

Black Women in the Media: Stereotypes and Trauma Porn

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Abstract

Background: Consuming media is everyone's favorite pastime. Whether it is television or movies, Black women are constantly made to be the worst character.

Objective: The purpose of this study is to examine the common stereotypes Black women depict in the media and to examine Black trauma porn in the media.

Design and Method: The research is derived from scholarly articles on the topic. The articles include common stereotypes seen in Black women in the media. Other articles were found about Trauma Porn. These were found in pop culture blogs. In Phase 2, the research is gathered from a questionnaire sent out to my peers. These questions were to be answered anonymously and based on three television shows, *Insecure* (2015), *Julia* (1968), and *Generation* (2021). The research questions are; *In what ways are Black women portrayed in the media? In what ways are Black women affected negatively by the portrayals in the media? Is there a correlation between Black women screenwriters and directors and White women screenwriters and directors and how Black lives are depicted?*

Results: The stereotypes we see Black women play are not new. They have not evolved since Black women were allowed to be on television. However, these stereotypes are shaping the way Black women are treated.

Conclusions: Black women are getting the short end of the stick when it comes to media. Black women are not being depicted in the best light. Black women need to be allowed the opportunity to tell their stories. There needs to be more diversity not just in front of the camera but also behind the scenes.

Keywords: *Black women in the media, portrayal of Black women in the media. Issa Rae, Julia, Diahann Carroll, Black Lives Matter media, Trauma porn, Angry Black women in the media, Sassy Black friend, Jezebel in the media, Black screenwriters, Black television, Black actors.*

Chapter 1

Introduction

This research study has been conducted to investigate the lack of Black women in the media. When you start to look into the emptiness, you tend to magnify what has already been made. While searching through the limited media with Black women characters, you will see many of the same characterizations, stereotypes, and storylines.

Statement of the Problem

Watching Black women in the media has been the same story over and over again. The viewer is met with levels of racism, abuse, poverty, and sexual assault. Think of all the bad situations that can happen to someone. Every Black character has faced it. Although we see more diversity in the media, Black women are still being reduced to played out stereotypes and storylines about horrific events. Why are these the only stories being told?

Purpose and Significance

The first part of my study was to look for scholarly articles about my topic. Then I compared and contrasted them in my literature review. The second part of my research will include an analysis of three television shows. The first show is *Insecure* (2015), created by Issa Rae, a Black woman. The second is *Julia* (1968) which was created by a white man. Finally, the third show is *Genera+ion* (2021) which is created by a non-Black father-daughter duo. The analysis will prove that Black women do not follow the same formula non-Black creators do when writing Black characters.

This study is to call out the problems in the media due to racism and misogynoir. It serves as a what not to do when writing Black women characters. Screenwriters will have to find new

ways to write. They will have to come up with better stories. Then, maybe, Black women screenwriters will have more opportunities. This study will add another Black woman's perspective into the conversation. The literature review will follow the introduction. Then the methodology section will follow after that the results, then the discussion.

Conceptual Framework

Many people have written about and studied trauma porn in Black media. As of this month, Black trauma has been coming up in many Twitter and Tumblr discussions. With all the police brutality and weird films about Black people enduring racism, it is a hot topic. If you just Google "trauma porn" or "Black trauma in the media," thousands of think pieces and blogs will come up. Paulina Jayne Isaac writes, "For some reason, films focusing on the pain of black history gain more recognition than movies highlighting the triumphs. This is not just harmful to black viewers, but it also does a disservice to white viewers by contributing to black erasure" (Isaac, 2021). Many people have this same thought process. The question is asked by many different culture writers in recent times. Maryam Muhammed asks, "Where are the movies about happy Black people? Why don't we have more of our own science fiction movies? Is it too much to ask for little Black children traveling in outer space or developing superpowers? What about the Black mermaids, centaurs, elves, or fairies? Are we not allowed to have those?" (Muhammed, 2019). Yasmeen Ludy writes about how important Black writers are, "Black writers are important because they create stories that cannot thrive without Black voices, Black representation, and Black characters. The story cannot go on without them...Black writers are important because their work features Black people. It is a reflection of different aspects of the community" (Ludy, 2021). The backbone of my study is the many different views from Black culture writers and scholars.

Research Questions

There are so many questions I had starting this research. Some of my initial questions were *Who is dominating the screenwriting rooms? Who is allowing these stories to be told? Where is the diversity in screenwriting? Why are Black people signing off on these stories?* Although these are great questions, I wanted to look deeper. The focus will be on these three questions

RQ 1: *How are Black women portrayed in the media?*

RQ 2: *In what ways are Black women affected negatively by the portrayals in the media?*

RQ 3: Is there a correlation between Black women screenwriters and directors and white women screenwriters and directors and how Black lives are depicted?

Definition of Terms

Trauma porn- Whether it be art or any kind of media based on exploiting marginalized peoples' oppressions and struggles.

Angry Black woman- Common stereotype in the media. It portrays Black women as angry, rude, and harsh.

Jezebel- The stereotype that portrays Black women as oversexualized seductresses. Her whole personality is based on her sexual history.

Mammy- The stereotype that portrays older Black women in service roles. Most commonly servicing white families.

Colorism- Discrimination or prejudices of people with darker skin. Most commonly happens within ethnic groups.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

When flipping channels or scrolling through streaming sites like Netflix or Hulu, what do you see? You will see hundreds of new shows premiered every week. The shows have captivating storylines, fantastic dialogue, and great actors. But they are missing one crucial aspect. Diversity. A scroll through the shows and a preview watch gives a glimpse of Black women in the media, and you may notice very similar traits in the characters. This study will focus on two themes. The themes are stereotypes and characterization and trauma porn.

Stereotypes and Characterization

For as long as Black women have been on television, they have played the same stereotypical roles (Saint-Fleur, 2017). ~~The different parts~~ Black women actors ~~play~~ are roles are the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire (Toms-Anthony, 2018; Saint-Fleur, 2017). The Mammy is a character that is most commonly seen servicing white families (Saint-Fleur, 2017). Mammies are seen as mother figures. She is loyal, sassy, and desexualized (Kretsedemas, 2010). This trope dates back to slavery. She is responsible for housework, and she takes care of everyone around her (Toms-Anthony, 2018). The Mammy was the image that white America used to sugar coat slavery. It was the image to prove that Black people were happy being slaves (Toms-Anthony, 2018).

The Jezebel was the oversexualized, underdressed, and seductress (Saint-Fleur, 2017). Jezebel's characteristic is that she is most commonly depicted as a light-skinned Black woman (Toms-Anthony, 2018; Saint-Fleur, 2017). A Jezebel uses her body and sexuality to get her way

(Toms-Anthony, 2018). The Jezebel took Mammy's place as the central trope in the 1970s. This stereotype was used to justify raping Black women and rationalize relationships between white men and Black women (Saint-Fleur, 2017; Toms-Anthony, 2018). However, this trope is commonly seen as reality and is used to discredit Black women who survive rape (Saint-Fleur, 2017; Toms-Anthony, 2018).

The Sapphire is most commonly seen as a Black woman who is overbearing and angry. You will hear the term "Angry Black Woman" in recent times (Saint Fleur, 2017, p. 240; Kretsedemas, 2010, p. 151; Toms-Anthony, 2018, p.60). The Sapphire is seen as miserable, and her punching bag is always a Black man (Saint-Fleur, 2017). The Mammy was seen as having no sexuality, while the Jezebel has all the sexuality. The Sapphire is just made to be seen as masculinized (Toms-Anthony, 2018). Kretsedemas argues that the Angry Black Woman trope is being used more often on all media to represent Black women.

These stereotypes and tropes are seen in the media are detrimental to Black women (Saint-Fleur, 2017). These tropes alone are molding how society sees and then treats Black women in reality. For example, it teaches viewers that older Black women are only there to service and care for others (Saint-Fleur, 2017; Toms-Anthony, 2018). It also leads the viewers not to believe Black women when it comes to sexual assault (Saint-Fleur, 2017; Toms-Anthony, 2018). Finally, it does not permit Black women to feel negative emotions, including anger (Kretsedemas, 2010).

Trauma Porn

When consuming media with Black women as actors, they are usually portrayed in some kind of pain. Seeing Black pain or suffering in the media is most notably called Trauma Porn

(Jerkins, 2019). Black struggles in the media emphasizing racism, slavery, and the Civil Rights Movement adds to the current Black struggles (Muhammad, 2019; Jerkins, 2019). The media is not only portraying Black suffering in films. The trauma and suffering find their way to social media sites, too (Hornaday, 2020).

During the past years, the media coverage contains police brutality and hate crimes in real-time every day. These real-life depictions of Black people suffering, and the dramatization seen on TV or movies desensitizes us (Hornaday, 2020; Jerkins, 2019; Muhammad, 2019). Black people cannot escape these horrific events. Black people have no form of escapism when this is what storytellers are portraying and producing (Jerkins, 2019; Muhammad, 2019). While watching the sufferings, Black people are constantly reminded that they live in a society completely controlled by white supremacy. As a result, Black people cannot forget where they stand in a white society.

White individuals are watching police brutality, hate crimes, trauma porn, and racism to get a feel for what Black people are experiencing in society. Perhaps some whites may feel empathetic towards the Black experience. However, many are being entertained and, in a way, maybe aroused by the Black pain (Jerkins, 2019; Muhammad, 2019). As a result, the pain experienced by Black individuals is being reinforced while non-black individuals are being entertained (Muhammad, 2019).

Identity Formation and Critical Media Literacy

Identity formation theory is the “complex manner in which human beings establish a unique view of self and is characterized by continuity and inner unity” (Herman, 2011). This

goes hand in hand with personal values, personality, and self-esteem. In the end, the purpose of identity formation is to create a stable image of oneself (Herman, 2011).

Petra A. Robinson states that environmental situations often shape identities. The media is one very important environmental context that shapes the identities of Black women. (Robinson et al., 2021). The media has a very clear image of what an “acceptable Black woman” may look and act like. Black women are often reduced to their hair texture and skin color. If they do not fall into the “acceptable” category they are grossly mistreated. The media often favors lighter-skinned Black women with a loose curl pattern. This shows young darker-skinned girls with a tighter curl pattern that they do not matter, and that they do not exist. This is called colorism. Lighter-skinned Black women are treated better in real -life. They are afforded more opportunities, including housing, education, better access to healthcare and marriage. While darker-skinned Black women are suffering economically, physically, and mentally. The media is a great example of colorism every day. If you see a Black woman in the media, she is most likely going to have light skin. Therefore audiences will always see Zendaya playing in a lead role before they will ever see Coco Jones.

Oftentimes, Black scholars use critical media literacy. This is used as a tool to break down gross media depictions of Black women then they rebuild and retell a more positive narrative. Critical media literacy can teach Black women to thoughtfully analyze horrible depictions and replace the negative with positives and redefine Black womanhood/ sisterhood (Robinson et al., 2021). Using critical media literacy to deconstruct negative caricatures made by the media will help Black women become more conscious. In turn, this will strengthen Black women’s sense of self and shape their identities (Robinson et al., 2021).

Finally, Robinson states that Black women seeing positive depictions of Black womanhood in the media goes hand in hand with a positive sense of self and self-esteem. This alone is an act of resistance (Robinson et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The literature found on the portrayal of Black women in the media is never-ending. The literature search resulted in several articles discussing the stereotypes in Black media. The different tropes are seen in Black media and how they affect society's view of Black women. There are articles discussing all the Black shows and how they are either positively or negatively affecting the Black community. There are studies about how Black shows make Black audiences feel. These contributions help continue the conversation about racism and diversity in the media.

One strength in the research was that the authors were able to go into detail about every show and dissect character dynamics down to their clothing and speech mannerisms. One weakness in the research was that a lot of the shows that were studied were not modern. The goal of this study is to analyze what researchers are thinking about more modern shows. Are these current shows helping or hurting the Black community? Who is writing these Black scripts? Where do their politics lie, and does that reflect in the final product?

The literature on identity formation theory and critical media literacy answered a lot of my questions however, there isn't much research on how specific characters, tropes, and trauma porn are making young children feel. There needs to be data collection from Black girls ranging from 12-18 to study what they are watching and how it affects their sense of self. Are they having a hard time relating to the characters they are seeing? Do they feel non-existent? What kind of characters and storylines do they want to see?

Some final questions that were left unanswered are how many of these modern screenwriters are Black women? What do they have to do to get their foot in the door? In order to get rid of all these gaps, we have to give researchers the time and funding. We must value Black voices. We must be able to give Black people opportunities to study these topics.

Chapter 3

Methods

How many hours do you typically spend looking for something to watch? A few minutes? If you're like me, you spend hours, days, and months switching between Hulu, Netflix, Disney Plus, and HBO Max. I can never find anything that catches my eye. Some people like viewing drama, some like comedy, and some like horror, and I like all of those genres! I especially like them when Black women are included. It feels like there are new shows uploaded every week. How many of these shows feature Black women? How many of them show Black women who are not side characters pumped with stereotypes? How many of them have Black women who are not surrounded by their trauma? It appears Black women are constantly overlooked or made to be gross, racist stereotypes. My research questions are:

RQ1: In what ways are Black women portrayed in the media?

RQ2: In what ways are Black women affected negatively by the portrayals in the media?

RQ3: Is there a correlation between Black women screenwriters and directors and white women screenwriters and directors and how Black lives are depicted?

For the first part of my research, I used the Purchase College Library's databases to look for any scholarly articles about the lack of visibility of Black women in the media. I used the search terms "Black media," "Black women in the media," "Angry Black Woman trope," and "trauma porn." I had a lot of trouble with the databases because it seemed like our library did not have access to any of the topics I needed. I feel like 95% of the articles that could have been useful to me were blocked for privacy reasons, or we did not have access. Another problem I faced was that I could not log onto my Interlibrary Loans account to access any of it. So, most of

my sources were from Google Scholar using the same search terms. I also found two articles that were not scholarly or peer-reviewed. I could not find scholarly articles on trauma porn. I think that's a big gap in my research. There were only blog posts about the topic. I think we need to have more scholars write about Black trauma porn in the media. I would like to know how it affects the Black community as a whole. I hope to see that in the future. I also hope to see articles about the impact Issa Rae and Michaela Cole made in the media. After collecting my articles, I analyzed them by doing a literature review. I compared all of my sources. I also separated important topics and used them as themes or subtopics. I used a literature review because my sources had a lot to offer, and I wanted to analyze them.

After my literature review, I stepped into Phase Two of my study. In this part, I had a watch party with my peers. I made a post on Snapchat saying that I was doing a study about Black women's portrayal in the media. I also said that I wanted to discuss some stereotypes, typical roles, and trauma porn found in the media. I mentioned that we would have a watch party to discuss these themes, and if anyone was interested in joining, they should swipe up and send me their email address. A few moments later, I got email addresses and got started sending out consent forms and questions to guide the conversation during the watch party. We watched an episode of *Insecure* (2015) on HBO MAX, an episode of *Genera+ion* (2021) on HBO MAX, and an episode of *Julia* (1968) that we streamed on YouTube. Some of the conversations questions I asked were:

What stereotypes are Black women forced to bring to life in modern media?

Can you name some positive roles Black women have today?

Can you name some of the negative roles?

List some stereotypes/trauma you noticed in Insecure.

List some stereotypes/trauma you noticed in Julia.

List some stereotypes/trauma you noticed in Genera+ion.

Can you define trauma porn?

What are some shows/movies that you consider to be trauma porn?

How do you think the media's portrayal of Black women affects Black women in real life?

How do you think trauma porn affects Black lives?

And for fun, what kind of storylines/genres would you like to see Black women in?

Finally, I used the answers to the conversation to analyze and find answers to my research questions. Although I asked my entire platform, I chose the first five responders. Selecting the first five participants was manageable for this study.

I did hit many walls when it came to finding literature for my literature review. I could not access a lot of the articles I really thought could be helpful. Another problem was being unemployed and in a global pandemic. I could not physically access the school's library to get some of the great book choices that I saw. I also could not afford to spend excess money. I was limited to what would open and what the school had access to. Another dilemma I had was making sure the authors were credible. I did not want to use sources written by white people. Due to racism, Black critics aren't awarded the same opportunities as non-Black people. Due to Misogynoir, Black women aren't awarded as many opportunities as I'd like. So, their voices aren't heard as loudly as everyone else's. My only problem with analyzing my sources was that

they pretty much said the same things. All of my sources spoke about the same shows, the same stereotypes, and the same actors. The analysis proved a point, but it was very limiting. I felt like I was put in a box with the literature portion of this assignment.

I also faced some problems with my watch party. The main issue was that not all internet is created equally. The lack of stable internet was a limitation for this study. Some of us have horrible connections, while others had amazing connections. Another problem was timing. Since the world “opened back up,” many of us were asked to go back to work. We’re all navigating extremely long hours and hectic lives. I do appreciate everyone who took out some time to join my study.

I can say that I do have a biased outlook on this topic. As a Black woman, I will always fight to see myself represented in all media or art. I do not want to settle for pretending to relate to white women. It’s exhausting. There will be tons of people who disagree with me. But I think that says a lot about who they are as people. I do want to see Black women on TV without experiencing racism, abuse, and sexual assault. I don’t want them to always have a hard time. I don’t want them to be every racism stereotype known to man. I want to see Black women in love. Black women solving mysteries. Black women fighting crime. I want to see it all. I think we’re ready for that future.

Chapter 4

Results

Research Question 1: In what ways are Black women portrayed in the media?

Although there has been some effort in more recent times in adding more Black women to the media, there has not been diversity in the storylines. It is evident that Black women are type casted. Black women almost exclusively play the angry Black woman, the jezebel, the mammy, or just the sassy best friend. There usually isn't any deviation from that norm.

In Jessica Saint-Fleur's 2017 article, she states that Black women have been playing these stereotypical roles for as long as they were able to be on television (Saint-Fleur, 2017). Saint-Fleur and many other scholars describe these stereotypes. The mammy is the servant. Her character will always be an older woman with a bigger build who is not seen as attractive. She is most commonly seen caring for white families (Toms-Anthony, 2018; Saint-Fleur, 2017). A modern example of a mammy in the media would be Octavia Spencer in the 2011 movie, *The Help*.

The jezebel is the oversexualized character. She is always underdressed and trying to seduce a man or using her sexuality to get what she wants. The jezebel will most likely be depicted as a lighter-skinned Black woman (Toms-Anthony, 2018). You can always see examples of this trope in rap/hip-hop videos. Other examples would be Danielle Isaie's character in the 2015 television series, *Chewing Gum*, Tiffany Haddish's character in *Girls Trip* (2017).

The angry Black woman is a popular trope in the media. She is loud, crass, and easy to anger. She is always seen as manly and hard to please. Her anger is most directed at Black men (Saint-Fleur, 2017). No matter how much progress is done, the angry Black woman trope does

not go away. It just gets reworked. Some modern examples of the angry Black woman would be Tichina Arnold's character in *Everybody Hates Chris* (2005), Tichina Arnold's character in *Martin* (1992), and Taraji P. Henson's character in *Empire* (2015).

Finally, the last common trope is the sassy Black friend/sidekick. This trope is seen in more modern media. She is only there for comedic effect and one-liners. She does not have any real storyline, and she will always be there to listen to her white friends' issues. She will snap her fingers, roll her neck, and save the day. Examples of this trope are Rah Digga's character in *Thirteen Ghosts* (2001), Raven Goodwin's character in *Good Luck Charlie* (2010), Giovonnie Lavette Samuels' character on *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (2005) and, Frances Callier's character in *Hannah Montana* (2006).

In addition to the literature review, participants were asked, "What stereotypes are Black women forced to bring to life in modern media?" Table 1 below illustrates their responses. The participants listed many tropes. Black women are forced to follow in the media. For example, participant A recognized a lot of Black women being written as bitter and independent.

In comparison, participant B said strong and aggressive. Although strong and independent are positive descriptors, they can still be harmful. They can be very isolating. If Black women are always seen as independent and strong, they can never be vulnerable. No one will ever be there for them because it looks like they do not need anyone. The other participants listed other big tropes which include, sexual, sassy, submissive, and comedic relief.

Table 1

Q#1: What stereotypes are Black women forced to bring to life in modern media?

Participant	Response
A	The stereotypes black women are forced to bring to life in the media are displaying forms of anger, bitterness, and independence.
B	Strong, aggressive, independent
C	I've noticed that in the media they make black women the comedic relief often or the "sidekick" best friend of the main (white) character.
D	being the sassy best friend constantly being over the top being a single mother their anger is seen as a threat, even if it is justified. Or being too sexual and not being seen as someone to be in a long-term relationship
E	Black women are often seen as the submissive, sassy, or sexy character. They rarely got their time to shine, since they were often made invisible as the white actresses take the spotlight.

Research Question 2: In what ways are Black women affected negatively by the portrayals in the media?

A lot of the time, individuals tend to pass judgment on what they think they know. If you see that Black women are almost always loud, obnoxious, and angry on television, you might believe that is how they are in real life. However, the media is shaping how Black women are viewed and, in turn, treated.

The jezebel trope has always done harm to Black women. Because Black women are characterized as overly sexual, little black girls are sexualized at a young age. They are seen as

promiscuous for just existing. When Black women are sexually assaulted, not many people believe them because they “were asking for it.” Toms-Anthony, 2018).

When Black women are used to seeing the Angry Black woman in the media, they try to counteract that by being the opposite. When they are upset, they’ll try not to show it. They tend to bite their tongue at work so that they won’t be described as just another angry Black woman. Black women are being taught to turn off their emotions just to be treated like a human. As a result, Black women are not afforded the opportunity to feel, react, or exist (Kretsedemas, 2010).

As illustrated in Table 2, these negative stereotypes are doing harm in real life. Participant C explains that Black women have to be emotionless to be taken seriously. Participant D goes on to say that black women feel like a burden and unwanted.

Table 2

Q#2: How do you think the media’s portrayal of Black women affects Black women in real life?

Participant	Response
A	Black women are expected to act a certain way based on what they see in the media. When you don’t fit the media’s expectation of a Black woman you are treated poorly. When you do meet the expectations, you are still treated poorly. There’s no winning.
B	When all these stereotypes are floating around Black women aren’t taken seriously. We are just a joke or a meme to outsiders.
C	In real life, many black women probably feel like they’re not supposed to say how they feel with fear of being called difficult. That they have to be seen as strong and almost emotionless.
D	Makes black women feel like a burden and just unwanted in society. Nobody wants us around and it shows when other characters talk about black women. It always feels less than.

Research Question 3: Is there a correlation between Black women screenwriters and directors and White women screenwriters and directors and how Black lives are depicted?

After analyzing three television shows that feature Black women, it is evident that there is a difference between Black creators and white creators. *Insecure* (2015) was the only show that was created by Issa Rae, a Black woman. The about section on the show's IMDb profile says, "Follows the awkward experiences and racy tribulations of a modern-day African-American woman" (IMDb, 2015, np). The participants found the content to be very relatable, and the topics were very specific to the Black community. Although the participants did find some stereotypes in this show, they felt it was not coming from a place of harm. A Black woman wrote these scenes from her experiences and did not exploit the Black community in doing so. The participants were not disappointed. They enjoyed this show the most. They felt that the comedy was not forced. They also found less trauma porn and stereotypes in this program. The participants also expressed that they would continue to watch it even after the study. In general, they had more to say about this show, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Q#3: Is there a correlation between Black women screenwriters and directors and White women screenwriters and directors and how Black lives are depicted?

Participant	Response
A	Talking white- classroom scene (first episode) Bitter black women stereotype (first episode)
B	The idea of “talking white.”
C	Issa: “acts/talks white”, aggressively passive, makes jokes when the mood gets awkward Molly: bougie, stuck-up, high standards for men she dates, which makes her “hard to please” and “likely to be alone and not get married”
D	The kids were coming for Issa in the beginning of the episode. They roasted her natural hair, she was “talking white”, and called her a bitter black woman. At Issa’s job, she’s the only black woman so she is ultimately tokenized. Every non-black person comes to her about trends thinking she knows all. Issa’s boyfriend Lawrence is a deadbeat. She is the breadwinner, doing more than what she needs to when her significant other hasn’t done her fair share. That’s unnecessary pressure she needs to deal with. Issa’s best friend Molly is high strung and knows what she wants but her high standards don’t always match up with what she wants. Especially when she rants about black men like every other woman but black women and pay them to dust. You can be as successful as Molly and still be unlucky in love. She’s a powerful force and men are easily intimidated which makes Molly feels insecure about herself
E	Issa is the designated black person in a non-profit organization, run by predominately white people. Molly is the strong, independent woman who craves romance but can’t keep relationships for long-term.

Daniel and Zelda Barnes created *Generation (2021)*. They are a non-Black father-daughter duo. This program’s IMDb profile describes the plot, “Ensemble dramedy centering on a group of high school students exploring their sexuality in a modern world” (IMDb, 2021, np). Although this cast was diverse, there was only one Black girl in the series. My participant found her character to be intolerable. This show was about exploring sexualities and the Black girl, Arianna, was homophobic. My participants thought she was just the token Black character. In general, she was just unlikeable and annoying. My participants did not want to continue watching this show. As seen in Table 4, Participants C, D, and E had a big problem with the only Black girl in the series *Generation (2021)*. She was just unlikeable to most viewers.

Table # 4

Q# 4: List some stereotypes/trauma you noticed in Generation

Participant	Response
A	Trauma- ballerina scene (second episode) .
B	Trauma - ballerina scene
C	Arianna is: quick tempered, talks about sex often, says things for shock value (“my comedy’s edgy, okay”), enjoys talking about her dads but also messing with them.
D	I did not like the Arianna character at all but maybe that is the point. She comes off very privileged, full of herself, and very out of touch. Making homophobic and “edgy” jokes to come off relatable to her peers is not the way. Especially when she has two gay fathers. So I guess, this can go with how the black community tends to be homophobic. This is clearly internalized within Arianna, and it is really ugly to see that.
E	Arianna is another designated Black woman character. She seems to use edgy comedy as a coping mechanism.

Julia (1968) was also written by a non-Black creator, Hal Kanter. This plotline is described as “Julia Baker is a young African-American woman working as a nurse. She is also a widow (her husband died in Vietnam) trying to raise a young son alone” (IMDb, 1960, np) Since this was an older show, my participants were viewing how life could be like as a Black woman through the lens of a white man. She endured discrimination and the loss of her husband. My participants were not happy with this. They did not understand why she had to endure racism and be a widow. They did not like that her character was based on trauma.

In all, the shows with Black women that Black women write will always depict Black women realistically. This means Black women play characters with actual purposes. They are not the comedic relief, they are not sassy, they are not angry, and they are not going through unnecessary trauma. It is very obvious when Black women are not involved in any aspect of the creative process. The dialogue was very fluid in Issa Rae’s *Insecure*, while the dialogue in *Generation* made my participants cringe. Issa Rae depicted real-life moments which made her work so successful and relatable. The Barnes family wrote forced moments that did not show a Black girl in the best light.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the stereotypes Black women most commonly bring to life in the media. This study was achieved by a thorough review of literature on the topic. Then, I explored whether or not these stereotypes affected Black women in real life. This exploration helped me answer my research questions to determine if there was a correlation between non-Black women media creators and Black women media creators and if the created characters have more dimension or storylines outside of the stereotypes. A willing group of peers discussed these questions after analyzing specific media which had Black women as characters.

Looking for something to watch has become more complex lately. Due to the pandemic, the world was put on pause. Everyone was filled with so much anxiety and had a lot of downtime—what better time to binge hours of television and watch countless movies from your couch. But when Black women are looking for something they can relate to, they're met with played out, dated, and problematic stereotypes. Black women are not vehicles that drive your “angry Black woman” or “sassy sidekick” storylines. These characterizations cause real harm.

During the discussions with my peers, I asked, “How do you think the media’s portrayal of Black women affects Black women in real life?” Their answers speak volumes. Participant B says, “When all these stereotypes are floating around, Black women aren’t taken seriously. We are just a joke or a meme to outsiders.” Being reduced to a joke for your entire life makes it feel like your life does not matter. Participant C says, “In real life, many black women probably feel like they’re not supposed to say how they feel with fear of being called difficult. That they have to be seen as strong and almost emotionless.” Black women are constantly hiding their feelings

so they won't be seen as a problem. And finally, participant D says, "Makes black women feel like a burden and just unwanted in society. Nobody wants us around, and it shows when other characters talk about black women. It always feels less than." As seen in these answers, Black women's visibility in the media shapes how people expect them to be in real life. Black women follow suit by making themselves smaller, quieter, and flexible to make their lives easier.

This study was geared towards many groups of people: upcoming Black creatives, non-Black creatives, and media viewers. Most importantly, this was a reminder for me to continue writing so that I can be the change I wish to see. This research experience was a very close-to-home study. I am directly affected by what I see on television. Therefore, I felt the need to dive deeper so I can share the anger. Through my research, I can tell I am not the only one that is upset.

This experience had its ups and downs. Research has been conducted about Black women in media, but I would like to see more. I wish I could find peer-reviewed articles about trauma porn and how it affects people's lives. I think that it is still a relatively new topic. Finding Tweets from strangers that had the same opinion as I was the best part. I can say that Twitter-inspired my research. If I was doing this research pre-COVID-19, the pandemic, I could have gotten a bigger group of people for my watch party. A larger watch party would have given me the chance to hear more opinions. I am very grateful for the opinions and views I did get.

So, What?

This research taught me that I am not alone with my thought on the media. For the first half of my study, I was afraid that I was not going to find anyone who agreed with me. Now that I know the truth, I am excited to see new studies on the same topic. My research was based on

my love for television and movies and my inability to see myself, a Black woman, on television. After doing this research for a few months, I think having access to a library could have made this a lot better. If this were a pre-COVID-19 study, I would probably have more than enough resources.

Now What?

In order for future researchers to be successful, there is a need for Black women to have their voices heard. We need to be able to hear and listen to what Black women are saying on the issue, whether it is peer-reviewed or not. I believe we need to analyze more media. I only studied three shows. I want to hear what people have to say about other modern shows. I want to see how they compare to older shows. Are the storylines the same? Who wrote these scripts? Were there any Black women involved behind the scenes? I think that is very important; are there Black women in front of and behind the camera? Are Black women being treated right on set?

I would like to see someone safely research the correlation between how racists view Black women in real life versus in the media. Are they getting their hatred from these made-up characters? I would also like to see how racism affects fiction-based media. Of course, the content could be very dangerous, so I might not have an answer to these questions at all, but it is what I am left wondering.

Finally, I hope for upcoming Black creatives to do what they do best and create more Black stories. We do not need to keep seeing media about slavery, the Jim Crow era, or violent Black stories. Instead, let's see more romantic comedies, science fiction, horror, and dramas featuring Black women.

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