelmingly of Black women with natural styles (see Figure 1). The image was retweeted over 8,000 times with other Twitter users finding similar results (Jackson-Edwards, 2016).



Figure 1 Google's Professional Hair

As a woman of color with a head of abundant curly hair, I have been aware of the favoritism associated with Eurocentering first-hand. The consistent increase in compliments, such as, “you look so pretty today” or “your hair looks so nice,” I experience when my own hair is straightened, rather than its natural state, reflects the findings of @BonKamona. It seems that my peers are primed to associate natural hair, styles with no significant treatment—chemical, heat-based, or artificially supplemented—to alter the natural state, with different qualities than Eurocentric hair such as beauty and professionalism.

Stemming from this Twitter phenomenon now is the time to investigate where and how this bias is perpetuated; the image of reality represented in the television landscape influences audience attitudes toward natural hair in professional settings. An exploratory and rhetorical analysis of *Scandal* previously conducted supports this position by consistently associating natural hair with problematic contexts while framing Eurocentered images more favorably (Blackburn, 2016). My work found that Black women with natural hair—curls, coils, kinks, dreadlocks, afros—are absent from the professional environment within *Scandal* (p 20). The current project expands on this line of research to examine how audiences are invited to view natural hair in entertainment media in order to critique the range of acceptable appearances afforded to Black women in professional contexts.

1.1 Overview and Rationales

The objective of this study is to document the visibility and contextual implications of natural hair within entertainment media through a qualitative visual analysis of seven television programs. Natural hair may not be represented enough in the media, and the absence may imply that those styles do not belong in corresponding real-life settings. McKerrow (1989) emphasizes that “absence is as important as presence in understanding and evaluating symbolic action” for

rhetorical scholars (p 107). Studies of visual rhetoric must consider the symbols *not* shown to the audience as a part of the visual argument created by the text. If audiences do not see natural hair in professional contexts, then the image of a successful Black woman is narrowed to the visible portrayals. Media serves as a source for audiences to build meaning about their world; every representation of race, gender, and sexuality becomes a part of that construction of beliefs (Gray & Lotz, 2012).

Hair texture deserves observation because of its unique ability to be changed. Because a person can easily change his or her hair, styling can be disconnected from race. However, coded language like frizzy, messy, wild, unkempt, etc. that is used to describe the natural state of many Black women's hair disciplines the population. Styles perceived as acceptable for professional contexts are more accessible to White populations; Black women, in general, must undergo a long straightening process or rely on heavy chemicals to achieve the same styling as their non-Black counterparts. Hair can then be used as a symbol of domination and racism because the favorably viewed styles disproportionately disadvantage Black populations. The styles that are visible in the media create a specific argument for the way individuals should alter their hair. Shauntae White (2005) suggests that the scope of rhetoric includes hairstyle choices; therefore, I am focusing on natural hair in television from a critical perspective to examine the range of acceptability afforded to Black women in professional contexts presented through the visibility of hair within television texts.

This line of research is important to rhetorical media studies because the media environment is hardly just a source of entertainment. Burke (1941) equates media texts to *equipment for living* that help audiences confront everyday experiences. Black women in powerful, professional positions, such as First Lady Michelle Obama, fashion mogul Tyra Banks,

and executive television producer Shonda Rhimes, are becoming more prominent and counter the historically established status-quo. The representations of Black women in television may serve as equipment for living as a means for the audience to understand how this demographic should look and behave in emerging professional contexts: even if the representations shown contain bias. Mastro (2009) argues that images of race on television potentially provide misinformation and evidence as to who racial minorities are and how they should be viewed to the audience. Considering the equipment for living concept that is stationed within symbolic interaction and meaning theories of media, representations of Black women in the media become an important element in audience construction professionalism.

1.2 Goal and Research Question

As a qualitative study entrenched in the critical/cultural paradigm, answering research questions rather than proving a hypothesis is goal of this project. The examination of natural hair in relationship to Raymie McKerrow's (1989) critique of domination is essential to understand how the audience is invited to view natural hair within the sample. A visual analysis of seven television programs that feature prominent Black women portrayed in their professional contexts focused on hairstyle will answer the overarching research question of the study.

How does the visibility and representation of natural hair in entertainment television invite the audience to discipline Blackness in those mediated professional spaces?

Although research on the entire spectrum of television and media programs would be ideal, time and resource constraints force me to narrow my area of study. There are hundreds of television channels, each with too many programs to cover. I have narrowed my focus for this study to seven dramas that represent several professional occupations for the prominent Black women characters. Each of the programs in the sample has at least three seasons to provide

comparative analysis and show potential change over time, have aired since 2010 to limit confounding variables of fashion trends, and offer variety in occupations held. No children's programs were selected because the focus is on working professionals: children are not engaged in work. No reality or news programming was selected because the focus is on fictional representations to limit the influence of personal style and choice for the women in reality or news programs. Comedies were excluded because the focus is, again, on professional contexts in which many comedies do not tend to focus; the drama genre offers the most range for personal to professional situations within the narratives. Future projects should research the excluded genres to provide comparison and further insight into mediated messages. The purpose of this study is to examine how the visibility and contextual framing of Black characters with natural hairstyles limit what audiences are invited to perceive as acceptable for Black women in professional environments. The results complement existing literature on Black women in advertising media and magazine contexts.

1.3 Organization of Thesis

The following paragraph outlines the organization for the completed study. Chapter 2 introduces the context of this study with an orientation to racial neoliberalism and the paradigm of born again racism. Understanding of racial neoliberalism orients and grounds the literature on Eurocentrism, meaning theory of media, and the symbolic power of hair styles for this study. Chapter 3 is the methods section, which explains how the sample of seven programs was selected and why a visual analysis offers the best approach for answering the research questions. Chapter 4 provides the rhetorical and visual analysis of the sample. It is sectioned by research questions as well as additional themes I discovered beyond my original inquiries. And finally, Chapter 5 concludes with a review of the study, explains limitations, potential problems, and the solutions

to counter-arguments of this study. The Television Thematic Guide and key note sheets from the study are provided in the appendix section at the end of the document.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is grounded in the critical/cultural paradigm to understand how particular ideologies have gained cultural dominance over competing perspectives (Ott and Mack, 2014). The dominant ideology, or hegemony, normalizes certain aspects of culture, such as acceptable hairstyles for work, to benefit the dominant group. To understand how hairstyles have been normalized I will discuss literature on racial neoliberalism as the overarching theoretical foundation, then Eurocentrism because it is heavily present in hegemonic discourses, the role of media in reinforcing hegemony, and finally the symbolic interaction between hair and cultural constructions.

2.1 Racial Neoliberalism

As a post-Civil Rights society, race and racism have been reduced to irrelevant concepts through the colorblindness of racial neoliberalism. Goldberg (2009) argues that “racism is reduced in its supposed singularity to invoking race, not to its debilitating structural effects or the legacy of its ongoing unfair impacts” (p. 360). Within the racial neoliberal framework race is too taboo to even be considered and thus mentioning race is equated to racism; the colorblind ideology can hinder meaningful discussions of racial issues and allows the institutionalized disadvantaging of minority groups to persist. Building on Goldberg, Darrel Enk-Wanzer (2011) argues that antiracialism, created from the new conceptualization of racism, encourages us to move past race altogether and forget the historical conditions connected to race (p 24). History cannot be erased and physical differentiations will always be an element in visual rhetoric and symbolic interaction. The history of enslaving, disadvantaging, and discriminating against persons of color created the conditions in society today. Although largely concerned and applied

to law, the work of critical race scholars, such as Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, often discuss the interplay between race and history (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). The same respect and understanding of historical underpinnings in race-based perceptions should be applied to television studies.

Racial neoliberalism allows Black persons be viewed as successful and respectable as long as he or she does not call attention to his or her racial identity by appearing too Black. The campaign messages of President Barack Obama are an excellent example of this colorblind racial framing; Ada Harvey Wingfield and Joe Feagin (2013) identify how he casts himself as an acceptable Black person, one that was not too stereotypical, to gain access to White voters largely view him as not ‘fully’ American (p. 196). The racial framing places people of color who “do not openly discuss or emphasize their and others’ racial oppressions” as acceptable because we [the White audience] “can ‘forget’ these individuals are black” (p. 24). Turning to First Lady Michelle Obama, straight Eurocentric hair is a prominent feature. Being a Black woman in a position previously designated for White femininity, it is no coincidence that her styling is as reminiscent as possible to familiar aesthetics. She has aligned herself as a style icon for and of the American people through her clothes, make-up, and hair (Tate, 2013). To further extend this point, *InStyle* (n.d.), a popular celebrity fashion magazine, featured “Michelle Obama’s Changing Looks” that followed her style from 1971 to 2015. The family photos of a pre-spotlight Michelle included natural styles; in 2004, now the wife of U.S. Senator Barack Obama, the hair became distinctly straighter. In the remaining 10 images, see Figure 2, only one resembled a natural style, although the “modern, messy ringlets” appeared to be the work of a curling iron. The performance of both Obamas as recognizable and acceptable Blacks demonstrates the persisting racial bias in a racial neoliberal framework.

MICHELLE OBAMA'S CHANGING LOOKS



Figure 2 Michelle Obama's Look

2.2 Rhetoric of Containment

A rhetoric of containment runs through the racial neoliberal framework to limit the threat to hegemony perceived by Other groups (Smith, 2010). The metaphor of containment can be identified as far back as colonial America; David Campbell (1992) directs literature to the barbarian/civilization dichotomy that justified the colonization of the New World. The racialized barbarian [African and other native peoples] were contained through slave codes and trade market (p 116-121). A fear of people considered different from the dominant group, either physically or culturally, drives containment. Since slave codes, Klu Klux Klan activity, and Jim Crow laws have largely disappeared, the practices of containment are far more subtle in a racial neoliberal framework. In today's context, rhetorical scholars Anjali Vats and LeiLani Nishime (2013) argue that rhetorical containment manifests as the "the repackaging of race and colonial difference as inferior to White, Western culture" as a means of protecting hegemonic interests (426). The study of containment then focuses on how Others are displayed in ways that support

and reinforce the Eurocentric ideologies culture has grown comfortable with, such as straight hair textures within this study. In short, mainstream American culture remains fearful of people that call attention to his or her race thus creating a racialized Other. Racial neoliberalism discourages discussions of race, so a Black woman who calls attention to her Blackness with natural hair is problematic for the hegemonic paradigm. The same fear and subsequent containing have been documented in media studies for other groups such as the LGBT community.

Containment and visibility have been critiqued in the literature on homosexuality in television. Danielle Mitchell (2005) explains how *Will and Grace* utilize containment and incorporation to provide palatable gay characters who were less likely to be found offensive by the audience. As a benchmark show in a landscape otherwise devoid of queer representation, *Will and Grace* served as the window for audiences to view homosexuality. The program uses working-class, majority White characters to remain within hegemonic norms and bring familiarity to the queer context. Sarah Schulman (1998) explains how programs like this “address the emotional need of Others to be accepted while selling a palatable image of homosexuality to heterosexual consumers that meets their needs to have their dominance secured” (p. 146). This foundation can be applied to any group considered an Other or a threat to the dominant view. Black characters in shows are more than likely be represented in palatable ways just as President Obama did and as *Will and Grace* found success with.

2.3 Eurocentrism

Eurocentrism resides in the undercurrent of Western thought and social science research, and influences both theory and aesthetic preferences. Before moving to visual rhetorical function

specifically, Eurocentrism will be defined in general terms. Then I will address literature on Eurocentrism in beauty and aesthetics that ground the study.

Eurocentrism is the tendency to interpret the world in terms of Anglo-American values and experiences (Merriam-Webster, s.v. Eurocentric). The Anglo-American phrasing is the key to this definition and refers to the descendants and ideologies Anglo-American refers to descendants and ideologies born from the British Empire. A distinct culture was developed through the significant historical, ethnic, and linguistic properties of that empire (Thompson, 2015). James Blaut (1993) uses “the colonizer's model of the world” to describe the essence of Eurocentrism (10). Based on this model of the world, indigenous peoples of conquered lands were viewed as inferior by European imperialists. The world became defined by European views as imperialism expanded; the superior West was further embedded into mainstream discourse (Thompson, 2015). The technological advances Europe used to dominate other cultures fostered the belief that White features indicated superior intelligence. Due to a lack of industry, steel weapons, and Greco-Roman knowledge, cultures in Africa and the Americas were viewed as primitive (Shohat & Stam, 2014). This perception of a superior West was reinforced through the successful conquest of the new world by European countries.

This study is most concerned with the influence of Eurocentrism on judgments of character based on visual cues. The perceived inferiority of non-White groups is woven into the framework of the United States. Slaves were divided into labor groups based on their complexion; housework and cognitive tasks were assigned to lighter-skinned slaves, while manual labor was best suited for darker-skinned individuals (Bennet, 2007). The closer to the Eurocentric standard a slave was, the more capable they were perceived as. Today, the trend of

evaluating individuals on a Eurocentric scale, light skin and straight hair, persists as documented in studies on beauty advertisements.

Dillard (2006) finds that the “African-American women found in advertisements of both *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence* were more likely to have Eurocentric characteristics” (p. 13). Mayo, D., Mayo, C., and Mahdi (2005) also conclude that Black models were more likely to adhere to Eurocentric beauty such as straight hair. Magazines such as *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *InStyle* have received attention for lightening the skin tone of Black actresses featured on their covers (Gordon, 2015). In 2011, Beyoncé Knowles was featured in an advertising campaign for L’Oreal Paris that was widely criticized. Knowles’ complexion and hair had been lightened by several shades, see Figure 3. Although L’Oreal denied altering Knowles’ features, this case exemplifies the subtle Eurocentering of Black women for consumption.

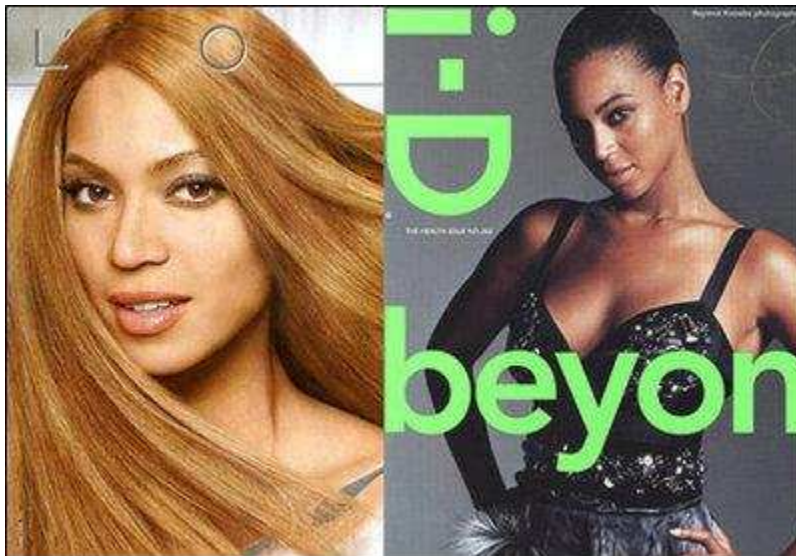


Figure 3 Beyoncé Advertisement

The literature has focused on beauty being determined through a Eurocentric lens, but beauty and professional success are intertwined. Economist Dr. Daniel Hamermesh (2011) finds that below-average looking women earn 3 percent less in annual earning than average or above-average counterparts. Reasons behind this correlation are not fully agreed on or understood, as

demonstrated in William's article for *Psychology Today* outlining many theories on the topic, but the effect of looks does have a clear consensus across studies: attractive people experience more success (2012). As established in advertising research, Eurocentric features are represented as more beautiful subsequently rewarding women closer to the Eurocentric standard with the correlated success. The intersection of beauty and success allows Eurocentrism to influence the perception of professionalism, thus making way for a study on natural hairstyles in professional contexts. This study builds on the findings within advertising to investigate how Eurocentric ideals circulate in entertainment television to similarly reaffirm Whiteness and promote Eurocentrism.

2.4 Creating Meaning from Visuals: Understanding the Power of Television

As a visual medium, televised texts are understood through the same theoretical foundations grown from visual rhetoric. The theory of symbolic interaction explains the link between how the viewers create, interpret, and retain a sense of meaning given the shared cultural interpretation of the visual symbols. This link allows media, like television, to shape and reinforce meanings created among large audiences (Benshoff, 2016).

Television has become a central part of the everyday life. The integration provides a role for television messages to influence the construction of core beliefs as televised images create an argument for what is important, acceptable, and salient to audiences; television most commonly influences perceptions of political sentiment; views of race, class, and gender; and what haircuts, fashions, and body types are attractive and valued (Gray & Lotz, 2012, p. 26). Television provides a representation of reality, though the interpretive framework and sense-making processes overlap with 'real-life' interactions. From the symbolic standpoint, what someone sees on the television can contribute to his or her schemas and understanding of the world in much the

same way as what they see on the street (Livingstone, 1990). Research concerned with racial stereotyping of Arabs exemplifies this phenomenon. Arabs are consistently depicted as barbarians or terrorists in film and television, and over time the complex and accurate presence of the group is erased in the minds of the consumer (Ott & Mack, 2014). Similarly, Mastro (2009) argues that the media conveys messages to consumers regarding race-based norms and the way races are integrated into the landscape and it cannot be ignored.

The meaning-making process begins outside of the television environment, but a dynamic interaction exists between both “worlds.” Television is a representation of our reality, yet its influence constructs the norms and values which are then re-represented (Allen & Hill, 2004). Nassanga and Makara (2015), contest that *reality* has a tendency to be adapted to the media representation rather than media adapting to the culture. The literature on meaning making in the media revolves around the premise that mediated images are representative of culture, yet culture is in part derived and constructed from the mediated images. Furthermore, a particular interpretation of reality can be promoted through the selective highlighting in the media. This circular feedback of media contributing to culture as culture contributes to media can distort the line between “reality” and television for audiences.

Because the distinction between media and reality is blurred, television offers vicarious social encounters. The characters who viewers “know” through television programs are incorporated into the understanding, or schemas, about selected racial groups, especially when real-life interactions with the diverse groups are low (Allen & Hill, 2004). Television’s ability to provide meaningful representation, even when biased, reflects Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical theory of literature as equipment for living. Burke writes that rhetorical texts not only define situations but offer strategies to maneuver through life. The text can provide a boundary for thought,

emotions, and attitudes for understanding the situation (Burke, 1941). Brummet (1985) explains that audiences are provided symbolic medicine, similar to the equipment for living concept, through media texts to understand problems represented in stories they consume. Applied to racial representations on television, this notion suggests that images and ideas provide the equipment or symbolic medicine to navigate cultural constructs on minorities.

Media as equipment for living is a useful lens through which to examine class and racial intersections among professionals portrayed on television. Blacks have historically been shut out from the upper middle class with only around 10 percent of the Black population making above \$50,000 (Lacy, 2007). But in 2016, 21 Black women were included in the *Forbes*' 30 under 30 list, which acknowledges young people completing extraordinary work in their respective fields ("Meet the Black women of Forbes 2016"). Representations in television are portraying more high-powered Black women (e.g. *Scandal*, elite public relations; *How to Get Away with Murder*, lawyer and professor; *Grey's Anatomy*, surgeons) and may reflect the increasing status of Black Americans. These representations serve as the "medicine" that helps the audience understand how this new demographic of professionals should look and behave; the representations, however, are bound to be shaded by the hegemonic discourse that has traditionally oppressed Black women. As described by the rhetoric of containment, hegemonic interests are often protected through the portrayal of threats, in this case, powerful Black women professionals, that are palatable or not *too* [Black]. Therefore, critical analysis is required to understand if and how television texts are providing poor medicine that reinforces the domination of Black women.

2.5 Hair in Symbolic Interaction

Specific elements in visual rhetoric, the symbols—images with a learned convention and reference (Harrison, 2003), contribute to the meaning-making capabilities of television for the

audience. These symbols come in many forms, such as a brief case meaning a certain professional status, but this study is focused on hair as a distinct symbol in the meaning making process of women in professional contexts. As Mercer (1994) explains, hair has a unique ability to “function as a key *ethnic signifier* because, compared with bodily shape or facial features, it can be changed more easily by cultural practices such as straightening” (p. 103). The ability to transform and thus conform to or disregard dominant standards creates a space for hair to reflect intention and self-expression of individuals.

Due to the public, yet highly personal, nature of hair, the styling an individual chooses creates strong symbolism for identity (Synnott, 1987). In Western cultures, the norms for head, facial, and bodily hair each have evolved meanings divided along gender and racial lines. For women, Synnott (1987) found hair to be evaluated on length, style, color, and additions to form associations with femininity, freedom, beauty, and attraction. Long, flowing hair from Western mythological figures such as Mary Magdalen or Rapunzel became the standard of status and feminine beauty (p. 385). Women are expected to change their hair more frequently and keep up with changing styles. All four elements of length, style, color, and additions contribute to the relationship between the physical body and the social body; hair plays a role in the way individuals symbolize their conformity or deviation from religious, political, sexual, occupational, and a variety of other social norms (p. 405).

Within the workplace, professional hairstyles are those that reflect valued characteristics of regularity, uniformity, and ambition; both men and women are expected in most workplaces to construct a professional image through behavior, dress, and grooming that support those corporate values (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). Long hair for men is often indicative, even if falsely so, of a social deviant or radicle. Shaggy hair is often tied to the hippie movement: an identity in

opposition to the corporate structure (Synnott, 1987). For women, the choices between long, short, color, and straight or curly contribute to a complicated persona. *Elle*, a popular style and fashion magazine, published an article in 2010 to help women understand how hair is “holding you back.” The article, with interviews from psychologists and professional hairstylists, describes straight hair as being more serious while advising curly hair can be seen as “too carefree” or even “upstage your talents” (Herbert, 2010). Other fashion magazines, like *Cosmopolitan* or *Redbook*, often teach readers how to achieve the professional styles with gloss and shine. Overall, professionalism for women is subjected to personal choice more-so than men, but the styles should still align with mainstream standards and not draw too much attention (Rosette & Dumas, 2007).

Black women face a triple bind within the workplace. The valued characteristics for corporate success are largely coded as masculine, yet conventionally attractive women tend to be rewarded with money and promotions (Hamermesh, 2001). Not only do Black women need to confront the line of feminine beauty and masculine leadership, but they must also contend with racial bias (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). This research emphasizes the ways that hair can minimize or emphasize racial identity and is, therefore, crucial in the symbolic understanding of professional ability.

In many workplaces, dynamics of persuasion, such as credibility and social attractiveness, can influence how successful and included an individual feels in the position. Social attractiveness can influence attitudes about an individual, and as the individual becomes more physically appealing and similar to the recipient, positive attitudes are more likely to be formed (Perfloff, 2014). In many corporate structures, Black women are in the vast minority of employees; the more different a Black woman appears to be the more difficult it can be to attain

acceptance in the environment because humans are more likely to feel a kinship and empathy with the similar other (Perloff, 2014; Rosette & Dumas, 2007). Altered hair that is more reminiscent of White aesthetics also increases how physically appealing a woman is perceived to be because Black women with Eurocentric features are more often described as gorgeous or beautiful than their counterparts (Fears, 1998). The research on advertisements consistently finds that Eurocentered Black models are more commonly used as the standard for beauty, reinforcing that to be more physically appealing Black women should alter their hair (Dillard, 2006; Mayo et. al, 2005). Hair styling can make an individual look more similar and attractive to co-workers when the style conforms to the norms of a workplace. Appearing as similar as possible to White peers can be advantageous for minority women in the workplace, and, as discussed by White (2005), hair has an ability to be changed to allow an individual to align with culturally enforced norms as a means of fitting in. On television portrayals of workplace settings, Black women actors may experience similar pressures to look like their predominantly White co-stars.

2.5.1 Black Hair

Black hair has a distinct history that carries through this study beyond the general symbolism of hair. For this study, the historical significance of Black hair in the United States begins with the stripping of culture from African slaves and evolves through decades of social movements for Black Americans. Although entire books, such as Noliwe Rooks' *Hair Raising*, have been devoted to the topic, a brief history to place this study in context follows.

The slave trade from Africa to the new world began the negative associations surrounding natural hair within American culture. Slaves were stripped of their traditional hairstyles by forces working to dehumanize them and by their own need for practicality to survive. During the journey from Africa, the conditions on slave ships often caused people's hair

to mat together. The term *dreadlock* originally came from Whites finding the slaves' "locks" to be "dreadful" (Cameron, 2015, p. 87). While working in the fields all day, slaves did not have the time nor resources to groom their hair (Thompson, 2009). Naturally, without the time and tools required, slaves' hair often became tangled and knotted. This tangled nature, reminiscent of a tangled horse mane or wool, further reinforced the dehumanized image of the Black slave as nothing more than an animal-type property (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Colorism, a judgement based on the shade of Black skin, and hair are intertwined as the lighter-skinned house slaves were provided more resources to manage their hair and mirror the hairstyles of their owners (Thompson, 2009). Dreadlocks were not as common among the house-slaves, creating additional layers of division between "professional" groups (as in the types of forced labor) of African slaves; the style of dreadlock and afro became an additional marker, beyond skin color, to separate degrees of freedom, desirability, and labor suitability.

Over the 20th century pressures to alter the natural state of hair continued to thrive for Black women. C.J. Walker developed and sold hair softeners and hot combs to Black people so effectively that she, who was a Black woman, created a standard and expectation for the Black community to adhere to straightened styles (Thompson, 2014). Participating in relaxing and hot-combing hair helped ensure a Black person's place and success in White society, or so the advertising rhetoric stated (Rooks, 1996). In contradiction to the persisting norm of straight hair, the Black is Beautiful Movement of 1960-70s encouraged Black pride and the embodiment of natural styles to unite oppressed peoples. The shift aligned a "real" Black person with natural hair and those who styled their hair otherwise were deemed inauthentic (Thompson, 2009). This movement, existing alongside with a largely feared and vilified Black Power rhetoric (Lucaites & Condit, 1990) further pushed natural hair as a signifier of racial solidarity and sign of a social

renegade to the majority White onlooker. The acceptable Black person does not draw attention to his or her race (Wingfield & Feagin, 2014); natural hair being aligned with authentic Blackness now places those styles in direct reference and embodiment to race as ‘real’ Black people do not emulate White aesthetic (Thompson, 2009). Present-day perceptions of natural and altered hair reflect this history by showing Eurocentered Black models in beauty advertisements (Dillard, 2009) and media programs (Blackburn, 2016) as well as persisting pressure from employment practices on Black women to look less ethnic (Thompson, 2014).

Today, Black women may continue to feel the pressure to conform to mainstream aesthetics more commonly inherent to their non-Black peers, especially in the workplace. Many examples of the ethnically biased norms for professionalism support the theory driving this study. For example, in the @BonKomana Twitter interaction, the displayed search results suggest that natural styles are considered unkempt, which reflects limits placed on what is considered “professional” in the workplace.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recently lost an appeals case against Catastrophe Management Solutions because the court ruled that racial discrimination, treating someone unfavorably because of personal characteristics associated with race, must be based on traits that cannot be changed (Massie, 2016). This ruling ignores the historical bias against Black hair and the physiological barriers in altering natural hair texture that disproportionately impacts Black Americans. Similarly, in 2014 the U.S. Military released standards that promote objectivity, yet clearly, disadvantage and discipline Black service members; twists, dreadlocks, and braids were classified as “unkempt and unacceptable” (Staples, 2014).¹ The juxtaposition of Black to White bodies and categorization of appearance, including hair and skin tone, in the 18th

¹ After a review from the Department of Defense, the U.S. Army did revise the policy to remove coded words such as “matted and unkempt” and allows braids, cornrows, and buns (Ferdinando, 2014).

century, shaped a stratified hierarchy and set the foundation for implicit bias against people of color today (Thompson, 2009). Hair texture and skin color cannot be as readily separated as workplace dress codes imply.

It is helpful to address precisely why standards and expectations for straightened hair are harmful due to the unique nature of Black hair. Natural hair requires maintenance, care, and practices often very different than other racial hair textures; the tight curls and often drier texture creates unique problems that are not necessarily considered by non-Blacks. In many ways, White hair is easier to style and change due to the generally softer, smoother nature, so asking an employee to maintain a certain style may not seem like a large request when looking through the Eurocentric lens. When the lens is shifted, one will see the time, effort, and expense required to similarly transform Black hair. Harsh chemicals can be applied to relax the hair, yet the strong chemicals required to break down the hair texture leave users vulnerable to breakage, hair thinning, scalp irritation, and hair loss (Gonzalez, 2010). Consistent use of thermal tools also leaves hair vulnerable to breakage and damage as well as scalp burns. The only other options are using extensions and weaves or natural styles. Weaves and extensions are a matter of cost and time at the salon; reading through a forum post on the topic, I found the average cost to \$150-\$800 (Simone, 2008).

More pressing than costs, the health of Black women is impacted by altering practices encouraged in society. As of 2009, 15 to 19 percent of Black women had experienced a permanent form of hair loss, known as central centrifugal cicatricial alopecia attributed to the aforementioned grooming practices (Thompson, 2014). Long, healthy, full hair is a sign of femininity and beauty in the United States (Synnott, 1987), yet the practices Black women are pressured to perform may be causing permanent hair loss; therefore, the quest for Eurocentric

beauty is actually moving some Black women farther from that ideal as their hair becomes damaged. In the end, the burden to attain the same hair style is disproportionately larger for Black women than for non-Black women in the workforce and can lead to health issues for women who attempt the styling practices expected.

2.6 The Intersection Between Black Hair, Television, and Professionalism

Black women are no longer invisible in the media. A considerable number of television shows, as seen in the sample for this study, now have Black women characters, including lead characters. However, as bell hooks argues, scholars must question every aspect of the representation rather than simply celebrating the presence (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010). How are Black women, despite being cast in professional roles and context, the subject of domination through the portrayal of Eurocentered models being rewarded? Byrd and Tharps (2001) affirm the difference between representation and mere visibility in their analysis of hair texture. They argue that “it is impossible to ignore the fact that pop culture paradigms of beautiful Black women are coiffed with long, straight hair” (pg. 155). Black women are present, yet audiences are provided a largely singular view of women with artificially straightened hair.

The long history of natural hair being associated with animalistic qualities through the dehumanization of field slaves to the present perception that curly hair is indicative of personality traits unbecoming to a successful professional demonstrates how racism and domination run through discourse. The negativity associated with natural hair disproportionately impacts Black women because curly hair is a natural occurrence in the African ancestral gene code. By promoting discourse that curly hair is too bold, too brash, too unorganized to belong in the professional context, a sub-discourse about Black women is also created. Black women who do not undergo the harsh chemical and straightening treatments, pay for weaves, or otherwise

achieve the Eurocentric biased image of professional hair can then cast as unprofessional as well. The key to professionalism then becomes straightened hair; the value of Whiteness is reinforced and oppression continues for those who must work harder to access this key.

This study connects the meaning making power of the media to the presentation of professionalism for Black women. This study provides an understanding of the way the audience is invited to view Black professionals conducive to reinforcing hegemonic standards. Images of Black women with Eurocentered hair dominating television, coupled with the existing cultural stereotypes of Blacks, creates an understanding that Black women should subscribe to a White aesthetic or risk being interpreted as unprofessional. Hair is a subtle, but pervasive symbol, that is often dismissed from critical analysis and observation. The consistency of representation forms a pattern that, overtime, becomes the expectation for how figures, in this case Black women, should look. The intersection of professional Black women and mediated symbols influencing reality drives the research questions to be answered.

2.7 Research Questions

RQ1: How does the visibility of natural hair in entertainment television limit the range of what is viewed as acceptable for Black women in professional contexts?

RQ2: Does the portrayal of natural hair in entertainment television invite the audience to discipline Black women and reinforce hegemonic values of Whiteness in professional contexts?

RQ3: How often is natural hair represented as professional in television contexts as compared to Eurocentric hair for Black women?

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

This study utilizes principles of qualitative observation through a visual analysis of specific television programs featuring Black women characters from a variety of genres. This study evaluates seven programs within the drama genre selected for the presence of a prominent Black woman protagonist. The sample was determined by browsing Netflix, Hulu, and conducting an internet search for “Shows with Black women 2016.” The potential sample was then narrowed by timeliness, season quantity, and production considerations (i.e. writers and network). Each program includes three seasons to analyze produced since 2010. The sample of seven programs includes two cops, one lawyer, two journalists/media, one music/entertainment manager, and a small business owner providing a variety of occupations to consider in the visual analysis. Each episode spanning the most current three seasons available for viewing online for every program in the sample was watched up to Feb. 1, 2017, and then episodes with significant moments concerning hair and professionalism were reviewed and analyzed with the Television Analysis Observation Sheet, see Appendix 2. The visual analysis is structured with definitions and examples found in the Television Thematic Guidebook, Appendix 1, to increase the consistency of my observations. The visual analysis focuses on the visual presence of natural hair, the setting, and the dialogue/narrative in the scene. Other contextual considerations were analyzed regarding the representation of the characters. Every episode, as opposed to a random sampling of episodes from the 21 seasons was the most useful for this study because of the predicated rarity of natural hair. This prediction is based on a visual analysis of *Scandal* in which a 9% frequency of natural hair in the sample was recorded (Blackburn, 2016).

3.1 Theoretical Framework of the Method

This study uses a qualitative method of visual analysis to critique the potential messages audiences are invited to take away from television to construct their relative culture. Studies of televised texts often benefit from qualitative approaches of analysis because of the complicated aspects of reception, the polysemy of visual messages, and the text's unique qualities in relation to culture (Benshoff, 2016). A visual analysis is the preferred method for this study because of the visual nature of television and the symbols that create meaning for the viewing audience. The critical and cultural paradigm grounds the visual analysis as I seek to understand how popular culture is a site of struggle between competing cultural groups (Benshoff, 2016). Within the critical cultural paradigm, this study takes on a negotiated reading as some themes can be accepted as encoded, such as Black women in positions of professional power, while other oppositional elements occur, like the styling choices of hair. The oppositional perspective uncovers the hegemonic powers of domination affecting Black women. Cultural studies critics often interpret negotiated positions as various social groups question the relationship to the dominant ideology (O'Donnell, 2007).

Studies of television are primarily split into the various effects texts exert on the audience and analysis of the text itself (Bryant & Oliver, 2009; O'Donnell, 2007). This study, being focused on decoding messages available from the visual elements, is an analysis of the specific texts in the sample. Critical analysis is an important part of television studies because critics become "transformers" who generate new awareness for viewers by breaking down the images, context, and cultural influences of programs; the critic then can ask what theoretical implications may result from the alternate readings of each text (O'Donnell, 2007). Content analysis and other counting-based approaches have been used to study visual elements in televised texts often;

however, reporting numbers cannot as adequately critique the text as a qualitative approach can (Benshoff, 2016; O'Donnell, 2007). Therefore, this study goes beyond just quantifying the instances of natural hair and Black women in professional roles in favor of critiquing the visual elements and examining the discourse to determine elements of power and discipline presented in each text.

To succinctly defend the methodological choice of this study, counting for the sake of counting representations of natural hair cannot answer the research questions of how the visibility and portrayal of natural hair reinforce hegemonic values and cultural understandings of acceptable presentations for Black women in the workforce. Decoding visual elements requires qualitative methods to enhance the trends identified through quantitative data. Both the frequency and the context contribute to a rich understanding of how Black women represented in the media texts may inform audience constructions of culture. This method draws on strong aspects from both content analysis and visual analysis methods to create a study that can understand the nuances of mediated messages while spanning a large sample to identify trends.

3.2 Sample

The seven programs were chosen based on the appearance of a prominent Black woman character through a targeted sampling approach. The program needed to include a Black woman connected to an occupation to analyze hair in professional contexts; therefore, children's programming was excluded as children are too young to hold professional roles. I scrolled through Netflix and Hulu's "most popular," "recently added," as well as various television oriented categories and Google searched "Shows with Black characters 2016" to identify available programming. I also utilized the algorithmic function of Netflix and Hulu's recommended programming lists because I have been searching and watching shows with diverse

characters previously; my Netflix and Hulu recommendations may have included programs not otherwise noted because of my viewing habits. Lastly, sampling relied on recommendations from peers who were aware of my research objectives. A similar sampling approach has been used in other television studies with a goal of analyzing particularities in social interactions (Himes & Thompson, 2007). This search method provides programs that are most likely to reach the widest possible audience as Americans turn to streaming. Additionally, the popular or recommended lists act as gatekeepers, screening what is passed on to audiences, potentially limiting what representations of Black women the audience views (Baran & Davis, 2015). I did not look specifically for niche African-American marketed television because this study is most interested in the representations of Black women for the mass viewing audience and what is most likely to be seen.

The sample was reduced to the seven programs based on two criteria: recentness and season quantity. Trends in fashion is a confounding variable that moves through decades. Media and culture are reflective of one another (Gray & Lotz, 2012); television programs will reflect and reinforce cultural aesthetics. To keep the socially idealized fashion choice consistent, only seasons from 2010 to present were eligible. Programs with no seasons airing after 2010 were excluded, namely being *The Bernie Mac Show*, *The Cosby Show*, *Firefly*, and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. Eligible programs include three seasons for analysis to provide observations on change over time and to represent popularity. Programs not renewed for additional seasons most likely did not receive high enough ratings (Chan, 2015; O'Donnell, 2007), thus less viewers were decoding the messages present. Again, this study is concerned with programs most likely to reach a wide audience.

All programs are viewable on streaming services (Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon), but the original networks include Fox, ABC, BET, and the CW. Three hundred and nine units of analysis (episodes) comprise the sample. The currently airing seasons were analyzed through the week of February 1, 2017. After this date the sample viewing ended due to time constraints of the project, and any remaining episodes in that program's season were excluded.

3.2.1 Summary of Programs

The summary description for each program is provided from Hulu. This description is copied to maintain what the viewing audience would be provided when gathering information about the program. The name and occupation of the central Black woman character is also provided, by me, for each program. The main protagonist is the focus of the visual analysis because, as opposed to minor characters, the main character embodies more traits like appearance, attitudes, and skills for a rich analysis (O'Donnell, 2007). Additionally, I wanted to ensure the presence of a Black woman to analyze in every episode, so focusing on main characters offered the highest probability of natural hair occurring and someone to analyze. It would be far too time consuming to create a sample of programs with only minor Black characters because the very minor characters are often not in the posters and descriptions. I have also provided the general observations about the programming from an analytical perspective.

3.2.1.1. *Bones: Dr. Camille Saroyan, Coroner/Lab Supervisor*

Inspired by the real-life forensic anthropologist and best-selling novelist Kathy Reichs, BONES is a darkly amusing investigative drama centered on Dr. Temperance Brennan, a forensic anthropologist who writes novels on the side. (Hulu, "Bones")

Bones was chosen because it offers a long-running program with a Black woman as the boss of the protagonist. This program airs on Fox. Seasons 10, 11, and 12 (2017) were viewed on Netflix and Hulu.

Bones is very much aligned with the racial neoliberal framework that ignores conversation about race. The character I followed, Cam, was never seen with any natural hairstyles in the sample. Cheryl, a District Attorney, was represented with natural hair; although, her hairstyle was closely cut and reminded me of my White grandmother. Cheryl is an older character--- the very short hair featured on her speaks more towards her age than her race. Nonetheless, Cheryl is a professional, respected Black woman with consistent natural hair when she is a guest on the program. Overall, *Bones* did not offer significant moments for the visual analysis in terms of Cam's representation of the supervisor with natural hair as she was always portrayed with altered styles. The distinct absence reflects the need for *Bones* to connect with the audience; as Perloff (2014) describes in the dynamics of likeability, similarity is highly influential in the way the audience connects with characters. FOX tends to produce hegemonically leaning programs, so the Black characters on *Bones* are represented well within the hegemonic constructs for an acceptable Black person.

3.2.1.2. *Mistresses: April Malloy Nickleby, Business Owner*

A provocative yet sophisticated drama about four women and their love lives, their sex lives, their secrets, their lies, and above all, their friendship. From ABC Studios, and based on the hit BBC series of the same name, this is Executive Produced by Bob Sertner ("Revenge," "No Ordinary Family"), KJ Steinberg ("Gilded Lilys," "Gossip Girl") and Rina Mimoun ("Privileged," "Gilmore Girls"). (Hulu, "Mistresses")

Mistresses was chosen because of the predominantly women cast of leading roles and because it is on the summer-run cycle so the seasons are currently complete. This program airs on ABC. Seasons 2,3, and 4 (2016) were viewed on Hulu.

Overall, *Mistresses* was similar to *Bones* in its absence political or social commentary of race; ABC tends to produce programs that push boundaries, and this program was more oriented towards pushing the boundaries for the sexual freedom and expression of women. April is

surrounded by exclusively White friends, and represents, again, the need for emphasizing similarity with her White peers and blending in to the group. This program did include interesting dynamics between the men April dates and reminds the audience of the stereotypical absentee Black father ripe for another study.

3.2.1.3. *Sleepy Hollow: Abby Mills, Cop/FBI Agent*

In this modern-day twist on Washington Irving's classic, ICHABOD CRANE is resurrected and pulled two and a half centuries through time to find that the world is on the brink of destruction, forcing him to team up with a contemporary police officer to unravel a mystery that dates back to the founding fathers. (Hulu, "Sleepy Hollow")

Sleepy Hollow was chosen because the supernatural setting offers a diverse plotline. This program airs on Fox. Seasons 1,2, and 3 (2016) will be viewed on Hulu. Season 4 premiered January, 2017, but the Abby Mills did not return in the latest season.

Sleepy Hollow did offer interesting and poignant moments for this analysis. The overall program was hard to follow as the characters became entrenched in supernatural drama, but Abby and Jennifer Mills did provide visual elements of race and hairstyle incredibly relevant to this study.

3.2.1.4. *How to Get Away with Murder: Annalise Keating, Lawyer*

The brilliant, charismatic and seductive Professor Annalise Keating (Viola Davis) gets entangled with four law students from her class, "How to Get Away with Murder." Little do they know that they will have to apply what they learned to real life, in this masterful, sexy, suspense-driven legal thriller from Shonda Rhimes and Betsy Beers, executive producers of "Grey's Anatomy" and "Scandal." (Hulu, "How to Get Away with Murder")

How to Get Away with Murder was chosen because Viola Davis, the leading actress, has received a Primetime Emmy and Screen Actors Guild awards for her role in this program. *HTGAWM* airs on ABC. Seasons 1, 2, and 3 (2017) were viewed on Netflix and Hulu.

Annalise Keating is quite the character. *How to Get Away with Murder* provides both subtle and direct commentary on race with attention to hair. Several times, the audience was

invited to view Annalise handling or discussing her hair; we were invited to experience Black hair through the lens of a Black women struggling in her professional sphere and private life.

HTGAWM is discussed several times in the greater analysis.

3.2.1.5. *Empire: Cookie Lyon, Co-CEO and Artist Manager*

From Academy Award nominee Lee Daniels (“Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*,” “*Precious*”) and Emmy Award winner Danny Strong (“*Game Change*,” “Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*”), comes *EMPIRE*, a sexy and powerful new drama about the head of a music empire whose three sons and wife all battle for his throne. Set to an original soundtrack written and produced by hip-hop hit maker Timbaland, the family drama stars Academy Award nominee Terrence Howard (“*Crash*,” “*Hustle & Flow*”) and Academy Award and Emmy Award nominee Taraji P. Henson (“*Person of Interest*,” “*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*”). (Hulu, “*Empire*”)

Empire was chosen because of the predominantly Black cast. This show has been popular on Fox, and Taraji P. Henson has won a Golden Globe award for her performance. Seasons 1,2, and 3 (2016) were viewed on Hulu.

Empire offered very interesting and dynamic commentary of issues of the Black community from mass incarceration to homosexuality, but was not significantly involved with hair texture and Blackness. Cookie Lyons was only viewed with natural hair in a couple moments involving her prison sentence. Tiana, one of *Empire*’s recording artists, offered the most valuable commentary on her hair and attention to her race: this will be discussed in the analysis. *Empire* is one of FOX’s only programs with a majority Black cast, something somewhat risky given the audience demographics of the network. Being as such, many of the stereotypes already associated with Black men and women are played out within this program from drug dealing to criminal activity to promiscuity. *Empire* did receive strong ratings and has been renewed for a new season, so perhaps the success of this program will open room for more diversity and representation that push against the hegemony.

3.2.1.6. *The Flash: Iris West, Journalist*

Barry Allen was just 11 years old when his mother was killed in a bizarre and terrifying incident and his father was falsely convicted of the murder. With his life changed forever by the tragedy, Barry was taken in and raised by Detective Joe West, the father of Barry's best friend, Iris. Now, Barry has become a brilliant, driven and endearingly geeky CSI investigator, whose determination to uncover the truth about his mother's strange death leads him to follow up on every unexplained urban legend and scientific advancement that comes along. Barry's latest obsession is a cutting edge particle accelerator, created by visionary physicist Harrison Wells and his S.T.A.R. Labs team, who claim that this invention will bring about unimaginable advancements in power and medicine. However, something goes horribly wrong during the public unveiling, and when the devastating explosion causes a freak storm, many lives are lost and Barry is struck by lightning. After nine months in a coma, Barry awakens to find his life has changed once again the accident has given him the power of super speed, granting him the ability to move through Central City like an unseen guardian angel. Though initially excited by his newfound powers, Barry is shocked to discover he is not the only meta-human who was created in the wake of the accelerator explosion and not everyone is using their new powers for good. In the months since the accident, the city has seen a sharp increase in missing people, unexplained deaths and other strange phenomena. Barry now has a renewed purpose using his gift of speed to protect the innocent, while never giving up on his quest to solve his mother's murder and clear his father's name. For now, only a few close friends and associates know that Barry is literally the fastest man alive, but it won't be long before the world learns what Barry Allen has become The Flash. (Hulu, "The Flash")

The Flash was chosen because it is in the superhero drama genre to add diversity in the sample.

This show airs on the CW, a slightly lesser known network than the rest of the sample. Seasons 1,2, and 3 (2017) were viewed on Netflix and Amazon.

The Flash, just as *Bones*, exemplified the racial neoliberal framework. This program is focused on a light-hearted super hero and is not meant to provide commentary on topics of race. Iris West is never viewed with natural hair, and her race is not acknowledged. She is an example of a character who happens to be Black rather than a Black character. Her race had no impact on the plot of the program as nothing about her perspective, clothes, behavior, attitude, or life would change if she were White. Her mother, however, did provide one moment significant for the study that will be discussed in the analysis.

3.2.1.7. *Being Mary Jane: Mary Jane Paul, Journalist/News Anchor*

This is a story to which millions of modern women will both relate and respond. Mary Jane Paul is a one-woman show: a successful TV news anchor and an entirely self-sufficient powerhouse who remains devoted to a family that doesn't share her motivation. Intense drama and unforgettable moments unfold as Mary Jane juggles her life, her relationships, her work and commitments to her family. (Hulu, "Being Mary Jane")

Being Mary Jane was chosen based on several peer recommendations, and it represents a program from BET, a Black oriented channel. This program may offer a point of comparison to the more hegemonically minded networks. Seasons 1, 2, and 3 (2016) were viewed on Netflix. Season 4 has been renewed, but no release date has been announced.

Being Mary Jane was the most significant program for this analysis in the sample. Mary Jane Paul often draws attention to her race and the issues that coincide with Blackness. She is a character that *is* Black; her experiences, perspective, and story heavily relies on being a Black woman in society. The audience is invited to interact with hair textures and styles along with the characters on multiple occasions. I fully recommend and look forward to revisiting *Being Mary Jane* in future research from other perspectives and focuses regarding the experiences of Black women.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

The visual analysis is guided by the occurrence and the setting of natural hair in each episode for each program in the sample. The overall premise of the episode and the overall impression of the character were analyzed to establish the general trends for the discussion. For the most poignant episodes and moments, a rich visual analysis was conducted. The visual context associated with the occurrence of natural hair includes Public/Private and Professional/Other intersection, see Table 1. The character was also analyzed based on an Empowered/Disciplined categorization for the interactions with other characters. The

observations will also be useful in establishing areas of future research as racism can manifest in many subtle ways such as language, mannerisms, clothing, and other interactions.

3.3.1 Themes and Focus

Natural hair is defined for this study as hair that has not been substantially altered through chemical, heat, or artificial products and is styled to remain curly, coily, kinky, Afro, braided, or dreadlocked. Images of each style are provided in Figure 4. Curly hair is defined as hair that falls in irregular, kinky, coily, wavy, or a ringlet pattern. Braided hair includes tight corn rows or multiple braids. Dreadlocks are intentionally matted or sculpted hair to form ropes. Afro is hair that extends around the head in rounded form. To distinguish between natural and altered hair, stylized curls are defined as hair that falls in a cylindrical pattern, is not consistent

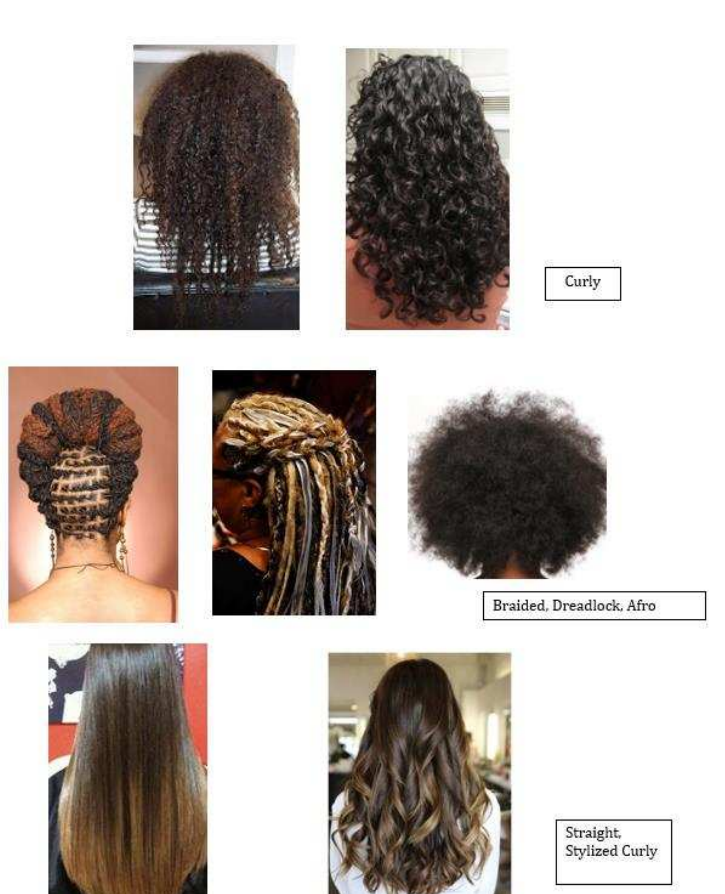


Figure 4 Styles of Hair

throughout, and/or is perceived to be in an unnatural pattern. Straight hair falls in a uniform and flat pattern. Although the main focus is on occurrences of natural hair, both natural and altered stylings will be considered in the overall message and impact of the messages in the sample.

The setting in which natural hair occurs will be considered as Public/Private and Professional/Other. Public is defined as a setting that is perceived or existing in an open view. Examples may be an office with the doors open and window coverings open (so the character is generally viewable by an undisclosed number of people), restaurants, parks, etc. Private is defined as a setting perceived or existing in a closed view or belonging to the use of one particular person or group of people. Examples would be an office with the doors and window coverings closed (so the character is hidden from the general view of others), residences, bathroom stalls, etc. Professional is defined as a setting that is perceived to pertain to working contexts as applied to the character's profession. Examples include a lunch meeting with colleagues, courtrooms, hospital wings, newsrooms etc. Other is defined as a setting not explicitly pertaining to working contexts as applied to the character's profession. Examples include lunches with generally unassociated characters and places outside of the contexts of occupation.

The visual demeanor that the audience is invited to view the character as will also be considered. The visual demeanor includes Empowered/Disciplined. The demeanor will be determined by the contextual behaviors of the character to those around her and the affective impressions encouraged of the audience. Empowered is defined as the character being perceived to control, manipulate, and dominate the space and those in the space around her. Disciplined is defined as the character being perceived to be controlled, manipulated, and subordinate to the space and those in the space around her.

3.3.2 Analysis Method

The method of observation is straight forward for the visual analysis of the sample. Each episode in the sample was watched from start to finish in order of appearance within the season. The programs were watched one at a time, starting with the first episode of each season. This style of watching replicates the bingeing style of consumption that has grown with the introduction of steaming. Binge watching, or viewing more than three episodes per sitting, has been reported by 68% of consumers (Spangler, 2015). Streaming sites, such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon, host the programs in the sample. Internet-video streaming overtook traditional television viewing in 2015 with 42% of American households reporting that they prefer streaming to live television (Spangler, 2015). Additionally, streaming services provide a rich landscape and convenience for observation as I can jump within and between programs easily. I can also rewatch, rewind, pause, and search within programs without taping. As I watched the episodes, I marked units that contained significant interactions with natural hair to then review with an in-depth visual analysis. I also took many notes in a notebook for assist with the final analysis.

Many of the programs have seasons currently airing on television that were included in this analysis. Hulu maintains an archive of the latest episodes from current seasons that periodically expire. Due to the expiration date, some programs were viewed as they aired concurrently with the older available seasons. Although this interferes with the overall plot line of a program, each season maintains unique subplots and so context can still be understood and observable for the most recent season, even without the previous seasons.

This study provides oppositional readings from the context in question. My position as a bi-racial woman in the viewing audience enhances my ability to see the negotiated and

oppositional readings because my identity is in opposition to the hegemony. My own understanding of American culture from the perspective of a Black woman who has been raised in a White household provides additional insight into the potential messages decoded from both hegemonic and Black audiences. I have experienced the way hair style influences interactions in the real world with my own natural hair; those experiences impact the messages I decode from the media just as the real experiences of other audiences will impact the messages they decode. This visual analysis can only offer one perspective on the messages, but the oppositional perspective is none-the-less vital to societal understandings of Black women and the representations they are subjected to in dramatic television.

To focus on the research question of the study, only episodes and scenes with significant implications for the research questions were subjected to the rich visual analysis as to answer the questions at hand. Although every episode provided context to assist in understanding the characters and the plot, therefore viewed and pondered on, the focus of research efforts and energy was on the presence of natural hair in professional contexts as to understand the potential symbolism for American culture. The variables identified were created from findings of a previous study of similar nature (Blackburn, 2016). In the previous study of *Scandal*, I found the themes outlined here to be present in that text, and so similar positioning of Black women are likely to occur within this sample. When considering Frankfurt School approaches to television production (Benshoff, 2016), a model of cultural texts that has previously been successful will continue to be produced as long as audiences consume the product. In this case, the most prevalent messages will likely to be encoded by the cultural producers until significant social change prompts otherwise. Because social change occurs over time, multiple seasons of each program are analyzed to identify any shifts in the representations. A benefit of qualitative work

is the ability of the researcher to make new notes and inferences as necessary. Using the guidelines set forth from the previous study focuses this project, yet open note taking provides space for nuances in context.

3.3.3 Analytical Method Limitations

It is not possible for this study to include every program with a Black woman within the sample due to time, cost, and other logistical considerations. To complete the study and write the results within the five-month period available, the sample had to be pared down. The sample was selected with clear boundaries of recentness and seasonal multitude after being narrowed by prominence on popular streaming sites, but it is unclear how many programs have been excluded. Too many programs and niche markets exist within the media landscape to avoid cherry-picked examples. Additional programs that are not included in this study, but offer interesting points of analysis, are listed in the Future Projects section.

A strength of the study is the breadth of the sample. Single episodes are more common with this visual analysis method; however, I viewed 309 total units of analysis. Researcher fatigue was a concerning limitation that could have impacted my attention to detail and affective observations on each unit of analysis. After 224 hours of watching television, I may have grown impatient, tired, and grumpy, which would have influenced the decoding of the messages. To reduce researcher fatigue, I took ample breaks. The research fatigue was also counteracted by the reviewing of the specific episodes for the rich visual analysis as they applied to the research questions.

The visual analysis as a method is subject to my perspectives as a bi-racial, woman researcher. The note guidelines were created to maintain consistency in the analysis of each program, yet my experience as a bi-racial woman may make me more sensitive to visual

elements than a researcher with a different background would be. This visual analysis can only offer one oppositional reading of the programs from a specific perspective. It would be interesting to read an analysis, using the same note guidelines, from another researcher's perspective to the readings. To allow me to remain as open as possible in the visual analysis, I read various literature from Black feminist scholars (such as bell hooks, Noliwe Rooks, Melissa Harris-Perry, among others) to understand how Black women have been represented previously. The purpose and strength of this study is to offer an argument and explanation regarding the messages that mediated images offer; extensive literature, as established in the Literature Review, explain that media does serve symbolic function and influence attitude formation, so this study is still important and valid for discussing American culture and Blackness.

3.4 Concluding Summary

The study uses a qualitative method with an expansive sample to understand how the visibility and portrayal of natural hair reinforces hegemonic values within professional contexts and limits what the audience is invited to view as acceptable for Black women. A visual analysis of natural hair provides some quantitative data enriched with critical cultural analysis of every episode within the sample universe. The study is heavily set in an environment realistic to the real-world because the sample will be viewed using internet streaming sources in a binge-watching style popular to the American public. No audience effects are being investigated, and so this study does not need to address issues of IRB approval, participant consent, participant mortality (and any sample that becomes unavailable for streaming can be purchased on Amazon video), social acceptability bias, and other considerations associated with human subjects.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This study uses qualitative methods to conduct a visual analysis of popular television texts containing Black women in professional contexts to evaluate how and if representations of natural hair reinforce hegemonic values and invite the audience to view Black women ways. The qualitative method, with a large sample size, allowed me to answer my research questions with depth and nuance as the media is hardly a black and white medium suitable for quantitative work.

The overall impression that I decoded from the sample was that in, regards to the main women protagonists, the audience is invited to view natural hair in disciplinary ways. Out of the seven women characters that I focused on, only one represented natural hair in a neutral way at work (April Malloy, *Mistresses*, 3:11²). The other main protagonist tended to represent natural hair in either problematic situations, such as workplace failures, or in the private sphere. In general, natural hair is not visible in the professional realm for the main protagonists. Several minor and guest characters did, however, represent natural hair in the workplace and in positive ways. The portrayals of those women varied from empowered to disciplined, providing some, albeit limited, range and visibility to natural hair in the work place. Many of the characters were in the service professions, such as medical and restaurant staff, or the judicial workforce such as judges and attorneys. The most problematic finding was the consistent association of natural hair and mental instability that underscored the visibility and the framing of Black women across the sample. This section will move through the research questions with examples from the study

² In this section, the episodes will be cited in the format *Season: Episode number*.

to explain how natural hair is defined as a marker for an unstable, undesirable, uncivilized individual while refocusing the arguments from the literature review.

To adequately answer RQ1 and RQ2 I considered all the elements of television style beyond simply what the character in focus is doing. The lighting, framing, editing, shooting, and other production choices enhance the story telling of the program (O'Donnell, 2007). Not only were production choices carefully examined and considered, the mise-en-scene, or arrangements of visual elements, are included (Gianetti, 2011). All the visual aspects and design choices convey a message to the audience; this analysis considers all the pieces on and off screen to clearly understand how the audience is invited to view natural hair and, subsequently, the Black women who draw attention to their race with the hair style choice.

RQ3 is answered through general counting and frequency estimates. This study is not a quantitative content analysis so the estimates are not meant to definitively offer exact numbers. Counting every single extra and minor character that crossed the screen was beyond the scope of this study and would not provide substantial insight into the core question of how are audiences invited to understand Black women who draw attention to their race in professional contexts; it would simply detract from the core purpose. Instead, RQ3 is answered with my general tracking of the main characters and the discussions about natural hair as it pertains to work as well as a relative frequency of extras and minor characters visible with natural hair in the workplace. Although this question cannot provide contextual insight on the readings, the number and type of representations are important given that media serves as a gatekeeper for the audience's perception of racial groups. Racial stereotypes displayed in the media have been found to produce a significant effect on consumers, especially if real-world contact with that racial group is limited (Mastro, 2009). RQ3 contributes to the literature on racial representations that viewers

are exposed to in popular media texts and can serve as a base for future studies on audience attitudes from the programs in the sample. I would recommend a new study, grounded in quantitative methods, be conducted on the sample to increase the understanding about Black representation and contribute to the body of literature.

The cross-program analysis of the qualitative notes informed the discussion of overall trends identified in the sample universe. Many critical and rhetorical television studies critique single episodes (O'Donnell, 2007), but this study looked across complete seasons and programs to grasp context on a larger scale to answer the research questions. Contextual analysis attends to the relationships between episodes and programs, and to how each affects another (Gary & Lotz, 2012). Many of the programs in the sample appear in the “because you watched” or other recommended based on similarity lists generated on Hulu and Netflix; being mindful of how an audience may move from one text into another, and the representations of Black women presented in each, is important as those interactions form a matrix of symbolism that feeds into the construction of reality for the viewer. Television programs are not viewed independently as an audience may watch *How to Get Away with Murder* on Thursday nights and then binge watch *The Flash* on Netflix the next day. The symbols and messages of each program continuously interact, and so I considered the contextual positions within the results of this study to explain and answer each of the research questions.

4.1 RQ1 and RQ2: Visibility and Context

How does the visibility of natural hair in entertainment television limit the range of what is viewed as acceptable for Black women in professional contexts?

Does the portrayal of natural hair in entertainment television invite the audience to discipline Black women and reinforce hegemonic values of Whiteness in professional contexts?

Visibility and concealment are important concepts when understanding a rhetorical situation because the audience is invited to understand what is not seen as much as what is shown. McKerrow (1989) urged rhetorical critics to pay close attention to the absent as well as the present when evaluating the factors and arguments in any rhetorical situation. The visual elements that are present to the audience provide the symbols that foster symbolic interaction and meaning making while the absent symbols serve to strengthen the understandings of the present. What the audience sees and how they see each symbol, like hair, work closely together to contribute to the schemas surrounding that symbol (Baran & Davis, 2015). In this study, I find that the absence of natural hair in positive roles punctuates the role of altered hair for Black women in achieving notoriety and professional success. In other words, the highly successful characters all had altered hair thus emphasizing the effectiveness of a Black woman finding similarity to the predominantly White peers and colleagues through hair style. This section will also unpack the symbolic meaning of altered and natural hair that the audience is invited to understand.

When natural hair is present, the audience is invited to view and understand the presence in ways to discourage Black women from practicing hairstyling that draws attention to their race. Natural hair is a visual call towards the race of wearer that runs directly counter to the

racial neoliberal discourse in society that discourages discussion of race itself (Goldberg, 2009; Enk-Wanzer, 2011). Containment, the minimizing of a racialized threat to the hegemony, is achieved through the physical and/or rhetorical disciplining of women with natural hair across the sample (Mitchell, 2005). At times the characters were physically separated from the public when they had natural hair while other characters were verbally degraded as a means of discouraging racial attributes.

The key to successfully containing a threat is in the discrediting and dehumanizing of that group; to racially discredit a group forces them to see any cultural or racial differences as inferior to Whiteness (Vats & Nishime, 2013). This discretization and dehumanization plays out across the sample as natural hair is consistently associated with a Black savage framing: a framing that defines civilization, thus professionalism, with Whiteness as understood through altered hair and in opposition to Blackness as symbolized through natural hair. Critical race theory places the work sphere as a Eurocentric construction because the imperialistic colonizers brought notions of capitalism and business to the cultures that they dominated. These dominated peoples were mostly hunter and gatherer cultures not oriented towards the Eurocentric business model of society, which was understood as a currency and commerce system. The Eurocentric view of non-business cultures being defined as the savage served to validate the definition of Whiteness standing for civilization because colonizers could understand themselves through what they were not (Campbell, 1992). If he was not *wild* or *savage*, then the White man could more clearly define himself as *civilized*. The understanding that civilization meant participation in business and commerce, in the Eurocentric sense, plays out in the sample as natural hair is visually bound to a different type of professional woman than altered hair.

Natural hair is largely absent from the upper class, white-collar workforce but abundant in the lower class, blue-collar sphere. The absence of natural hair in certain professional sectors can limit the range of what audiences are invited to view as customary, acceptable, and comfortable. The main protagonists, who were mainly within the upper-class spheres and financially secure from their work positions (as lawyers, supervisors, detectives, etc.) were featured with altered hair. The nurses, waitresses, and other service workers, those considered a lower-level of professional, were more likely to feature natural hair. To more thoroughly answer this question, I describe specific moments from the sample that, first, highlight the presence of natural hair in service positions and, secondly, support the claim that natural hair is mostly absent in higher class spheres, especially from the main protagonists. I will then explain the implications of these visibility trends further.

Medical professionals, nurses in particular, were the most common occupations that featured natural hair. Meggy Travers (*HTGAWM*), was the most prominent guest character to embody this trend. Meggy was the girlfriend of Wes Gibbons (a main character) in Season 2. She did not contribute many lines and attention was never directly paid to her hair, but she was consistently portrayed with an Afro both in professional settings and private ones. Meggy was a medical student who was viewed working in the hospital several times. More vaguely, natural haired medical staff were seen at various points across the sample as extras in the background.

On the surface, nurses being highly visible occupations for hair diversity is simply interesting. When I dove deeper, I realized that the connection between health care practitioners and traditionally problematic stereotypes of Black women exists. The health care professionals symbolize a reinvented Mammy trope. The Mammy is the image of a good natured, caring Black woman who is eager to and happiest when in service (West, 2008; Bogle, 2010). The Mammy is

problematic because the trope was used to justify and validate slavery while decreasing any sense of guilt on the part of the slave master because the slaves *wanted* to serve. Mammy imagery created an argument that Blacks do not dislike slavery but actually appreciated the structure. The Mammy also served to redefine and remind White audiences of the Black savage because Blacks were not active participants in commerce but rather the commodities being sold. Mammy's were defined less as people and more as an item awaiting instruction to be of service your home. Today our nurses are, of course, paid professionals who may genuinely like assisting patients, but the problematic elements of the original Mammy make the connection more than a coincidence. The Mammy was the embodiment of Black servitude in the White home, and now nurses and waitresses, whose occupation is in service and personal care, are represented in ways that call attention to their race and refocus the notion of Blacks being best suited in personal service. Nurses also are perceived as happy to serve the doctor, who is more than likely to be a White male (Association of American Medical Colleges, 2016)³, and happy to serve the patient. It seems that the connection between the eager to serve Mammy trope is conceptualized here in the eager to help nurse with distinctly more natural hair tendencies to symbolize Blackness.

Other than health care professionals, natural hair was more likely to be seen in judicial positions. This representation was interesting and surprising to me, but given the context of *HTGAWM* and *Bones* as law and crime dramas, the images may be skewed toward that professional discipline. The visibility of Black women in judicial positions may be a product of the professional focus of the shows. Nonetheless, *HTGAWM* offered several representations of Black women with natural hair as successful and powerful judges and attorneys. A district

³ 2015 data compiled by the AAMC found 58.8% of medical school graduates were White compared to 19.8%, 5.7%, and 4.6% for Asian, Black, and Hispanic students respectively. Females comprised of 48% of graduates.

attorney, Renee Atwood, is viewed with an Afro style both in and out of the courtroom as in Figure 5. Annalise meets with her in a private/professional space of the DA office and the public/professional space of the courtroom several times in Season 2 and Season 3. The image of the natural haired DA is ultimately disciplined, however, by her termination from the District Attorney's office (3:13) due to her mishandling of evidence discovered by Annalise's team. The visibility of natural hair in the DA office is promising as the audience is invited to view Atwood as a successful and competent woman early on, but then remains problematic as the key message remains that women who draw attention to their race through natural hair will eventually lose their professional status and/or women who choose a natural style are more likely to commit crimes, an already problematic stereotype for the Black community.



Figure 5 Renee Atwood

Turning now to the visibility of the main protagonists in their professional spaces, natural hair is most frequently absent. Dr. Cam Saroyan of *Bones* is touted as one of the best forensic coroners and is the supervisor of the distinguished Jeffersonian Institute. And she is always viewed with altered hair. Iris West, a rising star for the Central City Picture News, is always represented with altered hair. Cookie Lyon, a founder and the Entertainment Director for Empire Records, is most always featured with altered hair—although it should be noted that her work and personal spheres are heavily entangled as the entertainment industry does not subscribe to normal working hours—but the audience is rarely shown Cookie with natural hair regardless. The most prominent instance was Cookie in prison and very clearly not at work in any capacity. Another image was Cookie on a date/at a work event party outside of the office.

Abby Mills in *Sleepy Hollow* is a lieutenant for the sheriff's office and then an agent of the FBI. She almost always is represented with altered hair. The only exception to this visibility comes toward the end of season 3, after she is trapped in a demonic realm, when her hair is distinctly natural. Abby does return to work in 3:11 with natural hair for the remainder of the season. The framing of natural hair is empowered on the first reading as Abby does fulfill her professional roles well, but the audience is also invited to discipline this caricature through the dialogue of the characters. This will be discussed in detail in the next section about framing. Overall, *Sleepy Hollow* offers eight episodes of Abby Mills the successful, white-color FBI professional with natural hair, but remains disciplinary in the framing of her change of appearance with coded language. The idea of a natural hair and being unstable will return later in this analysis. April Malloy from *Mistresses* follows this same pattern of limited visibility as she is represented with altered hair in most of the three seasons. In the season 3 finale, April does have curly hair while working in her shop. This representation doesn't appear to have any

significant subtext beyond a fresh start metaphor after escalating drama from the season. This is a neutral, if not positive, representation of natural hair in the workforce.

Two episodes of particular note, from *Being Mary Jane* and from *How to Get Away with Murder*, show the main protagonist with natural hair as it relates to their professional roles.

Episode 2:7 of *Being Mary Jane* invites the audience to understand why Mary Jane always has altered hair while at work, and a sequence of episodes in season 2 of *HTGAWM* portrays Annalise at work with braids.

Being Mary Jane: After an entire season and a half, the audience is finally invited to think about why natural hair is so absent in the professional contexts of the show. The audience does see Lisa Hudson consistently represented with natural hair, but the audience only witnesses her at work in a couple of moments. We are aware she is a doctor (again the medical professional is the acceptable work for natural hair), but we are not invited to see her professional persona. Instead, the audience is most invited to see Mary Jane Paul at work with altered hair every day. In 2:7 Mary Jane Paul explains to Niecy, and thus the audience, why some Black women may not feel comfortable with their natural hair in a professional environment.

At about 34 minutes into the episode the scene opens with a shot of a weave sitting on the bathroom counter, Figure 6. The camera pans up to Mary Jane smiling into the mirror while she plays with her Afro, Figure 7. Clear admiration is expressed as Mary Jane twists her curls and fluffs her hair with a giddiness not seen from this character before. She then dials her hairdresser to confirm if she should wash her hair before the appointment to put a new weave in. The hairdresser explains that she must cancel, and Mary Jane responds, with clear panic, “I already had Tami take out my weave!” The thought of her having to either manually straighten her hair



Figure 6 Weave on Counter



Figure 7 Mary Jane

or go to work tomorrow with natural hair seems to be very distressing for Mary Jane as she hangs up on her hair dresser. Mary Jane then calls her niece, whom she is fighting with at the moment, and begs her to come over and help. Begging is highly uncharacteristic for the strong willed and highly independent Mary Jane Paul, further adding to the desperation felt in this moment. Mary Jane even offers to reimburse Niecy for the movie she was at *and* to babysit for her: Mary Jane, as established when Niecy lived with her earlier in the show, does not

particularly enjoy the children in her home. While Niecy is braiding the new weave into Mary Jane's hair, Mary Jane explains why she begged Niecy to come over.

“Because your perfect aunt is terrified of going to work without her weave. Terrified that no one would think I was beautiful. That people would think I was average, and I would be invisible.”

This short exchange, so easy to miss, captures the self-hate experienced by the Black community due to binary thinking that persists in our society. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) writes about the objectification of Black women and the tension experienced due to our binary processes of categorizations: “One part is not simply different from its counterpart: it is inherently opposed to its Other” (pg.77). For Mary Jane, this binary means that she must strive for beautiful or be categorized as ugly. If she is average, she is defined in opposition to superior. And to Mary Jane, superior is the only group worthy of visibility. Collins goes on to connect the intersection of beauty and race in this binary as beautiful (the White, blond, blue-eyed woman) could not be defined at all without the Other. Without the “Black women with African features of brown skin, broad noses, thick lips, and *kinky hair* [my emphasis]” (pg. 98). Since Mary Jane cannot change her brown skin, her broad nose, or her thick lips to align with beauty, she must change her kinky hair. For Mary Jane being in the entertainment industry as a television talent, beauty is even more crucial to success than the average profession. Recall that social attractiveness is always linked to success in our business society (Hamermesh, 2001), but Mary Jane's image is even more important to her professional status. If she is ugly, can she survive in the industry? [This question comes up again after a car accident]. If she is invisible, how can she be a celebrity with a wide reach? Mary Jane invites the audience to understand that she cannot be a professional if she is categorized in opposition to those beautiful qualities. Although not an

instance of natural hair at work, this episode invites the audience to think about what hair means and does for Black women in society.

How to Get Away with Murder. Annalise Keating also utilizes natural hair to gain leverage and credibility in her professional sphere; season 2 of *HTGAWM* invites the audience to see Annalise at work with braids 10 years prior to the main narrative. The glimpses into Annalise's past professional experiences, defined by failure and heartache, shed light onto her use of wigs and weaves while in the courtroom and meeting with clients for the majority of the show. The flashback of Annalise span 2:9 through 2:14, but a particular exchange in 2:12 is of the most interest for this analysis. During 2:12, Annalise is in the courtroom, Figure 8, and reprimanded by a client in way that invites the audience to engage with her race, her condition, and her professional being.



Figure 8 Annalise Keating

A younger Annalise is in Cleveland defending Charles Mahoney who is accused of murdering his fiancé. The case hangs in the balance as the eye witness for Mahoney's alibi, Rose, is afraid to testify. Annalise finally convinces Rose to testify anonymously on a closed-

circuit camera. The scene at 18:40 pans across a courtroom and rests on Annalise standing proud and confident before the jury. Her long braids are tied back, yet cascade prominently over her shoulder. One noticeable member of jury has an Afro herself. Annalise is addressing the jury as she prepares them for Rose's testimony and calls the prosecution circumstantial. The closed-circuit camera displays an empty chair. Annalise calmly waits for her witness, but Rose never appears. The audience is invited to view this as a failure for the young lawyer as Rose's testimony was the only thing to provide an alibi for the client. Annalise has always (to the audience) come through in court, she is the best defense attorney in the context of this show, but young, braided Annalise fails to do her job. The scene cuts to the hallway after the hearing. Senior Mahoney, the defendant's father, is talking to Annalise. She is being disciplined by her client as he says,

“My corporate attorneys told me not to hire you.... With the jury being made of mostly minorities a woman of color would be best. So I found you, turns out there are not a lot of women like you out there. I went against my instincts and chose this. [*As he gestures up and down her body, focuses on her pregnant belly*]. Don't give your people a bad name.”

This dialogue is inviting the audience to acknowledge several aspects of Annalise's identity while reinforcing why natural hair is not visible nor acceptable in the workplace. Mr. Mahoney draws attention to her race only because the minority jury might be more sympathetic. He calls on her gender and her pregnant state. Ultimately he is acknowledging her intersectionality and explicitly explaining his disapproval at a woman like her being present. I am focused on her call toward race because no other client in the program has directly acknowledged and criticized her race before. I argue that her natural hair is a key reason why Annalise is understood as a woman of color and why the audience is invited to see natural hair. Recall the juror, another woman of color, was represented with an Afro. The reading that I deciphered from the line, “Don't give your people a bad name,” aligns natural haired Annalise

much more firmly with the Black community. Natural hair is highly visual and highly distinctive, so it does have the ability to strengthen associations that people may have with each other; this tactic was used to unite oppressed Black people during the Civil Rights Movement (Thompson, 2009). Mahoney also may have been referring to Annalise's natural hair when he says, "turns out there are not many women like you out there," because, as Thompson explains, within the Black community a 'real' Black person wear natural hair while those who go for the unnatural look are sometimes deemed fake or aligned with Whiteness. Mahoney clearly knew that he needed someone to appeal to the minority jury, so he needed to find someone who calls attention to their own race. Hair, being an ethnic signifier, functions to call attention to Annalise's Blackness as she adorns a natural style (Mercer, 1994). The audience is invited to agree with Mahoney's disciplining and disapproval of his 'real' Black lawyer because we just witnessed her fail in the courtroom. The audience is also invited to see Annalise as a token to represent all Black women in success and in failure. Overall, this exchange limits what the audience is invited to view as acceptable for a professional Black woman because, as compared to the *usual* look for Annalise, she does not succeed at her job. Her client explains that she doesn't belong there and he wouldn't normally accept someone like her in this position.

When the Mahoney trial flashback narrative ends with natural haired Annalise being in a car accident (set up by the Mahoney's after Rose kills herself and Annalise loses the trial) and losing her baby. In the duration of the program, the audience is never invited to see Annalise with natural hair *while in the courtroom* again. The absence of the braids represents a successful disciplining of natural hair because Annalise validates her choice to alter her hair for work by consistently winning. Using hair to minimize her race may have been the key to Annalise's success; Mikayla, one of the brightest of Annalise's law students and the other prominent Black

woman in the program, also alters her hair while achieving great academic success. The images of two successful Black women with altered hair juxtaposed to natural haired Annalise failing and losing her baby strengthens the association of altered hair and more positive outcomes for women of color. Of course, the audience is aware that Annalise has 10 more years of experience as a lawyer and we are not shown the transition to altered hair, but the Black woman's strive toward Whiteness is still validated through the absence of a successful Annalise portrayed with her natural hairstyle. Recall that Renee Atwood, the District Attorney, is visible with altered hair while at work until she is fired for tampering with evidence. The combination of these character representations all limit the range of acceptable workplace hairstyles for Black women because the women with altered hair are successful while the Black women with natural hair are not.

Overall, the visibility of natural hair in the professional space is disproportionately limited for the audience. Across the sample altered hair was the dominating representation of Black women while at work. The main protagonists, which are the characters the audience is invited to think about and connect with the most, almost always wore their hair in an altered way to work. The minor and guest characters, especially those in the medical field, and the lower-skilled extras playing servers and waitresses were the most common representations of natural hair. The range that the audience is invited to view natural hair as acceptable seems to be limited to nurses, which can be argued are the re-embodiment of the Mammy trope, and very low-skilled positions, which is a continuation of slave hierarchies. My analysis points at natural hair being largely absent or disciplined within the professional sphere for Black woman as the literature portrayed.

Turning more towards the context of Blackness and natural hair, the symbolism of natural representing the Black savage is glaring and evident. Black women with natural hair are characterized as unstable or mentally and/or physically unfit for the workforce. I find that natural

hair tends to be disciplined within the sample, thus supporting the hegemonic rhetoric that seeks to deemphasize race and any subsequent discussion or acknowledgement of race-based issues. The audience is invited to discipline characters who choose natural hair from many sources. The disciplining of natural hair comes from Black characters practicing self-discipline, from dialogue between those in charge, and from the general narratives of the program. To expand on this question, I examine examples from *Being Mary Jane*, *Empire*, *How to Get Away with Murder*, and *Sleepy Hollow* that offer the most insightful and impactful discussions about race portrayal and natural hair. I will then provide more general discussion on the question as a whole.

Being Mary Jane: The characters often discipline each other for the representations of natural hair within the program. I was interested by this observation because *Being Mary Jane* discussed the various dimensions of race more than any other program. The characters are often seen doing their hair or discussing the nuances of Black hair from Mary Jane's mother have a closet full of expensive wigs to Niecy brushing her daughter's hair to Mary Jane calling her hair stylist.

In episode 1:8, Niecy tells Mary Jane [in regards to Niecy's unborn, biracial baby] that she is glad her daughter will not be fully Black.

“Her dad being Pilipino means something... she is going half-Filipino and half-Black. That means she is going to pretty. She is going to have light skin and good hair and an easier life.”

Niecy acknowledges the importance of the colorist hierarchy and how good hair contributes to a sense of value. Drawing again on Collins' (2000) conception of the binary, if good hair exists then bad hair must be defined. Having light skin and *good* hair is key in what it means to pretty and key in having an 'easier life.' Harris-Perry (2011) discusses the concept of shame within the Black community and the ways that Black people have been made to feel that

their very presence, that being visible, is a problem in American society. Being constantly shamed is certainly not conducive to living an easy life. Harris-Perry goes on to discuss the racial strategies used by the Black community to resist shame such as reducing the racial attributes most noticeable to Whites such as “braids or dreadlocks” (p 120). Again, racial attributes that are unfavorable must be defined, as Collins says, by racial attributes that are favorable. Natural hair is unfavorable because altered hair reduces racial attributes. A few minutes later the definition of good and bad hair are defined for the audience in the following exchange and emphasizes the advice from members of the Black community to do what it takes to minimize your “bad” racial attributes.

Mary Jane: “And I love your hair.”

Niecy: “It’s not mine.”

Mary Jane: “And neither is mine.”

In this scene, the audience is invited to acknowledge the importance of Eurocentrically defined beauty standards in success in life and the elements that contribute to that definition of pretty. Because the unborn child will have light skin and good hair as a bi-racial child, Niecy is disciplining herself as a fully Black woman lacking the light skin and the good hair. When Niecy admits that her “good” hair is not actually hers, and Mary Jane validates that acknowledgement, the audience is further invited to view natural hair as bad and good hair as something that must be bought for Black women. Good hair for these Black women may also include natural hair that can be more easily “change shape and sizes with a hot comb and some water” as discussed in a talk show segment in 2:9; regardless, good hair still emphasizes the ease of change because natural hair is unacceptable for an easy life. A similar discussion returns in a professional context in 3:4 as Niecy attempts to get a job as a flat iron sales consultant. She uses her experience living

as a Black woman in the quest for good hair to get the position. The Black woman's quest for altered hair is rewarded with a position.

“You sell flat irons up in here right? You want to know my experience? I am a Black woman. That is my experience. I spent my whole life trying to straighten my hair all just to fit into some stereotype of what the magazines say is beautiful. I know more about your products than anyone on your staff.”

Once again, the audience is invited to think about what defines beauty and success for Black women. The more introspective members of the audience may be able to take these exchanges critically to understand the issue in defining beauty through standards unnatural for Black women; however, the problematic and much easier to digest reading tells the audience that Black women have the ability to fit into the standards of beauty by *simply* buying products to alter their hair. This rhetoric tells the audience that the transformation from the Black savage to a civilized being is that easy. And with Niecy and Mary Jane having successful workplace positions, the association with altered hair being an attainable key for success is strengthened.

Still within 3:4, Mary Jane confronts Cece, the woman who is extorting her for money, in Cece's bookstore. Cece has short, natural hair compared to Mary Jane's long, altered style. Mary Jane tells Cece, “And you wonder why so much of society sees criminals when they see Black men and women. Really?” Mary Jane is referring to the fact that Cece is stealing money, through black mail, from her. The scene at 33:00, Figure 9, visually places the successful and wealthy Mary Jane Paul in juxtaposition with struggling, stealing Cece. The audience is also invited to view Cece as a deranged fringe to the commerce-based understanding of civilization. Her bookstore is unprofitable yet this is her dream. Cece explains how profits are less important than spreading knowledge as she allows her customers to borrow, instead of buy, books. Therefore, she is blackmailing Mary Jane for cash: she has run her business into the ground. If natural haired Cece is not a successful business woman then, due to the binary understanding of

symbols, Cece is not civilized thus a savage. The scene places altered hair in juxtaposition to natural hair in, once again, a disciplinary context to show natural hair as the symbol for Blackness as inferior to the Whiteness, altered hair, of Mary Jane.



Figure 9 Cece

Overall, *Being Mary Jane* repeatedly acknowledges the crucial link between altered hair and success. The audience is invited over all three seasons to discipline natural hair and the women who choose natural hairstyles while rewarding altered hair. Mary Jane climbs the ladder of success with her weave intact, while characters like Cece with natural hair seek to steal her hard-earned money. Niecy makes a living out of selling flat irons to Black women so that they can achieve beauty and success just as C.J. Walker did in the earlier century (Rooks, 1996).

Being Mary Jane is a show about the Black perspective from a Black creator for a Black audience, yet natural hair is still largely absent or negatively framed. This program does explain and discuss hair issues in a way that no other program in the sample does, but the dialogue still disciplines natural hair.

The Good Hair Study by the Perception Institute found that a majority of the 4,000-person sample indicated bias towards women of color based on hair. The study also found that Black women have more anxiety about care and spend more money on hair care products than the White peers. *Being Mary Jane* reflects the findings that Black women are “twice as likely to experience social pressure at work to straighten their hair compared to White women” (Bates, 2017). As society continues to shift the public opinion on natural hair, perhaps programs like *Being Mary Jane* will be able to accurately reflect that experience thus furthering the loop of reflection and reinforcement between media and reality.

Empire: Tiana, Figure 10, is one of *Empire*’s top recording artists and consistently wears her hair in a natural style. Throughout the three seasons Tiana is portrayed with afros, braids, buns, and curls. Tiana’s professional sphere is being an entertainer, so the audience views her at work with natural hair often. Because Tiana is an entertainer, her body is an extension of the commodification of Black bodies. She is successful, but Cookie, with her altered hair and the symbol for Whiteness, is the professional mind selling Tiana’s Blackness to the audience. Natural hair is reinforced as the symbol for the Black savage unable to participate in commerce as a professional because Blackness remains the commodity for sale. Episode 3:8 invites the audience to think about the meaning of natural hair in a particularly direct way as *Empire* headlines a fashion show, HVW.



Figure 10 Tiana

The episode opens with Tiana rehearsing her song for the runway show. She has her usual natural hair, but instead of the large Afro she is wearing curls. The curls do represent a *toned down* Blackness as compared to her braids and Afro, which foreshadows the episode's content and feeling. At 9:38 minutes into the episode Tiana is complaining in her dressing room to her assistant, "How does she expect me to perform in that [meaning the assigned dress]? And she wants me to straighten my hair too! Like for what?" Tiana is commenting on Helen von Wyatt's request for the performance look. Because the dialogue doesn't provide an answer to Tiana's question until 13:40, the audience is invited to wonder for themselves why Tiana would be asked to straighten her. After Nessa, a rival singer, ruins Tiana's performance dress, Tiana delivers an empowered speech that directly explains to the audience what is going on with the HVW fashion show.

"Helen Von Wyatt will destroy me for this. That bitch didn't want me in her stupid White-washed show to begin with. The only reason she teamed up with Empire is because she got dragged out for doing some whack ass Out of Africa collection with no Black people in it. Then home girl tries to shove me in this damn dress meant for an anorexic White chick. That skinny racist bitch can't handle my realness."

Tiana is referring to cultural appropriation, to body composition, and to her Black style. The audience is invited to see the request to straighten Tiana's hair as a compromise to Blackness; Helen Von Wyatt would clearly prefer to not have a Black artist in her show, but has been forced to for PR purposes. *Empire* seems to be commenting on the way White culture tries to dilute Blackness and turn it into something that White audiences can understand and be comfortable with within the racial neoliberal structure. Tiana, frankly, has summed up my research in this dialogue: the media (in this case Helen) technically represents Blackness, but dilutes the image into a Black that is as White as possible. The audience is invited to see Helen's point of view as she defends herself to Andre, Nessa's manager and the CFO of Empire. Helen

states that she would rather have Ellie Goulding, a blonde, White pop singer, headline because she has the “right look.” Andre corrects Helen with “the White look.” Helen’s response shines a light on how the hegemony operates as a racist structure without the guilt or burden of being racist.

“Preference is not prejudice. You people expect change to happen overnight. The HVW Fashion show has always been associated with a certain level of class, that is all.”

Class is a coded word for White and the preference over prejudice debate can certainly be used to justify racist actions or intentions. In fashion, especially, designers are entitled to a certain look; however, that look often tends towards Whiteness. Recall from my discussion of Eurocentrism, how studies of beauty advertisements find disparities in the representations of racial groups (Dillard, 2006; Mayo & Mahdi, 2005; Gordon, 2015). As the episode comes to an end, we see that wanting Ellie Goulding was never really about a preference for the HVW show because Helen does allow Nessa to headline and seems successful. After being called out by Tiana for being a racist, which was in response to the assumed public outcry of racially insensitive cultural appropriation, Helen must allow a certain “authentic look” in her show with “some Black girl magic” as the headline. Cookie specifically asks Helen if she wants Nessa to straighten her hair and Helen says no. Nessa, and her back up dancers, perform with a variety of natural hairstyles as the lyrics [*people talk about the way I am, natural hair and chocolate skin...nappy head, yeah, it ain't so bad. Cause now they want the braids and the dreadlocks. Paying money just to get the curves I got*] [*Rock your curls and waves, you so fly, celebrating.... 'cause there ain't nothing like Black girl magic*] plays in the background, Figure 11. This song asks the audience to pay direct attention to natural hair and unapologetic Blackness as a commodity. Now “they want the braids and the dreadlocks” because Whiteness remains the buyer in the commerce sphere while the Black savage remains the thing to be bought.



Figure 11 Nessa

The accepted reading of this episode invites audiences to acknowledge and celebrate Blackness and natural hair as Tiana is empowered enough to confront the issue head on and then Nessa successfully headlines the show, but the negotiated reading exposes the problems present. The problematic element in this representation is that Helen only agreed to showcase Blackness because A) public relations-wise she had to, B) Andre cut off all her daughter's long straight hair in the middle of the night as a threat, and C) natural remains the symbol for the Black savage up for consumption by White civilization. While the audience celebrates the accomplishments of Black women, they are invited to understand that White people are under cultural and personal threats to be inclusive. Helen did want successful Black imagery and had to be forced, yet she is rewarded for her prejudice as the show was successful, and Andre is the only character that *knows* the truth behind the casting choice. This episode invites the audience to associate

Blackness with violence and black mail because Nessa, the more “authentic, urban” choice, purposely ruined Tiana’s dress to receive the headlining position and Andre threatened a child. Tiana, the only character in the situation to earn her spot and own her Blackness is ultimately disciplined as she is forced to sit at home, with her braids, and watch the show she was meant to headline on television. Ness and Tiana are clearly items to be traded and moved around by Cookie, Andre, and Helen who all represent commerce and civilization.

Overall *Empire* is similar to most other programs in the sample with minor or guest characters making up the bulk of the natural hair representations. *Empire* did feature a variety of guest characters such a highly acclaimed journalist and other recording artists with natural hair as a successful and positive representations, but the main protagonist, Cookie Lyon, didn’t have any significant professional moments with natural hair. In the end, *Empire* offers representation of natural hair that continues undermining Blackness. This is a common theme for the show as the entire Empire business was built on illegal activities like drug dealing, murder, and extortion.

How to Get Away with Murder: As previously discussed, Annalise has been viewed with both natural and altered hair the most frequently of all the main protagonists in the sample. The framing of her natural hair tends toward negative associations, however. As discussed in the previous section, Annalise is extensively seen with natural hair in season 2. That framing is overall disciplined and negative as Annalise fails in the courtroom and called out by her client. Again, that negative framing of her at work is the only professional moment for natural hair and Annalise. Because this moment has been previously discussed, I will be focusing on the other significant moments that the audience is invited to view Annalise’s natural hair. These moments are all outside of work. I will also discuss episode 2:3 because, although not Annalise, the episode’s case revolves around a Black woman with natural hair and her profession.

In 1:4 and 1:5, the audience is invited to see Annalise removing her wig and interacting with her natural hair. The sequence begins at the end of 1:4 with Annalise sitting in her bedroom in front of the mirror with the lyrics *you were always faster than me* playing in the background. She knows that Sam lied but has not yet confronted him. Annalise always seems to be ahead of the game and faster than everyone else, at least when she has her altered hair. Altered hair remains the symbol of a body in control of her business. The audience sees Annalise pulling her wig off and removing her fake eye lashes; we get to see her take off the mask and transition from her professional self to a highly private one, Figure 12. Sam walks in and Annalise asks, “Why is your penis on a dead girl’s phone?”

The scene continues in 1:5 as Annalise questions Sam about the affair. She is empowered as she has an advantage over Sam, but it is also problematic that the audience sees the natural Annalise being scorned as her husband cheated.



Figure 12 Annalise Crying

Suddenly, the image of a Black woman with natural hair is confronted with the fact that she couldn’t keep her husband from having an affair. Annalise is crying and highly emotional, something the audience is not accustomed to seeing from the normally calm and cool Annalise Keating, and she kicks Sam out of the bedroom. This scene ends with a jump cut to Annalise in the lecture hall discussing the case to Wes.

The audience is taken directly from the emotionally vulnerable, natural haired Black woman to the confident and in charge altered haired Black woman. That striking jump is what frames the previous moment with natural hair the most negatively; the audience is invited to make a clear comparison between a devastated mess and a powerful woman. Later in 1:5, when Wes discovers that Annalise knows that Sam was the professor that Lila (the murdered girl and center of the season's plot) was sleeping with, the audience sees Annalise with natural hair again. Annalise has lost control because Wes no longer trusts her; natural hair is, once again, aligned with a loss of control. Beyond these two episodes, the audience is only invited to see Annalise with natural hair in times of personal distress and private moments. Times when she is drinking alone like in 2:3 or after going home to her parent's home to receive some 'self-care' in 2:15. Again, the moments are far away from her professional sphere.

The structure of *How to Get Away with Murder* is like crime dramas in which specific cases rotate through each episode while deeper plots play out in the background. In episode 2:3, the specific case is about a Black woman who knows a sex club in which a man dies of a heart attack. The Black woman, Tanya, is represented with natural hair. This episode was interesting to me because a sex club is a taboo profession to be in, as emphasized in the dialogue, "so I can be called a whore, freak, nympho and whatever other derogatory term the world throws at you when you're sex positive" and the owner happens to have natural hair. The audience is invited to view natural hair with the "freak" who owns a tantric sex club.

Tanya's representation of Blackness hails back to the Jezebel trope; she is the Black woman who is obsessed with sex, kinky sex even. The main characters in the show do not explicitly discipline Tanya or the sex club, Connor even considers attending a party there, but the jury is something that the law firm worries about because of the general perception of sex clubs.

Annalise's team cannot even find a witness from the sex party that night because each person they approach acknowledges the fear of ridicule. One witness, a teacher, discusses how she would lose her job if anyone knew despite the sex club being a perfectly legal activity. The message of this episode can easily be read as only the natural haired Black woman would own and operate a kinky sex club. The audience is invited to view Blackness with uncontrollable sex that would get someone fired from his or her job. This framing reinforces the myth of Black women's hyper sexuality, which was created by White social, political, and economic institutions, used to create a space for White moral superiority (Harris-Perry, 2011). Once again, natural hair symbolizes that Black savage that is inferior to morally advance, more refined civilized being. At 21:31, when the audience sees a flashback of the evening that the man died, Tanya has straight hair. When Tanya is technically at work, even her hair is altered. This choice more than likely harks back to beauty standards and desirability that favors altered hair, but nonetheless while at work Tanya isn't represented with natural hair.

Overall *How to Get Away with Murder* disciplines that characters that wear their hair naturally while reinforcing the association of altered hair and professionalism. Annalise Keating always attends court, with the exception of 2:12, with her hair altered. When the audience is invited to see natural hair, that character is consistently framed in negative or extremely taboo ways. From alcoholism to a sex-crazy murderer, natural hair is associated with negative outcomes while altered hair is rewarded with professional success.

Sleepy Hollow: Abby Mills works as an FBI agent when the audience is finally invited to view her with natural hair. She returns from her time being trapped in a demonic realm in episodes 3:10 through 3:18. During this sequence, Abby does successfully navigate the professional sphere with natural hair. I will examine key moments from the eight episodes that

Abby goes natural to understand how natural hair is framed in a professionally positive way throughout the sample.

In 3:11 Abby is called by her boss to investigate a crime scene. In this moment it was unclear if Abby was technically working anymore because she did quit right before being trapped. Her boss alerts the audience, and Abby, that she is still a part of the team and the best agent on the force. “She is [referring to another agent that Abby recommends for the case], but she is not you. I never handed in your resignation.” Clearly Abby is a valued member of the team. Throughout this episode Abby plays a significant role in solving the case, thus inviting the audience to celebrate the successful achievements of a Black women with natural hair. In 3:12, the audience hears Jack Walters, an ambiguous FBI director character, discussing Abby with her direct supervisor.

Jack Walters: “I have heard that Agent Mills is not as stable as she once was. That she has changed.”

Daniel Reynolds: “Mills is a good agent. She will find her feet again.”

Jack is clearly concerned that Abby is not going fulfilling her duties as effectively as before because she “has changed,” yet the only thing that has changed about her is her hair style. Daniel is defending Abby’s abilities, yet also undermines her as he is sure she will “find her feet again.” The audience is invited to question Abby’s state and her abilities alongside her bosses because no one, at work or home, has every viewed her with natural hair. Abby must prove to her co-workers that she is just as good of an agent despite her change in appearance. I acknowledge that Abby’s appearance is representative of her slight change in mental state. Although mostly normal, she does exhibit some signs of distress that do not go unnoticed, but I still find that natural hair being the visible cue for distress a problematic message to send. This link will be discussed more thoroughly in section 4.4.

Outside of the FBI, Abby is also a “witness” for the supernatural storyline of the show. Although not a profession, the responsibilities of being a witness drive the entire narrative forward. In 3:18, Abby successfully performs the most important job that a witness has: she saves the world. Abby, Figure 13, still has natural hair as she stops the Chosen One from literally unleashing evil monsters onto the planet. She stops him by sacrificing herself. In this moment, the audience is invited to view a Black woman with natural hair giving the ultimate gift to save all of humanity. Unfortunately, as she gives up her soul to save humanity, she becomes the currency in the transaction to save the civilized world. The Black savage is a commodity that must be given up in exchange for civilization to continue forward: just as the colonies were built on the backs of slaves as the foundation for civilized business to progress. The Black savage savior was also viewed in 2:9 when the audience sees Abby’s mother, who has natural hair, sacrifice herself to save her children, otherwise viewed as the next generation and progress. The savior image represented is reminiscent of the *strong Black woman* that Melissa Harris-Perry (2011) describes as drawing encouragement and self-assurance to overcome great obstacles.

Abby Mills overcame every challenge in the first three seasons of *Sleepy Hollow* to prepare her for this moment.

On the surface, this is a positive moment, but as Harris-Perry argues, “by reproducing the icon of the strong Black woman,



Figure 13 Abby Mills

African-American women help craft an expectation that they should be autonomously responsible and self-denying caregivers” (pg. 185). Joan Morgan (1999) agrees that the strong Black woman is problematic because the super strength that strong Black women have was a “myth created by Whites to rationalize their brutality” (101). Ultimately, the positive trait of strength can backfire for the strong Black woman as oppressors and the Black community use this stereotype to minimize the harmfulness of any actions against the Black woman.

Calling again on the notion of real Blackness having natural hair, as seen with Tiana in *Empire* and written about by Thompson (2009), *Sleepy Hollow* invites the audience to see natural haired Black women as the persons expected to sacrifice themselves via Abby and Abby’s mother. This is problematic because natural hair and altered hair continue to be divided along a line of objects to be sacrificed versus civilization worth saving. If a Black woman wears natural hair to work, will she be expected to give until nothing is left and sacrifice in the name of business? Morgan (1999) describes being a strong Black woman as something that was “cutting off my air supply” (87). Even when Annalise is represented in her home having her emotional breakdowns with natural hair, the audience sees a previously strong Black woman reduced to dust because she has sacrificed and given too much to the people around her. A real danger exists in framing natural hair as a visual marker for a savage object worth losing to save White society.

Overall, *Sleepy Hollow* does present a positive representation of natural hair in a professional context. The representation includes some problematic elements, such as Abby’s supervisors doubting her abilities, but the audience is invited to see Abby solve cases and save the world just as she did with altered hair. Being a critical scholar, I cannot deny the problematic elements of the strong Black woman we are invited to see, but *Sleepy Hollow* does provide a

positive step forward with Abby and Jennifer Mills representing some range while pushing against the hegemonic expectations for professional hair.

After watching the entire sample, I have found that natural hair tends to be disciplined more than celebrated within professional contexts. The most successful of the characters tend to wear altered hair such as Mary Jane while broadcasting and Annalise while in court. Other characters, like Tiana and Abby Mills do provide the audience glimpses of positive and professional Black women with natural hair, yet natural hair still represents a commodified Black body for the enjoyment of the professionals around them. Tiana is the object of Cookie Lyon's empire while Abby Mills becomes an item up for sacrifice. The positive representations are overwhelmingly outweighed by the multitude of representations that reinforce the hegemonic ideals of altered hair being more professional with Iris West, April Malloy, Mary Jane and friends, Annalise and Mikayla, Abby Mills for two and half seasons, Cam Saroyan, and Cookie Lyon.

Lastly, and the most problematic framing of natural hair, is the consistent association between natural hair and mental and/or physical instability. In nearly every program, from suicide to demonic possession, the audience was invited to see natural hair as a cue to the mental and physical health of the characters. Even though these instances were not directly within the workplace of the program, the way that natural hair is framed as unstable does influence what professionalism for Black women looks like to the audience. An unstable person does not fit into the corporate understanding of professionalism: competent, confident, and able. With the binary understanding of symbols, something that is not Eurocentrically professional must be the opposite: professional is civilized thus unprofessional is, again, the savage. Natural hair is explicitly a symbol for the Black savage not yet able to exist in the professional, civil world.

The first time that I noticed how natural hair signaled instability to the audience was during *Sleepy Hollow*. Abby Mills, the main character I followed, always had altered hair while her sister always was portrayed with natural hair. Jennifer Mills also was introduced as a patient and criminal being held in the local town asylum. Literally, Jennifer was the crazy sister. As a standalone incident, the connection between natural hair and instability is hard to draw; however, when the Mills' mother was also introduced as a patient in the same hospital (as a ghost because she had committed suicide) she was also featured with natural hair. Both were outsiders deemed unfit to exist in civilized society. At this point, I began taking critical note of the way natural hair coincides with mental unrest and by extension civilization. Throughout the remainder of the research, I found that natural hair to be repeatedly associated with suicide and a loss of control. Two characters in the sample, Mother Mills and Lisa Hudson, committed suicide in the programs while Cookie Lyons, Jennifer Mills, and Annalise Keating alluded to doing so. These characters portrayed natural hair as the discussions or attempts were committed.

Lisa Hudson, from *Being Mary Jane*, was the only character in the predominantly Black cast to consistently have natural hair. Throughout the three seasons she showed signs of mental health issues, but in season three she did successfully take her own life, Figure 14. After her death, one friend further disciplines Lisa's character by saying, "Black people don't kill themselves. That is what they did. We took pride in the fact that we didn't do that." Lisa, even in death, is the object of discipline within her own community and further alienated from her peers who all wear altered hair. She is clearly separated from the civilized society, as symbolized through the altered hair on her peers, and cast as truly a savage from both the White understanding and a Black perspective of society.



Figure 14 Lisa Hudson

Cookie Lyons and Jennifer Mills each discussed the hardships of life in prison and allude to the appeal of suicide. Neither are represented as legitimately considering the act, but with natural hair they are in a weakened emotional state. Again, consideration of taking one's life is broadly considered an act against the laws of nature and civilization as most current societies ban suicide (Goldsmith, 2002). The scenes were emotional displays of the desperation that many inmates may feel while incarcerated and isolated from friends and family. Cookie was featured with braids while Jennifer featured curly hair. Annalise, an overall complicated and unstable character, considered suicide in several instances after her professional and personal life began to fall apart both with natural and altered hair.

Many of the depictions of natural hair did not take the context so far as suicide, but was associated with a loss of control, both emotionally and physically for the characters. Jenny and Abby Mills were both possessed by demons, Mary Jane Paul was in a debilitating car accident, Francine West was a drug addict before ultimately dying of cancer, and Annalise, again,

displayed emotional unrest while portraying natural hair. Through the plot of *Sleepy Hollow* Jennifer Mills is possessed by a demonic entity on two different occasions. While possessed she attempts to kill her sister and has no control over her consciousness. Natural hair becomes a symbol for someone weak minded and susceptible to demonic influence, something especially problematic given the Christian foundations of Western society. The natural haired Black savage is not strong enough to ward off evil thus inferior to her strong, altered haired sister. In season 3, Abby Mills was taken into a demonic alternate universe where she was trapped for nine months. During those months, clearly coinciding with her decaying mental state from being in solitude, her hair transformed from its altered straight norm to a natural curly style. This scene was distinctly reminiscent of imagery scene in *Scandal* when Olivia Pope is held captive and alone by kidnappers (Blackburn, 2016). Contained in physical capacity, natural hair stands as the symbol for the regression in a Black savage not able to be in the professional, civilized world.

This type of captive decay is also in line with the change in hair style from Cookie Lyons in prison. Being held captive or incarcerated without the normal access to hair care treatments, on the surface, is a reasonable excuse for the sudden appearance of natural hair. Natural styles, such as the braids seen on Cookie, were developed when slaves were forced to live in unreasonable conditions without hair care resources (Rooks, 1996). What is not acceptable is the depiction that natural hair should and would only occur if the woman has no other alternative as this reinforces the expectation that altered symbolizes a Black woman's ability and desire to fit in the civilized White world.

Once Abby Mills escapes the demon realm, her hair remains natural for several more episodes. During those episodes, everyone around her is worried about her mental state; the most notable dialogue came from her boss who explicitly said, "Is Abby okay? She seems less stable

than she used too” and Jennifer saying “You’re different than before you disappeared. You are dealing with it every day and I can see it.” Once Abby makes peace with her experience, her hair returns to the usual altered norm. In 3:18 Abby sits with Crane and says, “I made peace with it Crane. What the next stage is. I am ready.” This is so impactful because the scene is a dream sequence by Crane helping him find peace with Abby’s sacrifice. Crane envisions Abby with altered hair to represent her peace with passing. The captive, possessed sequence followed by the dialogue on her sanity, and the return of altered hair once the audience understands she is “better” all strengthen the association that natural hair is a sign of mental disruption and unwellness. The symbolism of natural hair and the wild, crazy Black savage is reinforced.

In a slightly different direction, Mary Jane Paul is featured with natural hair after her severe car accident. During the sequence, she does not work or leave her house as she is recovering. Only her close family and friends see her, as Mary Jane feels that the trauma to her face is a mark of shame given her career as a TV personality. Interesting and valuable papers should be written on the emphasis of beauty and Mary Jane’s struggle for self-worth here, but what is most interesting to my study on hair is the presence of her natural, scarfed style. She is on sick-leave and doesn’t need to be professional or “presentable.” More interestingly, she is experiencing extreme mental turmoil with her future career, legal issues from the accident, and her appearance. As Mary Jane contemplates her future and doubts her ability to remain in the professional, thus civilized, world the Black savage imagery returns. When Mary Jane finally returns to the office, even though she isn’t officially working yet, her hair is back to the altered straight because she needs to prove that she can still pass in the civilized world.

An association with natural hair and limited physical well-being is on display with Francine West as well. In *The Flash* (2:3), Iris’ mother, the only Black character with natural

hair visible to the audience, returns to her family 20 years after disappearing from rehab. Iris discovers that her mother returned because her mother is very sick. The contrast between the healthy and vibrant Iris, with altered hair, and her sick, ex-drug addicted mother, with natural hair, visually reinforces the symbolism that natural hair is a sign and symptom of Black women being unable to care for themselves or change. The message that I decoded, and the question I kept asking myself from the messages, was if a Black woman can do something with her natural hair—she would: otherwise, something must be wrong with the Black woman who keeps her hair natural. Francine West is also an outsider to society and the laws of nature as she abandoned her family for drugs; Francine embodies the Black savage that breaks down the Eurocentric, civilized understanding of a nuclear family unit.

The focus of my research was not the personal sphere, but the trend of associated mental instability, even suicide, with natural hair cannot be overlooked. Mental ability and coherence *is* a measure for professionalism; therefore, when the audience is invited to view and understand natural hair as a marker for mental unrest in a character, the audience is also, subconsciously, invited to view natural hair in opposition to the professional schema. If this connection had only been made on a few occasions, the association wouldn't be so strong, but the pattern of using natural hair as a cue to the audience about the mental stability of the character absolutely means something significant for Black women. The repeated and consistent imagery of a mentally unstable individual reinforces that meaning of natural hair as the symbol for the Black savage that cannot handle and does not belong in civilization. Throughout history, mental illness has been treated as something abnormal, dangerous, and unacceptable within society (Goldsmith, 2002).

The framing of the hair builds on my findings about the visibility because how the audience is invited to view hair when they do see it contributes significantly to the schemas and attitudes that are formed. Schemas are the cognitive structures that are defined by our experiences and serve as mental shortcuts for information processing (Baran & Davis, 2015). These schemas can be changed as new and contradicting information is processed and categorized, but that change requires significant and consistent new imagery to alter the meaning of each symbol (Livingstone, 1990). Heather Hendershot discusses the power of television to change schemas in her analysis of *Sesame Street* scholarship; she found multiple accounts of children changing the way that they perceive Blackness and the inner city because of positive exposure on the program. “A White mother recounted to Long that her daughter told, ‘Susan and Gordon [the Black characters] are bad people. They’re different from us. Their hair and skin are all funny.’ Some days later the child reported, ‘Mommy, Susan and Gordon aren’t really funny or bad. Now I know them, and every day they make me feel happy’” (p. 155). The accounts continue as suburban children take a field trip to a museum in the city. The adults were concerned that the bus had to drive through a ghetto neighborhood, but the children cheered and thanked the bus driver for bringing them to Sesame Street. Hendershot’s anecdotes show how representation can change our perception of reality in line with Benshoff (2016) and other media effects scholars understanding symbolic interaction and meaning making.

Although *Sesame Street* is made for children, adults may interpret television representation in similar ways. Yes, adults may understand the other factors and implications associated with reality and fictional television, but ultimately schemas are created and then expanded by experiences throughout our lives. Lai, et. al (2014) found that the most effective methods for reducing implicit bias towards racial groups linked Black people with positivity and

White people with negativity. If television would portray more abundant and positive representations of natural hair, the viewers may retain those positive images and change their implicit attitudes towards Black and natural hairstyles. Instead, however, this sample reinforces the symbolism of natural hair and a Black savage that is counter to a hegemonic understanding of professionalism. The consistent message from this study was that altered hair represents the successful transition from the savage to the civilized, acceptable, safe Black woman who can be successful in a post-racial, yet still Eurocentric, world.

4.2 RQ3: Frequency

How often is natural hair represented as professional in television contexts as compared to altered hair for Black women?

This study was not a content analysis, so the specific and detailed figures cannot be provided; however, I did keep track of the times that the main protagonists discussed natural hair and notes on the minor characters and extras that were scene with natural hair throughout the sample. In the sample of 309 episodes, roughly 23% emphasized or represented significant moments for natural Black hair in a workplace context by the main protagonists. Most of those instances came from *Being Mary Jane* and *How to Get Away with Murder*. Jennifer Mills, from *Sleepy Hollow*, was always represented with natural hair, but was rarely scene in a professional context as she was “rare item collector” (which meant a thief and Black Market trader) and a waitress between gigs. Jennifer Mills was also not a main protagonist but rather a supporting character. Table 2 shows the relative, to each other, frequency of the Black women minor and extra characters seen with natural hair for each of the programs in the sample. Many of these extras were only viewed in passing or served as the nurses and servers to the main characters. The profession with the highest rate of natural hair was the medical field, as described in RQ1.

Table 1 also outlines who the lead writer for the program is, the perceived race and gender for the writer, and the network. The table also describes the most common class of job portrayed by the extras and the minor characters within the program.

Table 1 Program Demographics

Program	Writers	Writer Dem.	Network	Minor BW	Extra BW	Types of Jobs
Bones	Hart Hanson	White Man	Fox	Infrequent	Moderate	Blue Collar
Mistresses	K.J. Steinberg	White Woman	ABC	Infrequent	Infrequent	Blue Collar
Sleepy Hollow	Phillip Iscove	White Man	Fox	Infrequent	Moderate	Blue Collar
HTGAWM	Shonda Rhimes	Black Woman	ABC	Moderate	Frequent	White Collar
Empire	Lee Daniels	Black Man	Fox	Frequent	Moderate	Both
The Flash	Greg Berlanti	White Man	CW	Infrequent	Infrequent	Blue Collar
Being Mary Jane	Mara Brock Akil	Black Woman	BET	Frequent	Moderate	Blue Collar

The pithy answer to RQ3 is *not very often*. Overall, altered hair on Black women, especially while at work, was substantially more common for the audience to see than natural hair on a Black woman at work. Natural hair is more often viewed in private contexts, such as bedrooms and bathrooms, rather than professional moments. The visibility of natural hair to private settings physically contains the Black savage from being viewed as a part of society while altered hair remains the needed key to access the professional, civilized world. The programs written by Black women included noticeably more extras and minor characters, both with and without natural hair, that were Black women. A future study should analyze and

describe this implication alone; do programs and movies written or directed by Black women more likely to focus on diversity in roles and representation than other programs and to what extent?

I did note a change over time in the visibility in nearly every program, however. The more contemporary the season, the more frequently natural hair was viewed overall. This observation implies that the world is indeed changing and becoming more open to women drawing attention to their race by wearing natural hair. Perhaps the public fear of a racialized other, the fear of Black women who are unapologetically Black, or at least undiluted, is subsiding. The media reflects society: as our culture becomes more responsive and accepting of Black bodies, the media landscape is and should reflect that. I highly encourage scholars to maintain observations on representations of Black women and racialized Others as new seasons of programming airs.

Overall throughout the sample, diversity in gender, race, and sexual orientation was indeed present. This observation about racial diversity regarding Blacks supports previous research (Mastro, 2009) that Black Americans are portrayed in the media at a rate higher than their actual proportion within American society; in other words, the audience is exposed to more Black characters within each program than their neighborhoods may include (on the national average scale). The representations of Black bodies were punctuated by hair styling choices as natural styles stood as the symbol for the Black savage unfit for a professional being. Natural hair was much more predominant in lower class positions: a residual effect from the division of labor in the slave hierarchy. Recall from Chapter 2, that house slaves, seen as more cognitively capable and civilized, were largely provided more resources to care for their hair and to assimilate with White cultural styles; field slaves were not provided the same level of resources

and were more often seen with the natural hairstyles disciplined today. The style of hair, altered and Eurocentric vs natural and Afrocentric served as a visual marker for the class of slave—the value of the slave— especially in terms of cognitive ability as house slaves did not work the heavy manual labor of their field counterparts. The division also marked the savageness of the Black body with those who had “good” hair being more civilized than the wooly, animalistic counterparts (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Not only was natural hair more visible in the service industry, natural hair was associated with the commodification of Black bodies for the consumption of the professional being. The natural haired Black savage is used as currency rather than as the professional being in a system that understands professionalism through the Eurocentric lens of commerce and business. To transition from an object up for exchange into a professional woman able to succeed in civilization, the Black woman is told to alter her hair and move away from her natural state when watching the sample of programs in this study.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

Sometimes representations that an audience sees of racial groups on television influences the way they see those groups in their life; the purpose of this study, to critique the representations of professional Black women, is rooted in that simplified explanation of media effects and symbols. Media tends to reflect and reinforce hegemonic values that oppress non-dominant groups within society because cultural elements practiced by large segments of the population are more likely to be emphasized than those by minority groups (Baran & Davis, 2015). Because the hegemony seeks domination over other voices and was established by predominantly White Anglo-Saxon Protestant males, the hegemonic power structures are inherently racist and sexist. Racial neoliberalism defocuses race in favor of colorblind attitudes, yet racism persists in institutional, less obvious forms, such as hair styles, as a function of Eurocentrism and hegemonic domination (Goldberg, 2009; Enk-Wanzer, 2011). Hair, due to its unique ability to be altered, has been largely separated from race, yet long standing bias against hairstyles inherent to Black women persist (Thompson, 2009, 2015; White, 2005). The bias is evident in coded language that more often describes curly hair, the hair genetically more prevalent among Blacks, such as unkempt, frizzy, and wild. The association between the wild state of natural hair reinforces the trope of a Black savage used to validate and define Whiteness as civilized, thus professional. Mediated images of hair and Black women serve as symbols in the meaning making process for audiences as they construct reality (Gray & Lotz, 2014). Every representation observed in the media contributes in some part to the understanding of racial groups and subsequent expectations of those people in society (Mastro, 2009). The intersection of meaning making and racist hegemonic values is where this study lives.

The goal of this study was to identify and understand how visibility and representations of Black women inform, reflect, and reinforce racist hegemonic understandings of what professionalism looks like. The first research question asked if the visibility of natural hair in entertainment television limits the range of what is viewed as acceptable for Black women in professional contexts. This question was formed out of literature finding hairstyles to carry schematic functions as symbols of perceived personality traits in real-life contexts (Synnott, 1987). Hair also has the ability to emphasize or minimize one's race depending on how it is styled; styling to draw attention to race creates a racialized Other and threat to the racial neoliberal structure. Straightening products have been marketed towards Black women since the early 1900s as a means of obtaining respect within society as a means of distancing one's self from the Black savage imagery of natural hair. This long tradition of discouraging natural hair styles promotes the cultural understanding that Whiteness is superior and that being as similar as possible to one's White peers is necessary for success (Rooks, 1996; Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Thompson, 2009). The results find that natural hair is largely absent from public view for the audience, which strengthens the understanding that natural hair does not belong in the civilized world and must be contained to private spaces. The absence creates pressure on each and every representation because range and accessibility is important for shaping consumer attitudes and beliefs.

The second research question asked if the portrayal of natural hair in television invites the audience to discipline Black women and reinforces hegemonic values of Whiteness. Not only does visibility and absence in the visual rhetoric of natural hair have impact (McKerrow, 1989), but the contextual framing of each character with natural hair contributes to the message (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010). I previously found Olivia Pope [*Scandal*] to be framed in

overwhelmingly negative ways when presented with natural hair (Blackburn, 2016) and the results of this study largely support that trend. Natural hair does tend to be disciplined more than empowered or celebrated across the sample of programs. Natural hair is a symbol for an unwell and unstable Black woman that works to disenfranchise the Black community by alienating them based on a perceived superiority of Whiteness. The unstable Black woman with natural hair cannot belong in civilized society and so cannot be a professional being. This sample also aligned natural hair with the commodification of Black bodies as something up for exchange.

The third research question asked how often natural hair is represented as professional in television contexts and loosely found that natural hair is not frequently shown except in the medical and service professions. This divide is reminiscent of the slave hierarchy divide punctuated by hair style for house and field slaves. The results also showed that programs with Black casts such as *Empire* and *Being Mary Jane* tended to have more diversity represented. *How to Get Away with Murder* also included more frequent Black extras and, like the previous two shows, is created by Black writers. An interesting direction for a future study would look at differences between Black shows for Black audiences and Black shows for White audiences with consideration to the race of the creators.

To investigate all the research questions, a visual analysis of seven programs featuring prominent Black women was conducted. The sample focused on dramas because the drama genre most readily includes narratives centered on the professional spheres for the characters. The programs aired on ABC, Fox, CW, and BET and included lawyers, medical practitioners, law enforcement personnel, journalists, and business owners. Three hundred and nine units of analysis, episodes, were observed and the messages critiqued. The units of analysis spanned three seasons for each program, including the most recent seasons, through February 1, 2017.

This study provides insight into the persisting racism towards Black women in professional contexts as understood through mediated environments. Television is not just a fictional world consumed for entertainment but a reflexive medium influenced by society and exerting influence on to culture (Livingston, 1998). Encouraging one style of hair over another may seem to be an innocent and objective business practice, yet the expectation of straight and smooth disproportionately affects Black women. Due to the genetic components of hair among Black women, achieving the preferred style of society takes more time, effort, and money. The subtle disciplining, in and out of the media environment, of styles that naturally complement genetic attributes is a systematic, reinvented racist structure that reinforces White domination of Others. The theoretical understanding that media representations of specific visual elements reinforce the disciplining of groups can be applied to any Othered party. This study can be replicated to look for subtle sexism and racism across the spectrum.

Media critiques such as this do not offer answers to direct audience effects, but the results will illuminate elements of media messages to bring awareness to an issue. Social movements need to be aware of the mediated messages working in opposition to their rhetoric. As media is called out for elements of racism or sexism, the conversation can begin for real change. Media reflects and reinforces what is in society, and so the media critic plays a vital role in movements for social equality.

5.1 Other Considerations

The study rests on the assumption that symbolic interaction exists and that hair is a symbol recognized to have meaning by the audience. A large body of literature was drawn on to build the argument for this study, the argument being that mediated images of natural hair invite the audience to view Black women who choose altered or natural hair styles differently, but

much of the literature assumes that audiences are actively engaged in the meaning making process. The study also assumes that styling choices for the characters on television are purposely made to create a specific visual argument and encoded with messages that reinforce hegemonic structures. For this study, the process of decoding the messages, the possible ways that audiences use media texts, works somewhat independently of the encoding process and allows for polysemy to exist (Ott & Mack, 2014). The decoded messages in the results of this study offer oppositional readings that audience may or may not have previously understood.

This study also rests with the assumption that Black women are continuing to feel pressure within the workplace to conform to an altered appearance. The sales of chemical relaxers have been steadily decreasing since 2008 (Thompson, 2014), and anecdotally I have noticed more models with natural hair in the pages of *Cosmopolitan*. Despite inevitable (and positive) of progress over time, this study assumes that hegemonic structures, which discipline and disenfranchise Black women, are still in place; this assumption is backed by historical evidence (see the section, Black hair), Black feminist scholars like bell hooks or Melissa Harris-Perry, and critical observations from my daily existence as a bi-racial Black woman.

5.2 Future Projects

This study provides a foundation for many future projects interested in representations of the Other. A future research endeavor can expand on the sample to view more genres and programs. Children programs were not included in this sample as the focus was on professional contexts, but it would be interesting to know how kids are invited to view Black children on television. In *Mistresses*, April Malloy's daughter was represented with natural hair until the character turned 13. At this point in the program she was scene with altered hair, posing the question of when are young Black girls encouraged to alter their hair or discouraged from

continuing to rock natural styles. I wonder if the transition through puberty and away from “childhood” is a marker for women to be a target of increase sexual objectification thus prompting the adoption of beauty traits like altered, Eurocentric hair. News outlets and reality television were not included as a genre in this study, but should be investigated in the future. How does the genre impact the representation of Black women? Do programs focused on “non-fiction/reality” reflect more diversity than purely fictional characters? The possible differences between film representations of Black women and television representations offer another interesting point of study. Does the film industry, with less dependence of branded advertising revenue than television business models, offer more images in opposition to hegemonic values?

Several programs were not included in this sample because of timing, but future projects should investigate the seemingly progress and positive programs. *Luke Cage* is the story of a bullet-proof Black man, and the show features a Black woman with regularly styled natural hair. This program is new to Netflix and only has one season. The plot may embrace more cultural discourse and attitudes in the encoding of the messages given the timeliness. Older programs, such as *The Bearnie Mac Show*, were not included because of the age, but a study comparing the visual elements of these shows to findings of contemporary texts can offer insight the assumption that culture changes and progresses in time.

Visual analysis does not offer audience effect information, so future studies should survey and interview audiences to understand what attitudes are being formed from the programs in the sample. How do Black audiences view these programs? How do White audiences differ in the decoding of Black characters? Do the oppositional readings I have offered resonate with real audiences? Studies on the implicit bias that may be enhanced by viewing the programs in the

sample need to be created for audience effect research. Future studies should also include interviews from the actresses to understand the production aspect of television.

Lastly, the study methods can be replicated with Hispanic, queer, women, and countless other traditionally disciplined groups to understand how mediated sources reinforce hegemonic discourse through subtle visual elements and context. Researchers concerned with other minority groups should use this study to ask their own questions regarding symbolic interaction in mediated visual arguments.

Overall, this study has uncovered significant patterns for the visibility and framing of natural hair that may have implications in society. I found that natural hair continues to be disciplined or only provided narrow spaces to exist. I look forward to continuing this line of research because it is time for the hegemony to stop fearing an unapologetically Black woman and start accepting and celebrating natural styles in the Black community.

In the opening of episode 5:18, Jake tells another character that [Black] Olivia Pope, “promised to do something with her hair today, so we are making progress.” This line blatantly aligns her Afrocentric hair with an inability to exert power over her appearance or take care of her-self. Olivia Pope’s hair has never been mentioned nor has the audience ever been invited to think about Olivia fixing her hair until this moment. It is not a coincidence that they are invited to discipline the natural hair, Blackness, for needing something done with it.

-Blackburn, 2016, p. 19

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APPENDICES

6.1 Television Thematic Guide

The following thematic guide contains operationalizations, explanations, and illustrations of the themes and frames for the study to assist in a qualitative understanding of the context.

Character Description:

- **Age-** the approx. age the character is perceived as. Select from Child, Teen, Adult, Senior Adult
 - Child- perceived to be 0-12 years old
 - Teen- perceived to be 12-18 years old
 - Adult- perceived to be 19-65 years old
 - Senior Adult- perceived to be 66+
- **Profession-** the profession, occupation, or work status that the character is perceived or mentioned to belong to.

Hair style of the character:

- **Curly-** Hair that falls in an irregular, kinky, coily, wavy, or ringlet pattern.
- **Braided-** Tight corn rows or multiple braids
- **Dreadlocks-** intentionally matted or sculpted ropes of hair
- **Afro-** hair extended around the head in a large, rounded form
- **Stylized Curly-** Hair that falls in a large cylindrical pattern, is not consistent throughout, and/or is perceived to be in an unnatural pattern. Do not code for stylized curly
- **Straight-** Hair that falls in a uniform and straight pattern. Do not code for straight hair

Image Source: Google Image Search, Sept. 25, 2016. "Hair styles from the back [Straight]

[Curled] [Dreadlock]"

Curly



Afro, Dreadlock, Braided



Straight, Stylized Curly

Setting:

- Public- perceived to be in an open view to the general public of characters
- Private- perceived to be in a closed view of the general public of characters
- Professional- perceived to be pertaining to working contexts as applied to character's profession
- Other- perceived to fall outside of explicit working contexts as applied to the character's profession

Character Framing:

- Empowered- The character is perceived to exert control or manipulate surrounding characters
- Disciplined- The main character is perceived to be controlled or manipulated by surrounding characters

Overall Impressions:

Provide notes on the overall impression of each episode and the character in the episode regardless of if natural hair occurred or not. Additional trends beyond professional contexts will be established for future research and discussion.

6.2 Television Analysis Observation Sheet

Identifying Information per Unit

Program Title	
Episode Number	
Episode Name	

Notes on Natural Hair

Per episode, notes will be taken based on the observation of natural hair regarding the character and setting context information.

Hairstyle:

Framing:

Setting:

Impressions

Based on the notes from the natural hair portion, what messages are decoded in this episode or scene?

Other Notes

Are there any other trends or themes to note for future research?

Being Mary Jane

Program Title	Being Mary Jane
Episode Number	2:7
Episode Name	Let's Go Crazy

Notes on Natural Hair

Per episode, notes will be taken based on the observation of natural hair regarding the character and setting context information.

Hairstyle: Afro. Normally her hair is altered with artificial hair (a weave) but this must be maintained. Her weave was taken out in preparation for a new one to be braided into her hair.

Framing: Neutral framing. The moment in the bathroom and with Niecy is very raw and human, but neither empowering or disciplining. Mary Jane expresses terror in the potential for loss of empowerment without her natural hair.

Setting: Private/Other. Mary Jane is in her own bathroom and the only characters that see her natural afro are the hairdresser and her niece.

Impressions

The scene opens at 34 minutes with a shot of her old weave on the bathroom counter. The camera pans up to her looking, in admiration, at her own hair. She is smiling to herself as she plays with her afro. “I already had Tami take out my weave!” She angrily hangs up the phone on her hairstylists. Mary Jane pays her niece for the movie tickets AND offers to babysit. Mary Jane does not like babysitting—as established by her disdain for people intruding in her house from earlier episodes.

“Because your perfect aunt is terrified of going to work without her weave. Terrified that noone would think I was beautiful. People would think I was average and I would be invisible.”

Other Notes

When Mary Jane is smiling at her natural hair alone in the bathroom the audience is invited to see someone who does like herself and experiences self-love in her hair, but then the dialogue and explanation shows the self-hate and anxiety that Mary Jane, and potentially other black women, feel about their natural hair. Mary Jane’s professional identity does rely on her beauty and her brains.... But being invisible is terrible for a TV personality. She realizes that her weave empowers her while at work even if she doesn’t necessarily want to subscribe.

Being Mary Jane

Program Title	Being Mary Jane
Episode Number	3:3
Episode Name	Sparrow

Notes on Natural Hair

Per episode, notes will be taken based on the observation of natural hair regarding the character and setting context information.

Hairstyle: Afro and an afro ponytail.

Framing: Displined... she is alone but is killing herself. Literally.. she is consuming medication in abundance while drinking wine. She finally goes unconscious and is foaming at the mouth. The White vomit dripples down her chin with the simple strings play a sad song.

Setting: Private and unprof. She is a Doctor... so she knows exactly what and how to take the pills.

Impressions

This program is notable for loud and interesting music but the entire opening has no dialogue, no music, it is completely silent at Lisa's house. She is alone. Sad string instruments finally start as Lisa takes pill after pill with all of her wine. This episode emphasizes her as crazy and even using her profession to kill herself. Notably her mother also has natural hair and Mary Jane credits her parents for the reason Lisa was so messed up.

Other Notes

30:00 "Oh my god. You guys remember the time Lisa got drunk, threw out all her hot combs, and bought a ticket to Kenya and came back with twists?"

While all of Lisa's friends are sitting together and remembering her life. Lisa was a volunteer for Boys and Girls Club, Kenya, and many other. They are remembering that Lisa was an amazing person while also disciplining her decision to buck the system. This is not the first time they have jokingly put Lisa, the only Black character with consistently natural hair. 1:3 the group mocks her for bucking party lines and not voting for Obama. This was interesting because natural hair is usually associated with 'realness' but she clearly is now not aligned enough with Blackness.

"Black people don't kill themselves. That is what they did. We took pride in the fact that we didn't do that."

Program Title	Empire
Episode Number	3:8
Episode Name	The Unkindest Cut

Notes on Natural Hair

Per episode, notes will be taken based on the observation of natural hair regarding the character and setting context information.

Hairstyle: Curls this is toned down from her usual Afro to begin with.

Framing: Empowered. She is yelling at the other artists and calling out the racist structures of her boss.

Setting: Public/Professional. She is in her dressing room at work.

Impressions

Tiana is supposed to headline the high profile fashion event. HBW fashion show.

“How does she expect me to perform in that? And she wants me to straighten my hair too.. like for what?” 9:38. “Helen Von Wyatt will destroy me for this. That bitch didn’t want me in her stupid White washed show to begin with. The only reason she teamed up with empire is because she got dragged out for doing some whack ass Out of Africa collection with no black people in it. Then homegirl tries to shove me this damn dress meant for an anorexic White chick. That skinny racist bitch can’t handle my realness.” 13:40

Referring to appropriation... to black thickness.. to realness in relation to her earlier request to straighten her hair.

More definitely Urban would make a very strong statement. More culturally aware and more Black. She has the “right look.” About Ellie Goulding.

“The White look.”

“Preference is not prejudice. You people expect change to happen overnight. The HBW Fashion show has always been associated with a certain level of class, that is all.”

“Your daughter has such beautiful hair. I see why you love it.”—AGAIN HAIR MEANS SOMETHING> she is always brushing it. Brushing is something that black people can’t really do. Wakes up and her long White hair is completely cut off. This was such a threat and HBW goes with a Black artist after all.

“So you don’t want to straighten her hair? Have some Black girl magic on it.” After being called out for a racist she wants to SHOW she is not with an “authentic look.”

Other Notes

Lyrics for Black girl Magic

People talk about the way I am
Natural hair and my chocolate skin
Walk is crazy, see it in my hips
Ain't nothing like a woman with some nice flips
I'm proud to say it, I'm from the motherland
Nappy head, yeah, it ain't so bad
'Cause now they want the braids and the dreadlocks
Paying money just to get the curves that I've got

[Pre-Chorus]
That's why I keep my head up high, elevated

Rock your curls and waves, you so fly, celebrating

We're gon' stand up strong, all my girls

We're real proud, run this world

Are you feeling it? Aw yeah

I feel it, girl , hey ey

[Chorus]

So, if you're with me, hey hey hey

Just ride on with me, hey hey hey

'Cause there ain't nothing like the black girl magic

That's my spell right on you

I know you're with me, hey hey hey

You wanna come and get me, hey hey hey

'Cause it ain't nothing like the black girl magic

Watch me now what I do

Black girl magic

Black girl magic

[Verse 2]

Queen so divine from the holy land

Darker than a berry, that's that melanin

Like a Goddess with the history

Of beauty and strength, yeah, that's all me

Coronation for all my roots

Suck a melon from the sweetest fruits

Royal blood running through my veins

So, don't you forget I was

Identifying Information per Unit

Program Title	How to Get Away with Murder
Episode Number	2:9- 2:14
Episode Name	It's a Trap

Notes on Natural Hair

Per episode, notes will be taken based on the observation of natural hair regarding the character and setting context information.

Hairstyle: Braids. Very long braids.

Framing: Empowered. Annalise is the boss of her small law firm. She remains the command of her students and tells her husband, Sam, what to do. She is clearly in charge in her own environment. She is working the “Mahoney” case, which becomes central in the third season plot. **2:12** She is disciplined heavily by the judge and by her client after a witness fails to show up to court.

Setting: Public/Professional and Private/Professional. A is seen in the courtroom and then in the in the hallway meeting with her client.

Impressions

Annalise used to wear her hair naturally, in braids, during the early stages of her career, roughly 10 years ago. The flashbacks throughout the sequences of episodes portray her working

a case with her braids in. **2:11** Annalise is meeting with Rose at a little café about being an eye witness. Rose also have natural hair. Rose did not know that A was a lawyer. She promises Rose that no one will get hurt (but we already know that this is a lie). **2:12** She is in the cell with her client, Charles Mahoney, prepping him for the stand. Annalise successfully gets her clients alibi as Rose agrees to testify. This natural haired lawyer appears to be doing a great job. “We hired her for a reason, she has a reputation for taking risks.”—Charles Mahoney about Annalise. But she is in a disciplined position as Mr. Mahoney thinly threatens both her and Rose’s children. 18:40 we are shown the courtroom. She is doing well, speaking directly and confidently to the jury, but then experiences a failure as Rose doesn’t show up for the testimony. This was a key piece of her job..... and she failed at that. “My corporate attorney’s told me not to hire you.... With the jury being made of mostly minorities a woman of color would be best. So I found you, turns out there is not a lot of women like you out there. I went against my instincts and chose this. Don’t give your people a bad name.” **2:13** “Glad one of us is paying attention.” She does try to stand up for Rose to Mahoney, but then is ultimately disciplined as Mahoney has her son killed in a car crash. **2:14** “That is it, no apology? Apologize for losing my son’s trial, for one... Talk to me like that again and you are fired.”

Other Notes

Annalise seemed to figure out the key to success for black women is to blend in. Detract from your race as much as possible. She is never shown with natural hair while at work in the rest of the series. Only in moments of personal distress or in prison. After the car accident the storyline with the braided professional Annalise ends.

Identifying Information per Unit

Program Title	HTGAWM
Episode Number	1:4 and 1:5
Episode Name	Let's Get to Scooping

Notes on Natural Hair

Per episode, notes will be taken based on the observation of natural hair regarding the character and setting context information.

Hairstyle: Short Afro

Framing: Empowered when it comes to Sam.... But disciplined by society

Setting: Private/Other. She is in her bedroom alone getting ready for the night.

Impressions

This is the first really significant moment the audience is invited to see the extent that Annalise goes to follow the mask and be beautiful. The music sings “you were always faster than me.” Same comes in. Annalise “Why is your penis on a dead girl’s phone?” Annalise is confronting Sam and in a position of power as she has the evidence against him, but from a societal view she is now certain that he cheated on her. There is no denying that this Black woman with nappy hair was not enough to keep her man from stepping out.

Other Notes

She is not in the professional sphere and this moment is very much about her private life. She returns to work and to the public back with her wig... her mask of power and source of strength. **1:5** We see her discussing the situation with Sam again. She is crying and emotional— cuz her husband was having an affair with a student. He begins to over power her and even covers her mouth while pushing her on the bed. She ultimately wins out and yells at him to get

out. She continues to sob. This shot immediately jumps to an extremely calm, cool, and laser focused Annalise talking to Wes with her wig on. The imagery is juxtaposed to crazy, hurt natural hair and in control professional A.

Identifying Information per Unit

Program Title	Murder
Episode Number	2:3
Episode Name	It's Called the Octopus

Notes on Natural Hair

Per episode, notes will be taken based on the observation of natural hair regarding the character and setting context information.

Hairstyle: Head wrap with her short nappy hair underneath. Tanya the sex shop owner

Framing: Disciplined as she is on trial. Not a respectable profession and not a coincidence that the black lady with natural hair is the oversexed one.

Setting: Private... professionalish

Impressions

She is drunk... and trying to work but also dropping yogurt all over the photos. Drinking and work don't generally mix well, but she is brainstorming about the case before passing out on her bed. Once again.. back at work for certain she is wearing her altered hair. During this episode her client, Tanya, with natural hair is on trial for her profession... she owns a sex club in which

people died. The crazy sex lady “whore, freak, nympho and whatever other derogatory term the world throws at you when you are sex positive”.

21:31.. technically when she was ‘at work’ she had her hair straightened. So that is interesting. Then Annalise disciplines her as well once she admits to pursuing a married man. She is ultimately found not guilty.

Program Title	Sleepy Hollow
Episode Number	3:10-3:18
Episode Name	Incident at Stone Manor

Notes on Natural Hair

Per episode, notes will be taken based on the observation of natural hair regarding the character and setting context information.

Hairstyle: Curly. Her hair is in tight and natural ringlets. An interesting note—the hair length is not consistent. Her straight hair is much shorter than would be the case if she straightened out the curls portrayed here. Does this have anything to do with our society’s need for long hair = beauty and health?

Framing: **Disciplined**, relative to her normal being. Abby is losing her grip on reality and sanity. She is playing chess alone in the cave while talking and reprimanding herself. She identifies herself as going crazy. “It is all in your head Abby. Your move.” Crane begins to lecture Abby, per usual. Abby admits that she needs the White Savior to help her decipher the images. To save her. “Don’t worry, I have not completely lost it. Not yet anyway.” Her interaction with Crane is neutral for what is the established trend for the two characters.

At 32 minutes the scene opens again with the sun shot and many cuts to Black. The voice over portrays the insanity and desperation. Abby is scolding herself for “You made your move. Live with it.” Abby could not have figured out the connection and an escape without Crane’s voice (perspective).

38:00 Abby is **empowered** as she is the one who brings Crane home by using her strong connection. She then saves the White Savior.

Setting: Private/ Other—it is just Abby and then it is just Abby and Crane. Once Abby is rescued... Public/Other with Abby walking around in the public with her natural hair remaining. She has not returned to work yet.

Impressions

The scene at 16:00 opens with a long shot into the sun. Looking directly into the sun is taught as a harmful activity AND does cause disorientation. This long-shot helps to foreshadow and establish the sense of distress that Abby feels in her solitary confinement. Abby has been there 10 months- but only weeks on Earth.

Other Notes

Abby continues to show signs of distress over the next 8 episodes. **3:11** At work, but “I am sorry for quitting so abruptly.” So she technically is not at work. She still is empowered and doing extremely well AT WORK. “She is, but she’s not you. I never handed in your resignation.” Although seems normal.. she is still tracing that figure and hiding her irrational thoughts and fears. **3:12** “You’re different than before you Disappeared. You are dealing with it every day and I can see it.” Jennifer has long established that she is hurting and dealing with a lot.. perhaps she understands the cue for natural hair and mental pain? Jack Walters (an ambiguous higher up) “I have heard that agent mills is not as stable as she once was. That she

has changed.” “Mills is a good agent. She will find her feet again.” **3:18** The natural hair savior was the one who sacrificed herself. A positive savior—just like Abby’s natural haired mother. This is also killing herself though. Abby’s hair is back to straight. “I made peace with it Crane. What the next stage is. I am ready.” Clearly natural was the unstable Abby and now she is back to business with a new sense of calm. This is a flashback for crane... so why does her hair jump back and forth. This makes the straight and peaceful scene even more impactful.

6.3 Television Analysis Tracking Spreadsheet

The excel sheet that was used to track the progress of the research. The workbook includes an episode checklist, the hours watched, and the total episodes. This appendix has been attached as an Excel Sheet and may need to be “double-clicked” to become active to scroll and view in its entirety.

			4			4		
Episode le	44 mins				44 mins			44
Total leng	2156 Mins				1716 mins			2332
	35.93333 hours				28.6 hours			38.86667
	49	49		39	39		53	53
Left	0		Left	0		Left	0	
Total hour	224.4							
Total Episc	0							
Total Watc	309							
Total with	72							
	0.23301							